The development of quality Early Years provision: raising standards, improving practice. An encounter with the hydra-headed creature that is the change process.

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ABSTRACT

Jacqueline Giacinta Evles: The development of quality Early Years provision: raising standards, improving practice. An encounter with the hydra-headed creature that is the change process

The provision of high quality education for three, four and five year-olds has become a major concern of Government. Set in the context of control, economic considerations and raising standards, Government has introduced statutory initiatives with a view to improving the quality of education for all young children. The introduction of the Foundation Stage based on Early Learning Goals has provided a framework for children’s learning in the Early Years.

The development of the Worcestershire Early Years support programme has provided a vehicle for the new initiatives and is seen in a context of improvement and effectiveness. Ensuring quality for all three, four and five year-olds in the variety of the County’s Early Years settings has become the responsibility of the practitioners in those settings, supported by a team of experienced Early Years practitioners described as ‘Mentor Teachers.’

The County strategy for developing, supporting and maintaining quality provision in the Early Years has provided a unique opportunity to examine the value of the strategy to the settings and the practitioners who work in those settings. The role of the Mentor Teacher in that process has been central to the investigation. The complexities of developing appropriate research dialogues and methodological approaches was another area examined. The use of survey research with its quantitative and qualitative elements provided an appropriate methodological tool that revealed a wealth of data. A postal survey was employed. Questionnaires were mailed to all Worcestershire Early Years settings in June 1999 and June 2000. Statistical information was obtained from the questions together with opinions and views expressed in the open-ended comments sections. Similar questionnaires were distributed to the Mentor Teachers. Twelve practitioners across the range of Early years settings were selected as a sample for interview, as were six Mentor Teachers who supported practitioners in the Worcestershire administrative areas of Malvern, Worcester, Kidderminster, Bromsgrove and Droitwich. All were engaged in the interview process between January and March 2001. Semi-structured interview schedules were used to allow interviewees the freedom to offer a depth of elaborated information and opinion. The research evidence revealed the problematic nature of purpose, role responsibility and relationships and of developing effective learning environments. The complex nature of developing a coherent and cohesive programme exposed the difficulties of establishing truths and realities, and the value and the weaknesses of the programme. The many positive revelations provided a degree of optimism for the future development of the programme.

Quality education is the right of all children, but particularly those in the Early Years. A good foundation will support children throughout their lives. The
challenge for the future is to develop a framework for quality Early Years experiences. An enhanced support programme based on a shared vision and collaboration would allow Handy's (1994) 'prophets' and 'kings' to flourish, and Early Years settings of excellence to become the norm for education provision for our youngest children.
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**ABREVIATIONS**

BERA - British Educational Research Association  
BSA - British Sociological Association  
CACE - Central Advisory Council for Education  
DES - Department for Education and Science  
DfEE - Department for Education and Employment  
DofH - Department of Health  
ECEF - Early Childhood Education Forum  
EEL Project - Effective Early Learning Project  
EPPE Project - Effective Provision for Pre-school Education Project  
EYDCP - Early Years Development and Childcare Plan  
FE - Further Education  
HE - Higher Education  
HofC - House of Commons  
HofCEC - House of Commons Education Committee  
LEA - Local Education Authority  
NCE - National Commission on Education  
NQT - Newly Qualified Teacher  
NVQs - National Vocational Qualifications  
OFSTED - Office for Standards in Education  
QCA - Qualification and Curriculum Authority  
SATs - Standard Assessment Tasks  
SCAA - Standards, Curriculum and Assessment Authority
SEN - Special Educational Needs

SPEEL Project - Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning Project

StEPs Project - Statements of Entitlement to Play (Training Pack)

WCC - Worcestershire County Council
PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Framed in a political context an investigation into the development of high quality Early Years provision for three, four and five year-olds seemed appropriate at this time. Many changes have taken place over the past four years. Government funding (OFSTED, 1998) for four year-olds and, more recently, three year-olds in approved Early Years settings paved the way for significant changes in how those settings were managed and organised. The requirement that settings should be inspected (OFSTED, 1995) as a prerequisite for involvement, and the introduction of guidance for developing the Desirable Learning Outcomes (DfEE/SCAA, 1996) and the Early Learning Goals (QCA/DfEE, 1999) has led to the establishing of the Foundation Stage (QCA/DfEE, 2000) for three, four and five year-olds in the variety of Early Years settings. The result of those changes has been a significant alteration to the way Early Years settings are organised, and to the responsibilities of the practitioners working in those settings - a different level of professional development and involvement.

My interest in investigating the nature of developments in Early Years provision and the changes taking place arose from my involvement in one particular programme. The introduction of an Early Years support programme in Worcestershire to further the development of quality provision for children aged three, four and five provided the context for my investigation. Support for practitioners involved in the programme was undertaken by designated Early Years practitioners termed ‘Mentor Teachers.’ The investigation explored the role of the Mentor Teachers as viewed by practitioners in Worcestershire Early Years
settings and the Mentor Teachers themselves. Through survey research using questionnaires and interview techniques, the quality of the programme and the role of the Mentor Teacher was revealed. The research evidence also provided the opportunity for discourse concerning future developments, and for exploring frameworks for continued improvement and raising standards both of settings and children.

I am indebted to the practitioners in Worcestershire Early Years settings and the Mentor Teachers who took part in the research process by responding to the questionnaires and involvement in the interview sessions. I am also indebted to Sheila Sage, Annette Bryant and Alison Hitchins from Worcestershire LEA for their support. I especially wish to record my thanks to Professor Ken Fogelman at the University of Leicester, School of Education for his encouragement, support and advice during the preparation of this thesis. Lastly, my thanks are extended to John Eyles for his continued help and encouragement, and the proof reading of the thesis.
Alice remained looking thoughtfully at the mushroom for a minute, trying to make out which were the two sides of it, and as it was perfectly round, she found this a very difficult question. However, at last she stretched her arms round it as far as they would go, and broke of a bit of the edge with each hand. 'And now which is which?' she said to herself ....

Lewis Carroll (1979) Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, p. 84

Alice experienced the acute difficulty of making decisions that would be effective in improving her situation. She needed to reflect upon the context of her predicament and devise strategies that would improve the quality of her existence. Like Alice, educators involved in Early Years settings in England have been experiencing similar difficulties. The burden of improving the quality of Early Years provision and ensuring that it is effective in raising standards has been placed firmly in the domain of practitioners in those settings, although improvement and effectiveness have clearly been driven from a base in the political arena (DES, 1989c, 1990; House of Commons Education Committee, 1994; OFSTED, 1995; DfEE, 1996; DfEE/SCAA, 1996; DfEE, 1997a; OFSTED, 1998; QCA/DfEE, 1999, 2000).

Improvement and effectiveness in educational settings - both in teaching and learning - has centred on notions of quality (DfEE, 1997a; Mortimore et al, 1995; Pascal et al, 1996; Pascal et al, 1999; Stoll and Mortimore, 1995; Sylva and Wiltshire, 1994). OFSTED inspections (OFSTED, 1998) have clearly indicated that quality of provision is variable and that improvement in the quality of
education for all is not only desirable but a requirement of Early Years provision (Alexander, 1994). Alexander’s (1997) model of good practice might provide the base for the development of practices to achieve that improved state. Hopkins et al (1994) explored the problems associated with improvement initiatives in turbulent times of change. The present climate in educational settings is turbulent and practitioners have been engulfed in a variety of rapidly introduced, and often misunderstood, initiatives. In the Early Years domain practitioners have been overwhelmed by the establishment of the Foundation Stage for three, four and five year-old children (QCA/DfEE, 2000) and the variety of initiatives that have affected management and organisation, teaching and learning - a prescribed curriculum (QCA/DfEE, 1999); the development of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (DfEE, 1998); Baseline Assessment (QCA, 1998); and inspection (OFSTED, 1995). Although these ‘outside’ influences could not be ignored, the context and culture of settings must be the starting-point for improvement, and the impetus for development must come from the ‘community of learners’ from ‘within’ (Barth, 1990). Busher and Saran (1995) describe the educational setting as a ‘learning organisation’ and Mortimore et al (1995) suggest that real change can only be brought about by internal, staff-based development. Much of the research into improvement and effectiveness has been school-based and has presented problems for many Early Years settings - particularly playgroups and pre-schools - who have not been part of a culture of research and development. Although it is necessary to draw upon school-based research in the search for directions for improving and developing effective practices in the Early Years context, Aubrey et al (2000) provide useful
insight into methodological and ethical issues in a discussion of educational research in the Early Years.

Sammons et al (1995) have provided a useful review of the tradition of school effectiveness and outline knowledge in that area which will:

*be of relevance to practitioners and policy-makers concerned with school improvement and enhancing quality in education.*

That review and other references to ‘studies of effective schools and the evaluation of school improvement programmes’ (p. 1) indicate the wealth of research on which practitioners can draw (Anning, 1998; Brookover et al, 1979; Cartwright, 1999; ECEF, 1998; Geddis et al, 1989; Mortimore et al, 1988; Rutter et al, 1979; Scheerens, 1992; Woodhead, 1996, 1998). Developments in school improvement and school effectiveness have indicated a pattern of involvement that is concerned with culture, leadership, policy-making and the process of learning by children, and in which the practitioner has a central role. The current vogue for initiatives imposed from ‘without’ provides significant barriers to improvement and effectiveness from ‘within.’ Sammons et al (1995) also sound a note of caution: there are ‘limitations’ to ‘existing school effectiveness research, particularly the weak theoretical basis’ (p. 1). Pascal et al (1997) have added to an understanding of improvement and effectiveness in Early Years contexts in the development of the Effective Early Learning Research (EEL) Project. The improvement in management, organisation and curriculum delivery has resulted in more effective practices across a variety of Early Years settings (Pascal and
Bertram, 1994, 1997; Pascal et al, 1994; Pascal et al, 1997). Difficulties have been noted in defining quality as the project has been based on a belief that it:

*is a value laden, subjective and dynamic concept which varies with time, perspective and place.*

Pascal et al, 1997, p. 40

The framework for quality outlined by Pascal et al (ibid.) has been extended in Edgington's (1998) guidance for co-ordinating Early Years practice and may well offer useful directions for developing the Worcestershire Early Years programme for supporting improvement and effectiveness. The quality of the programme may well depend upon an understanding of the background to the improvement and effectiveness movement, and to a commitment by practitioners to professional development through ownership, reflection and inquiry. The research will consider these issues in some detail.

The County strategy: the Worcestershire response to developing, supporting and maintaining quality Early Years provision provided the basis for investigation. The Government requirements for all Local Authorities to produce an Early Years Development and Childcare Plan (EYDCP) set in motion strategic planning that focuses on the ‘quality’ of Early Years provision (DfEE, 1997b, 1998; WCC, 1998, 1999, 2000). The level of ‘quality’ of settings with children aged three and four funded by the Government has been established by OFSTED inspection - the Government’s attempt at quality control in Early Years settings - and support for improving the quality of every setting has been developed through the local plan. A network of qualified and experienced Early Years teachers - Mentor Teachers -
provides support for clusters of Early Years settings. Those experienced educators provide support on a half-day a term basis although it has been flexible in time and context. Liaison with the Education Early Years Team, Primary Inspectors and Social Services Day Care Advisers gives it a multi-professional dimension. The key perspective of the Worcestershire strategy is professional development with the practitioners in the settings being central to the development: the emphasis on self. The County has outlined the key features that it believes will improve quality provision: inspection; self-evaluation and improvement; multi-professional support and advice; training; implementation of an appropriate play-based curriculum; consistency in delivering the Early Learning Goals; and establishing the requirements of the Foundation stage for three to five year-olds. The support and advice provided by Mentor Teachers has been considered central to the success of the strategy. The Early Years support programme and the crucial role of the Mentor Teacher needed to be examined to determine the value in promoting quality provision for our very youngest children.

The Worcestershire strategy for improvement and effectiveness is firmly rooted in a professional development model, with practitioners - both providers in the settings and Mentor Teachers - reflecting on their own practices. Silcock (1994) suggests that practice based on reflection has great ‘potential for professional improvement’ (p. 283), a useful basis for investigation of the programme. Elfer and Wedge (1992) discuss at some length these issues and emphasise the importance of reflection and relationships with less emphasis placed on the ‘translation of frameworks into practice’ (p. 67). That professional development
model is also dependent upon an insider/outsider perspective: the practitioner
‘within’ the setting working in partnership with Mentor Teachers, and Education
and Social Services staff - the ‘outsiders.’ Collaboration between the practitioners
and Mentor Teachers - the main focus in delivering the strategy - reflects the four
stages of development as outlined in the EEL Project (Pascal et al. 1997):

**Stage 1: Evaluation** - during which researchers and participants
work together to document and evaluate the quality of early
learning within the setting.

**Stage 2: Action Planning** - during which participants meet
together to identify priorities for action and to generate an action
plan to implement this.

**Stage 3: Development** - during which the action plan to improve
the quality of provision is implemented.

**Stage 4: Reflection** - during which participants are encouraged to
reflect upon the Evaluation and Development process and to
review the impact of the action plan in the light of experience.

The use of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and documentary evidence
(Appendices 1 - 8) has provided the opportunity to undertake an in-depth and
rigorous investigation, both qualitative and quantitative, of the support
programme in delivering quality educational provision in the wide range of
Worcestershire Early Years settings.

The aim of the County strategy is to provide the conditions necessary to improve
the quality of provision for children in the Early Years and to generate more
effective practices. Like Alice, careful deliberation and reflection is necessary to
ensure the right choices are made. Quality education is the right of all children,
and especially so in the Early Years. It is the foundation of all future learning, achievement and quality of life. An examination and evaluation of the Worcestershire programme will reveal the degree to which the Early Years settings are appropriately supported, and improvement and effectiveness is established. Siraj-Blatchford and Wong (1999) suggest that quality research by those who have a ‘vested’ interest in improving practice is:

> more likely to produce the understanding and involvement necessary for change and improvement to occur.

p. 10

How effective, then, has been the Worcestershire Early Years support programme in improving and maintaining quality in the variety of Early Years settings and, more importantly, the role of the Mentor Teachers in that process? The nature of the initiative would reveal the complexities of implementation and, as Anning and Edwards (1999) maintain:

> changing hearts and minds is also a question of changing cultures, that change is usually complex and rarely straightforward, and that it needs to be managed by supporting the learning of colleagues as they develop new ideas in practice, that it takes time and is far more than a question of simply setting targets.

p. 148

The unravelling of the background to the investigation would begin to set the Early Years support programme in a context that would reveal its worth.
CHAPTER 2

The development of educational provision in the Early Years and the background to the Worcestershire Early Years support programme

Miss Clare has taught here for nearly forty years ..... She is now over sixty, and her teaching methods have of late been looked upon by some visiting inspectors with a slightly pitying eye. They are, they say, too formal; the children should have more activity, and the classroom is unnaturally quiet for children of that age ..... but for all that, or perhaps because of that, Miss Clare is a very valuable teacher, for in the first place the children are happy, they are fond of Miss Clare, and she creates for them an atmosphere of serenity and quiet which means that they can work well and cheerfully, really laying the foundations of elementary knowledge on which I can build so much more quickly when they come up into my class.


The questioning of how ‘education’ is organised and delivered is not a new phenomenon. Change has always been a key feature of educational provision. The need for government, local authorities and the inspection service to intervene in the context, content and delivery of educational provision, has continually challenged practitioners. Miss Clare’s experience in the 1950s clearly illustrates the outside pressures that have continually impinged upon the way children have been educated. Despite her obvious experience, Miss Clare’s practice was being questioned although she provided a happy and secure environment for the children and was ‘really laying the foundations’ for future learning (‘Miss Read,’ 1961, p. 20). There has been a real feeling of deja vu during the 1990s and into the twenty-first century - the quality of the content and delivery of the curriculum in educational settings has been questioned and has provided the Government with the opportunity to introduce statutory measures to ensure control over the
education system and diminish the autonomy of practitioners. The focus of the reforms has centred on quality and raising standards (DES, 1987, 1989a, 1990; OFSTED, 1993; DfEE, 1997a). The quality of educational provision in the Early Years has also not escaped the attention of Government. ‘Improvement,’ ‘effectiveness’ and ‘raising standards’ in the Early Years have been driven by Government political and economic considerations (DES, 1989a, 1990; House of Commons Education Committee, 1994; OFSTED, 1995; DfEE, 1996; DfEE/SCAA, 1996; DfEE, 1997a; OFSTED, 1998; QCA/DfEE, 1999, 2000). The burden of improving the quality of Early Years settings and of raising standards has been placed firmly with practitioners. Local authorities are providing a co-ordinated response to the development of quality provision in the Early Years based on the guidance outlined in the Foundation Stage documentation (QCA/DfEE, 1999, 2000). The Worcestershire response has been set in the context of practitioners and those ‘expert’ Mentor Teachers working co-operatively to develop high quality provision based on existing good practice and the Foundation Stage guidance (WCC, 1998, 1999, 2000).

The Worcestershire Early Years Development and Childcare Plans (EYDCPs) (WCC, 1998, 1999, 2000) reflected the requirement of Government. The network of experienced Early Years teachers - the Mentor Teachers - had been formed to support the development of quality provision. Twenty-four Mentor Teachers supported four-hundred and eighty-eight settings in 1999 and twenty-three Mentor Teachers supported four-hundred and ninety-four settings in 2000 on a half-day a
term basis and there was some opportunity for flexibility of support in time and context. A multi-professional approach was encouraged through liaison with the education Inspectorate and Early Years Team, and Social Services Day Care Advisers in the County. The Worcestershire strategy for improving and maintaining quality was to be developed through the support and advice of the Mentor Teachers. The Mentor Teachers would reflect the County’s view of the key features of quality improvement: inspection; self-evaluation and improvement; multi-professional support and advice; training; implementation of an appropriate play-based curriculum; consistency in delivering the Early Learning Goals; and the establishing of the requirements of the Foundation Stage for three, four and five year-olds. The appointment of Mentor Teachers was central to the successful development of the programme.

The investigation of the programme has provided an opportunity to explore the value of its use so far in developing effective practices and raising standards. The collecting of the data - factual and opinion: quantitative and qualitative - from the Mentor Teachers and practitioners in the settings - provided a wealth of evidence of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, and Mentor Teacher/practitioner understanding of role requirements. An examination of the research findings will provide the foundation for development and a framework for future improvement strategies.

**Development of Early Years provision**

The establishing of the Foundation Stage for children aged three to five years has been described as ‘a significant landmark’ (QCA/DfEE, 2000, p. 3). Tate (2000) in the foreword to the curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage
stated that:

for the first time it gives this very important stage of education a distinct identity. The early learning goals set high expectations for the end of the foundation stage, but expectations that are achievable for most children who have followed a relevant curriculum.

p. 3

Here we have an indication of the Government's assurance of quality provision for all (DES, 1990; Ball, 1994; DfEE, 1997a). Certainly the preamble to the guidance suggests the purpose of the document is to provide all those that work with young children (the practitioners) a framework for developing high quality teaching and learning experiences throughout the Foundation Stage. Although the document is prescriptive, Tate (2000) suggests that it is useful to practitioners by:

allowing them to respond flexibly to the particular needs of the children, families and community with whom they work. In this way, standards of learning and teaching will be raised, so helping to give children secure foundations on which future learning can build.

p. 3

Simply responding flexibly to individual needs to achieve improved standards does not reflect the reality of the development of the Foundation Stage. There has been a move from practitioner autonomy and personal belief systems to a requirement to implement educational policy as the result of politically imposed reforms (DES, 1985b, 1988, 1989a, 1990; DfH, 1989; DfEE, 1996, 1997a; DfEE/SCAA, 1996; OFSTED, 1995, 1998; QCA/DfEE, 1999, 2000).

The fragmented nature of education and care provision for children aged three,
four and five has not made the development of an integrated service easy. Neither has it been desired by all practitioners working in the field. The traditional forms of provision - nursery classes, nursery schools and reception classes for mainly four-year-olds administered by Local Education Authorities and playgroups, private nurseries, and family care centres for three- and four-year-olds controlled by Social Services - show the complexity of pre-school provision. David (1993) concludes that:

one begins to have a sense of some of the difficulty and confusion arising in this country when attempting to describe and analyse education for our youngest children. p. 133

The dichotomy of the situation is clearly evidenced by the nature of Early Years provision - provision that can be described as 'education' and that which can be termed 'care.' The problematic nature of integrating those two broad areas of provision is revealed in the differences in training, qualifications and pay structure of the practitioners working in the field. 'Education' provision in schools and nurseries is staffed mainly by practitioners with teaching qualifications of degree status, and funded as part of the school budget. 'Care' provision, in playgroups, private nurseries and family care centres, for example, is staffed mainly by practitioners with certificate and diploma care qualifications, and is funded from fee-paying sources. The 'school' influenced, often more formalised provision makes an uneasy bedfellow with the informal, play-based, free choice care provision indicative of the playgroup tradition. These very separate traditions may well show little interest or enthusiasm for an integrated system.
The attempts by governments to influence the management, organisation, teaching and curriculum in schools have a long tradition, the greatest impact upon the curriculum being the introduction of the National Curriculum (DES, 1989b). Although the curriculum only applied to children who had reached the statutory school age of five, it would have a significant effect upon provision for children in the Early Years, particularly four-year-olds in primary school classes. Governments had also become aware of the political, economic and social advantages of intervening in the education system, and especially in provision for the youngest children. The Plowden Report (CACE, 1967) and the White Paper ‘Framework for Expansion’ (DES, 1972) referred to educational provision for four-year-olds and in ‘Better Schools’ (DES, 1985a) it was suggested that:

*Nearly all children stand to benefit from some attendance at school before reaching the compulsory age provided that what school offers is appropriate to their age and stage of development.*

p. 38

The emphasis was on ‘*school appropriate*’ activity, but there was a recognition that an integrated system for under-fives should be developed that required co-operation between ‘the education and social departments of local authorities’ (DES, *ibid.*, p. 40). A curriculum that was appropriate to the child’s age and stage of development was emphasised fifteen years later in the Foundation Stage curriculum guidance (QCA/DfEE, 2000). In the late 1980s the Government lacked the will to carry through recommendations for Early Years provision and simply instigated another committee to investigate aspects of nursery education. A House of Commons Select Committee (HofC, 1988) considered yet again
'education' provision for under-fives. The conclusion, explained David (1993), was that:

> there should be an expansion of public nursery education, and that good quality provision benefits all children, especially those from economically or socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Their report also stressed the benefit to children whose home language is not English.

p. 141

The constitution of the committee - members of parliament from all parties - highlighted economic and social considerations, but at the time the recommendations were not sufficiently important for the Government to take direct action. Inevitably, another committee of enquiry was constituted to consider the 'quality of educational experience offered to three- and four-year-olds' (DES, 1990). The Rumbold Report had a far-reaching remit which included the quality of the provision both in the 'education' and 'care' sectors although the emphasis was on 'educational experiences' even in the settings for three- and four-year-olds that were predominantly concerned with care. The committee of 'experts' with knowledge of the Early Years were required:

> To consider the quality of the educational experience which should be offered to 3- and 4-year-olds, with particular reference to content, continuity and progression in learning, having regard to the requirements of the National Curriculum and taking account of the government's expenditure plans. To take into account in this consideration:
  i. the diversity of needs and types of provision;
  ii. demographic and social factors;
  iii. the nature of training for teachers and other professional staff involved in the education of children under 5.

DES, 1990, para. 1
The importance of the Early Years to future Government policy-making was beginning to emerge.

The remit of the Rumbold Report reflected the pattern of educational change that had been taking place during the 1980s: a National Curriculum for children aged five- to sixteen-years; four-year-olds in reception classes in the school setting; the Children Act (DoH, 1989) promoting collaboration between Local Education Authorities and Social Services; and the need to expand Early Years provision in the face of Government moves to cut unemployment numbers by encouraging mothers to seek work. Playgroups were seen as an essential part of the programme for Early Years provision but provision 'on the cheap.' David (1993) remarked that although playgroups were seen as a vital link in supporting parents they:

continue to be substantially underfunded and dependent on the goodwill of poorly paid and volunteer workers, and fees paid by parents.

p.142

Government's understanding of the economic usefulness of developing pre-school education and care was overridden by the political expediency of greater control of the quality of the education system as a whole through statutory procedures that could be assessed. The 1988 Education Reform Act (DES, 1988), including the National Curriculum Programmes of Study and Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs), gave the Government tight control over the education of children aged five- to sixteen-years. Pressures upon schools to demonstrate quality and improvement immediately led to pressure on the organisation of under-fives settings and the provision of an 'appropriate' curriculum. David (1993) said there
was 'little doubt that it would have a 'top down' effect on children under five'
(p. 143).

The move to more formalised schooling in reception classes and local authority
nurseries, reflected in many pre-school settings, increased with the requirement to
administer the Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) at the end of Key Stage 1 to
children aged seven. That monitoring of standards in schools added to the
pressure on head teachers and practitioners to look more closely at development,
achievement and progression in the Early Years. David (1993) concluded that
schools had become more 'sensitive' to standards children had reached on
admittance to school, and that knowledge was important:

> from this they feel they can argue their case even if the results for
> their individual schools, at age 7, are comparatively low, as long
> as they are able to indicate that the school has a notable 'value
> added' score - the amount the children have progressed during
> their three years in the system, in Years R; 1 and 2.

p. 143

Baseline Assessment of children entering statutory schooling, and inspection by
OFSTED, added to the growing pressure to develop a more formalised approach
to pre-school provision.

Government influence - some would say 'intervention' or 'interference' - has
continued apace through the 1990s with a high priority given to the issues of
'standards' and 'employment' - two interrelated political issues. Firstly, the
concern with quality and raising standards has allowed central Government to
tighten its control over the education system (DES, 1990; DfEE, 1996, 1997a,
The Government’s stranglehold over policy to support practice in the school settings has prevented practitioners having real involvement in the delivery of the curriculum, for example, and how it is set in the local context. Bush (1999) suggests that:

implementation of externally imposed agendas reduces the scope for practitioners to debate what should be taught and why. The ideologies of central government drive the agenda, replacing the values of practitioners, individually and collectively, and limiting internal debate to implementation of a prescribed curriculum.

p. 7

Secondly, the political value in reducing the number of people on the unemployed register, particularly women, could not be ignored. The debate on the expansion of pre-school provision gained momentum. In 1993 the Newham Parents’ Group petitioned Westminster for the expansion of nursery provision and the National Commission on Education (NCE, 1993)

argued the case for a ‘national strategy’ for improving early childhood education and care, in particular, a state requirement on local authorities to ensure that sufficient high quality, publicly-funded nursery education places should be available for all three- and four-year-olds whose parents want it.

Watt,1994, p. 2

The Start Right report (Ball, 1994) was even more precise in its recommendations:

..... the Government should immediately prepare legislation to create by 1999 a statutory responsibility for the provision of free, high quality, half-day pre-school education for all children from the age of three in an integrated context of extended day care.

Recommendation 12; para. 7.21
The notion of the development of a national policy for Early Years was also seen as the responsibility of government by Cohen and Fraser (1991). Government should 'take the lead ...... by setting out and implementing a national child care policy' (p. 9) and Pugh (1992) acknowledged that:

\[
\text{in the interests of providing children with continuity and coherence and in making efficient use of scarce resources ...... a co-ordinated policy, with mechanisms for joint planning, management and review, must surely be a first priority.}
\]

p. 11

The development of the Nursery Education Scheme (DfEE, 1996) based on a voucher system of places for three- and four-year-olds fulfilled a Government goal to allow mothers to enter the workplace: economic considerations having a high priority. Standards were also addressed by linking inspection of settings (OFSTED, 1995,1998) that provided places for 'funded' children.

The influence of policy-makers from the political domain has led to the current situation where issues of 'quality' feature in debate concerning 'all public services' and have become an 'integral part of the social and political climate in which we live' (Watt, 1994, p. 4). Raising the issue of quality in the school setting has allowed the Government to seize the opportunity to exert unprecedented control over education and care provision in the Early Years. The Government requirement for all local authorities to produce Early Years and Childcare Development Plans (EYCDPs) has set in motion strategic planning that has focused on the 'quality' of Early Years provision (DfEE, 1997b, 1998; WCC, 1998, 1999, 2000). Government control has been maintained by engaging local
support systems to monitor, develop and improve all Early Years settings with funded children - a system of quality control. The ultimate influence at the beginning of the twenty-first century from central Government - policy-making from ‘outside’ - has been achieved by the introduction of the Foundation Stage for children aged three- to five-years with a curriculum based on Early Learning Goals (QCA/DfEE, 2000). The framework is in place and support has been provided for practitioners through national and local training, and local support. The problematic nature of such an arrangement has hardly been debated or considered by those directly involved and many issues remain unresolved: the appropriateness of a curriculum that addresses children’s learning processes; the range and variety of Early Years settings that have to adapt to a common framework; and the whole notion of an integrated service made up of so many disparate parts. Those central issues were revealed in addressing the research process and have provided key questions for the current investigation.

**Improving the quality of education for all and raising standards**

The goal of improving the quality of educational provision for all is a challenge (DfEE, 1997a, 1997c). Improvement strategies are often reactions to particular situations, often politically motivated, rather than ongoing professional development where practitioners become aware of the benefits of improving their own practice, of influencing others, and more importantly, of influencing policy. Morley and Rassool (1999) refer to the unwarranted intrusion of political agendas in the education process and Government fixation with raising standards in all settings, whatever the cost, and suggest:
The school effectiveness movement, and more recently, its operational arm - school improvement - are sometimes seen as utilitarian solutions to a largely manufactured crisis over standards.

