

The Early Years Professional what it offers Montessori prac

The important role of an Early Years Professional is to be a reflective practitioner and to lead and support colleagues in order to effect change and improve outcomes for children (Teaching Agency 2012). Whalley (2011) considers how Early Years Professionals should demonstrate additional qualities to align them with the European concept of a social pedagogue. These additional skills include expertise in decision making; sound knowledge of early year's pedagogy, holistic needs of all children and the EYFS; a sense of the intrinsic worth of the child; the ability to define a vision for practice in a setting; a role model and a competent agent of change.

When reflecting on the life and works of Dr. Maria Montessori it could be suggested that these additional skills support and enhance those gained from attaining a Montessori qualification. On the construction of childhood, Montessori recognised the Foundation years as critical to a child's future development, encouraging exploration, freedom and independence as a key part of the learning process. In Montessori's view the child is not an empty vessel but an active agent, ready to explore their environment and she intrinsically recognised the rights of the child as masters of their own learning process. Early Years Professionals have the opportunity to enhance their knowledge of child development from the ages of birth to five and are encouraged to critically analyse their views of childhood which encourage respecting children's rights and their voices.

The Absorbent Mind was recognised and charted by Montessori, she considered and explored the developmental planes and related these to pedagogical frameworks. She stated "The baby is ... endowed with an urge, or need, to face the outer world and to absorb it. We might say that he is born with 'the psychology of world conquest'". There are clear benefits of

During the past seven years over 11,000 early years practitioners in England have been funded by central government to engage in further professional development by working towards the Early Years Professional Status. Many of them are Montessori teachers. In this article Nikki Fairchild considers what gaining the status of Early Years Professional brings to Montessori nurseries; she highlights Montessori's own commitment to continued study and reflexive approach to working with young children. Whilst the value of the EYPS is questioned by both the Nutbrown review and the recent Truss report, working towards achieving the EYPS has enabled all Montessorians to review their practice and reflect on their effectiveness as leaders of Montessori settings.



the Early Years Professional working with babies and having a holistic view of children's development and learning from birth to the end of the

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Foundation Years. Allen states "a baby's early experiences are influential in determining the course of their future emotional, intellectual and physical development". An important element of the EYPS training is to engage with babies and toddlers (birth to three), linking theory to practice. They marvel at the capacity of young children to learn and develop. The EYPs have the opportunity to grasp the importance of this stage of development and evaluate their own impact on practice in this area of pre-school provision.

There is a strong link with the

positive outcomes for children and qualified practitioners working directly with them and their families.

Montessori also felt that practitioner education was key and considered that success lay in the on-going nature of the practitioners own personal development which should be viewed in tandem with observing and recognising the innate needs of individual children. In her view: "Education should be regarded as something of such importance that it is not entrusted to just any person, more or less qualified, morally or intellectually; but to persons who are very specially qualified."

An Early Years Professional is encouraged to engage in reflective

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practice. This type of engagement is important as a vehicle for personal growth. Deeper reflection is encouraged to support a consideration of the candidate's own perspectives and personal beliefs. Such reflection can be challenging but it is critical to enabling reflexivity – the chance for assimilation of fresh ideas and the skills to support greater reflection in the colleagues they work with. Reflexivity was a concept familiar to Montessori: her writing suggested that Montessori practitioners should undertake their own self-analysis in order to better understand their own belief and value systems.

The Early Years Professional, as the graduate leader of practice, has the role of leading and supporting their colleagues, evaluating practice, suggesting innovative improvements



Nikki with children at Chichester Montessori

improve outcomes for all children in their care;

- The ability to contribute to the continuing professional development of the staff they work with.

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The Early Years Professional, as the graduate leader of practice, has the role of leading and supporting their colleagues, evaluating practice, suggesting innovative improvements and working constructively with parents to benefit the children in their care.

and working constructively with parents to benefit the children in their care. Training programmes include the following elements: exploring effective practice, relationships with children, families and carers, leadership and team working and multi-professional working. There is also a chance for candidates to consider other pedagogical and practice approaches, such as how to use their theoretical knowledge to help understand and support children's learning, how to create a safe and secure environment, the concept of child-centered learning with play as the vehicle for this and using sustained shared thinking. This ensures that programmes have the diversity and rigour to produce Early Years Professionals who have:

- A deeper understanding of the knowledge and theories that underpin good practice;
- The ability to be critically reflective practitioners and to encourage this in others;
- The ability to lead and support others in order to effect change and to

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