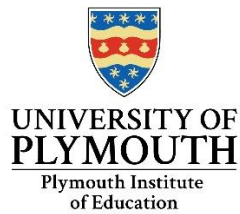# Insights Into a High-Quality Early Years Curriculum

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH AND MONTESSORI GLOBAL EDUCATION

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> **Insights Into a High-Quality Early Years Curriculum**

About the Authors:

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Executive Summary

The quality of early years education and childcare (EYE&CC) is well established as facilitating the holistic development of young children and providing the foundations for their life-long learning. However, while the quality of EYE&CC has been well researched and theorised, there has been less of a specific focus on the quality of the early years curriculum. When considered in relation to the early years, curriculum has been identified as an area of struggle, generating questions about its content and coherence (and how these are determined)[1]. In the English context, there has been a tendency in recent years to focus on guidance documents and frameworks to support children's development, rather than having a specific early years curriculum. In fact, Ofsted (as the regulatory body for EYE&CC provision in England) clearly states that it does not have a preferred way for how settings design their early years curriculum[2]. Ofsted do, however, make a distinction between curriculum as 'what is taught' and pedagogy as 'how it is taught'[3]. In reality, there is a close and almost inextricable relationship between the two that warrants further exploration to find out what constitutes a high-quality early years curriculum - what does it look like and how is it enacted in practice?

The aim of the *Insights Into a High-Quality Early Years Curriculum* project was therefore to explore the perspectives of multiple stakeholders on the features of a high-quality early years curriculum.
The research was undertaken in four stages:

1. A Delphi survey of experts (e.g. academics, sector representatives)
2. Nominal Group Technique focus groups with educators
3. An Appreciative Inquiry into practice
4. Learning Walks with educators

The mix of methods and participants ensured the research collected the views of a range of stakeholders, providing rich and broad data on the central question: what are the features of a high-quality early years curriculum? All data were analysed for core themes, with consideration of where themes complemented each other across the different data sources and for evidence of consensus and/or contradiction.

Across the data, common themes were identified around following the child; the importance of trained educators; the role of the environment; inclusion; working with families; observation and assessment; and children's development. There was a strong sense that the curriculum was open-ended in content to accommodate the

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[1] Wood, E., & Hedges, H. (2016) Curriculum in early childhood education: critical questions about content, coherence, and control, *The Curriculum Journal*, 27:3, 387-405, DOI: 10.1080/09585176.2015.1129981

[2] Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[3] Best start in life: a research review for early years - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

uniqueness of each child in support of their social and emotional development. Educators were seen as requiring the knowledge and skills to be able to follow the child and to provide learning opportunities in the moment, based on the needs and interests of that child. There was acknowledgement of children's cultural contexts and the families and communities that they were from, thereby foregrounding the importance of parental partnership. In part, this related to a desire to ensure that the approach to the curriculum was inclusive, irrespective of a child's background. Discussions of inclusion also prompted consideration of ways to adapt support to provide a range of learning opportunities appropriate for children's different needs.

The environment was seen as providing opportunities for enriching children's learning and facilitating their agency in ways that reflected the needs and interests of each child. Examples from practice illustrated how educators utilise the environment and the resources in it to offer prompts and stimulations in support of children's learning. These prompts might be shaped by aspects of developmentalism and anticipation of 'the next stage' but are informed by the current interests of the child. The early years curriculum therefore does not reflect a model of distinct subjects each with a specific course of study (as can be found in other stages of education), but is instead thematic in its approach, with integration across themes and foundational disciplinary knowledge. Curriculum as 'what is taught' is therefore grounded in children's needs and interests, often emerging in the moment to support children's expression of these motivations. The professional knowledge of educators to respond in the moment, but with awareness of learning to come, was found to be essential in facilitating this unique and distinct model of curriculum.

Key Findings

- **The early years curriculum is distinct from all other stages of education** and requires a clear definition to enable articulation. A typical curriculum sets out a course of study to enable the transmission of established knowledge and skills, but an early years curriculum is less prescriptive and more emergent and iterative.

- **The early years curriculum is an emergent, expressive and contextual curriculum**, with an emphasis on responding to the needs and interests of the child, offering autonomy of exploration in support of appropriate child development.

- **The early years curriculum is a collaborative curriculum**, where the pedagogy upholds an approach that follows the child and supports the child's expression through a collaboration between the child and the educator, and the educator and the family/community.

- **The early years curriculum is an integrated curriculum,** cutting across subjects, topics and forms of knowledge.

- **The knowledge and expertise of educators is central to the quality of an early years curriculum**. Educators utilise knowledge of child development in their interactions with children to support a personalised approach to learning that adapts environments, interactions and activities for an inclusive curriculum.

- **Curriculum in early years education is most strongly represented through practice**; it can be hard to articulate and would benefit from the development of a set of linked concepts. Current ways-of-speaking about the early years curriculum are more associated with pedagogy and need to be reframed to focus on curriculum.

- **Initial and continuing training for staff in early years education should include content on curriculum** so that early years educators are confident in how to articulate their aims for what children might learn as well as comment on how this will happen**.**

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A High-Quality Early Years Curriculum Is…

An emergent curriculum

Responding to the needs, interests and stage of development of a child.

Educators will understand trajectories of child development and will draw on this knowledge while building on children's interests in support of their learning. The curriculum therefore might evolve in the moment, but it is not completely free. Educators will provide resources and interact with children to guide their learning and development in ways that support their future educational trajectory.

A contextual curriculum

Recognising the ecological context of the child and the diverse backgrounds that children will come from.

The curriculum responds to and supports children to express their interests and capabilities, building on their cultural capital in support of their life-long learning.

An expressive curriculum

Builds on the autonomy of the child, whereby children shape the curriculum through their active participation in the EYE&CC setting.

There is an emphasis on children as capable and for children to be able to express themselves in terms of their capabilities, set against the context of building on their interests and an understanding of their ecological context.

Introduction

The social and economic importance of early years education and childcare (EYE&CC) is internationally recognised, due to its role in facilitating parental employment while supporting young children's holistic development (Campbell-Barr and Nygård, 2014). The quality of EYE&CC provision is established as important for securing the best outcomes for children and has become a site of policy interest, with various initiatives to improve the quality of provision at international, national and local levels. In England, the continual evolution of research, policies and legislation surrounding how to achieve quality EYE&CC has led to multiple revisions to the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), the standards that EYE&CC providers must meet when providing services for the learning, development and care of children from birth to five. However, while the EYFS acts as a guide for EYE&CC practice, the framework is not a curriculum and EYE&CC providers are able to determine their own curricular approach to support children towards specified outcomes. The lack of a specific curriculum document marks early years education as different from other stages of education in England, where a National Curriculum has existed since 1988. Curriculum guidance for EYE&CC providers is currently provided by documents such as Development Matters (Department for Education, 2021a) and Birth to Five Matters (Early Years Coalition, 2021), but even the existence of two guidance documents illustrates that there are different approaches to a high-quality early years curriculum.

Ofsted was introduced in 2004 to inspect the quality of EYE&CC provision. While Ofsted presents a centralised assessment of quality throughout England (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016), they state:

> *The EYFS's educational programmes provide the framework for the curriculum. It is up to schools to decide how to expand, extend and broaden these. It is for schools to decide what guidance to use when developing and shaping their curriculums.*

> Gov.UK, 2023

Through Ofsted, a specific focus is placed on assessing the quality of provision, measured against a set of predetermined standards within a single assessment framework (Ofsted, 2019). The assessments by Ofsted arguably prompt educators to consider how to produce and deliver a high-quality early years curriculum but, despite extensive research into the quality of EYE&CC, there has been little to focus specifically on the question of what constitutes a high-quality early years curriculum. The flexibility in approach to the curriculum indicates acceptance that there will not be one approach towards implementing high-quality EYE&CC (Giardiello, 2014), but such flexibility can also raise questions around what can (perhaps even should) guide a high-quality early years curriculum.

Features of the Curriculum

Internationally, the early years curriculum is in most cases informed by theories of child development (Wood, 2020). The EYFS guidance illustrates this by presenting age-related expectations and milestones that children are likely to achieve within each stage of their learning and development (DfE, 2021b; Early Years Coalition, 2021), culminating in a stated good level of development (GLD) (DfE, 2021a). The development and mastery of such knowledge, skills and age-related developmental expectations are supported through the delivery of high-quality teaching and the provision of appropriate learning experiences. Approaches to early years teaching and learning continue to be influenced by early years pioneers of educational provision designed especially for young children (Giardiello, 2014); within the EYFS, significant pioneers whose ideas about what children should learn include (for example) Rousseau (1762), Froebel (1826), Montessori (1912), McMillan (1919), and Isaacs (1929). However, the numerous ideologies contributing to what constitutes a high-quality curriculum can create uncertainty regarding the best approach. This has led to a juggling act for educators managing priorities within an ever-changing educational climate (Urban, 2008). Wood (2019) has likened this to a kaleidoscope of EYE&CC practice, which changes each time particular priorities, initiatives, policies or features of a quality curriculum are foregrounded, leading to questions about whether a high-quality early years curriculum can ever fully be achieved (Moss, 2016).

Research such as the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project (Sylva et al, 2004), the Tickell Review (2011) and the Nutbrown Review (2012), have helped highlight features of a high-quality learning environment and identifying the importance of improving children's life chances through strong parental partnerships, secure professional knowledge and high-quality pedagogical interactions. Tickell (2011) recommended flexibility in EYFS provision through a clear and accessible framework and proposed that personal, social and emotional development, communication and language and physical development should become prime areas of learning. This led to revisions of the EYFS and the current version constitutes seven areas of learning, split into three 'prime areas' and four 'specific areas', all of which are underpinned by the characteristics of effective teaching and learning (DfE, 2021a). Facilitating children's learning through the characteristics of effective teaching and learning forms part of a high-quality curriculum, and there are links here to historical philosophies on teaching and learning, but there is also an intersection between curriculum (what is taught and what children should learn) and pedagogy (how it is taught) that requires further exploration.