Barber's (1996) view that practitioners are now willing partners in improving quality for all:

Teachers and schools now believe they can make a difference: they can work towards changes which are achievable and whose effects can be monitored

needs to be treated with some degree of scepticism. Improving the quality of provision for all in Early Years settings presents its own particular problems. The variety and scope of the settings, and the range of qualifications and experience of the practitioners provide for innumerable starting points. This is a challenge for all practitioners. Alexander (1994) outlines four 'possibilities' that would focus practitioners and provide a basis for improving quality. Firstly, practice is based on a personal philosophy, value or belief. Secondly, it has a 'pragmatic' element - 'This is the practice which works for me, and which I feel comfortable with' (p.19), and this can be personally motivating. The third 'possibility' is an empirical aspect: practice that is proof of improved teaching and learning that is more effective. And finally, 'political' influences: 'This is the practice which I (and others) expect to see, and it should therefore be adopted' (p. 19). The impact of government imposed curricula, assessment and inspection, provides that political intervention that cannot be ignored. Ensuring quality for all using imposed strategies is still dependent upon the co-operation and will of the
practitioner. Barth (1990) suggests that can be achieved by creating a 'community of learners' (p. 45). In such centres of learning the practitioner’s skill and expertise would be central to improving quality - an emphasis on the practitioner as professional (Bush and Saran, 1995). Ball (1997), though, maintains the focus of improvement is now concerned with success and failure and that effectiveness can only be determined by measurable factors: an emphasis on the 'organizational' with little attention to values and beliefs will lead to a situation where improvement and effectiveness can be attained through prescribed curricula and assessment procedures that are imposed (Clarke and Newman, 1997). Morley and Rassool (1999) describe the power of such an influence:

> the current skew is towards the organizational, with a belief in the capacity of bureaucratic co-ordination to deliver predictable outcomes.

p. 3

'Outcome' has become central to improvement. It can be measured and evaluated. Perhaps this could, too, help to undermine the importance of what is seen as 'theory,' which cannot be measured. There is a centrality that involves accountability and with it 'has come a new morality of attainment' (Morley and Rassool, ibid., p. 3). Performance that is measured, rank ordered and classified - of the children, practitioners and the setting itself - is currently in vogue (Parker, 1997). The notion of a 'community of learners' with values, beliefs and culture at its core is diminished. It poses a dilemma for those involved in improving the quality of education for all. The multiplicity of its strands reflects the various ideologies of those engaged in improvement/effectiveness strategies. The shift to
processes and procedures that can be used in all settings and situations to raise standards indicates they need not reflect the social context. Such approaches, therefore, must be value-free. The reality of such a stance would indicate a changed role for the practitioner:

*In this teachers feature as functionaries in a linear input-output school process which relies predominantly on the acquisition and ongoing maintenance of procedural skills and techniques*

Morley and Rassool, *ibid.*, p. 135

and measures which allow central Government to keep a tight rein on the education process for political, sociological and economic reasons (Ball, 1998). It is questionable, suggest Morley and Rassool (*ibid.*), that:

*in such a diverse and rapidly changing social world, whether absolute standards can ever exist ..... concepts such as quality, improvement, management and effectiveness are not value-free and indeed, are saturated with power relations.*

p. 135

It is important, therefore, to refocus practitioners.

Improving the quality of provision for all may be achieved by the dissemination of ‘good practice’ by those already engaged in effective teaching, through research projects. Gipps (1994) suggests that:

*We know much about effective teaching strategies, research has done much to show us what these strategies are, while theories have helped us make sense of the findings.*

p. 37

The current plethora of government initiatives ‘devalues people’s previous
practice' (Gipps, *ibid.*, p. 37) but this trend should be reversed and:

> good classroom practice should be one element in restoring morale and felt worth for teachers since our information on effective practice has come, as it only can, from observing teachers at work.

p. 37

If improved practice becomes the feature of all settings, then in spite of government initiative overload, practitioners may gain the confidence to question policy. The reality for settings may be the force of external pressures becoming greater than an individual’s or setting’s view of change so preventing improvement and effectiveness. Fullan (1992) suggests there is a real dichotomy: the setting ‘as the context for innovation’ or the setting ‘as the target for change’ (p. 24).

Improving practice and the quality of provision for all must be the goal for those involved. This entails a positive commitment and the confidence to develop self. Such development will be strongly influenced by external initiatives, prescriptions and statutory requirements, both nationally and locally: improving and maintaining quality will be a considerable challenge.

**Professional development**

Improvement in the quality of educational provision must centre on the interrelationship between practitioner development and setting development. Although the catalyst for the development may not be initiated by the practitioners, the key to the process will rest with them. Fullan (1992) suggests the process of ‘getting started’ by practitioners is not an easy one. Success is
dependent upon the practitioner and has four key features. Firstly, an awareness that 'participation, initiative-taking and empowerment' (p. 25) are prerequisites to the development. Secondly, participation will require both 'pressure and support' (p.25) to stimulate effective and improved practices. The development will be less effective if either is diminished in any way:

\[
\text{Pressure without support leads to resistance and alienation; support without pressure leads to drift or waste of resources.}
\]

p. 25

Appropriate 'pressure and support' from colleagues and 'expert' outsiders such as the Worcestershire Mentor Teachers, will be important in maintaining and improving the quality of educational provision. Interpersonal, collegial and managerial skills will be essential in providing effective support. Thirdly, changes in 'behaviours and beliefs' will be a feature of involvement (Fullan, 1992, p. 23). Fullan (1985) suggests that changes in behaviour generally occur before changes in beliefs. Fourthly, practitioners will need to wholeheartedly accept ownership of the development. Conditions for improving quality need to be positively and skilfully orchestrated.

Barth (1990) considers the process of improving the quality of provision that centres on the setting, and concludes that improvement from 'within' could make a significant difference. The notion of staff development as the catalyst for improvement is highlighted. Fullan (1992) extends Barth's view that staff development or, more importantly, professional development is crucial to improving quality: 'staff development and successful innovation or improvement
are intimately related” (p. 97). Research in the area of staff/professional development indicates some success in improvement and effectiveness. Stallings (1989) describes staff development impacting upon improved teaching and more effective learning practices, but conditions have to be right. The conditions include ownership, observation, self-evaluation, goal setting, implementation, reflection and modification. Stallings’ (ibid.) model provides a clear framework for practitioners:

1. learn by doing: try, evaluate, modify, try again
2. link prior knowledge to new information
3. learn by reflecting and solving problems
4. learn in a supportive environment: share problems and successes

Joyce et al (1989) also show the link between implementation of improvement practices and the achievement of pupils through staff development projects. Fullan (1992) suggests that initiatives such as those described by Stallings and Joyce et al: ‘required considerable sophistication, effort, skill and persistence to accomplish what they did’ (p. 100). The implementation of improvement initiatives are not without their barriers and constraints (Pink, 1989). The barriers include lack of understanding of the innovations to be implemented, lack of time, poor funding, the role of ‘insiders/outsiders,’ setting culture, and overload. The interrelationship of staff development, the innovation and pupil achievement require a concerted effort by practitioners to co-ordinate the practices for them to succeed whilst having an awareness of the possible barriers to change. And even when improvement and effectiveness have been established, Fullan (1992)
maintains there is always the possibility that it is ‘unlikely to be sustained beyond the tenure or energy of the main initiative of the project’ (p. 100). This is particularly problematic when the innovation is instigated from ‘outside.’ Settings that have a well-established culture of collegiality may provide the basis for sustained effective practices (Hargreaves, 1991). A culture of collegiality can empower participants to pool expertise, skills and reflection that will lead to improved and more effective practices. Conversely, it may only establish a collaborative foundation for involvement that is uncritical. Such involvement would see practitioners participating at a ‘technician’ level rather than collegial professionals engaged in critical activity. Improvement and effectiveness must be seen in a framework of continuous professional development. The problem with the ‘technician’ stance is its basis in practice, although important, lacks a theoretical underpinning.

Improving settings from within - the case for professional development - is problematic with its possible reliance on ‘list logic’ (Barth, 1990, p. 37). Providing lists of characteristics of effectiveness would give practitioners the ‘tools’ with which to develop effective and improved practices. Such processes inevitably follow the ‘technician’ pathway. Barth (ibid.) maintains there are no real alternatives to ‘list logic’ as ‘lists promise change, legitimacy and accountability to an enterprise’ (p. 41). The notion that settings can become ‘communities of learners’ indicates there is an alternative that does not rely on taxonomies of effectiveness. Such a position would have practitioners taking the lead role, with support from ‘within’ and ‘without.’ Barth (ibid.) would maintain:
School improvement is an effort to determine and provide, from without and within, conditions under which the adults and youngsters who inhabit schools will promote and sustain learning among themselves.

p. 45

The problem still remains: the impact of increased standardisation, the influence from outside the setting, accountability, assessment and overload will deter practitioners from revealing their own 'extraordinary idealism, vision and energy' (p. 47) that could lead to improvement and effectiveness of quality that can be maintained. A return to the development of improvement strategies that lack critical enquiry and commitment will founder and wither. Barth (ibid.) draws attention to the unsatisfactory route taken by some improvement and effectiveness programmes:

..... how can a conception such as a community of learners avoid becoming yet another set of prescriptions, another list to be imposed on teachers, principals and students.

p. 47

Joyce (1991) is more positive. The 'doors' that lead communities of learners to opportunities to 'restructure' the culture of settings will result in improvement and effectiveness. Such successful processes will involve collegiality, understanding of research knowledge of the setting, and the development of teaching initiatives and learning strategies. Hopkins et al (1994) endorsed the importance of collaboration, collegiality and developmental practices involving those from 'within' and 'without' but stressed the importance of 'reflection' as the key to the development - a development that is ongoing:
Critical reflective practitioners are essential in the development of improved practices. Engaging in such activity will allow practitioners 'to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations' (Boud et al, 1985, p. 19). Reflective practice leads to 'a disposition to inquiry ..... being carried out by critical thinkers ..... [and is] at the interface between practice and theory' (Ghaye and Ghaye, 1998, p. 19). It is certainly a foundation for improvement and effectiveness but it requires practitioners to be proactive in analysing and criticising their practice. This will impinge upon their long-held beliefs, values and ideological perspectives. Such a stance provides a daunting prospect for practitioners. Establishing improved and effective practices is not without difficulties. The quality of educational provision can be improved, but at what cost? An emphasis on professional development may be at the expense of the important issue of the nature of the way children learn as a reflection of the learning environment.

**Teaching and learning: the child and the practitioner**

The development of improved practice in Early Years settings cannot ignore the children in the equation, and particularly the way children learn. The Foundation Stage guidance (QCA/DfEE, 2000) states that all settings:

*that receive grant funding for the education of children aged three to five are required to plan activities that help children make progress in their development and learning.*

p. 8
There would seem to be an acknowledgement that the way children learn is important. The curriculum guidance, though, provides detailed support for delivering the prescribed curriculum organised into six areas of learning: personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; mathematical development; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; and creative development. This begs the question whether such prescriptive treatment can be reconciled with the way children learn. Moyles (1997) reminds us that much of the debate about the appropriateness of curriculum programmes has:

focused around the perceived imperative to balance the needs of society for a suitably educated workforce and the needs of children to learn at their own pace and in ways deemed appropriate to their current development phase.

p. 9

The Stepping Stones within the Foundation Stage guidance can be seen to represent a developmentally appropriate curriculum but the problem remains that the framework is based on an entitlement of care - a social and economic base. A curriculum underpinned in that way is unlikely to reflect a curriculum based on the needs of individuals which is central to effective Early Years practice (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 1995).

The preferred learning approaches of children are reflected in the diversity of provision. Children will benefit from involvement in Early Years settings that allow for a developmentally appropriate curriculum to emerge. That could well be stifled by a curriculum that is too prescribed. Learning for young children is a
complex process. Hayes (1996) suggests that:

Although enthusiasm, commitment and motivation play an important part in bringing about the best conditions for learning

understanding how children learn must have a significant impact upon the curriculum delivered. The importance of the development of the brain (Meadows, 1993) in the Early Years is crucial, suggest Wood and Attfield (1996), as:

learning and development are dependent on how cognitive structures are formed, connected and co-ordinated.

The situations needed for brain development to take place and importantly for learning to progress are generally considered to be through play. Those ‘playful’ activities usually occur in interactions with adults and children with greater experience than themselves. The learning environment in which such ‘play’ takes place must be stimulating and appropriately resourced. Wood and Attfield (ibid.) emphasise the importance of the ‘environment’ and ‘curriculum’ through play in developing learning capabilities:

All the processes involved in play such as respecting actions, making connections, extending skills, combining materials, taking risks, provide the essential electrical impulses which help to make the connections and interconnections between neural networks, thus extending children’s capabilities as learners and thinkers.

They also suggest that the more recent theories of cognitive development do:
Traditionally, Early Years settings were staffed by practitioners with the autonomy to provide environments that addressed the individual needs of young children. The pressures on practitioners to focus on the delivery of the content of prescribed curricula has eclipsed the need to understand the nature of the way children learn. That level of understanding of how children learn was variable and often intuitive. Now, the needs of those young children may well be compromised by organisation and a curriculum that is externally prescribed and perceived to have a narrow focus. Learning opportunities that develop spontaneously together with elements that need to be taught may well provide the best context for young children to become successful learners. Spontaneous learning opportunities may be covered by an externally imposed curriculum. The problem is less the fact that the curriculum is externally imposed, and more concerned with the nature of the curriculum. Strategies are necessary that enhance cognitive development that ensures ‘a wide repertoire of skills, knowledge and experiences’ and allows for transferability (Wood and Attfield, 1996, p. 36).

Hayes (1996) also stresses the importance of certain specific elements of learning: ‘knowledge, understanding and skills’ (p. 62).

The complex nature of the way children learn has a profound effect upon the way they interact with adults in Early Years settings. Traditionally, the freedom of choice of activity - usually play - has been in the child’s domain: engagement in
adult-structured and planned activities was often dependent upon the choices made by the children. There are questions that need to be asked about the practitioners' role in developing appropriate and effective learning environments based on how children learn, not controlled entirely by a formalised and prescriptive curriculum yet still carefully structured and allowing for children to make choices. Wood and Attfield (1996) point to the necessity of:

>a balance between teachers’ and children’s intentions, reciprocity between the two and opportunities for teachers to appreciate children’s meanings as they arise in play.

p. 36

The models of children’s learning summarised here indicate the importance of practitioner knowledge in this area if the provision is to support each individual in the Early Years. Norman’s (1978) model of interdependent processes of ‘accretion,’ ‘restructuring’ and ‘tuning’ lays stress on the activity provided. Moyles (1989) extends the model and suggests that specific activities and tasks necessary to support the learners are the key to the play and learning environment:

* Incremental tasks - which involve accretion and require imitation or step-by-step reproduction of new procedures.
* Restructuring tasks - working with mostly familiar materials but at the same time constructing new ways of looking at problems.
* Enrichment tasks - extending the range of application of new concepts and skills rather than adding new ones.
* Practice tasks - repetitive and automatic responses with rapid application of familiar knowledge and skills to familiar problems and settings.

p. 25

The experiences of the learners allowed the brain to develop and become ‘co-ordinated’ and ‘connected’ through activities and tasks of a problem-solving,
exploratory and imitative nature, brought about by interaction with ‘significant’ others. Practitioners need to have an understanding of the processes of learning so that they can make valid interpretations of the outcomes of the activity. The processes of learning - of cognitive development - have concerned Athey (1990) and Nutbrown (1994) and involve ‘schemas’ - patterns of thinking and learning. Although associated with the complexities of learning in the later school life of the child, these theories still have relevance for the youngest children. Emphasis is on the importance of the adults’ understanding of the learning process and the appropriateness of support given in the learning setting. Wood and Attfield (1996) explain Nutbrown’s views in the following terms:

The support of adults in an educative role is critical to identifying these schemas and supporting their development through interaction, language and the provision of relevant materials in a supportive learning environment ..... [and must] encourage children to make connections and to raise the child’s awareness of the meaning of their activity.

p. 39

Not only will the practitioner be aware of the process of thinking, learning and understanding what a child understands, but will learn to use that knowledge to develop worthwhile activities in appropriately organised settings. The practitioner is much more than an ‘enabler’ or ‘facilitator.’ Wood and Attfield (ibid.) conclude that more importantly:

He or she actively mediates in the process of coming to know and, in the process, draws on a wide range of pedagogical skills and knowledge.

p. 39
This is a very proactive approach.

The relationship between child-initiated and practitioner-directed activity, including play, will have a profound effect on cognitive development and the curriculum framework that supports it. It is not sufficient to adopt a curriculum that simply sees children as learners, but requires the perception to provide for children to learn how to learn and subsequently ‘become responsible for and have control over their learning’ (Dignan et al., 1994, p. 94). A curriculum based on a ‘programme of activities’ that is subject-based with its ‘own language’ is unlikely to provide an environment for a developmental approach to learning. Dignan et al. (ibid.) suggest that in such a context:

> At worst 'getting through the work' rather than 'learning' becomes the central focus, and the opportunity to 'learn how to learn' may be irretrievably lost.
> p. 97

Wood and Attfield (1996) view that metacognition - ‘the self-conscious participation and intelligent self-regulation in learning and problem-solving situations’ (p. 41) acknowledges the child’s crucial role in learning. The practitioners’ understanding of the ways children learn provides a clear basis for developing a framework for an appropriate and effective curriculum. Lally (1991) stressed the role of the practitioner in that effective learning environment:

> very young children need and deserve adults who are prepared to set out on a voyage of discovery with them.
> p. 163

It remains to be seen if the practitioners using the Foundation Stage guidance and
the Early Learning Goals can provide that content. Evidence from the research activity - to be discussed later - indicated that there may be cause for optimism.

**Early Years research projects and evaluations**

The basis of much of the current research of improvement and effectiveness in the Early Years is that of quality (DES, 1990). Alexander's (1997) model of good practice - values and beliefs embedded in practice: empirical evidence of effective practice; consideration of 'best fit' practice for individuals; conceptual indicators of the essential elements of practice; and political influences that concern the views of others - provides the framework for development that can be applied to any setting. Quality provision has now a high profile and reports nationally have emphasised the importance of the Early Years (DES, 1989a, 1990; HoCEC, 1994). The introduction of curriculum frameworks (DfEE/SCAA, 1996; QCA/DfEE, 1999, 2000) and OFSTED inspection of settings with 'funded' children (OFSTED, 1993, 1995) have highlighted the Government's intentions to improve practice in Early Years settings. The importance of high quality provision and practice has been stressed (Ball, 1994). And quality will be achieved by empowering practitioners (Pfeffer and Coote, 1991).

The development of the Effective Early Learning (EEL) Project (Pascal *et al*, 1994: Pascal *et al*, 1996) has been in the forefront of research into improvement and effectiveness in the Early Years. Pascal *et al* (1997) state that:
The Project provides a clear and targeted strategy for change and improvement which builds upon the existing range of provision for young children and attempts to extend the skills and expertise of all those who work with young children.

p. 40

And Miller (2000) suggests the project:

*attempts to quantify the quality of adult engagement in children’s learning through measures of sensitivity, stimulation and autonomy.*

p. 20

The research has exposed the problematic nature of defining degrees of quality in the wide variation of Early Years contexts. Defining quality numerically by league tables or star ratings for inspection ignores the context and does not provide ‘universal measures of quality’ (Miller, *ibid.*, p. 21). The EEL project focuses on improvement and is:

*based on the belief that ‘quality’ is a value laden, subjective and dynamic concept which varies with time, perspective and place.*

Pascal *et al*, 1997, p. 40

The framework for quality developed by Pascal and her colleagues provides the foundation of the current research into quality provision in the Early years. Developments in Birmingham with four year-olds in Reception classes (Pascal *et al*, 1999) had a focus on evaluating quality of provision in the city and its relationship to pupil progress: the aim to improve policy and practice in all Reception classes. The framework provides ‘clear principles which settings can use to evaluate themselves’ and ten ‘dimensions of quality’ provide that framework (Pascal *et al*, 1997, p. 41):
The quality of other Early Years programmes has undergone considerable scrutiny and provides useful research comparisons. The High/Scope project (Scheinhart and Weikart, 1997) and the Effective Provision for Pre-school Education (EPPE) project (Sylva et al., 1996) have added to an understanding of the use of Early Years programmes for developing quality practice.

The current requirements of Early Years settings to improve the quality of provision can draw upon such research in the field with confidence. The ten ‘dimensions of quality’ (Pascal et al., 1997, p. 41) provided a useful starting-point for the investigation into the Worcestershire Early Years support programme, and might be considered as a project based on Action Research.

**Action Research: the foundation of the Worcestershire Early Years support programme**

The Worcestershire Early Years support programme provided the county with a framework for improvement based on Action Research. Action Research has been described as the means by which professional development may improve practice (Blenkin et al., 1992; Elliott, 1991). The notion that it empowers individuals to improve practice has been the starting-point in considering its appropriateness in
developing an Early Years support programme. In the UK central Government’s (DES, 1990) active involvement in furthering quality provision in the Early Years through the funding of places for three and four year-olds (DfEE, 1996), the development of the Desirable Learning Outcomes (DfEE/SCAA, 1996), Early Learning Goals and guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA/DfEE, 1999, 2000), school and nursery assessment by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED, 1995) and the introduction of Baseline Assessment (SCAA, 1997) provides the foundation for improving the quality of provision.

The Government’s initiative to develop Early Years Partnerships and for all Local Authorities to produce an Early Years Development Plan (EYDP) has set in motion developments that focus on the quality of Early Years provision (DfEE, 1997b, 1998; WCC, 1998, 1999, 2000). The level of ‘quality’ of settings with children aged three and four funded by the Government is established by OFSTED inspection (OFSTED, 1995) - the Government’s attempt to introduce a degree of quality control in Early Years settings - and support for improving the quality of every setting - is developed through the local plan. The promotion of quality provision throughout the country has placed the onus on local authorities to provide a support service for all settings offering places for three and four year-olds funded by the Government - Local Education Authority nurseries, nursery classes and reception classes; Social Services registered establishments such as family support units, nurseries, special needs centres, playgroups and pre-schools; and private facilities such as kindergartens, extended day nurseries and pre-prep settings. The emphasis has been on supported practitioner involvement.
The programme discussed here has been undertaken by Worcestershire County Council. In the Summer of 1998 a network of qualified and experienced Early Years teachers was formed to provide support for clusters of Early Years settings and develop quality provision. Those experienced educators were Early Years teachers from LEA schools, university/college lecturers and managers of preschool settings - the 'Mentor Teachers.' The half-day a term support had a flexibility of time and context. The multi-professional dimension of the programme was enhanced by the involvement of the variety of support agencies within the Local Authority - the Early Years Team, Advisory Services, LEA Inspectors, the Psychological Services and Social Services Day Care Advisers. The Worcestershire strategy had professional development at its core with practitioners in the settings and Mentor Teachers central to the development. Collaborative professional development was highlighted. The framework developed through the Effective Early Learning (EEL) Project (Pascal et al. 1997) underpins the County strategy for improving and maintaining quality. The key features that have emerged include: inspection; self-evaluation and improvement; multi-professional support and advice; training; implementation of an appropriate play-based curriculum; consistency in delivering the Early Learning Goals; and establishing the requirements of the Foundation Stage for three to five year-olds (QCA/DfEE, 2000). The support and advice provided by Mentor Teachers has been considered central to the success of the strategy. Three key aspects of their role have been identified: a) a supportive role; b) a trainer role; and c) assessor/professional evaluator role. The success of the strategy and the key role of the Mentor Teacher has been determined by a two-stage evaluation programme
- 1998/1999 and 1999/2000. That has involved exploring the role of the Mentor Teacher by obtaining the views of the practitioners in the settings and the Mentor Teachers themselves of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme. OFSTED reports have provided additional evidence of success or failure. The first stage of the evaluation has provided the basis for adjusting and adapting the strategy to allow improved and more effective practices to develop. The initial findings - evaluation of Stage 1 - indicated that conditions for developing improved practices were being established. The effectiveness of the practice in place had been of major concern. Many issues have been identified during the period of collaboration/co-operation between the Mentor Teachers and practitioners: appropriateness of provision for three and four year-olds; the nature of the curriculum with reference to the Desirable Learning Outcomes/Early Learning Goals; improved planning, organisation and delivery of the curriculum; professional development and OFSTED inspection. Evaluation of Stage 2 has shown that these key areas continue to have significance. Much of the development of the county strategy has been strongly influenced by an Action Research model.

**What is Action Research?**

If Action Research is seen to be a useful tool in determining the quality of practice in the County's settings and the methods employed have provided a basis for improvement, then the whole notion of Action Research as an appropriate framework for developing the programme needs to be explored. Clarity of description might provide a starting-point (Lewin, 1946; Stenhouse, 1975; Carr
and Kemmis, 1986; McNiff, 1988; Elliot, 1991; Dadds, 1995). Such descriptions could provide the basis for discussion of the main theme of the chapter - improving practice: affecting policy (Burgess, 1993). Sanday (1993) discusses local and national initiated research and the relationship between educational research, evaluation and the role of the Local Education Authority. Such research provides useful comparisons in the evaluation of the county initiative. Pole (1993) for example, examines empirical studies of local and national evaluation and the contributions they make to educational improvement. Sanday (1993) describes the difficulties of internal/external commissioned research. There are issues of methodology, funding, ownership and accountability identified in developing such research that need to be addressed if Action Research is to have a firm foundation. Biott (1993) considers the position of individuals involved in Action Research and their influence on policy-making. Research has little value if the participants are not fully aware of the worth of their involvement, or have no effect upon decisions made because they have no part in the policy-making process. A related issue is that of dissemination of research findings (Nisbett and Broadfoot, 1980). Inevitably, involvement is viewed as 'wasted effort' resulting in disillusionment in the whole process. Action Research is complex and time-consuming. It is necessary to be absolutely clear about its scope and appropriateness when instigating any type of enquiry concerned with developing, assessing, improving or changing practice.

A significant move 'academy-based to teacher centred educational research' (McNiff, 1988, p. xiii) occurred in the 1980s. That has been described in its most
simplistic form as research carried out by practitioners into their own practice.

Kemmis (1993) describes Action Research as:

*a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social (including educational) situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own social and educational practices, (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the situations in which the practices are carried out.*

p. 177

The notion of change or improvement is described as a key feature of Action Research (Lewin, 1946; Winter, 1989; McKernan, 1996). Elliott (1991) describes Action Research 'as the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it' (p. 69). In the search for validity and truth, Dadds (1995) sees Action Research as a useful tool for fostering school improvement. Projects based on Action Research are:

*driven by purposes other than primarily the production of knowledge; that are committed to the application of knowledge to action, to change, to improvement.*

p. 112

Such research requires 'passionate enquiry' (Dadds, *ibid.*, p. 112) and would be pro-active. It is concerned with the improvement of practice, rather than simply the identification of knowledge (Elliott, 1991) and such improved practice could be successfully developed if the emphasis is on participant enquiry - a role for the reflective practitioner (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). McNiff (1988) also describes Action Research as self-regulatory enquiry that leads to the improved quality of managing, teaching and learning. The very nature of Action Research might
suggest that it does not have the rigour of other research methods - systematic, measurable factors might be lacking and such research might be characterised by a ‘looseness’ of design. McNiff (ibid.) describes the ‘soft’ approach of that type of research:

*Action research is seen as a way of characterising a loose set of activities that are developed to improve the quality of education: it is an essentially eclectic way into a self-reflective programme aimed at such educational improvement.*

p.2

Many writers focus on the merits of Action Research as an appropriate research paradigm for developing and improving educational settings (Burgess, 1993; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988; Lomax, 1989, 1990; McKernan, 1996; Nixon, 1981; Zuber-Skerritt, 1996). Oja and Smulyan (1989) identified four phases of the development of Action research that had relevance to the implementation of the Worcestershire Early Years support programme - a) interpretive research where ‘educators ...... made sense of practice by developing educational theory ‘on a grand scale;’ ’ b) a technical phase where ‘problems identified ...... could be solved through the application of scientific tools and methods;’ c) a third phase where ‘Research came to be seen as irrelevant to practice, the domain of technicians or bureaucrats who had little understanding of life in schools’ and, d) a ‘self-reflective phase which recognises practitioners’ rights and skills as professionals and encourages their involvement in the examination of practice and the clarification of theory’ (p. vii). Three main areas evolved from that development. Firstly, a Scientific-Technical approach, the focus of which provides opportunities for developing effective and efficient practices.
encompassed in a professional development approach. Group involvement is central to the approach but facilitated by outside experts. Researchers support the researcher/practitioner projects by developing scientific research instruments such as questionnaires and interview schedules, rating scales and checklists. It can provide a framework for institution, and personal, professional development that supports continuing setting improvement and acts as a catalyst for the involvement of others. Secondly, the development of Action Research led to an approach termed Practical-Deliberative. Again, the emphasis is on the development of effective and efficient practices - a professional development approach. It ‘aims at the practitioners’ understanding and professional development’ (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996, p. 4). Unlike the Scientific-Technical model it departs from the emphasis on measurement and control to more informal practices, although a no less rigorous practical model that involves ‘human interpretation, interactive communication, deliberation, negotiation and detailed description’ (McKernan, 1996). The process involves seeking the truth by engaging in a series of questions and answers. A facilitator role engages the practitioners in co-operation rather than co-option, and that co-operation involves self-reflection and empowerment. Empowerment is possible with participant practitioners and outsider (Mentor Teacher) involvement working together. Success is dependent upon the relationships between all those involved. Critical-Emancipatory processes build on the Scientific-Technical and Practical-Deliberative approaches. It moves from co-option and co-operation to an emancipatory position of collaboration and personal empowerment: it provides
the opportunity for practitioners to improve their own practice, transform policy and change systems. The facilitator role is shared by all the participants - the practitioners and Mentor Teachers. Such a scenario allows for grounded theory to develop. The willing partners in Critical-Emancipatory initiatives develop an appropriate methodological framework for educational, organisational and professional development: they become researchers in action. The challenge for those involved is to overcome the barriers to change encountered along the way from colleagues, and especially those who manage Early Years settings. This raises issues of power and where it is located: empowerment versus the challenge of power. All initiatives will involve elements from the variety of methodologies to achieve a ‘best-fit’ scenario. And, even then, the chosen pathway will not be without its problems.

