

# Learning, Playing and Interacting

Good practice in the Early Years  
Foundation Stage

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# Introduction

## Learning, playing, children and adults

Babies and young children are powerful learners, reaching out into the world and making sense of their experiences with other people, objects and events. As they explore and learn, children are naturally drawn to play. Play is recognised as so important to their well-being and development that the right to play is set down in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and play is a fundamental commitment within the Early Years Foundation Stage.

How play and learning are related, however, is not as straightforward as it may seem at first glance. There is a significant body of knowledge showing that many forms of play help children to learn and to become confident learners for the future. Research also shows that a skilled adult who interacts with children in particular ways to enhance their learning is a crucial ingredient in children making good progress.

It may not always be clear how these two elements work together – how play sits at the centre of Early Years provision, and how it relates to the role of the skilful practitioner. Many questions and uncertainties arise as practitioners consider the best approaches to play and learning for young children.

- What does 'learning through play' actually mean, and what is the adult role in this?
- Should children's free play be unrestricted (within the bounds of safety), with the adult simply observing, either to document learning or to plan further learning experiences?
- Should play opportunities be structured, with learning intentions defined by adults? Is it 'play' if adults have designed the activities?
- How much time should children spend playing?
- What about other learning opportunities – what is the adult's role in helping children to learn in other ways?
- How can adult-led activities involve playful teaching and playful learning?

This guidance addresses these questions and clarifies the role of adults who support and enhance young children's learning. Early Years practitioners do this by selecting from a range of strategies, matching what they do to the needs of the children and identifying the best way for them to learn at that time. These decisions are made hundreds of times each day, and are rooted in an understanding of how children learn and the nature of play and playfulness, and in knowledge of the areas of learning and development and a repertoire of effective strategies – in other words, in early years pedagogy.

This publication reflects the guidance contained within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) materials and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) Handbook. As well as demonstrating how pedagogy, provision and assessment are interwoven, it aims to help practitioners understand how evidence about children's attainment can be drawn from a wide range of contexts including child-initiated and adult-led activities, particularly clarifying how this supports completion of the EYFSP in reception.

# Thinking about pedagogy

Being an effective adult in helping children to learn involves being both skilful and thoughtful. Many Early Years practitioners shy away from using the word ‘teaching’ to describe their work with children, perhaps because of the perception that teaching implies a particular ‘top-down’ or formal way of working with children. In fact, teaching is much broader and more subtle than that, and covers the many different ways in which adults help children to learn. The more we are aware of our practices – what we do, why we do it, its impact on children and their learning – and the more we reflect, learn and develop our practice, the more effective we will be. This is developing our pedagogy.

Pedagogy is the understanding of how children learn and develop, and the practices through which we can enhance that process. It is rooted in values and beliefs about what we want for children, and supported by knowledge, theory and experience.

From Stewart, N. and Pugh, R. (2007) *Early Years Vision in Focus, Part 2: Exploring Pedagogy*, ©Shropshire County Council. Used with kind permission.

Pedagogy covers many things that practitioners believe and know, and all the interactions they have with children, families and caregivers. The themes and commitments of the EYFS provide guidance across broad elements of pedagogy, including child development, working in partnership with parents, the importance of relationships, understanding the areas of learning, play, and establishing secure emotional and challenging physical environments.

## Find out more

The EYFS materials, including the Principles into Practice cards, CD-ROM, and Practice guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage, contain further guidance across these areas which are essential to effective pedagogy.

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for ‘Early Years’.

This publication focuses on one part of the larger picture – the adult’s role in supporting, stimulating and extending learning through supporting and initiating experiences, and interacting skilfully with children in play and planned activities.

## Playful approaches and successful outcomes

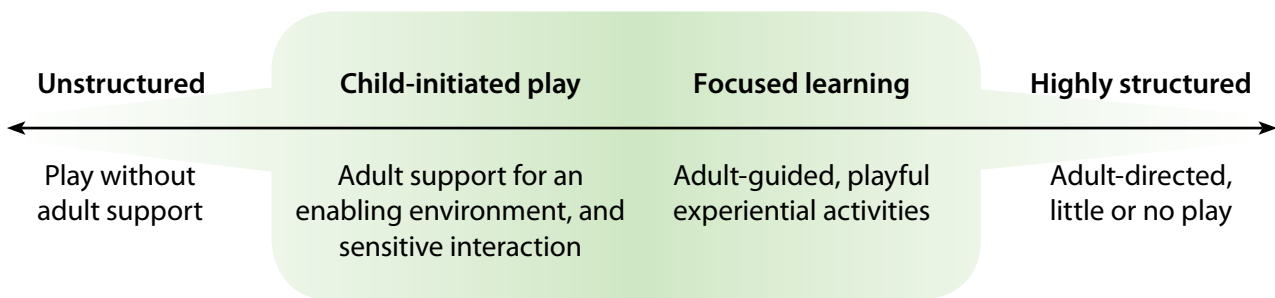
For babies and very young children, few would question the central role of play and exploration within close, respectful relationships to support early development. At these youngest stages throughout all activities – from changing nappies to walking to the shops – practitioners should also focus on their crucial role in interacting sensitively and skilfully to support and enhance learning.

Practitioners with children of nursery and reception age sometimes feel uncertain about providing an appropriate combination of child-initiated and adult-led activities, and balancing open-ended play and exploration and direct teaching in adult-led activities. The EYFS and the Early Learning Goals (ELGs), however, provide sufficient flexibility for practitioners to follow children’s interests, respond to their ideas for developing play activities, and provide structured activities (which can also be playful) to teach specific knowledge and skills.

Research on successful outcomes of Early Years provision – both in the short term and for later success in school and as adults – has pointed to some general guidelines. The best outcomes for children’s learning occur where most of the activity within a child’s day is a mixture of:

- child-initiated play, actively supported by adults
- focused learning, with adults guiding the learning through playful, rich experiential activities.

This can be illustrated as a continuum of approaches as seen below.



At one end, too little adult support can limit learning. While play without adults can be rich and purposeful, at times it can become chaotic or repetitive activity which is ‘hands-on, brains-off’. At the other end of the scale, too much tightly directed activity deprives children of the opportunity to engage actively with learning. Effective Early Years practitioners will organise the time, space and activities in the daily routine to reflect the overall combination which best supports children’s well-being and learning.

As part of this general emphasis on combining child-initiated play and playful adult-led opportunities, confident and reflective practitioners will select the approach that is best for the developmental stage of the children, and for individuals and groups. For example, within a whole day it may be that a period of free play without adult involvement meets a child’s need for space, independence and relaxation. This may apply particularly in an out-of-school club, for example, or for children attending settings for full days. On the other hand, short sessions of carefully planned, structured activity can be useful in teaching specific skills, for example benefiting children with identified special educational needs, building vocabulary for children learning English as an additional language or demonstrating how to use tools or equipment.

# Learning

## How children learn

Knowing how children learn and develop is the bedrock of professional knowledge for confident Early Years practitioners, and supports them in making decisions about provision, practice and adults' roles, which are then adjusted in the light of understanding specific children in the setting.

### Messages from brain research

Neuroscientists study how the human brain develops and functions, and how human minds are formed. Their research shows that children are highly motivated, intelligent learners, who actively seek interactions with the people around them – from the earliest gaze of infants towards their caregivers, to the confident child who asks 'Will you come and play with me?' Children have 'built-in' exploratory tendencies, and engage all their senses to investigate and master tools and resources, to develop their skills, and to build their knowledge and understanding of the world. The freedom to combine resources in many different ways may be especially important for flexible cognitive development, by enabling children to build pathways for thinking and learning, and to make connections across areas of experience.

Theories of learning and development agree with these perspectives from brain research. Learning is both individual and social. Young children are not passive learners – they enjoy participating in 'hands-on' and 'brains-on' activities. They actively drive their own learning and development, by the choices they make, the interests they develop, the questions they ask, the knowledge they seek, and their motivation to act more competently. Children's choices and interests are the driving force for building knowledge, skills and understanding: by working and playing with other people, they are constantly learning about themselves and their social and cultural worlds. Children build positive identities through collaborative, caring relationships with other people, by managing and taking risks, 'having a go', experiencing success, developing resilience, and developing 'mastery' or 'can-do' attitudes. High-quality provision helps children to develop positive dispositions which lay the foundations for becoming lifelong successful learners.

Practitioners have a key role in building the right conditions for learning. Firstly and fundamentally, adults ensure that children feel known and valued as individuals, safe and cared for. Their own rate of development is respected, so that children are not rushed but are supported in ways that are right for each child. Children's time must be managed so that they have the opportunity to become deeply involved in their activities and to follow their ideas through, including returning later to continue their explorations or creative expressions. Adults manage the pace of activities, planning varied and interesting new experiences to stimulate learning alongside opportunities for children to revisit, practise or enjoy a sense of mastery. With this groundwork in place, it is then the adult's skilled interactions which will move learning forward.



## Practitioners build conditions for learning across the EYFS themes

A Unique Child	Positive Relationships	Enabling Environments	Learning and Development
<p>Children develop at different rates, have different interests, come from varied cultural backgrounds and unique families</p> <p><b>Practitioners</b> Ensure provision reflects and supports all children</p>	<p>Respectful and caring interactions are the basis of emotional security which supports learning</p> <p><b>Practitioners</b> Give priority to a key person, and respect feelings and opinions</p>	<p>Children need time, space and materials to play, investigate and explore</p> <p><b>Practitioners</b> Observe, then organise spaces, materials and the flow of the day</p>	<p>Experiences offer stimulating opportunities to explore, be active, and think creatively</p> <p><b>Practitioners</b> Ensure challenging opportunities across all six areas of learning</p>

### Find out more

Social and Emotional Aspects of Development (SEAD)

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Development: Guidance for EYFS practitioners'.

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# How children learn

## EYFS Framework

Children are competent learners from birth and develop and learn in a wide variety of ways.

**EYFS Statutory Framework, Learning and Development Requirements 2.2**

Play underpins all development and learning for young children.

**EYFS Practice Guidance 1.17**

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## What are the key ways that young children learn?

- **playing**

Playing – indoors and out, alone and with others, quietly or boisterously – allows children to find out about things, try out and practise ideas and skills, take risks, explore their feelings, learn from mistakes, be in control and think imaginatively. Playing is an important centre of learning for young children.

- **being with other people**

As well as developing emotional security and social skills, being with other people – other children and adults – stimulates ideas and involvement that move learning forward.

- **being active**

Young children need to move, and learn and remember things by taking experiences in through the senses as they move. Sitting still for too long can disrupt learning.

- **exploring new things and experiences**

Children's deep curiosity leads them to use all their senses to explore in real hands-on activities, and then put the information together in their own minds to form ideas and make sense of the world.

- **talking to themselves**

In 'self-speech' children use out-loud thinking to clarify their thoughts, regulate their activities, take on imaginative roles and rehearse their skills.

- **communicating about what they are doing with someone who responds to their ideas**

Even before they can talk in words, children are keen to share their ideas through sounds, gesture and body language. Talk helps children to understand what they experience. It is important that they have a chance to express their own ideas, as well as have conversations to hear other people's ideas, extend their thinking, and use language about learning.

- **representing ideas and experiences**

Children deepen their understanding as they recreate experiences or communicate their thinking in many different ways – in role-play or small world play, pictures, movements, models, and talk.

- **meeting physical and mental challenges**

Working out what to do, trying hard, persevering with problems, finding out and thinking for themselves are opportunities for developing real understanding. These challenges may occur in play, or in real-life or planned activities.

- **being shown how to do things**

Children learn skills by watching others or being shown how to do something. Adults or peers may directly instruct, model, guide or demonstrate.

- **practising, repeating, applying skills**

Rehearsing skills in similar tasks or new contexts helps children to build mastery, to enjoy their own expertise, and to consolidate what they can do.

- **having fun**

There is no place for dull, repetitive activities. Laughter, fun, and enjoyment, sometimes being whimsical and nonsensical, are the best contexts for learning. Activities can be playful even when they are not actually play.

# Learning and teaching through play

## EYFS Statutory Framework

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

### Learning and Development Requirements 2.5

Learning through play is one of the key principles of Early Years education, which is supported by a wealth of research. Play and playfulness are shared across all cultural groups, but with some variations according to the beliefs and customs that influence child-rearing practices. Family members and caregivers typically play with their children, and they devote a great deal of time to helping children to learn by teaching them:

- how to play, through structured games such as peek-a-boo, and open-ended activities such as sand and water play;
- how to pretend, by being imaginative, acting different roles, making one thing stand for something else;
- how to be playful, by demonstrating playful ways of interacting with others through humour, gentle teasing, jokes, mimicry, riddles and rhymes, singing and chanting, clapping games, and using materials and resources in imaginative ways.

In high-quality Early Years settings, children have opportunities to play as well as to experience a wide variety of adult-led and child-initiated activities. Practitioners build on children's home-based knowledge and experiences, and provide opportunities for progression, extension and challenge. These activities can also successfully build on the child's innate joy in play.

Ideas of play, child-initiated and adult-led activities overlap and it is useful to be clear about what is meant by these terms, how they can work together to support learning, and the adult's role in each.

