

Planning In the moment

The Early Years Statutory Framework 2021 states:

1.11. Practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests, and development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all areas of learning and development.

1.14 Play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, relate to others, set their own goals and solve problems. Children learn by leading their own play, and by taking part in play which is guided by adults. Practitioners need to decide what they want children in their setting to learn, and the most effective ways to teach it. Practitioners must stimulate children's interests, responding to each child's emerging needs and guiding their development through warm, positive interactions coupled with secure routines for play and learning

Building on what is known is nothing new. Every responsive parent and skilful practitioner will do this. Planning in the moment takes account of both statutory requirements. There is no formal forward planning. Practitioners:

- use observation and listening skills
- respond as needed to experiences to extend and enrich a child's interest and development.

This type of planning helps practitioners to be effective. Practitioners should consider and review the indoor and outdoor environments. They can then adapted them to meet the children's level of involvement.

The core areas needed for success:

- Good levels of well-being through meaningful relationships with each child and their family
- Large amount of child-initiated play, including:
 - access to outdoors
 - genuine autonomy and choice to provide opportunities for deep levels of involvement.
- Consistent boundaries, expectations, and routines.
- An enabling environment that:
 - is engaging
 - stimulating
 - contains plenty of open-ended resources
 - is challenging and extends learners at all levels.
- Skillful, responsive practitioners

Teachable moments

Children often learn in an unconscious way during casual or less formal interactions. Staff need to be able to recognise that these are 'teachable moments'. They need practitioners to:

- Provide opportunities with an environment that stimulates curiosity. Each child will have different things that stimulate them. For example – while one might enjoy painting, another might like dressing up.
- Observe and listen so they can follow the child's lead.
- Pick up on the thing/place/person/idea that has sparked the child's interest.
- Use open ended questions.
- Praise and reinforce positive learning experiences.
- Practitioners need to be sensitive to teachable moments. They need to be mindful of how they can extend children's thinking across all areas of the EYFS curriculum.

The role of the practitioner

The role of the practitioner is to:

- observe children during play
- tune into what children are saying and doing
- interact when appropriate to move the learning on. This may be for an individual or a group of children depending on the activity observed.

When a child shows a level of interest and curiosity that an adult can build on this is a 'teachable moment'. The adult can enhance and extend the interest to delve deeper into the child's line of enquiry.

Instead of 'planning', think 'enhancing'.

It is not possible to plan this type of learning in advance. The core provision must create an engaging environment. Materials must excite and interest children at all levels of ability.

- Use learning journeys to record what children have done after the event. Record both practitioner/child interactions and child/child interactions.
- Ask children to reflect on their own learning. Use what they say in your records. The 'child's voice'.
- Highlight areas of progress within the observation records
- Systems for assessment and record keeping need to be manageable. Most of your time needs to be with the children

Planning in the moment will give practitioners a strong understanding of children's

- interests
- knowledge
- skills
- level of progress.

Children will have more opportunities for making progress in all areas of learning.

Crucial elements to the success of planning in the moment are:

- a well-resourced, open- ended provision
- quality interactions from adults,
- clear and careful observations by adults
- effective ways of extending children's thinking
- knowing the children in your care well.

Anna Ephgrave in her book 'The Reception Year in Action. 2013' suggests the following elements are essential for children to be able to pursue their own interests.

"Children have a natural desire to explore, communicate, create and learn. Our job is to establish an environment (meaning the provision, the people and the atmosphere) where this is possible. One vital part of this is to ensure each child feels safe, valued and important within the setting. Firm boundaries and expectations are established from day one. Staggered intake of small groups allows adults to concentrate this vital aspect of our work. Self-discipline is also key. Once the enabling environment is established, the next job is to observe, support and extend the children in their pursuits.

This approach is daunting for many practitioners and parents. They are unsure about how the children will 'learn' if they are not 'taught' by the teachers... Children excel if they are in a stimulating environment that is carefully organised. They learn and develop when they are closely observed and the observations are used to support their 'next steps'. They take risks and surpass expectations when they have clear routines and boundaries, combined with a supportive staff and an enabling environment. They see learning as an integral part of their lives when information and links are made between home and school."

Extracts from - Teaching and Play in the Early Years - A Balancing Act July 2015

"Teaching incorporates all of the ways that adults help young children to learn. Those we visited found it unhelpful to think of their work as either

teacher-led or child-initiated. They saw the interplay between adults and children as a continuum, with the adults making constant decisions about the level of formality, structure and dependence that would promote the best possible learning”

An effective start with young children relies on getting to know:

- their strengths and weaknesses
- interests and fascinations
- aptitudes and attitudes

This needs to happen quickly so that the adults can provide the right balance of activities.

Children at all developmental stages make rapid progress in an environment where they

- are settled
- have learning experiences that challenge and engage them
- have effective teachers who know interact and extend learning.

Teaching and play are not separate activities. When an adult plays with a child they are teaching through:

- the resources they might need to find
- the questions they are going to ask
- their physical behaviour and how they are modelling a skill
- the language and vocabulary they are using

Teaching is happening all the time adults are engaging and interacting with children.