

Like Bees, Not Butterflies



Child-Initiated Learning
Sally Featherstone

"We have got to do a lot fewer things in school. The greatest enemy of understanding is coverage. As long as you are determined to cover everything, you actually ensure that most kids are not going to understand. You've got to take enough time to get kids deeply involved in something so they can think about it in lots of different ways, and apply it – not just at school, but at home, on the street and so on."

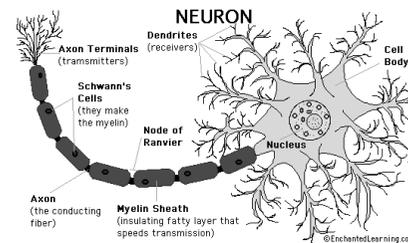
Howard Gardner



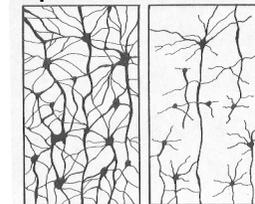
DCFS response on child-initiated learning

- We would consider activities which the practitioner initiates and leads, such as a cooking activity, or an activity to measure and compare the height of all the children, as being 'adult led.'
- 'Child-initiated' or 'freely chosen' activities would be those where a child selects the resources they will use from those that are available, and decides how they will use these resources – examples might include a child deciding to play shops in the home corner, a child experimenting with filling and emptying containers in the water tray, or a child using building bricks to create a roadway for the toy cars. Practitioners may involve themselves in these activities where appropriate, but they are initiated by the child.

The hundred thousand million cells!



The place of stimulation



SECTION OF A STIMULATED BRAIN SECTION OF AN UNSTIMULATED BRAIN

The place of schemas

'Schemas are patterns of linked behaviours, which the child can generalise and use in a whole variety of different situations.

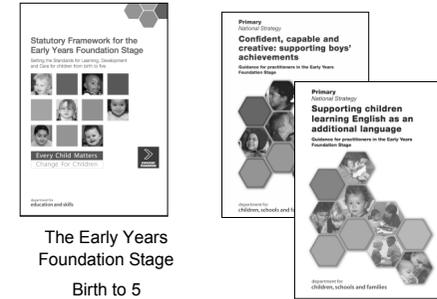
It is best to think of schemas as being a cluster of pieces, which fit together.'

Tina Bruce 1997

Linking brain cells

"In many classrooms, self directed activities make up a quarter to half of the child's day. Brain research asks that at least a third of the day be reserved for self-direction. A successful teacher in these early years often finds that some students can support more than half a day of self direction. For the developing brain, self direction has many advantages, especially that in a well led environment the mind gravitates towards learning what it needs to learn in order to grow. The brain has, to a great extent, its own blueprint of how to grow itself, and if a classroom is set up to let the brain explore, it moves in the neural motions required."

Michael Gurian: Boys and Girls Learn Differently!



The Early Years Foundation Stage
Birth to 5



Child Initiated learning

- Children need plenty of space and time to play, both outside and indoors

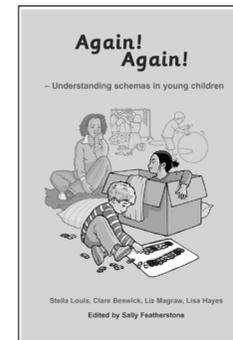
Children who are allowed to play with resources and equipment before using them to solve a problem are more likely to solve the problem successfully. Making dens and dressing up are an integral part of children's play and they don't require expensive resources. Role play areas allow children to take on and rehearse new and familiar roles.

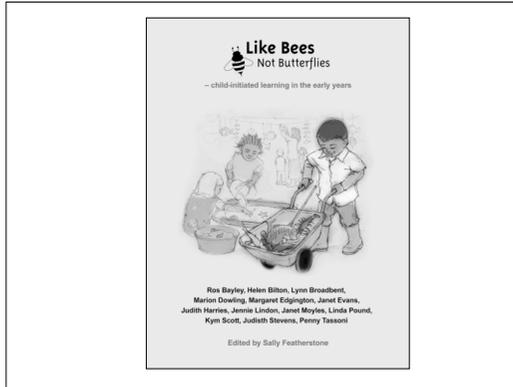


Sustaining shared thinking

- In the most effective settings practitioners support and challenge children's thinking by getting involved in the thinking process with them.

Sustained shared thinking involves the adult being aware of the children's interests and understandings and the adult and children working together to develop an idea or skill. Sustained shared thinking can only happen when there are responsive trusting relationships between adults and children. The adult shows genuine interest, offers encouragement, clarifies ideas and asks open questions. This supports and extends the children's thinking and helps children to make connections in learning.