**Play** is freely chosen by the child, and is under the control of the child. The child decides how to play, how long to sustain the play, what the play is about, and who to play with. There are many forms of play, but it is usually highly creative, open-ended and imaginative. It requires active engagement of the players, and can be deeply satisfying.

**Play engages children's bodies, minds and emotions. In playing children can learn to interact with others and be part of a community, to experience and manage feelings, and to be in control and confident about themselves and their abilities.**

**Play can help children to develop these positive dispositions for learning:**

- **finding an interest**
- **being willing to explore, experiment and try things out**
- **knowing how and where to seek help**
- **being inventive – creating problems, and finding solutions**
- **being flexible – testing and refining solutions**

- **being engaged and involved – concentrating, sustaining interest, persevering with a task, even when it is challenging**
- **making choices and decisions**
- **making plans and knowing how to carry them out**
- **playing and working collaboratively with peers and adults**
- **managing self, managing others**
- **developing ‘can-do’ orientations to learning**
- **being resilient – finding alternative strategies if things don’t always go as planned**
- **understanding the perspectives and emotions of other people.**

There are many forms of play that support the EYFS areas of learning and development. **Construction play**, for example, involves spatial and mathematical knowledge, problem-solving and reasoning. **Exploratory play** with natural and man-made resources builds knowledge and understanding of materials and their properties, and develops manipulative skills. Learning across all areas of the EYFS can be seen by practitioners who observe children’s play.

As children develop as players, **the ability to pretend** has special significance for children as learners. When a small child begins to pretend that one object stands for something else – such as a toy cow ‘eating’ the toy bricks – a key ability is being formed. The child is beginning to understand the idea of symbols, which eventually leads to being able to think in abstract ways. In time the child will be able to use words and images (marks, drawings, and symbols) to express ideas, predict or solve problems, instead of having always to rely on trial and error with physical objects. This supports the child’s development as a flexible, creative thinker.

**Role-play** involves the next development of this imaginative play, where a child is able to ‘become’ someone or something else. In taking on a role a child sees how it feels to have another point of view, and learns that the world looks different to different people. This brings the realisation that we all think, including the child, and this awareness of being a thinker and a learner is one of the strongest supports for successful learning. Children become more aware of their own mind, and that they can think of different strategies to try when faced with a task or a problem.

Practitioners cannot plan children’s play, because this would work against the choice and control that are central features of play. Practitioners can and should plan for children’s play, however, by creating high-quality learning environments, and ensuring uninterrupted periods for children to develop their play.

### *Find out more*

EYFS Themes and Commitments

- Enabling Environments: The Learning Environment 3.3
- Learning and Development: Play and Exploration 4.1, Active Learning 4.2

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for ‘Early Years’.

Every Child a Talker: Guidance for Early Language Lead Practitioners (includes audits on the environment and routines)

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for ‘Every Child a Talker: Guidance for Early Language Lead Practitioners’.

The adult is an interested observer of play, finding out about the individual children and the community that is created through play. The adult should seek to discover what children are interested in, know and can do in order to support their learning more effectively. Children’s achievements across all areas

of learning can be recognised through observing play. The skilful practitioner will also be alert to opportunities to join in the play sensitively and appropriately, in order to enhance the play and learning. Supporting children's language as they play, by describing what children are doing or commenting on current actions, is a prime way in which practitioners help children to learn through their play. At times the adult will support children in developing their abilities to play, perhaps through modelling how to pretend, or ensuring that children with specific educational needs are supported in how to participate in play opportunities.

### **Find out more**

EYFS Themes and Commitments

A Unique Child: Inclusive Practice 1.2

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for 'Early Years'.

Inclusion Development Programme

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for 'Inclusion Development Programme'.

**Child-initiated activity** has many characteristics in common with play, as it is wholly decided upon by the child, based on the child's own motivation, and remains under the child's control. It may involve play of many types, or it may be seen by the child as an activity with a serious purpose to explore a project or express an idea which the child may not see as pure play. It is guided by certain expectations within an Early Years setting regarding responsible use of space, time and purposes.

Practitioners are aware that child-initiated activity is a powerful opportunity for learning, and make the most of this. Practitioners:

- maintain their focus on learning, and actively use a range of strategies to support and extend learning through engagement with the children – including introducing new words and new ideas, thinking out loud, modelling more complex ways of speaking, posing new problems, encouraging negotiation of conflicts, explaining, or demonstrating approaches
- offer assistance and support as needed to help children to be successful in following their ideas, including talking about or suggesting strategies, and practical support such as holding an object in place as the child works with it
- ensure that the learning environment offers a range of stimulating open-ended materials, outdoors and indoors, which children can use and combine in their own way to meet their own purposes
- ensure that children have sustained time to develop their activities
- encourage children to use the language of learning as they make their plans and carry out and review their activities, talking about things such as 'I remembered, I tried, we found out, we know, I can, we thought, we solved the problem.'
- use a problem-solving approach to resolving conflicts or behavioural issues, helping children to be aware of others' points of view and thinking together to agree on a solution
- observe children's activities carefully, trying to discover what the child is thinking about and learning and the goals of the play, so they can accurately support and extend the child's learning focus either at the time, or later by changes to the environment or in planned activities.

**Adult-led activities** are those which adults initiate. The activities are not play, and children are likely not to see them as play, but they should be **playful** – with activities presented to children which are as open-ended as possible, with elements of imagination and active exploration that will increase the interest and motivation for children. As well as focused activities with groups of children, adult-led activities can include greeting times, story times, songs and even tidying up.

Practitioners plan adult-led activities with awareness of the children in the setting and of their responsibility to support children's progress in all areas of learning. They will build on what children know and can do, and often draw on interests and use materials or themes observed in child-initiated activities. As with child-initiated activities, the practitioner actively uses a range of effective interaction strategies to support learning in the adult-led context.

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# Playful learning and playful teaching

Through all activities in the Early Years setting, a playful approach supports learning because:

- playful children use and apply their knowledge, skills and understanding in different ways and in different contexts
- playful practitioners use many different approaches to engaging children in activities that help them to learn and to develop positive dispositions for learning.

Children are strongly motivated to play, and can experience satisfaction and deep learning in play, as they bring their current interests, questions and thinking together with strong motivation, so that they are able to function at their highest level. In play children can concentrate deeply, sustain concentration for long periods, and communicate with others to develop and maintain the play. Playful practitioners are able to engage with children in their play, and to use characteristics of play in other activities as well.

## Practitioners participating in play

Practitioners often have difficulties knowing when and how to interact in children's self-initiated play. They often make the mistake of going into a play activity with lots of questions, and may try to take on a role that does not flow easily into the play – one practitioner described this as 'going in with your size tens and flattening the play'. Children like playing with adults, however, and actively seek adults as co-players. A guiding principle is to do what young children do when they are learning to be good players – they often stand at the edges of play and watch what is happening. They may be observing strategies for entering the play, trying to understand the rules of the play, or thinking about what they can offer. Sometimes they ask permission to enter – 'Please can I play?' – and sometimes they wait to be asked. Children seem to know intuitively that they need to tune in to what is happening in order to be included in the flow of the play.

### Practitioners can use the following strategies to join in play:

Take a little time to observe, find out what the children are playing, and what are their roles and intentions.

Consider whether you need to enter the play, and for what purposes (such as offering suggestions, introducing new ideas or vocabulary, managing the noise or behaviour, extending the activity through additional resources or negotiating entry for another child).

Try to play on the children's terms by taking on a role that they suggest, and following children's instructions. With the youngest children, often participating alongside and imitating a child's actions with the same type of materials will signal that you are in tune and start a playful interaction.

Offer your own ideas when you are sure that they are consistent with the flow of the play.

Avoid going into closed questioning ('How many? What colour? What size?'). Instead, try to maintain playful ways of engaging by following children's directions, and tuning into their meanings.

Try not to direct the play to your own learning objectives or assessment agenda. Instead, be alert to the qualities of play, and to the knowledge and skills that children are using and applying.



## Playful adult-led activities

Alongside the child-initiated and play activities where adults can have a key role in supporting learning, there is an important place for activities initiated by adults. Adult-led activities provide opportunities for introducing new knowledge or ideas, and for developing and practising skills. The activities can provide a new stimulus, or an opportunity to revisit or further develop learning.

Sometimes the activities could be prompted by children's interests as observed in their play. At other times practitioners will identify areas of learning which are less likely to be available to children through daily experience and play, where adults can best take a lead in introducing new ideas and concepts.

This 'adult agenda' could be addressed in any adult-led time (planned small or large group activities, greeting time, story or song times; in reception, this will include the discrete daily phonics session).

Adult-led activities may:

- provide open-ended opportunities where practitioners observe and support children's learning during the experience and consider next steps based on children's responses; or
- have clearly specified learning objectives which will be matched to children's current learning to extend or consolidate what children know and can do.

Adult-led activities should be playful, even when planned with a specific objective in mind, by maintaining characteristics of play through a sense of playing with things, ideas, imagination, and others. Playful practitioners will plan activities which motivate children by:

- presenting tasks in imaginative ways
- ensuring tasks are as open-ended as possible, allowing children to make choices and express their own ideas
- using materials or story-lines that children associate with play
- providing for children's hands-on, active participation.

## The Unique Child and play

Children bring their own experiences, culture and personal characteristics to their play and practitioners need to understand and respond to children's individual differences as players just as in every other aspect of their development.

Skilful adults understand that children develop as players at different rates, and are able to support patterns of development within play. For babies, play may be primarily about playful interactions with sensitive and responsive others, such as games of peek-a-boo. With toddlers who enjoy exploring objects alongside others, imitating the way a child uses an object can become a playful communication, and using objects to pretend opens new areas of play. Creative and open-ended play of many types follows, where children decide the purpose and may agree the 'rules' of the play. Children also come to understand more formal games as a different type of play that involves set rules.

Depending on their previous experiences, some children may not be familiar with particular play opportunities within settings. They will be encouraged to play when they encounter familiar resources similar to those at home, possibly including elements from popular culture such as TV characters or favourite toys. Children may need support to engage in new and unfamiliar play experiences. Some children may not feel secure in making open-ended choices, and benefit from more support and structure as they gradually develop the ability to manage themselves and their activities in play.

Practitioners also need to be aware of different cultural expectations about play. It is important to share points of view with fathers as well as mothers about play and learning.

### **Find out more**

Working with Parents and carers e-learning module [www.nationalstrategiescpd.org.uk](http://www.nationalstrategiescpd.org.uk)

Parents as Partners in Early Learning case studies

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for 'Parents as Partners in Early Learning'.

## **Weaving the strands together to plan for learning**

Play, child-initiated and adult-initiated activities, together with the practitioner's knowledge of the areas of learning, all come together in good practice in Early Years settings. 'Planned, purposeful play' includes planning for child-initiated opportunities which will enable children to learn, as well as planning for adult-led activities.

The specific combination will vary with the development of the children. Provision for babies and toddlers, for example, will follow individual children's rhythms and play agendas, with brief planned opportunities for experiences either one-to-one with an adult or in very small groups. As children move through the EYFS years they will gradually be ready for small group and short periods of large group planned activities.

Practitioners consider children's interests and learning observed in both child-initiated and adult-led activities, along with knowledge gained from home links, and then decide how best to support the children's learning. This may be through an adult-led activity, or instead it could be through targeted support for child-initiated activity, such as bringing in additional resources, introducing new elements into the routines, or ensuring that adults are engaged to support a particular area.

It is important for practitioners to consider how best to ensure that children benefit from both child-initiated and adult-led opportunities. It may be possible for the day to involve moving seamlessly between one emphasis and the other. There are risks, however, in not distinguishing between these elements of the routine.

- Where adults focus on supporting particular planned opportunities during child-initiated time, there may be children who regularly do not opt into these activities and so miss the adult stimulus and support for learning.
- When practitioners plan and lead small group activities while other children play, they are not available to observe, engage with and support play.
- If this organisation involves calling children away from their child-initiated activities to join in with adult-led activities, children's control over their play and sustained time to develop their interests is compromised.

Practitioners may instead develop a clear structure ensuring that all children participate in focused activities and that child-initiated activity is valued and supported.

Sometimes adults will plan a focused activity based on what they observed in child-initiated activity. When materials introduced in adult-led activity are then made freely available, children may choose to play with them in their own way and so further explore, practise or develop a skill. This interweaving of approaches motivates, stimulates, and reinforces learning.

**In responding skilfully to support learning, whatever the context, knowing about a range of appropriate strategies helps practitioners to make decisions about which strategies are likely to be effective for groups and individual children. These strategies include:**

**Direct instruction:** Sometimes it is not appropriate to allow children to explore and discover when an adult can see that direct teaching is the most appropriate strategy. This can include teaching a skill or giving facts/information – or possibly correcting a child’s misconception, although often encouraging children to think through and explore their misconceptions can provide rich opportunities for learning.

**Providing assistance:** Children learn to choose and direct their own activities, but many will need assistance to develop their skills and confidence to express their own ideas, and share these with their peers.