The first characteristic of effective teaching and learning acknowledges the importance of enabling children to learn through 'playing and exploring' to investigate and experience the world around them (DfE, 2021b). This concept of play as promoting the joy of learning knowledge and skills was greatly valued by the early years pioneers mentioned above. However, individual interpretations in defining playful experiences continue to exist, and this can create muddled constructs surrounding quality in EYE&CC. For instance, Montessori (1912) promotes playful experiences within a well prepared and structured environment, valuing play as the child's work, whereas Froebel (1826) believed that the spontaneity of play reveals thoughts and feelings and enables children to reflect upon, and make connections between, lived experiences through self-directed activity. Similarly, Issacs (1929) values the idea of free-play and not limiting the children's freedom within their learning, so children can construct and interpret their own understandings of the world. Within these ideas is evidence of the intersection between curriculum and pedagogy, but arguably the emphasis is on the how something is taught, with what is taught and what children learn being more opaque.

The importance of the learning environment is acknowledged within the Statutory Framework for the EYFS as the overarching principle: an enabling environment (DfE, 2021a). The concept of a high-quality curriculum consisting of a

well-prepared and resourceful, enabling environment, links to the second characteristic of effective teaching and learning – 'active learning'. Active learning is described in the EYFS as relating to children maintaining concentration, developing perseverance and enjoying achievements (DfE, 2021b). These aspects of active learning are included in experiential learning, providing the opportunity for children to learn through first-hand experiences, whether this be through nature acting as the teacher (Rousseau, 1762), or children practising daily living skills (Giardiello, 2014). The Montessori Method (1912) incorporates the opportunity to develop skills needed for later life, such as cookery and becoming independent. Similarly, Froebel's (1826) use of occupations focused upon active learning through delivering inventive activities, such as wood crafts and sewing. While not specifying developmental milestones, there is a sense here that the curriculum should lead to acquiring knowledge and skills for future life.

As identified in the third characteristic of effective learning, 'creating and thinking critically', children develop their own ideas and this gives particular direction to each individual's learning (DfE, 2021b). The uniqueness of each child is identified as an overarching principle of the EYFS, viewing children as continuous learners, resilient, capable and self-assured, placing young children at the centre of EYE&CC provision (DfE, 2021a:6). The origins of the emphasis on creating and thinking critically can be found in; experiential learning (Rousseau, 1762; Froebel, 1826; Montessori, 1912), directing their own learning (Isaacs, 1929), having freedom to explore (Isaacs, 1929; Bruce, 2005; Athey, 2007), co-constructing knowledge (Vygotsky, 1962; Bruner, 1960) and conducting a journey of self-discovery (Piaget, 1936). Support for children to develop their critical and creative thinking is advocated through incorporating open-ended natural resources, to support the development of children's ideas and strategies and their use of imagination and creativity (DfE, 2021a). The use of open-ended and/or natural resources is not just a present-day concept; Froebel (1826) incorporated the use of gifts and occupations within his kindergarten practice, providing open-ended objects as gifts to stimulate children's creativity. Similarly, Montessori (1912) provided children with freedom of choice within a well-prepared environment, consisting of a variety of open-ended natural materials aiming to inspire young children. McMillan (1919) and Isaacs (1929) also supported this philosophy, suggesting that high-quality EYE&CC requires children to have the freedom to interact with the natural world around them to develop curiosity, creativity and critical thinking.

There are many roles associated with an educator in delivering a high-quality curriculum, which have been influenced by different theoretical approaches of teaching and learning (Basford, 2019). Froebel (1826) valued the educator's role of observation and reflection in monitoring and guiding children's learning and development. Montessori (1912) believed in observing children, with the educator only intervening during sensitive periods, whereby children show signs of inviting the educator into their learning process to facilitate and guide their learning further. Isaacs (1929) believed in supporting children to learn through freely chosen activities, whilst Vygotsky (1962) noticed how children could often achieve more with the help of a knowledgeable other, and Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) explored the role of the educator in finding different ways to scaffold learning and support children to extend their knowledge and skills. Furthermore, McMillan (1919) emphasised the care element within EYE&CC, identifying the essential nurturing role educators have in promoting children's learning and development. Consequently, there is a need to ensure educators have the skills needed to adapt their roles to support the enactment of the curriculum alongside children's individual needs and experiences (Sylva et al, 2014).

Contemporary practice acknowledges the responsibility of educators to develop an awareness of the cultural capital children bring to their EYE&CC setting (Ofsted, 2019). Cultural capital relates to identifying each child's unique experiences to date, what they have learned from 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al., 1992) built up in families and

communities. More controversially, cultural capital can also refer to the essential knowledge children need on their trajectory through the education system to become educated citizens. To enable all children to reach their potential, these two kinds of knowledge should overlap, so that children can use the knowledge they bring from home to support their learning in their EYE&CC setting. If curriculum is understood just as a course of study that leads to the development of particular knowledge and skills, this can result in a linear design; in the case of the EYE&CC settings in England, curricula might therefore be designed to lead towards the set of desired knowledge and skills set out in the elements of the GLD. However, there are concerns as to whether this might limit potential to celebrate children's uniqueness (Cowley, 2019) and negate more child-centred approaches (Wood, 2020).

In the first of a series of 'research reviews for early years', Ofsted (2022) have outlined their view of an early years curriculum and pedagogy. As discussed, they make a clear distinction between curriculum as 'what is taught' and pedagogy as 'how it is taught'. Ofsted advocate a progression model of curriculum within which progress is defined as "knowing more and remembering more" (p10) with the role of educators being to plan for that progress with careful sequencing of subject-based knowledge. Curriculum in this form may be viewed as deterministic, providing a framework from which "practitioners choose activities and experiences *after* they have determined the curriculum" (Ofsted, 2022. P17). The narrative within Ofsted's research review has been critiqued as narrow and linear (Early Education, 2022) with concerns expressed over the potential influence a simplistic understanding of curriculum may have on practice in the context of the current accountability and inspection processes.

Educators' accountability for the provision of high-quality EYE&CC remains a topical debate (Moss, 2016; Wood, 2019; Basford, 2019), with evidence of the entanglement of philosophical concepts with theories of children's development that shape the making of an early years curriculum. Curriculum and pedagogical approaches cannot solely be designed using theories of child development, due to the uniqueness of each child and their accompanying experiences of the world around them (Wyse and Goswami, 2008). Just like the history of EYE&CC, children's development is not always linear or determined by their socio-historical contexts (Guttierez and Rogoff, 2003). Learning should therefore lead development, requiring an educator to identify children's individual experiences to inform approaches to teaching, learning and the curriculum design (Hatch, 2010). However, there is reason to question whether the constraints of the EYFS and GLD result in educators placing less focus on free-play and children's uniqueness, instead focussing on meeting particular outcomes (Robert-Holmes, 2015).

EYE&CC practice is continuously evolving as a result of emerging research, priorities, initiatives and legislation, alongside the influence from existing philosophies and theories of child development (Wood, 2020). In an attempt to achieve high-quality provision, ideas and concepts surrounding best practice in EYE&CC are altered and recycled (Moss, 2016). Confusion appears to remain around identifying *exactly* what the features are included in a high-quality curriculum and the most effective approach to take with regards to facilitating children's learning. It could be argued that the features of a high-quality curriculum are flexible, dependent upon the values and needs of each setting, corresponding with the flexibility identified in delivering opportunities for teaching and learning within the EYFS (Early Years Coalition, 2021; DfE, 2021b). However, the lack of certainty as to what is driving the appearance of the features of a high-quality early years curriculum in particular contexts demonstrates that it is an area that requires further exploration in order to ascertain both what concepts underpin quality in an early years curriculum and what this looks like in practice.

Methods

To explore what constitutes a high-quality early years curriculum, the research was conducted in four phases comprising of: a Delphi Survey of experts; a series of Nominal Group Technique (NGT) focus groups; an online module using an Appreciative Inquiry approach; and a series of Learning Walks in early years settings. Details of each methodological approach are outlined in this section.

Phase 1: Delphi Survey of Experts

Phase one of this research project involved a Delphi survey of identified experts in the field of Early Years Education and Childcare (EYE&CC). The Delphi survey was employed as a consensus group method used to engage a variety of expert opinions concerning the features of a high-quality early years curriculum. In methodological literature the Delphi Survey is described as involving six stages (Humphrey-Murto et al, 2017). These are: identifying a research problem; undertaking a literature review; developing an initial questionnaire; conducting anonymous and iterative survey rounds; providing participants with feedback between rounds; and summarising the findings (Humphrey-Murto et al, 2017, p1491). Following the identification of the problem (what constitutes a high-quality early years curriculum) and an initial literature view, the Delphi survey consisted of three iterative questionnaires, compiled using JISC Online Surveys, which allowed participants to submit their responses anonymously. Participants were made aware that the anonymous nature of the survey prevented the possibility of withdrawing data, but that they could withdraw from later surveys or decline to answer specific questions. Participants in the Delphi survey were purposefully sampled with the objective of selecting a variety of experts representing the broad spectrum of the EYE&CC field. Those invited to participate included academics, trainers and consultants and sector organisation members.

The first survey consisted of a series of nine open ended questions relating to the theme of a high-quality early years curriculum ([see Appendix One for the Survey Questions](#)). Survey one received seventeen responses which were collated and returned to participants for further comment in survey two. Survey two received 8 responses which were analysed and emerging themes were presented back to participants for final comment and ranking in survey three.

The Delphi survey method afforded a number of benefits, including the capacity to engage participants from across a wide geographical area, thus broadening the potential pool of experts involved. The opportunity to respond privately in writing helped to avoid undue dominance by individuals (as can happen in focus groups), allowing equal space for the voices of all participants. The combination of open and closed questions across the surveys generated a wide range and large volume of data. However, limitations included the time required to complete three surveys, particularly where respondents were asked to read previous data, and not being able to link to their own responses due to the anonymous nature of the surveys.

