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## RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON THE EYFS – September 2010

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TACTYC is a membership based organisation whose aims are:

- to promote the highest quality professional development for all practitioners in early childhood education and care;
- to pursue matters of current educational concern and to act as a voice for all those who work with young children;
- to facilitate effective communication and support for early years tutors, trainers, advisers and practitioners in schools and other settings;
- to further the educational well being of all children.

In 2006, TACTYC responded to the consultation on the establishing of the EYFS and reiterated two key points which continue to remain fundamental to our ongoing concerns about and recommendations for the further development of the EYFS:

- a recommendation of an extension of the EYFS to children aged 6-7 years, which more substantially signifies the special aspects of the ages Birth-three years, and,
- a need to create an ongoing and comprehensive initial and professional education and development programme for early years practitioners to enable them to engage with their multiple professional responsibilities relating to understanding children's learning; the development of playful pedagogies and links between play and learning; the need to work sensitively with parents and carers; the need for integrated working practices and a comprehensive and informed understanding of the relationship between equity and learning.

In April 2008, TACTYC, the Vicky Hurst Trust, Leeds Metropolitan University and the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Special Interest Group, Early Years, jointly sponsored the first research seminar colloquium in the UK on playful learning in early years settings at Leeds Met. National and international play scholars presented their findings and subsequently produced a research summary which then informed a seminar in the House of Commons for politicians and policy makers and was also referenced

extensively in the Interim Report of the *Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum* (DCSF, 2008). A book focusing on research into practice followed, (Broadhead, Howard, Wood, 2010).

We have selected and responded only to those questions within the consultation that pertain to our organisational remit and focus.

TACTYC has a membership of over 400, an elected Executive with co-optees, holds an annual conference and AGM, produces a bi-yearly members' newsletter and three annual copies of: *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*. Further information is available on our website at: <http://www.tactyc.org.uk>

## **The questions and TACTYC's responses**

**Questions for practitioners, owners/managers, schools, academics, sector representative bodies, training providers, local authorities etc.**

**12. Many people have views about the EYFS. Many think that it has been very successful and would like it to remain unchanged. Others think parts of it need changing, or that there shouldn't be a mandatory framework at all. What is your overall view of the EYFS?**

The EYFS has been well-received overall by practitioners across a range of settings and is recognised as raising the profile on playful learning in early years settings (Brooker et al., 2010; Moyles, 2010a). However, our view at TACTYC is that it represents a stage in a journey towards a more appropriate manifestation of an early years curriculum and is by no means complete. We would like to see a more coherent and extended discussion of playful learning and playful pedagogies to help practitioners understand the nature of the relationships between play and learning and the ways in which these are supported in early years settings (Moyles, 2010a; Wood 2010; Wood & Attfield, 2005). This is a relatively under-researched aspect and would benefit from further research to inform both policy and practice (Broadhead, et al 2010). Although play is evident in the statutory guidance (and thus clearly assumes a link between play and learning) the references are disparate and lightweight. The value of play is undermined by the substantial emphasis on Early Learning Goals as further illustrated in the guidance materials and does not support understanding of the relationship between play and learning for younger and older learners as a statutory requirement. This understanding would also be invaluable in KS1 and KS2 settings as it links directly with active and experiential approaches and with integrated subject knowledge; play is a natural and effective way of bringing disciplines and their related knowledge together.

We would like to see a greater emphasis on the importance of outdoor play in relation to children's learning and an informed approach to risk-taking within outdoor play being explored within a revised document (Bilton, 2009; Tovey, 2007; Waters and Begley, 2007). There have been substantial culture shifts in attitudes to outdoor play (Play England recent report) in both homes and schools/settings and it is now recognised that there are clear links with the growth in obesity (O'Dea and Eriksen, 2010). Many children are being denied access to learning through physical and intellectual exploration and activity in the early years and so to good mental health. Forest school initiatives (Maynard, 2007a; Maynard 2007b; Maynard 2007c; Knight, 2009; 2010) have been influential and related

approaches need to feature within the curriculum guidance. See also:  
<http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/website/forestresearch.nsf/ByUnique/INFD-6HKEMH>

As has been the case in Wales, we would like to see the EYFS being extended beyond aged five years and on into Years 1 and 2 of the primary school reflecting the personalised learning of key Stages 3 and 4.