The context of the Worcestershire Early Years support programme

Improving the quality of provision in the Early Years and developing more effective teaching and learning has been at the heart of the programme. The Worcestershire strategy is firmly rooted in a professional development model, with practitioners in the settings and Mentor Teachers reflecting on their own practices. Practice based on reflection has great potential for furthering professional development (Silcock, 1994). That professional development model is also dependent upon an insider/outside involvement. The importance of practitioners in the settings (insiders) working in partnership with Mentor Teachers, Education, Early Years and Social Services staff (outsiders) should be stressed. Elements of Action Research are clearly evident in the process. The
main focus for delivering the strategy is the collaboration between the practitioners in the settings and the Mentor Teachers and reflects the four stages of development as outlined in the Effective Early Learning (EEL) project: evaluation, action planning, development, and reflection (Pascal et al., 1997).

Collaboration in the early stages of the programme to determine quality of existing practice would lead to the planning and development of the action required. The continuing reflection upon audit, planning and development would provide the basis for self and setting improvement. Shared philosophies and the nature of the underlying principles of Early Years education would also need to be considered as part of understanding the totality of the County strategy and its development.

The question of how the quality of Early Years provision can be raised and maintained is central to the development of the Worcestershire programme. Change as a key feature of educational provision has provided an ongoing challenge for practitioners, and the situation that Miss Clare (‘Miss Read,’ 1961) found herself in is now reflected in the changes that are taking place in the twenty-first century. The importance of development and improvement in education and care in Early Years settings is not to be decried. Improvement needs to reflect that children’s learning is developmental, and practitioners need to have a clear understanding of the key aims and values of Early Years education (Pascal et al., 1997). There must be a degree of autonomy in the way settings are organised, and methods of teaching that provide appropriate learning experiences for young children. Inevitably it will be the practitioner who must have the
confidence, and take the risks, in developing high quality Early Years education and care.

This investigation focused on the organisation and delivery of the Worcestershire Early Years support programme. The implementation of the programme provided an opportunity to explore the development of Early Years provision in the County, and to determine the quality of support for practitioners that would lead to improved practice and the raising of standards. Methodological issues, therefore, needed to be addressed.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

In 1086 King William wishing to know the value of what he had conquered ordered the making of Domesday Book. The detailed record describes the state of the country .... The surveyors did their work well, much to the resentment of a contemporary, who considered it shameful that not so much as one ox, cow or pig escaped their attention .... Domesday book enables a reconstruction of their society to be made on a scale not possible for any other medieval state. Few of the many statistics it provides are without interest.

William ..... wrote a book called the Domesday Book, which contained an inventory of all the Possessions of all his subjects; after reading the book through carefully William agreed with it and signed it, indicating to everybody that the Possessions mentioned in it were now his.
Seller, W. C. and Yeatman, R. J. (1960) 1066 and all that p. 25

Methods of investigation: the development of appropriate methodological tools

The gathering of information - a survey - of the population in 1086 was important socially, politically and as an ethnographic study (Campbell, 1982) and still provides us with fascinating insights into medieval society. How such information is used is of greater significance. A simplistic notion of survey providing William with a list of possessions that takes no account of the opinions, views or feelings of people (Seller and Yeatman, 1960) shows the narrowness of such an approach and is of little value to the development of policy and practice that takes account of those involved. An evaluation of the Worcestershire Early Years support programme using survey methods would need to reveal more than William’s simple list. It would need to provide clear evidence of the way the Government’s prescribed Early Years curriculum has been implemented and developed through
the views of the practitioners involved, and the role of the Mentor Teachers in supporting them. The practitioner evidence will provide insight into the acceptance or otherwise of a prescriptive Early Years curriculum introduced with little regard for those who had to use it - the Early Years practitioners. William may have used survey as a simple inventory of assets without any regard for the feelings of, or effect upon, the population at large, but the use of survey as the preferred means of gathering evidence in supporting the evaluation of the Early Years programme would be much more complex. The Worcestershire Early Years support programme, the involvement of practitioners, and the role of the Mentor Teachers set in the context of the prescribed Desirable Learning Outcomes and Early Learning Goals have been examined to allow for the development of appropriate research methodologies (DES, 1989a; DfEE/SCAA, 1996; DfEE, 1997b, 1998; HofCEC, 1994; OFSTED, 1995, 1998; QCA/DfEE, 1999, 2000; WCC, 1998, 1999, 2000).

Educational research is concerned with the systematic investigation of 'realities' and 'truths' (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Burns, 2000). It is the search for truth and for an understanding of the concepts of social reality (Barr and Greenfield, 1975; Cohen and Manion, 1994). But, importantly, educational research must have a purpose, be worthwhile and extend knowledge and understanding. Verma and Mallick (1999) echoed that view of the systematic nature of research - a view that needs to be clearly understood by all those engaged in the enquiry, both the researchers and the researched:
• Research is an organized and deliberate effort to collect new information or to utilize existing knowledge for a new purpose.

• Research seeks to answer worthwhile and fundamental questions, by utilizing valid and reliable techniques.

• Research is logical and objective, using the most appropriate test/s to justify the methods employed, data collected, and the conclusions drawn.

• The final outcome of research contributes to the gaining of new knowledge and a better appreciation of the issues involved.

There are alternative systematic bases for interpreting social reality that do not rely on traditional scientific investigation (Barr Greenfield, 1975; Cohen and Manion, 1994). Cohen and Manion (ibid.) suggest the nature of enquiry is concerned with ‘experience, reasoning and research’ (p. 1). They are not ‘independent’ or ‘exclusive’ but:

must be seen as complementary and overlapping, features most readily in evidence where solutions to complex modern problems are sought.

p. 1

The interpretation of social reality can be demonstrated by the investigative approaches available to researchers. A precursor to this is an understanding of the nature of science itself, and assumptions made. Scientific activity is concerned firstly with ‘determinism’ - events have causes and therefore there must be causal links. Secondly, it involves ‘empiricism’ - it is concerned with what is verifiable: the notion of proof. Mouly (1978) describes a model of empirical science that involves five steps. The origin of the process is ‘experience’ - the starting-point for any investigation - with ‘classification,’ ‘quantification’ and ‘discovery of
relationships' (Cohen and Manion, 1994) providing the methodological framework for discovering the truths and realities of the investigation. Cohen and Manion (ibid.) summarised Mouly’s steps for developing practice concisely:

1 experience - the starting point of scientific endeavour at its most elementary level

2 classification - the formal systemization of otherwise incomprehensible masses of data

3 quantification - a more sophisticated stage where precision of measurement allows more adequate analysis of phenomena by mathematical means

4 discovery of relationships - the identification and classification of functional relationships among phenomena

5 approximation to the truth - science proceeds by gradual approximation to the truth p.13

Thirdly, there is an assumption about ‘parsimony’ - ‘that phenomena should be explained in the most economical way possible’ (Cohen and Manion, ibid., p. 13). Lastly, there is an assumption of ‘generality’ - that the findings of the research can be used to formulate generalities. The systematic accumulation of data that can be analysed by quantitative means may appear to provide a firm basis for generalisability, but proves more difficult with phenomena of a more qualitative nature. These are basic assumptions about empirical science.

The aim of the researcher is to uncover new facts, explore opinions and increase understanding of phenomena, and add to the existing body of knowledge in a specific area. More dynamically it is an activity that researchers do: the body of knowledge is important but more important are the discoveries made. Research
provides a way of understanding the world: ‘as a means of explanation and understanding, of prediction and control’ (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 14).

Adding to the existing body of knowledge is important and essential, but for much research making the ‘link’ with theory is the ultimate goal of the activity. Theory helps to make sense of ‘phenomena’ (Kerlinger, 1970; Mouly, 1978). Kerlinger (1970) explains a theory as:

\[
\text{a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that presents a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena.}
\]

p.11

Theory is seen as a convenient necessity that allows sense to be made of the abundance of ‘phenomena’ (Mouly, 1978). The development of theory to underpin educational research activity is often seen as less sophisticated than that in the natural sciences (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Nevertheless, theory has the potential to be the source of additional ‘information and discoveries’ (p. 15):

\[
\text{It is in this way a source of new hypotheses and hitherto unasked questions; it identifies critical areas for further investigation; it discloses gaps in our knowledge; and enables a researcher to postulate the existence of previously unknown phenomena.}
\]

p.15

Cohen and Manion (ibid.) extend this notion of the status of theory and its links with research methodologies. Hypotheses, test and validity are key features of the research process with theory at its core:

\[
\text{A theoretical system must permit deductions that can be tested empirically: that is, it must provide the means for its confirmation or rejection.}
\]

p.15
The selection of appropriate methodological tools, therefore, is essential. This can mean changes and adaptations to the methodology to accommodate the development of theory. The better the theory the more satisfying the explanation of the phenomena is likely to be (Cohen and Manion, *ibid.*):

Theory must be compatible with both observation and previously validated theories. It must be grounded in empirical data that have been verified and must rest on sound postulates and hypotheses.

p.15/16

Although the research process, of its very nature, can be complex and the data obtained extensive, its relationship to theory must be expressed in its simplest terms to ensure clarity.

Unquestionably, theoretical perspectives and empirical research go hand-in-hand. The methodological approach appropriate for the investigation to be undertaken will depend upon the investigation itself, and stances taken by the researcher/s. The approach will be determined by a position based on a ‘positivist’ or ‘anti-positivist’ tradition: ‘normative’ or ‘interpretive’ approach (Cohen and Manion, 1994): ‘scientific’ or ‘qualitative’ research (Burns, 2000). These polarised positions provided a starting-point for consideration by the researcher. Cohen and Manion (1994) stress the importance of understanding the setting, the researcher and the researched and provide a useful outline of the normative/interpretive positions that can be considered before embarking on a study of behaviour:
### Normative

- Society and the social system
- Medium/large-scale research
- Impersonal, anonymous forces regulating behaviour
- Model of natural sciences
- 'Objectivity'
- Research conducted 'from the outside'
- Generalizing from the specific
- Explaining behaviour/seeking causes
- Assuming the taken-for-granted
- Macro-concepts: society, institutions, norms, positions, roles, expectations

### Interpretive

- The individual
- Small-scale research
- Human actions continuously recreating social life
- Non-statistical
- 'Subjectivity'
- Personal involvement of the researcher
- Interpreting the specific
- Understanding actions/meanings rather than causes
- Investigating the taken-for-granted
- Micro-concepts: individual perspectives, personal constructs, negotiated meanings, definitions of situations
- Phenomenologists, symbolic interactionists, ethnmethodologists

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*Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 39*

**Figure 1: Normative/interpretive positions**

The problematic nature of much investigation is explained by the perceived need to use approaches from either end of the spectrum (Burgess, 1984). The preoccupation with normative approaches 'based upon statistical sampling, measurement and experiment' has diminished and investigation, particularly educational research, is more likely to include interpretive approaches such as 'observation, participant observation and informal or unstructured interviews alongside documentary data' (p. vii). Burgess (*ibid.*) suggests integrated approaches can provide breadth and depth. The development of interpretive/participant/action research methodologies (Finch, 1986) has indicated that it is so.
There are, therefore, a variety of methodological tools available to the researcher.

Cresswell (1994) suggests that:

*might involve "between methods," drawing on qualitative and quantitative data collection procedures (e. g. a survey and in-depth interviews).*

p. 174

It is the dichotomy of these normative/interpretive approaches that now needs to be examined.

*The quantitative and qualitative research paradigm*

The systematic investigation of phenomena to discover those ‘truths’ and ‘realities’ (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Burns, 2000) can be attributed to two broad-based approaches that compete for the researcher’s attention: ‘the scientific empirical tradition, and the naturalistic phenomenological mode’ (Burns, *ibid.*, p. 3). Burns suggests the traditional, scientific approach is characterised by ‘control, operational definition, replication and hypothesis testing’ (p. 5). The strength of such approaches lies in the precise nature of methodologies that have a quantitative base of reliability and validity through precise statistical analysis.

Such ‘answers ….. have a much firmer base than the lay person’s common sense or intuition or opinion’ (p. 9). This is an interesting assumption of the worth of naturalistic, qualitative research. Quantitative research methodologies are located in the positivist tradition and can provide a wealth of factual data, but such research suggests Burns (*ibid.*) ‘may simply become an end in itself’ (p. 10). There are limitations in using scientific approaches in much educational research. It does not take account of the fact that people are often the central focus of such
investigation: it simply:

fails to take account of people's unique ability to interpret their experiences, construct their own meanings and act on these.

p.10

Scientific, quantitative methodologies may be important in certain situations - information gathering - but are 'narrow approaches to the examination of educational experience' (p. 13).

The naturalistic, phenomenological, or qualitative approach to educational research 'places stress on the validity of multiple meaning structures and holistic analysis' (Burns, 2000, p. 11). Importance is placed on understanding the context through in-depth examination of the views and opinions of those involved - an emphasis on subjectivity rather than objectivity, and on meanings of a personal nature that come directly from experience. The interpretive model is crucial to such an approach. As Burns (ibid.) suggests:

the 'reality' of a given educational setting may be seen not as a fixed and stable entity but as a type of variable that might be discerned only through an analysis of these multiple forms of understanding. Qualitative methodologies provide avenues that can lead to the discovery of these deeper levels of meaning.

p.11

Qualitative approaches rely on process rather than consequence, and reveal more of the context of the investigation rather than 'hard facts.' Burns (ibid.) develops Eisner's (1979) view that:
Interest is directed towards context-bound conclusions that could potentially point the way to new policies and educational decisions rather than towards ‘scientific’ generalisations that may be of little use at the coal face.

This hints at the limitations of qualitative research - that of reliability and validity. It is difficult to convince the quantitative researcher that research based on view or opinion has rigour. They would suggest that it is not possible to replicate specific context investigation or make generalisations that could benefit a ‘wider context’ with any degree of confidence. Time is also a limiting factor as qualitative research practices often require excessive amounts of the researcher’s time to collect, analyse and interpret the data. Collecting observational data and interviewing subjects and transcribing those interviews ‘in order to examine, holistically and aggregately, the interactions, reactions and activities of subjects,’ is time-consuming (Burns, 2000, p. 13). The presence of the researcher in the research setting may also present potential conflict and reflect upon the reactions of both the researcher and the researched, affecting the data collection and subsequently the results of the findings. Problems of preserving anonymity and eliminating bias by all participants needed to be addressed. Burns (ibid.) suggests that a qualitative approach to educational research is of its very nature eclectic, has ‘a hypothesis-free orientation’ and has ‘an implicit acceptance of the natural scheme of things’ (p. 13). Perhaps the ‘purity’ of the quantitative/qualitative paradigm does not reflect reality.

There is no real dichotomy: the polarisation of quantitative and qualitative approaches is unhelpful (Burns, 2000). The legitimacy of using either or both
methodologies is underpinned by the necessity of having rigour, reliability and validity, and the choice should be appropriate to the particular focus of enquiry (Burgess, 1984). Both quantitative and qualitative research is empirical since both 'are concerned with observation and recording of the real world' (Burns, 2000, p, 14). Cresswell (1994) suggests research activity that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches will be based on:

*discussion about mixing methods, linking paradigms to methods, and combining research designs in all phases of a study .... The concept of triangulation was based on the assumption that any bias inherent in particular data sources, investigator, and method would be neutralized when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators, and methods.*

p. 174

Cresswell (*ibid.*) advocated three designs for this mixed method approach. Firstly, quantitative and qualitative aspects presented in distinct phases of the research. Secondly, a *dominant-less dominant design* where one methodology is dominant within one aspect of the investigation. And thirdly, a *mixed-methodology* approach that uses quantitative and qualitative methods throughout all aspects of the research (p. 189). An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of a mixed-methodology approach provided a useful starting-point for discussion on a research design. The combination of quantitative and qualitative aspects in a specific investigation has considerable virtue (Greene *et al*, 1989). Cresswell (1994) defined five reasons for supporting that view:
triangulation in the classic sense of seeking convergence of results

complementary, in that overlapping and different facets of a phenomena may emerge (e.g., peeling the layers of an onion)

developmentally, wherein the first method is used sequentially to help inform the second method

initiation, wherein contradictions and fresh perspectives emerge

expansion, wherein the mixed methods add scope and breadth to a study

p. 175

The advantage of research that uses a combination of approaches is that it not only adds to the body of knowledge and understanding, but depth and breadth develop from the investigation.

Survey research with mixed-method elements was considered as a possible framework for the evaluation of the Worcestershire Early Years support programme. The theoretical underpinning of such an approach required discussion.

Survey Research: a useful tool for evaluating the Worcestershire Early Years support programme

May (1997) suggests that surveys have their origin in the positivist tradition; but to describe surveys nowadays as 'positivist' is an over-simplification. Oppenheim (1966) describes a survey in its simplest terms as:

a form of planned collection of data for the purpose of description or prediction as a guide to action or for the purpose of analyzing the relationship between certain variables.

p.1
Such research provides a kind of truth or reality at a point in time. The evaluation of the Worcestershire Early Years support programme has been undertaken with specific purposes in mind: to explore practitioner and Mentor Teacher understanding of the programme; the role of the Mentor Teacher; and to identify and itemise additional aspects that relate to those central purposes including frameworks for improving quality. Identifying the role of the Mentor Teacher, the relationships developed between practitioners and Mentor Teachers, and the strengths and weaknesses of the programme needed to be clearly understood. That involved the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. Such information could be obtained by the use of survey research that incorporates more sophisticated techniques to support the purpose of the research. Cohen and Manion (1994) support such a view and extend Oppenheim's simplistic stance:

Typically, surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions, or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared, or determining the relationships that exist between specific events. Thus surveys may vary in their levels of complexity from those which provide simple frequency tests to those which present rational analysis.

p. 83

Survey research as a tool for evaluating the Worcestershire programme certainly needed careful consideration. In developing a research plan based on survey Fowler (1993) stresses the importance of addressing specific issues: the reason and purpose of the survey; sampling techniques; implementation and non-response; methods of data collection; ethical issues; and data analysis. Fowler (ibid.) suggests that 'surveys meld sampling, question design, and interviewing
methodologies (p. 1).

The use of survey research to collect information from a sample group must only be undertaken when the research process is clearly understood and the methodology used is a necessary part of the research activity (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993). The size of the population to be researched - 466 Early Years settings in 1999 and 495 in 2000: 24 Mentor Teachers in 1999 and 23 in 2000 - and evaluation as the core activity of the research provide the basis for the appropriateness of using survey research with combined quantitative and qualitative elements. The use of postal questionnaires and face-to-face interviews would enhance triangulation, and the combined approach would provide a fuller picture of the programme. The data from the quantitative aspects of the questionnaires were extended by the 'comment' responses and interpretative data from the interviews. That would overcome the generalizability problem in solely qualitative research. Morrison (2000) also suggests:

*Combined approaches may facilitate an improved understanding of the relationship between variable ..... encourage improved links between 'micro' and 'macro' levels of analysis ..... [and] allow appropriate emphases at different stages in the research process.*

p. 8

Although quantitative and qualitative research start from different epistemological standpoints, the importance of both to the research is the nature of the data to be collected: a body of knowledge that provides a picture of what, when and how, and opinion that reveals aspects of process, relationship and the individual. Both approaches may well support the evaluation and future development of the Early
Years programme. Although the starting-point for the Worcestershire programme is both interpretivist/qualitative and quantitative, a combined approach may in reality be ‘more a case of separate work proceeding in tandem than combination’ and the researcher must resolve the conflict of ‘which research ‘counts’ most and for which purposes’ (Morrison, *ibid.*, p. 8). The use of a questionnaire that incorporates quantitative and qualitative elements suggests a ‘combined’ approach but triangulation through interviews indicates that part of the research will be in ‘tandem.’ In the context of the Worcestershire programme there will be a need to demonstrate an understanding of the requirements of a combined approach. The aim of the enquiry has been established, the population identified and the methodological tools to be used - the prerequisites for survey research - chosen (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

The use of questionnaires and interviews has advantages but also disadvantages. The questionnaires will be efficient in reaching the large number of settings in the sample but because of their anonymity there could be problems with non-returns: in itself a source of bias (Hoinville and Jowell, 1978). Closed questions would ensure standardisation without interpretation or distortion of meaning but problems of superficiality might be encountered: they provide a body of information without explanation (Munn and Drever, 1990) and allow for ‘statistical summary of results’ (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993, p. 380). The ‘comment’ sections in the questionnaire will allow the respondents to provide ‘narrative/literary descriptions of proceedings’ which are difficult to quantify but reveal a broad, elaborated picture (Fraenkel and Wallen, *ibid.*, p. 380). The
interviews will develop 'significant' elements identified through the
questionnaires. The advantage of interviews as part of survey research is that:

'researchers can collect more information, and more complex information'
(Lewis-Beck, 1994, p. 2). The interview sample - twelve practitioners from Early Years settings (playgroups, nurseries, extended day nurseries, family care centres, kindergartens and reception classes) and six Mentor Teachers working in Malvern, Worcester, Kidderminster, Bromsgrove and Droitwich areas - provided breadth and depth of information. The use of semi-structured interviews would give the interviewees according to Bell (1987):

\[
\text{freedom to ..... talk about what is of central significance to him or her ..... but some loose structure to ensure all topics which are considered crucial to the study are covered.}
\]

p. 72

And Wragg (1984) suggests that semi-structured interviews:

\[
\text{allows respondents to express themselves at some length but allows enough shape to prevent aimless rambling.}
\]

p.184

The main advantage of an interview approach is its adaptability. There are opportunities for probing, clarifying; and issues of feelings and attitudes can be addressed. It can also be adapted to suit the developing needs of the research, the interviewee and the context of the research. There are disadvantages. Bush (2000) describes the main sources of bias. Interviewer bias may occur when the researcher seeks a particular answer: this may be conscious or subconscious action. Those interviewed may also wish to alter the 'reality' by 'deliberately or
"inadvertently" misleading the interviewer regarding the subject of the research. Questions too could also be subject to bias: questions posed in a particular way may result in particular responses. Bias may occur because of the selected sample: those chosen may be more likely to give a particular answer.

The use of both questionnaires and interviews has merit. Each will provide opportunities for gathering particular types of data, but the constraints in using each need to be recognised. Taking into account the methodological issues discussed, the decision to use survey research based on quantitative and qualitative elements is felt to be justified in the case of the Worcestershire programme. An exploration of the ethical issues involved in undertaking the research provided further evidence of the appropriateness of the methodological tools to be used.

**Undertaking the research: considering ethical issues**

The relationship between ethics and educational research indicates the problematic nature of the situation. "Deontological" rule-bound approaches/“consequentialist” compromise approaches (Morrison, 2000) and “modernist”/“postmodernist” perspectives (Dahlberg et al. 1999) place significant pressure on researchers to address ethical issues whilst engaged in research. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggest educational research will always be subject to considerable concerns of an ethical nature because:
the educational sphere of society is par excellence a moral sphere where judgements ..... are held about what is right and wrong, good and bad, appropriate and inappropriate, justifiable and non-justifiable.

Investigation presents the researcher with ethical problems at all stages of the research process (Burgess, 1993):

*with choosing topics to investigate, designing a project, collecting data, analysing data and writing reports.*

Burgess (*ibid.*) maintains that both the setting and the researched need to be considered in the light of ethical issues, but of equal importance is the place of the researchers in the process. They need to be able to ‘*assess their own skills, experiences and expertise to conduct the investigation*’ (p. 119) from an ethical standpoint. Cohen and Manion (1994) suggest there can be tension between the research, the researched and the researchers which has its roots in ethical considerations. The research needs to ‘*proceed ethically without threatening the validity of the research endeavour in so far it is possible to do so*’ (p. 347). The process suggest Cohen and Manion (*ibid.*):

*requires researchers to strike a balance between the demands placed on them as professional scientists in pursuit of truth, and their subjects' rights and values potentially threatened by the research.*

The ‘*cost/benefit*’ ratio is at the centre of ethical considerations. The research project may benefit but at what cost to the investigation; to the researcher; to the
setting; and to the researched.

The purpose of investigation is to obtain information that is reliable and valid. The role of the researcher is to gather that information in an ethical manner and that suggest Cohen and Manion (1994):

> requires interpersonal skills of a high order supported by humane personal and professional values rooted in a shared culture if investigators are to deal effectively with the ethical challenges of the research adventure.
> p. 349

The research methods used need to be ‘ethically justifiable’ (Burgess, 1993). Understanding the place of the ‘cost/benefit ratio’ and the notion of ‘informed consent’ contributes ‘to the bedrock of ethical procedure’ (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 349). Specific ethical details need to be considered carefully in developing research procedures. The major issue of informed consent - the ‘researched’ right to self-determination in choosing to take part, or not take part, in an investigation, and a right to withdraw at any stage of the research - has implications for validity and reliability. If the researched possess a degree of competency to allow for effective involvement, have freely chosen to be involved or not involved in the investigation, have full information, as far as possible, about the investigation, and fully comprehend the investigation, however complicated, then aspects of informed consent will have been appropriately considered. Informed consent (Cohen and Manion, ibid.) is the basis of an:

> implicit contractual relationship between the researcher and the researched and will serve as a foundation on which subsequent ethical considerations can be structured.
> p. 352
The importance of access and acceptance is central to the initial development of the investigation - informed consent. The depth of knowledge of the aims of the research and detail of the procedures to be adopted can pose ethical problems. Aronson and Carlsmith (1969) noted that research may be compromised by disclosing particular aspects of the research, whilst Festinger and Katz (1966) described secrecy as problematic as it fostered inaccurate speculation. Bell (1991) outlined a useful checklist that provides the researcher with a set of criteria concerned with ethical issues which included informed consent; co-operation; anonymity and confidentiality; dissemination of data; intentions; honesty; and agreement. Such considerations would allow researchers to reflect upon the possible effect of the research upon the researched. Sensitivity to the needs of those involved would be observed, so that in the desire for truth, ethical limits would not be over-stepped. Although truth is important, ignorance is preferred to breaking the ethical code.

A number of other ethical issues have been identified in the development of research projects and of major concern has been the right to privacy. Diener and Crandall (1978) emphasised the problematic nature of ensuring privacy for participants in the research, and the right of the public 'to know.' Researchers have an obligation to place in the public domain information that rightly belongs to them. Such a dilemma arises when the data collected is of a sensitive nature. Settings may also prove problematic for the researcher as 'they may vary from very private to completely public' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 366). Disseminated information may also identify particular individuals. An
overlapping issue is that of anonymity - the data collected reveals nothing about an individual’s identity. Problems can arise if, for example, the research involves face-to-face interviews. In that situation anonymity cannot be guaranteed, but confidentiality can. At the data analysis stage of the research, abstracting identifying information can help ensure anonymity (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992). The overlap with confidentiality is clear, and protecting sources of information is important in the research procedure. Although researchers will have identifiable features of the research and the researched, these should not be revealed in the research findings. To ensure confidentiality for participants but public access to the information and findings of the research, safeguards have to be put in place. Cohen and Manion (1994) identify four important safeguards: firstly, deleting any form of identification; secondly, creating crude report categories which rely on generalisation rather than specifics; thirdly, ‘microaggregation’ - where the findings made public are an averaging of the data collected from the participants; and, lastly ‘error inoculation’ - where errors are added to the data on individuals that will leave the ‘averaged’ data unaffected (p. 368). Confidentiality highlights the issues of truthfulness and manipulation, validity and reliability. If the issues of confidentiality and anonymity are not addressed, researchers may become susceptible to betrayal - betraying information acquired in confidence - and that say Cohen and Manion (ibid.):

*is a breach of trust ….. and is often a consequence of selfish motives of either a personal or professional nature.*

p. 368

The Action Research element of the Worcestershire programme, for example, is
vulnerable to betrayal because of the intimate involvement of the participants: practitioners and Mentor Teachers. Kelly (1989) suggests that can be resolved by discourse with the participants, and in particular deciding how the findings might be disseminated. Participants who understand and support the aims of the research may well have constructive comments to make, but those that are not entirely supportive can be problematic. The interpretation of comments can be perceived differently by each of the participants. Betrayal may be a conscious or unconscious act but deception (Cohen and Manion, 1994) involves a:

situation where the researcher knowingly conceals the true purpose and conditions of the research, or else positively misinforms subjects ..... The deception lies in not telling the whole truth.

p. 369

Such a view could be adopted if that is the only way, and no harm comes to the participants. It is a view that is difficult to justify and problems have been encountered in research involved in covert studies and where techniques involving deception have been used (Patrick, 1973; Milgram, 1974).

