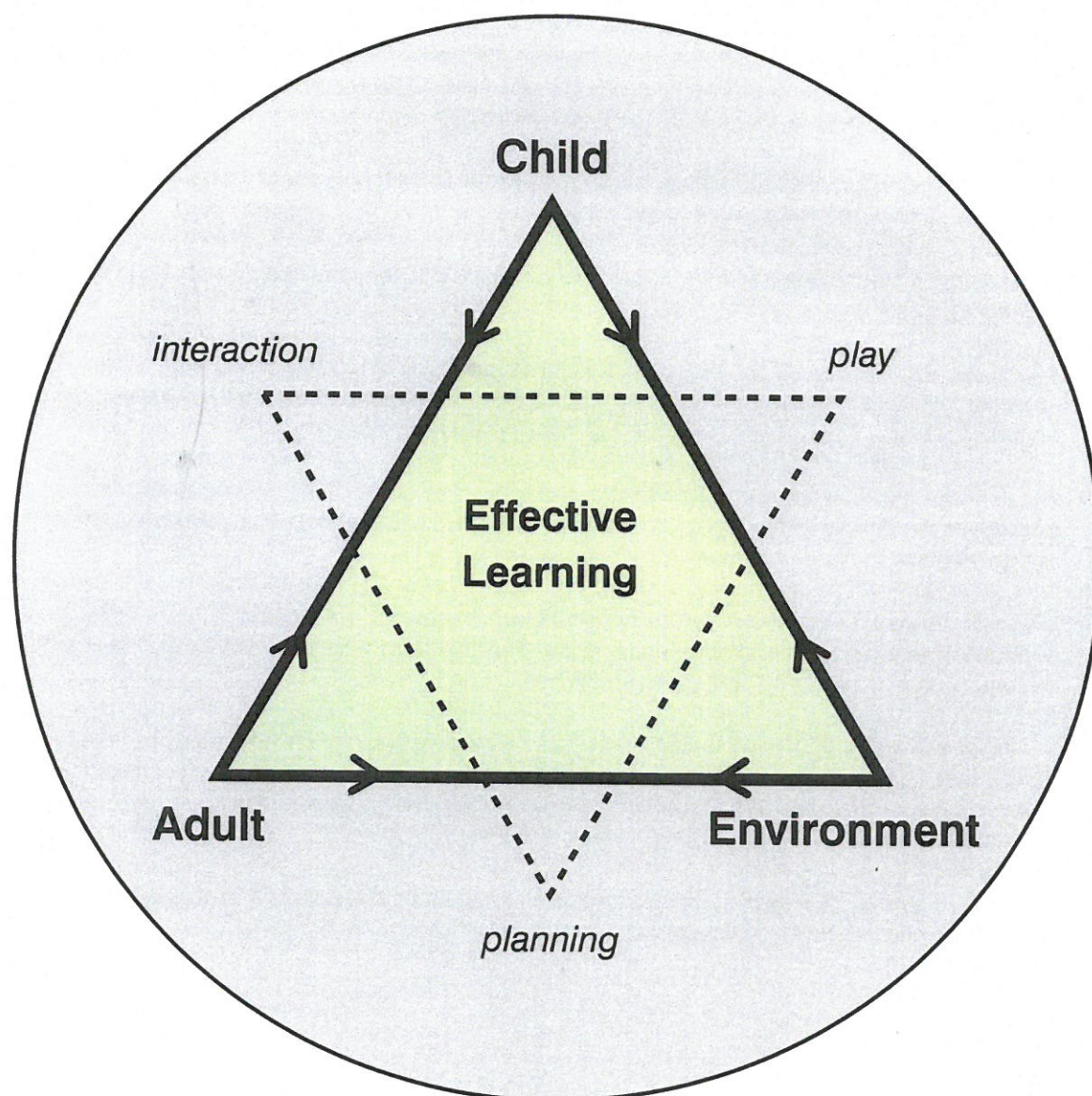




## Our pedagogical model

Our pedagogical model, shown below, presents a view of quality. It illustrates, through three overlapping layers, the key factors in effective learning and teaching.

The simplicity of the model is part of its strength, making it an accessible framework to use in review and evaluation. However, its real strength lies in how it captures the complex relationships between the child, the environment and the adult, highlighting the dynamic processes of everyday life in an early years setting.