Phase 2: Nominal Group Technique Educator Focus Groups

Phase two of this research project employed an adapted Nominal Group Technique (NGT) approach to facilitate discussion regarding the features of a high-quality early years curriculum. NGT is an inclusive focus group-based approach designed to encourage input from *all* members of a participant group. Participants are asked to respond to a central question or statement, which forms the basis for the generation and discussion of ideas across four (Vander Laenen, 2015) or five (Potter et al, 2004) main phases. Each focus group begins with a general introduction and explanation of the process. In *phase one* participants work independently to consider and record their responses to an initial question. In *phase two* participants share their responses in a round-robin format, ensuring that all ideas are

included and recorded by the researcher, using the words of participants. At this point participants can add additional ideas. *Phase three* involves discussion of the ideas generated in phase two, opening space for clarification and rewording where necessary. Similar and repeated ideas can be combined under new headings. During *phase four* the ideas are anonymously ranked by participants using a voting system to reveal consensus on the best or most relevant ideas.

There are a number of benefits associated with the NGT method. The views of all participants are represented as each member of the group has the opportunity to put forward their own statements and have the option to vote for their own ideas in the final phase (Macphail, 2001). The sequential and structured nature of the method also increases consistency between groups as researchers follow a series of predetermined steps (Macphail, 2001).

Typically, NGT focus groups take place in person; however, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic the method was adapted for use on an online platform, in this case Zoom.   The adapted phases for this project are detailed below. In addition to Zoom, the NGT focus groups used online software Ideaboardz and Mentimetre to facilitate documentation of ideas and voting.

- Preparation.
  The starting question, 'What are the features of a high-quality early years curriculum?', was developed by the research team prior to the focus groups and was sent to participants in advance of the meeting.
- Phase 1: Individual responses.
  Prior to the NGT meeting participants were asked to consider the starting question and to record up to five responses.
- Phase 2: Generation and recording of themes.
  Participants were asked to record their responses to the starting question using Ideaboardz, creating individual post-it notes for each idea. Once posted responses became visible to all, however, participants were asked not to discuss their ideas until the next stage.
- Phase 3: Discussion of themes.
  Researchers facilitated discussion inviting participants to clarify their ideas and to group them into common themes, agreeing on distinct headings. At this stage, participants were able to add new themes in response to discussion.
- Phase 4: Voting and ranking.
  Once headings for each theme had been agreed, these were put into Mentimetre, where participants were invited to rank the themes according to their importance and relevance to the starting question.

The NGT process produced both qualitative and quantitative data. Visual data of the themes generated and the resulting quantitative ranking were collected from Ideaboardz and Mentimetre. The NGT process, including discussion, was documented and transcribed using the record function on Zoom.

Sampling for the NGT phase of data collection was purposeful, inviting participation from experts in the field of early childhood education and care, including practitioners currently working in early years settings. A pilot group was carried out, followed by two focus groups (Focus Group 1: N=4, and Focus Group 2: N=3).

Further focus groups were planned, but recruit was difficult as EYE&CC providers adjusted to the relaxing of Covid restrictions, alongside the day-to-day challenges of working in the sector. Given this, a focus group was incorporated into the online learning module to generate additional qualitative data (N=6).

Phase 3: Appreciative Inquiry Online Module

Phase three of this research project involved the development of an online module, designed based on analysis of the data from the Delphi Survey and NGT focus groups. The module was designed to guide practitioners through an Appreciate Inquiry (AI) process within their settings, leading to the development of a learning walk exploring the features of a high-quality curriculum. Appreciative Inquiry focusses on the positive aspects of experience, focussing on what is going well within a setting or organisation, rather than looking for problems to solve (Peel, 2021). An AI approach assumes that every organisation has examples of positive practice and focusses on the "systematic discovery of what gives life to an organization or a community when it is most effective and most capable in economic, ecological, and human terms" (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005, p15). The reason for choosing an AI approach to structure the online module was a desire to recognise and celebrate the many positive achievements of EYE&CC settings in relation to the development and practice of curriculum. Bushe (2012) considers that any inquiry into the development of a social system should begin with appreciation of what works well, using this as a starting point for any future change or transformation.

Within the online module participants were led through four AI phases:

- Discover: finding strengths and the best of current practice.
- Dream: identifying opportunities and aspirations in search of 'what could be'.
- Design: understanding strengths and planning strategies for development (realising the dream).
- Destiny: implementing strategies in a sustainable, holistic and creative way. (Adapted from Passy et al, 2018)

In the 'discover' phase participants were asked to share the strengths of current practice within their settings, focussing on what they do well. In the 'dream' phase participants were asked to consider their responses to the question 'What are the features of a high-quality early years curriculum?' Responses were documented using Padlet, and participants were encouraged to respond to each other's ideas. In the 'design' phase of the inquiry participants were supported to work with colleagues within their settings in order to plan an inquiry exploring what they do well and thinking of ways in which they could make that element of their practice even better. During the final session participants were asked to reflect on and share their inquiries, thinking through the 'destiny' phase of the Appreciative Inquiry to consider how they might implement any resulting changes within their setting.

The online module consisted of four sessions structured using the four D's of Appreciative Inquiry - two facilitated sessions led by members of the research team and two independent study sessions. Session materials were accessed through an Open Moodle platform, with participants working sequentially through each session interacting with resources and engaging in tasks leading to the development of a learning walk in their setting. Using an AI approach helped to structure the sessions, keeping participant focus on positive elements of their existing practice, whilst also considering areas for development. Participants were invited to submit their AI as a learning walk to provide evidence of what they thought constituted a high-quality early years curriculum.

Phase 4: Learning Walks

Phase four of this research project collected data through a series of learning walks in EYE&CC settings. Learning walks are a commonly used method for generating data about education settings and feature strongly within the Ofsted

Education Inspection Framework (EIF). Caswell (2021) identifies the learning walk as a key part of the EIF and something that providers will be expected to do as part of the inspection process. The focus of the learning walk within the EIF discourse emphasises the quality and effectiveness of a setting's curriculum (Caswell, 2021), in particular in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework (DfE, 2021). The focus of the learning walk in this project, however, adopted a broader view of curriculum than just the EYFS, encouraging participants to reflect on their own understandings of curriculum and how it is constructed within their setting. Continuing to draw on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry, participants were asked to lead a researcher on a tour of their setting responding to the question 'What are the features of a high-quality early years curriculum?' and demonstrating where these features were evident in practice. Learning walks were either audio-recorded and transcribed or documented using field notes to enable data analysis. A total of six learning walks were completed. While further learning walks were attempted, similar to other stages of the research, the changing EYE&CC landscape following COVID-19 restrictions meant educations were unable to find the time to participate, despite being interested in the research.

Delphi Survey of Experts

The following analysis of the Delphi Survey presents the collective responses from all three surveys, signalling the stage of the survey where relevant. An initial open question of 'what are the features of a quality early years curriculum' identified several ways in which respondents would describe the curriculum, such as playful, holistic, fun and providing learning opportunities. Further analysis identified that the descriptions could be grouped into the broad themes outlined below. The themes are discussed in the order of the number of references to them[4], while also drawing on subsequent questions that asked more specifically about areas such as children, families, staffing and the ethos of the setting (see Appendix One for the Survey Questions). The discussion therefore represents the open responses of participants to the question of what makes a high-quality early years curriculum, followed by specific questions on particular areas of the curriculum that were raised in survey one and further explored in subsequent surveys.

Chart 1: Core thematic areas of a curriculum

Following the child represented responses where participants emphasised ideas of the curriculum being open ended, focused on the unique child who is driving/guiding/leading the curriculum. There were references to children's needs and interests being met in support of their social and emotional development, alongside recognition for their agency and existing knowledge and skills. In Survey Two, one respondent questioned the use of 'fun' as being superficial, but

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[4] References are the number of times a theme/topic was raised across the first two surveys.

there remained a strong emphasis on the child's agency and the ideas of the child as 'capable', with another respondent mentioning Anna Freud's idea to 'go with the child'.

A later question in Survey One that asked 'what is the role of the child in the curriculum' found further references in support of going with the child:

> *The unique child should be the primary agent for driving the curriculum.* Survey 1, Respondent 3.

> *They should actively shape the way the curriculum is experienced and accessed.* Survey 1, Respondent 7.

> *Their interests and understandings and capacities should be a key driver.* Survey 1, Respondent 16.

However, in Survey Three (where respondents ranked items), support for the idea of the child being at the centre of the curriculum was less clear.

Chart 2: The child is at the centred of the curriculum:
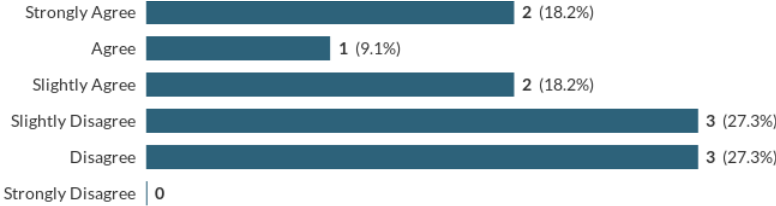
While acknowledging the low response rate, Survey Three identified that there is not agreement on an early years curriculum following the child or centring on it. A similar question asking if the child was the driver of the curriculum or actively shapes the curriculum also found that there was a lack of clear agreement, with only two respondents strongly agreeing with either statement. One respondent in Survey One did raise that ideas of following the child were more about the pedagogic strategy than the curriculum with evidence in Survey Three of a need to distinguish between curriculum and pedagogy in the context of early years education. Therefore, where there are contradictions in later aspects of the data, this may be because features that were identified as a part of quality in an early years curriculum are actually more about pedagogy. Chart three demonstrates that respondents to the Delphi Survey largely agree that curriculum is different to pedagogy.