Many researchers have highlighted ethical dilemmas in carrying out their research. Burgess (1989) provided a forum for revealing the variety of ethical issues encountered by researchers, the researched and the context. Burgess (ibid.) highlighted the complexities of the ethical debate whatever the method or the context. Sammons (1989) suggested that quantitative, statistical methods of research can result in the dissemination of misleading information and its misuse to fit a required scenario. The nature of the data collected is subsequently used out
of context. Burgess (1989) outlined the problematic nature of relationships in ethnographic research and ethical issues. Central are:

_the dynamics of the relationship between the researcher and the researched … and in turn the relationship between the researcher, the research, the process of researching and the results that are disseminated_

p. 60

and these are related to issues of privacy, betrayal and exploitation. Burgess also referred to the classic debate concerning the ethics of covert as opposed to overt observation and the issues concerning gaining access, informed consent, deception, confidentiality and disseminating findings. The same issues were also observed in some case study research (Simons, 1989); in feminist research concerned with ‘exploiting the exploited’ (Riddell, 1989); and in research exploring girls’ under-involvement in science and technology (Kelly, 1989).

Cohen and Manion (1994) reaffirm the centrality of ethical issues in educational research in raising questions of ‘honest, power relations, the responsibility of the researcher to the researched, ….. collaboration’ (p. 373), informed consent and dissemination of findings. Burgess (1989) suggests that Codes of Practice (BERA, 1992; BSA, 1996) may aid research in addressing ethical issues but concludes:

_it is relatively easy to prescribe a set of abstract principles it is less easy to apply them or to enforce them._

p. 74

Cohen and Manion (1994) maintain that the:
issues thrown up by the complexities of research methods in educational institutions and their ethical consequences are probably among the least anticipated, particularly among the more inexperienced researchers.

p. 373

The wide variety of ethical dilemmas in educational research, therefore, confronts researchers at all stages of investigation and particular research methods and contexts present their own particular problems.

Survey research: ethical considerations of the evaluation of the Worcestershire Early Years support programme

Survey research may be seen to pose fewer problems ethically because of the distance of the researcher from the researched, but that is not the case. There is a need to be more ethically aware because of that distance. Burgess (1993) suggests that:

*Ethical principles in survey research ..... concern the proper conduct of relationships between researchers and a broad amorphous group we shall call ‘the public’*

p. 124

but more specifically, Oppenheim (1992), maintains that the:

*basic ethical principles governing data collection is that no harm should come to the respondents as a result of their participation in the research.*

p. 83

That raises the issue of informed consent, the samples used ‘and those legal and professional codes that have been established to protect subjects involved in survey research’ (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 373).
Survey as a tool for evaluating the Worcestershire programme was given careful consideration. Fowler (1993) stressed the importance of aspects of investigation: the reason and purpose of the survey; sampling techniques; implementation and non-response; methods of data collection; and data analysis. All have to be set in a context of ethical appropriateness. Fowler (ibid.) suggests that 'surveys [must] meld sampling, question design, and interviewing methodologies’ (p. 1) in an ethical context. The Worcestershire investigation provided the context for a methodology based on survey research which combined quantitative and qualitative elements. Although quantitative and qualitative research start from different epistemological standpoints, the importance of both to the research is the nature of the data to be collected: a body of knowledge that provides a picture of what, when and how, and opinion that reveals aspects of process, relationship and the individual. Both approaches support the evaluation and future development of the Early Years programme. In the context of the Worcestershire programme the researcher needed to demonstrate an understanding of the requirements of a combined approach, and address ethical issues in establishing the aim of the enquiry, the population of the survey and methodological tools used - the prerequisites for survey research (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

Ethical issues are addressed in published guidelines and frameworks (BERA, 1992; BSA, 1996) and codes of practice protect both the researcher and the researched (Data Protection Act, 1994: Government Statistical Service, 1984). Central issues relate to informed consent, access and acceptance, secrecy, privacy and anonymity. Raffe et al (1989) identify the wider ethical principles of survey
research: that which concerned the appropriateness of the relationship between
the researcher and the 'resource-providers, data subjects' and the wider 'public'
(p. 16). The head teachers, owners and managers of the Worcestershire pre-school
settings - the resource-providers - provided the access to the data subjects - the
individual within each setting that had direct contact with the Mentor Teacher. To
ensure access to the data subjects it was important that clear ethical principles had
been established with the resource-providers and that they were fully aware of the
exact nature of the investigation: the evaluation of the Early Years programme
and the role of the Mentor Teacher within that programme. These issues were
clarified: anonymity would be assured throughout; individuals had a right to
privacy; the right of the data subjects to be involved or not involved in the
research process; and the dissemination of findings upon completion. The posting
of questionnaires with full explanations concerning the investigation to the large
number of settings in the sample did not prevent some resource-providers acting
as 'gatekeepers' to the data subjects and barring involvement. Burgess (1993)
maintained it was essential that 'researchers should clarify their obligations in
advance' to resource-providers 'and honour them honestly' (p. 124). That
indicates good ethical practice but no guarantee of access or acceptance. Clarity
and honesty should also be a feature of the relationship with the researched - the
data subjects. The use of a questionnaire precluded the researcher from direct
contact with the data subjects in the main part of the investigation. It was
important that ethical considerations should be addressed fully in the information
communicated directly to the data subjects - the researched - and the implications
of involvement. Raffe et al (1989) highlighted the importance of such a stance:
researchers should be conscious of their intrusive potential, and should seek to minimize any intrusion; the confidentiality of data must be respected and protected by positive measures; and subjects should be told the purpose of the research and should have adequate opportunity to withhold their cooperation ..... "informed consent."

p. 17

The element of personal privacy was a key feature of the Early Years investigation. The research offered the data subjects the opportunity to make a contribution to a better understanding of the programme whilst retaining personal privacy. Westin (1967) developed that approach further and maintained that:

*Privacy is the claim of individuals, groups or institutions to determine for themselves when, how and to what extent information about them is communicated to others.*

p. 7

Such a view raises the question of the rights of the researcher to disseminate information/findings particularly of a sensitive nature. The obligation of the researched to allow data they provide to be used raises another issue if the data is offered voluntarily. Here issues of privacy and confidentiality overlap.

The research relationship established with head teachers, managers and owners of the Early Years settings sampled, and individual practitioners directly involved in the research was important in promoting a depth and level of involvement that would provide quality data. Ethical considerations played a part in that process. The dissemination of the findings to those who had been involved and to the wider public required another set of ethical considerations. Raffe et al (1989) maintained that researchers in pursuing 'openness, sensitivity, accuracy, honesty
and objectivity in their choice of topic, methods [and] analysis’ (p. 17) would need to address ethical issues in the use of research methods and findings in the wider context: the public arena. That includes, maintain Raffe et al (ibid.):

respecting the interest of different groups in society; avoiding research designs which preclude particular outcomes of the enquiry; disseminating findings fully, as well as widely; and facilitating the re-use of data.

p. 17

There can be real tensions between openness and confidentiality, and between protecting the rights of individuals and the public ‘right to know’ that are not easily resolved.

Ethical considerations have been at the forefront of the developing investigation. Such considerations have arisen in key areas: the establishment of access via those in authority in the Early Years settings; the consent gained, allowing for confidentiality and privacy; and the right of the public, particularly the Local Authority, to have access to the findings of the investigation. In addressing important ethical issues the investigation may provide significantly enhanced data for developing quality provision in the County’s Early Years settings.

The highly complex ethical issues identified in educational research procedures have originated from sources of tension. Two key sources of tension explain the complexity of ethical considerations in any investigation. Cohen and Manion (1994) described those tensions:
The first, as expressed by Aronson and Carlsmith (1969) is the tension that exists between the two sets of related values held by society: a belief in the value of free scientific inquiry in pursuit of truth and knowledge; and a belief in the dignity of individuals and their right to those considerations that will follow from it.

p. 360

The implication is that greater consideration must be given to the individuals involved in the research than to the potential of the research to make a contribution to new knowledge. The second source of tension is revealed by the position taken by 'absolutists' and 'relativists' in the research endeavour. Cohen and Manion (ibid.) suggest:

The absolutists view holds that clear, set principles should guide the researchers in their work and that these should determine what ought not to be done ..... Those who hold a relativist position ..... would argue that there can be no absolute guidelines and that the ethical considerations will arise from the very nature of the particular research being pursued at the time: situation determines behaviour.

p. 361/2

There are many situations where such polarised views are not clearly identified and Plummer (1983) insists that both positions have their weaknesses: a potential for the absolutists to under- or over-research groups, and for the relativists, in the extreme, to be unscrupulous. Conflicting ethical dilemmas revealed by individuals, between individuals, and group perspectives have to be resolved if tensions are not to develop and create problems for the researcher, the research and the research process.

Opportunities for enhancing the quality of the research process can be developed
if ethical issues are addressed at all stages. Truth, honesty and sensitivity were central to the investigation. The research methodology used raises ethical issues, and the Worcestershire survey posed particular problems because of the distance between researcher and researched. Clearly relationships, even at a distance, needed to be positive and conducive to developing the research initiative. Ethical principles made a major contribution to the development of the research investigation and needed to be addressed at all stages of the process. They could not be ignored. Valued involvement was at the forefront of the investigation. Such involvement was more likely to be rewarded with important data that added to a body of new knowledge - in the Worcestershire investigation, data that would help in developing quality Early Years provision. Ethical issues were addressed throughout the research process and a meaningful rapport with the researched was developed, thereby laying the foundation for quality investigation. Ignore ethical considerations and it is likely that poor quality research will be the result.

**Evaluation of the Worcestershire Early Years support programme**

Developing appropriate methodologies for evaluating the Worcestershire Early Years support programme has been a complex undertaking. The dichotomy of choosing normative/interpretive approaches and quantitative/qualitative methodological tools has been at the heart of the decision taken. Burgess (1984) highlighted the complexity of developing appropriate research methodologies and stated that researchers should not be:
preoccupied with quantitative methods based upon statistical sampling, measurement and experiment for much research uses qualitative as well as quantitative methods .... qualitative methods .... [such as] .... informal or unstructured interviews alongside documentary data.

Survey research using 'combined' approaches seems the preferred option (Creswell, 1994).

The decision to use survey research with both quantitative and qualitative elements has primarily been based on the requirements of the research to obtain both statistical information and the views and opinions of the participants in the Early Years settings, and the Mentor Teachers. The appropriateness of such an approach was evident in the survey ‘Early Childhood Education Project: Principles into Practice: Improving the Quality of Children’s Early Learning’ (Blenkin and Yue, 1994) which had both a quantitative and qualitative dimension and which the researchers believed:

would provide a good base from which to develop the quality of both policies and practices in the early years.

A simple evaluation would not be sufficient for the Worcestershire programme. Just as Blenkin and Yue (ibid.) expected more than a simple snapshot of a moment in time, the Worcestershire survey will take such conclusions into account. Unlike the Domesday survey of 1086 which provided King William with accurate information about his subjects' possessions but nothing about their needs or aspirations, the Worcestershire survey, with its outcomes resulting from a more
substantial methodology, may well lead to an improved Early Years provision: quality support from Mentor Teachers based on the clearly understood needs of the practitioners in their individual settings. This may even work in harmony with the prescribed Foundation Stage and the Early Learning Goals.

**Research plan: data collection and time-scale**

The framework for the research programme had its foundation, therefore, in a consideration of the methodological tools and time-scale that would support the questions that needed to be addressed. Although the development of the programme, itself, had its roots in an Action Research approach, the evaluation of the Worcestershire Early Years support programme and the role of the Mentor Teachers in supporting and developing the programme was based on Survey Research and Interview procedures. The investigation needed to take place over time to allow for a review of ongoing professional development. The use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews over a two-year period would provide information about the continuing development of the programme, and in-depth knowledge of the quality of support given by the Mentor Teachers. Such knowledge might provide a framework for continuing setting improvement and the raising of standards. The responses from practitioners in the settings would reveal their level of involvement in the development of the programme, the status of relationships and the degree of collaboration achieved.

The plan and time-scale for the investigation was as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| April/ May 1999             | > Identifying the sample - all 466 Early Years Settings in Worcestershire and 24 Mentor Teachers  
                              > Developing the questionnaires: trialled with Early Years practitioners                                                                 |
| June 1999                   | > Access sought - Local Authority, Early Years settings and Mentor Teachers  
                              > Questionnaires distributed with explanatory letter - returns requested by middle of July                                                                 |
| September 1999 - December 1999 | > Identifying key issues to support ongoing training for the Mentor Teachers                                                                                 |
| January - June 2000         | > Revising the questionnaires: trialled with Early Years practitioners                                                                                   |
| June 2000                   | > Questionnaires distributed with explanatory letter to 495 Early Years settings and 23 Mentor Teachers  
                              > access established where there were new settings and new Mentor Teachers - returns requested by the middle of July |
| June - December 2000        | > Addressing the findings - interim report to Local Authority  
                              > Development of the semi-structured interviews with 12 practitioners from Early Years settings and 6 Mentor Teachers - practitioners representing the range of Early Years provision from within the county and the Mentor Teachers the variety of the ethnography of Worcestershire  
                              > Identifying data subjects and gaining access                                                                 |
| January - March 2001        | > Interviews with data subjects                                                                                                                                 |
| May 2001 - October 2001     | > Findings, data analysis, discussion, conclusions and recommendations                                                                                   |

The time-scale of the research provided an excellent opportunity to carry out Survey Research of all Early Years settings in Worcestershire. Statistical information and views and opinions provided by the practitioners and Mentor
Teachers would provide an in-depth picture of the development of the programme, and provide the basis for future developments. The possibility of establishing a framework for that future development could only be determined by an examination of the research findings. What was the view of the practitioners of the Worcestershire Early Years programme? What were the Mentor Teachers’ views on involvement and to what degree had they successfully supported the practitioners? Was there a shared vision or any divergence of opinion between practitioners and Mentor Teachers that might pose a challenge for the future development of the programme?
Those who talk about vision as essential for the future of enterprise are right, but it has to be the sort of vision that others can relate to.

Handy's (1994) reference to 'enterprise' and 'vision' encapsulates the promise of the Worcestershire Early Years programme: a vision of quality of provision in the Early Years grounded in good practice and raised standards. The commitment and enthusiasm of practitioners supported by the Mentor Teachers would be the goal of the endeavour. Such clarity of purpose and understanding of the aims of the programme were explored in the research investigation. The evaluation of the Worcestershire programme revealed the complex nature of the initiative and the difficulties experienced by all the participants in formulating roles and responsibilities. Initially, that lack of clarity of the nature of participant involvement and the role of the Mentor Teacher in supporting Early Years settings resulted in tensions and difficulties. There was some hesitancy by Mentor Teachers in developing their role and confidence was undermined by lack of a clear brief for supporting Early Years settings. That lack of clarity had occurred because of the speed of the introduction of a government initiative that had not been clearly prepared. Practitioners in those Early Years settings had been suspicious and unclear of their own role in the programme and the relationship with the Mentor Teachers. The two surveys - in 1999 and 2000 - revealed how
that understanding of the programme developed. Issues concerned with purpose, roles and responsibilities, and relationships were to feature highly. The vision perhaps proved to be more nebulous. The interviews with the sample of Mentor Teachers and practitioners provided a more in-depth view of the perceived situation and a sense of a developing framework for ensuring good practice and raising standards. The main research methodology based on the two surveys provided detailed information on the understanding of the purpose of the programme by the practitioners in the Early Years settings; the role of the Mentor Teacher in developing the initiative; and their own attitudes towards the programme. The questionnaires completed by the Mentor Teachers related to the same issues and provided a broader picture, and more detailed information about their support role.

The practitioner responses: sample details

The questionnaires circulated to all Worcestershire Early Years settings clearly indicated the wide range of provision in the Early Years and the status of those working in those settings. There were tensions in some pre-school settings because of the Government requirement that involvement in the programme must include a qualified teacher. A quarter of the pre-school settings that responded were staffed by practitioners with qualifications other than that of a qualified teacher - many with qualifications in child care appropriate to the age of the children with whom they were working. Details of the responses from the settings (see Table 1) show a response rate of just over 52% and therefore the findings are based on just over half of the target sample. It is important to acknowledge at this
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Years settings</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reception Class (LEA)</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reception Class (Independent)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery Class (LEA)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery Class (Independent)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery School (LEA)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery School (Private)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgroups</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Care Centres</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Day Care</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Nursery</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Day Nursery</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed-age Group (R, Y1 and Y2)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Unit</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of settings circulated</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of responses for each year</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Early Years settings surveyed: 1999 and 2000

point the situation of the non-responders and whether those that did respond were representative of the target group as a whole (see Table 2). The small groups - the independent schools and LEA special schools - with good response rates may well be seen to be typical of the views of those groups. Responses from the LEA school settings increased over the period of the two surveys. The three groups had relative stability of staffing over time. The lowest response rate involved the pre-school settings where movement of staff has been significant. There is no specific pattern of distribution for responders and non-responders. Indeed, both groups of settings have been evenly spread throughout the County.
response rate for Early Years settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>settings</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>response</td>
<td>total</td>
<td>response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all pre-school settings</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>132 (50.6%)</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>117 (43.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA school settings</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>107 (53%)</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>125 (62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>independent school settings</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13 (72.2%)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11 (61.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA special school settings</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4 (57.1%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5 (71.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>495</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Response rate for four categories of settings: all pre-school settings, LEA school settings, independent school settings, and LEA special school settings

In the extended interviews following the surveys there has been some intimation that the questionnaires had not reached the designated Early Years practitioner. The small interview sample would preclude validity but would be a possible indicator of reasons for a non-response. In school settings the problem of the questionnaire ‘getting beyond’ the head teacher or senior staff has been offered as a reason for non-response, and in pre-school settings the issue of ‘the gatekeeper’ has been even more problematic. The more frequent changes in personnel of owners, managers, committees and setting leaders has added to the problem of questionnaires being lost in the system. It has not been possible to provide evidence that the non-responses would have provided information and opinion similar to the respondents, but it is clear that both groups covered the whole range of setting types and covered all parts of the County both urban and rural.

From the settings who responded, (see Table 3) qualified teachers were found in
over 72% of those settings. Just over 27% did not have a qualified teacher as a staff member and were all pre-school settings. That created considerable tension within those settings. Government required the involvement of qualified Early Years teachers but many of the pre-school settings, traditionally, had been staffed by practitioners with Certificate, Diploma and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in childcare and allied areas. Initially, the perceived interference by teachers resulted in a nervousness of the Early Years programme and of the Mentor Teachers. Practitioners felt threatened and in some instances undervalued and inferior. The proportion of pre-school settings without qualified teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualified teachers in Early Years settings</td>
<td>187 (72.2%)</td>
<td>186 (72.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No teacher in Early Years settings</td>
<td>72 (27.8%)</td>
<td>71 (27.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3: Proportion of qualified teachers in Early Years settings*

remained constant although varied according to the type of setting (see Table 4).

The financial status of the pre-school settings did not allow for the appointment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Nursery School</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgroup</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Day Nursery</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Day Care</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Care Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Place Nursery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery Class (Independent)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4: Early Years settings with no qualified teacher*
of qualified teachers, and the care of three and four year-olds in such settings had not previously been the domain of the Local Education Authority. The absence of qualified teachers only applied to the private and voluntary sectors, but the point was made that some practitioners in Local Education Authority settings were qualified teachers but had ‘no up-to-date training in Early Years or any facet of it’ (Reception Class Teacher, LEA). Some settings in the private sector had access to teacher input although they did not have a teacher as a staff member:

But we have a teacher based at one of our other nurseries who comes termly to discuss planning, changes, routines and child development, etc.
Supervisor, Private Day Nursery

Practitioners’ view of the Worcestershire Early Years support programme and the role of the Mentor Teacher

Responses from the wide variety of settings involved in the programme indicated a degree of understanding and misunderstanding of its purpose (see Table 5). Although support for the programme was generally positive, practitioners were unsure of the role that the Mentor Teachers played and their relationship with the settings. A minority of practitioners had little knowledge or understanding of the programme and how they might be involved. The reason for that view was unclear. The majority of respondents (170) suggested that the programme was primarily concerned with good practice. Mentor Teachers would advise and support the development of that good practice; they would provide guidance by sharing ideas; and they would be the link between the Mentor Teacher and practitioners in other settings. The programme was concerned with the notion of change involving new initiatives particularly in the areas of curriculum.
Practitioner responses 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development of good practice</th>
<th>170</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To raise standards</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher support</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on latest</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linked to OFSTED</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linked to Partnerships/EYDCPs</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of EYDCP</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator/voice of Early Years</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No knowledge/understanding</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of the programme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money saving programme</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Practitioners' understanding of the Early Years support programme and the role of the Mentor Teacher

development and planning. Practitioners saw the programme extending knowledge of many aspects of Early Years provision. Many practitioners (67) focused on the perceived purpose of the programme and a requirement to raise standards. Central to the programme was improvement of existing practice, monitoring standards and ensuing consistency and equality across all Early Years settings. The Mentor Teachers would oversee the practice to ensure it was sound and that the learning environments met the needs of all children. They would also need to make judgements concerning acceptable levels of provision - not defined in the responses - and action to be taken if those standards had not been reached. Checking on the quality of provision was seen as a central feature of the programme. Supporting practice would improve practice and raise standards.
Respondents (16) linked that to the **OFSTED arrangements**. Mentor Teachers would support pre- and post-OFSTED inspections.

There was evidence to suggest that practitioners saw a clear link between the introduction of the programme and new government initiatives: the introduction of the **Foundation Stage for three to five year-olds** and **Early Learning Goals**, and previously the **Desirable Learning Outcomes**. Mentor Teachers would provide consistent information across the County that was ‘correct’ and ‘up-to-date’ concerning government initiatives, and local issues such as the Partnership arrangements, Local Authority grants, funding and the development of the Early Years curriculum. Mentor Teachers would be an important source of information. Although only one response suggested a link between the programme and the **Early Years Development and Childcare Plan (EYDCP)**, a number of respondents (21) had some understanding of the government requirement of the involvement of practitioners with Early Years teaching qualifications. Qualified Teacher status was a prerequisite for the role of Mentor Teacher: qualified teachers would support every Early Years setting in the county. Mentor Teachers would provide ‘expert support’ for those settings without a teacher staff member and ‘to help less able and untrained people with running a pre-school group’ (Reception Class Teacher, LEA). Perhaps not the view of the pre-schools themselves.

A number of respondents (32) believed that a significant element of the programme was the involvement of the Mentor Teachers with the **Early Years Partnership** groups and that was closely linked to the Early Years Development
and Childcare Plan. The Mentor Teacher would be the 'link' between pre-school settings, school settings and the Partnership groups: working together in partnership would be the prime objective. The important link with the Local Education Authority was highlighted, although continued links with Social Services was not identified as an element of the work of the Mentor Teacher. Perhaps such an omission was not unexpected by practitioners in the school settings, but was surprising with pre-school settings whose registration depended upon the involvement of Social Services. Again the links with the Partnerships placed an emphasis on ensuring consistency of provision across the county, and on providing a forum for exploring issues concerned with improving practice and furthering knowledge and understanding of aspects of Early Years provision. The practitioners (5) considered that it was vital that the voice of Early Years should be heard and that the Mentor Teacher could be a point of reference: almost a mediating role. Only a minority of the respondents (3) indicated that they were ignorant of the programme and the role played by the Mentor Teacher.

It was clear from the responses in 1999, during the initial stages of development, that practitioners were not clear about the detail of the programme (see Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding prior to Mentor Teacher's first visit</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>some</th>
<th>most</th>
<th>completely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>school settings: LEA/Independent/Private</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pre-school settings: Playgroups/Nurseries, etc.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Practitioners' understanding of the Early Years programme prior to the Mentor Teachers' first visit
Practitioners' level of knowledge of the programme prior to the Mentor Teachers' first visits was not consistent across the County. Communication was a serious issue. Much of the unease about the programme was based on lack of clear and coherent information that had been ‘rushed in’ by the Local Authority:

*Felt the whole issue of Mentor Teachers was a rather rushed issue which could have benefited from greater information of the project to the settings.*

Reception Teacher, School Setting

Much of the comment reflected practitioner anxiety about the purpose of the programme: ‘It all came with a feeling of threat’ (Reception Teacher, School Setting). It was viewed as another form of inspection: ‘I was anxious before the first visit as I wasn’t sure if I was going to be inspected’ (Supervisor, Playgroup). The threat was more pronounced in the pre-school settings without qualified teachers as staff members: ‘It is not always fair to groups who do not have a teacher. It puts them under pressure’ (Supervisor, Playgroup). Anxiety was also exacerbated by a belief that Mentor Teachers were ill-prepared for their role in the process: ‘the mentor had little understanding of her role’ (Reception Class Teacher, School Setting). Anxiety lessened as the programme progressed and a ‘relationship developed with understanding of her role as we discussed my role’ (Nursery Teacher, School Setting). With knowledge and understanding of the programme and the development of positive relationships, initial concerns and anxieties diminished in many settings. During the initial stages of the development of the programme and with the knowledge available at the time six main areas of involvement were identified:
1. support for the development of the curriculum
2. raising standards through the development of good practice
3. inspection and the link with OFSTED
4. involvement in the local Partnerships
5. teacher support through the Mentor Teachers
6. the voice of Early Years in Worcestershire

As the programme progressed, practitioners were able to identify more clearly the core elements of the programme and the role played by the Mentor Teachers in that development. The responses in 2000 indicated perhaps an ideal. Later findings would indicate the degree to which that was the reality of the situation. Practitioners were asked to consider what were the three main roles of the Mentor Teacher in supporting Early Years settings (see Figure 2). The responses suggested that practitioners had considered the question in some depth and that the possibilities for developing better practice and raising standards were very apparent. Fourteen practitioners did not respond to the question and all would have negative responses to future questions posed. The positive responses reflected the importance of the six areas previously identified but with additional detail of how that might be achieved (see page 90). Additionally, the importance of developing good relationships was seen as a vital element in the equation. The issue of quality control was briefly referred to and became of greater significance as the programme progressed. The comments made by practitioners indicated implicitly, if not explicitly, that Mentor Teachers would need to have a degree of expertise if the programme was to be successful. They would need 'to give advice and new ideas and to help group[s] implement these changes by their experience and training' (Supervisor, Playgroup); 'help the setting progress/improve in the best possible way' (Reception Class Teacher, LEA); 'Ensure all in Early Years
Main roles of Mentor Teachers

Foundation Stage Development
- guidance
- planning
- information/changes
- curriculum
- needs of children

Raising Standards
- support and help
- advice
- solving problems
- training developments
- overview
- monitoring

OFSTED
- Ofsted support

Partnerships
- liaise with outside agencies partnerships/EYDCPs

Good Practice
- sharing expertise
- inter-setting

Teacher Support
- guidance
- observation
- facilitator/motivator
- consultant
- exemplar teaching

Relationships
- communication
- co-operation
- critical friend
- listening ear
- working relationship
- morale booster

Quality Control
- quality control

Figure 2: Main roles of Mentor Teachers as identified by practitioners
settings have consistent standards’ (Supervisor, Pre-school); ‘To answer questions that have arisen, and to offer advice on solving the difficulties’ (Supervisor, Playgroup); and ‘to sympathise and empathise with my role. To be a friendly face’ (Reception Teacher, LEA). The Mentor Teacher had a significant role to play in the development of the programme:

To advise me on my teaching and my classroom environment in order to provide the best education possible during the Foundation Stage.
Reception Class Teacher, LEA

The practitioners’ views on essential aspects of the role of the Mentor Teacher

The Mentor Teacher involvement was central to the successful development of the Early Years programme and wide-ranging in its application. Although that developing role resulted from the Mentor Teachers’ increasing experience, knowledge and understanding, the importance of the practitioners’ involvement in that development was essential. Although practitioners were unsure if they were involved in a co-operative venture many had clear expectations of the programme. The important elements of the programme identified by the practitioners showed that there were many aspects that remained constant over time (see Table 7). New aspects became significant with the development of the programme providing a different emphasis. Key issues for the settings began to emerge: issues concerned with ‘good practice’ and especially externally imposed initiatives. Table 7 also provides a summary of the practitioner responses which clearly indicated the constant features of the role of the Mentor teacher: advice; support; curriculum development; planning; assessment; evaluation; liaison with outside agencies;
and providing clear channels of communication. Four elements of the role of the Mentor Teacher not initially identified as important, assumed a significantly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>essential aspects of the Mentor Teacher role</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advise staff</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support staff</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support children in the setting</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help develop the curriculum</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help with planning</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>develop assessment procedures</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evaluate the work of the setting</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supporting training initiatives</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide exemplar teaching</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support parents</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liaise with outside agencies</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide channels of communication</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>replace staff to visit other settings</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to update settings with information: local/LEA/gov.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development of EYDCPs/Partnership</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge of SEN provision</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development/sharing good practice</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development of the Foundation Stage/Early Learning Goals</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involvement with OFSTED inspection</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no response</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Essential aspects of the Mentor Teacher role: practitioner responses
high priority as the programme developed. Firstly, there was the development and sharing of good practice. That developed with the realisation by practitioners that there was much good practice already in the settings and that could be used by the practitioners and Mentor Teachers co-operatively to raise standards. Practitioners also indicated that Mentor Teachers could help and support the implementation of the Foundation Stage and provide assistance through OFSTED inspections. Although Mentor Teachers were not directly involved in the development of the Early Years Development and Childcare Plans (EYDCPs) or the local Partnerships, practitioners saw them as an important source of information in those areas. Even in the early stages, responses indicated that:

*The role of the Mentor Teacher should be wide ranging to enable settings to improve provision in whatever area is giving cause for concern or would benefit from a review of practice.*

Reception Class Teacher, LEA, 1999

That degree of optimism was reflected in many of the responses. Practitioners often recognised that ideal but their own particular perceptions were substantially different from that:

*But to achieve this the Mentor Teachers need to be sufficiently qualified and experienced! An ability to achieve all this would be wonderful! None of this happens at all! Too idealistic! Passive observation and a social chat and coffee is what actually happens. The list above is very exacting but presupposes a very skilled, experienced and committed practitioner as Mentor Teacher.*

Centre Leader, Private Nursery School, 1999

As the programme developed practitioner confidence grew and many of the essential aspects of the role of the Mentor Teacher became evident. Many of the
Mentor Teachers were perceived to be providing good support for the settings:

My Mentor Teacher has proved her weight in gold. She has helped in all above [essential aspects] and I find her visits useful and informative. Never dull.
Manager, Extended Day Care, 2000

Support pre- and post-OFSTED was highly significant as the continued functioning of settings depended upon successful inspection. Although in such situations, Mentor Teachers were seen as valued members of the team and essential to improving practice and raising standards, that support was not perceived as consistent across all settings. Some settings indicated that it was still ‘early days’ in the development and that success depended on ‘time.’ There continued to be barriers to involvement and some settings remained totally resistant to any kind of dialogue:

We do not need her at all. We are not new to childcare and early “education” - our children are NOT in school.
Supervisor, Nursery School, Private, 2000

Practitioners in some settings continued to have negative ‘non-involvement’ views and were unable to consider any positive aspects that the programme might offer.