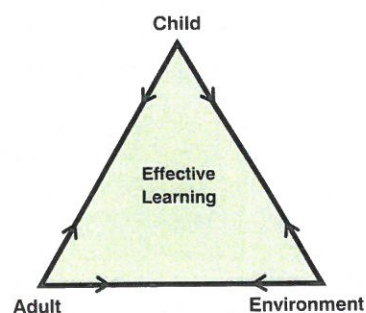
As you read about the model and begin to understand its significance, you will see how you could use it as a professional development tool, which you can refer to at regular intervals to identify aspects of your practice that are strong and those that need further thought and development.



## The key elements in effective learning

The first layer is the triangle shown here in green. It represents the elements that educators need to understand most clearly if they are to develop a foundation stage curriculum that responds to what young learners need.

The following three elements form the underpinning framework for effective learning: responding to children's interests and desires, having an informed view of how best to structure the environment and understanding the role of the educator.



## The dynamic processes of effective learning

The second layer is the overlapping triangle shown here as a dotted line. By adding this layer we can represent the processes involved in effective learning and teaching.

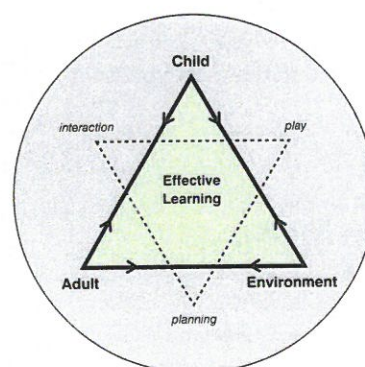
- Play - which we see as the dynamic relationship between the child and the environment.
- Planning - which is the way in which educators structure the environment, adapting and enriching their provision in response to children's interests and emerging ideas.
- Interaction - which is the voice of teaching and learning. It is the communication between the adult and the child, in which, through sustained shared dialogue, ideas are exchanged and learning unfolds.



## The culture of effective learning

The third layer is the circle that surrounds the two triangles. This represents the culture in which learning and teaching take place, the ethos that pervades what we do and how we do it and defines the quality of our practice.

A supportive culture of warmth and respect fosters children's confidence, motivation, independence and well-being, enabling every child to feel valued and successful.



In the following pages we examine the model in more detail. First we take a closer look at the three key elements in effective learning; the child, the environment and the adult. Secondly, we provide an overview of the dynamic processes involved in everyday practice: play, planning and interaction. Thirdly, we explore the importance of the culture in which these processes take place.





## The key elements in effective learning

### A focus on the child

#### *understanding children's desires and interests*

When we introduce our model, we talk about children first and the importance of creating a curriculum that responds to their interests.

In our daily evaluations of practice, what we know about children matters most. Looking closely at children and their play ensures that educators keep in touch with children's lives. Only by deepening their understanding of what motivates children can educators provide experiences that empower them, value their play and take up their ideas.

In this part of our model we invite educators to explore the core of children's lives: their desires and interests in playing, exploring and understanding the world.

In their early years, children have a natural desire to...

- move freely and use all their senses
- talk, listen, ask questions and communicate
- build and construct
- represent and make
- role-play
- story and imagine

These desires are at the heart of children's lives and are central to their learning. They drive the visible behaviours of learning; they are the tools with which children explore and build their understanding of the world.

In their early years, children are interested in...

- themselves and their families
- their immediate environment and everything in it
- their community and the wider world
- the world of fantasy and make believe

These interests lie in the things that children experience most often, the things that they see and feel every day throughout their lives. It is these immediate happenings, a family event, a birthday party, a visit to the shops, a blustery day or a spider's web, a favourite story or TV character, that engage and motivate them.

In working to secure children's well-being we know that capturing what naturally motivates them, their desires and interests, is critical. Responding to children's motivation is highly effective in promoting self-esteem: it is a way of valuing all that is natural to children and giving status to their ideas.

### A focus on the environment

#### *developing a carefully planned environment that engages and excites children*

In our model, a well-planned, carefully organised indoor and outdoor environment that connects with children's desires and interests, is an essential element of effective learning and teaching.



Creating this environment requires careful consideration and involves the development of two aspects: continuous and enhanced provision. Both these aspects provide structure and enrich the learning opportunities available to children, feed children's self-initiated play and provide the basis for more focused investigations and adult-directed activities.

### Developing continuous provision

We use the term continuous provision to describe the resources that are available to children all the time.

**In the indoor environment** continuous provision is best organised by dividing the available space into small, distinct areas for sand, water, paint, workshop, dough, role play, construction, blocks, books and mark making, maths investigations and music. In each of these areas a carefully selected range of resources is presented in an attractive and accessible way.