Chart 3: To what extent would you agree that curriculum is different to pedagogy?
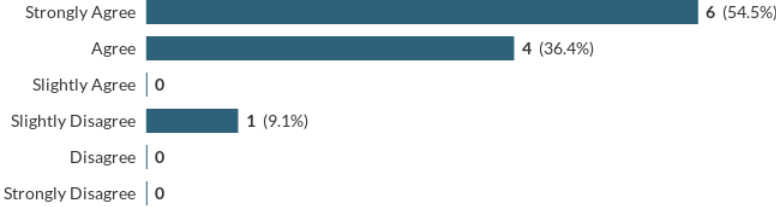
Staffing and family had equal references across the surveys, the former drawing attention to staff qualifications, knowledge and expertise. Staff were identified as needing to know about how children learn, and skilfully listen and respond to children, with a strong emphasis on recognising the adult's role in establishing the early years environment. A later question on the role of educators in a high-quality early years curriculum further articulated the importance of their knowledge and skills.

> *The adult develops the environment and uses their skills to develop learning opportunities based on the needs and interests of the child.* Survey 1, Respondent 6.

> *Understand how children learn and how the curriculum provided meets their needs, extends their learning and is constantly revised and amended to make it a truly supportive learning space.* Survey 1, Respondent 10.

In Survey Three there was broad support for the idea that educators scaffold children's development and create learning opportunities.

Chart 4: The role of educators in current early years curriculum[5]

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
The educator scaffolds children's development	4	5	2
The educator creates learning opportunities	5	3	3

While the educator was also seen as a facilitator of the curriculum (4 strongly agreed, 2 agreed and 5 slightly agreed), they were not always seen as the designers of the curriculum, with similar findings for the idea that educators co-construct the curriculum.

Chart 5: The educator designs the curriculum
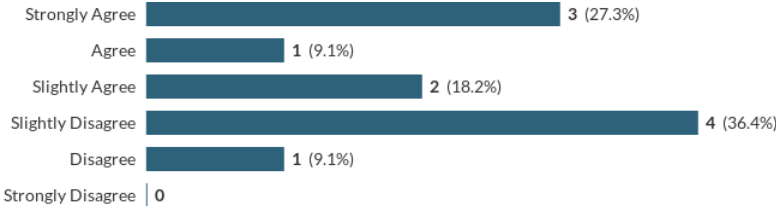
In Survey One there was evidence of the curriculum being driven by policy (see discussion on assessment), with a strong sense that it is policy objectives and directives that guide much of the curriculum due to a concern for children to reach particular outcomes. Thus, while the Statutory Guidance for the EYFS states it is for EYE&CC settings to determine their curriculum, the focus on children's development was seen to act as the driving force, reflecting the wider literature that developmentalism has shaped debates on the quality of EYE&CC.

Family participation and acknowledging families' knowledge about their children were identified as ways to enrich the curriculum and support children's learning. There was acknowledgement of the culture and values of families and working in partnership with them in support of a co-constructed curriculum. Families were identified as the 'strongest influence' on a child, with the possibility of them having an influence on the curriculum and providing a bridge to the

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[5] There were no responses in the disagree categories.

home learning environment. However, survey three identified some disagreement that families shape and inform the curriculum.

Chart 6: To what extent do you agree that families shape and inform the curriculum?

Strongly Agree	**1** (9.1%)
Agree	**2** (18.2%)
Slightly Agree	**2** (18.2%)
Slightly Disagree	**2** (18.2%)
Disagree	**2** (18.2%)
Strongly Disagree	**2** (18.2%)
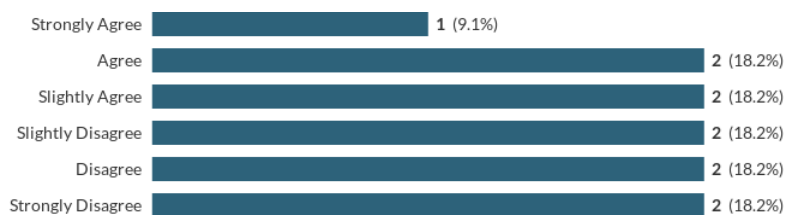
Thus, while Survey One and Two indicated support for family involvement in early years education, Survey Three suggests this might not be specific to the curriculum.

Discussions of inclusion indicated some link to recognising a child's family background, such as their socio-economic status, and ensuring equality of access irrespective of background. There was also evidence of the unique needs of children as discussed earlier. The needs of children prompted consideration of adaptations to support children's learning and the provision of a range of learning opportunities. While one respondent questioned if inclusion needed to be mentioned (based on the premise that inclusion is just deeply embedded in early years practice), another raised the importance of being aware of exclusion, with a different respondent cautioning against a white, middle-class curriculum.

Inclusion therefore represented ideas about access to early years education, children's needs, alongside their individuality and backgrounds, but also had a future-orientated notion of learning and success, irrespective of background or need.

> *[Inclusion] is both a moral and practical perspective guiding equity for all children in the delivery of a curriculum that enables everyone to succeed in meeting their potential learning and development.* Survey 1, Respondent 2.

The environment can be seen to encapsulate much of the earlier discussion through its role in opening opportunities for children's learning, enabling children's agency and supporting inclusion. The environment was seen as both indoors and outdoors and as an enabler of the curriculum, providing opportunities for learning. While the environment was seen to support children's independence and respond to children's needs, it was also evident that it was adults who established the environment in support of the curriculum.

> *The environment is the third teacher and should be shaped to support inclusive and active learning for the children. It should encourage child initiative, choice and agency.* Survey 1, Respondent 7.

> *The environment should reflect the adult's commitment to children's participatory and creative learning. Although adults will inevitably have some control in what is offered, the environment should be responsive and shaped by a continual commitment to listening to children.* Survey 2, Respondent 6.

In Survey Three there was broad agreement for the environment being both indoor and outdoor and supporting both emotional and physical development, but with less certainty about the environment reflecting children's needs and

interest or encouraging their agency and providing opportunities for learning. The lack of certainty as to the place of the child may reflect earlier findings that it is not clear if the child is at the centre of the curriculum, which in turn may acknowledge that the educator has the core role in the designing of the curriculum and the environment.

Chart 7: The role of the environment

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The environment reflects children's needs and interests	4	3	2		2	
The environment encourages children's agency	5	1	1	1	3	
The environment provides opportunities for learning	6	3		1	1	

Survey responses made few links between the curriculum and children's development but acknowledged that the curriculum supports 'an agreed set of learning competencies and aspirations (rather than goals) for children' (Survey 1, Respondent 9). However, the relationship between child development and curriculum was also identified as two-way.

> *I see it as the other way round. Knowledge of child development supports provision in the environment, planning and facilitation by adults, intervention and teaching. It would be impossible to plan a high-quality curriculum without knowledge of child development and of subject development.* Survey 1, Respondent 2.

In the Second Survey there were clearer reflections on the relationship between curriculum and children's learning and goals.

> *Knowledge of how children's learning evolves and pedagogy which supports learning experiences is key to curriculum design. Child development in terms of milestones and hierarchies can contribute but should not be the dominant influence.* Survey 2, Respondent 6.

Respondents indicated that they recognised that understandings of child development would inform the curriculum, but there was a degree of criticism of child development being seen as prescriptive and/or restrictive. As discussed in the literature review, curriculum is associated with learning outcomes, but across the survey questions there was some criticism of the idea of prescribed learning goals. The earlier identified support for the uniqueness of the child, and appreciating the family context of the child, was positioned as counter to a linear view of child development that did not facilitate a sense of adaptation. Respondents indicated that rather than a curriculum supporting child development, the knowledge and the skills of the educator in following the child would be the way in which the child's development was supported. Thus, it is the educator's knowledge of a child that informs the curriculum as opposed to externally set ideas on child development underpinning the curriculum. While not a complete separation, the fragmenting of a clear relationship between the curriculum and child development suggests that early years education requires a different view and model of curriculum than is found in other stages of education where there is a view of the curriculum as a course of study to achieve knowledge and skills. In the Delphi survey, there was an indication that the curriculum was emergent and contextual through being focussed on the child. As discussed in the next section, observation is seen to be key to knowing the child.

Observation, Assessment and Ethos and Values

Survey One also asked questions about the role of observation, assessment, a setting's ethos and values and policy as features of a quality early years curriculum. Again, these are discussed in relation to the number of references in the survey, with observation and assessment being the two most discussed areas across all the surveys and considering all responses.

Observation was seen as an essential part of the curriculum and having a strong relationship to assessment. Observation was regarded as a way to know about children's interests and their development in order to inform future activities, with some acknowledgement that it needed to be undertaken by skilled educators. Observation was seen as an ongoing exercise, but not one that needed to be dependent on particular formats for it to be evidenced and documented. Instead, observation was seen as important for knowing children and developing interactions based on this. Such observations were seen to have elements of assessment, but as a formative assessment for developing the curriculum.

> *Observation is part of listening to the child and assessment is reflecting on that listening in order to support further learning.* Survey Two, Respondent 14.

Assessment was seen as a tool that could help inform the curriculum and its delivery, but was not seen as something that should lead the curriculum. Again, assessment was regarded as an ongoing exercise, with some references to it needing to be based on a model that celebrated children's progress. Throughout the questions on assessment there was evidence of a rejection of 'prescribed' outcomes and assessment as a summative, tick-box exercise.

> *Assessment should be ongoing and not linked to performative/ accountable outcomes - assessment should recognise and celebrate children's progress rather than attainment against a set of prescribed learning outcomes.* Survey One, Respondent 12.

> *Working out how children are getting on, across all domains of development is of course essential, this knowledge is used to create meaningful play and learning opportunities. However, where assessment is used for any other purpose (especially high stakes purposes such as accountability, reporting beyond the family / setting, inspection,) then the way in which assessment skews the delivery of curriculum is treacherous.* Survey One, Respondent 17.

The link between assessment and observation was seen as the latter informing the former, where observation provided the grounds on which to know a child and which could support making assessments of them. In survey two there was a repeat of the earlier quote from respondent 14, mentioned above.

While the first two surveys signalled a relationship between observation and curriculum, Survey Three demonstrated that there was not agreement about this relationship.