The issue of relationships and its importance in the developing programme

The issue of relationships was also explored (see Table 8). The ease or difficulty with which Mentor Teachers and practitioners established good working relationships was closely linked to the issue of positive involvement in the programme. Good relationships were more in evidence where there were positive
attitudes to continued development of good practice, the raising of standards and the implementation of the new Early Years initiatives. Practitioners who could not see any value in the Early Years support programme and the involvement of Mentor Teachers often indicated that ‘relationships’ was at the root of the problem: practitioners used the Mentor Teachers as an excuse for non-involvement. Difficulties in establishing relationships were in the minority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>establishing good relationships</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>easy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(59.8%)</td>
<td>(59.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17.2%)</td>
<td>(15.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10.5%)</td>
<td>(10.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4.9%)</td>
<td>(6.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.3%)</td>
<td>(3.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.5%)</td>
<td>(2.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.6%)</td>
<td>(1.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.4%)</td>
<td>(0.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: How easy/difficult was it to establish good relationships with the Mentor Teacher?

The ease of developing good relationships was dependent upon a number of factors. Mentor Teachers needed to be pleasant, friendly, supportive, approachable and understanding but that was enhanced by having expertise, experience and professionalism in their interactions with practitioners. The juxtaposition of the perceived confidence of the Mentor Teachers with a non-threatening and non-intimidating attitude towards the practitioners encouraged a rapport and positive relationships to develop. Responses from the questionnaire in 2000 showed evidence of a growing bond between many Mentor Teachers and
practitioners:

- excellent relationship and rapport
- very friendly, helpful and informed
- approachable
- always available
- a lovely lady

Those excellent personal qualities were enhanced by a shared professionalism:

My Mentor Teacher is a fellow professional who has a wealth of background experience and who has always been friendly and approachable.

Supervisor, Pre-school

A positive bond was a key factor in developing good relationships.

A significant minority of practitioners (8%) (see Table 8: total of 5, 6 and 7 responses) indicated they had difficulties in establishing good relationships and categorised two areas that provided barriers to achieving a positive scenario.

Firstly, there were factors involving time. Infrequent visits and insufficient time to address issues directly with the Mentor Teacher because of teaching commitments were significant barriers to developing good relationships. Many settings had overcome those difficulties by using the time creatively. It was not clear whether time factors were used as an excuse for non-involvement by reluctant practitioners. Time was also an issue not resolved over the period of the programme’s development. Secondly, good relationships were not established because some practitioners perceived the Mentor Teachers as inadequate. That was particularly so during the initial stages of the implementation of the programme. One respondent suggested that:
It was difficult because the Mentor was sadly lacking in knowledge and understanding but didn’t quite appreciate this and saw her role more as an inspector in the reception class and just did not have the skills needed to be a Mentor.
Reception Class Teacher, LEA, 1999

The Mentor Teacher was ‘not on our wavelength!!” (Playgroup Supervisor, 1999). A year later in 2000 the difficulties in developing good relationships had been overcome for more practitioners. The emphasis had moved from the ability, skills and experience of the Mentor Teacher to the practicalities of the arrangements: time constraints were still problematic. Visits were seen to be infrequent and sessions disrupted: there was simply a ‘lack of quality time to build up relationships’ (Nursery Co-ordinator, LEA Nursery, 2000). And for one setting it remained ‘difficult - we still haven’t’ (Supervisor, Pre-school).

The notion that specific qualities were required to establish good working relationships were explored (see Table 9). Criteria developed in the pilot study provided practitioners with statements on which to base their responses. Additional statements were offered by the practitioners but were not significant as a proportion of the responses. Those additional responses indicated that Mentor Teachers had professional, relaxed natures: were not judgmental; provided help and support for SEN children; understood the setting; and gave of their time. The weighting of most responses did not alter over time: they were relatively constant. Throughout the developing programme good working relationships were dependent upon a range of positive personality traits: helpful; positive attitude; relaxed; supportive; co-operative; good listener; friendly; professional; morale booster; good friend; caring; and interested. Where it was
successful, practitioners felt at ease: 'the personalities of the people are vital' (Supervisor, Playgroup). The relationship was enhanced if the Mentor Teacher had the skills, experience and expertise necessary to support improved and effective practice. Practitioners identified those aspects as: acknowledged staff qualifications and experience; practical advice; had a grasp of current issues; understood the nature of the settings; specific experience e.g. pre-school, LEA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishing good working relationships</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Mentor Teacher had the ability to establish a good rapport with the setting</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was a willingness to listen</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was an awareness that communication was a two-way process</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits were guaranteed to take place when arranged</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mentor Teacher was able to provide clear and positive advice</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was a confidence in the Mentor Teacher's ability to support the setting through knowledge skills and experience</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Aspects that helped practitioners establish good working relationships with the Mentor Teacher

school, nursery; had good ideas; and provided support, guidance and information. There was good evidence, even early in the programme, that good working relationships were possible: 'our mentor teacher was excellent and made a considerable difference to staff morale and knowledge' (Early Years Coordinator, Reception Class, LEA, 1999). It was also important to have specialist knowledge:
Our Mentor Teacher has had experience of teaching in our type of setting and therefore has a good understanding of the challenges involved. She was also very flexible about the agenda for the visits which helped us considerably.

Early Years Co-ordinator, Nursery Class, LEA, 2000

There was a realisation that Mentor Teachers needed to go beyond the micro-state of the setting and promote a macro-picture that was embodied in the Early Years programme. Mentor Teachers needed to have a ‘a comprehensive understanding of the needs of very young children’ (Supervisor, Playgroup, 1999) at the heart of the programme.

Those positive responses reflected a pattern of development that addressed the issues of raising standards and improving practice. Although only referred to by a minority of the respondents, there were aspects of involvement that prevented the establishment of good working relationships (see Table 10). Three main areas of concern were identified. Firstly, practitioners had little confidence in the Mentor Teacher’s ability to understand and support the setting (29 in 1999, 26 in 2000): mostly based on first impressions. Secondly, that was closely linked to a belief that the Mentor Teachers did not have the appropriate knowledge, experience and skills (32 in 1999, 26 in 2000) to carry out the role successfully. The experience and background of the Mentor Teacher would inhibit the building of good relationships in some settings. There was a perceived lack of compatibility. Practitioners were suspicious of the support provided by those who did not have experience of their particular type of setting: the ‘playgroups/pre-school are totally different to Reception Classes or Private Nurseries’
(Supervisor, Playgroup, 2000) and practitioners believed that the complexities of the different settings were not always clearly understood by the Mentor Teachers. Although not explicit in the responses, the tone appeared to imply that practitioners felt uncomfortable and threatened by the programme. Practitioners placed the difficulties firmly with the Mentor Teachers: no reference was made to the practitioners’ own part in the equation. The third significant area of concern again focused on the Mentor Teacher: they did not provide clear and positive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>barriers to establishing good working relationships</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A clash of personality</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mentor Teacher was not willing to listen</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mentor Teacher was not aware that communication is a two-way process</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mentor Teacher was unable to make herself available to the setting at times acceptable to the setting</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits had not taken place as arranged</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was little confidence in the Mentor Teacher’s ability to understand and support the setting</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not believe that the Mentor Teacher had appropriate knowledge, skills and experience</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not provide clear and positive advice</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Aspects that prevented practitioners from developing good working relationships with the Mentor Teachers

advice (30 in 1999, 20 in 2000). Again that was linked to skills, experience and
knowledge that Mentor Teachers possessed and that would be lacking if they were not familiar with specific Early Years settings.

Although the barriers to developing good working relationships diminished with time, there remained a number of settings that continued to experience difficulties. Where relationships proved problematic it invariably centred on the question of raising standards. Settings that held the view that improvement and raising standards were not necessary - they were already 'excellent' - saw the Mentor Teacher as a useful scapegoat in preventing the development of the programme. Such a situation could have affected the confidence of the Mentor Teacher. A resolution of the situation sometimes involved a change of Mentor Teacher although that was no guarantee that those few settings would see any value to involvement in the programme.

_The complexities of Mentor Teacher involvement: activity that supported the programme_

The range and extent of the activity undertaken by the Mentor Teachers to support the individual needs of the settings was considerable (see Table 11). The extent to which each setting was involved in that activity was closely linked to factors already identified: the perceived need by the setting; the working relationship established; and the question of time. In many instances the support given through a range of activity was positive: "Mentor Teacher always prepared to tackle any questions/advice needed and always followed through any further information required" (Leader, Playgroup, 1999). In other situations it was seen as 'very routine and superficial. Not addressing any real problems but lots of
sympathy and very pleasant' (Centre Leader, Private Nursery School, 1999).

During the initial phase of the programme the activity centred on activity concerned with audit: Mentor Teachers making sense of the management and organisation of the settings, practitioners understanding the Mentor Teacher role, and the duality of both in achieving the aims of the programme. Revealing the purpose of involvement was not easy. Discussion and monitoring and review of the setting continued to be a feature of the programme. With its consolidation, the emphasis moved and much of the activity was concerned with providing current and relevant information on aspects of new initiatives e.g. Foundation Stage guidance, new OFSTED arrangements and National Standards for pre-schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>activity undertaken by Mentor Teachers</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>observation</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussion with practitioners</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussion with other staff</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>completion of contact form</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reviewing documentation: OFSTED/policies/plans</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working with children</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exemplar teaching</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>replacing staff to allow visits to other settings</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training initiatives</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>links with other agencies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working in setting</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>providing relevant and current information/useful contacts</td>
<td>0*</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* not a statement in 1999

** not a statement in 2000

Table 11: Activities undertaken by the Mentor Teachers during visits to settings

The complexity of the activity undertaken by the Mentor Teachers was generally acknowledged. It was far-ranging, and practitioners realised the implications of that for the time allocated to Mentor Teachers: half a day per term per setting (see
Table 12). Time has become a significant recurring factor in the development of the programme. Two-thirds of practitioners indicated that the time allocation was about right (168 in 1999, 169 in 2000) whilst others suggested too little time (46 in 1999, 53 in 2000) or too much time (27 in 1999, 23 in 2000): fairly consistent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>half-day per term visit by the Mentor Teacher to the setting</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>too little time</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about right</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>too much time</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don't know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no response</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>256</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: The appropriateness of the time allocated to Mentor Teachers to visit settings

Practitioner comments provided key insights into their perceptions of the use of available time. Too much time was given to the programme where the Mentor Teachers were seen to be unfocused and lacking in purpose, and the quality of involvement was poor because of lack of expertise. Infrequency of visits was compounded by the lack of quality time for discussion, observation and exemplar teaching. Practitioners commented that quality could not be improved through sporadic visits, and the time available could lead to disruption for the children as staff could not be involved with discussion with the Mentor Teachers and teach at the same time. Visits were too inflexible and did not always address the differing
needs of the settings.

Practitioners recognised that professional development was important and although clearly the responsibility of the setting, the Early Years programme through the Mentor Teachers did provide the ‘ideal opportunity to develop teachers professionally’ (Reception Class Teacher, LEA). The perceived inflexible nature of the half-day allocation was seen as a significant barrier to that development. That was also linked to the injustice of size - a small playgroup; a mixed age-group; Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 class in a small village school; and a three-form entry Primary school with a Nursery attached, received the same allocation of time. In such circumstances it was difficult to address the needs of the settings. Three issues were, therefore, clearly identified. Firstly, the appropriateness of the time involved was dependent upon the quality, experience and expertness of the Mentor Teachers in supporting the setting. Secondly, the needs of the setting were a key determinant of the time element. More time was needed where substantial areas of professional development were to be addressed, and that varied over time. And thirdly, the settings’ ability to structure the time allocated to Mentor Teachers within the constraints of a ‘normal’ working session was problematic - time to engage in professional interaction with practitioners.

**The positive aspects of involvement**

Much that was positive emerged from the practitioner responses. Mentor Teachers were said to have had a very positive effect (220: 85.9% in 1999; 231: 89.2% in 2000). Although a minority of practitioners indicated that no positive aspects could be identified (36: 14.1% in 1999; 28: 10.8% in 2000) - and those figures
cannot be ignored - much was described that provided an optimistic view of
future development. Ten key aspects of the interaction between Mentor Teachers
and practitioners were identified:

- raising standards
- good practice
- teacher support
- OFSTED
- Foundation Stage development
- relationships
- Partnerships
- Mentor Teacher skills
- Quality Control
- professional involvement

Practical support and advice that supported the practitioner was valued highly.
The development of the Foundation Stage requirements, preparation for OfSTED
inspection, and other Early Years initiatives were essential features of the
interaction and practitioner confidence was a key element of that interaction.
Confidence building supported that and was dependent upon the Mentor
Teachers’ personality and ability to develop relationships. In those positive
situations Mentor Teachers had empathy with the settings and with individual
practitioners. The key aspects of the Mentor Teacher/practitioner involvement
(see Figure 3) that were identified matched very closely with the ‘ideal’
identified earlier (see Figure 2: main roles of Mentor Teachers: p. 93). The
positive responses clearly indicated that practitioners believed that the Mentor
Teachers had been influential in supporting the development of good practice and
the raising of standards. As the programme developed the importance of the
Ten positive key aspects of the Mentor Teacher/practitioner interaction

- raising standards
  - support and advice
  - solving problems
  - involvement with children
  - SEN support
  - training initiatives
  - a place in the hierarchy of decision-making

- good practice
  - practical suggestions
  - sharing ideas
  - visiting other settings
  - inter-setting involvement

- teacher support
  - discussion/talk
  - encouragement
  - motivation
  - information/dissemination
  - time
  - link with LEA/ outside agencies
  - understanding settings
  - work with parents
  - continuation essential

- OFSTED
  - OFSTED involvement

- Foundation Stage development
  - advice and support

- relationships
  - communication/two-way
  - listening ear
  - positive personality traits
  - working relationship
  - mutual respect
  - morale booster
  - critical friend
  - inspirational

- Partnerships
  - Partnership/EYDCP

- Mentor Teacher skills
  - knowledge
  - experience
  - expertise
  - objective advice

- Quality Control
  - evaluating the setting
  - appraisal success
  - hope for the future
  - celebrating success

- professional involvement
  - professional development

Figure 3: Key aspects of the work undertaken with Mentor Teachers that pleased practitioners
Mentor Teacher support for raising standards and developing improved practice was identified by more respondents and through the semi-structured interviews. The issue of 'relationships' was less significant as the programme progressed although still important. Good relationships had been established in many cases and continuity had helped with that process. In a number of situations poor relationships had been overcome by a change in personnel, either at practitioner or Mentor Teacher level. Practitioner level posed the greater problem.

**The concerns of involvement**

Although almost 90% of the practitioners in Early Years settings provided very positive comments, it was important to explore the concerns expressed (see Table 13 and Figure 4). Major concerns were expressed by the practitioners (10%) who were unable to identify any positive features of the programme. Practitioners who had been extremely positive expressed reservations in some areas. As the programme developed it became clear that many concerns diminished (154 in 1999; 126 in 2000).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>practitioner concerns</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no concerns</td>
<td>102 (39.8%)</td>
<td>133 (51.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concerns</td>
<td>154 (60.2%)</td>
<td>126 (48.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 13: Concerns of practitioners of aspects of Mentor Teacher work*

Over the period of the programme one significant issue was not resolved. The role
**Concerns about the Early Years Programme and Mentor Teacher Role**

### Negative Issues

#### Mentor Teacher Role
- Lack of clarity/focus
- Uncoordinated selection
- Lack of power
- Poor support/advice

#### Time Issues
- Meeting problem
- Disruptive to setting
- Inefficient allocation
- Too little/too much children first

#### Programme
- Waste of time
- Waste of money
- Money to be used for other things
- Extra staffing for settings

#### Setting
- Support not needed
- No benefit
- Others could support
- Match of Mentor Teacher to setting

#### Mentor Teacher
- Gains more than setting
- Issue of 'two jobs'
- Weak Mentor Teacher
- Clash of personality

#### Mentor Teacher: Qualifications/Experience
- Poor knowledge base
- Lacked specific experience
- Lacked training
- SEN issues

#### Mentor Teacher: Partnerships
- No involvement in the Partnership
- Mentor Teacher/Settings: Same Partnership

### Positive Issues

#### Funding
- If funding ceases
- Support disappears
- If it changes
- If Mentor Teacher changes

---

*Figure 4: Concerns about the Early Years programme and the role of the Mentor Teacher*
of the Mentor Teacher continued to be problematic. Practitioners perceived a lack of clarity of purpose, a remit that was not clearly articulated and Mentor Teachers’ own understanding of their own role was inadequate. Practitioners suggested that the problem arose because the Mentor Teacher role was secondary to their main working commitment - their own settings. The uncertainties of the Mentor Teacher role and the lack of a clear understanding of the full implications of involvement in the Early years programme was highlighted by a number of practitioners. There was:

no system of ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme. Another system imposed on us without consultation or feedback (except now too late!!). Money could be so much better spent to support our needs (e.g. training led by knowledgeable professionals).

Reception Class Teacher, LEA, 2000

For a minority of practitioners the system was simply ‘not working’ - hardly a basis for professional development. The concerns also fell into two distinct categories: one that had a negative value where the value to the practitioner or the setting was not evident, and a positive value that focused on a situation - possibly a funding problem - that would prevent the programme from continuing in its present form or at all.

The way forward

The concerns identified were a necessary consideration of the ongoing, developing process. The questionnaires and interviews provided practitioners with the opportunity to explore those concerns. They questioned the motives for the introduction of the programme, and the role of the Mentor Teacher in that
development. The realisation that the continuation of the programme implied ongoing change and development was difficult to accept. The way forward provided a considerable challenge for practitioners. For a minority of practitioners that resulted in a total rejection of the programme and resistance to involvement with the Mentor Teacher. As the programme progressed practitioners became more convinced that change was not necessary (86 in 1999; 121 in 2000) - a surprising revelation because of the degree of concern expressed. Set in the context of the many new initiatives abounding in the Early Years, that may have been a reaction to claims on their time and considerable personal workloads. The continuing development of the programme was addressed by the practitioners (170 in 1999; 138 in 2000). Ways of improving the quality of the programme were identified and it was not surprising those improvements were linked to the concerns expressed and to the ideals identified earlier. The list indicated the what of improvement and revealed little of the how. The key elements of the route to improvement and raising standards were:

- clarity of the Mentor Teacher role/job description
- a review of the qualifications, expertise and experience of Mentor Teachers to match settings
- flexibility of time to support settings including quality time to talk
- involvement in professional development and training
- improving support, help and advice in planning, organising, moderating and evaluating: support only where it is needed
- greater involvement in OFSTED arrangements
- closer links with Partnerships/settings: Mentor Teacher to support whole local Partnership group
- give Mentor Teachers more power or the ability to change things
- improve communications
Where practitioners identified positive routes to improvement it was in the context of the bigger picture - and that would need substantial alterations to the current arrangements:

*It would make it into an advisory post rather than Mentor post and give a few teachers of experience the roles full-time whereby we could meet out of school time to discuss issues of real need to our specific environment. I would welcome more of a personal input from an adviser who had taken time and interest in my setting with a view to long term situations and the good of children and staff.*

Reception Class Teacher, LEA, 1999

That extended view became an ongoing feature of practitioner responses: a sharing of information, ideas and views:

*I would like the opportunity to have a meeting with all Mentor Teachers and practitioners so that we could explore issues in a wider remit - maybe an after school meeting or a ½ day conference.*

Reception Class Teacher, LEA, 2000

Perhaps those statements were beginning to express something of the shared vision referred to by Handy (1994). There was, therefore, good evidence of practitioner willingness for involvement in the ongoing development of the Early Years programme. Non-involvement was very much a minority view. Alterations to the programme and Mentor Teacher role were evident from the practitioner responses but little reference was made to their own role or development within the programme - perhaps the right question had not been asked. And for a number of practitioners there was not a need to ask the question as they were:
completely happy with the Mentor Teacher system. Our Mentor Teacher has been a source of help, encouragement and invaluable advice.

Playgroup Leader, 2000

Practitioners who were totally at ease with the programme suggested that change was an unnecessary consideration: ‘I do not believe there needs to be any changes in the programme’ (Nursery Teacher, LEA, 1999).

The variety of response clearly indicated the complexities, fluidity and uniqueness of the programme in the interaction between Mentor Teacher and setting. There was much positive comment that would allow development and change to occur although predominantly at the micro-level. Development at the macro-level - the wider vision - was much less evident. A minority of respondents saw little value in the programme and by extension little worth in involvement with the Mentor Teacher: strong evidence of closed minds and an unwillingness to engage in personal or setting development. No vision there.

Practitioners certainly provided a very complex picture of Mentor Teachers and their role in supporting Early Years settings. The responses of the Mentor Teachers to a range of questions provided a different view of their role and their place in supporting the practitioners in the development of the Early Years programme.
CHAPTER 5

The findings: the Mentor Teacher view of the Worcestershire Early Years programme

Maslow was right when he postulated that there was a hierarchy of needs, that when you had enough material goods you moved your sights to social prestige and then to self-realisation. Perhaps, however, his hierarchy did not reach far enough. There could be a stage beyond self-realisation, a stage which we might call idealisation, the pursuit of an ideal or a cause which is more than oneself.


The importance of shared ‘vision,’ as discussed in Chapter 4, clearly showed the complexities of the interaction between practitioners and Mentor Teachers in developing a framework for improving practice and raising standards in Early Years settings. Practitioner responses highlighted the difficulties in rising above the minutiae of the day-to-day experiences and practicalities of involvement, to a more global understanding of the place of the Early Years programme in improving practice and raising standards for all. As Handy (1994) suggested, the ability to relate to the ‘vision’ is dependent upon an understanding of that vision. Handy’s (ibid.) reference to ‘idealisation’ provides the role of the Mentor Teacher with a different perspective. Not only must the Mentor Teacher involvement focus on shared initiatives, but more importantly the need to lead and drive the programme so as to attain ‘idealisation.’ The investigation provided Mentor Teachers with the opportunity to reveal their understanding of the part they played in the development of the Worcestershire Early Years programme.
The Mentor Teacher responses: sample details

The questionnaires were circulated to all the Worcestershire Mentor Teachers (24 in 1999; 23 in 2000). There was an excellent response rate: 22 (91.7%) in 1999 and 21 (91.3%) in 2000. Although predominantly from school settings the Mentor Teachers represented a variety of backgrounds (Table 14):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Teacher backgrounds</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>school</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retired</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mother</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pre-school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nursery (LEA)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lecturer (HE/FE)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Background of Mentor Teachers who responded to the questionnaires

All Mentor Teachers were qualified teachers - a government requirement for such an appointment - and had considerable experience in working with children in Early Years settings. The range of qualifications showed evidence of continued professional development and a deep-seated commitment to the Early Years (Table 15):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>qualifications of Mentor Teachers</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certificate in Education</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Education &amp; Bachelor of Education (Honours)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science (Honours)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Arts (Education) (Honours)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduate Certificate in Education</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Education</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Philosophy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor of Philosophy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: Range of academic qualifications of Mentor Teachers
The Worcestershire Early Years Support programme had been imposed upon practitioners but involvement had been the choice of Mentor Teachers: a choice based on very different views about the purpose of the programme and the role of involvement. **Aims, goals, achievement, improvement and raising standards** were, perhaps, key aspects of that involvement. Handy’s (1994) ‘vision’ and ‘idealisation,’ essential to the programme’s successful development, were difficult to establish as actuality from the Mentor Teacher responses. Lack of clarity of role, initially, and the various starting-points of the Mentor Teachers, so very different from those of the practitioners, prevented the programme from developing common goals or aims with any sort of consistency. Personal professional development was referred to as important and that somewhat clouded the issue of the main purpose of the programme. The notion of sharing experience and expertise was described as important but it was not clear initially how that would relate to the desire for professional development. The first questionnaire provided the Mentor Teachers with the opportunity to voice their reasons for involvement in the programme (Table 16):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>reasons for becoming a Mentor Teacher</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>personal/future development/new direction/career move</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interest</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>better understanding of Early Years issues</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sharing knowledge, experience, expertise/good practice</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involved in raising standards/improvement/quality</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enhance own practice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love/enthusiasm for the Early Years</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal challenge/stimulation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>directed by Head Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 16: Mentor Teachers’ reasons for involvement in the Early Years support programme*
There was a strong emphasis on sharing knowledge, experience and expertise (17) and giving practical help and advice was seen, initially, as central to that. Such support would provide opportunities for raising standards and improving the quality (5) of Early Years provision. The willingness to collaborate with colleagues in Early Years settings was tempered with the desire to develop personally and professionally. Personal and professional development (14) could lead to new directions and have an impact upon future career moves. Perhaps there was a basis for tension: commitment to the development of the programme and future professional enhancement. Involvement would be challenging and stimulating (6) and was underpinned by a love and regard (12) for the totality of the Early Years. That was echoed by one Mentor Teacher:

_I relished the opportunity the post offered, the range of experiences on offer and the ability to share good practice amongst equally interested and enthusiastic colleagues. I recognised the personal development area and the experiences that would hopefully help me to fulfil my own future potential._
Mentor Teacher, Retired, Full-time Mother

Enthusiasm to be involved and the challenge of the unknown were evident in Mentor Teacher responses. There was, generally, a confidence to support those challenges although from early in the programme there was a realisation by some Mentor Teachers that there were gaps in their own knowledge, expertise and experience (see Table 17).

Throughout the investigation, Mentor Teachers indicated they were mostly confident to engage with practitioners in developing the Early Years programme. They were confident in their own abilities: the qualifications, expertise and
experiences they brought to the role but were less confident in areas where they lacked experience. Confidence grew over time with experience and training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>confidence of Mentor Teachers</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not confident</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confident in some areas</td>
<td>10 (45.5%)</td>
<td>3 (14.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confident</td>
<td>10 (45.5%)</td>
<td>14 (66.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very confident</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
<td>4 (19%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 17: Confidence to undertake the role of Mentor Teacher*

Mentor Teachers were clearly confident of their own abilities as practitioners as all made positive responses in that area but qualified their responses with reference to role. The diversity of the settings was a challenge as Mentor Teachers did not have experience of the whole range of Early Years provision:

*I felt confident about my understanding of good practice and what was expected in schools but was unsure of what reception would be in the voluntary sector and if I would be able to say things that needed to be said!!*

Mentor Teacher: Reception and Year 1 Teacher, Primary School, Local Education Authority

and:

*More confident in pre-school settings than schools. Schools generally fairly hostile.*

Mentor Teacher: Early Years Co-ordinator, First School, Local Education Authority
Two years into the programme Mentor Teachers were more confident than at its inception and training; professional development and peer support ensured that increased confidence. Clarity in understanding role had also been a key factor in establishing greater confidence.

**Mentor Teachers’ view of the Worcestershire Early Years support programme and the role of the Mentor Teacher**

Practitioners had expressed a view that the programme, and the Mentor Teachers’ role in supporting that programme, had lacked clarity (Table 18). That view was reinforced by the responses of the Mentor Teachers: initial understanding had been vague. Initially, the diversity of the needs of settings confirmed the Mentor Teachers’ view that the crucial clarity of role definition had not been established in the early stages of its development:

```
I don’t think the role had been explored sufficiently - we make different roles for ourselves.
Mentor Teacher 4: 1999
```

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding the role of Mentor Teacher</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not at all</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some aspects</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most aspects</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>totally</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 18: Mentor Teachers’ view of understanding their role*
There was a perceived lack of clear programme planning at Local Authority level that added to the 'vagueness' identified early in the programme which certainly did not help with role definition:

I'm not sure that anyone had really analysed the role ..... there have certainly been mixed messages since the initial advert!
Mentor Teacher 11: 1999

The vagueness of role and the disparate requirements of settings took time to be resolved:

It is still vague. Different settings require different help - to some I give advice, information, etc. and some reassurance (and some don't see the need in Mentor Teachers).
Mentor Teacher 10: 1999

The introduction of a job description helped to clarify the role of the Mentor Teacher but the complexities remained: 'The role has endured and I think there are as many roles as there are Mentors!' (Mentor Teacher 5: 2000). The responses in 2000 suggested that clarity of understanding of role had increased considerably. 17 of the 21 responses were clear about most aspects of the role and the other 4 understood the requirements totally and with that knowledge came confidence (see Table 18: p. 121). The difficulties encountered in developing the programme lie elsewhere and focused on the practitioners in the settings:

Yes [clear about most aspects of the role of Mentor Teacher], however I'm not sure that all settings are clear of the role or why they have a Mentor.
Mentor Teacher 4: 2000

The make-up of the role (Figure 5) would be a critical element in the development of
Main roles of Mentor Teachers

Foundation Stage Development
- curriculum development
- development of a play-based curriculum
- guidance
- planning
- assessment
- evaluation
- organisation of settings
- information/changes
- resources

Raising Standards
- support
- advice
- training support
- own development/courses
- new initiatives

Partnerships
- liaise with outside agencies
- develop Partnership groups
- involvement in EYDCPs
- provide information

Supporting Practitioners
- advise staff
- support staff
- exemplar teaching
- sounding board

Supporting Children
- working with children
- support children

Supporting Parents
- working with parents
- support parents

Figure 5: Main roles of Mentor Teachers as identified by Mentor Teachers
the programme and the interaction between the Mentor Teachers and the practitioners.