**One of the aims of the EYFS was to bring together learning and care requirements, because the evidence suggests that this helps to raise the quality of early learning and childcare provision. It was also felt that it would be easier for practitioners and parents/carers if all the guidance on early years services was brought together in a single framework.**

**13. Do you think there should be a framework that covers both welfare requirements and learning and development requirements? If you have views on the content of the welfare or learning and development requirements, note there are specific questions on this later on in the questionnaire.**

It is not possible to educate children without caring for their overall well-being, and it is impossible to care for children without providing an environment which is – whether intended or not high quality or otherwise – a learning environment for babies and young children. These three aspects (welfare, learning, development) cannot be separated, and a single framework supports this understanding for those who work with young children.

**16. It could be argued that if providers receive government funding - for example for delivering free nursery education for 3 and 4 year olds - then they should be required to deliver the things that Government thinks are important and sets out in the EYFS. What are your views on this?**

If services are receiving public funding they should be accountable for the quality of their service and for making a commitment, with support from government, to constantly seeking to review and improve the quality levels in their provision. However delivering to an importance relating solely to a government's agenda is not necessarily equivalent to the provision of a quality environment and nowhere has this been more evident than in early years education. For example, over the last 20 years we have seen examples of reception classes where provision may be deemed to be compliant with a government agenda but where children are poorly stimulated and deemed to be failing and where the environment does not take sufficient account of children's learning needs and conditions for well-being in this young age range (Adams, *et al.* 2004; Bennett & Kell, 1989; Broadhead, 2004). In addition, although messages around the importance of playful learning have been evident for reception children (and seemingly deemed important in government policy), play has nevertheless extensively diminished in reception classrooms and also in Years 1 and 2 where once it also thrived as active and experiential learning. The imposition of the literacy hour on young four and five year olds is one such example arising from interpretations of government policy and certainly a substantial factor in the diminishing of playful learning opportunities in reception classes (Featherstone, 2006). Whilst ability setting is not officially recommended, we have evidence of an increase in its use in reception classes, a concept that is considerably at odds with the young child and with the philosophy of the EYFS. Yet the review of research on grouping strategies commissioned by the government in 2008 ([www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk)) found 'ability grouping in primary schools had no academic benefits and severe negative consequences for children's development (Boaler, 2009: 97).

## **17. Do you have any other comments you'd like to make?**

In relation to government's responsibilities in supporting the implementation of the EYFS we would want to draw particular attention to the importance of maintaining funding to ensure that teachers remain **directly involved** with the education of young children in maintained nursery classes, schools and children's centres. Several studies have revealed their positive impact on enhanced learning opportunities (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002; Sylva et al., 2004) and the Select Committee (2010) also recently recommended:

Para 35: 'The Department must develop its policies in relation to early years provision in line with the findings from a range of studies, many of which it funded, showing the critical importance of qualified teachers in early years settings. We call on the Department to provide a clear statement on the respective roles of qualified teachers and Early Years Professionals in early years settings'.

