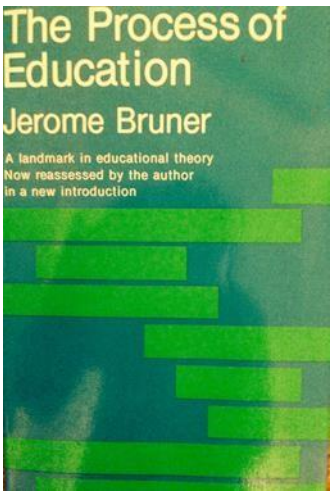
West Earlham Infant and Nursery School Learning and Teaching Policy

Approval

This policy has been reviewed in line with the 2010 Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Act. Due regard has been given to Equality.
This Policy will be adopted in **July 2025**. The date of the next formal review will be **July 2028** and every three years thereafter unless statutory legislation changes.

*'The first object of any act of learning, over and beyond the pleasure it may give, is that it should serve us in the future. Learning should not only take us somewhere; it should allow us later to go further more easily.'***Jerome Bruner 1977**



Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn. **Benjamin Franklin**

I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it. **Pablo Picasso**

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.
Maya Angelou

I am always ready to learn although I do not always like being taught. **Winston Churchill**

1. Introduction

In our school, learning is understood to take place in not only the lessons that we teach but within the routines, events and additional activities that we offer. It is a process that the whole community are encouraged to engage in. We believe that children need to be taught about approaches and attitudes that help them become lifelong learners.

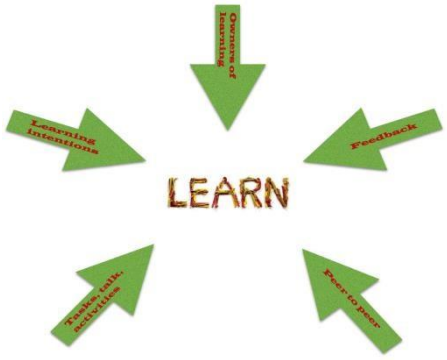
2. Key principles of learning.

a. Each and every child has the right to access the very best learning that we are able to offer.
b. Learning should be relevant, meaningful and purposeful and based on where the child is at in their learning and development.
c. Staff and children have different styles, enthusiasms and passions, strengths and approaches - we value this individuality.
d. Teaching at West Earlham Infant and Nursery School is 'Learning Centred' meaning that each element of whole school and classroom practice is designed with an understanding of how children learn best.

e. We are all on learning journey, and have much to learn from children, families, colleagues, other professionals, by responsible and healthy risk taking and by our mistakes.
f. Teaching is sometimes difficult and good learning can be hard. Learning is not always immediately visible.
g. The stickability of learning is rooted in the way it makes children feel.

3. **Key principle:** ***Each and every child has the right to access the very best learning that we are able to offer*** So at West Earlham Infant and Nursery School you will see:
   - Engaged children in meaningful learning
   - Carefully constructed learning sequences
   - Children being supported when they get things wrong
   - Learning that connects with children's interests but broadens their experiences
   - Well organised environments that are invitational for a range of learners
   - Teachers and adults trying out new approaches and challenges with children and with each other
   - Learning being monitored, evaluated, discussed and improved upon
   - Development of pace and depth in delivery and learning

4. **Key principle:** ***Learning should be relevant, based on prior experience and formative assessment*** So at West Earlham Infant and Nursery School you will see:
   - Teaching and planning based on the needs of the learners
   - Children talking about what they know already and where to go next
   - Learning which links curriculum areas
   - Learning which has a real life purpose and will help the development of each child
   - Books marked using a clear marking criteria to help children know next steps (for more information please see our Feedback and Marking Policy and our Assessment Policy)
   - Children using frequent, detailed and accurate feedback from teachers, both oral and written, to improve



their learning – eg. re-drafting writing

5. **Key principle:** ***Staff and children have different styles, enthusiasms and passions, strengths and approaches we value this individuality.***