The constituent parts of the role of Mentor Teacher highlighted in the responses mirrored the roles identified by practitioners (see Figure 2, page 93). The individual elements identified by the Mentor Teachers described the complex nature of the role that was 'more complex than initially realised' (Mentor Teacher 24: 1999). Relationships were highlighted as important during the initial phase of the programme and continued to be featured in the responses throughout the study. That was due in part to the resistance of some practitioners to being involved, and partly to the frequent appointments of new staff particularly in pre-school settings. The diversity of the features of the role indicated the challenge facing the Mentor Teachers in responding to the diverse nature of the settings: ‘The range of activity varies so much - aspects of the job rely on the needs of the setting’ (Mentor Teacher 14: 2000).

Mentor Teachers, like the practitioners, identified priority areas for inclusion in the development of the programme:

1. support in developing the Foundation Stage
2. raising standards through the development and sharing of good practice
3. supporting OFSTED inspections
4. supporting the development of the Partnerships
5. advising and supporting practitioners
6. supporting children
7. support for parents

All those features formed a knowledge base and provided the Mentor Teachers with a framework that at all stages focused on the practicalities of the programme:
Evidence that the programme had a goal beyond the immediacy of the individual setting was slow to emerge. That global view became more apparent in the extended interviews with the Mentor Teachers (carried out during June - December 2000). Knowledge and information were still important but the notion of a professional, critical friend broadened and deepened the role. The role also allowed self to develop as well as that of the practitioner and the setting. The programme ‘has broadened contact with other people and that raises own confidence ...... was going to need changing and reforming’ (Interview 2). So the role has changed: ‘has been an evolution not a revolution’ (Interview 6) and had become ‘now more professional’ (Interview 4). The interviews with the Mentor Teachers indicated that the raising of County standards, professional development of self and individual practitioner improvement in a more global context began to emerge but not without the continuing problems of the day-to-day interaction between Mentor Teachers and practitioners. For the majority of Mentor Teachers:

Changes have taken place - initially involved with putting people in touch with each other - networking going on - less of that now - settings, on the whole, are more confident about planning - understand about planning - more interest now in Special Needs and Foundation Stage - less involved in setting up relationships, that’s there - focus on pre-OFSTED and the Action Plan - behavioural problems becoming an issue - outdoor areas/curriculum - more ‘meat’ to what I am doing - settings now know what to expect - can set their own agenda.

Mentor Teacher 5: 2000

Confused and complex but evidence of development.
The growth and development of the programme was not achieved in isolation. A range of support was provided by the Local Education Authority whilst other support was generated by the Mentor Teachers themselves (Table 19).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>support activity</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no response</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training days (LEA)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resource file</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Years Inspectors</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Years Development and Childcare Team</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor Teacher colleagues</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading literature</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgeries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support from settings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support if not setting based</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sharing good practice</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>workshops</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19: Main areas of activity to support the Mentor Teacher role

Mentor Teachers were generally pleased with the initial training programme as it provided a framework for developing their role. The Training Days offered a content that:

was appropriate and pitched at a sensible level. It enabled the ..... Mentors to team build quite quickly. Later training has not quite maintained the same level of relevance.
Mentor Teacher 11: 1999
The Training Days were seen as necessary to the development of the programme. They provided the opportunity to share information and to share ideas. There were opportunities to raise issues or express concerns although that was often difficult as the Training Days provided a forum for addressing general issues rather than specifics. The introduction of Surgeries: Mentor Teachers meeting with a member of the Inspectorate on a one-to-one basis was viewed as very productive:

_I found the surgeries quite useful - to talk to one person - I had half a dozen bullet-points - and had someone's undivided attention ...... very valuable .... person taking surgery could pick common issues and address them perhaps through [the] training days._

Mentor Teacher 5: 2000

Much emphasis was placed on the collegiality developed amongst Mentor Teachers. The importance of sharing experiences and consulting when there were concerns or problems was highlighted. Reference was made to feeling more 'comfortable' with this arrangement than the one with 'officials.' Support in the form of a resource file and documentation when appropriate and available was described as essential to the development of the day-to-day working with settings. Such resources provided the foundation for improving practice and raising standards. Surprisingly, little mention was made of the support the practitioners in the settings might provide. If the Early Years programme was a collaborative venture it might have been assumed that many of the practitioners provided that collaboration with experience and expertise that would have been extremely useful to the developing role of the Mentor Teacher.
The **Training Days** were identified as the major support for the Mentor Teachers (Table 20). The breadth and scope of the content of those sessions increased with time and attempted to include activity that addressed needs identified by the Mentor Teachers themselves. The appropriateness of the Training Days improved over time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Days as a support mechanism</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not at all</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in some areas</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in many areas</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>totally</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 20: Question for Mentor Teachers: Have the Training Days supported the development of the role?*

It was evident from the inception of the programme that the Training Days provided a useful context for an understanding of the programme and the role of the Mentor Teacher:

> *It has been useful to 'get to know the Authority' through the training days ..... I think we have developed alongside the training, as our role has become more defined.*
> Mentor Teacher 4: 1999

Those Training Days went *some way to develop a coherent and cohesive role* (Mentor Teacher 24: 1999). As already indicated the initial support involved the practicalities of the role - information, guidance and paperwork - but over time other aspects were revealed. The sessions encouraged debate and discussion, and the *opportunity to meet with, and discuss issues with fellow mentor teachers*
(Mentor Teacher 20: 2000) was seen to be invaluable. Local Authority impact was significantly strengthened by peer-group support. Mentor Teachers gained in confidence as the training became more focused on their needs: needs identified by that peer-group interaction: ‘I would feel as if I were working in a vacuum without them! It is brilliant to touch base and feel more empowered’ (Mentor Teacher 11: 2000).

Generally, the Training Days provided good support providing a range of information on many aspects of the role. Inevitably, some aspects were seen as inappropriate by some Mentor Teachers and some aspects had not been addressed sufficiently or at all. Such a variation in view was determined by a Mentor Teacher’s own perceived experience or expertise. All Mentor Teachers emphasised the value of peer-group support:

_We need to get together to debate things - Training Days do a lot of that for us - a list of Mentor Teacher strengths would be useful - share expertise and experience - a lot of talent in the Mentors that you don’t tap into because of lack of time - peer support [essential]._

Mentor Teacher: Interview 3

Other areas of support were identified in the first round of questionnaires or highlighted during the Training Days. Those areas included: the individual surgeries with Local Authority inspectors; the development of a line manager; the development of a written job description; and links with the local Partnership and the Early Years Development and Childcare (EYDC) team. Mentor Teachers continued to struggle with the everyday challenges of the role with only glimpses of the programme in a
more global context.

The question of any additional support allowed the Mentor Teachers to consider the wider ramifications of the programme and of the role. The responses continued to centre on the need to keep up-to-date and informed: ‘Keep us informed!’ (Mentor Teacher 8: 1999). Specific training to ensure that Mentor Teachers had a clear understanding of any new legislation that was introduced was essential - Foundation Stage guidance; Numeracy and Literacy strategies; Baseline Assessment; New Standards for pre-school settings; and new OFSTED requirements - and needed to be ongoing. Additional training that provided a better understanding of the context of Early Years education at local and national level was also highlighted.

Continuing support from the line manager, identified as an important support mechanism by Mentor Teachers in the first round of questionnaires (1999), could ensure that Mentor Teachers were part of a programme that was set within the County context. Difficulties were experienced in moving the contact and relationship into the wider context. It would need to move beyond the personal experience into both the Local and National arena for that more global understanding of the programme and the role of the Mentor Teacher to be established. The enthusiasm for the continued support of the County Inspectors in the one-to-one surgeries focused on personal development but in relation to visits to individual settings:

*A one-to-one approach ..... to talk through experience at each setting: set targets, to check that I’m on the right path and suggest new approaches.*

Mentor Teacher 18: 1999
The continuing introduction of government initiatives and alterations to existing arrangements prevented Mentor Teachers from moving beyond a simple knowledge base. The additional support identified by the Mentor Teachers was not a new type of support but simply an extension of what was already in place: a constant stream of information on new initiatives so that settings could respond immediately; consistent messages from the Inspectorate and Early Years team; peer support; training; resource files; and, time for administration. Mentor Teachers stressed 'being able to contact a 'source of support' is very important' (Mentor Teacher 11: 2000). Mentor Teachers also suggested that additional support was necessary for those Mentor Teachers not employed in Early Years settings. Attaching them to a school was one option. There was no mention of attachment to a pre-school.

As settings had not been identified as a source of support it was not expected that reference would be made to practitioners in settings providing additional support. Only one reference was made to the settings and involvement in the programme and that could hardly be termed 'support.' It should take the form of a:

letter sent to all settings explaining what their contribution might be in order to gain the most from their mentor and reiterating what settings originally committed to when accepting funding.

Mentor Teacher 12: 2000

Hardly the mechanism for support and collaboration: more an indication of coercion. In spite of a perceived one-sided approach to the development of the programme, Mentor Teachers believed that continuing and often additional support and training were necessary:
as long as the Early Years Team continues to support by direct advice or by help to find the direction to look in, I'm happy.
Mentor Teacher 7: 2000

Support and encouragement was certainly a key element of the programme.

The developing role of the first two years of the programme was explored with Mentor Teachers (Table 21). The question posed focused on changes that had taken place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>has the role changed over the past two years?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 21: Changes in the role of the Mentor Teacher - June 1998 - June 2000*

Although the yes responses (12) indicated that changes had taken place, the no responses (5) did not suggest the reverse. It was more a question of semantics.

Mentor Teacher comments suggested that the role had not changed, but had developed: "It has developed rather than changed partly due to strengthening relationships and apparent greater stability of Mentor's job" (Mentor Teacher 16: 2000). The yes responses were supported by comment that suggested that changes that had taken place were of a developmental nature: "as relationships have developed and with it mutual trust, the role has become increasingly effective" (Mentor Teacher 1: 2000). Mentor Teachers had become more focused as knowledge of settings had developed with the identification of their particular
needs. Professional relationships had been established and the sharing of experience and good practice had become a central feature. The role of the Mentor Teacher became clearer. The growing confidence of Mentor Teachers had resulted in:

staff in settings more demanding of me, expectations are higher but also relationships have developed alongside trust: this places greater demands on my role.
Mentor Teacher 5: 2000

The mechanisms that had provided a framework for the development and support of the programme through the Mentor Teachers had centred on the Training Days and the practical application of support from peers, Inspectors and the Early Years team. Practitioners were not involved. A dichotomy was revealed in the Mentor Teachers' view of the changes that had taken place over time. The changes and development that had taken place occurred because of the interaction with practitioners in the settings. The evolution of the Early Years programme in a rapidly changing context did not allow time for Mentor Teachers to understand it at a macro-level as they continued to be overwhelmed by day-to-day issues at the micro-level.

The issue of relationships and its importance in the developing programme

The issue of relationships was explored with Mentor Teachers. The ease or difficulty with which Mentor Teachers established good working relationships with practitioners was identified as a practitioner problem. In terms of numbers those settings where it was difficult to establish good relationships were few in
number: 47 in 1999 and 39 in 2000. The features of those poor relationships were focused on the practitioners: they prevented positive developments:

- suspicion, assuming ‘role’ was a critical one; resentment
- Mentor Teacher not seen as an asset
- difficulties of making contact
- nervous of being judged; felt threatened
- misunderstood role; lack of clarity
- settings believed that they could not be improved
- independent/private settings were self-sufficient; did not like intrusion
- some schools: a waste of time - they were experts
- pre-schools: lack of understanding of programme; could not see their place in it; lacked confidence
- personality clash (practitioner problem)

The additional comments of the Mentor Teachers mostly reflected the difficulties experienced. The reasons for the development of good relationships appeared to not need an explanation. It was clear that the majority of Mentor Teacher/practitioner involvement had developed along very positive lines but required effort and continued commitment: ‘All relationships have had to be worked at. They will need to be nurtured’ (Mentor Teacher 13: 1999).

All the respondents revealed that they had encountered difficulties with a small number of settings (no more than 4 in each case) primarily due to the reluctance of practitioners to be involved in the unknown and not because of a clash of personalities. Practitioners had indicated that personality was a major difficulty in establishing good relationships. Clearly a major divergence of perception.

Generally, Mentor Teachers believed they had developed good relationships with their settings but that had taken time and effort. In the few settings that continued to
present challenges the contact remained less productive. The shared professionalism identified by practitioners was not acknowledged by the Mentor Teachers. Their comments reflected a view that the pace of the developing relationship was only dependent upon the practitioner in the setting. No reference was made to the Mentor Teachers’ part in the equation:

_The playgroups especially were very vulnerable as a result of 4 year-olds going into school and they lacked confidence. They needed time to realise we were there for them and not in judgement - it’s been a pleasure to see some of them blossom._

Mentor Teacher 6: 1999

A year later responses presented a very similar picture: that it takes time for practitioners in the settings to ‘blossom,’ and for a minority of settings relationships remained difficult:

_Some settings had initial hostilities to the scheme which I have been unable to break down. Others have now realised the value of the Early Years partnership in general - and we also get on well._

Mentor Teacher 2: 2000

Although the very positive view of relationships between Mentor Teachers and practitioners provided an excellent framework for the developing programme, the issue of the minority of difficult collaborations gave rise for concern.

Mentor Teachers were asked to consider the issue of those settings that were not receptive to an involvement in the Early Years programme. Why were they so reluctant? Firstly, they considered the lack of information about the programme and understanding of the Mentor Teachers’ role in supporting the programme was at the heart of the reluctance. Some settings were suspicious and hostile and
involvement was seen as interference. Mentor Teachers suggested that practitioners felt intimidated, nervous, vulnerable and threatened. Those anxieties were linked to the lack of understanding of the role of Mentor Teacher which was perceived to be a critical one with the Mentor Teacher acting as assessor or judge. Secondly, there was a reluctance based on the practitioners' view of their own settings. Successful OFSTED inspections suggested that improvement was not necessary: there was nothing to improve. They had no wish to change: everything was fine and forced involvement would only result in feelings of being insulted, offended and not valued by the County. And thirdly, a view was expressed that the settings in which Mentor Teachers were permanently employed did not need a different Mentor Teacher to support them. It was a waste of time. There was not a reluctance to involvement: quite the reverse. The arrangement was simply seen as a duplication of precious resources.

To summarise, therefore, settings that were not receptive to involvement were in the minority and decreased over time. Mentor Teachers were firmly of the opinion that the difficulties encountered were those initiated by the practitioners: no reference was made to the Mentor Teachers' own part in the equation. That was in direct contradiction to the views expressed by the practitioners. A more explicit question to both Mentor Teachers and practitioners might have provided a more measured response. They were certainly aware of each other's foibles, and knowledge of their own might have provided a better framework for interaction. Inevitably, a number of settings continued to resist involvement. They were already 'excellent' so they simply dismissed any involvement. No reference was
made to the possibility of changing the Mentor Teacher and that was not surprising as Mentor Teachers did not see themselves as the cause of any difficulties encountered. The issue of relationships would continue to be a key factor in the developing programme. That, perhaps, was too simplistic as other factors revealed the complex nature of developing both the programme and the role of the Mentor Teachers.

The complexities of Mentor Teacher involvement: activity that supported the programme

The range of activity undertaken to support the needs of each setting was described by Mentor Teachers as considerable and varied over time (Table 22). Initially, the range of activity involved a ‘getting to know’ period and establishing the needs of the settings: ‘Some wanted to discuss and make plans immediately. Others to build trust and to be more cautious’ (Mentor Teacher 14: 1999). The content of the visits to settings tended to reflect ‘the burning issues of the day’ (Mentor Teacher 18: 1999). Setting an agenda was often difficult as the needs of individual settings were only revealed during the visit. The role varied from term-to-term: ‘every setting is so individual and so different in their needs’ (Mentor Teacher 5: 2000) and all activities could have applied to any setting at a point in time. The questionnaire responses indicated the breadth of activity taking place. The extended interviews provided a more in-depth understanding of the involvement.
### Activities undertaken by Mentor Teachers during visits to settings

The variation in activity clearly reflected priorities at different stages in the development of the programme (see Table 22). Some aspects varied little over time:

- observation, discussion with Early Years personnel, and completing the Contact Form.

**Table 22: Activities undertaken by Mentor Teachers during visits to settings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>1999 visit 1</th>
<th>1999 visit 2</th>
<th>1999 visit 3</th>
<th>2000 visit 1</th>
<th>2000 visit 2</th>
<th>2000 visit 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>observation</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>discussion with Early Years personnel</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>discussion with other staff</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>completing Contact Form</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>1**</td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
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<td>OFSTED involvement</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involvement with parents</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>up-to-date information</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>- *</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* not a statement in 1999  
** not a statement in 2000
Form (the record of the Mentor Teacher’s visit and type of involvement). There were some significant variations, however, over the two year period. Increased involvement was identified in specific areas. Firstly, involvement with Outside Agencies was referred to by only one respondent during the three visits in 1999, but in 2000 that had increased dramatically (18: 12: 19). That reflected in part an increased recognition of the need to support children with Special Educational Needs and the support that could be accessed through the introduction of a new team of Educational Psychologists specifically focused on children in Early Years settings. There was also a new requirement for all Early Years settings to identify a Special Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) to act as a focus for Special Needs issues. Secondly, as inspection became a requirement of settings to access funded children, Mentor Teachers became increasingly directly involved in the pre- and post- OfSTED Inspection of settings (1 in 1999: 12: 12: 11 in 2000). Both practitioners and Mentor Teachers recognised the importance of the inspection process and the implications of not being successful: more frequent inspections and increased tension in the settings. Lastly, visits increased that focused on the dissemination of up-to-date information, particularly in the area of curriculum in 2000. The introduction of the Early Learning Goals and the Foundation Stage guidance required Mentor Teachers to refocus priorities. Mentor Teachers had to be flexible in response to the particular needs of settings at specific times in the development of the programme.

Working with settings was described as an evolutionary process and the data from the questionnaires already outlined was extended in the Mentor Teacher interviews carried out towards the end of the research period. The support
provided for the settings was complex:

[I] have supported them throughout that evolution - settings moving at different rates - confident to be able to move them at their own rate - different settings had different amounts of time in different points in time.
Mentor Teacher: Interview 1

The evolutionary process was closely linked, therefore, to the nature of the settings: 'most are open to new ideas and want to discuss issues ..... [but] some teachers [in schools] not as open to new ideas as the staff in pre-schools' (Mentor Teacher: Interview 2). Mentor Teachers suggested that pre-school settings were often more responsive than schools and this was linked to the status of the practitioner:

the pre-schools value you going in and to talk to you because they do still see and feel the difference - that you are a teacher and they are not although are pre-school educators.
Mentor Teacher: Interview 6

Many of the pre-school settings did have members of staff with qualified teacher status (see Chapter 4: qualifications of practitioners: pp. 83-87). Perhaps a hint of tension was indicated in the responses: did such differences really pose a problem for the developing programme?

Practitioners had identified the developing support that addressed the needs of the settings, and the duality of Mentor Teachers' understanding the cultural context of settings and practitioners understanding the Mentor Teacher role. Mentor Teachers expressed a more limited view of involvement: a process that allowed Mentor Teachers to provide information on new initiatives e.g. Foundation Stage
guidance; new OFSTED arrangements; and National Standards for pre-schools, and practical support. The importance of practitioner collaboration did not appear to be significant. The range and level of support was dependent upon the relationships developed: 'Relationships? takes time - key to the whole thing really - how they relate to me: how I relate to them' (Mentor Teacher: Interview 4). The range and diversity of a Mentor Teacher's cluster of settings added to the role becoming more arduous:

> Relationships have developed over time - they've taken time to develop - some I've gone in and it's been fine right from day one - others it had taken three years and I'm still working on it!

Mentor Teacher: Interview 6

Relationships were often difficult in settings with a high turn-over of staff. That was particularly so in pre-school settings, so engaging in appropriate activity was problematic.

Three key areas in developing the programme were identified. Firstly, the range of activity undertaken was closely linked to the development of relationships. Secondly, where good relationships were developed useful activity itself was indicated: discussion with staff; reviewing documentation; supporting planning and assessment; modelling practice; in-service training in settings; supporting pre- and post-OFSTED; working with children; involving other agencies; and, providing up-to-date information including new initiatives. Thirdly, the question of time was raised as an issue. The half-day per term was generally believed to be appropriate (Table 23). Over time there was a realisation that
the very individual needs of settings would require more or less time to support the development of the programme:

* I found as the job goes on, that more time is needed to explore ideas in more depth. A few settings need very little time. 
  Mentor Teacher 4: 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>visits to settings: half-day per term</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>too little time</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>too much time</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* more than one box was ticked in 2000: a growing realisation of the differing needs of individual settings

Table 23: Mentor Teachers' view of the half-day per term time allocation to each setting

Time requirements varied according to circumstances and therefore flexibility was essential. That flexibility was stressed in the 2000 responses. Mentor Teachers identified reception classes; pre-school settings; and voluntary, private and independent settings as needing more or less time: a clear indication of the practical needs of individual settings, rather than any type of setting. The examples described where extra time was required provided clear evidence of the variation in need: playgroups; private nursery classes; impending OFSTED; setting-up an Early Years unit; new staff; newly qualified teacher (NQT); reception classes because of teacher's teaching commitment; current problems;
private extended day nurseries, etc. The time allocated was 'perfectly adequate for most purposes if the setting is able or will commit to the time' (Mentor Teacher 11: 2000). An indication of the tension that existed was revealed in references to the interrelationship between the work of the Mentor Teacher, OFSTED and the independent and private sector. One Mentor Teacher (Reception Class and Nursery Class in an Independent School) suggested that:

*Making an impact depends on the receptiveness of staff, and in general the attitude is that independent schools give what parents want and pay for. Also very good OFSTEDs ..... even though practice is not necessarily appropriate, make input difficult as OFSTED is ‘God’ and Mentors are mere ‘Mortals.’*

Mentor Teacher 21: 2000

Although time was a significant factor in addressing the needs of the settings, time was also problematic logistically. The majority of Mentor Teachers had full-time teaching commitments which often restricted the timing and length of contact - the support offered had to be manageable. Mentor Teachers with more time available to them - part-time teaching commitments, retired, etc. - had more flexibility. That seemed to result in an unevenness of provision. Fairness was also an issue. There seemed to be some injustice where a Mentor Teacher’s allocation of time involved a visit to a reception class in a one-form entry school; a playgroup; a reception class and playgroup on the same site; or three reception classes and a pre-school in one location:

*For some there is too much time, so I leave early and use the time for settings which need more time. It is very hard when I have to visit two settings on one site e.g. playgroup on school site. I feel I do neither justice.*

Mentor Teacher 2: 2000
Mentor Teachers recognised the evolutionary development of the programme and the importance of developing appropriate activity for the settings. Personal, professional development as part of the programme development was somewhat overshadowed by the necessity to provide for the very individual needs of each setting. The micro-level of involvement prevented the more global picture from being defined. The often perceived inflexible nature of the time allocation was identified as a barrier to setting development. It was difficult to address the needs of settings in such circumstances. The distribution of time - more or less as necessary - circumvented those problems but only where Mentor Teachers could engage in some flexibility. The notion of professional interaction became lost in the minutiae of the sharing of knowledge and its practical application in the settings.

The positive aspects of involvement

All Mentor Teachers believed that they had had significant, positive effects in their collaboration with the Early Years settings and provided a very optimistic view of the development of the programme. A number of key aspects were identified by Mentor Teachers that were indicative of that optimism (Figure 6). Mentor Teachers valued highly the support that they could give practitioners in developing the programme. There was a clear indication that, initially, Mentor Teachers did not feel totally confident in their role, but the developing relationships and the acquisition of knowledge and expertise led to very positive views on both the development of the settings and of the Mentor Teachers themselves. Certainly, those positives were very dependent upon collaboration.
key aspects of involvement that pleased Mentor Teachers

**working with practitioners**
- a welcome support and friend
- valued
- useful
- motivation
- improvement based on Mentor Teacher support

**relationships**
- mutual respect
- two-way process
- enthusiastic professionals 'sounding board'
- improving communication channels

**good practice**
- sharing good/excellent practice
- with committed professionals
- inter-setting dialogue
- development of networking

**raising standards**
- development of settings
- instilling confidence
- valuing diversity
- improvement in provision
- sense of achievement
- acting on advice
- training
- involvement with children

**Partnerships**
- Local Partnerships/ EYDCP

**practitioner involvement**
- enthusiastic practitioners
- dedicated staff
- development of practitioner professionality
- knowledge
- experience
- motivating

**OFSTED**
- OFSTED involvement

**quality provision**
- developing good quality provision for Early Years children
- richness
- discussion of Early Years practice
- working towards common goals
- enhancing quality of Early Years provision
- raising the profile of Early Years
- greater awareness of Early Years issues in the County

**Mentor Teacher skills**
- improving own practice
- personal development
- professional development
- extending own knowledge; experience; expertise
- ability to 'do the job'
- reflection on own practice

*Figure 6: Key aspects of the work with which Mentor Teachers were pleased*
That collaboration involved a systematic process: motivation, encouragement and respect led practitioners to view involvement in very positive terms and, as practitioners became more confident, collaboration continued and Mentor Teachers felt valued and more confident in the process of developing the programme. Such positive developments were entirely dependent upon the enthusiasm of the practitioners, and that created a professional rapport. In those positive situations Mentor Teachers maintained that an empathy with individual practitioners in the settings had been established. The key aspects of the Mentor Teacher/practitioner involvement identified matched in some respects the main roles identified earlier (see Figure 5: Main roles of Mentor Teachers, p. 123). Mentor Teachers believed that they had been influential in supporting the development of good practice and improving that practice. Although Mentor Teachers had identified very specific key elements of the Mentor Teacher role - Foundation Stage development, raising standards and supporting parents - those elements had not been specified in the positive key aspects of their work. That was a surprising omission.

There was a significant match between the practitioners’ and Mentor Teachers’ views of the positive aspects of involvement in the programme - the opportunity to raise standards, the development of good relationships, the sharing of good practice, involvement in OfSTED inspection and in the Early Years Partnerships (see Figure 3: page 109 and Figure 6: page 145). Practitioners saw Mentor Teachers taking a lead role in providing information and example whilst mentor Teachers believed that it was a collaborative process based on a shared experience.
Mentor Teachers indicated that standards could be raised by instilling confidence, sharing good practice and working with the practitioners’ skills and experience. There was a clear indication that was linked to a perceived shared professionality developing in the settings. Practitioners had a very different view. Standards would be raised by the direct support of Mentor Teachers through example and the provision of practical suggestions, ideas and documentation. Practitioners, particularly those from the pre-school settings, did not have the confidence or belief in their skills or experience to engage in a collaborative venture. The perceived information giving role of Mentor Teachers set them apart from the practitioners in the settings. The development of positive relationships was seen as an essential part of the programme development - it was a two-way communication process. Empathy and mutual respect were valued by both practitioners and Mentor Teachers but practitioners indicated an additional role for the Mentor Teacher - the role of critical friend, with the development of good relationships the responsibility of the Mentor teachers.

Clearly there was some divergence of approach, but two key aspects of the programme were identified by practitioners and Mentor Teachers that showed a polarisation of position. Mentor Teachers identified the development of quality provision as a significant feature of the Early Years programme, and their role in that development. There was an emphasis on discussion, working towards common goals, enhancing the quality of provision and raising the profile of Early Years in the County (Figure 6: page 145). That was in stark contrast to the practitioners’ emphasis on quality control. Celebrating success and hope for the future was based on notions of
evaluation and appraisal (Figure 3: page 109). The development of a more integrated, collaborative position would need time to develop.

As the programme developed the importance of support for practitioners - motivation; encouragement; confidence building; sharing good practice; improving practice; collaboration - continued as a thread over time. The Mentor Teachers also indicated that this ran alongside their own needs in developing professional expertise, increasing confidence and collaboration skills. Creating empathetic relationships was also essential. Initially, the programme and the role developed at a very practical level and were identified as key elements:

*Being able to give advice, or share general Early Years information, which has made a difference to the way the setting operates (albeit in a small way). I thoroughly enjoy the role. Powerful stuff!*

Mentor Teacher 22: 1999

As the programme developed the practical activity continued to flourish but Mentor Teachers began to look beyond those basic requirements to Handy’s (1994) view of ‘self-realisation’ and onwards towards ‘idealisation’ (p. 263). Mentor Teachers talked of understanding Early Years provision and practice in the County context and also a view of Early Years in a more global scene. A key aspect of the work of the Mentor Teacher was described as:

*Raising the profile of Early Years - helping to develop the importance of good Early Years practice across the County - I am very proud to be a part of this.*

Mentor Teacher 1: 2000

That development would involve a multi-professional approach which would reveal a
larger picture. The realisation of that view would be much more problematic.