**Guided interaction:** Adult and child collaborate on a task, where the adult’s strategies are highly tuned into the child’s existing skills and motivations. The adult uses a range of pedagogical strategies that are responsive to the child’s intentions, focused on the spontaneous learning, and provide opportunities for the child’s feedback. Talking together is a primary tool, using open questions and exploring what the child is thinking about to help the child to go beyond what they understood before.

**Participating in the play:** Joining in with children’s play, taking cues from the children to understand the nature and purposes of the play, can offer an opportunity to extend children’s learning. Children learn from others in play – often they learn from their peers, and they also learn from a knowledgeable, skilled and sensitive adult who plays with them.

**The case studies which follow illustrate some of the ways practitioners and children move between child-initiated and adult-led activities, making use of active opportunities which stimulate and reinforce children’s learning. Where children are in the final year of the EYFS, practitioners will be able to observe their learning and development across a range of contexts to gather assessment evidence toward the EYFSP.**

**A child writing a message provides an opportunity for the adult to encourage message writing with all the children.**

During play on arrival that morning Emily had written a message for Sally, the practitioner.

child-initiated

Before going outdoors Sally gathered the children together to show them the message and share her excitement at receiving the note. All the children looked and listened attentively, and one child made a link with writing a note to John who was away on holiday. Sally suggested that if the children wrote to John he would be very happy about returning to nursery since he would know that his friends had missed him.

adult-led

Several children then used the mark-making resources outdoors and indoors to write messages to their friends during child-initiated time.

child-initiated

**Pause for thought**

- What do these observations tell you about individual children’s interests?
- What areas of learning do you identify as being shown here?
- What changes to the environment might be planned to support these developments?

**Find out more**

Mark Making Matters: Young children making meaning in all areas of learning and development

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for ‘Mark Making Matters’.

**In a nursery group, a playful adult-led activity includes both demonstration by the adult and children's independent explorations.**

The practitioner first demonstrated to a group of ten children how to create static electricity with balloons. She had set out resources for children to explore independently, and asked the children to carry out their own experiments to see what they could do.

The practitioner gave running commentaries on what different children were doing, encouraging the children to learn from each other, for example, 'Harry is rubbing his balloon on his jumper.'

At the end of the session, the practitioner brought the children back together and asked some of them to talk about what they had done.

***Pause for thought***

- Can you think of any other ways as well as talking in which the children could be encouraged to represent their experiences of static electricity with balloons?
- How could you enable children to continue their explorations if they chose to do so in child-initiated play?
- Could you identify possible developments across different areas of learning that children might demonstrate while they play with balloons: Physical Development; Personal, Social and Emotional Development; Communication, Language and Literacy; Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy; Creative Development; Knowledge and Understanding of the World?

**Adult support for children to resolve a conflict results in a creative solution which leaves children in control.**

Two four-year-olds in a nursery group were arguing over who could wear the monster costume. The adult intervened to stop the shouting and pulling, and held the costume while they discussed the problem. She encouraged each child to give their point of view and say how they felt. She supported one child by saying, 'It looks as if you might be feeling angry about that.'

She then posed the question, 'What can we do so that both people will be happy?' 'Share!' suggested a listening child. 'How could you share one costume?' asked the adult. There was discussion about taking turns, but neither child would agree to wait.

'I know! We could both have one leg in,' suggested one of the two. The adult asked if they would both be happy with that idea, and they agreed that they would. So amid great hilarity they cooperated to put the costume on and walk away wearing one leg each.

***Pause for thought***

- How could the practitioner build on this experience by helping children to recognise and celebrate their success in solving the problem?
- What might be planned for an adult-led opportunity to support children to recognise the feelings and points of view of others?

**The interweaving of learning through play, adult-led and child-initiated activities is seen in five-year-old Ella's growing knowledge and use of numbers.**

Ella is interested in numbers and numeracy, which she shows during daily adult-led routines when the children count the number of boys and girls, identify the numerals, and work out whether there are more boys or girls.

adult-led

Ella continues her interest during child-initiated activities. The teacher observes her sorting, matching and counting plastic figures, where she uses numeracy concepts in context. Ella counts accurately up to 20, sorts according to colour, counts on ('Five red dolls, and five more – six, seven, eight, nine, ten – ten altogether.'), adds and subtracts ('Five add two more is seven, take away two and it's five again. See!').

child-initiated

During outdoor play at lunchtime, Ella announces that she is going to 'make a hopscotch'. She uses the large chalk to mark out a grid, and writes the numerals. An adult is watching and Ella talks through her activity, asking for support when necessary: 'This is my hopscotch. I'm starting backwards – 15, 14, 13. What comes next?' She writes some numerals correctly, but 4, 5, and 7 are reversed. The adult chooses not to correct Ella at this point in order for her to sustain her own purposes and enjoyment. She makes a note to support Ella in recognising and writing numerals in adult-led activities.

outdoor play

(adult-led)

During role-play, Ella uses her knowledge to enforce the rules: 'Only five children are allowed in here. There's too many – one, two, three, four, five, six. James, you've got to go out 'cos you haven't got a band.'

child-initiated

**Pause for thought:**

- Can you identify ways in which the adult-led opportunities to gain knowledge about numbers have supported Ella's activities in play?
- Judging from how Ella is using numbers independently in her play, what would you identify as next steps in her learning?
- From this episode what evidence might you gather about Ella's attainment that would contribute to the EYFSP?

**Find out more**

Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy (PSRN) e-learning course

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for 'Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy'.

## **Evidence toward Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scale points**

### **Personal, Social and Emotional Development**

#### **Dispositions and attitudes**

- *5 Selects and uses activities and resources independently*  
Ella selects own resources and uses her knowledge and skills to initiate her own activity
- *6 Continues to be interested, motivated and excited to learn*  
Ella is absorbed in what she's doing
- *7 Is confident to try new activities, initiate ideas and speak in a familiar group*  
Ella initiates making a hopscotch and confidently organises the group in the role-play area

### **Communication, Language and Literacy**

#### **Language for communication and thinking**

- *7 Uses talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events; explores the meanings and sounds of new words*  
Throughout the process of making a hopscotch Ella talks through her thinking by saying what she's doing

### **Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy**

#### **Numbers as labels and for counting**

- *4 Says number names in order*  
Ella demonstrates counting amounts and counting backwards when making her hopscotch
- *5 Recognises numerals 1 to 9*  
Ella writes the numbers on her hopscotch
- *6 Counts reliably up to ten everyday objects*  
Counts reliably up to 20 objects
- *8 Uses developing mathematical ideas and methods to solve practical problems*  
Ella uses her knowledge of number lines, order and recognition to support her in making and using her hopscotch game

#### **Calculating**

- *4 Relates addition to combining two groups, and 8 Uses developing mathematical ideas and methods to solve practical problems*  
'Five red dolls, and five more – six, seven, eight, nine, ten – ten altogether.'
- *5 Relates subtraction to taking away, 6 In practical activities and discussion, begins to use the vocabulary involved in adding and subtracting, and 8 Uses developing mathematical ideas and methods to solve practical problems*  
'Five add two more is seven, take away two and it's five again. See!'

*7 Finds one more or one less than a number from 1 to 10*  
'Only five children are allowed in here. There's too many – one, two, three, four, five, six. James, you've got to go out 'cos you haven't got a band.'

## Engaging with ICT offers children opportunities to learn in a range of contexts in a reception / Year 1 class.

**Building on children's interests, the practitioner offers direct instruction and support for children to reach their own aims**

The children are interested in making maps and recording directions, using programmable toys. The teacher reminds them how to programme the toys, what the arrows signify – forward, left, right, and how to clear the commands. Some children mark out maps with chalk on the playground for the toy to travel along. Other children are happy to explore what the toy can do. The teacher encourages them to record their actions (e.g. Forward 5) on clipboards. The children use numerals and letters as well as their own marks and diagrams.

Noah is playing with the programmable toy. He puts a felt-tip pen in the hole so that he can see the trail as the toy moves along a long sheet of paper on the playground. He asks the teacher for some help making the toy into a snail. They work together using paper, scissors and crayons to make a head and shell, and they stick it on with adhesive tape. Noah returns to programming the 'snail' and makes it go in the right directions to follow the trail he has marked on the paper.

**Children actively support each other's learning**

Reception and Year 1 children have chosen to use digital cameras and movie software on the computer.

Jack has recorded a video on the camera, and takes it to the computer. Theo is 'the best moviemaker' (his 16-year-old brother has taught him lots of computer skills), and he shows Jack how to load the video into the computer programme. Ruby shows Jack how to animate his video. She guides him to the toolbar and makes suggestions.

*Jack:* Why don't we put a meteor loop?

*Ruby:* This time put it in the middle (points to the screen).

*Jack:* No. I'm going to do it over here (clicks and drags the icon to the top left).

*Ruby:* OK Jack, that's cool. Now put the volcano on so it will do big explosions.

*Jack:* Let's only do explosions then it will blow everything up.

*Ruby:* Just keep on pressing that Jack (points to icon). OK, now press play. How's it going Jack? That's fantastic! Put some music on now. That needs a bit more design.

*(Leo comes over.)*

*Ruby:* Look Leo, this is what we filmed. This is what we filmed RIGHT NOW.

*Leo:* I want to film stuff. How do you film?

*Ruby hands Leo the camera:* Press this button and hold it down hard. Then you look through here (holds camera to her eye, then holds it to Leo's eye).

*Leo goes off to make his video.*

adult-led

child-initiated

**Pause for thought**

Children learn from other children who have more knowledge or experience.

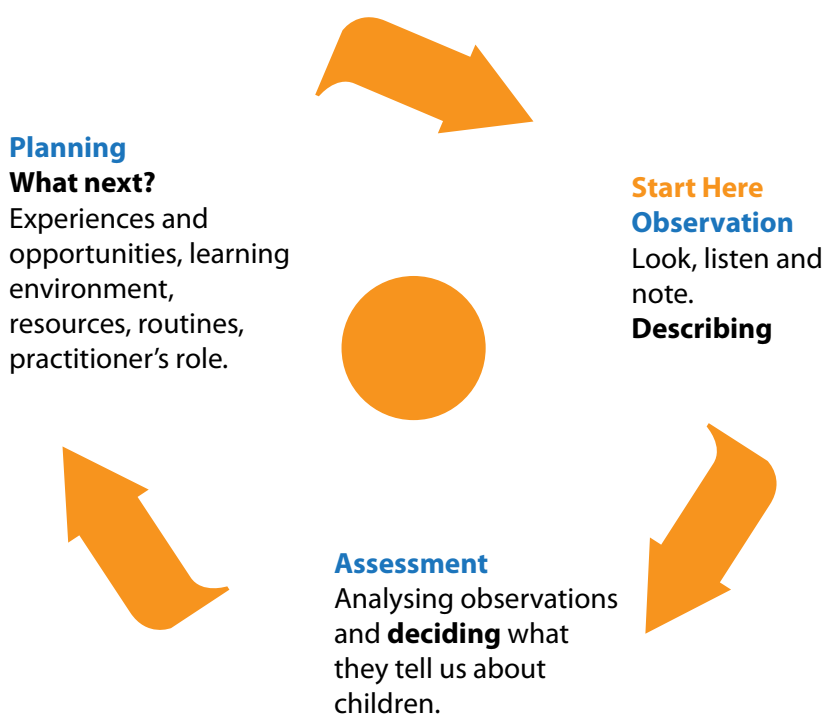
- What particular features of the learning environment might encourage children to work together?
- What strategies might adults use in child-initiated time to encourage children to support each other?
- How do you decide when children would not benefit from an adult joining the activity?

## The skilful practitioner

When young children are left to their own devices in a stimulating environment, most will learn through their own explorations and play, following their own ideas and motivations. Early Years practitioners play an important role in providing the building blocks for such independent exploration – materials, time, space and a supportive emotional environment.

Yet this is not enough. Adults have a crucial role in stimulating and supporting children to reach beyond their current limits, inspiring their learning and supporting their development. It is through the active intervention, guidance and support of a skilled adult that children make the most progress in their learning. This does not mean pushing children too far or too fast, but instead meeting children where they are, showing them the next open door, and helping them to walk through it. It means being a partner with children, enjoying with them the power of their curiosity and the thrill of finding out what they can do.

The ability to tune in accurately to meet children where they are is summed up in the first steps of the cycle described in the EYFS guidance:



Important key words in understanding this cycle are highlighted above.

**Observation** involves paying attention, noticing, and being able to **describe** accurately what a child does or says. The description could be written down, or the practitioner could make a mental note of what has been noticed.

**Assessment** means reflecting on the observation to **decide** what it means in terms of the child's interests, current focus of learning, ways of thinking, emotional response and level of development. Assessment involves the practitioner making an informed judgement about the child's learning. It may be represented in accounts of a child's learning journey, or summarised as described in Progress Matters: Reviewing and enhancing young children's development (go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for 'Early Years'). The same process is used to inform judgements at the end of the EYFS, as a practitioner observes what children do and say in a range of contexts and decides how these contribute as



evidence towards the specific scale points of the EYFSP (go to [www.qcda.gov.uk](http://www.qcda.gov.uk) and search for 'QCA Tests and exams support – Early Years Foundation Stage Profile').

