

Sue Palmer: On the road



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The law is an ass

Well, as of September, the EYFS is on the statute book. From now on, anyone looking after children from birth to five outside their home *must* abide by Government regulations. It's the law.

It doesn't matter that the Government's own advisers have expressed concern about aspects of the EYFS. Or that two of its 'literacy goals' have been universally condemned (and are already up for review). Or that, in the light of recent neuroscientific findings, there's widespread concern about the ICT goals. It doesn't matter that parents, childminders, playgroup leaders, nursery nurses and teachers are worried about inflicting a one-size-fits-all, highly bureaucratic model on children under five. It's the law.

At the end of last term I did a day's workshop on Detoxing Childhood for childcare workers. During the morning session, discussion turned to the EYFS and I expressed my opinion. At lunchtime, I was taken aside by one of the organisers (local authority advisers) and told these opinions were unacceptable. I mustn't express them again. It's the law.

I explained to the adviser that it might be the law, but personally I think this law is an ass. And then, in the afternoon session, I buttoned my lips because I have to earn a living. Is this what everyone else is doing?

Too much, too soon

If you've got a minute, do look for 'Too Much Too Soon' on www.youtube.com – amid all the pop videos there's a short film about the EYFS, featuring Penelope Leach, Margaret Edgington and many others, explaining exactly why this particular law is an ass!



Viva Vygotsky!

It's 25 years since I stumbled across a book in Manchester University library called *Thought and Language* by the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. It knocked me out, and I've been a dedicated disciple ever since. My work on 'skeleton' frameworks for cross-curricular writing was pure Vygotsky.

At around the same time, a teacher in Moscow called Galina Dolya was also discovering Vygotsky. His writings, banned for many decades, were reissued in the new dawn of perestroika. Galina remembers exciting seminars at the university – when people would stay up all night talking about his ideas. She started working with a group of Vygotskian scholars, developing classroom practice based on the theories.

Since then, she's come to England, opened a nursery (I visited to see Vygotskian teaching in action and was knocked out again), and produced – along with the Moscow University researchers – a complete developmental learning programme for three- to seven-year-olds. Her book about it, *Key to Learning: the technology of child development* (GDH publishing, ISBN 9781906453008) is available by calling 01582 831 360 or emailing keytolearning@fsmail.net. It's brilliant.

Vygotsky bluffers' guide

- Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) was a Russian teacher and psychologist whose brilliant writings were suppressed by the Communist authorities. Rediscovered long after his death, he became one of the most influential educational thinkers of all time.
- Vygotsky explained that education isn't just about imparting knowledge and skills, but developing children's learning abilities – the ability to think clearly and creatively, plan and implement plans, and communicate understanding clearly.

We do this by giving them a set of cultural tools, including symbols, maps, plans, numbers, musical notation, charts, models, pictures and, above all, language and literacy.

- The essence of teaching is finding a child's zone of proximal development (ZPD), where they can succeed *with guidance* at tasks they couldn't cope with alone. (NOTE: This is not the same as giving them a target!)