The current requirements for teacher presence should remain as stated in the EYFS with one substantial amendment relating to the location of children from aged four in reception classes. This currently carries a minimum requirement in keeping with infant class size of 1:30. This is severely inadequate in our view given that all reception children have entitlements within the EYFS. One adult cannot support opportunities for playful learning, an educative experience and well-being required for this age range without statutory additional support; wherever possible, we would like to see a recommendation that the 'key person' approach be developed in Reception classes to improve the adult - child ratio. It currently remains at a head teacher's discretion whether additional staffing is forthcoming from the school budget and this leaves reception teachers and the children susceptible to understaffing. Many local authorities now fund early admission to reception classes immediately after the child's fourth birthday; this is significantly out of step with the majority of other European countries. Many reception classes are structured around extended periods of teacher direction and in keeping with the recommendations of the EYFS should be encouraging more opportunities for child-initiated and child-directed learning (Featherstone and Featherstone, 2009; Peters, 2009); these elements need expanding upon within the EYFS and a clear link with the reception classroom should be evident. We would also like to see an upward expansion of these aspects into KS1 to support more effective transitions for young children.

We would also like to strongly recommend the need for an integrated and well-considered national programme of professional/workforce development for early years practitioners that includes access to research findings relating to young children's learning and playful learning and playful pedagogies (Moyle, 2010a) and including multi-modality (e.g. Kress, 1997); the influences of new technologies, new media and popular culture on children's play and meaning making (Marsh et al, 2005) and the 'New Literacy Studies' (e.g. Pahl and Rowsell, 2006) There is a wealth of literature to show that effective practitioners are reflective practitioners who take new ways of thinking into their settings to inform their own practice and to share new insights with parents and carers (Moyle, 2010b).

### **The themes and objectives of the EYFS**

**18. The EYFS is currently based around four themes that are designed to provide a context for the EYFS requirements, and describe how practitioners should provide good quality and consistent support for the learning, development and care of young children. These themes are:**

- **A unique child**
- **Positive relationships**
- **Enabling environments**
- **Learning and development**

**Would you take a different approach to these themes and underpinning principles? If yes, please specify what approach you would take.**

The inherent weakness of these themes is not in their actual titles but in how they are subsequently worded to depict the child most substantially as a product of, or only in relation to their settings-based learning environment. They make rather limited attempts to encapsulate or recognise the influences of the home environment and the local community on the growing child and we would like to see these aspects further developed. Young children make meaning in the world drawing from experiences in school, from home and in their wider cultures and communities (Brooker, 2008). Essentially, the themes are currently being elaborated so as to depict the child as 'acted upon' by adults in the learning environment in order to acquire particular developmental milestones; a very limited view of learning. As they currently stand and are explained, the themes have little capacity to acknowledge the child's cultural starting points within the family and so fundamentally depict home-school relationships being about the parents' responsibilities in helping settings to move children towards developmental milestones that pay no attention to cultural influences and home experiences and which also make little if any reference to children's growth within communities of learners. Observers of children come to recognise the substantial impact that 'expert other' peers can make on children's learning and development in facilitative environments (Broadhead; 2004; 2006). We are seeing and welcoming evidence of related theoretical underpinnings in more recent government documentation (DCSF, 2009a; 2009b) but this documentation now needs to more substantially influence and influence the language and structure of the EYFS far more substantially if practitioners are to move from a simplistic view of children's learning in the early years. We would also like to see inclusion of the UN Convention of the 'Rights of the child' (1989) as guiding principles (UNICEF).

**19. The overarching aim of the EYFS is to improve children's developmental outcomes and to reflect that it is every child's right to grow up safe, healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and with economic wellbeing. Do you think the EYFS should have a different aim? If yes, please specify what aim you would have.**

The aim should make explicit reference to culture, family and social equalities as being integral to any young child's learning potential. We also feel the need to resist the construct of 'improving children's developmental outcomes' as a justifiable aim within a curriculum framework. It speaks of the child in terms of their future potential to 'contribute' to society rather than of their right to 'be' respected by society. The concept of 'outcomes' is severely limiting and it has long been recognised that stages of development is also an outdated construct for curriculum development. We should be thinking and speaking in the language of 'progression' rather than of 'outcomes' and stages (Goswami, 2007) and also considering children's strengths and rights.