Chart 8: Assessment informs the curriculum

Response	Value
Strongly Agree	3 (27.3%)
Agree	3 (27.3%)
Slightly Agree	1 (9.1%)
Slightly Disagree	2 (18.2%)
Disagree	2 (18.2%)
Strongly Disagree	0
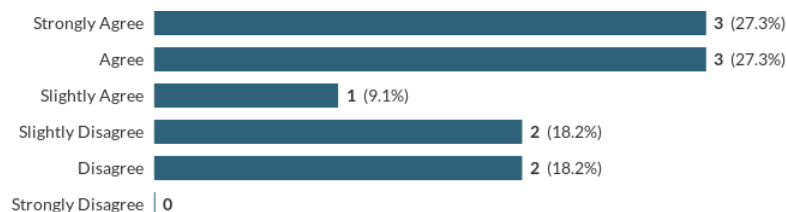
Chart 9: Assessment is separate from the curriculum

Response	Value
Strongly Agree	1 (9.1%)
Agree	0
Slightly Agree	3 (27.3%)
Slightly Disagree	0
Disagree	5 (45.5%)
Strongly Disagree	2 (18.2%)
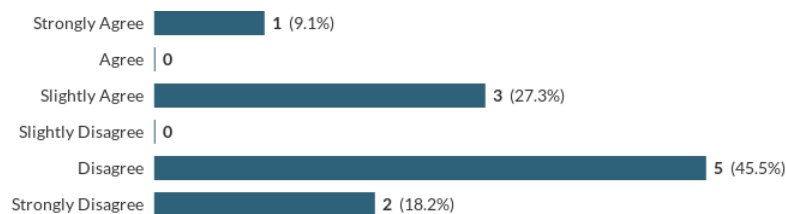
Similar mixed responses were found for the idea of observation informing the curriculum and whether observation is separate from the curriculum. Therefore, while there was some evidence of a relationship between observation, assessment and curriculum it was evident that this needed to be more clearly understood.

A setting's ethos and values were seen to be highly important and supported establishing the curriculum. The ethos and values of a setting needed to be shared to ensure everyone was working together to create a joined-up approach to practice. While there was one reference to a setting's ethos and values drawing on approaches such as Froebel, Montessori, Steiner and Pikler, and another referring to Bruner, Ladson-Billings, Rogoff and Hedges, more responses referred to ideas of respecting children and providing them with opportunities for learning. Ethos and values were regarded as signalling the intent of a setting and its curriculum.

> *The ethos and values of a setting or group of practitioners will underpin the curriculum on offer; when this is un-acknowledged the curriculum-making can be limited and exclusive. By attending explicitly to values and ethos then their role in curriculum-making can be visible.* Survey One, Respondent 19.

Leadership and shared vision were seen to be important for guiding the ethos and values of the curriculum.

Policy was seen to facilitate 'consistency', a 'unified approach' and 'cohesion' for ensuring legislative requirements and standards are met and maintained across the sector. However, there was also reference to the need for policy to be supportive, rather than prescriptive. Policy was seen as being able to guide a setting's principles with some recognition that it sets out broader societal values on children and learning.

> *Policy should ensure appropriate health and safety and staffing standards. It should provide a framework within which EYE&CC staff are appropriately professionally developed and supported to create meaningful and relevant play and learning opportunities for the children in their care. Policy might outline entitlement for all children to such meaningful and relevant EYE&CC curriculum-making, but should not set out the explicit contents of an EYE&CC curriculum.* Survey One, Respondent 17.

In Survey Three all agreed that policy was responsible for the current early years curriculum, but there were discrepancies in whether policy is supportive in facilitating a quality curriculum.

Chart 10: Policy is supportive in facilitating the curriculum
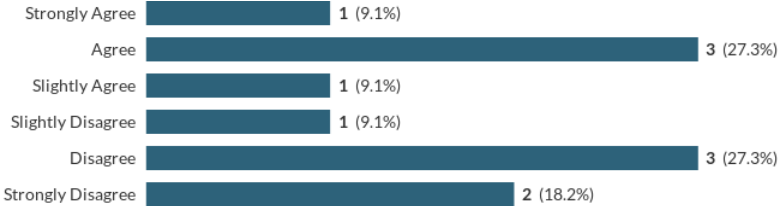
The final question in Survey Three sought to develop some clarity on what aspects were emphasised in the current early years curriculum.

Chart 11: The focus of the early years curriculum

	Mean Rank
The current curriculum is focused on external demands	8.36
The current curriculum is focused on content	7.82
The current curriculum is explicit	7.36
The current curriculum is focused on delivery	6.45
The current curriculum is focused on structures	6.27
The current curriculum is focused on daily practice	5.82
The current curriculum is focused on process	4.82
The current curriculum is focused on co-construction	4.09
The current curriculum is hidden	4.0

The rankings demonstrate the perceived demands of external factors on the curriculum and that it will be focused on content. However, it is interesting that the curriculum is identified as explicit given the contradictions identified in the earlier analysis. It is important to stress that in the above question, our respondents to the Delphi survey were being asked about the current curriculum, rather than one that they might describe as ideal or preferred.

In asking respondents whether the curriculum should be play-based and follow the child's interests, there was some indication that this was the preference.

Chart 12: The curriculum should be play-based

Response	Count
Strongly Agree	7 (63.6%)
Agree	2 (18.2%)
Slightly Agree	2 (18.2%)
Slightly Disagree	0
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0
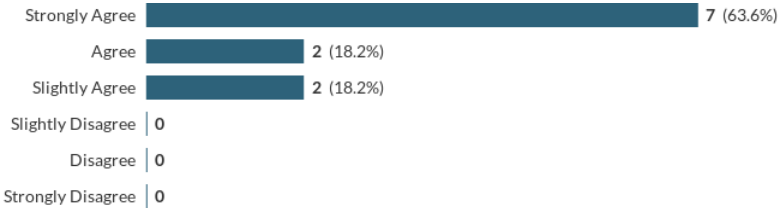
Chart 13: The curriculum should support the child's agency

Response	Count
Strongly Agree	7 (63.6%)
Agree	2 (18.2%)
Slightly Agree	1 (9.1%)
Slightly Disagree	1 (9.1%)
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0
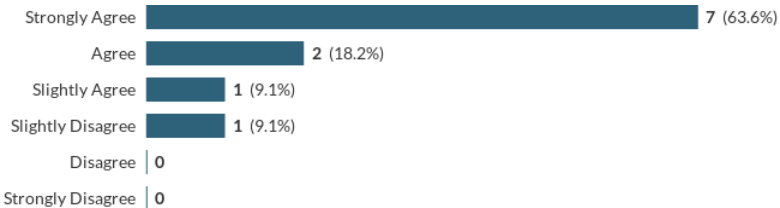
Summary

While the Delphi survey sought to generate open responses to the question of what are the features of a high quality early years curriculum, followed by seeking to reach a consensus through a series of follow up surveys, the data demonstrate that there is still a need for better understanding of what the features of quality in an EYE&CC curriculum. Curriculum was seen as different to pedagogy, and there was evidence of the influence of developmentalism, but also a strong sense that the curriculum is responsive and contextual, based on adult observations of children, whereby adults then shape the environment in support of children's learning.

Focus Groups

The following analysis presents responses from the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) focus groups. Analysis of data from the focus groups utilized the core thematic areas that emerged from the Delphi Survey, as well as acknowledging additional themes that emerged as being important to participants in relation to their understandings of a high-quality early years curriculum. The NGT discussions also highlighted the interconnected nature of many of the themes, which is acknowledged within this analysis and supports a building on and refining of the analysis of the Delphi Survey.

Following the child emerged in association with themes of agency, participation and active learning, reflecting many of the survey responses. Participant discussions identified a high-quality curriculum as one within which '*the children have considerable agency and are active learners, supported by and in collaboration with their peers and adults*' (Focus Group 2). Participants considered that a high-quality curriculum would '*allow children the opportunity to question, choose, lead, explain, engage [and] be critical thinkers*' (Focus Group 2). Other indicators of a high-quality curriculum expressed by participants included:

> …*responding to children's interests and destinations (Focus Group 2)*

> …*a positive culture of children participating and leading their learning (Focus Group 2)*

> …*allowing children the opportunity to question (Focus Group 2)*

> …*children having agency, being active learners, being rich and participating, their interests and their fascinations (Focus Group 2)*

The relationship between adults and children was highlighted as a factor related to following the child, as part of a high-quality curriculum.

> *It's developing the curriculum from the point of view of being, like, a co-adventurer with the child…we're in this together. And that's when you do pick up on those little hints and tips and interests (Focus Group 3)*

Potential challenges associated with following the child were also identified by participants. One participant identified tensions between developing a curriculum approach that follows the child and an approach that aligns with wider, school-based curriculum agendas.

> (Discussing curriculum in relation to nursery and reception phases) '*Obviously, we have to be able to show progression across both of those year groups…but we also want to make sure that we hold to the principles that we feel we've got in terms of play-based learning and child-initiated or following the child because we think that we do those things well. And we don't want to lose those things by going down an academic route or a topic-based route, which is sort of something that's been suggested to us by the rest of the school because they find it quite difficult that we don't have something written down that we're definitely going to do as we go through the year*.' (Focus group 4)

This response further indicates that there is something unique in an early years curriculum that distinguishes it from other stages of education. There is the suggestion that the curriculum may not be a written document, but something that emerges from following the child.

As with responses to the Delphi Survey, discussions of staffing encompassed ideas connected with qualifications, experience, knowledge and skills. In Focus Group 1 participants discussed the idea of a '*professionally justified curriculum*', emphasizing the importance of educators having an informed understanding of the reasons for curriculum decision making. This was also linked to the idea of a sustainable curriculum. Sustainability in this context was linked

to the idea of a curriculum that was '*researched and understood*' (Focus Group 1) and which educators could justify with evidence, both from theory and experience.