**Planning** involves deciding **what next** to provide to support the child's learning, responding to what the practitioner understands about the child from the assessment process. As noted in the diagram, planning may include introducing experiences or changing the environment, the routines, or the resources. It should also include a wide range of specific ways of interacting through which practitioners can support and extend learning.

## Moment-by-moment

This cycle is often thought of in terms of recorded observations, assessments possibly matched to areas of learning and stages of development, and planning for the next day or the next week. These are useful elements of good practice which may support the practitioner in meeting the needs of the children in the setting, and support the link between what is observed in child-initiated activity and how this can be built upon in planned adult-led activity (and vice versa).

Babies and young children, however, are experiencing and learning in the here and now, not storing up their questions until tomorrow or next week. It is in that moment of curiosity, puzzlement, effort or interest – the 'teachable moment' – that the skilful adult makes a difference. By using this cycle on a moment-by-moment basis, the adult will be always alert to individual children (observation), always thinking about what it tells us about the child's thinking (assessment), and always ready to respond by using appropriate strategies at the right moment to support children's well-being and learning (planning for the next moment).

### A skilful practitioner uses the observe–assess–respond cycle on a moment-by-moment basis.

In a day nursery a practitioner, Claire, is sitting on the floor with two babies, Sarah and James. She is facing Sarah, talking to her and supporting her with one hand when she wobbles as she sits, and also keeping an eye on James. James has a plastic ball which he is repeatedly banging on a posting box. He then starts to bang it on the floor, but it doesn't make a noise on the carpet. He puts the ball to his mouth, then goes back to banging it on the box.

The ball slips out of his grasp and rolls away across the floor. Claire reaches out to retrieve the ball and hands it back to James, saying 'Oops. Here it is.'

James goes back to knocking the ball on the box, then begins to bang it on Sarah's head. Claire puts her hand between to protect Sarah's head, then offers her palm to James, and he begins to bang the ball on her hand.

Observe:

James is banging the ball on other objects.

Assess:

James is exploring with some persistence – is he interested in the sound, or the feel?

Respond:

Support James in his exploration by making it possible for him to continue.

Use simple language models about the here and now.

In a nursery class three-year-old Luke has chosen to go with a friend to the craft area during child-initiated time. Looking through pages from catalogues, they find pictures of bicycles and his friend begins to cut out his favourite bike. Luke says, 'I want this one.' He uses both hands to hold the scissors, opening and closing them like garden shears against the paper with no effect.

An adult says, 'Shall I help you?' and when Luke agrees she first demonstrates, explaining about using the thumb and fingers of one hand. She then helps him place his fingers correctly, tells him to open the scissors and holds the paper taut in position for him to close the scissors.

After the first snip he pushes the scissors at the paper. She says, 'You have to open them again. Pull your fingers apart, like this.' She continues to hold the paper, turning it at the right time so that the cuts go roughly round the picture. She says, 'Open, close, open, close' until the picture is free from the page.

**Observe:**  
Luke doesn't know how to hold or use the scissors.

**Assess:**  
Luke has a specific goal in mind, and he will not be successful by experimenting on his own with the scissors. Cutting around a shape is complicated, involving a continuous cutting movement while holding and turning the paper.

**Respond:**  
Directly teach Luke how to hold and open and close the scissors. Support him to continue the scissor movement by talking, and hold and turn the paper for him.

In both of these cases, the practitioner could plan adult-led activities to support the learning at a later time.

- Claire might decide that James was probably most interested in the sounds made by knocking one object on another in his up and down movements, so she may plan to put some wooden trays on the floor, provide different materials to hold, and model banging in rhythm.
- The staff at Luke's nursery may plan small group opportunities with a purposeful task which will involve using scissors, and provide support as needed.

But in both of these cases, the right support at the right time is critical to the children's learning. This will occur over and over as the adult actively supports child-initiated learning.

A limited number of adult-led activities will be planned for each day, and the practitioner will try to ensure that the activities are relevant and appropriate to the learning of the children through basing them on previous observations. When planned as open-ended activities, a group of children will be able to engage with and benefit from an activity sparked by observing one child. During the activity, the practitioner will use the same skills of moment-by-moment 'observe-assess-respond' to help each child in the group to move learning forward.

### **Find out more**

The Practice Guidance for the EYFS offers useful support for practitioners on responding to children, both in the moment and in future plans.

- Look, listen and note sections support practitioners to understand observed behaviour in terms of learning and development.
- Effective practice sections offer suggestions and examples of responses that will support and enhance learning and development.

(Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for 'Early Years'.)

The following case study illustrates one reflective practitioner's journey in developing, reviewing and refining her approach as she built on her knowledge of how children learn and her understanding of her role. Accessing training and working with a network of practitioners was helpful in further developing her thinking and skills.

## A practitioner's story – developing pedagogy

**Sue is a reception teacher and deputy head teacher at an infant and nursery school in Shrewsbury.**

Through more than twenty years experience as a teacher of nursery and reception children, Sue has developed her practice. Drawing on changing national frameworks and other models of pedagogy, Sue has kept challenging herself to develop her approach in line with her central marker – 'what I believe in for young children'.

Sue says the support of headteachers has been important to her journey. 'They valued me as a professional, and trusted me. In order to get that trust, you have to prove that the children are making progress, that you are making a difference.' Teamwork, now with teaching assistant Helen, has been another key part of the process. Sue points to some essential skills in her work which she is continually refining, including observation and assessment and using questions from children and adults. Her focus on learning is clear: 'We find out what they already know, and work so they understand more the next time. I always try to give a challenge or provoke a question.'

### **Too relaxed?**

Sue says that early in her career the approach was 'almost too relaxed'. 'We used to have just a blue hardback notebook, and we'd sit at the end of the day and say, "Right, what shall we do? Well, we haven't had the marble run out for a while so let's put that out tomorrow. Or the aquaplay system – they'll like that, it's a nice sunny day so we'll get that out".'

When the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage was issued in 2000, Sue says she fully embraced it. 'I opened it and I thought – this is good, because it talked about "awe and wonder", and that's me. We'll bring as much as we can into the classroom and we'll get that sense of awe and wonder and really spark and interest young children.'

### **Too structured?**

But soon her practice was not developing in a way she felt comfortable with. 'It was seen as a way of working where each child had to hit each of those stepping stones and it was almost as if you have to do it in this order. You had to work through this and almost use it as a tick sheet. And that was very tricky for me because I know that children don't necessarily work in that way. You had to lift your objective from the stepping stones and plan an activity for that. So I would spend hours at home trying to think of activities that would interest the children that would hit that objective, and then go into school, get all the resources ready – and it was just deadly. I didn't like it, and I had quite a battle on my hands to prove that children could learn through play, and that you didn't have to set up activities that would specifically reach each objective.'

### **Linking learning to play**

Her next step was to try to find an approach between her former loose method of using activities the children liked, and a more structured way using the Foundation Stage and monitoring progress. 'So we tried to look at the types of activities that children enjoyed and set those up, then look at the Profile, the Early Learning Goals and the stepping stones to see if we were actually hitting those by doing that – and we were.'

The use of observations made Sue think again. 'We made sure we had very tight observations. In those days we just used to do sticky notes and stick them on the kitchen door, so that at the end of the session you'd have a door full of observations, which we'd then take off the door and put in the child's folder which would then sit on the shelf. Until you came at half-term to update your profiles you wouldn't look at them again. Then we had to think about why are we doing the observations, and what are they telling us about how children learn?'

### **Too prescribed?**

Sue began to use the observations to plan for groups of children. 'You'd have the observations, and it was almost like filling the gaps – "Well, that one's striped off, and that one, but this is a bit of a gap so we'll do that one." We then thought this wasn't working either. The profile was being used as a planning tool, and it was just too prescriptive and too rigid. It wasn't really moving from children's interests. That went on for a long, long time, and I didn't particularly enjoy what I was doing – too much assessment, too much questioning about where the children were and which statements they'd hit.'

### **Starting from children's interests**

A local authority workshop on Reggio Emilia, and later a more extended training course followed up by network meetings, provided the next support for Sue's developing thinking and practice. 'I thought, this has elements of where I want to go. This is what I believe in for young children.'

'As soon as we started following their interests we broke away from the planning, which is very radical and very brave,' Sue says. 'This was even before the EYFS came in, but it fits in well with the EYFS.' It has not been a straightforward change, and Sue points out that over the last three years their way of planning has changed many times. For instance, they thought carefully to avoid a themed approach: 'Like the old days when you'd bring the butterfly in and it would last for a whole term,' Sue says. 'We didn't want everybody having to study butterflies. What about the children who don't show that interest?'

### **Flexible days**

Within the stable daily routine there is still flexibility and constant shifting of types of activity. In a still-emerging approach, the children's interests and knowledge are explored in mind-mapping, discussions, and open-ended activities. In response, Sue and Helen plan opportunities which encourage children to think and find out, and these are grouped into an umbrella project that can hold strands of children's particular interests within it.

Through careful observation and discussion about individual children, Sue and Helen plan for a morning with a mix of open-ended and objective-led focus groups, and for enhancements to the afternoon of child-initiated opportunities. There is also a daily session of Letters and Sounds in two groups.

### **Purpose and challenge**

Throughout child-initiated activity Sue focuses on learning. 'At the beginning of child-initiated time I'll say, "At review time today I think I will be asking Maddie about what she found out about those new materials", so then I'm giving them a purpose. In the session I might refer to that, saying "I need to hear from you two things that you found out – two tricky things, or two things that you found really easy." So there is a purpose and a bit of a challenge, and they know that they've got to find something out from their play.'

Sue and Helen support children's play by participating alongside them which often strikes up a conversation, modelling and posing questions. 'The skill you need is asking the right questions,' Sue says. 'I say, "Tell me what you're thinking – what have you got in your head?" Then it's a step-by-step approach between you and the child. "I have an idea..." "What if...?" You don't want to be the big person that always comes in and interrupts, or presents something as "Do this".'

Sue keeps her sights on making a difference to children. 'When we talk things over at the end of the day I always ask, "What has that child learned today? What has been the benefit for them of being in school today?''

Warm, trusting relationships with knowledgeable adults support children's learning more effectively than any amount of resources.

**EYFS, Supporting Learning 2.3**

## Skilled and thoughtful practitioners support learning by:

### *A Unique Child*

- Seeking to know and understand each individual child and their development
- Showing interest and celebrating with children their interests and achievements

### *Positive Relationships*

- Maintaining close, caring and respectful relationships
- Encouraging and supporting children to relate to others
- Supporting children to resolve their own conflicts through problem-solving

### *Enabling Environments*

- Ensuring children have sustained time to develop child-initiated activities
- Arranging, resourcing, and making time for children to make free use of rich indoor and outdoor spaces
- Observing children as a natural part of all normal activity
- Interpreting children's actions and words to try to understand the child's thinking and learning
- Being sensitive to the child's thinking and learning when deciding when to interact and when to value the child's independent activity
- Joining in play and child-initiated activity following children's agendas
- Scaffolding children's learning through talk, discussing strategies and ideas, suggesting possibilities and modelling approaches
- Providing brief, well-planned focused learning opportunities in response to observed interests, learning and development

### *Learning and Development*

- Using daily events within the routine to provide worthwhile real-life experiences
- Varying experiences, using fresh, creative and playful approaches
- Providing first-hand experiences to explore and discover
- Directly teaching, through demonstrating or explaining
- Encouraging and supporting children to persevere through difficulties, to take risks, to ask questions and problem-solve
- Using the language of learning to focus children on themselves as learners
- Identifying and supporting next steps in learning

## Case studies

On the following pages, case studies covering the age range of the EYFS illustrate how effective practice by skilful practitioners supports children's learning and development across a range of contexts.

**Notice the callout boxes along the side, which identify some of the ways listed on the previous page in which skilful and thoughtful practitioners support learning.**

Activities develop in complexity as children move through different stages of development, yet the importance of practitioners interacting with skill and sensitivity does not change. The principles of observing, seeking to understand each child, and responding to support learning within a warm and trusting relationship remain the same.

In the case studies, can you identify how practitioners are:

- valuing children's unique interests and characteristics, and supporting children's independence and play?
- observing, interpreting and responding to children on a moment-by-moment basis?
- using what they have understood from their observations to plan for enhancements to child-initiated opportunities through new stimulus or materials?
- using what they have understood from their observations to provide playful adult-led opportunities?
- making good use of a range of contexts to support and extend children's learning?

PHOTO  
REDACTED  
DUE TO THIRD  
PARTY RIGHTS  
OR OTHER

## Birth–20 months

PHOTO  
REDACTED DUE  
TO THIRD PARTY  
RIGHTS OR  
OTHER LEGAL  
ISSUES

### An environment for babies

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Practitioners at a day nursery in Hertfordshire decided to improve the environment for babies. Responding to research which suggests that young babies focus best on high-contrast tones of black, white and red, a high-contrast area was created in the baby room. Practitioners worked with parents to provide black and white photographs of the babies, people and objects which were special to them, and mounted these on display boards at eye level for the babies.