**20 a) Underneath this overarching aim, the objectives of the EYFS are to:**

- **Objective 1: Set the standards for early years providers**
- **Objective 2: Provide for equality of opportunity**

- **Objective 3: Create the framework for partnership working**
- **Objective 4: Improve quality and consistency**
- **Objective 5: Lay a secure foundation for future learning.**

**Do you think these objectives are the right ones? If no, please specify what you think the objectives of the EYFS should be.**

We feel there should be an additional objective that relates to the child's right to enjoy and benefit from their early years experiences and to develop their identity and personality as an individual within their diverse communities.

**23. One of the aims of this review is to identify the knowledge and skills that are most important for young children to develop and thrive, particularly so that when they move into Year 1 they will continue to make good progress and achieve well in later school life. What do you think are the most important skills, knowledge, attitudes and dispositions that children need to develop from birth to five years?**

<input type="checkbox"/> All of the current six areas of learning	<input type="checkbox"/> A subset of the six areas of learning - please specify	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other - please specify
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Children's brains are incredibly flexible in these early years and are accommodating huge amounts of information. (Goswami, 2007). This is why, the question 'why' is so frequently on their lips. A good early years environment encourages this capacity for questioning in young children and through the use of flexible and open-ended play materials, allows children, as they become older and more skilful problem-solvers, to begin to answer their own 'why' questions. In this, a good early years setting understands and takes an interest in what children do at home and outside school as well as what they do within the setting and can accommodate and explore the child's view of the world from these multiple perspectives. This is a highly sophisticated teaching skill. Unfortunately, when children lose a play-based curriculum, they also seem to lose the ability or inclination to ask 'why' and increasingly accept (to one degree or another) the adult's right to transmit information to them. Hence we would recommend, as above, a deeper understanding of the impact of playful pedagogies which holds at its heart child-initiated experiences and activities on learning and the continuation of playful learning and pedagogies beyond the current EYFS age of five years. (Maynard and Chicken, 2010; Wood, 2010a; Wood 2010b).

**24. Currently, the EYFS says that children should be supported to develop equally across all six areas of learning at all ages. Neurological evidence suggests that there are some things it's important for young children to learn when they're very young - for example emotional control - and other things that they can pick up at an older age - for example peer social skills. Should the areas of learning be tailored for specific ages and stages?**

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure
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This question reflects a superficial view of human learning and of infants' and young children's tremendous capabilities. If young children are denied opportunities for extended peer interactions in activities of their own choosing and with sensitive adult guidance they are likely never to learn peer social skills (Broadhead, 2004; Goouch, 2010). Similarly emotional control is a complex human response which differs according to environment,

mood, well-being, prior experience and many other factors. It is, neither for adults nor children, a stable learning state (Martin, 2010; Hyson, 2003). We do not 'pick up' any facet of human behaviour, rather we deepen our understanding as we mature of the appropriateness of what we do, the impact of what we do and the alternatives we might employ. This is why practitioners in early years settings need to understand the complexity of human experiences so as to also understand the enormity of what young children are learning. Studies have shown that very young children can act with empathy and altruism if they have themselves experienced these conditions (Edmiston, 2007). Similarly, quite young children can resolve conflicts if they are within a space where adults culturally value and model conflict resolution themselves on a regular basis (Broadhead, 2009).

It is doubtful whether anyone has sufficient knowledge of human learning to 'tailor' it to ages and stages and furthermore, many would now argue that the concept of stages of development is in fact redundant because it in effect narrows our perspectives on human capabilities rather than informing or broadening them (Anning, *et al.* 2004).

As stated above, we would prefer to see the curriculum guidelines framed towards an understanding of progression in learning rather than a focus on learning outcomes.