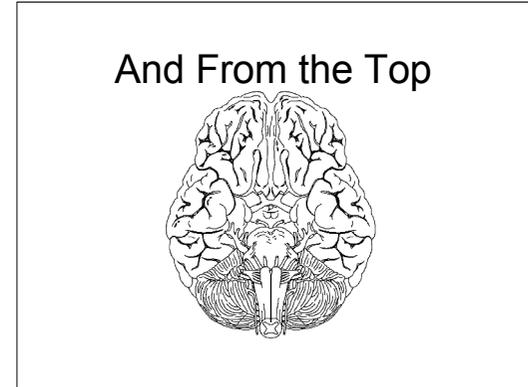


A Brain of Three Parts

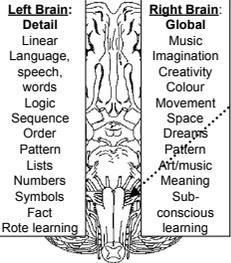
Three brains in one



- **At the top** - the cortex or 'bark' of the brain, used for thinking, talking, seeing, hearing and creating
- **In the centre** - your 'old mammalian brain' which controls your emotions and sexuality and plays a key role in memory
- **At the bottom** - your brain stem called the 'old reptilian brain'. It controls instinctive functions like breathing, blinking and 'flight or fight' instincts



Two sides of the brain

Left Brain:		Right Brain:
<p>Detail Linear Language, speech, words Logic Sequence Order Pattern Lists Numbers Symbols Fact Rote learning</p>	<p>The corpus callosum (the broad band of the brain)</p>	<p>Global Music Imagination Creativity Colour Movement Space Dreams Pattern Art/music Meaning Sub-conscious learning</p>

The keys to motivation

There appear to be three strands to a decision to attend to and react to a new situation or stimulus.

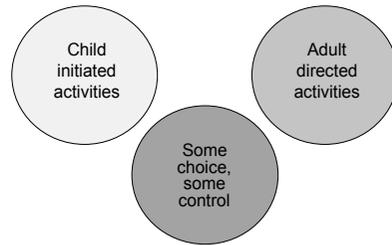
1. Firstly, the brain needs to be emotionally connected to the experience (and positive emotions, links and memories of similar events are obviously more likely to keep our attention locked in).
2. The second factor is challenge. We need to feel that the new experience has something to add to what we know. Interest and motivation are attracted to appropriate challenge.
3. The third factor is reward or payoff. This reward can be external - a smile, a sticker, a sweet, a treat; or intrinsic - internal satisfaction for doing something well. Intrinsic rewards will have a more lasting effect on our brains and our learning.

Settings which motivate and engage

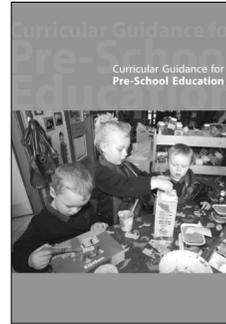
Some of the features of such settings are:

- ✗ flexible planning so children's arising interests can be incorporated;
- ✗ encouragement for independence and autonomy;
- ✗ plenty of child initiated learning at prime times of the day;
- ✗ long periods of time when children can continue their chosen activities;
- ✗ places for storing unfinished or ongoing projects;
- ✗ time for children to talk with each other and adults, before they work, during the activities and after they have finished;
- ✗ choice (for at least part of the day, and ideally a third of the day) when children can choose where, what and who they play with;
- ✗ easy access to resources & equipment, so children can find the things they need;
- ✗ flexible use of the indoor and outdoor environments for learning;
- ✗ a stimulating environment with challenging, enjoyable activities where external rewards are unnecessary because children are involved in and enjoying their work;
- ✗ an atmosphere of challenge, success appropriate reward.

Getting the balance right



Northern Ireland
curriculum
Guidance for
Pre-school
Education



Characteristics of the pre-school child

- Most young children come to pre-school as active, experienced and enthusiastic learners.
- They are interested in themselves and their environment and like to explore, investigate and be creative. They have a natural curiosity and sense of wonder and amazement.
- They like to establish good relationships with adults and peers and enjoy communicating with them. They are developing confidence, self-esteem and self-control. They often choose to work in groups and some may show signs of leadership. At other times, they may choose to play alone.
- They are developing concentration and a range of skills and competencies such as observing, making decisions, problem solving and communicating and can, with the support and guidance of adults, further enhance their own learning.
- They enjoy stories, rhymes and music.
- They enjoy physical play and are becoming physically independent.



Needs of the pre-school child

Young children require:

- a safe and stimulating supervised environment where they can feel happy and secure;
- opportunities to investigate, satisfy their curiosity, explore the environment inside and outside the playroom, extend their sense of wonder, experience success and develop a positive attitude towards learning;
- appropriate periods of time for learning through sustained involvement in play;
- interaction with sensitive and understanding adults who promote their sense of well-being and extend their learning and development; and
- adults who will treat them as individuals, support them and sensitively participate in their play.