Arranging, resourcing and making time for children to freely use rich indoor and outdoor spaces

The baby room was designed to stimulate babies' senses and encourage exploration, with different textured materials at ground level for the young baby to reach and grab, including soft cushions, silk scarves, black hard pots, rubber shoes and voile.

Providing first-hand experiences to explore and discover

### Sharing a moment of communication

Nine-month-old Chloe was sitting up, playing and exploring with her hands in the high-contrast area, in a calm and quiet atmosphere. She reached forward and started patting one of the many photographs around her. Karen, the practitioner, realised that this was Chloe's own photograph, and thought that Chloe was indicating her interest in the picture.

Observing children as a natural part of all normal activity

Karen moved down to the level to make eye contact with Chloe, and spoke to her using facial expressions and a voice that showed her interest and pleasure: 'Is that you, Chloe? Can you see Chloe?' Chloe smiled broadly, encouraging the conversation to continue. Chloe and Karen continued taking turns with expressions and gestures, sounds from Chloe and words from Karen, as they looked at each other and the photos.

Interpreting children's actions and words to try to understand the child's thinking and learning

#### Pause for thought

Can you identify how Karen was observing, interpreting and responding to Chloe on a moment-by-moment basis?

Would you plan any further response to Chloe's interest in the photos?

How might you share this experience with Chloe's parents?

Maintaining close, caring and respectful relationships

## Listening to babies

Grace, 14 months, crawled towards the practitioner, Sandra. Grace sat on Sandra's knee, placed her right index finger onto the palm of her left hand, and smiled at Sandra.

Sandra said, 'Do you want me to do "Round and Round the Garden"?', and Grace responded with a smile.

Sandra sang the song, doing the actions on Grace's hand. As Sandra tickled Grace at the end of the song, Grace giggled and snuggled into Sandra. Grace then again put her finger against her palm, and Sandra repeated the song twice more.

But then Grace then put her finger into Sandra's palm. 'Oh, you do it now,' Sandra said, and she sang the song while Grace did the actions on Sandra's hand.

Joining in play and child-initiated activities following children's agendas

Interpreting children's actions and words to try to understand the child's thinking and learning

## Responding to feelings

Peggie, seven months, was placed into a high-chair for lunch. Peggie became very distressed and wouldn't take any food.

Her key person, Claire, took Peggie out of the high-chair and spoke to her in a soothing voice, rocking her until she settled. Continuing to talk in a reassuring voice, Claire then offered Peggie some food as she sat on her knee. Peggie smiled at Claire and started eating her food.

When Peggie was totally settled and relaxed, Claire said, 'Are you ready to go in your chair now?' She placed Peggie back into the high-chair and Peggie happily finished her lunch.

Maintaining close, caring and respectful relationships

### *Pause for thought*

Understanding what young babies are communicating requires attentive practitioners who notice the babies' signals and interpret what they mean.

- How might Claire interpret Peggie's distress at lunchtime?
- Would you think about any changes to mealtimes for Peggie?

### *Find out more*

Practice Guidance for the Foundation Stage – Look Listen and Note, Effective Practice

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for 'EYFS areas of learning and development'.

Social and Emotional Aspects of Development: Guidance for EYFS practitioners

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Development: Guidance for EYFS practitioners'.



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## 16-36 months

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### Exploring together

Clayton, 29 months, had a stick and was poking about in the bushes. The practitioner, Terri-Ann, was sitting nearby.

Terri-Ann: What are you looking for, Clayton?

Clayton: Snails.

*He is very focused on looking through the bark.*

Terri-Ann: Have you found anything, Clayton?

Clayton: No.

*Then excitedly:*

Look!

Terri-Ann: What is it?

Clayton: Ant.

Terri-Ann: Ooh, let me see.

Clayton: And spider – look!

Showing interest and celebrating with children their interests and achievements

Joining in play and child-initiated activities following children's agendas

Clayton and Terri-Ann continued looking through the undergrowth and chatting together, until Clayton decided to move on to another part of the garden.

### Supported by a child

At a private day nursery in Newham for two-to-five-year-olds, open from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm, everything is packed away twice a week. A high proportion of the children are learning English as an additional language, and members of staff speak some of the children's home languages.

Ashritha, 3 years 8 months, spoke Telugu as her home language. She had attended the setting full-time for over a year and, having begun with two or three words, her English was now fluent.

Pranav, 2 years 6 months, also spoke Telugu and had just joined the setting. He was crying for 'nana' (dad) who brings and collects him. His key person tried to comfort Pranav, but he was still distressed.

The practitioner decided to ask for help from Ashritha. 'You speak the same language as Pranav. Could you tell him, because he's crying, that dad is going to come and pick him up soon?'

Ashritha said, 'Yes, I speak his language because it is my home language...Daddy coming soon (in Telugu).'

Pranav calmed as Ashritha spoke to him, reassured at being able to communicate. Later Ashritha told Pranav's key person that she knew Pranav because he sometimes came to her house.

Seeking to know and understand each individual child and their development

Encouraging and supporting children to relate to others

### Commenting on play

Stephanie, nearly three, speaks Swahili confidently at home. She has been attending the day nursery for about a month, and has just started occasionally to use single words in English when she has built a rapport with the practitioner. Stephanie was outside playing in the water, with the practitioner, Sylvia, supporting her by commenting on her actions, providing a model of language at just the right level for Stephanie.

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Joining in  
play and  
child-initiated  
activities  
following  
children's  
agendas

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Sylvia: That is full...right to the top. Look how full it is. Shall we fill it again?  
*Stephanie nods, and pours more water. There is frequent eye contact and smiling at each other throughout the exchange.*

Sylvia: Fill it up. *Stephanie smiles.*  
Pour it out. *Stephanie smiles.*  
Again. *A big grin from Stephanie.*  
More water.  
And stop. *Stephanie smiles.*  
And stop.  
And it's empty. *Stephanie gives another big smile.*

Scaffolding  
children's  
learning  
through talk,  
discussing  
strategies  
and ideas,  
suggesting  
possibilities  
and modelling  
approaches

The play stopped because Stephanie was off to the Post Office role-play in the outdoor area.

### **Pause for thought**

What strategies can practitioners use to best support young children's developing communication and language?

When children are learning English as an additional language, what kinds of provision and interaction with practitioners are most helpful?

### **Find out more**

Every Child a Talker: Guidance for Early Language Lead Practitioners

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for 'Every Child a Talker: Guidance for Early Language Lead Practitioners'.

Supporting children learning English as an additional language: Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for 'Supporting children learning English as an additional language: Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage'.

## Snack time

Jackie is a childminder who had planned a walk to the supermarket with Thomas, two, and Chelsea, three.

Jackie supported the children to prepare shopping lists by laying out pictures of fruits and vegetables. She encouraged Chelsea to make marks to represent the items and show how many, while Thomas selected magnetic pictures to place on his shopping list, and said the names of some foods he recognised in the pictures.

When getting ready to go out Thomas was able to find his own shoes. He tried to put them on his feet, but when he was not making progress Jackie said, 'Would you like me to help you?' Thomas nodded, and sat on Jackie's lap. She followed his lead to decide which foot to do first. Once the foot was in the shoe, she said, 'Will you do it, Thomas?' and he successfully fastened the Velcro strap.

On the way home after a period of great interest choosing and buying the food, Thomas had a package of strawberries in his basket, which was clearly heavy work for him to carry. 'Do you want me to carry it?' Jackie asked. 'Is it getting a bit heavy?' Thomas shook his head and said, 'No.' As he continued to struggle Jackie suggested, 'You could carry the ticket.' He shook his head and she commented, 'No? Well, I'll carry the ticket, shall I?' She walked patiently holding Thomas's hand as he continued to make slow progress with the load.

After washing their own purchases, the children were given knives to cut the fruit into pieces. Jackie suggested Thomas start with a banana. She held his hand and said, 'Turn it this way up. Then cut. Cut.' Thomas explored on his own how he could jab the fruit with his knife, and occasionally between eager eating of banana, strawberries and orange Jackie helped him to cut more pieces of fruit.

Having seen Chelsea count her pieces of orange to ten, without prompting Thomas pointed to the fruit pieces on his plate one at a time, saying, 'One, six, four.' Jackie supported him by counting along in order, and he began to copy her numbers. 'Was it six?' Jackie asked. 'How many? Six! Lots and lots! What a clever boy!' Thomas smiled with pleasure, and popped another strawberry in his mouth.

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Using daily events within the routine to provide worthwhile real-life experiences

Identifying and supporting next steps in learning

Encouraging and supporting children to persevere through difficulties

Directly teaching, through demonstrating or explaining

Being sensitive to the child's thinking and learning when deciding when to interact and when to value the child's independent activity

Showing interest and celebrating with children their interests and achievements



## 30-50 months

### Learning across the day

In a nursery school attached to a children's centre in Liverpool, learning opportunities in play and playful planned activities are supported by adults who respond to children and extend their learning.

#### Providing a new challenge

Luke had made a paper ring for Kate, the practitioner. Kate showed her pleasure in receiving the gift. But when she tried it on she found it was too big to stay on her finger, and she asked him to adjust it to fit her finger.

Luke happily went off to do this, returning several times to check the fit until it was the correct size.

Scaffolding children's learning through talk, discussing strategies and ideas, suggesting possibilities and modelling approaches

#### Supporting children to play

Faith was outdoors, standing by herself watching a group who were being nature detectives. The practitioner, Fiona, asked in a welcoming way if she would like to join the group. Faith nodded and followed the group.

Fiona noticed that Faith was struggling to keep up with the others, so she asked Faith to lead the way with her so Faith could set the pace. The group accepted Faith in the play, with Lucie saying, 'Let's go and see what Faith has found.'

Encouraging and supporting children to relate to others

#### Sharing ideas through talk

Kate, sitting at the writing area with three children, commented on the swamp monster in a book someone had brought into the area. This sparked lively conversation as the children began to draw pictures of the monster – 'It's got big eyes,' 'It's going to eat you for tea,' 'It lives in the swamp and frightens people at night.'

All three children had struggled in the past to make relationships and were usually reluctant to talk in a group, but they were comfortable talking in this situation. As the children's discussions didn't always include Kate, she took the opportunity to make quick notes of some of the things the children said.

Madison began to talk about a lake she had seen in a park, and Kate realised that she was making a link to a swamp. Madison went on to talk about having seen Kate out of nursery.

Connor enthusiastically began to tell a story about his monster in a swamp, using a different voice when the monster spoke. Kate made a mental note to make opportunities for Connor to take a lead in future story sessions.

Kate encouraged the children to write their own names on their pictures and to use their name cards. Connor became upset because he couldn't find his name card and Kate helped him to find it.

Observing children as a natural part of all normal activity

Interpreting children's actions and words to try to understand the child's thinking and learning

Identifying and supporting next steps in learning

## Playful learning: Role-play heroes

Building on the children's interest in stories of a fireman and his friends, Kate planned a role-play scenario outdoors for a group of children. She had gathered plenty of props, and thought about words she would use to build vocabulary. She referred to all the children's favourite characters in the stories as she introduced the activity.

Varying experiences, using fresh, creative and playful approaches

Kate used exciting language and expression in her voice both to give instructions and to provide suggestions for the imaginative play, such as 'There's an emergency!', 'Quick, someone is stuck up the tree'. She posed problems which the children eagerly solved. Some children were in a fire engine, moving from side to side with the movement of the vehicle, some steering, some making the noise of the engine. 'We are heroes,' she said several times, and children repeated this in their play. Children shouted 'Fire!' and 'Save the day!' Some children took roles as fire fighters, while others chose to be rescued.

Scaffolding children's learning through talk, discussing strategies and ideas, suggesting possibilities and modelling approaches

When there was a dispute between two children both wanting a hose, Kate suggested strategies to solve the problem and the children agreed that they would take turns with the hat and the hose.

Kate introduced ideas of the dangers of fire, reminding children how it could burn your skin and make you choke, and enacting choking from fumes.

Supporting children to resolve their own conflicts through problem-solving

At times when the situation became very lively, Kate was able to bring calm by asking the children to sit down so they could recap on the action and make suggestions for what could happen next. This developed into a detailed storytelling session.

The staff decided the story the children developed could be written down for reading to them at story time – a new title in one of their favourite series.

Encouraging and supporting children to persevere through difficulties, to take risks, to ask questions and problem-solve

## Celebrating success

Ashritha, who speaks Telugu at home, told the practitioner at her setting that she is clever because she eats cashews and walnuts. The practitioner shared this with Ashritha's parent, who confirmed that this was true, and this is one of the things they talk about in their home language.

Showing interest and celebrating with children their interests and achievements

### Pause for thought

How can practitioners learn from parents about their child's interests and home experiences and make links in their learning?

### Find out more

EYFS Themes and Commitments

Positive Relationships, Parents as Partners 2.2

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for 'Early Years'.

Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PEEL) project

Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for 'Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PEEL) project'.

