

Giving something back

As their training draws to a close, a group of trainees reflect on their experiences, highlighting both the positives of Early Years Initial Teacher Training, and the challenges and opportunities for the future.



Maureen Lee

is director of Early Years at Best Practice Network draws on the experiences of trainees and reflects on the positives of EYITT and the challenges and opportunities for the future

SEPTEMBER 2014 saw the first trainees join newly established Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT) programmes across England. EYITT was intended to build on the Early Years Teacher Status programme that had operated the previous year and on the Early Years Professional Status graduate leadership programmes that had been so successful (and popular) since 2007.

Best Practice Network is fortunate to have established positive partnerships with six ITT providers, which has brought great benefits to our trainee Early Years Teachers. We offer a strong track record in early years and graduate leadership training, a first class virtual learning environment and learning platform supported by highly successful experience in preparing highly effective teachers.

The EYITT trainees are now fast approaching the end of their training year. Despite the pressure of finalising their portfolios and completing placements, they have been reflecting on the EYITT journey they have followed and where they perceive they will be once they have achieved their goal of Early Years Teacher Status.

Jessica Bifani

Jessica Bifani from Chagford in Devon sees studying for Early Years Teacher Status as a very positive learning curve – one that improves her daily practice and offers future job security and mobility. Jessica is an employment-based trainee with Best Practice Network/Bath Spa University.

‘I work in a Foundation Stage unit with an amazing team. They have been truly supportive of me engaging with the EYITT programme, whether covering for me to attend face-to-face training days or offering advice, guidance or ideas, which always feed into my improved practice. I have learnt so much from everyone.

‘I am thoroughly enjoying the challenge. As a single, working mother of three children under seven-years-old, life was pretty full already and I am not quite sure where the extra time has come from. But I am a student at heart. I love to learn and like nothing better than to get my teeth into new books and new ideas to bring into my setting.

‘As such, I know I am progressing, but still voice concerns at work about not knowing how to evidence the standards. My amazing team always tell me that I do these things every day without

even thinking about it and so, with this support, I am realising that I do. For me, achieving Early Years Teacher Status is about giving something back. Engaging with current theory and legislation puts perspective on the huge impact we have. Having the opportunity to meet with like-minded people from a variety of backgrounds provides new ideas, enthusiasm for the profession and tremendous support.

‘I know that I have found my niche in the early years. These children keep me on my toes, keep me engaged, keep me learning and thinking and open my eyes to see the wonders of their world every day.’

Amy Gilder

Amy Gilder is an employment-based trainee based in Melksham, Wiltshire. After graduating last summer, she secured a job in River Mead School’s foundation unit and at the same time accepted a place on Bath Spa University’s Graduate Employed Based Route. Amy is confident in the pedagogy that will define her as an Early Years Teacher.

‘EYITT has been such a crazy year, but in completely positive way. I have learnt so much about early years and child development but most importantly about my own values, beliefs and the pedagogy that will define me for years to come. Studying on the EYITT programme, taking on more responsibility and working in a setting full-time meant there were challenges that took a while to overcome. Like most people, I found it difficult getting the balance right between work, study and rest. I also faced many new workplace challenges where I had to stand firmly on my own two feet.

‘Luckily, I have felt completely supported by my academic tutor and work place mentor. I also have the perfect opportunity to develop constantly on the job, trying new ideas with the children and developing setting practice, for example, the way that data is collected on the children. The placements in other settings have also been a huge support to my development, working with different age groups and learning from different professionals.

‘When I think ahead to being an Early Years Teacher, I feel confident. I know the pedagogy I wish to develop and what I believe is right. I feel very positive about what the future holds and how I can inspire others. And I also feel very proud of what I have achieved in this one crazy year where all the hard work has definitely been worth it.’

Natalie Sahayek

Natalie Sahayek lives and works in London and came into early years from the interior design industry. She has a BSc and MSc in management and a very strong commitment to her new career with nursery-age children. Natalie is training through the Best Practice Network/SCITTELS partnership.

‘After part-time work in several nurseries, I have been working full-time for the past year at a nursery in central London. I knew I wanted to improve my qualifications so I set out to achieve Early Years Teacher Status. I was motivated to do this because I was fascinated by and wanted to learn the theory behind childhood development. I am very passionate about doing the very best I can for the young children in my care and the more I know and understand about how they learn and grow, the better I will be able to support their development emotionally, intellectually, physically and socially.

‘I am pleased to say that at this stage of the EYITT programme I am quite certain about what is expected of me and the standard required of me. To extend my experience beyond my own setting, I have undertaken placements with babies and also in a school, for experience with reception and key stages 1 and 2. Both placements were extremely valuable and have had a huge impact on me.