So at West Earlham Infant and Nursery School you will see:
   - An agreed curriculum entitlement based on the revised National Curriculum and/or Early Years Foundation Stage and further enhanced based on the needs of children and specific cohorts
   - Children learning about different things at the same time
   - A range of different teaching strategies
   - Children learning inside and outside

- Children learning on their own, in pairs and in groups
- Children supporting each other
- Children using technology to support learning

6. **Key principle:** ***Teaching at West Earlham Infant and Nursery School is 'Learning Centred' meaning that each element of whole school and classroom practice is designed with an understanding of how children learn best.***

So at West Earlham Infant and Nursery School you will see:

- Learning activities that are well planned, ensuring progress in the short, medium and long term
- A holistic approach to supporting the child
- Teaching and learning activities which enthuse, engage and motivate children to learn, fostering their curiosity and enthusiasm for learning
- Assessment informing teaching so that there is provision for support, consolidation, depth and mastery of learning for each child, at each level of attainment.
- A thoughtfully ordered learning environment with a purposeful safe and welcoming atmosphere
- Strong links between home and school with the importance of parental involvement in their children's learning recognised, valued and developed
- Carefully chosen resources to support children at different stages of their learning, from real life objects and role play areas to symbolic resources to develop more abstract thinking.
- Resources and approaches that value the experiences, beliefs and cultures of all learners.

7. **Key principle:** ***We are all on learning journey, and have much to learn from children, families, colleagues, other professionals, by responsible and healthy risk taking and by our mistakes*** So at West Earlham Infant and Nursery School you will see:

- Adults asking children questions Children asking adults questions
- Children asking children questions
- Learning that has unexpected outcomes
- Children and adults learning and talking about mistakes and failing
- Learning that is physically, mentally and emotionally challenging
- A range of adults working with children to offer depth and breadth to their experience Information shared effectively and with families to encourage participation
- Key events such as Cafes to promote forthcoming learning and engage families

8. **Key principle:** ***Teaching is complicated and good learning can be hard*** So at West Earlham Infant and Nursery School you will see:

- Learning organised in a range of different ways depending on what is being taught
- Sessions dynamically changing from the plans to respond to children
- Learning being taken in different directions in response to children's understanding and need
- Times of rapid acceleration and pace and times of review, practice and re-teaching
- Ambitious teaching encouraging children to overcome personal barriers
- Resilience and persistence are encouraged
- Teaching about learning and attributes for learning
- Teachers and staff watching each other and providing feedback to feed forward.

9. **Key principle:** ***The stickability of learning is rooted in the way it makes children feel.***

So at West Earlham Infant and Nursery School you will see:

- Learning framed in a way that makes children want to engage
- Children who feel secure to speak and act freely, enjoying freedom from bullying and harassment that may include prejudice-based bullying related to special educational need, sexual orientation, sex, race, religion and belief, gender reassignment or disability
- Times of over learning to develop confidence, automatic responses and mastery
- Children being supported to access their learning
- Individualised and tailored plans for children who need it
- Warm and welcoming adults who enthuse about learning
- Creative books to stimulate engagement in new texts or themes.

10 Formative assessment

At West Earlham Infant and Nursery School we believe that the principles of formative assessment pioneered by Dylan William and Paul Black should be at the heart of the learning process. Dylan William sets out five key principles; these are:

- Clarifying and sharing learning intentions that inform the children as to where their learning is going
- Engineering tasks and activities that illicit evidence of learning
- Providing feedback that moves the learner forward
- Activating children as learning resources for one another
- Activating children as owners of their own learning

11.Key principle: *Effective teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage*

At West Earlham Infant and Nursery school we have adopted the Early Excellence pedagogical model of effective learning, capturing the relationship between the children, the environment, the adult and the process required for effective learning and teaching to take place; play, planning, interaction. For more information please see Appendix A.