**In the outdoor environment** the space is organised so that children have a range of opportunities for investigative, imaginative and physical play. Key provision includes resources for building and constructing, water investigation, role play, physical activity and games, digging and gardening. In the outside area, a wide range of resources to support these experiences is readily available every day.

In continuous provision, the resources and the way they are organised remain constant throughout the year, offering children a familiar environment in which they can develop sustained play, practise new skills and extend their ideas over time.

Selecting these resources and deciding how best to present them are skilful tasks. To support the development of each area we ask practitioners to think about two questions:

1. What do children spontaneously do in each area of provision?
2. How can educators respond to these spontaneous activities, extending and enriching their potential for learning?

#### *For example...*

*In the water area we know that one of young children's natural desires is to pour and fill. They do this time and time again as part of their play. By using our curriculum knowledge, we can provide resources that feed these natural desires and promote mathematical and spatial understanding.*

*By selecting graded jugs and funnels and by having two sets of conservation equipment such as beakers and cylinders, we offer greater potential for learning. By presenting these resources individually, in size order, we enable children as part of their play, to think about and use language to describe and compare size, order and capacity.*

Only by taking account of what children naturally want to do and combining this with our curriculum knowledge, can we select rich and relevant resources and organise them in a way that maximises opportunities for learning.





This approach to provision, which gives careful consideration to the range of resources available and the way they are presented, creates a well-structured framework for children's play. It provides a rich context for children's experiences, ensuring that play can be both enjoyable and challenging.

### Using enhanced provision

Alongside the development of continuous provision, we promote the use of enhancements as a way of extending and enriching the environment.

An enhancement is a collection of books and resources that connect with children's predictable interests and seasonal themes. They extend learning by offering opportunities for children to develop their ideas and interests. They are also a starting point for new learning, acting as a catalyst for exploring, talking and thinking about new ideas.

In our centre we display a wide range of resources that can be used to enhance the environment.

#### *For example... Let's Pretend Garage Mechanic*

*Children love to recreate the experiences around them. In the outdoor environment they often engage in imaginative play with vehicles and role play washing cars, mending them, filling them with petrol, and so on.*

*Our garage collection provides the resources to feed children's interest in vehicle play with, for example, mechanics' jackets, tools and toolboxes, oil cans and traffic cones. It also includes non-fiction books, open and closed signs and number plates to extend children's play and enrich their learning.*

In the indoor environment, enhancements include:

- New books - to support a particular interest, season or festival
- Images and resources - to develop an interactive display around a particular idea or interest
- Interactive trays - using small world or natural materials
- Resource collections - to enrich a provision such as sand in miniature
- Focused collections - to explore a particular concept such as colour or light
- Role play resources - for themed play such as a hospital or shop

In the outdoor environment enhancements include:

- Role play resources - to extend events such as camping, BBQ, picnics
- Investigative resources - such as exploring windy weather, bubbles
- Resource collections - to introduce and develop maths games, pattern making, mark making
- Horticultural collections - to add stimulus to growing and gardening

This approach to enriching the environment is a significant element in effective learning and teaching. Enhancements can be introduced to extend learning within continuous provision, to stimulate children's exploration of new ideas and as the starting point for more adult-directed activities.



For the most effective use of both kinds of provision, children need clear guidance and support in acting responsibly: taking care of the resources, treating them appropriately and co-operating with each other. When adults model how to handle tools and resources, special artefacts and books, children quickly learn to use them with confidence and skill, taking pride in their surroundings.

## **A focus on the adult**

### *understanding the educator's contribution to children's learning*

The most skilful part of our role as educators is the way in which we scaffold children's learning. We provide the bridge between what children already know and understand, and what they will learn next given attentive guidance and support.

It is essential that children are well supported by adults who know how to guide and extend their learning in this way. We emphasise this part of the adult's role, because we know that the quality of their support determines the quality of children's learning.

We encourage educators to recognise two distinct aspects of skilful support.

### **Responding to the learner**

This requires empathy with the learners and a real interest in their thinking. By responding to children, to their ideas, thoughts and feelings, educators promote a strong sense of well-being, creating the safety within which children can push at the boundaries of what they already know and understand.

When educators respond attentively to learning, children are encouraged to:

- ask more questions
- wonder about and puzzle over ideas
- work things out for themselves
- think creatively
- reflect on their ideas

### **Contributing to the learning**

Our commitment to children as strong, powerful and competent learners, full of curiosity to make sense of the world, informs our understanding that children come to learn about their world through discovery and discussion rather than by being told about it. But children also need new information and fresh experiences that promote further learning.

