

Session 2.5

Play and learning

In this session we explore the importance of the key person in supporting a child's play and learning by:

- *Being there, being interested and available*
- *Observing carefully and tuning in to key children*
- *Allowing time for child to develop their thoughts and play without being rushed on*
- *Not filling the day with over busy activities*



Video - Play and learning

Practitioners and parents alike may often find themselves caught up in the “getting ready for” mode of thinking, focusing on the next transition, activity or skill to be mastered. Possibly believing that the sooner a child acquires a skill the better which research shows is not the case. Feeling they must be constantly moving a child on, without allowing the child time to experiment, consolidate and lead their learning through their own individual interest and drive and at their pace.

SUSTAINED SHARED THINKING

Sustained shared thinking is an important concept when looking at how children learn.

It has the following features:

- *There needs to be a positive, trusting relationship in place between the adult and the child*
- *The adult is aware of the child's interests and level of understanding*
- *The adult works together with the child to develop ideas or a skill*
- *The adult shows genuine interest, offers encouragement, clarifies ideas and asks open ended questions to support and extend the child's thinking*
- *The adult is involved in the process with the child by supporting and challenging the child's thinking*

“One of the most striking things about watching children playing in nursery is how much they love to have the attention of an adult watching what they're doing or initiating some play activity.”

Peter Elfer

Task 1



Play & learning - video clip 1

Play & learning - video clip 2

Play & learning - video clip 3



Play & learning - video clip 4

Play & learning - video clip 5

In the following 5 video clips you will see practitioners involved in children's play and learning. The children you will see range in age starting from baby up to reception class age. This is to show that this level of involvement in the process of play is possible with all ages.

Ask practitioners to look out for and note when they see the following taking place;

- Giving child time to follow their own interest
- Using open ended questions
- Extending child's thinking
- Involvement with the child taking the lead
- 'Tuning in' to child's interest
- Respectful interaction

After watching the video clips pause to discuss as a group what was observed. The following notes highlight particular effective practice:



Play & learning - video clip 1

- Gillian allows Lucas time to follow his own interest and take the lead in his explorations. She gently encourages him to explore further without taking over or rushing his explorations. She helps him to feel secure and confident to explore by letting him know she is there and interested in what he's doing.



Play & learning - video clip 2

- Vicky is nearby and able to join in with Michael's play as he shows interest in first rolling ball up and down grassy slope then running up and down grassy slope. She joins in running up and down with him and falling over with him encouraging his play by copying him, letting him take the lead. She encourages him to show her what he's interested in, recognising this as important and not rushing his explorations or moving onto something 'more purposeful'.



Play & learning - video clip 3

- Claire is present and very much part of the play, she asks open ended questions to Ava that extend her thinking – “who else will fit in there?”
- She affirms what Ava is doing and encourages her to try her own way of tying the bag without offering a ready solution. She talks to other child that comes over explaining what Ava is doing, and so giving importance to and showing respect for Ava's play. The conversation between Ava and practitioner flows with the lead coming from Ava and her interests and thoughts.



Play & learning - video clip 4

- Evan starts throwing the stones into the tray. Rather than stopping his play Gwen allows Evan to continue his exploration by encouraging him to “gently drop it in”, she is still allowing Evan to lead his play although keeping it safe. She joins in, copying his actions encouraging him to watch what happens and extending his language, she is his partner in this play taking turns together to explore dropping the stones.



Play & learning - video clip 5

- Becky gives Lilly one to one time giving her full attention, valuing her thoughts and ideas. She helps Lilly to develop them further by affirming her ideas and providing the props she needs.
- Becky values Lilly's ideas and shows this again when she gets Lilly to share them with her classmates. She gives Lilly time to develop and extend her thinking through careful questioning and respectful interactions. She shows genuine interest in Lilly's ideas and lets Lilly lead with her ideas.
- During group time, Becky restates what Lilly says each time she says it. Lilly speaks clearly and audibly so is this necessary?

Reflection

- Are there times when you feel unable to be tuned into your key children? When might this happen and why?

Possible thoughts might be: When another child is distressed, when other children are in play space, another practitioner is needing your support, you need to talk to a parent, you don't feel their activity is 'worthwhile' or 'interesting', you are feeling stressed, noise level very high, play nearby has become chaotic, not knowing child's interests or personality well, difficulty reading child's emotions, routines tightly structured so times when you want to tune in are not possible as you need to be moving onto next bit of day.

- What strategies would support you to be tuned in with your key children?

Possible thoughts might be: Planning for opportunities to have one to one and smaller group time, finding out more about your key children, identifying which

children you have more difficulty tuning into and why this might be, practitioners being tuned into each others needs with their key children to allow each other time to tune in, relaxing certain routines to allow time for tuning in when needed.

- Do we value some forms of play and learning more than others?

For example:

- Building a model or road with construction bricks
- Painting lots of pictures
- Dropping a toy or food from their high chair time after time
- Mixing mud with a stick and getting messy
- Running around outside
- Going down the slide
- Being in cosy den area with friend or by themselves
- Pushing doll around in push chair each day... etc.

- Why might this be?

Possible thoughts might be: Our own experiences at school and growing up of what is 'learning', parental pressure, lack of information about play and learning, lack of information about how children learn through schemas, lack of confidence in our knowledge, pressure from others in the setting, some activities we enjoy more, we may relate better to certain children who choose activities we see as more worthwhile...

Action to be taken

Perhaps ask the team to discuss what they would like to change in daily practice that would support them in being more 'available'.

- How much time and space do the children in your setting have for thinking and continuing their ideas across the day? Do you need to make any changes for this?

- How much time do you have for making observations of your key children? Do you need to make any changes to allow more time for this?