'Teaching in the early years should not be taken to imply a 'top down' or formal way of working. It is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned & child-initiated play & activities: ***communicating & modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges.*** *It takes account of the equipment adults provide and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, as well as taking account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and how practitioners use this information to plan children's next steps in learning and monitor their progress.'* **OFSTED 2016**

The Early Years Foundation Stage is not preparation for the next key stage, it is important in its own right. At West Earlham Infant and Nursery School we know that young children learn best through high quality play. Young children live in the here and now. We understand therefore, theimportance of addressing children's next steps immediately, by practitioners who are highly skilled in identifying 'teachable moments' and using the most appropriate interactionto support children's learning.

Interaction/ Teachable Moment	**Example**

Modelling language	**Commenting** on what the child or adult is doing eg 'you're rolling the playdough. It's getting longer' **Recasting or** repeating back to the child what they have said correctly or adding an additional word to extend their vocabulary
Showing	Showing a child how to zip up or put on their coat
Explaining	How caterpillars become butterflies.
Demonstrating	How to use the hole puncture successfully.
Exploring ideas	'What if….' Either from a suggestion a child makes or using an opportunity that presents itself. Sustained shared thinking.
Encouraging	Write their name. Take a step unaided along the balance beam
Questioning – think of questions as being for assessment	Open questions eg 'I wonder why/what/where?' Avoid closed questions eg 'how many?' 'what colour'
Recalling	A past event, perhaps by looking at photos, how they did something last time etc How they have got better at something.
Providing a narrative	In small world play you might describe the scene/adventure as
	the children play
Facilitating	Providing space, resources, time
Setting challenges	This might be by providing additional resources or making a suggestion such as 'can you make green' 'can you put your own boots on' 'write your name' 'find your name'

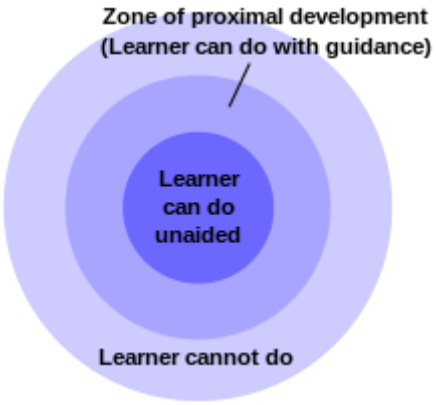
Early Years Practitioners at West Earlham Infant and Nursery School are highly valued. Regular Early Years Foundation Stagemeetings and CPD takes place. Staff are encouraged to be reflective and the latest research/reports are shared and discussed with a view to adapting and improving practice, as necessary. In addition, the Early Years Foundation Stage team work very closely with the school Speech Therapist. *'Working on children's communication and language is one of the key ways in which we can prevent children from underperforming.' Penny Tassoni 2016*

We recognise that to learn, children must be cognitively and physically engaged in the process and that knowledgeable, sensitive, interested adults are required to facilitate deep level learning.

The cycle of observation- assessment, planning, teaching, is carried out by practitioners on a moment-by-moment basis throughout the day. At West Earlham Infant and Nursery School we use **In the Moment Planning** approach; staff record observations of groups of children, the teachable moment, and the learning outcome.

Child Initiated and Adult Initiated Activities

We recognise that high level involvement often occurs in child initiated activities, when children are allowed the time and space to pursue their own activities in continuous provision, supported by highly skilled staff. During these moments children are more likely to reach Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development.



Practitioners are encouraged to go to the child**,** choose their moment and decide whether they are going to interrupt the play. Children need lots of time to reveal their ideas, problems, interests, puzzles. Staff will use their knowledge of the child and their observation to decide on the most suitable interaction, to support a child's next step. Sustained shared thinking is most likely to arise during adult child interactions.

We recognise too that there are times during the day, when children benefit from adult directed activities; daily phonics (RWI in reception and Letters & Sounds for older funded 3s), communication and language activities (Early Years TalkBoost, Listening & Attention Box Time) and cooking. We also recognise the importance of exposing and encouraging children to activities and materials they might not normally choose to play with.

