

I am proud to say that I am a Reception Class Teacher at a wonderful, large, inner city school in Bradford, West Yorkshire. My class comprises of 30 delightful children, nearly all of which are second language children.

I have been teaching for a long time and think that this Reception Year is one of the most exciting age groups to teach. They are, as research has proved, at **the** best stage for learning to read and write and it is a daily delight to see how fast they flourish.

Not everyone knows about this Reception Class age group or indeed the 2 year phase of schooling called Early Years Foundation Stage.

I am increasingly feeling that maybe more people should know about what is happening within this hugely important phase of education.

6
13
9
117
30
3510

The Foundation Stage comprises of **6 Areas of Learning**. These are divided into **13 sections**. These sections themselves are then divided in to **9 scales** by which you then assess the children at the end of the Reception Year. These assessments lead to the children being awarded points. This means that there are 117 different assessments to make, and as I have 30 children in my class, then I have to manage 3510 different assessments by the end of the academic year.

Now it would seem fairly sensible to assume that these assessments would be accumulative and progressive, and indeed the first 3 do lead to the attainment of the points 4 to 8. But unfortunately these (points 4 to 8) are not hierarchical and a child could achieve these in any order which gets a little confusing.

(They can actually score between 4 and 8 without scoring between 1 and 3)

However they can only score the last one (scale 9) if they have got all the other 8.

When these scales were first published, the government presented them in a list form, but, some teachers were unfortunately using them as a straight forward, easy to read and manageable format; so the government had another think and when they emerged again, they were dotted about in a honeycomb design to truly make sure we did not know where we were up to.

Over the years, the government has been very generous and has produced an endless stream of publications to assist us in our quest for simple, comprehensive support through this bizarre maze of hexagons. Local Authorities have employed many people to write, publish and present numerous documents to try to achieve that same goal.

Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage
(2000 QCA/DfEE)

A Training Support Programme for the Foundation Stage
(2000 with video)

Foundation stage Profile (2003)

Foundation Stage Handbook (2003)

Foundation Stage Audit Materials (TTA 2004)

Statutory Framework of EYFS (double folder with CD) (2007)

Practice guidance for the Early Years published by DCSF (2008)

One of the latest helpful manuals which is called
Practical Guidance for the Foundation Stage 2008.

It contains many, every day, hands-on examples to help in assessing the children, and thus give them their scores. I need to stress here, that the government requires a teacher to assess the child by finding 80% of their evidence from observing child initiated activities. Only 20% can be teacher led. It needs to be looked for, listened for, and noted, as and when 'it happens', in order for a child to be 'scored'.

So any help in doing this is gratefully welcomed. I now enlighten you with some examples taken from the document.

Example 1 (page 71) KUW - Scale 5 - asks questions about why things happen and how things work, looks closely at similarities, differences, patterns and change

A great deal to 'look, listen and note'.

This means a Reception Class Teacher has to spend a huge amount of time observing the children for lengthy periods of time to find the emergence of any of these skills.

And what do they score for all this?

just

1 point!

It must be hard to imagine how we find emergent evidence of all this in a busy, noisy Foundation Stage Unit but here is their helpful example

While playing outside Lucy and Jake notice the brown and yellow leaves falling from the trees.

They talk about how different the trees are in other seasons and go on to make comments about the weather and the clothes they wear at different times of the year.

Just how many seasons have these 2 four year olds been chatting their way through? I do like the fact that they also remember last season's fashions too!

Let's try
another

Example 2 (page 81) creative point 8 - expresses and communicates ideas, thoughts and feelings using a range of materials, suitable tools, imaginative and role play, movement, designing and making and a variety of songs and musical instruments

I am going to have to stalk this child 'big time' to observe all the many precious moments when they securely demonstrate that they can do all this, all by themselves.
And what do they score?

You guessed!

1 point

So let's see how it is done.

- Carol and Linda make paper wings.

They help each other stick them on with sticky tape.

As they skip around the room, Carol shouts 'We're flying off to fairy land

When was the last time you taught someone called Carol or Linda?
I'm wondering whether they just might be the teaching
assistants!
Especially with the reference to Fairy Land!

One last look at these helpful examples

Example 3 (page 58) mathematical point 2- counts reliably up to 3
everyday objects

This is more like it. I can cope with this one.
How much does the child score?

1 point!

I am giving children point scores that are weighted totally differently, so comparing 2 children's performance is now becoming a nightmare too.

Example?