Adults contribute to learning by:

- introducing a new stimulus or a new key word
- giving direct instruction
- demonstrating skills
- modelling language and behaviour
- recording ideas
- documenting and re-proposing ideas

This kind of input is essential. It creates the scaffolding that enables children to reach the next steps in their learning.





## The dynamic processes of effective learning and teaching

The second layer of our model is more complex. It represents the on-going processes that are part of effective learning and teaching. It is when educators look more closely at these processes that they can see more clearly how best to act in the interests of children's learning.

### The dynamic of play

The first process is play, which we see as the dynamic between the child and the environment.

In high-quality play, children are strongly motivated and deeply absorbed. They actively explore the world, keen to try things out and solve problems. They creatively develop and represent their ideas, showing persistence as they encounter problems and find solutions that satisfy their need to know or do more. They use their imagination to invent new worlds, playing out scenarios and stories that help them make sense of their world, the people they know and their roles and relationships. They express themselves freely, communicate and talk about what they are doing, eager to engage with others who show an interest in their play.

When we observe play that is half-hearted, repetitive or disengaged, we must not doubt children's intrinsic capacity to play whole-heartedly, with intensity and application. We should rather examine our own capacity to organise for and support play in ways that extend children's learning.

By looking closely at children's play, we can learn about the quality of the educators' contribution to play.

### The dynamic of planning

The second process is planning, which we see as the dynamic relationship between the adult and the environment. A well-structured environment, which connects with and responds to children's interests, requires careful planning and continual review and development, based on observation and reflection. It cannot simply be set up and left for children to enjoy.

When planning is successful, the environment becomes a totally supportive setting for the many encounters and interactions that take place between children and children and between children and adults. Furthermore, adults can introduce new challenges, fresh ideas and materials, ensuring that this element of the model does not stand still but continues to impact on children's learning.

Looking closely at children's use of the environment will involve staff groups in regular observation and discussion. In their daily/weekly decisions about 'what next', educators can respond to what they have seen of children's ideas and interests. This kind of responsive planning requires staff to discuss children's interactions and their use of resources, recording the significant developments they have noted. They will go on to consider what implications these have, not just for the environment, but for individual children and groups of children, and their developing interests and activities.

It is important to realise that there is more to the educator's task of planning than simply setting up a well-resourced environment. Planning for effective learning entails planning for adult interactions and for children's play, the two other processes represented in our model.



## The dynamic of interaction

The third process is interaction, the dynamic relationship between adults and children.

Interaction is an essential part of teaching and learning. But interacting with thinking children is a demanding skill. It requires educators to have a repertoire of strategies for valuing children's ideas and, at the same time, guiding them towards the next steps in their learning.

In the process of quality interaction, children are engaged in sustained dialogue, in exchanges that resemble good conversation, where two or more people share their ideas and feelings. They help each other through their shared experiences, and the give and take of their talk, to understand more.

This kind of interaction, this exchange of ideas, is a serious process and should not be mistaken for a laid back 'make it up as we go along' approach. Educators can skilfully shape their exchanges with children in ways that maximise learning, building a strong reciprocal relationship in which both adult and child have significant parts to play. Through timely suggestions, open-ended questioning and encouraging feedback, educators can foster greater encouragement and interest: these in turn sustain further thought and deeper learning.

Recent research has demonstrated the significance of this kind of adult-child interaction. The important study Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) has convincingly shown that, in the most effective settings, there are significantly more of the interactions described as 'sustained shared thinking' than in less effective settings; the report suggests that these interactions 'may be especially valuable in terms of children's learning' (Siraj-Blatchford et al 2002:10).

By looking closely at the interactions taking place in their settings, educators can evaluate the degree of support and challenge children are offered in their daily activities, and consider the strengths of the strategies they use to sustain children's thinking.

## The culture of effective learning

The third layer of our model is all encompassing. It represents the culture within which children's learning flourishes, and the ethos that defines the quality of our practice.

The culture of a foundation stage setting is the outcome of the relationships between adults, children and their families. Where these relationships are warm and respectful, educators create a culture in which everyone thrives, and in which children enjoy the safety and security upon which their learning depends. The qualities of this distinctive culture foster children's confidence, motivation, independence and well-being, enabling every child to feel valued and successful.

By looking closely at the culture in which educators and parents meet and interact, it is possible to review and improve the quality of the conditions that promote effective learning, and enhance ways of meeting the shared responsibilities adults have towards children.