> *…part of the sustainability is really linked to this, the fact that if it's researched and understood…and when I say evidenced, I don't mean evidence for Ofsted or evidence externally, [but] evidence for yourself, I know this works because I'm going to try different things…I think that in itself makes it a sustainable curriculum. And part of that sustainability comes from the reflection of the practitioner*. (Focus Group 1)

The qualities of staff, as part of a high-quality curriculum, were also discussed as being important. Having educators who were '*qualified, knowledgeable, positive, reflective and caring*' (Focus Group 1) was highlighted as part of developing a high-quality curriculum. Educators being active in their professional roles was related to the idea of '*continuously developing professionals*' (Focus Group 1), further highlighting the importance of professionalism and qualified staff.

Discussions about staffing also recognized the importance of a professional ethos, connecting with the theme of <u>following the child</u>.

> '*Staff are passionate about children and share the learning journey with them…following their lines of inquiry*' (Focus Group 2)

> '*…they've got to be responsive enough…to follow the children's line [of inquiry]*' (Focus Group 2)

The importance of knowledgeable adults who can respond to and meet children's needs was emphasized as part of high-quality education.

> '*I think that what really raises the standard of high-quality education is having staff who really understand children, can tune in to children and also can verbalise [and] articulate that*' (Focus Group 2)

Participants in one focus group discussed the importance of collaboration within teams, highlighting the valuable opportunities offered within professional settings for '*reflection and higher-level thinking about children*' (Focus Group 2).

<u>Engagement with families, parent partnership and community involvement</u> were all identified as key features of a high-quality early years curriculum building on the findings of the surveys. However, in the focus groups, participants discussed the complex nature of terms such as 'parent partnership', highlighting that the nature of a setting's work with families and their community is likely to vary depending on their context. Distinctions between concepts of parent and community partnership were also identified.

> '*Personally, parent partnership is about meeting the needs of the parents and supporting the parents and also having good positive parent partnership about them having input into their children's development and the curriculum that we have, whereas community partnership is about knowing the community that you serve*.' (Focus Group 1)

A high-quality curriculum was considered by some participants to be both reflective of the community within which it is situated, but also part of that community. Equality in relationship between families and practitioners was also identified as being important.

> '*…a partnership doesn't necessarily imply one side has greater power or authority.*' (Focus Group 1)

A setting's relationship with the community was also discussed in relation to the environment. Engagement with a setting's local community was considered by some participants to be a feature of a high-quality curriculum, supporting children to develop an understanding of their local environment.

> '*With regard to the community…we were looking at taking the children to understand their environment. So, what is the town? What is the countryside? Where the fire station is? So, they're aware of their own real world that they experience, day by day…We really focus on taking trips, to see all these places and see the people who help and for them to understand their community where they are, to feel part of something*.' (Focus Group 1)

Recognition of the environment as well-resourced and multi-faceted was highlighted as important.

> '*I also think about the environment as multi-facetted in that you're talking about maybe the physical environment where the resources are and then you're talking about the psychological environment which is part of the culture that's created, how I interact with the children*' (Focus group 2)

A multi-faceted environment was considered to support children's multi-modal meaning making and to be responsive to the children, linking back to notions of a high-quality curriculum following the child.

Links between the curriculum and children's development were discussed explicitly in one focus group in relation to notions of positive outcomes. The importance of practitioners knowing the children they are working with and having an informed understanding of how to support children's learning and development was recognized; however, participants were clear (as reflected in the surveys) that this did not mean assessing children according to developmental norms but always striving to have a positive outcome for each individual child.

> '*I would have thought that knowing your children is always striving to have a positive outcome so even if you try something and it doesn't work or you're working with a speech and language person and you're trying different approaches, you're always aiming for that positive outcome. You don't give up.*' (Focus group 1)

Focus Group Summary Rankings

As part of the Nominal Group Technique focus group, participants are asked to group their responses into themes and to then rank the themes for how important they think they are. The overall categories and ranking for focus groups 1 and 2 are depicted below. Despite the terminology around the categories differing, there are considerable similarities in the group responses to the question 'What are the features of a high-quality early years curriculum?' The themes of **child-led/centred learning** (Focus Group 2) and a **multi-faceted and democratic environment** (Focus Group 1) share common aspects, highlighting the importance of a curriculum that considers the agency of the child. The attributes of staff as **knowledgeable and continuously developing professionals** was also rated highly by both groups as an important feature of a high-quality curriculum. Both groups questioned the process of ranking, finding it difficult to give priority to any particular aspect as they felt that all were of equal importance. This acknowledgment of the complexity and multi-faceted nature of curriculum echoed some of the findings from the Delphi survey where there was not always consensus in the final ranking questions of Survey Three. However, the focus group data, combined with the Delphi survey, begin to demonstrate some core themes as to what constitutes a high-quality early years curriculum around following the child, the importance of staffing and the role of the environment.

Chart 14: NGT Focus Group 1 Ranking

Ranking

1st — Staff that are skillful & deeply knowledgeable about children reflect & collaborate (with staff and children)

2nd — Multifaceted and democratic environment

3rd — Recognition for children's agency

4th — Play

5th — Multi-modal meaning making

Chart 15: NGT Focus Group 2 Ranking

Ranking

1st — Child-led/centred learning

2nd — Continuously developing professionals

3rd — Inclusive practice

4th — Flexible and accessible environment

5th — Parent partnership

6th — Community engagement

7th — Sustainable
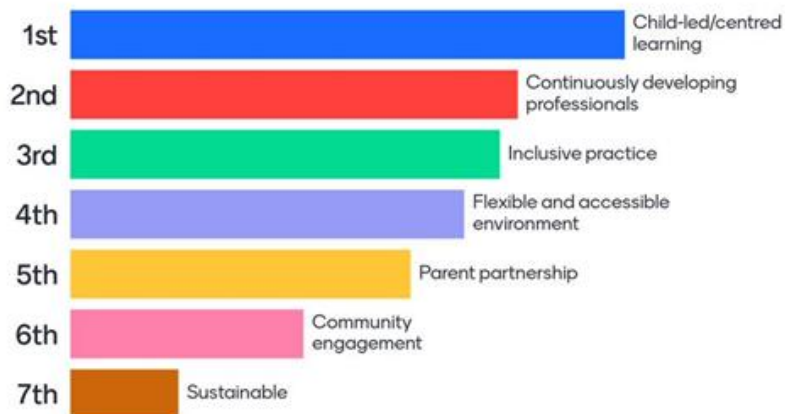
Learning Walks

The learning walks provided an insight into the curriculum in practice, whereby educators were asked the question 'what is a high-quality early years curriculum and what examples can you provide?'. The learning walks were then analysed in relation to the themes that had emerged from the surveys and focus groups to help provide illustrative examples of the curriculum in practice.

Talking About Curriculum

As part of the learning walks, all participants were asked about their features of a high-quality early years curriculum. The discussions of curriculum help to illustrate the uniqueness of an early years curriculum to those of other stages of education.

Day Nursery, SW England

Children aged 0-5 years accepted

Curriculum Lead and Researcher present (children are outside or in different rooms throughout the learning walk).

> *… I find myself have a bit of a juxtaposition really … because I … I … my role is to create a progressive stimulating curriculum across the nursery … which is fine … I totally understand that ... however … for me that would need to be more skills based ... a progression of skills and a certain amount of knowledge … but if you … the children might not want to do that … they might have their … well they will have their own ideas … you can't plan [in advance] for that ...*

> *'... a high-quality curriculum does need to be flexible and it should meet the children's need above any other agendas! … it's all very well to have this … it's probably why I've struggled with it since September … I haven't committed anything to paper … I have got lots of information and lots of ideas in my head and read lots but it's really hard to commit anything to paper … and … I don't think there's any expectation to have a paper copy [of the curriculum] but then I think there is … depends on what you read! … there are loads of 'curriculums' out there and I've read most of them probably … but I think it's still going back to theme led …'*

The discussion of curriculum demonstrates that early years education is more thematic in its approach as subjects and areas for learning are not clearly defined and bounded as can be found in other stages of education, such as a secondary maths curriculum. National curricula with clear outcomes create curricula that have a strong organisation of knowledge where the educator generally controls the pedagogy; here we explore how in EYE&CC the educator might be regarded as having less control and there is uncertainty and ambiguity, but this enables an emergent, expressive and contextual curriculum that supports collaboration with children and facilitates their agency.

In one setting, that was part of a chain, the respondent articulated their use of 'building blocks', that brought together a pictorial representation of different aspects of child development to help guide the staff in knowing how best to support the children's development. The respondent went on to discuss how the building blocks provided a framework

for the curriculum, but the actual curriculum would vary between the nurseries as it responded to the children that were present.

<u>Chain of Nurseries in Southern England</u>

<u>Children aged 0-5 years accepted</u>

<u>Director and Early Years Training Lead and Researcher present (online).</u>

> *The staff teams are very confident within their rooms to tell you what their curriculum is, so, and like I said, you went into a baby room they tell you their curriculum, you go in to our two year old room they would tell you their curriculum, [all] following the same ethos and kind of values, but there are different things that these children need to learn, watching out for the developmental milestones in different levels throughout the year groups.*

The above demonstrates how the early years curriculum is responsive to children rather than prescribed, emerging in the moment in a contextually appropriate way that includes considering children's developmental progress. The responsiveness reflects the earlier discussions on following the child and how observations provide a way to know the child and their family context and develop an environment that supports the curriculum and pedagogical interactions.

The Role of the Environment

Across all the learning walks it was evident that the environment was central to the way in which the curriculum was planned and enacted. As illustrated below, educators discussed the importance of resources, illustrating how they support children's learning and expression of agency.