Richard points to the number 3
and indicates 'stop' when the practitioner is giving buns to the dolls

I suggest that maybe Richard is wishing his teacher might get on and teach him something as opposed to dishing out buns to the dolls!

'Observation of children participating in everyday activities is the most reliable way to build up an accurate picture of what children know, understand, feel, are interested in and can do'.

Only 20% of the evidence must be teacher led.

Practitioners should be ready to capture spontaneous but important moments.

Moderation is a huge issue. It takes up a great amount of time. The assessment criteria, as demonstrated, is so open to different interpretations. Early Years Teachers, Nursery Nurses and Teaching Assistants are spending a gross amount of time trying to agree on whether a child has or has not fully gained that massive score of 1. Each year, specific scale points are used both nationally and locally, as a focus, to try and help people understand exactly what does or does not qualify that certain point.

There are grave worries that some teachers are submitting the wrong scores for some children as obviously this amazing amount of assessment must be leading somewhere.

'The process of collecting information about children's learning is a critical part of the assessment process and is vital in order to ensure that the judgements made against the 13 assessment scales produce accurate and reliable data'

I was recently accused of contaminating my results as I had not given a score of 1 to any of my children for the point 4 on the Linking Sounds and Letters.

Links sounds to letters, naming and sounding letters of the alphabet

I was questioned as to why.
I said that the children did not know the names of the alphabet so I could not give them a point.

Why did they not know the names?

I had not taught them, as the letter names do not help a child to learn to read.

But the assessment criteria states they should know them.

But, I teach children to read.

'The primary focus of the EYFS profile is to provide year 1 teachers with reliable and information about each child's level of development as they reach the end of the EYFS, enabling the teacher to plan an effective, responsive and appropriate curriculum that will meet all the children's needs.'

I have already touched on the fact that the point scores are indicating totally different weightings of the assessment criteria. This is obviously difficult to compare children's performance but it can actually misinform Key Stage 1 teachers.

Look at 2 children's performances.

Their scores come from long moderated discussions between the staff of my reception class

CHILD A

PSE - very social, loves school and talks and talks and talks	scores 6 6 6
Creative - paints, sticks, creates. loves role play	6
Physical - colours, cuts beautifully, skips, climbs	6
KUW - very inquisitive, asks questions, investigates	6
No numbers	1 2 1
Cannot blend sounds, or recognises any words	3 2 1 1

Score 47

CHILD B

PSE - reluctant to talk, always alone, not keen to join in	1 1 1
Creative - no interest in painting etc won't sing	1
Physical - clumsy, won't colour, can't cut out, won't climb	2
KUW - shy, won't have a go,	1
1-20 numbers add& subtract, blends/segments sounds, knows 24 words, attempting to write, reads well	6 5 6 5 6 6 6

Score 47

They score the same and they are 2 completely different children with massively different abilities. Not only that, when these 2 are assessed again publicly at the end of Key Stage 1, in reading, writing and mathematics, how can these scores be a bench mark? Their score includes physical, creative and the other areas of learning. Where is the value added shown from the school? Does anyone know? What do Year 1 teachers do with scores that do not correlate to National Curriculum levels?

What are these score actually for?

Why are we scoring young children?

Page 5 - 'EYFS profile scale points and cumulative scale point scores are statutory assessments that exist in their own right. They are not equivalent to any national curriculum levels or sub-levels and no such comparison should be made.'

The government called this scoring system a baseline. How can it be a baseline when the children have been in school for 2 years? What about using the level they enter school at either Nursery Stage, or at latest, on entry in to the Reception Stage?

Surely that makes more sense and it should absolutely marry with what goes on further on in the school.

There is a dark side to all this, which is truly un-nerving me. These flawed observations and assessment scores are taking up masses of time of all reception class teachers in this country.

They are now

statutory.

From September 2008 all Teachers **MUST** assess their children in this manner.

But there is something even worse than this.

In and amongst all the Foundation Stage Documentation 2008, there is a one word missing from it all.

TEACH!

No where, does it ask anyone,
anywhere
to actually
teach
a child
anything.

We deliver.

We provide opportunities

We provide encouragement.

We support development

And then we assess as it all emerges.

'All areas must be delivered through planned, purposeful play with a balance of adult-led and child initiated activities'

Something must be done.

This is scandalous.

If I asked any man or woman on the street
what the average Reception Teacher was paid to do,
they would say

TEACH!

**I think it is time that they knew
what is really happening.**

Marj. Newbury

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