The issue of the Mentor Teacher as reflective practitioner became an important aspect of the developing Mentor Teacher role:

An opportunity to reflect on my practice - how I can improve as well as a larger canvas on which to see good practice. Your perceptions are broadened and interrelationships more easily seen.
Mentor Teacher 8: 2000

There was a 'gradual influence leading to measurable development and increased self-worth' (Mentor Teacher 15: 2000). And for some it has revealed professional avenues. Mentor Teachers concluded that there were positive aspects to involvement although they often underplayed their own role in the development of the programme:

Positive aspects - it's been fun and a privilege really to see people working in good settings - amazing - astounded by the hard work that people put in it - best thing, generally, overall ...... it is done with a good heart, and the care and concern that people have has been the best thing - and having people accept you as a friend - we go into their space and why should they greet you with open arms - and yet they have and been very generous with their time - also outstanding improvements made - hope I have had something to do with that - have had an enormous influence on the pre-schools and how they have grown - they have benefited a lot - change to good practice.
Mentor Teacher: Interview 4

Raising the profile of Early Years and improving provision and practice were the most positive aspects of the developing programme and role.

**The concerns of involvement**

Practitioners had highlighted areas of concern that focused on the ability of the Mentor Teacher to carry out the role, and the value of the programme at all (Figure 7). The
programme and the Mentor Teacher were synonymous. Conversely, all Mentor Teachers were positive about the programme but expressed concerns about their own ability to carry out the role successfully. There were a number of constraints that prevented or hindered successful development. Definition of role had been identified by practitioners as problematic, and that had also been central to the view expressed by Mentor Teachers. There needed to be a clarification of role definition, and more information and knowledge to support the programme. A job description helped but support remained problematic because of inconsistency of knowledge and information. Concerns were expressed over supporting the variety of setting contexts and unevenness of collaboration with practitioners continued to be problematic.

Success was difficult where practitioners were reluctant and some continued to be so. The major issue of concern for Mentor Teachers was that of time. Time often appeared to be flexible - too much, too little or unavailability. It was used as an excuse by practitioners for non-involvement and Mentor Teachers in full-time posts were often constrained by the timing of contact with settings. The challenge was a logistical one: the allocation of time and the appropriateness of contact needed to be significantly more flexible. Many of the concerns expressed by Mentor Teachers concerning own role, practitioner and setting involvement could be addressed in training. The training opportunities did not always alleviate the problems encountered by Mentor Teachers but were seen by some as a means of challenging some of the concerns indicated.

Mentor Teachers indicated that there must be a future for the programme, but they expressed a concern that that future was in doubt. A future could only be assured if a
### Concerns about the programme

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<th>practitioner support</th>
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<td>challenge of more formal</td>
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<td>time: problems of own setting</td>
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<td>development of permanent Early Years staff (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time for Mentor Teachers to meet</td>
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**Figure 7:** The main areas of concern about the Early Years programme identified by Mentor Teachers

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long-term direction was in evidence. Unlike practitioners, all Mentor Teachers’
concerns focused on improvement in delivering the programme which did have a
bright and positive future. There was no indication that Mentor Teachers had any real
doubts about the worth of the programme and the importance of their place in its
development. The development of good Early Years provision was at the heart of the
programme:

*That whilst ‘Early Years’ is to be celebrated, we should not forget the
bigger picture and stress to schools the importance of continuing a
positive child- and family-centred approach into KS1 and 2. We should
not work in isolation but in partnership ....*
Mentor Teacher 11: 2000

The complex nature of the Early Years programme and the problems encountered in
delivering the programme did not deter Mentor Teachers from recognising the worth
of the initiative although some did question whether ‘we are offering value for money.
It is hard to assess and varies between settings I feel’ (Mentor Teacher 11: 2000).

**The way forward**

It was necessary for Mentor Teachers to consider both the positive features of the
Early Years programme, and the concerns raised as it has developed. Mentor Teachers
were clear about the implementation of the programme. They were to support
practitioners and settings in improving practice and raising standards and there was a
clear realisation that if it was to continue changes would be inevitable. An
understanding of what those changes might be were far from clear and would be a
considerable challenge for Mentor Teachers. They were starting from a point that
*‘in principle [was] a very good idea - it does work really well on the whole’* (Mentor
Teacher: Interview 2). Alterations and changes to the programme focused on the what rather than the why or how and continued to be positioned at the micro-level rather than a broad-band picture at a more macro-level. A clear indication that the here-and-now still dominated. It was, though:

*a fascinating role- I’m really glad I do it - it’s developing all the time - how it will develop needs looking at - with some groups we’ve come to the line with them - with some groups you’ll go no farther with them - other groups there is always something new to come up.*

Mentor Teacher: Interview 3

And one Mentor Teacher suggested that from uncertain beginnings something of real worth could emerge:

*It* has been a bit amateurish - that has been reflected in the training - it was so new though - hit the ground running - now let’s make this more professional - get our act together - keep the good things.

Mentor Teacher: Interview 4

Clearly, Mentor Teachers saw significant value in the programme.

Mentor Teachers indicated that the programme should continue and that there was a role for them in that development. The principle was sound. Initially, it had been ‘amateurish’ but developing more professional characteristics would benefit the whole programme. Mentor Teachers were unclear and uncertain about the process of the way forward: ‘don’t know because it is all changing ..... I really don’t know what the answer is’ (Mentor Teacher: Interview 4). That uncertainty of direction moved Mentor Teachers to only consider developments at the day-to-day working level that would strengthen the existing arrangements for supporting settings. A wider view was indicated in the reference to the cost effectiveness of the programme.
although no elaboration of that was in evidence. That wider view was also revealed in
the notion that a dedicated team of Mentor Teachers should be in place free from the
constraints of other commitments. The key elements of providing a way forward were:

- clarity of Mentor Teacher role/job description/guidance
- a dedicated team of full- or part-time Mentor Teachers
- smaller team supporting clusters of settings, with more clout
- continue to use Mentor Teachers from a variety of backgrounds
- disseminating best practice
- consistency of delivery/same message
- considering needs of settings
- more flexibility of time/quality of time
- improved training/specific training/surgeries
- administration time
- determining programme cost effectiveness

Mentor Teachers would continue in their pursuit of excellence.

Little of the shared vision expressed by practitioners was evident in the Mentor
Teacher responses. Their view of the way forward focused on providing quality
support and that was concentrated on the acquisition of knowledge and information.

Three important areas had been identified. Firstly, improved training opportunities
would extend the Mentor Teachers' knowledge base and ensure consistency of advice
to settings was given:

*If the content was to address issues which the Mentors had requested,
then (a) the training sessions would be more meaningful, rather than
general (b) the Mentors would be able to provide more information to
the settings regarding LEA issues, or the Mentor role, or future
developments.*
Mentor Teacher 22: 1999

Secondly, the development of a small dedicated team of Mentor Teachers would
focus on quality:
Mentor would be even more focused without the worry of inconveniencing their schools or first job. It would create more time for a smaller group to focus on developing a quality service.

Mentor Teacher 8: 1999

In fact, 'it would allow Mentor Teachers to focus totally on the job of being a Mentor Teacher' (Mentor Teacher 24: 1999). Perhaps, here, a hint of that wider role. The third and crucial element of future development was that of time. The available time needed to be flexible and 'it would be a commitment on both parts (which many settings do) to use time efficiently and address issues' (Mentor Teacher 12: 2000).

The development needed to satisfy the needs of every setting to ensure that the 'best possible service was being delivered' (Mentor Teacher 18: 1999).

The complex nature of the programme and its uniqueness was highlighted in the Mentor Teacher responses. The very positive interactions between practitioners and Mentor Teachers resulted in much improved practice and the raising of standards but was overshadowed by the problematic nature of the content of the programme and the Mentor Teachers' efforts to be competent in its delivery. Inadequate initial understanding of the programme and the role proved to continue to be a concern over time. With increased knowledge and improved management and organisation of time, Mentor Teachers, similar to practitioners, still found it difficult to rise above the minutiae of the practicalities of involvement. Improving practice and raising standards continued to develop at the local level, but time to reflect upon own practice and develop the 'vision' had only a cursory impact. Handy’s (1994) term 'idealisation' when viewed as an important aspect of the role of Mentor Teacher was only minimally in evidence from the research. Mentor Teachers believed the content
and context of the programme needed to develop as the secure framework, but there were hints that they, themselves, should be pivotal as the source of support for developing quality provision set in a wider, global context. The Early Years programme developed in Worcestershire should become a source of inspiration for other local authorities.

The findings have provided a wealth of information but can such data provide the basis of a framework for significant development to take it to greater heights? Mentor Teachers suggested that it did need ‘a new focus’ and the future of the programme and the role of the Mentor Teacher in that development would be that challenge.
Chapter 6

Discussion of the findings and the way forward

'There are kings and prophets, I was always told,' said Tony Benn, the British socialist politician. 'The kings have the power and the prophets have the principles.' I am on the side of the kings, the people who make things happen, but every king needs a prophet, to help him, and increasingly her, keep a clear head amidst the confusions. No one, however, would want the prophet to run the show.


The reference to 'kings' and 'prophets' (Handy, 1994) provides the focus for an examination of the research findings. The investigation had been primarily concerned with the role of the Mentor Teacher: the findings suggest that the context was significantly more complex. The involvement of the Mentor Teachers and the practitioners in the development of the Early Years programme needed to be based on interaction at the philosophical and principles level, as well as at the practical informational and knowledge-based level. The key feature of the programme - that interaction - indicated the need for movement in position. Both Mentor Teacher and practitioner involvement would need to be underpinned by a view of Early Childhood education (Ball, 1994; Edwards and Knight, 1994) and the development of self as pedagogue (Soler et al, 2001). The 'king/prophet' paradigm would be central to understanding the role of the Mentor Teacher and the practitioner in developing the programme. Would the programme and those involved grow and develop if the Mentor Teacher and practitioner revealed elements of both 'king' and 'prophet' in their interactions? Would that provide the basis for raising standards and improving practice?
The validity of this study is grounded in the integrity of the findings. The depth of exploration through a triangulation of practitioner/Mentor Teacher investigation using questionnaires, practitioner/Mentor Teacher in-depth interviews, and interpretation of relevant literature in the field provided a framework for establishing the quality of the Worcestershire Early Years support programme with particular reference to the role of the Mentor Teacher. The empirical data gathered, through the in-depth interviews, provided clear evidence of the complexities of developing a coherent programme on a County-wide scale. The diverse and very individualistic nature of the settings and practitioners working in those settings was matched by the diverse and individualistic nature of the Mentor Teachers supporting those settings and practitioners. Moully's (1978) five steps in the process of an investigation provided the framework for examining the study. Experience, classification and quantification were addressed in previous chapters. The important steps - 'the discovery of relationships' and 'approximation to the truth' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 13) - provide the basis for a discussion of the findings: has such a programme substance or is it a waste of public money?

If a support programme is to have any lasting impact upon the quality of Early Years provision within the County, the findings of the research investigation will provide the foundation and framework for the future development of that programme. Improvement of the programme will need to be founded on a number of underlying principles that will be part of the professional development of all those involved.
1. The development of a shared philosophy

The need to develop a shared philosophy, a working together in harmony, will be central to maintaining and extending quality provision in the Early Years. Anning (1997a) argues ‘for a reassessment of and new coherence in the educational provision for all young children’ (p. 6). The reference to children is important. Much of the research data emphasised the concern with management, organisation and curriculum as somehow separate from children. Future emphasis should be on children and their learning. Harmony is realised in the practitioner/Mentor Teacher collaboration in providing a quality environment for children’s learning. The development of Early Years settings as ‘learning communities’ provides an environment that supports ‘children as learners’ (Anning and Edwards, 1999, p. 149). The evolution of professional communities - the Mentor Teachers and the practitioners in their settings - is arguably crucial to the formation of a shared philosophy to underpin quality Early Years provision.

The development of a shared philosophy involves change and adjustment. Change is a process and cannot be imposed. Professional discussion between Mentor Teachers and practitioners/Mentor Teachers and Mentor Teachers/practitioners and practitioners, and action-on-discussion will provide the mechanisms for developing a shared philosophy. It is a complex route and will have an impact upon the time necessary for its development. Acceptance by some of those involved will continue to be a considerable barrier to be overcome.

The way forward: the development of the County programme based on a shared Early Years philosophy
2. **The programme supported by shared expertise and experience**

There will be a need to emphasise that the expertise and experience of both Mentor Teachers and practitioners will be important to developing the programme. That would be a two-way process but should also address the problem of the diverse nature of Early Years settings and the variety of backgrounds of practitioners from those settings. Data from the investigation did not reveal the extent of the expertise and experience of practitioners that could have been part of a shared experience with Mentor Teachers. Worthwhile practitioner involvement is vital to the programme’s development. Drake (2001) maintains that:

*working as a team is a process ..... It is rooted in an ideology of empowerment, encouraging adults ..... to take control of their own lives and giving children permission to do the same.*  
P. 171

The development of the collaborative use of expertise and experience will encourage ownership of the programme. Ownership will provide motivation to engage in delivering a quality Early Years curriculum and with children’s learning central to the quality equation. Arming and Edwards (1999) maintain that:

*a collective focus on pupil learning allows the development of a professional discourse which centres on the professional actions of colleagues so they create contexts and plan and evaluate actions taken to support children’s learning.*  
P. 149

To move forward with colleagues there needs to be communication, co-operation, respect and support (Drake, 2001) and that will only grow, evolve and advance if
the expertise and experience of all is recognised. Expertise and experience, though, will not be uniform. The diversity of Early Years settings and the range of experiences of Early Years practitioners will provide that rich mix necessary for good practice being brought to the notice of others. The challenge of sharing the expertise and experience present in the Early Years community with colleagues in the County would have to be addressed. A greater ‘facilitator’ role for the Mentor Teacher may overcome the difficulties by developing mechanisms for dissemination. Collaborative Mentor Teacher/Mentor Teacher initiatives could provide a forum for developing that would be more dynamic than the Training Days described in the investigation as useful informational and knowledge-based sessions.

The way forward: development of the Mentor Teacher role and mechanisms for sharing expertise and good practice throughout the County

3. The critical issue of relationships

The development of quality Early Years provision can only proceed if the issue of relationships is addressed. The investigation had revealed that good relationships had often been difficult to establish between Mentor Teachers and practitioners. The challenge would be to develop positive relationships based on shared philosophies, expertise and experience. The skills and ability necessary to foster positive relationships would develop the confidence to further the process of improvement and raising standards in the settings. Those skills would be an essential part of the Mentor Teacher armoury - issues of the suitability of Mentor Teacher appointments here - and the development of practitioner skills that
increase the probability of engagement in meaningful relationships. A consideration of issues concerned with trust, empathy, motivation and inter- and intra-personal relationships would be important.

The quality of relationships established in educational settings, argue Gammage and Swann (1998), is dependent upon:

\[
\text{the ability to establish positive and productive relationships with the child, the child's family and carers.}
\]

\[p. 14\]

More importantly, perhaps, is the ability of Mentor Teachers to establish such relationships with the practitioners to further the development of the County programme. The fundamental links between shared philosophies of education, the expertise of those involved in establishing quality provision and the development of positive relationships between Mentor Teacher and practitioners, are the factors that underpin professional practice. Gammage and Swann (ibid.) suggest that ‘\textit{high quality childhood provision ..... [is] dependent upon high quality professional practice}' (p. 15). Relationships is a key element in that equation.

\textbf{The way forward: development of the Mentor Teacher role and acting as facilitator in exposing and developing the skills and abilities necessary to establish good working relationships amongst the Mentor Teachers and practitioners in the settings throughout the County}

\textbf{4. Professional development for Mentor Teachers and practitioners}

The complexities of developing theory and practice in Early Years education can be addressed through the vehicle of professional development. The County programme should provide the framework for professional development. The
investigation revealed the fragmented nature of the programme as it existed, and
the need to harness the knowledge, understanding and experience of all those
involved into a well-articulated, coherent programme of professional development
and training. A co-ordinated programme of training initiatives, workshops and
conferences could provide a framework for Mentor Teacher/practitioner
professional development. A study in effective pedagogy (Moyles, 2001b)
confirmed the importance of the practitioners’ role in developing quality
provision in the Early Years. The effective practitioner is:

\[
\text{clear about principles underpinning early years pedagogy and}
\text{reflects regularly on current thinking about children’s learning}
\text{and development in relation to effective pedagogy, internal and}
\text{external initiatives and is committed to training and development.}
\]

p. 44

The County professional development should involve the wider community, and
include the collaboration and co-operation of Mentor Teachers, Early Years
practitioners, Local Education Authority Early Years staff, and other
knowledgeable experts. The link with the shared philosophy and Mentor Teacher/
practitioner expertise and experience would need to be maintained. The
involvement of Barth’s (1990) ‘community of learners’ (p. 45) would be the basis
of the professional development process although outside influences such as a
nationally imposed curriculum could not be ignored.

The very nature of professional development implies a notion of change and as
Rodd (1994) suggests: ‘Change is one of the few certainties in life!’ (p. 114). Both
Mentor Teachers and practitioners would need to realise that any programme of
professional development would involve change and adaptation, the acceptance of which would support improvement and the raising of standards. Rodd (ibid.) is mindful that:

*Growth is a result of change and illustrates the capacity of an individual or organisation to respond to the environment, to adapt, to be flexible, to question traditional and established practices, methods or ideas in order to develop new knowledge and ways of applying that knowledge. It is a means of sustaining individual and organisational survival.*

p. 114

The development of strategies for improvement and raising standards must be part of that change process which is the core of continuing professional development. The challenge for Mentor Teachers and practitioners to improve own practice and to influence policy can be hampered by the problematic nature of outside interventions. Morley and Rassool (1999) had expressed disquiet with political agendas interfering in the process of education. The imposition of initiatives can hamper the process and present those involved with difficulties in reconciling own and outside aims and objectives. Barber's (1996) view that practitioners were willing partners in professional development initiatives concerned with improving quality for all was not borne out by the investigation, and the unwillingness of some needed to be addressed. The value of involvement in the County programme to practitioners themselves would need to be established. Alexander (1994) had suggested the key to improving quality educational practices was firstly, dependent upon a personal philosophy with which practitioners were comfortable; and secondly, empirical evidence that the practice would support the improvement. Such a view ignores the place of shared
philosophies. Personal and shared philosophies may be difficult to reconcile, but would be a significant feature in supporting improved practice in the County. Political influences could not be ignored, either, and would also provide a challenge in developing quality provision.

The shared philosophy envisioned in the County programme would go beyond personal endeavour, and the adaptation of politically prescribed initiatives could provide the opportunity to develop much more powerful expressions of quality. In Barth’s (1990) terms all those involved in professional development to improve and raise standards in the County’s Early Years settings would be part of that ‘community of learners’ (p. 45). Such a community would be the basis of high quality professional development. The Mentor Teachers would have a significant role as facilitators, whilst practitioners in the settings would need to be committed to involvement: both would need the shared vision.

The way forward: The creation of co-ordinated, co-operative professional development opportunities for both Mentor Teachers and the practitioners in the settings.

5. OFSTED inspection as a benchmark for improved quality and raised standards in Early Years settings

The vision of Early Years education has to be set in the context of quality control. Government has attempted to standardise Early Years provision with the introduction of the Foundation Stage curriculum for three, four and five year-olds and inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) which identifies the extent to which the quality of that provision is maintained and improved. The reports following OFSTED inspections revealed ‘how well settings
support children's progress' (Siraj-Blatchford, 1999, p. 23). Evidence from the investigation had revealed that support given by Mentor Teachers to the settings and collaboration between Mentor Teachers and practitioners frequently focused on OFSTED issues both pre- and post-OFSTED. Improvement had been identified in subsequent inspections in the County.

The important role of OFSTED in the current climate has to be seen as an integral part of the development of quality provision in the County’s Early Years programme. The dichotomy for practitioners is the impact of prescription versus ethos: control versus vision. Drake (2001) suggested that:

practitioners find themselves in a period of significant change and it is to their credit that they embrace initiatives with commitment and an open mind ….. in striving to keep abreast of developments in local and national policy, and to be practising in accordance with current thinking, it is easy to lose direction or cohesion as a team. Practitioners should give priority to developing a shared ethos and ….. to invest in time for talking and listening to each other.

p. 147

In using OFSTED inspection as a benchmark for improving quality and raising standards, those involved in the County programme must not lose sight of the shared vision already identified as an essential element of Early Childhood education. The future development of the County programme will depend upon the integration of OFSTED inspection reports and good Early Years practice in developing the County framework for support.

The way forward: The more critical use of OFSTED inspection reports in developing the Worcestershire Early Years support programme
6. A community of professional practitioners: towards excellence

The vision for the future must focus on children and the creation of high quality Early Years learning environments. That in turn highlights the issue of professionalism and the development of Mentor Teacher/practitioner professional collaboration. Moyles (2001a) suggests that:

*If we want professionals, then professional understanding itself needs to be nurtured, to be allowed time to develop and opportunity to be applied. Educational improvement depends upon practitioners feeling they WANT to make a difference; upon them feeling empowered and professional.*

p. 89

This is not denied as a basis for promoting excellence in the Early Years. Anning (1997b) suggests that excellence can be achieved by:

*more research into the long-term effects of different types of pre-school provision on the educational achievements of children. With hard data, rather than vague aspirations .... the various vested interests dealing with under-fives .... might be able to work within a framework where good quality pre-school education and care are clearly defined and exemplified.*

p. 147

This offers an interesting vision. Developing the Worcestershire programme to support practitioners in adopting *pedagogical principles and practices* (Siraj-Blatchford, 1999, p. 20) is at the heart of creating professionalism. A high degree of professionalism revealed in the StEPs project (Moyles and Adams, 2001) provides pointers to the process of developing professionalism and could be a useful reference in developing the County programme. Moyles (2001a) describes the process for practitioners as the:
• deconstruction of practice and thinking, whatever emotional costs to themselves;
• openness to challenge, conflict and paradox, however painful this may have been ….;
• analysis of practice and, more importantly, their views on their own and other’s practices and intentions;
• reconstruction of practice and theory, following a period of affirming the validity of their own knowledge, beliefs and values and the support available from other sources;
• development of thinking and articulation, leading to greater justification of practice and values.

p. 90

These processes must feature in any development that is concerned with improvement and raising standards.

Continued improvement in the quality of provision in the County’s Early Years settings will require a commitment and enthusiasm on the part of Mentor Teachers and practitioners towards that end: a passionate belief in what they are about. A high level of professionalism must be the norm. Moyles (ibid.) suggests that Mentor Teachers and practitioners need to view themselves as:

_a professional body of practitioners who can speak with authority on the special nature of the education and care of young children and their own roles in those processes._

p. 93

The Mentor Teachers will need to engage energetically in the facilitator role in developing that professional/practitioner culture. Such a culture will ensure that practitioners have the knowledge, skills, resources and confidence to provide high quality learning environments where all Early Years children will have the opportunity to flourish.
The way forward: development of the Mentor Teacher facilitator role: creating a community of professionals in the County

A framework as a vision for the future

The investigation has provided an opportunity to critically examine the truths and realities of the situation and to evaluate what it has revealed about the County’s Early Years support programme and the role of the Mentor Teacher in its development. It has been evident from the investigation that the aims and objectives of the programme, initially, had not been clearly understood by all those involved and have continued to pose problems. Once clarity of purpose and design has been established, the opportunities to develop at the philosophical and principles level will be greatly enhanced. The collaboration between Mentor Teachers and practitioners based on a shared vision would be central to the development and the specific role of each would need to be grounded in that collaborative context. A framework for developing and improving the Worcestershire Early Years support programme would provide a foundation for dialogue and planning. Dialogue between Mentor Teachers and practitioners would establish a common understanding of what underpins Early Childhood education and this would lead to reflection on practice essential to an understanding of the wider picture throughout the County. The framework would provide a foundation for the Mentor Teachers to act as facilitators in developing specific plans with practitioners in individual settings. The role of the Mentor Teacher will be important in maintaining an overview of the development of the County programme whilst concurrently supporting the needs of individual settings and practitioners.
To summarise, a framework for developing and improving the quality of Early Years provision in the County that would allow practitioners and Mentor Teachers to work in harmony would be essential, but it would not be without its challenges. The dilemma would lie in the establishment of a community of learners (Barth, 1990) that were motivated, enthusiastic and committed. A framework for improvement and raising standards would include:

1. **The development of clarity in a shared understanding of the principles that underpin teaching and learning in the Early Years** (Pascal, 1997). The research findings (Chapters 4 and 5) indicated the practicalities of implementing new initiatives such as the requirements of the Foundation Stage and addressing the needs of OfSTED inspection and revealed how thinking at that deeper, philosophical level might be precluded. The need to address the nature of teaching and learning (Chapter 2: pages 28 - 35) must be a priority for future developments;

2. **The development of a shared philosophy** is clearly linked to the first point. A shared philosophy would only develop as a meaningful collaboration between practitioners and Mentor Teachers if the emphasis moved from the day-to-day issues encountered in the settings to a deeper level of involvement. Practitioners (Chapter 4: findings: practitioners' views) had found it difficult to move beyond the immediate. Effective learning environments would develop where there was evidence of a shared philosophy involving practitioners, Mentor Teachers - and children (Lally, 1991). There needed to be a recognition that shared expertise and experience was necessary to move the programme to a
different level of engagement where the purely informational aspects of involvement in the programme were less significant (see Table 7: page 95);

3. The development of a professionalism that then draws upon the skills, abilities, experience and confidence of all those involved would be developed and deepened by a link to the shared philosophy. Both practitioners and Mentor Teachers indicated that such characteristics were already a feature of many settings (see Figure 3: page 109 and Figure 6: page 145) and therefore provided a basis on which to build. Collaboration by an expert community of learners (Barth, 1990) would add substance to the programme and its delivery. Central would be the place of the reflective practitioner as an adjunct to critical thinking (see pages 27 and 28: Boud, 1985; Ghaye and Ghaye, 1998; Hopkins et al, 1994). Training would also be a part of that active involvement in extending professionalism;

4. The development of good, positive relationships would be a critical aspect of the developing framework. Practitioners had identified relationships as an important feature of involvement (see Figure 3: page 109) and that was confirmed by the Mentor Teacher responses (see Figure 6: page 145). Both indicated it was a two-way process, but there needed to be a greater recognition of that in situations where relationships were poor (see Table 10: page 103 and Mentor Teacher comments: page 124); and

5. The continued development at the micro-level. Although dialogue between practitioners and Mentor Teachers was necessary to move the programme into the
wider context, the development at the individual setting level would need to be maintained. A clear understanding of the requirements of national initiatives - the Foundation Stage curriculum, OfSTED inspection, National Standards for Early Years settings and Baseline Assessment (see page 9: development of educational provision) - and the importance of Mentor Teacher support in providing the knowledge to support the learning environment (see Figure 3: page 109: key aspects of work undertaken with Mentor Teachers that pleased practitioners) would need to continue and be maintained so as to develop, nurture, support and extend children's learning in challenging, stimulating and safe learning environments. That would entail extending the development of skills for planning, organisation and assessment.

The different roles of Mentor Teachers and practitioners in improving the County programme will be crucial to its successful development. The reference to 'kings' and 'prophets' (Handy, 1994) is particularly apt. Practitioners have the power to make things happen in their settings. They are the 'kings' of their domains but the global picture and the shared vision needs to be part of the development. Quality Early Years provision can be developed through common pedagogic principles and practices. The 'prophet' role of the Mentor Teacher needs to be maintained and developed. Such a collaboration of practitioner and Mentor Teacher, of king and prophet, has the potential for providing a unique opportunity for developing high quality Early Years provision in Worcestershire. The effective pedagogue will be at the heart of the development as part of a community of learners. Merry (1998) maintained that:
A successful learning context is one where both the teacher and the child are secure enough to make their private thinking explicit and open to change, and successful teaching happens best when teachers too become more like successful learners.

p. 127

Quality is attainable but not without effort by all those involved. There will be a role for the inspirational visionary but it will be tempered by the place of the corporate image in the guise of national initiatives. Quality education is the right of all children, and especially so in the Early Years. It is the foundation of all future learning, achievement and quality of life.
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Worcester: Worcestershire County Council

Worcester: Worcestershire County Council

Worcester: Worcestershire County Council


Appendix 1

Letter to practitioners and Mentor Teachers: the research process and involvement (1999)
June 1999

Our Ref: AH/DGP
Contact: Alison Hitchins Tel: 01905 766731

Dear Colleague


With the completion of the first year of the Mentor Teacher Programme there is now a need to evaluate what has taken place. The views of those who have been involved are crucial to an understanding of what has happened and in evaluating the programme.

With this in mind, two questionnaires have been developed. One is for the Mentor Teachers which will provide evidence of an understanding of the role undertaken and of the activity that has taken place in the settings. The information obtained will help identify the Mentor Teachers' role. The second questionnaire will be sent to the person who has direct contact with the Mentor Teacher and most involvement in the programme within the setting. The information will provide details of the impact of the Mentor Teacher Programme upon the work of the setting. The questionnaire should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

This evaluation is a joint initiative by Jackie Eyles as part of a funded doctoral research programme and Alison Hitchins on behalf of Worcester LEA with a view to developing Quality Control for the Mentor Teacher Programme.

