

# Working together: you and your EYP

Readers have expressed concern about the sometimes tense relationship between managers and EYPs. We asked Kathy Brodie, trainer, early childhood tutor and an EYP, to explore how the two professionals can successfully work together on a common aim



**T**he question 'What does it mean to be an Early Years Professional?' is being asked again.

As the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) is being re-evaluated after the *Nutbrown Review*, some managers are reconsidering the role of their EYP. Although research is still in its infancy, initial findings are that EYPs are giving 'added value' to their settings (Ranns et al., 2011: 6) and that 'EYPs positively influence outcomes for children' (Davis and Barry, 2012:10).

But the working relationship

between manager and EYP can be a complex one. This may be because EYPs were initially lauded as 'change agents' for settings, which, in some cases, has created a sense of unease between managers and their EYPs.

However, as time has progressed, some good practice for effective collaboration between manager and EYP has started to emerge. Some of these are discussed here.

## Understanding roles

There are more and more EYP job roles and specifications being created, to meet the needs of the setting. A written document aids clarity, but this could also be a verbal understanding.

This is because the role of a true EYP is very different from that of the manager, even though they may look similar to the untrained eye. It can be likened to the difference between a vet and a doctor – both have specialist medical knowledge, but it needs to be applied to their own specific circumstances.

A role profile is an ideal way to clarify the different roles. Unlike a job specification, which is merely a list of possible tasks (and usually caveated

with 'and anything else you get asked to do!'), a role profile identifies technical competencies and the measures of good performance. It is about 'shared understanding, shared expectations and accountability' (Churchill, 2009).

A role profile can support good working relationships by identifying, through a shared dialogue, the purpose of the EYP role in the setting, at that particular time. This should be revisited at regular and planned intervals, to ensure the role profile is still fit for purpose.

## Sharing a common vision

It is essential that the two roles are pulling in the same direction at a strategic level or else one will undermine the other, setting up resentment and wasted energy trying to find common ground.

This necessitates the EYP being on the senior management team so that she or he can fully understand the setting's strategic decisions and how these affect the EYP role. For example, if the setting has a goal to gain iCan accreditation, the EYP can support this by providing evidence



EYP Jean Maguire (left) and manager Vicky Harnley from Goodwood Lodge Day Nursery, Stockport

of the speech and language practice in the setting. If the EYP is unaware of this goal, then valuable opportunities may be missed.

## Challenging, not changing

An EYP is charged with the role of 'challenging practice'. This can be an area of contention, but if done properly, can be of great benefit to the children, the setting, practitioners and the manager. 'Challenging' in this context means checking that all practice is good practice and understanding why it is good practice.

For example, the EYP may analyse the snack routine and find that there may be ways for children to be more independent when choosing a snack, supporting the children's mastery disposition. Alternatively, the EYP may examine the continuous provision and find that it is of a high quality, meets the needs of the children and does not need to be changed.

When the EYP is engaging in these sorts of self-checks, the manager can be reassured that the provision for the children is of the best possible quality.

## Reflective practice

Reflection is one of the most valuable tools that an EYP brings to the setting. Reflection is at the core of the EYP course and can significantly improve practice after the status has been achieved. For a manager, there is little time to sit back and take stock of the wider picture. This is particularly true when considering external pressures on the setting, such as Government reviews and the latest research into child development.

This is an ideal area for EYPs to use their reflective practice, discussing their thoughts and investigations with their manager.

## EYPs across the setting

Historically, EYPs have been used in the pre-school room more than with any other age range. There is some sense in this, because the transition from nursery to school needs careful handling. However, this can leave EYPs feeling frustrated at not being able to support practitioners in the baby or toddler rooms. Nor is it good business sense to restrict such

**EYP Jean Maguire with children from Goodwood Lodge Day Nursery, Stockport**



a valuable member of staff to working with one room.

It could be argued that the baby room is the flagship of the setting, where good practice and good habits are embedded in both staff and children. For example, if a firm basis of personal, social and emotional development can be achieved with the very youngest children, this will give resilience for their later years.

## Two-way understanding

For a successful collaboration it is important that the understanding is a two-way process. The EYP needs to understand the priorities and concerns of the manager just as much as the manager needs to make the most of the EYP's skills. This may mean additional conversations or meetings.

## Using EYP networks

EYP networks can be rich sources of information about practice, current Government and local authority views, local initiatives and settings with areas of excellence. This can be used directly in the setting to support the children and other practitioners. In addition, the networks often give EYPs the confidence to implement new ideas and to reflect on their own attitudes and beliefs.

Great strides in practice can be achieved, where the relationship between the manager and EYP is one of trust and true collaboration.

This may take time and adjustments in working patterns, as manager and EYP find their role and strengths.

A strong working relationship will benefit the children in the setting, as well as supporting and encouraging the other practitioners. However, further research needs to be done into how the role of the EYP can be developed, especially in light of the revised EYFS, the *Nutbrown Review* and the new Ofsted inspection regime.

Meanwhile, it is worth taking the time to build a strong bond between your EYP and manager. ■

## References

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