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## 30-50 months

### Movement play in a pre-school setting

Frances is an Early Years professional in a pre-school setting. As part of the Graduate Leaders' Network she had the opportunity to attend training in movement play and her setting was provided with equipment to set up a movement area.

#### Observing and interpreting

The mats were placed temporarily in a back room and the movement equipment was available most of the time. Initially Frances simply watched how the children moved, and at what points of the day. 'I found that I was captivated by the sheer difference in each child's movement – the unique ways in which each child chose to move, and how individually each child interpreted the new movement equipment that we'd been given,' Frances says.

Arranging, resourcing and making time for children to freely use rich indoor and outdoor spaces

One piece of equipment, a red cone, particularly drew her interest. 'It was astonishing how much I could learn about children's trust of their bodies by watching the way that they approached this particular object. There was either a huge sense of trust and ease, that allowed the child to fling him or herself into the heart of the cone and surrender their body to its movement, or there was a gradual "making peace" with its anarchic rolls and spins.'

Seeking to know and understand each individual child

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Frances then noticed that the red cone seemed to offer sanctuary for some children. One child found it hard to concentrate and to exclude outside distraction. For him the cone became a protective shell where he visibly relaxed. Another child also adopted the movement place as somewhere to have 'a bit of peace' – for him, the soft rolling cushions were soothing, and a contemplative rolling movement was what he needed.

Interpreting children's actions and words to try to understand the child's thinking and learning

#### Responding – provide space and time

Frances decided to make sure the nursery kept a designated movement space, which coincided with the offer of new carpet for the room where the movement area had been set up. This prompted removing all the furniture from that room, leaving a space that invites movement.

Arranging, resourcing, and making time for children to freely use rich indoor and outdoor spaces

## Play

Children began to initiate games involving physical challenge and imagination. One group developed an obstacle course, under the leadership of one particular child. They decided the sequence of movement pieces and how they would be used, the order in which the children should take turns, and what was fair or unfair in terms of rules. A pretend scenario developed as to where and who they were – about an hour's play with extremely high levels of child involvement, and no adults intervening at all.

Encouraging and supporting children to relate to others

One day the whole movement space become an undersea world for one girl, in which the rolling ball, the stretchy material, and the cone, all became rocks, shells, octopuses and so on – each thing suggesting a plant or creature by the quality of its movement.

Ensuring children have time for sustained child-initiated activity

The movement space offered new possibilities to one of the strands of adult-planned activity within the nursery – looking at air as an element. The children tested their relationship with the ground and with the air, with balance and control. The desire to fly was very strong and all of the equipment helped to explore what flying might feel like. This in turn fed into role-play and drawing.

Varying experiences, using fresh, creative and playful approaches

## Pearls

Two children who were attending the nursery at the time were experiencing a delay in language development, and two staff members attended signing training. 'All of us were enthused by the way in which the children were picking up signing and, in their turn, passing this on to those members of staff who had not attended the training,' Frances says.

Directly teaching, through demonstrating or explaining

The adults decided to plan a project exploring other ways of communicating without words. A local rivers officer, Mike, approached the nursery about a project to reintroduce freshwater pearl mussels to the local river, so 'Pearls' became the theme – focusing on telling stories without words about how pearls are made.

After seeing some mussel shells and hearing how slowly pearl mussels grow, several children adopted the red cone as a shell, and also began to use the stretchy green and blue material, wrapped around themselves, as the 'layers' of pearl growth, slowly accumulating.

Providing first-hand experiences to explore and discover

A storyteller visited on the same day as the rivers officer, and so the adults decided to re-enact the pearl mussels' life cycle. Frances says that everything came together and 'allowed us to play, adults and children together, in a joyful and interesting way'. The storyteller asked Mike to use the ribbons as the gills of a salmon, which the tiny mussels use as hosts. Mike swam around and the children floated and caught onto the gills, then followed the fish to a new part of the river. The red cone was used as a pearl mussel shell with the children inside, imagining themselves growing in the dark. The staff also described the 'wrapped-up' game that the children had developed, and this became part of the story, too.

Providing learning opportunities in response to observed interests, learning and development

## Children's ideas

The movement space has continued to be used in an open-ended way. It has become a ladybird's home, an enchanted castle, a horse and carriage, and a deep sea full of rocks where everyone nearly drowned but were saved by a boat. It can be quiet or noisy, boisterous or calm, a place for one or two or the whole group. Frances says, 'Now I cannot imagine how we ever managed without it.'

Joining in play and child-initiated activities following children's agendas



## 30-50 months

### Dinosaurs

At a nursery school in St. Helens children starting nursery are supported with a 'welcome day' and home visits. Practitioners noticed that some children were particularly interested in dinosaurs. Thomas had a collection of dinosaurs at home, and his parent told his new key person Jane how excited he was about coming because he knew there were dinosaurs in nursery.

Maintaining close, caring and respectful relationships

### Responding to children's interests

His key person ensured that there were plenty of dinosaur models available, and displayed them along with some non-fiction texts and pictures. During Thomas's first days in nursery his interest in dinosaurs provided a focus for Jane to interact with Thomas.

Seeking to know and understand each individual child and their development

Jane noticed Thomas transporting the dinosaur models to the walk-in sand area. He put the dinosaurs in the sand area, arranging them in the sand or on the tiles at the side. Jane sat near him, quietly observing. Thomas picked up a dinosaur and turned it over in his hands, fingering its features and looking at it very closely. He looked at Jane, and pointed to the spines on one model.

Observing children as a natural part of all normal activity

Thomas: Look – it's got these spikes on its back...

Jane: *Sits next to Thomas and mirrors his touching of the dinosaur.*

Yes – just look at those spines!

*Feels them as she talks, using a quiet, reflective voice as though thinking to herself.*

They're really sharp...

Thomas: This one's bigger. Look, it's got a tail!

Jane: You're right – it's longer than that one, and it's got a long tail...

*She looks over at other models and picks one up, using her facial expressions and slow, deliberate movements to model her curiosity about its features.*

Thomas: *Becoming excited – eyes widening, smiling at Jane.*

And look at this one! Look at the teeth!

*Thomas puts his finger into the open mouth of a dinosaur, and touches its teeth.*

Jane: My goodness, Thomas! Can I touch them too?

*Runs her finger along the teeth, using her face to express her 'shock' at their sharpness.*

Thomas: If I move this like this, it makes a trunk. That's the word for the dinosaur, you know...

I'm going to make a dinosaur house.

*Thomas looks around him and sees a tray nearby. Pulls it over to the sand area and places it in the sand.*

I can use that for my house. Dinosaurs need rocks – they have to have them.

Jane: I think I know where there are some rocks, Thomas.

Would you like me to get them?

*Jane goes to a cupboard and brings an armful of volcanic rocks back to Thomas. She knows from the home visit that Thomas is interested in volcanoes.*

These rocks are volcanic, Thomas! They're from volcanoes!

*Jane and Thomas have a talk about volcanoes. Thomas obviously already knows something about them – he talks about fire, and uses his hands to show fire coming out of the top. They handle the pieces of rock as they talk, looking closely at them and picking each up in turn.*

Joining in play and child-initiated activities following children's agendas

Scaffolding children's learning through talk, discussing strategies and ideas, suggesting possibilities and modelling approaches



Jane: We could try and find out a bit more about volcanoes. I wonder where we could look?  
*They are joined by another child, Michael, who has been nearby.*

Michael: I've got a book about volcanoes! Some volcanoes are covered in grass!  
And...some are in the sea.

*Jane walks away and leaves the boys playing while she sources some picture books with volcanoes. She returns a few moments later, opens a book at a volcano picture, and places it on the floor. Michael picks it up enthusiastically. He finds pictures and shows Jane and Thomas a picture of a volcano coming out from the sea.*

Encouraging and supporting children to relate to others

## Extending at nursery and at home

At the end of the nursery session, Jane shared the information about both boys with their mums and dads, describing what they had done and what they had talked about. That evening staff shared their observations and discussed the obvious interest in dinosaurs and volcanoes.

Over the next few days, Jane developed the sand area to include several books on dinosaurs, some large pictures of volcanoes and some more information books about volcanoes. Rocks, driftwood, leaves and branches were provided nearby, with 'builders' trays' containing bark chippings, pebbles and other natural materials. The interest attracted a small group of boys, who came to this area first each day, on arrival at nursery.

Arranging, resourcing, and making time for children to freely use rich indoor and outdoor spaces

Thomas and Michael frequently transported their dinosaur models to other areas of the nursery, as they explored their new surroundings. This included the mark-making area, and resulted in some drawings by both boys of their dinosaur models, which became the subject of a 'learning story' display.

Showing interest and celebrating with children their interests and achievements

Talking about this interest with the boys' parents resulted for one in a trip to the museum to look at dinosaur remains and fossils, and formed the basis for a regular exchange of information between his key person and his parent.

### Pause for thought

How did Jane use the 'observe–assess–respond' cycle in various contexts:

- from the home visit and speaking with Thomas's parents?
- as Thomas played in the sand?
- to build on the children's interests?

What strategies did Jane use to enter into a partnership with Thomas as he played in the sand?

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## 30-50 months

### Vehicles

Mohammed, three-years-three-months, had previously never spoken in any language at the day nursery he attended in Newham, while his parents said he spoke in Bengali at home. He had just returned the previous week after more than two months in Bangladesh, and practitioners noticed that he was now happy to talk in Bengali.

Mohammed was playing on his own in a tray containing flour and blue powder paint, repetitively rolling one car backwards and forwards for ten minutes, with an uninterested expression on his face. Shahida decided to sit next to him, to offer company and support his language development. Most of the conversation is in Bengali, with Shahida including some English words (in bold italics).

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Shahida: Do you like playing with cars?  
*Mohammed nods.*

Shahida: Look, tractor, car. *Pointing to the different vehicles.*

Mohammed: Tractor, car. *Continuing to roll car backwards and forwards.*

Shahida: Your dad has a car. ***Dad car.***

Mohammed: Yes, and uncle has a car. *Still rolling car backwards and forwards.*

Shahida: Shall we put some more cars out to play?

*Holds up bucket that was there all the time for him to choose from. **More car?***

*Mohammed takes more cars and trains and plays with them, moving them around and at times holding a car in each hand. Shahida watches attentively, saying nothing but maintaining companionship. Mohammed then lines several cars up against the edge of the tray. He makes one car move and becomes more animated.*

Arranging, resourcing, and making time for children to freely use rich indoor and outdoor spaces

Being sensitive to the child's thinking and learning when deciding when to interact and when to value the child's independent activity

Scaffolding children's learning through talk, discussing strategies and ideas, suggesting possibilities and modelling approaches

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Maintaining close, caring and respectful relationships

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- Mohammed: Choo choo. Choo choo.  
 Shahida: Train. **Train.**  
 Mohammed: Car. *Picks up a car.*  
 Shahida: The cars are lining up, it's a traffic jam.  
 Mohammed: Line. *Tracing a line in the air over the cars.*  
*Mohammed shunts the line backwards and forwards, moving a car to the front and back of the line. He plays like this for several minutes, with Shahida maintaining a gently supportive presence.*  
 Mohammed: Yooooooooow...(sound of car)...yeeeeeeeew...ooooooooowwww.  
*He picks up two cars and begins to bang them together.*  
 Shahida: **Bang crash.**  
*Mohammed smiles and bangs them together more.*  
 Shahida: There is an accident.  
*Mohammed picks up a car that has a tiny steering wheel he can hold and pretends to drive it, making noises of the sound of the car. This continues for a minute or so, as Shahida watches.*  
 Shahida: You are driving to the shops. **Driving, driving.**  
*She imitates his driving action. Mohammed begins to pick cars up and repositions them into a circle.*

Interpreting children's actions and words to try to understand the child's thinking and learning

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- Shahida: The cars are in a circle now. **Circle.** The cars drive round.  
*She traces in the air over the circle of cars, as Mohammed had with the line.*  
**Round.**  
 Mohammed: Daddy drives like this.  
*He holds his hands up and demonstrates, making driving noises. Shahida reaches to take a car from the circle to play with, but Mohammed stops her sharply with his hands.*  
 Mohammed: No! Driving.  
 Shahida: How did you get to Bangladesh?  
 Mohammed: We went on a plane.  
*Mohammed continues to make his driving noises.*

Identifying and supporting next steps in learning

Joining in play and child-initiated activities following children's agendas

### Pause for thought

What might be an area of interest for Mohammed that could be built upon further? What learning and development might you want to support – perhaps his representation of shapes with physical objects and drawing lines in the air, or his sharing of experiences from home, or his confidence in communicating?

Can you identify enhancements to the learning environment that might be appropriate? Would you plan an adult-led opportunity specifically with Mohammed in mind?

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## 40-60+ months

**For the children in the last year of the EYFS, practitioners will be using observational assessment to gather evidence towards their final judgements for the EYFSP at the end of the EYFS, and some of these links are described along with the case studies.**

Providing brief, well-planned focused learning opportunities in response to observed interests, learning and development

### Exploring trees

#### Adult-led planning from children's interests

Before a reception class went for a session at a forest school site, the adults wondered which aspect of the forest would capture their attention. They had previously noted that individual children in the group were interested in flowers and other growing things, while exploring trails and finding out about minibeasts interested others.