‘I feel have established a good method of self-reflection from writing my learning journal accounts. We also build up an e-portfolio of documents as part of our evidence that we are demonstrating the Teachers’ Standards (Early Years). I am pleased to say that I can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel!

‘Another big plus is that I have really enjoyed meeting all the different personalities, children, practitioners, other trainees and the tutors. I feel I have really progressed in my knowledge and practice since starting both my new job and EYITT. The most rewarding part has definitely been the relationships I have built and the experiences we have shared along the way.

‘My mentors in my own setting and my placement have been readily available if I have needed anything, from obtaining policies and other information to providing feedback and opportunities to improve my teaching. My tutors have been so supportive in observing me and feeding back my strengths and any areas for improvement and responding to me should I have any questions or concerns.

‘The training sessions have been a great way to stay up-to-date with knowledge, the other trainees and tutors, and to take my learning forward. It really feels like we are all part of a strong team and I could not ask for more than that.’

Joe Brown, programme leader

Joe Brown, Bath Spa University’s EYITT programme leader works closely with the trainees and has an excellent understanding of their individualised



Natalie helping a child experiment with cornflour during one of her placements

learning journeys. ‘As programme leader, I recognise the opportunity the programme offers to develop reflective early years leaders who are well-versed in the principles and values of up-to-date professional practice. In particular, the birth-to-five scope of the programme offers the potential for the sector to create a specialised role and identity for Early Years Teachers, distinct from other teacher training programmes.

‘EYITT expects trainees’ engagement in a wide range of professional reading and discussions, which has been very successful in supporting the ongoing development of personal pedagogical positions and values, which they then use to develop practice in their settings. Working with mentors and academic tutors to continually set and reflect on developmental targets has set a culture of structured critical reflection, enabling the trainees to question their own and others’ practice and, again, leading to some significant improvements in their settings.

‘There have been challenges too as, even with funding in place, employment-based trainees can



photo © Natalie Sehayek

Gaining teacher status is a challenge but the learning journey can be rewarding

find it difficult to negotiate time away from their work setting to attend placements, Some trainees have also found particular elements of the standards difficult to evidence, for example, leading other practitioners has been particularly difficult for a trainee based in a school. However, feedback from the trainees has been overwhelmingly positive, with

Key points

- EYITT is proving to have a wide and positive impact on settings
- Essential understanding includes critical reflection, questioning, challenge and developing own pedagogical understanding
- EYITT trainees value (and need) support and time from setting mentors and colleagues
- Achieving Early Years Teacher Status is a challenge worth working for and a way of giving something back

many stating that their confidence and knowledge has increased and their practice developed.

‘As EYITT develops, I hope it can support greater numbers of both experienced practitioners and those new to early years to enact change and improvement, which can benefit the whole sector.’

To conclude, two more trainees give an insight into their own learning journeys and the impact they feel they are now having. First Jayne Byers, a childminder, who has moved firmly into the educator role.

Jane Byers

‘I think the children in my care have definitely benefited from me being on the EYITT programme. As a childminder, I had previously seen myself as more of a nurturer than an educator, but since starting EYITT, in planning learning across the foundation stage, I now look for the learning opportunity in everyday activities. A recent trip to the car wash turned into a very rich learning experience that the children were really excited about.’

Tija Mason

Tija Mason talks of her improved confidence and renewed passion for the job.

‘Since starting EYITT I have gained so much more confidence through good support and positive recognition for my hard work. I feel I have also gained more respect from parents and colleagues and the children benefit from my growing network where I can share ideas to improve my practice.’

‘EYITT has made me more passionate again about working with the children and has enabled me to both learn more and to reflect on previous learning. I am now confident to stretch myself to make sure I meet all the requirements for achieving Early Years Teacher Status.’

Conclusion

It is very clear to everyone that EYITT requires focus, commitment and determination. For those on employment-based routes, often working full-time, EYITT is a challenging balancing act and for new entrants to the profession, a very steep learning curve. But with clear guidance, high quality training, individualised support and regular encouragement our trainees this year have proved they can get there – they are an incredibly determined and talented bunch.

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Useful resources

- Maureen can be contacted on Maureen.lee@bestpracticenetwork.co.uk
- You can find out more about the BPN EYITT courses here: www.bestpracticenetwork.co.uk/eyitt
- To find out more about Bath Spa’s EYITT course, visit: www.bathspa.ac.uk/schools/education/courses/initial-teacher-education/eyts