Please do not write your name/name of setting on your questionnaire: all returns should be anonymous. A stamped addressed envelope is included for your convenience. Return by Friday 25 June 1999.

Thank you for the time taken to complete the questionnaire. Your views are essential to ensure that the Mentor Teacher Programme fully addresses the needs of the settings.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Eyles
Researcher

Alison Hitchins
Early Years Development Officer
Schools Division
Educational Services
PO Box 73
Worcester
WR5 2YA
Tel: 01905 766731
Fax: 01905 766029

Encs.
File

Alison Hitchins
Early Years Development Officer
Appendix 2

Mentor Teacher Programme Questionnaire:
June 1999 - for practitioners (orange)
Mentor Teacher Programme

Questionnaire

June 1999

The Worcestershire Early Years Development Plan was approved by the DfEE in March 1998. One of the components of the quality section outlined a Mentor Teacher system and how that would operate. The Worcestershire Early Years Partnership appointed Mentor Teachers in response to the requirements laid down by the DfEE. Those requirements included the involvement of a qualified early years teachers in all early years settings. A letter outlining the detail of the Mentor Teacher system was sent to all Primary, First and Independent Schools and Nurseries and Playgroups in April 1998.

With the completion of the first year of the Mentor Teacher programme there is now a need to evaluate what has taken place. The views of all those that have been involved are crucial to an understanding of what has happened and in evaluating the programme. Two questionnaires have been developed. One is for the Mentor Teacher which will provide information about their work in the settings. The second questionnaire is for the person in the setting who has most contact with the Mentor Teacher. This will provide information about the impact of the Mentor Teacher programme on the setting. The questionnaire should take approximately **30 minutes** to complete. All information will only be used as part of the evaluation of the Mentor Teacher programme and will be **CONFIDENTIAL**. No individual names or settings will be used at any time.

All your responses are important as what you have to say will influence the development of the Mentor Teacher programme. Please return the completed questionnaire by Friday 25 June 1999.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

Jackie Eyles
Alison Hitchins
Your views about the Mentor Teacher

1. Identify the reasons why you think the Mentor Teacher programme was put into place?

a)

b)

c)

2. Did you understand the role of the Mentor Teacher before the first visit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>no</th>
<th>some aspects</th>
<th>most aspects</th>
<th>completely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment

3. At the end of the first year, what would you now consider are the essential aspects of the role of the Mentor Teacher?

- to advise staff
- to support staff
- to support the children in the setting
- to help develop the curriculum
- to help with planning
Mentor Teacher Programme: Questionnaire to Early Years Settings

To be completed by the person who has direct contact with the Mentor Teacher

Type of Setting: please tick

- □ Reception Class (LEA)
- □ Reception Class (Independent)
- □ Nursery Class (LEA)
- □ Nursery Class (Independent)
- □ Nursery School (LEA)
- □ Nursery School (private)
- □ Playgroup
- □ Family Centre
- □ Extended Day Care
- □ Workplace Nursery
- □ Other (name)

Title of position held: e.g. reception class teacher/playgroup leader/supervisor

title: ..........................................................

How long have you held your current position?

- years
- months

□□ □□

Is there a qualified teacher in your setting?

yes □ no □
☐ to help develop assessment procedures
☐ to help in the evaluation of the work of the setting
☐ to support training initiatives
☐ to provide exemplar teaching
☐ to support parents
☐ to liaise with outside agencies (health, social services, etc.)
☐ to provide channels of communication
☐ to replace staff to allow them to visit other settings
☐ other

List all that apply

Comment

Your views on the practical aspects of the programme

4. How was contact made with your setting?

☐ telephone
☐ letter
☐ personal visit
☐ other
☐ other

Tick all that apply

Comment
5. Were you able to make contact with your Mentor Teacher?

yes □ no □

If yes, how was that contact made?

6. How easy/difficult was it to arrange Mentor Teacher visits to your setting?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>easy</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>difficult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

indicate rating with a x

Comment

7. How easy/difficult was it to establish a good relationship with your Mentor Teacher?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>easy</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>difficult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

indicate rating with a x

Comment
8. Identify any aspects that helped you to establish a good working relationship with your Mentor Teacher. Rank them in order of importance: 1 being the most important; 2 the next most important, etc.

☐ the Mentor Teacher had the ability to establish a good rapport with the setting
☐ there was a willingness to listen
☐ there was an awareness that communication was a two-way process
☐ visits were guaranteed to take place when arranged
☐ the Mentor Teacher was able to provide clear and positive advice
☐ there was confidence in the Mentor Teacher’s ability to support the setting through knowledge, skills and experience

Comment

9. Identify any aspects that prevented you from establishing a good working relationship with your Mentor Teacher. Rank them in order of importance: 1 being the most important; 2 being the next most important, etc.

☐ a clash of personality
☐ the Mentor Teacher was not willing to listen
☐ the Mentor Teacher was not aware that communication is a two-way process
☐ the Mentor Teacher was unable to make herself available to the setting at times acceptable to the setting
☐ visits did not take place as arranged
☐ there was little confidence in the Mentor Teacher’s ability to support the setting
☐ did not believe that the Mentor Teacher had appropriate knowledge, skills and experience
☐ did not provide clear and positive advice
10. Identify any activities undertaken by the Mentor Teacher during the visits.

- observation
- discussion with yourself
- discussion with other staff e.g. Head Teacher/owner/manager
- completion of Contact Form
- reviewing documentation e.g. OFSTED reports/policies/plans
- working with children
- exemplar teaching
- replacing staff to allow visits to other settings
- any other

Comment

11. Was the half-day a term spent in your setting by the Mentor Teacher generally:

- too little time
- about right
- too much time

Comment
12. Was the Mentor Teacher involved with your setting for more than a half day per term?

   yes □  no □

If yes, was that additional time used for:

□ discussion with yourself and staff
□ completion of Contact Form
□ attending Local Partnership Meetings
□ invitation to attend Local Partnership Meetings, but could not attend
□ discussion with you about involvement in Partnership Groups
□ addressing parent/staff groups
□ liaising with outside agencies on your behalf
□ supporting the development of staff training programmes
□ providing additional resources
□ Other

Comment

Your overall view of the Mentor Teacher programme

13. Identify 3 key aspects of your work with the Mentor Teacher that have most pleased you.

1.

2.

3.
14. What, if any, are your main concerns about the Mentor Teacher programme?

1.

2.

3.

15. If you could change one thing to improve the Mentor Teacher programme what would it be?

16. How would the change improve the Mentor Teacher programme?

Thank you for your time.

Your response will help us to improve the quality of the Mentor Teacher Programme.

Please return in the stamped addressed envelope provided to County Hall by Friday 25 June 1999.

Jackie Eyles - Researcher
Alison Hitchins - Early Years Development Officer
Appendix 3

Mentor Teacher Programme Questionnaire: June 1999 - for Mentor Teachers (blue)
Mentor Teacher Programme

Questionnaire

June 1999
MENTOR TEACHER PROGRAMME: REVIEW OF THE SECOND YEAR -
SUMMER 1999 - Winter/Spring 2000

The Worcestershire Early Years Development Plan was approved by the DfEE in
March 1998. One of the components of the quality section outlined a Mentor
Teacher system and how that would operate. The Worcestershire Early Years
Partnership appointed Mentor Teachers in response to the requirements laid
down by the DfEE. Those requirements included the involvement of a qualified
early years teachers in all early years settings. A letter outlining the detail of the
Mentor Teacher system was sent to all Primary, First and Independent Schools
and Nurseries and Playgroups in April 1998.

With the completion of the first year of the Mentor Teacher programme an
evaluation of the programme took place and adjustments were made to work
undertaken by the Mentor Teachers in the light of your response. Now at the end
of the second year of the programme questionnaires are being circulated to all
settings involved - including those who have joined the programme during
1999/2000. One questionnaire is for the Mentor Teacher which will provide
information about their work in the settings. The second questionnaire is for the
person in the setting who has had most contact with the Mentor Teacher. This
will provide information about the impact of the Mentor Teacher programme on
the setting. The views of all those who have been involved are crucial to an
understanding of how the programme has developed, and its future development.
The questionnaire should take approximately 45 minutes to complete. All
information will only be used as part of the evaluation of the Mentor Teacher
programme and will be CONFIDENTIAL. No individual names or settings will
be used at any time. The number on the front cover is for administrative reasons
only - so that reminders can be sent to those that have not responded by the
return date. The front cover will be removed when the questionnaires are
evaluated - the responses, therefore, will be totally anonymous.

All your responses are important as what you have to say will influence the
continued development of the Mentor Teacher programme. Please return the
completed questionnaire by Friday 30 June 2000.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

Jackie Eyles
Annette Bryant
Mentor Teacher Questionnaire

Mentor Teacher: Personal Details

Qualifications held: name all □ QRT Ed, BEd (Hons), M.Ed, M Phil.

Career path:

jobs held since qualification dates

Class Teacher 1964-1976
Head Teacher 1976-1990
Senior Lecturer 1990-1997

current position held date from
Visiting Lecturer UCE 1997
Mentor Teacher 1998

Describe all your current areas of responsibility e.g. D/H, responsibility for Maths, PSE, etc.
Responsible for MA; Early Years and Management of the Primary School

How did you find out about the post of Mentor Teacher?

☐ School mailing
☐ Newspaper (e.g. Malvern Gazette)
☐ From LEA Inspector/Early years Adviser
☐ Other (name)

Why did you apply for this post?

Felt I had qualifications and experience. It was also a challenge working with many different people. I also had it spread my enthusiasm for the field years.
Personal views on the role of the Mentor Teacher

1. Did you feel confident that you were appropriately qualified to undertake the role of Mentor Teacher?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>not confident</th>
<th>confident in some areas</th>
<th>confident</th>
<th>very confident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment
After meeting some Mentor Teacher colleagues I still felt confident but became concerned that we were a very disparate bunch!

2. Did you understand the role of the Mentor Teacher?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>not at all</th>
<th>some aspects</th>
<th>most aspects</th>
<th>totally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment

Your views on preparing to be a Mentor Teacher

3. Identify aspects of the job necessary to fulfil the role of the Mentor Teacher. Rank in order of importance: 1 being the most important; 2 being the next most important, etc.

- [ ] Advise staff
- [ ] Support staff
- [ ] Support children
- [ ] Develop curriculum
- Planning
- Assessment
- Evaluation
- Training support
- Communication
- Exemplar teaching
- Support for parents
- Liaise with other agencies (health, SEN, etc)
- Other (list all)

Comment
It is a very complex role - may complex item too.

4. What support were you given to carry out your role? List all

a) Training Days.
b) Access to Early Years Development Office.
c) Access to Social Service staff.

eetc. family, assumption, portfolio of photographs, etc useful.

Comment
More practical information about psychological services, special needs, support services and social services would have been useful - as I had not worked for years before.
5. Identify any additional support you consider necessary to undertake the role of Mentor Teacher

a) Copy of a newsletter that could be sent to schools of pre school groups.

b) Training for the literacy and numeracy focus.

c) 

c etc

Comment

6. Did the training days support the development of your role?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not at all</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in some areas</td>
<td>2 ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in many areas</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>totally</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment

It was useful to get to know the authority and other Site Mentor Teachers - this helped some way to develop a cohesive role.

7. At the end of the year how confident did you feel about your role as a Mentor Teacher?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>some confidence</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mainly confident</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very confident</td>
<td>4 ✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Give reasons for your choice

As the year developed and relationships were established with the settings I felt that I was of use mostly.
The practicalities of being a Mentor Teacher

8. How did you make contact with your settings?

- [ ] telephone
- [ ] letter
- [x] personal visit
- [ ] other
- [ ]

Tick all that apply

Comment
Telephone called the most useful.

9. How difficult/easy was it to arrange visits to your settings?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>number of settings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

State reasons for the different responses to making those arrangements.

Easy because of my flexibility to be able to arrange visits at the convenience of the settings.
10. How difficult/easy was it to develop good relationships with the settings?

number of settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>difficult</th>
<th>easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Give reasons for the different responses.

- Two difficult ones - class teachers felt my visit was a waste of time and one of private extended day nursery felt really threatened by my visit.

11. If some settings were not receptive to your visits, why was that?

See chart.

12. Identify the activity that you were involved in during your visits?

Visits
1 2 3
☑ ☑ observation
☑ ☑ discussion with nominated Early Years person
☑ ☑ discussion with other staff e.g. Head Teacher/owner/manager
☑ ☑ completion of Contact Form
☑ ☑ reviewing documentation e.g. OFSTED reports/policies/plans
☑ ☑ working with children
☑ ☑ exemplar teaching
☐ ☐ replaced member of staff to allow visits to other settings
☐ ☑ ☑ any other talking to parents
☑ ☑ ☑
☐ ☑

Comment

Varied from setting to setting - most now want to work on just assessment, planning, etc.
13. Was the half-day per term spent in the setting generally:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>too little time</th>
<th>about right</th>
<th>too much time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment: Some settings needed more — others not so much.

14. Identify if any types of setting needed more or less time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Setting</th>
<th>More Time</th>
<th>Less Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reception Classes (LEA)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reception Classes (Independent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery Classes (LEA)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery Classes (Independent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery Schools (LEA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery Schools (private)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgroups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Centres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Day Care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Nurseries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment: Depends very much on the setting and the type of problem: some OFSTED for example!

15. Were you involved in any activity with a setting outside your contracted hours?

☑ yes      ☐ no  If yes, what was the purpose?

- Attending parent groups
- Attending Partnership Meetings
- Observing particular children: SEN
✓ Continuing discussion about visit to the setting
✓ Completion of Contact Forms
✓ Attended Local Partnership Meetings
✓ Invited to attend Local Partnership Meetings, but could not attend
✓ Discussed with settings involvement in Partnership Groups
✓ Addressed parent/staff groups
✓ Liaised with outside agencies on behalf of the setting
✓ Supported the development of staff training programmes
☐ Provided additional resources
☐ Other

Comment
Many settings wanted greater involvement which meant outside contracted hours. I had the time.

Your overall view of the process of being a Mentor Teacher

16. Identify 3 key aspects of the Mentor Teacher work that have most pleased you.

1. "Having had the opportunity to work so closely with the pre-school and the parents for years of excellence."

2. "The restriction that I have the ability to support the variety of early years settings that I visit."

3. "Working as a Mentor Teacher has furthered my own professional development."
17. As a result of your involvement as a Mentor Teacher during the year what are your 3 main concerns about the programme?

1. Not knowing that there was parity of provision.

2. Not enough contact with other Mentor Teachers' opportunities for discussion about our ups and downs.

3. Not having all the information needed in every setting at our fingertips - some settings thought we ought to have that information, therefore we were not too adequate.

18. If you could change one thing to improve the Mentor Teacher programme what would it be?

Increate P/T posts and sec/numpts.

19. How would the change improve the Mentor Teacher programme?

It would allow Mentor Teachers to focus initially on the job of being a Mentor Teacher.

Thank you for your time.

Your response will help us to develop quality in the Mentor Teacher Programme

Please return in the addressed envelope provided to County Hall by Friday 25 June 1999. This can be sent via the 'LEA Bag.'

Jackie Eyles - Researcher
Alison Hitchins - Early Years Development Officer
Appendix 4

Letter to practitioners and Mentor Teachers: the research process and involvement (2000)
Dear Colleague,


With the completion of the second year of the Mentor Teacher Programme there is a need to continue the evaluation of what has taken place. The views of those who have been involved are crucial to an understanding of what has developed and in evaluating the programme.

With this in mind, two follow-up questionnaires have been developed. One is for the Mentor Teachers which will provide evidence of the progress made in defining their role and of the type of activity that has taken place in the settings. The information obtained will help to continue to clarify the Mentor Teachers' role. The second questionnaire is being circulated to the person who has direct contact with the Mentor Teacher and most involvement in the programme within the setting. The information will provide details of the impact of the Mentor Teacher Programme upon the work of the setting. The questionnaire should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

This evaluation is a joint initiative by Jackie Eyles as part of a funded doctoral research programme, and Annette Bryant on behalf of Worcester LEA to develop a Quality Control mechanism for the Mentor Teacher Programme.

Please do not write your name/name of setting on your questionnaire: all returns should be anonymous. Return by Friday 30 June 2000.

Thank you for the time taken to complete the questionnaire. Your views are essential to ensure that the Mentor Teacher Programme fully addresses the needs of the settings.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Eyles - Researcher  Annette Bryant - Primary Inspector
Appendix 5

Mentor Teacher Programme Questionnaire: June 2000 - for practitioners (orange)
Mentor Teacher Programme

Questionnaire

June 2000

The Worcestershire Early Years Development Plan was approved by the DfEE in March 1998. One of the components of the quality section outlined a Mentor Teacher system and how that would operate. The Worcestershire Early Years Partnership appointed Mentor Teachers in response to the requirements laid down by the DfEE. Those requirements included the involvement of a qualified early years teachers in all early years settings. A letter outlining the detail of the Mentor Teacher system was sent to all Primary, First and Independent Schools and Nurseries and Playgroups in April 1998.

With the completion of the first year of the Mentor Teacher programme an evaluation of the programme took place and adjustments were made to work undertaken by the Mentor Teachers in the light of your response. Now at the end of the second year of the programme questionnaires are being circulated to all settings involved - including those who have joined the programme during 1999/2000. One questionnaire is for the Mentor Teacher which will provide information about their work in the settings. The second questionnaire is for the person in the setting who has had most contact with the Mentor Teacher. This will provide information about the impact of the Mentor Teacher programme on the setting. The views of all those who have been involved are crucial to an understanding of how the programme has developed, and its future development. The questionnaire should take approximately 45 minutes to complete. All information will only be used as part of the evaluation of the Mentor Teacher programme and will be CONFIDENTIAL. No individual names or settings will be used at any time. The number on the front cover is for administrative reasons only - so that reminders can be sent to those that have not responded by the return date. The front cover will be removed when the questionnaires are evaluated - the responses, therefore, will be totally anonymous.

All your responses are important as what you have to say will influence the continued development of the Mentor Teacher programme. Please return the completed questionnaire by Friday 30 June 2000.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

Jackie Eyles
Annette Bryant
Mentor Teacher Programme: Questionnaire to Early Years Settings

To be completed by the person who has direct contact with the Mentor Teacher

Type of Setting: please tick

☐ Reception Class (LEA)
☐ Reception Class (Independent)
☐ Nursery Class (LEA)
☐ Nursery Class (Independent)
☐ Nursery School (LEA)
☐ Nursery School (private)
☐ Playgroup
☐ Family Centre
☐ Extended Day Care
☐ Workplace Nursery
☐ Other (name)

Title of position held: e.g. reception class teacher/playgroup leader/supervisor

Title: ..........................................................

Is there a qualified teacher in your setting?

yes ☐ no ☐

Your views about the Mentor Teacher

1. Identify the three main roles of the Mentor Teacher?

1.

2.

3.
2. Ideally what aspects of the work of the Mentor Teacher are essential to support your role?

☐ to advise staff
☐ to support staff
☐ to support the children in the setting
☐ to help develop the curriculum
☐ to help with planning
☐ to help develop assessment procedures
☐ to help in the evaluation of the work of the setting
☐ to support training initiatives
☐ to provide exemplar teaching
☐ to support parents
☐ to liaise with outside agencies (health, social services, etc.)
☐ to provide channels of communication
☐ involvement in local Early Years Partnerships
☐ to disseminate good practice
☐ to support the development of the Early Learning Goals
☐ to support the setting through OFSTED Inspection

_tick all that apply_

_comment_
Your views on the practical aspects of the programme

3. How is contact best made with your setting?

☐ telephone
☐ letter
☐ personal visit
☐ e-mail
☐ other

tick all that apply

comment

4. How easy/difficult is it to arrange Mentor Teacher visits to your setting?

indicate rating with a x

if difficult, what are the difficulties?
5. How easy/difficult has it been to establish a good relationship with your Mentor Teacher?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Indicate rating with a x

Comment

6. Should there be an opportunity to change your Mentor Teacher?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Comment
7. Identify any aspects that have helped you to establish a good working relationship with your Mentor Teacher. If a statement does not apply please leave blank

☐ the Mentor Teacher had the ability to establish a good rapport with the setting
☐ there was a willingness to listen
☐ there was an awareness that communication was a two-way process
☐ visits were guaranteed to take place when arranged
☐ the Mentor Teacher was able to provide clear and positive advice
☐ there was confidence in the Mentor Teacher’s ability to support the setting through knowledge, skills and experience

comment
8. Identify any aspects that have prevented you from establishing a good working relationship with your Mentor Teacher. If a statement does not apply please leave blank.

☐ a clash of personality
☐ the Mentor Teacher was not willing to listen
☐ the Mentor Teacher was not aware that communication is a two-way process
☐ the Mentor Teacher was unable to make herself available to the setting at times acceptable to the setting
☐ visits did not take place as arranged
☐ there was little confidence in the Mentor Teacher’s ability to support the setting
☐ did not believe that the Mentor Teacher had appropriate knowledge, skills and experience
☐ did not provide clear and positive advice
☐ was too judgmental

comment

9. Identify the activity undertaken by the Mentor Teacher during the visits.

☐ observation
☐ discussion with yourself
☐ discussion with other staff e.g. Head Teacher/owner/manager
☐ completion of Contact Form
☐ reviewing documentation e.g. OFSTED reports/policies/plans
☐ working with children
☐ exemplar teaching
☐ providing relevant and current information, including useful contacts
☐ any other

comment
10. Was the half-day a term spent in your setting by the Mentor Teacher generally:

- too little time
- about right
- too much time

□ □ □

comment

11. Was the Mentor Teacher involved with your setting for more than a half day per term?

- yes □
- no □

If yes, was that additional time used for:

- discussion with yourself and staff
- completion of Contact Form
- attending Local Partnership Meetings
- providing relevant and current information, including useful contacts
- discussion with you about involvement in Partnership Groups
- addressing parent/staff groups
- liaising with outside agencies on your behalf
- supporting the development of staff training programmes
- providing additional resources

□ other

□

comment
Your overall view of the Mentor Teacher programme

12. Identify 3 key aspects of your work with the Mentor Teacher that have most pleased you.

1.

2.

3.

13. What, if any, are your main concerns about the Mentor Teacher programme?

1.

2.

3.

14. If you could now change one thing to improve the Mentor Teacher programme what would it be?
15. How would the change improve the Mentor Teacher programme?

Thank you for your time.

Your response will help us to improve the quality of the Mentor Teacher Programme.

Please return in the stamped addressed envelope provided to County Hall if you are a pre-school/private school setting or via the 'bag' if you are a pre-school/school LEA setting by Friday 30 June 2000.

Jackie Eyles - Researcher
Annette Bryant - Primary Inspector
Appendix 6

Mentor Teacher Programme Questionnaire: June 2000 - for Mentor Teachers (blue)
Mentor Teacher Programme

Questionnaire

June 2000

The Worcestershire Early Years Development Plan was approved by the DfEE in March 1998. One of the components of the quality section outlined a Mentor Teacher system and how that would operate. The Worcestershire Early Years Partnership appointed Mentor Teachers in response to the requirements laid down by the DfEE. Those requirements included the involvement of a qualified early years teachers in all early years settings. A letter outlining the detail of the Mentor Teacher system was sent to all Primary, First and Independent Schools and Nurseries and Playgroups in April 1998.

With the completion of the first year of the Mentor Teacher programme there is now a need to evaluate what has taken place. The views of all those that have been involved are crucial to an understanding of what has happened and in evaluating the programme. Two questionnaires have been developed. One is for the Mentor Teacher which will provide information about their work in the settings. The second questionnaire is for the person in the setting who has most contact with the Mentor Teacher. This will provide information about the impact of the Mentor Teacher programme on the setting. The questionnaire should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. All information will only be used as part of the evaluation of the Mentor Teacher programme and will be CONFIDENTIAL. No individual names or settings will be used at any time.

All your responses are important as what you have to say will influence the development of the Mentor Teacher programme. Please return the completed questionnaire by Friday 25 June 1999.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

Jackie Eyles
Alison Hitchins
Mentor Teacher Questionnaire


Personal views on the role of the Mentor Teacher

1. How confident do you now feel to undertake the role of Mentor Teacher?

   not confident  confident in some areas  confident  very confident

   1 □  2 □  3 □  4 □

   comment

2. Are you now clear about the role of the Mentor Teacher?

   not at all  some aspects  most aspects  totally

   1 □  2 □  3 □  4 □

   comment
Your views on carrying out the role of Mentor Teacher

3. Identify aspects of the job that you now feel necessary to fulfil the role of the Mentor Teacher.

☐ Advise staff
☐ Support staff
☐ Support children
☐ Develop curriculum
☐ Planning
☐ Assessment
☐ Evaluation
☐ Training support
☐ Communication
☐ Exemplar teaching
☐ Support for parents
☐ Liaise with other agencies (health, SEN, etc)
☐ Other (list all)

Comment

4. Has the role changed over the last two years?

   yes ☐    no ☐

If yes, how has it changed?
5. What support have you been given to develop your role?

a)

b)

c)

eetc

comment

6. Identify any additional support you consider necessary to undertake the role of Mentor Teacher

a)

b)

c)

comment
7. Have the training days supported the development of your role?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>not at all</th>
<th>in some areas</th>
<th>in many areas</th>
<th>totally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Give reasons for your choice

The practicalities of being a Mentor Teacher

8. How do you make contact with your settings?

- telephone
- letter
- personal visit
- e-mail
- other

Tick all that apply

Comment
9. How difficult/easy is it now to arrange visits to your settings?

number of settings

difficult □ □
easy □ □

Why was it difficult/easy to make those arrangements?

10. How difficult/easy has it been to develop good relationships with the settings?

number of settings

difficult □ □
easy □ □

Give reasons for the different responses.

11. If some settings are still not receptive to your visits, why is that?
12. Would you like the opportunity for another Mentor Teacher to take over some of your settings?

yes ☐ no ☐

If yes, why?

☐ work overload
☐ personality clash
☐ poor relationships
☐ do not have empathy with the setting
☐ other
☐

13. Identify the activity that you have been involved in during visits.

Visits 1999/2000

1 2 3

☐ ☐ ☐ observation
☐ ☐ ☐ discussion with nominated Early Years person
☐ ☐ ☐ discussion with other staff e.g. Head Teacher/owner/manager
☐ ☐ ☐ completion of Contact Form
☐ ☐ ☐ reviewing documentation e.g. OFSTED reports/policies/plans
☐ ☐ ☐ working with children
☐ ☐ ☐ exemplar teaching
☐ ☐ ☐ providing relevant and current information, including contacts
☐ ☐ ☐ other
☐ ☐ ☐

comment
14. Has the half-day per term spent in the setting generally:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>too little time</th>
<th>about right</th>
<th>too much time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*comment*

15. Identify if any types of setting needed more or less time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>more time</th>
<th>less time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reception Classes (LEA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reception Classes (Independent)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery Classes (LEA)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Nursery Schools (LEA)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery Schools (private)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgroups</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Centres</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Day Care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Nurseries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*comment*
16. Have you been involved in any activity with a setting outside your contracted hours?

☐ yes ☐ no  If yes, what was the purpose?

☐ continuing discussion about visit to the setting
☐ completion of Contact Forms
☐ attended Local Partnership Meetings
☐ provided relevant and current information, including useful contacts
☐ discussed with settings involvement in Partnership Groups
☐ addressed parent/staff groups
☐ liaised with outside agencies on behalf of the setting
☐ supported the development of staff training programmes
☐ provided additional resources
☐ other

comment

Your overall view of the process of being a Mentor Teacher

17. Identify 3 key aspects of the Mentor Teacher work that have most pleased you.

1.

2.

3.
18. As a result of your involvement as a Mentor Teacher during the last two years what are your 3 main concerns about the programme?

1. 

2. 

3. 

19. If you could change one thing to improve the Mentor Teacher programme what would it be?

20. How would the change improve the Mentor Teacher programme?

Thank you for your time.

Your response will help us to develop quality in the Mentor Teacher Programme

Please return in the addressed envelope provided to County Hall by Friday 30 June 2000. If you are school based please send it via the LEA ‘bag.’

Jackie Eyles - Researcher
Annette Bryant - Primary Inspector
Appendix 7

Interviews - questions for practitioners in Early Years settings
Questions for practitioners in Early Years settings

The role of the Mentor Teacher

- understanding the role
- does that role match with the needs of the settings
- have changes taken place over the last two years - all aspects

Support for settings

- has the nature of the support been clearly identified
- is it necessary

Working with the Mentor Teacher

- activity
- relationships
- time
- development

View of the last two years involvement

- positive aspects
- concerns
- way forward

Possible outcomes

- develop a taxonomy/framework for developing good practice in the Early Years - linked to the Foundation Stage and Early Learning Goals
- basis for professional development for practitioners
Appendix 8

Interviews - questions for Mentor Teachers
Questions for Mentor Teachers

The role of the Mentor Teacher

- understanding the role
- confidence in undertaking the role
- have changes taken place over the last two years - all aspects

Support for Mentor Teachers

- function of the support
- is it necessary

Working with practitioners in Early Years settings

- activity
- relationships
- time
- response from the variety of settings - the differences

View of the last two years involvement

- positive aspects
- concerns
- way forward

Possible outcomes

- develop a taxonomy/characteristics for Mentor Teachers to develop an effective role
- basis for developing training needs of Mentor Teachers