

The Early Learning Goals in practice

by Liz Wilcock

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Introduction

In the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage book, which came into force in September 2012, the learning and development requirements are described in plain English.

These comprise of:

- the seven areas of learning and development and the educational programmes
- | the early learning goals, which summarise the knowledge, skills and understanding that all young children should have gained by the end of the Reception year; and
- the assessment requirements (when and how practitioners must assess children's achievements, and when and how they should discuss children's progress with parents and/or carers).

This book has a focus on the early learning goals.

Prior to looking at each of the early learning goals, we need to understand that the areas of learning and development now fall into two categories:

- Prime Areas of Learning
- | Specific Areas of Learning

In 2010, Dame Claire Tickell, Chief Executive of Action for Children, carried out an independent review of the EYFS – her remit was to see how the Framework could be less bureaucratic and more focused on supporting children's early learning.

In *The Early Years: Foundations for Life, Health and Learning*, Dame Claire Tickell explains her reasons for introducing prime and specific areas of learning into the Framework:

'Evidence shows that personal, social and emotional development, communication and language and

physical development are essential foundations for children's life, learning and success. Therefore, I am recommending these are identified as prime areas of learning in the EYFS. Sitting alongside these, I am proposing that literacy, mathematics, understanding of the world, and expressive arts and design are identified as the specific areas of learning in which these prime skills are applied. I believe this model for the areas of learning is clear, unambiguous, and simple and should help all early years practitioners to understand better how to support children's development.

Many practitioners told me that they would like to see the early learning goals – which define the level of development most children should have reached by the end of the year in which they turn 5 – reduced and simplified, and made more sensitive to the needs of summer born children and to those children who are fast developers. To address this, I recommend that the early learning goals are reduced in number from 69 to 17. I also recommend that for each goal, a simple three-part scale is established which sets out what working towards, what achieving, and what exceeding each goal looks like. Many people spoke to me about tensions with the current formal assessment of children's level of development at age 5 – the EYFS Profile. In consequence, I am recommending this is radically simplified, and reduced in size from 117 pieces of information to 20 pieces of information that capture a child's level of development in a much less burdensome way'.

As a result, the areas of learning and development and their aspects are now presented as in the table opposite.

In Section One of this book, we will consider the **aspects of the prime areas of learning**.

In Section Two, we will consider the **aspects of the specific areas of learning**. The table shows the aspects we will be focusing on.

In Section Three, we will consider the **EYFS Profile**.

Area of Learning	Aspects
Prime Areas	
Communication and Language	Listening and attention Understanding Speaking
Physical Development	Moving and handling Health and self-care
Personal, Social and Emotional Development	Making relationships Self-confidence and self-awareness Managing feelings and behaviour
Specific Areas	
Literacy	Reading Writing
Mathematics	Numbers Shape, space and measure
Understanding the World	People and communities The world Technology
Expressive Arts and Design	Exploring and using media and materials Being imaginative

Information for this book was sourced from:

- *The Early Years: Foundations for Life, Health and Learning* (2011)
- | The Statutory Framework (2012)
- Development Matters (2012 non statutory guidance)
- Ofsted (www.ofsted.gov.uk)
- Department for Education (www.education.gov.uk)



Section One: The prime areas are at the heart of each child's learning

From birth, babies begin to develop quickly in response to relationships and experiences. The prime areas continue to be at the core of learning throughout the EYFS – they run through and support learning in all other areas.

Let's look at each one in turn.

Communication and Language

This is all about developing children's listening and attention skills, helping children's understanding of language and developing their speaking skills. Early language development is crucial for future learning and school readiness.

Early Learning Goals

Listening and attention

Children listen attentively in a range of situations. They listen to stories, accurately anticipating key events and respond to what they hear with relevant comments, questions or actions. They give their attention to what others say and respond appropriately, while engaged in another activity.

Understanding

Children follow instructions involving several ideas or actions. They answer 'how' and 'why' questions about their experiences and in response to stories or events.

Section One: The prime areas are at the heart of each child's learning

Stories

The book area is a small, cosy and communication friendly space that not only has a range of books for the children to look at but also a selection of cushions and blankets for the children to snuggle up in. It is covered with fabric to give a den like feel, which provides the children with a sense of privacy. Children can often be found in our book area sharing stories with each other. They will look at the pictures and create their own narratives and they usually have a group of friends sitting around them listening. They love to pretend to be the teacher and sit and listen to each other attentively. Audio books can also be found in the book area. Children are able to self select the story they would like to listen to and play it on the CD player. The children enjoy this because they can use technology to hear their favourite tales.

'We have a designated storytime every day as well as sharing key texts for our themes every week. When we read a story we try to encourage the children to contribute as much as possible. In order to achieve



this we try not to ask too many questions, especially questions that only have one answer! Instead we will comment on the story and allow children time to add their own comments without always having to put their hand up. For example we might start a comment with "I wonder why..." We find children are more likely to contribute to a shared read like this than if they are put on the spot with lots of questions that only have a right or wrong answer'.

Whenever teachers do need to ask children a question about a book, they follow the ten second rule, which means they give the children ten seconds to think about the question before expecting them to answer it.

Giving attention to what is said to them

Teachers always plan from the children's interests in the setting and are constantly supplementing learning bays with resources that will capture the children's imagination. As children explore these resources, adults may play alongside them, commenting and modelling language. For example if a child is using the Dino World an adult might share their knowledge of dinosaurs or talk about a visit to the Natural History Museum. The children then feel encouraged to share their own knowledge but they do not need to stop what they are doing to show the adult what they know about dinosaurs.

In terms of **understanding**, let's look at how you can:

1. Support children to follow instructions involving several ideas or actions.
2. Provide opportunities for children to answer 'how' and 'why' questions about their experiences and in response to stories or events.

Following instructions

The simplest way teachers at John Rankin Infant and Nursery School support children with following instructions, is through daily routine. At tidy up time each child is given a specific job to do as part of a group, such as tidying the role-play area. The children are told what is expected of them and the task is made easier with resource drawers being clearly labelled so the children know where to put things away.