**25. The early learning goals (ELGs) set out the things that most children should be able to do by the age of 5. The goals provide a structure for early years practitioners to work towards, but some people have told us that there are too many goals, with some duplication, and that some of the goals are too hard for some 5-year-old children. Do you think there should be a structure for practitioners to work towards?**

<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Partly agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Neither agree or disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> Partly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	

We are especially concerned at the impact the following goal has had:

*Use their phonic knowledge to write simple regular words and make phonetically plausible attempts at more complex words.*

This particular goal, building on the legacy of the implementation of the Literacy Hour in the majority of reception classrooms in particular had created an excessive focussing on the formal aspects of learning to read at a very young age whereas much research emphasises the importance of the enjoyment of books and stories for children as an prerequisite in the longer-term development of reading skills. Children in many European countries are not required to begin to acquire these skills before ages 6-7 years and are as well developed in their reading skills by KS2 as English children

The guidance should not speak in terms of 'goals' in our view; we have several times above referenced the use of progression as a key feature of learning and development without the inherent need to measure attainment as implied by the use of the term 'goal'. This relates to assessment which we address later and in the next response. We would like to suggest that the sections 'language for thinking' and 'language for communication' (in the section on CLL) are also included in the section for PSRN since, in our view this

would extend the somewhat narrow emphasis on 'skills' and mathematical vocabulary in this area of the curriculum. This view is underpinned by research (e.g. Carruthers and Worthington, 2005) and by the review of mathematics teaching (DCSF, 2008: chapter 3) on 'mathematical mark making' and developed in another DCSF publication (2009c, 12-17).

**26. If you think there should be a structure for practitioners to work towards, what do you think this should include?**

The goals do not provide a structure for practitioners to work towards. They provide a justification for a tick box approach to children's learning borne of the need to generically demonstrate compliance with a value-laden approach to 'standards' rather than a willingness to engage with the inevitably messy and complex business of human learning. Assessing children's learning in ways that reveal children's interests, capabilities and prior knowledge – and gaps in knowledge – is a sufficient structure for practitioners to work within if curriculum documentation can help them to understand 'progression' rather than listing goal-achievement (McAfee and Leong, 2010). In order to create and sustain an appropriate structure, well-embedded assessment techniques (including observing, listening, conversations) should become a significant focus of initial and ongoing professional education and development for practitioners (Broadhead; 2006; Carr, 2002).

**27. What do you think are the most important areas to focus on to support disadvantaged children to progress? Please tick your most important 3.**

<input type="checkbox"/> Personal, social & emotional skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication, speaking & listening skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Reading & writing
<input type="checkbox"/> Problem solving & numeracy	<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge to make sense of the world	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical development
<input type="checkbox"/> Opportunities to explore creativity	x Other - please specify	

These cannot be hierarchically rated. The point of having them there is that this is currently it seems the best way we have of depicting the holistic learning needs of all young children. They are long-established ways of helping practitioners understand how to dis-assemble and reintegrate these learning needs within their pedagogies of practice. All children need them all and to suggest that 'disadvantaged' (we assume you mean 'economically disadvantaged' but are not fully clear how the term is being defined) children have a set of learning needs that differs from those of 'advantaged' children is inequitable. There are numerous texts and studies that show that language development and effective communication in a variety of symbolic ways (including gesture, speech and graphicacy) is the basis for and a significant influence on progression and learning (Whitehead, 2009) and that it needs to be experienced by children with well-trained adults who understand its value within a broad and balanced curriculum (Moyles, *et al.* 2003). Providing a good range of playful experiences which allow children to learn from their peers and extended conversations between interested and relaxed adults and children in relation to any/all of the above will be of significant benefit to those children who, for whatever reasons, are experiencing difficulties in making progress in learning (Papatheodorou, 2010).