For very young children at West Earlham Infant and Nursery School, the number and length of adult directed activities, are kept to a minimum, to ensure their needs are appropriately and immediately met by their Key Person. As children get older, the frequency and length of adult directed activity gradually increases. Staff regularly reflect and review the appropriateness of adult directed activities and understand the importance of ensuring that children are given opportunities to revisit and practise newly taught skills in child initiated activities.

The Environment

'For children who are at risk of educational disadvantage, a rich play environment can support them in a variety of ways; well-being and freedom, sensory exploration, self-regulation, physical activity and exploration of roles.' Penny Tassoni 2016

We recognise the importance of a carefully planned environment, whose layout 'flows' and discourages children from merely 'flitting' from area to area inside and outdoors. Attractive, open ended resources that will stimulate children's natural curiosity are thoughtfully selected and are displayed, often with 'match-back', picture or word labels to encourage children to return items at the end of play. Equal value and importance is placed on the outdoor environment. Practitioners recognise that the outdoor environment offers children experiences that are not found indoors, including engagement with the natural world and the space to learn and practice gross motor skills.

Daily Routines

At West Earlham Infant and Nursery School we recognise the opportunities that daily routines offer children in learning new skills. For example, adults promote self- regulation, self-care and life skills during beginning and end of day procedures, snack time, getting dressed for outside play and lunchtime.

Visits and Visitors

We recognise that children who have a wide range of experiences, will often have higher levels of vocabulary, because words and phrases are best learnt in context. At West Earlham Infant and Nursery School we ensure that children regularly have visits to theatres, UEA SportsPark, farm, parks, library, Sainsbury Centre as well as visitors eg emergency services, chicks and ducklings, puppet theatre etc.

Families

Early Years Foundation Stage Practitioners recognise the important role families have. The Effective Provision of PreSchool Education (EPPE) has long acknowledged that better outcomes for children are linked with a setting's strong parent partnership. At West Earlham Infant and Nursery School, we acknowledge that a parent is a child's first teacher

Every family is offered a home visit, before their child starts school/nursery. This allows the family to meet their child's Key Person and for the family to share important information about their child's interests, disposition and independence.

Time is always available at the start and end of the session/day for staff and families to chat.

From February 2017, families are able to access their child's online Learning Journal at home and are actively encouraged to contribute to it.

When their child is a 'focus child', staff spend time talking to the parent and listening to their views to support the assessment.

Staffregularly plan 'workshops' for families to get involved in activities to promote learning eg story café. In reception Maths Monkey helps families support mathematical learning at home.

Getting it Right for Boys

'*Good learning, for all children, occurs when children are a recognised part of the process'* Neil Farmer 2012 Girls outperform boys nationally in the Early Years.

Early Years Foundation Stage Practitioners are aware that boys develop cognitively and physically, later than girls. They know that boys' brains develop at a different rate from girls. They are aware that boys' wrists and ankles are not fully developed until 5 ½ -6 years (4 ½ in girls). Their thumb and metacarpal develop even later.

Boys have a surge of testosterone at approximately 2-3 years old and again at 7. Testosterone generally encourages children to be very energetic. They enjoy physical play, including rough and tumble and physical contact. They can be competitive, excitable and action orientated.

Research suggests that the caudate, governing language and emotion is less developed in young boys, compared with girls. Boys produce less serotin(a contributor to feelings of well-being) and have less oxytocin. This means that many young boys behave impulsively and physically and are bigger risk takers. Boys reticular activating system (RAS) in the brain that filters information, is less well developed in boys. This means they are less able to process the same amount of information as girls. Whilst girls use more cortical areas of their brain for emotional and verbal functioning, boys use the cortical for mechanical and spatial functioning. (Moir &Jessel 1989)

To ensure that boys' needs are fully met,Early Years Foundation Stage practitioners ensure that