<u>Montessori Nursery School, SW England</u>

<u>Children aged 2.5 to 6 years accepted</u>

<u>Nursery Manager and Researcher present (children are outside or in different rooms during the learning walk).</u>

The walk begins in the entrance of the nursery where the manager talks about the importance of welcoming the children and having a chance to talk to parents. The emphasis is on knowing the children as part of a holistic approach to understanding their development. The Nursery follows a Montessori work cycle:

> *I could just say that in a typical Montessori environment, you would have your activities, different types of activities grouped in different ways, so in the middle we have what we call the everyday living and they are all about motor skills, independence, eye-hand coordination, dexterity, all of that sort of kind of things. As well as a lot of physical development, but also your personal, social and emotional side of things. So obviously Montessori didn't really write about personal, social and emotional, I mean it was just an indirect objective of a lot of these activities, but having now got the Early Years Foundation Stage, looking at what that entails, you can actually see that … the way the classroom is set up is really entailed to a lot of that. So for instance, the fact that we take children to the shelf, and we will suggest to them, you know the two and a half year olds we'll say this is pouring, would you like to do some pouring? This is how we hold the tray, and then, do you think you can*

carry it and then they will pick it up and they will carry it as much as they can to a table and they can choose where they want to sit and um, so by doing that you are already really increasing self-esteem.

<u>Day Nursery, SW England</u>

<u>Children aged 0-5 years accepted</u>

<u>Curriculum Lead and Researcher present (children are outside or in different rooms throughout the learning walk).</u>

> *'...*staff member* has taken over managing Littles ... she is developing a more creative area so the children have more of a … an access … they know they are beginning to know where resources are ... so they can help themselves ... so it's less 'we are doing this and doing it in this way' so they have got the freedom to express themselves really … it's accessibility and independence we have had lots of conversations about children being independent being able to find things for themselves … know where things belong … which all links into that continuous provision doesn't it … early years is the one phase in the whole of their education … where they can actually exercise their creativity and get it going.'*

The settings visited were fortunate to be well resourced and, as found in previous research (Campbell-Barr et al., 2018), resources provide signals to children as to the activities to be undertaken in different areas. The above also illustrates that educators are providing resources with a sense of how they are supporting children's learning, interacting with the children in a way that will support this. EYE&CC environments use resources as a means to frame the curriculum (to indicate the course of study), but the messages can be both explicit and implicit (Cordoba and Sanders-Smith, 2018). The extent to which the messages are evidenced may depend on both the child and the resources. The two examples illustrate the different ways that resources can signal activities, but how children engage with the resources will be dependent on their cultural capital and whether prior experiences have provided knowledge of ways the with which to engage with the resources. In terms of curriculum, the resources set expectations about the nature of learning. Whereas in other stages of education the curriculum is often concerned with the transmission of formal knowledge, here the curriculum has an expressive form whereby it is concerned with the transmission of social values (and cultural capital) and is personalised and participative.

The Outdoors

The outdoors represents an environment where the course (focus) of study was embedded in the environment. As such, the outdoors represented a space that both facilitated a responsive, emergent and contextual curriculum through being free flow, while also providing the opportunity to learn about the outside world and nature. The outdoors therefore illustrates support for children's agency, alongside providing connections to the real world.

<u>Montessori Nursery School, SW England</u>

<u>Children aged 2.5 to 6 years accepted</u>

<u>Nursery Manager and Researcher present (children are outside or in different rooms during the learning walk).</u>

I think a lot of practitioners really value the opportunities the outdoors can give. I think that's really great, just being outside appreciating you know, it's so natural, there's so much detail, it really stimulates. You know you do need the knowledgeable, nurturing staff obviously, they enhance that relationship between child and nature, so just be instilling that sense of respect in children, because I think children have such a strong desire to experiment and explore, so sometime they might not always understand about picking the leaves off a plant. Well actually, how does that effect the plant? What will happen to the plant if it hasn't got any leaves left if we all picked the leaves off and things like that, it sort of actually appreciate what's the function of a leaf, what's it doing, you can do so much through talk and conversation.

<u>Day Nursery, SW England</u>

<u>Children aged 0-5 years accepted</u>

<u>Curriculum Lead and Researcher present (children are outside or in different rooms throughout the learning walk).</u>

'It's all linked to the environment isn't it and as *staff member* would say 'plough to table' … that sort of thing … so hopeful again this year that we might have enough tomatoes at one point to actually take them in and perhaps put them in a salad or something for the children … but it is really important that experience … so they don't think everything comes from a supermarket … um … and they learn how to look after plants and be careful with them …. um … and unfortunately when you start planting something children think it is ok to actually take bits off and once these get bigger they will be able to take things off of them … but at the moment they are learning that … actually they are growing so we are going to care for them … and … um … look after them and not actually just dig everything up … I suppose it's about boundaries … boundaries comes into that [high-quality curriculum] as well because young children do need certain boundaries … consistent boundaries …. that has to be part of the high-quality curriculum doesn't it …

… having the free-flow in pre-school … the younger children coming up from Littles into the Pre-school room … they are able to mix with and learn from the older children … and that's good practice … um but that's cascaded to Littles now as well … so they go out as soon as they come in … it's free-flow as soon as they come in …'

Professional Knowledge

The survey and focus groups had identified the role of educators in determining the curriculum and how the environment would facilitate this, signalling the importance of professional knowledge. Research has evidenced the importance of a well-qualified workforce for the quality of early years education, but there has been little to focus specifically on the role of educators in a quality early years curriculum. The below illustrates the role of educators in supporting children's learning through following their interests in a responsive, contextual and emergent curriculum.

<u>Day Nursery, SW England</u>

<u>Children aged 0-5 years accepted</u>

<u>Curriculum Lead and Researcher present (children are outside or in different rooms throughout the learning walk).</u>

'... for some random reason a group of girls the other day got all the tissue paper out and started making dresses … and it's just see where that goes and then you got the cutting of the sticky tape … you've got all the holding of the scissors … but that … for that to happen and that learning opportunity to be maximised for want of a better term … you need every practitioner to be able to spot that learning opportunity …

… I think definitely ensuring there's at least … that the skills and the knowledge and experience of existing staff are positioned … well … I think that's really important … and then mentoring and coaching them to then be able to … support the delivery of that in their rooms … through their staff …'

'...so that's a training issue I guess … training's important for a high-quality curriculum! … and … yes … and then you get that shift …'

The examples illustrate that an EYE&CC curriculum requires a different way of working for education than might be found in other stages of education and as such the training of those working in early years education needs to be appropriate.

Underpinning Theory

In order to be able to support emerging learning – to spot the buds of development - educators need to know what to look for. Theoretical concepts help them to know what to notice out of the whole array of activity in the playroom, to identify what is 'good' about what a child was doing – and what to do about this. Practitioners sometimes mentioned specific theory or theorists or used concepts from theory to help describe what they thought was good about the curriculum (understood as learning opportunities) in their settings. These words and phrases constituted a considered use of a body of knowledge shared within the early years academic and professional community which could be drawn on to explain or highlight something noteworthy. In a discussion with staff at a Maintained Nursery School, while talking to the researcher, one teacher broke off excitedly and said 'Look! Connectiveness!' as a two-year-old child brought over a Duplo construction and placed it deliberately by photos of block play in the class floor book. The child had done something noteworthy, and the teacher (correctly) made the assumption that the researcher would also find this interesting. The significance of the moment was shared by the use of a single word that acted as a short cut to a framework of theoretical principles in Froebelian thinking. No other words were needed; the noticing and the attribution of a shared theoretical concept marked a significant curricular moment.

Concepts from theories could signal something as abstract as overall curriculum orientation ('holistic' vs 'ages and stages') or be used to share something that the educators had noticed and which they thought had significance. Theory supports the articulation of complex concepts using words often loaded with a history of meaning ('child-centred', 'holistic', 'creative') and available both for personal reflection on practice and to facilitate discussion within a professional context – a sort of horizontal discourse deeply sedimented with meaning for those 'in the know' to talk about shared ideas and experiences. Educators in several settings were, however, also concerned to find ways to talk about the quality of the curriculum in their settings to others who might not have studied these concepts. In the example below, educators talked about their discovery that Froebelian principles captured what they valued in their provision. Their engagement with Froebelian theory gave them a set of linked concepts which underpinned their practice and a lens through which they could then view their statutory responsibilities under the EYFS. The staff of these two nurseries want to be able to share this knowledge about curriculum with parents to help them to support their children's learning at home. Curriculum in this context had become tried-and-tested activities that could also be fitted into everyday family life. They found that this could be achieved by playing alongside parents at activities that could be easily replicated at home, or talking about activities later in the corridor after the session.

Maintained Nursery School, SW England

Children aged 2, 3 and 4 years old

Nursery Teacher, Teaching Assistant, Parent and Researcher present; children are outside or in different rooms during the learning walk).

It's [the Froebelian approach] very much what we do anyway… Froebel is about a journey. We have learned about using Froebel's ideas in shaping what we do. The Froebel approach is not compartmentalised – it's about the whole child. The Froebel approach is used because it is not schoolified; instead we talk about "freedom with guidance". The EYFS can be more pressured. Focussing on Development Matters can be very dull, very limited. Froebel is like Characteristics of Learning. It has to be a reflection of real life – it has to have connectiveness.

[The workshop] activities show [parents] opportunities to support their children's learning, rather than us telling them what to do. It helps parents realise there's a process behind what happens at nursery. … It helps with understanding what and why we do things the way we do them here.

The [parent workshop] project has meant also opportunities for the [teaching assistant] to learn through observation and modelling – developing more confidence with sharing their knowledge in a practical context. Getting to know parents better helped here; it was easier for her to share her knowledge when she was 'in her comfort zone' taking part in activities with the children (where she is an excellent practitioner).

Shared theoretical concepts are not enough on their own, however. A learning walk in another nursery school, also during a parent workshop, included observation of a sewing activity with staff and parents sitting round one table while other activities took place in the rest of the playroom. After the session ended, the staff chatted excitedly: did you see that! Such progress! It's wonderful – I could cry! The researcher was left bemused; she had seen nothing remarkable in the activity and indeed had made no notes on it. The class teacher explained that this was the first time the child had sustained interest in an activity and brought it to a conclusion, sharing his work with others on the table. His mother was sitting there witnessing his calm concentration and her pride was clear (to them – the researcher missed this). Noticing progress along a desired trajectory requires deep knowledge of the individual and their family context, as well as knowledge of important theoretical principles such as the central importance relationships in a child's life.