Given these needs, it follows that young children require a curriculum that:

- provides equality of opportunity; promotes their physical, social, emotional, creative and intellectual development; and ensures that they feel included, secure and valued;
- is planned, purposeful, flexible and allows them to follow their own interests and develop at their own pace;
- is enjoyable and motivates, challenges and stimulates them by building on their natural curiosity and desire to experiment;
- promotes active learning and helps them begin to develop the skills and dispositions that they will need to be life-long learners;
- is broad and balanced, building on their previous learning and allowing them to make choices and decisions; and
- provides them with opportunities, through play and other experiences, to develop the learning associated with:

The Arts, Language Development, Early Mathematical Experiences, Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Physical Development and Movement, The World Around Us

The Learning Environment

- Staff should provide a rich and stimulating environment which will promote effective learning.
- This means presenting children with opportunities to explore, experiment, plan and make decisions for themselves, thereby enabling them to progress in their learning and development. Staff should work together to create learning environments, both indoors and outdoors, that are motivating and inviting to the children and which allow them to choose from a range of activities provided for them in safe and secure defined areas.



Features of SST

- An instructive learning environment
- Clear routines
- Free choice
- Appropriate intervention from adults
- 1:1 with an adult or single peer partner
- Extended child-initiated play, coupled with the provision of teacher initiated group work

EPPE - findings

- “Effective pedagogy includes interactions traditionally associated with the term ‘teaching’, the provision of instructive learning environments and ‘sustained shared thinking’ to extend children’s learning.”

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education

Child Initiated learning

- Children need **plenty of space and time to play**, both outside and indoors

Children who are allowed to play with resources and equipment before using them to solve a problem are more likely to solve the problem successfully.

Making dens and dressing up are an integral part of children’s play and they don’t require expensive resources.

Role play areas allow children to take on and rehearse new and familiar roles.

Some ‘super-scale points’

- Form good relationships with adults and peers
- Continue to be interested, motivated and excited to learn
- Maintain attention and concentrate
- Attempts writing for a variety of purposes, using features of different forms
- Asks questions about why things happen and how things work



Some more ‘super-scale points’

- Use talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events, exploring the meanings and sounds of new words
- Uses developing mathematical ideas and methods to solve practical problems
- Handles tools, objects and malleable materials safely and with basic control



So who is in control?



Sharing the control



Child initiated

Adult initiated
Adult supported
Adult involved
Adult invited
Adult modelled
Adult observed
Adult tolerated

Adult directed

Adult Approaches to Play

Inspectors are critical of two approaches to play used by adults working with young children.

- **Too little help** – just occupying children. When children are left to themselves and told to play, their play does not show progress. Children are often sent off to the sand tray, water tray, home area or the block area and told to play. However, children need support and help in their play.
- **Too much help** – Too many adult led tasks. Sometimes children are overloaded with too much 'help, guidance and teaching' in their play. Children need to be encouraged to make choices, decisions, take risks, and try out their own ideas, feelings and relationships when they play.

Points to Remember

- 80% of the evidence collected and used to complete the profile should be collected in child initiated activities. (NAA 2006)
- 20% of your time should be spent in observing and assessing children's learning

Collecting evidence of learning

Tasks	Transcripts	Group work	Video
Discussions	Tracking	Informal observation	Photos
Field notes	Conversations	Post-its	Tick sheets
Children's evaluations	Plenary sessions	Questions	Listening in
Sustained shared thinking	Planned observations	Anecdotes	Group times
Parents' comments	Other children's views	Tape recordings	Written work

Watching for evidence

- ✓ plan time for assessment - if you don't plan for it you won't do it!
- ✓ use Post-it notes for little jottings. Date them, but don't feel you have to copy them up in 'best'.
- ✓ use other adults to help with the notes and observations;
- ✓ give yourself a bit of time at the end of focus sessions to sit back, observe and make a few notes;
- ✓ start involving children in assessing their own performance and success;
- ✓ work with your TA to share the load - one leads a session, the other observes;
- ✓ keep a notebook with you when children are investigating, playing, selecting their own activities;
- ✓ focus on a few children each day, so you can get some in-depth information;
- ✓ take lots of photos - digital cameras are a MUST - and get the children used to photographing their own work;
- ✓ photocopy children's work (written on white boards etc);
- ✓ get used to looking for 'significant' achievements (those which surprise you, delight you or confirm what you thought was happening);
- ✓ always date and annotate items you put in the children's folders;
- ✓ use the curriculum statements often, so you get to know them well;
- ✓ don't try to observe too many things at once, but be prepared to recognise learning that you didn't plan or expect!



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