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The trees themselves proved to be the prime focus of interest in the forest. 'The trees have bumps at the ground,' said one boy. 'Look at all this stuff on the ground – how does it all get here?' asked a child. 'I think it comes off the trees,' another said. 'But how does it all get on the trees? I think the wind blows it up, and then it sticks, and then the wind blows it down again.' 'No, it grows on the tree. My nanny's got an apple tree and they fall off and wasps eat them.'

Another interest was stories in the forest. 'I'm riding a massive Brontosaurus! You can see his long, long neck!' 'We're going to the Three Bears' House. It's down here!'

#### Parents' voices

'A truly wonderful experience. Imaginative and creative activities structured in a way that allowed the children to involve themselves in a way that was right for them; noisy and boisterous, magical and creative, calm and thoughtful, or a mixture of all! Joe has carried his love of the forest home with him – making camps and seeing the world from a different perspective.'

Varying experiences, using fresh, creative and playful approaches

'All the children and myself were much involved. Making shelters was very exciting for them and for them to know that people can sleep outside. I think the trip was brilliant. Living in the inner city I think the children have no idea about the forest and making fires and shelters.'

Providing first-hand experiences to explore and discover

'I felt it was a great outdoor activity. They learnt to work together. Felix got involved eventually. Once he got settled in after eating he got involved and enjoyed working in a team.'

Encouraging and supporting children to relate to others

#### Finding out about trees

In discussion after the trip, the adults decided to plan activities to focus on finding out about trees. First they created a mind map with the children, asking them to think of everything they knew about trees and what they would like to find out. This would be revisited and added to during the project.

*We know:*

'When the little seed grows it soon turns up into some woods and then it grows. And then it grows lots of branches. And then loads and loads of leaves turn up.'

'Squirrels live in trees and hide nuts.'

'Trees are really, really, really big.'

'I've got a tree house in my garden. My daddy made it'.

*We want to find out:*

Why do the leaves fall off?

Why have trees got holes?

Why is the spider under there?

Why is the bark red?

Using the language of learning to focus children on themselves as learners

## Representing what we know

In small group time the adults then invited the children to make a picture of everything they knew about trees. A large piece of paper was placed on the floor, and children chose the materials to use for their picture.

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One child scattered the coloured 'apples' across the space.

*Adult: I can see the apples are all around the tree.*

Scaffolding children's learning through talk

Joshua: No, they have to attach to branches.

The adults noted that one child placed branches at the bottom of the tree. (Maybe she was representing roots, or had seen new saplings growing out of the bottom of the trunk?)

Observing children as a natural part of all normal activity

Interpreting children's actions and words to try to understand the child's thinking and learning

## Finding out more

The adults posed a question: 'How can we find out more about trees?'

The children suggested the internet and books – both of these were used, including concentrated use of non-fiction books. Joshua was most interested in a big book about life in trees, which was then used as a big book shared with the class.

This interest appeared in Joshua's child-initiated time, where he chose to draw and write, and also in adult-led independent writing where he chose to write:

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'A fox was digging in the roots.

The bees are stinging.

A racoon was in the tree.'

## First-hand experiences

In the school grounds there were many trees of different varieties. The adults took advantage of looking at trees outside with the children, experiencing trees at first hand and using all their senses to find out more.

Providing first-hand experiences to explore and discover

The adults sat with the children and encouraged them to ask questions and come up with their own answers. As the children were used to using non-fiction books to support their investigations, William went to get his favourite information book about trees and referred to it while sitting under the willow. The adult and William read the book together to find out more information. 'Look, trees have roots. Roots go under the ground. I can see the roots. The roots help the tree drink, 'cos my mum said.' William got up and showed the adult where the roots were on the tree. 'Look, see.'

Showing interest and celebrating with children their interests and achievements

The children experienced sitting under a huge willow tree. The adults listened to the conversations that the children were having about what they were seeing, hearing, smelling.

'The branches are really, really long and they go down to the ground. I can touch them!'

'It swishes.'

(The leaves were blowing in the wind.)

'It's got holes. What's in the holes?' 'Put your hand in and see.' 'No, a squirrel might bite it!'

The children touched the bark and explored the textures.

'It's got bumps on it. It's scratchy.'

'Trunks are harder and branches aren't.'

'The trunk is strong. The trunk is like an elephant. It's got some roots and lots of leaves.'

The adults had brought along a range of media, including fine black pens, pencils and paint. They encouraged the children to look carefully at the trees and draw them.

The teacher also drew the tree and talked through her thinking as she was doing so to encourage further language about trees, and to show that she was looking at the tree and verbally describing what she saw.

Scaffolding children's learning through talk, discussing strategies and ideas, suggesting possibilities and modelling approaches

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There's holes in the tree.

What are the holes in the tree for? For the animals and the birds to live in. like owls.

When I went camping with my friend I heard an owl. Twit twoo, twit twoo. In the night'

## More learning, more representing

The children learned more about trees from further investigation of the trees outdoors, discussions with adults and parents, reading non-fiction texts and using the internet.

The adults planned for children to represent their growing knowledge in three dimensions using clay, and also encouraged the children to describe their work in words.

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'My tree is called a falling-over tree. The branches grow down because it's only got one root so it can't drink much water.

Apples grow on the tree – they are invisible, you can't see them.

People don't have to have ladders to climb up because the branches are down.'

Varying experiences, using fresh, creative and playful approaches

'It's called a magic tree and everything on the tree is magic and it's the prettiest tree in the whole world.

It's got lots of roots, and the roots are magic and they let the tree grow up into the air.

The body – that's called the trunk.

The branches are girlfriends and boyfriends and the leaves and branches talk to the tree.'

## Planning around a particular concept, knowledge or skill

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Adults planned a series of activities around sorting and classifying, giving reasons for decisions. There was a walk outside to look at ways that trees were the same or different, and how they could be grouped (e.g. fruit or not, trees/bushes). Then adults planned a focus group activity sorting leaves, and recorded each child's thinking and decisions about how to sort the leaves.

Identifying and supporting next steps in learning

Interpreting children's actions and words to try to understand the child's thinking and learning

## Partners in learning

Joshua decided to paint a tree, and used the style of making small marks that had been the focus of a small group painting activity. As Joshua painted, he described his thinking to the adult who took an active interest.

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'We need to do a sun because the sun makes the tree grow. There can be holes in it for animals to live in.'

The adult made a mental note that Joshua was making a connection with the books he had read. He left a space where a hole could be.

'We need branches here, as they don't all come out the top.'

Joshua was looking out of the window at a tree to consider what colours he wanted to use. 'Leaves can be any colour green and when they fall off they change colour.' He used his knowledge of mixing colours to support him in making the colours that he needed. He mixed blue and yellow. 'Look, I've made green.' He then added black or white to lighten or darken the shade required. He used both a light and a dark green for the leaves.

Scaffolding children's learning through talk, discussing strategies and ideas, suggesting possibilities and modelling approaches

'There could be over a million leaves.'

Points to the 'hole' space in the tree.  
'What colour do we do this?'

They discuss the colours, then decide to try to find out. There is no hole visible in the tree outside the window, so they go outside.

No trees have holes, but they do have splits. Joshua decides this is the right colour to use for the hole.

'A dark brown. It needs to be very dark. Almost black.' Joshua considers his paints.  
'We could add some black.'

Encouraging and supporting children to persevere through difficulties, to take risks, to ask questions and problem-solve



## An indoor forest

After building trees from clay one child suggested making the forest inside, which sparked a great interest from many of the children. The practitioner asked what resources they thought they might need. The children wanted various materials to make trunks, and wanted to use real leaves.

Together the practitioner and children found large tubes for the trunks. The children set about finding ways to support the trunks to stand up. They used flowerpots and strong sticky tape and tied the tubes to the legs of tables. One group gathered leaves to stick on, another mixed colours to paint the bark, while others stuck wood shavings onto the tubes so they were rough like bark. One child spent two days tying knots around the trunk. The children built the forest, with the practitioner helping when asked.

Arranging, resourcing, and making time for children to freely use rich indoor and outdoor spaces

Ensuring children have time for sustained child-initiated activity

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'Let's paint the trunk.'

'Get the paint.'

'We need brown.'

'I'll make brown, I'll mix all the colours up, that makes brown!'

'Look, I've got leaves, now it will be crunchy like the real forest.'

'The branches won't stick.'

'Use tape, look, here's some!'

'Well done, now they stick.'

## Child-initiated time – Pirates

Alongside exploring his interest in trees, Joshua demonstrated another interest which often took prime place in his play. For several days, he and a small group of friends consistently chose to use the soft blocks, and were playing pirate games.

Building a pirate ship was the focus, which soon also included an island.

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Ensuring children have time for sustained child-initiated activity

The adults observed the play, and noticed that Joshua had lots of ideas and was listened to by the other children. They felt that this play was a confidence-booster for Joshua who could be reserved in other contexts.

Seeking to know and understand each individual child and their development

One day the children started to build a large 'tower' on the ship. The adult said, 'I haven't seen a pirate ship with a tower before.' Joshua said, 'Yes, they do have these, but they aren't called towers.' He went to get the pirate book he had been reading with the teacher, and together they found the word 'mast'.

Scaffolding children's learning through talk, discussing strategies and ideas, suggesting possibilities and modelling approaches

The adults planned to place wooden sticks and string of different lengths in the block area the next day, to encourage the children to explore the ideas of masts. It would involve a challenge in mounting and fixing the uprights, and comparing lengths.

Identifying and supporting next steps in learning

## ***Evidence toward Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scale points***

### **Personal, Social and Emotional Development**

#### ***Dispositions and attitudes***

- *5 Selects and uses activities and resources independently*

Children select paints to mix colours, collect leaves from outside.

- *6 Continues to be interested, motivated and excited to learn*

The children are able to follow their own interest; they were excited by the forest trip and continued the interest once back in the setting.

- *7 Is confident to try new activities, initiate ideas and speak in a familiar group*

The group involved in making the forest were confident and shared their ideas.

- *8 Maintains attention and concentrates*

The trees project lasted for one term, with the children revisiting making trees and building forests.

#### ***Social development***

- *4 Works as part of a group or class, taking turns and sharing fairly*

The children worked together in the forest, and when building the forest. Parent comment: 'Felix became more involved and worked as part of a team.'

- *5 Forms good relationships with adults and peers*

The group supported each other and shared resources. 'Well done, now they stick.'

- *6 Understands that there need to be agreed values and codes of behaviour for groups of people, including adults and children, to work together harmoniously*

The children followed the rules in the forest to keep safe.

#### ***Emotional development***

- *4 Responds to significant experiences, showing a range of feelings when appropriate*

The group respond with excitement, fear and awe when in the forest.

## Communication, Language and Literacy

### **Language for communication and thinking**

- *5 Uses language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences*

The children acted out roles in the forest looking for the Three Bears and riding a Brontosaurus. 'I'm riding a Brontosaurus! He's got a long neck!'

- *6 Interacts with others in a variety of contexts, negotiating plans and activities, and taking turns in conversation*

As children used their senses to explore the trees, they took turns in the conversations, sharing thoughts and ideas. When the children were recreating the forest they negotiated roles that each would take on.

- *7 Uses talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events; explores the meanings and sounds of new words*

The children talked through their thinking, for example: 'Let's paint the trunk.' 'Get the paint.' 'We need brown.' 'I'll make brown, I'll mix all the colours up, that makes brown!' 'Look, I've got leaves, now it will be crunchy like the real forest.' 'The branches won't stick.' 'Use tape, look, here's some!' 'Well done, now they stick.'

The children used new vocabulary; branches, roots, bark, 'the trunk is strong like an elephant'. The children experimented with words to support them in being able to describe trees; scratchy, rough, massive.

### **Reading**

- *8 Shows an understanding of how information can be found in non-fiction texts to answer questions about where, who, why and how*

The children referred to non-fiction texts to find out more about trees.

### **Writing**

- *6 Attempts writing for a variety of purposes, using features of different forms*

Joshua chose to write about trees.

## Knowledge and Understanding of the World

- *4 Investigates places, objects, materials and living things by using all the senses as appropriate, identifies some features and talks about those features they like and dislike*

Children explored the forest, e.g. textures on the trees.

- *5 Asks questions about why things happen and how things work, looks closely at similarities, differences, patterns and change*

Children frequently ask questions: 'Why are there holes?' 'Why is the spider under there?'

- *8 Builds and constructs with a wide range of objects, selecting appropriate resources, tools and techniques and adapting her/his work where necessary*

The group constructed the forest using a range of materials and tools. When fixing the branches to the tubes the children modified their ideas in order to meet their objective of fixing the branches.

They explored different fixing strategies until they were successful.

## Physical Development

- *5 Demonstrates fine motor control and coordination*

One child tied knots; children used brushes, pens and scissors effectively.

- *7 Handles tools, objects, construction and malleable materials safely and with basic control*

Children used clay, and tools to construct the forest.

## Creative Development

- *5 Explores colour, texture, shape, form and space in two or three dimensions*

Children explored the forest, e.g. textures on the trees.