- there is sufficient space (reducing the number of chairs and tables)indoors and outside to allow for vestibular and proprioceptive activity
- the amount of information given to boys at any given time is appropriate, to avoid overloading
- they give specific praise*'If we truly want our boys to achieve well in later years then praise must be channelled correctly*' Neil Farmer 2012
- they understand that boys will find it physically more difficult to write and ensure that skilled adults are on hand to scribe for them, as well as offering mark making and writing tools that have less resistance eg screen, pens and whiteboards – motivate boys with a purpose for writing
- they offer activities that support the development of upper arm and shoulder strength
- they keep the amount of time children are expected to sit stillto an appropriate length of time (age plus 2 minutes) *physical comfort impacts on emotional and cognitive engagement, boys find it more difficult to sit still*
- the interests of boys are considered eg careful choice of stories, superhero play, (including the safe use of weapons) adventure, humour and sport eg football
- routines and adult directed activities are not sedentary
- that there are appropriate problem solving activities

- there are positive male role models within the setting – visitors, posters, stories that challenge gender stereotypes etc. *February 2017*

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

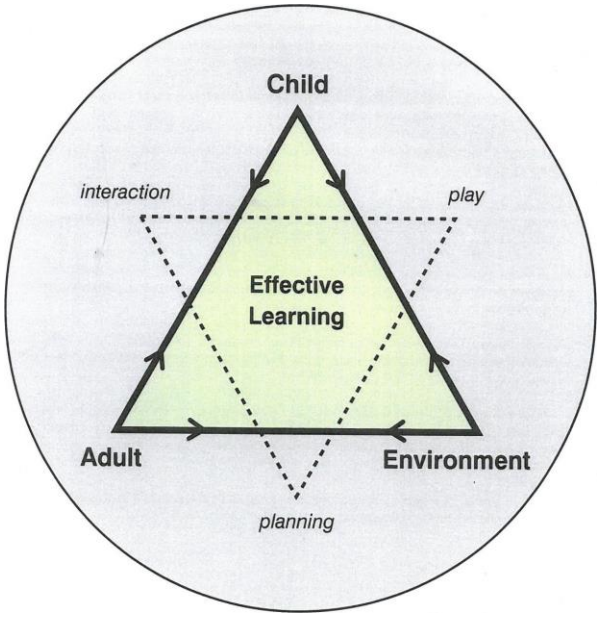
- Assessment policy
- Behaviour policy
- Feedback and Marking policy

Policy approved by the Head Teacher of West Earlham Infant and Nursery School.

Appendix A – Early Excellence 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

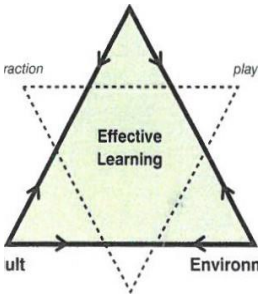
The first layer is the triangle shown here in green. It represents the elements that educators need to understand most clearly if they are to develop a foundation stage curriculum that responds to what young learners need.

The second layer is the overlapping triangle shown here as a dotted line. By adding this layer we represent the processes involved in effective desires, having an informed view of how best to structure the environment and understanding the role of the educator

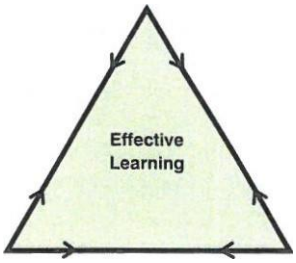
The following three elements form the underpinning framework for effective learning: responding to children's interests and

- 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

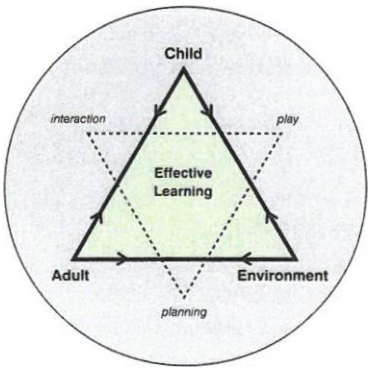
Adult



Child



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 takes 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... e move freely and use all their senses • talk, listen, ask questions and communicate • build and construct • represent and make e 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 e 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 selfesteem: 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 lugs and tunnels and by having two sets of conservation equipment such as beakers and cylinders. we offer greater potential tor 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 piay 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:

e 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