Conclusion

The research presented here set out to explore what constitutes a high-quality EYE&CC curriculum. In the English context, EYE&CC providers follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The EYFS acts as a Statutory Framework for the curriculum, and there are guidance documents such as Birth to Five Matters and Development Matters to support the process of designing the curriculum, but it is EYE&CC providers who decide how to shape, articulate, implement and realise their curricula. The guidance is clear in stating that there is not one singular curriculum, arguably offering a degree of flexibility to EYE&CC providers as to what they identify as important for their curriculum. However, the EYFS is set in the context of the national quality inspection framework, as described by Ofsted, and the expectation that EYE&CC providers will be supporting children to meet 'good levels of development'. Therefore, while the curriculum will arguably have a focus on children's development, the combination of different guidance documents and the perceived flexibility in developing a setting's curriculum resulted in questions about what a high-quality early years curriculum is.

Through a multimethod approach the research therefore sought to identify what early years experts and educators identified as the features of quality in an early years curriculum and what this looked like in practice. A Delphi Survey of experts sought to establish the features of a high-quality early years curriculum, with focus groups, appreciative inquiries of practice and a series of learning walks building on the findings of the Delphi Survey, while also exploring what the curriculum looks like in practice.

The findings demonstrate that an early years curriculum is distinct from curricula at other stages of education. Curriculum consists of the subjects (a sequence of knowledge and skills) that make up a course of study. A curriculum will typically set out what counts as valid knowledge and skills, with pedagogy being the transmission of the knowledge and skills. While in some instances the framing of the knowledge and its transmission are bounded and discreet, in other instances there is more integration (Bernstein, 2000). An early years curriculum can be seen to reflect the integrated model of cutting across subjects, topics and forms of knowledge, to bring together various aspects under broad areas of study. However, the evidence presented demonstrates that the integrated model in an early years curriculum is distinct from other curricula, being also emergent, expressive and contextual.

The EYE&CC sector needs to develop a set of linked concepts that enable educators to talk to parents, inspectors, senior leaders and other stakeholders to provide a frame of reference for what is unique about an early years curriculum. Educators referred to the need for confidence in the curriculum. Therefore, drawing on the data, we elaborate how an early years curriculum can be understood as emergent, expressive and contextual, while demonstrating that these concepts have clear themes across them that articulate what can be regarded as the core themes of a quality early years curriculum.

An emergent curriculum is one that responds to the needs, interests and stage of development of a child. Educators will understand trajectories of child development and will draw on this knowledge while building on children's interests in support of their learning. The curriculum therefore might evolve in the moment, but it is not completely free. Educators will provide resources and interact with children to guide their learning and development in ways that support their future educational trajectory.

An expressive curriculum builds on the autonomy of the child, whereby children shape the curriculum through their active participation in the EYE&CC setting. There is an emphasis on children as capable and for children to be able to express themselves in terms of their capabilities, set against the context of building on their interests and an understanding of their ecological context.

A contextual curriculum recognises the ecological context of the child and the diverse backgrounds that children will come from. The curriculum responds to and supports children to express their interests and capabilities, building on their cultural capital in support of their life-long learning.

The core concepts of the curriculum as emergent, expressive and contextual are interrelated and grounded in the professional knowledge of educators in regard to understandings of child development, but also their ability to observe children to support putting the curriculum into practice. The 'putting into practice' reflects the close relationship between curriculum and pedagogy, whereby the core themes of a quality early years curriculum are articulated through the pedagogy of everyday practice. The core themes shaping the curriculum, as identified in the data, are around following the child and the role of the environment.

This vision of high-quality curriculum offers a counter-narrative to the linear and progressive model reported in Ofsted's subject review (Ofsted, 2022). It offers a more complex and nuanced concept that recognises the professional knowledges and skills of educators in shaping high-quality environments for learning in response to curriculum that emerges in the moment, is representative of, and responsive to context, and enables children's active participation in the process of creating curriculum.

Across the data there were references associated with following the child. The ability of the educator to follow the child reflects historical concepts of child-centredness, where the subjects and course of study emerge from the child. Educators therefore find themselves cutting across different topics that emerge from their observation of children, drawing on different resources to support children's expression and participation in support of fostering their development. Observation is an essential element to informing the emerging curriculum, but this is not a passive observation to record achievement; it is active observation to anticipate appropriate action. The environment, and the resources in it, become tools to build on children's interests and capabilities in support of furthering their development. The ability of the educator to follow the child, respond sensitively to critical moments and develop a rich environment, reflects the importance placed on educators in the EYE&CC sector for providing a quality early years curriculum.

A High-Quality Early Years Curriculum Is...

An emergent curriculum

Responding to the needs, interests and stage of development of a child.

Educators will understand trajectories of child development and will draw on this knowledge while building on children's interests in support of their learning. The curriculum therefore might evolve in the moment, but it is not completely free. Educators will provide resources and interact with children to guide their learning and development in ways that support their future educational trajectory.

A contextual curriculum

Recognising the ecological context of the child and the diverse backgrounds that children will come from.

The curriculum responds to and supports children to express their interests and capabilities, building on their cultural capital in support of their life-long learning.

An expressive curriculum

Builds on the autonomy of the child, whereby children shape the curriculum through their active participation in the EYE&CC setting.

There is an emphasis on children as capable and for children to be able to express themselves in terms of their capabilities, set against the context of building on their interests and an understanding of their ecological context.

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Appendix One: Survey One

Introduction

Early years education is well established as supporting the foundations to children's lifelong learning. In the drive to improve the quality of early years experiences for children and support their holistic development, we are interested in exploring

the features of a high-quality early years curriculum

and how these features might be related to child development

Questions in the survey are intentionally broad and will be followed up in subsequent surveys. Responses to the survey will be confidential, and we will not name any organisations or individuals who have contributed to this research in reports or publications. Participation is voluntary, and if you take part you may decline to answer any or all of the questions. However, as the surveys are anonymous, please note that we will not be able to remove your data once you have started to answer the questions.

During the project lifetime, only the University of Plymouth research team will have access to the project data. All data relating to this project will be kept securely on password-protected computers until ten years after the end of the project, when it will be destroyed in line with university policy.

Our report will be made freely available on the University of Plymouth website and that of our funders, Montessori International.

If you have any questions or concerns, or there is any aspect of the research that you would like to discuss, please contact Verity Campbell-Barr verity.campbell-barr@plymouth.ac.uk

1 I have read and understood the information about this survey and I am happy to proceed

Yes

No

p. 2 The Curriculum

Please note that a design feature of this survey is to ask for succinct responses to the following questions, consisting of one, maybe two sentences.

2 What are the features of a quality early years curriculum?

3 Who is responsible for the curriculum?

4 Who should be responsible for the early years curriculum?

5 What age range should an 'early years' curriculum cover?

p. 3 An early years curriculum

Please comment on what is the role of the following in an early years curriculum?

6 Please look at the items listed below and comment on what is their role in an early years curriculum? (No need for response here)

a The child

b The adult

c Families

d The environment

e Inclusion

f Setting ethos/values

g Assessment

h Observation

i Policy

7 How might an early years curriculum support child development?

p. 4 The broader context

8 Would you like to comment on how your previous responses relate to the EYFS?

9 Are there any sources that you think will be helpful in the research team exploring the features of a high quality early years curriculum and how these features might be related to child development?

10 How might COVID-19 have shaped approaches to curriculum and child development?

Appendix Two: Survey Two

Below represents what were identified as the features of a high-quality early years curriculum, along with a summary of the responses given. Please comment on each one in turn.

1. Feature of a high-quality curriculum: Characteristics of the Curriculum

2. Feature of a high-quality curriculum: Environment

3. Feature of a high-quality curriculum: Families

4. Feature of a high-quality curriculum: Following the child

5. Feature of a high-quality curriculum: Inclusive

6. Features of a high-quality curriculum: Links to child development/child outcomes

7. Features of a high-quality curriculum: Staff

8. Features of a high-quality curriculum: Setting ethos/values

9. Features of a high-quality curriculum: Assessment

10. Features of a high-quality curriculum: Observation

11. Given the responses on assessment and observation, what do you think is the relationship between assessment and observation?

12. Children (and parents) are responsible for the curriculum.

13. Government/Policy are responsible for the curriculum.

14. Practitioners/Teachers/Educators are responsible for the curriculum

15. Society is responsible for the curriculum

16. Government should be responsible for the curriculum.

17. Parents and children should be responsible for the curriculum.

18. Practitioners/Teachers/Educations should be responsible for the curriculum.

19. The curriculum supports child development.

20. Child development informs the curriculum.

21. Practitioner/teacher/educator knowledge and skills informs the curriculum

22. To help us review who has responded to the survey, please provide a short description of your role (e.g. Practitioner, Trainer, Professor, Lecturer)

23. Would you like to make any further comments?

Appendix Three: Survey Three

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The curriculum focuses on what children will learn	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
Curriculum is different to pedagogy	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
The curriculum should be play-based	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
The Curriculum should support the child's agency	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Teachers/educators/carers	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
Parents	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
Children	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
Society	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
Policy	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox

In responding to the statements below, please provide your answers based on how you see the curriculum being delivered now, as opposed to how you might like to see it being delivered.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The child is the driver	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox

for the curriculum						
The child is at the centre of the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
The child actively shapes the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
The child is core to planning the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
The child is co-constructor of the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The educator scaffolds children's development	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
The educator creates learning opportunities	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
The educator responds to the needs of the child	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
The educator designs the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
The educator	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox

facilitates the curriculum						
The educators co-constructs the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
The educator implements the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Families shape and inform the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
Families support the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
Families are partners in the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
Families are a part of the learning environment	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
Families provide information on the child so educators can shape the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
Families are not integral to the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Policy provides the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
Policy ensures accountability of educators delivering the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
Policy co-constructs the curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox
Policy is supportive in facilitating a quality curriculum	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox	Checkbox