- *7 Uses imagination in art and design, music, dance, imaginative play, role-play and stories. Responds in a variety of ways to what they see, hear, smell, touch and feel*

and

- *8 Expresses and communicates ideas, thoughts and feelings using a range of materials, suitable tools, imaginative play, role-play, movement, designing and making, and a variety of songs and musical instruments*

The children represented their ideas throughout the project in response to the forest trip, e.g. through role-play and movement: 'I'm going to the bear's house!' 'Grrrr, I'm a bear! I'm going to eat you up!'

The children represented their ideas using a range of available resources, paint and brushes, drawing materials, hand drills, pens, 3-D materials, sticking tape, etc.

The group made decisions about what resources to use based on previous knowledge about the properties of materials: tape will stick leaves, paint can make brown, wood shavings will make good bark.

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## Children leading their learning

At an infant school in Wolverhampton, a core principle of the school is that 'the child leads their learning'. This has moved away from a very structured, adult-led approach in reception classes a few years ago, where planning was determined weeks in advance.

'In planning skills activities now we respond to what we've noticed in child-initiated time, when the children are applying their skills in their own way and in their own time,' says Rekha, EYFS Coordinator and Assistant Head teacher. 'So we take every week as it comes.' Alongside adult-led activities 'delivered in a fun way', the adults plan a variety of opportunities for children to use and apply the skills in play – which the children often take in new directions.

Varying experiences, using fresh, creative and playful approaches

Providing brief, well-planned focused learning opportunities in response to observed interests, learning and development

## Child-initiated activity

Rekha comments that the adults have an active role in the plan-do-review sessions. 'The children have chosen what to do, but we don't just leave them to it. We support them to question, to think, and to use language. We are ensuring the children are making the most of what we're offering them.'

The role-play area is currently a travel agency, and children have been talking about ways to travel and designing aeroplanes. Fareed has made a model aeroplane and brings it proudly to show Rekha.

Scaffolding children's learning through talk

- Fareed: Look at my aeroplane!  
Rekha: Where would you like it to take you?  
Fareed: To Africa.  
Rekha: Africa! Have you been there before?  
Fareed: No. It's got gardens there.  
Rekha: How do you know, when you haven't been there?  
Fareed: I've seen pictures.  
Rekha: I'd like to see those pictures of gardens in Africa.  
Fareed: I might bring it – next week. I might bring it on my birthday.

Showing interest and celebrating with children their interests and achievements

### Pause for thought

How did Rekha, in the context of an everyday exchange, support Fareed to connect his model-making to other areas of interest and knowledge for him?

How might she build upon this conversation further?

## How can the explorer cross the river?

### Interweaving – children’s ideas, adult-led stimulus, children’s ideas

The children had shown an interest in the water tray the previous week, talking about what went to the bottom and what stayed afloat. The adults decided this was a perfect opportunity to explore floating, sinking and capacity.

They sent an email to the children from a storybook explorer, explaining that she was in the jungle but unable to cross a river. She needed the children to find suitable materials to tell her how to cross the water. The children discussed the possible problems with various materials, and the adults introduced and reinforced the language ‘heavy’ and ‘light’, ‘float’ and ‘sink’.

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Some of the children then chose to experiment with various materials to see which would float and sink, in order to help the explorer. Adults observed and used open questions to further develop the children’s ideas and thought processes.

Many of the children extended and experimented with their ideas, making various models using floating materials. One group got a toy man to represent the explorer to test a bridge of drinking straws they had made.

Observing children as a natural part of all normal activity

Identifying and supporting next steps in learning

Scaffolding children’s learning through talk

Providing first-hand experiences to explore and discover

Arranging, resourcing, and making time for children to freely use rich indoor and outdoor spaces

### Adult-led session, designing in pairs

Building on the children’s ideas of bridges and their obvious interest, the adults decided to plan an adult-led session challenging the children to design their own way for the explorer to cross the river, using a variety of materials. The children worked in pairs, and generated ideas ranging from boats and bridges to pontoons. Once they had drawn their plans a number of children chose to label their diagrams to include materials and parts, and others chose to stick a small piece of each material on the diagram.

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Varying experiences, using fresh, creative and playful approaches

Encouraging and supporting children to relate to others

## Making it real

The children were excited and wanted to make their ideas real. As this activity had not been planned for in advance, the wood had to be borrowed from another year group. So the production process began. The children needed to find, measure, cut and attach their own materials. Adults only intervened when asked. A number of the children independently adapted their models during the production process for numerous reasons.

The following day the children were given the opportunity to test their models in the water trays. Adults were very interested in the children's language and discussion, and were impressed at the way children talked about adapting their models next time. One child commented to his partner, 'We need to put the mast in the middle, otherwise it will capsizel' Another said, 'The bottom is too small – we need a bigger one, or it will sink.'

Encouraging and supporting children to persevere through difficulties, to take risks, to ask questions and problem-solve

Interpreting children's actions and words to try to understand the child's thinking and learning

## Child-initiated birthday card for the explorer

In response to a story about the explorer, the class had been talking about birthdays. One table had been set out with collage materials, and Wajihah decided that after making a collage of a birthday cake she could adapt this to make a card for the explorer.

She folded the card in half, wrote 'To Dora' on the front and then proceeded to attempt to write 'Happy Birthday Dora from Orange Class' using her phonic knowledge.

The adults noted that Wajihah was able to write using the initial sounds and some short vowel sounds too, which would inform their focus in phonics work with Wajihah. She was pleased with what she had made and adults felt it was one of her best pieces of unaided writing she had done so far.

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Showing interest and celebrating with children their interests and achievements

Interpreting children's actions and words to try to understand the child's thinking and learning

## Phonics play

Sunisha chose to go to the phonics table, and started taking objects out of the phonics game box. She picked up a ring and said, 'r – ring.' She continued selecting objects, saying in turn, 'd – dummy', 'n – nose', 't – tyre', 't – teeth', 'l – lipstick'.

A practitioner picked up a letter card and said, 'What sound does this letter show?' When Sunisha replied, 'd', the practitioner said, 'I wonder if there are any more things that begin with that sound.' Sunisha looked through the objects, took out a doughnut and placed it on the card. After doing the same with the dummy, she picked up a toy that had been referred to in adult-led sessions as a 'lady'. She said, 'Dancing', and played it on the card. Sunisha then chose the 'm' sound mat, saying 'm for mouse'. She looked in the box of objects, found a milk carton and said, 'm'.

Identifying and supporting next steps in learning

Ensuring children have time for sustained child-initiated activity

Sunisha packed away the objects and sound mats, selected a phonics jigsaw, and correctly matched initial letters with object pictures for g, x, s, z, d, o, f and a. She remained engaged, playing alone at the phonics table for an extended period.



## **Evidence toward Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scale points**

### **Personal, Social and Emotional Development**

#### **Dispositions and attitudes**

- *5 Selects and uses activities and resources independently*

Sunisha chooses the phonics game.

- *8 Maintains attention and concentrates*

Sunisha works independently and remains engaged at the phonics table for an extended period.

### **Communication, Language and Literacy**

#### **Linking sounds and letters**

- *3 Links some sounds to letters*

### **Using and applying phonic knowledge**

Mia chose to go to the mark-making area and got out the felt pens and an A4 exercise book. She explained to her friend, 'I'm making a register'. Mia independently wrote, 'Aby, Mix, Cameron, Mia C' on the paper, one under the other. She sounded out the names as she wrote them.

Mia then asked, 'Max, is that how you write your name?'

Max: 'No, you need an "a".'

So Mia wrote 'Mixa.' Max said, 'No, not like that. The "x" has to come after.'

Mia then approached an adult and asked, 'How do you write Ysabel?' The adult told Mia the letters and Mia wrote them on her register.

Mia then went and explained to her friend, 'If you want to write my name you need "M", "i", "a" and a "c", the round-the-caterpillar one.' Mia then went on to point at her register and ask her friend, 'Who is the special helper? It says Aby and Max.' Mia then gave them her register to 'take to the office'.

When she got her register back she said, 'I need more names on it but I don't know how to write them.' She went over to her friends: 'Karnell, can you write your name on this register, 'cos I don't know how to write it?' After he wrote his name she went and asked some other friends. When she asked Alicia how to write her name, Alicia sounded it out and Mia wrote it down asking, 'How do you write "i"?''

Mia then wrote 'B' down and went to an adult and asked, 'How do you write Billy?' The adult sounded it out and Mia wrote it down. She then asked, 'How do you write Ben?' The adult said 'B' and Mia responded, 'What, like the same as Billy?' then wrote it down.

When Mia had filled the page she continued to use the register in her play.

Arranging, resourcing, and making time for children to freely use rich indoor and outdoor spaces

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Scaffolding children's learning through talk, discussing strategies and ideas, suggesting possibilities and modelling approaches

## ***Evidence toward Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scale points***

### **Personal, Social and Emotional Development**

#### ***Dispositions and attitudes***

- *5 Selects and uses activities and resources independently*

Mia chooses to make a register and is able to find the appropriate resources that she needs.

- *6 Continues to be interested, motivated and excited to learn*

Mia shows great interest in making a register. She stays involved and shows an interest in registers.

- *7 Is confident to try new activities, initiate ideas and speak in a familiar group*

Mia has the confidence to initiate her own activity and is happy to involve other children by asking them questions.

- *8 Maintains attention and concentrates*

Mia stays involved in register making over a period of time.

- *9 The child has achieved all the Early Learning Goals for dispositions and attitudes. In addition, the child sustains involvement and perseveres, particularly when trying to solve a problem or reach a satisfactory conclusion.*

Mia uses a range of strategies to solve her problem of writing names for her register. She persists until her register is complete. Mia knows she has successfully accomplished her mission and then uses her register in her role-play.

#### ***Social development***

- *4 Works as part of a group or class, taking turns and sharing fairly*

Mia involves other children in supporting her in making her register. Asks questions and listens to the responses.

- *5 Forms good relationships with adults and peers*

Mia is able to ask children for support, and also works confidently with the adults around her by asking them for support when she needs it.

### **Communication, Language and Literacy**

#### ***Language for communication and thinking***

- *5 Uses language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences*

Mia chooses to make a register to include within her role-play.

- *6 Interacts with others in a variety of contexts, negotiating plans and activities, and taking turns in conversation*

Mia has many interactions throughout making her register. She asks for information which she values and uses in her register writing.

- *7 Uses talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events; explores the meanings and sounds of new words*

'I'm going to make a register.' 'If you want to write my name you need an "M".'

### **Linking sounds and letters**

- 4 *Links sounds to letters, naming and sounding letters of the alphabet*

Mia is able to link sounds and letters when asking children how to spell their names. The adult told Mia the sounds and she wrote them down independently.

- 5 *Hears and says sounds in words*

'If you want to write my name, you need "M", "i", "a" and a "c", the round-the-caterpillar one.' Mia says the sounds in her name including the initial of her surname.

### **Reading**

- 3 *Recognises a few familiar words*

Mia is able to read the names of her friends.

### **Writing**

- 4 *Writes own name and other words from memory*

Mia is able to write her name and those of her friends.

- 6 *Attempts writing for a variety of purposes, using features of different forms*

Mia has chosen to write a register. She also has an understanding that a list of names need to be written under each other.

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Wilson, R. (2007) *Nature and young children: encouraging creative play and learning in natural environments*, David Fulton, London

## Resources

Early Years Foundation Stage materials

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) Ref: 'Early Years'

Social and Emotional Aspects of Development (SEAD)

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) Ref: 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Development: Guidance for EYFS Practitioners'

Every Child a Talker: Guidance for Early Language Lead Practitioners

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) Ref: 'Every Child a Talker – Guidance for Early Language Lead Practitioners'

Working with Parents and carers e-learning module

[www.nationalstrategiescpd.org.uk](http://www.nationalstrategiescpd.org.uk)

Parents as Partners in Early Learning case studies

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) Ref: 'Parents as Partners in Early Learning'

Mark Making Matters: Young children making meaning in all areas of learning and development

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) Ref: 'Mark Making Matters'

Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy (PSRN) e-learning course

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) Ref: 'Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy (PSRN) e-learning course'

Progress Matters: Reviewing and enhancing young children's development

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) Ref: 'Early Years'

Supporting children learning English as an additional language: Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) Ref: 'Supporting children learning English as an additional language: Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage'

Creating the Picture

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) Ref: 'Foundation Stage resources: Creating the picture'

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile handbook

[www.qcda.gov.uk](http://www.qcda.gov.uk) Ref: 'Tests and exams support – Early Years Foundation Stage Profile'

Inclusion Development Programme: Supporting children with speech, language and communication needs

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) Ref: 'Inclusion Development Programme: Supporting children with speech, language and communication needs'

EYFS Inclusion Development Programme: Supporting children on the autistic spectrum

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) Ref: 'Supporting children on the autistic spectrum'

Confident, capable and creative: Supporting boys' achievements

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) Ref: 'Confident, capable and creative: supporting boys' achievements'

Building Futures: Believing in children – A focus on provision for Black children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) Ref: 'Building Futures: Believing in children'

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