**28. Parents have the biggest influence on their children's learning and development. Do you think there's a role for early years practitioners to work with parents to help improve children's learning and development at home?**

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Sure
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Very often, parents do not themselves realise how they conversations with and responses to their children's 'why' and 'how' questions are an integral part of how the young child comes to be knowledgeable and influential in their world and certainly early years practitioners can assist in this growth of understanding (Nutbrown and Hannon 1997). Our uncertainty, in response to the question arises therefore not from concerns about parental roles but from the potential advocacy of an ethos where parents are held responsible for or made to feel guilty about not becoming their child's educator. There are complex cultural dimensions here and practitioner expectations are often predicated upon assumptions that home cultures are similar to their own when in fact parents may not share the same cultural understandings about children's learning (Brooker 2002; 2008). All parents want the 'best' for their child and the majority will respond well to non-judgemental, accessible and interesting programmes that help them to better understand the nature of learning and how children's behaviour relates to the relative capacity to make choices and be autonomous in their environment – whether home or setting. From this will come decisions to engage in new and potentially developmental ways with their own children. We could not agree to advocacy of parental instruction in the home as a means of moving children more rapidly towards the acquisition of developmental outcomes as prevalent within the current standards based agenda. We do not believe that homework should be a part of children's experience in the early years.

**29. Learning and development in the early years is complex. Do you have any further comments on the current six areas of learning and development, ELGs and educational programmes in the EYFS?**

**Assessing children's progress**

**30. It's an integral part of caring for young children that practitioners should, on an ongoing basis, observe and understand what children are capable of and enjoy, and tailor what play and activities they do with them to reflect this. This cycle of observation and assessment, known as formative assessment (or 'Listen, Look and Note') informs or guides everyday planning. What do you think of this approach?**

In our previous response we suggested that this language be changed from 'look, listen and note', to: 'observe, reflect and record' and reiterate this point. Practitioners have substantial difficulties with understanding and applying observational approaches and of what to subsequently write about. In particular this relates to the purposes of the 'noting' or 'recording'. To create a pedagogy of practice around these approaches is far more complex than the above statement reflects. Studies have shown how practitioners have taken many years to perfect such approaches (Rinaldi, 2006; Maynard and Chicken, 2010) and ongoing development opportunities should be being provided. Their capacities to make sense of the integrated nature of children's learning at this age is severely inhibited by a fragmented and goal-orientated approach to assessment. Assessment against goals inhibits integrated thinking by practitioners and we have evidence that in the reception class, many teachers teach to the goals and do not go beyond them.

31. **Summative assessment is a summary of all the formative assessment done over a long period and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) is a way of capturing this at the age of 5. It is intended to provide Year 1 teachers with each child's level of learning and development as they reach the end of the EYFS, so that they should be able to tailor learning to individual children's abilities, and to inform parents/carers how their child is developing.. However, some practitioners tell us that this takes up too much time, and that not all Year 1 teachers find the EYFSP useful. What are your views on the EYFSP?**

<input type="checkbox"/> I like it as it is  I think it should be got rid x of completely - please specify why	<input type="checkbox"/> I think it should be slimmed down - please specify how	<input type="checkbox"/> I think it should be non-statutory
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The EYFSP should be abandoned and a new set of developmental guidelines relating to observing, reflecting and recording should be introduced to form the core of a national professional education and development programme for all early years practitioners. At inspection, settings could provide evidence of attendance at these sessions and could show the documentation being used to inter-connect assessment with planning whilst taking account of children's interests and of the curriculum guidelines (Smidt 2005). Many settings have already developed innovative approaches such as learning journals/journeys which provide an effective means of documenting the rich diversity of young children's play and learning (see for example, DCSF, 2009c: 41), Other approaches include weekly planning sheets displayed for parents that reveal links between children's interests and teacher-directed activities; the use of photography, including photos taken by children as records of their learning (Williams, 2010). It is time to collate, share and develop these innovative banks of activity and to begin to consider more practical ways of using ICT to store and share learning experiences with parents and carers. It still remains extremely difficult for practitioners to evidence children's learning through play and this aspect needs special attention if the commitment to playful learning is to become a reality in every early years setting (Brock, *et al.* 2009).

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