

How Children Learn Through Our Philosophy



How Do Children Learn?



Play underpins learning and all aspects of children's development. Through play, children develop language skills, social, emotional and cognitive skills and creativity. For most children their play is natural and spontaneous although some children may need extra support from adults. Play takes place indoors and outdoors and it is in these different environments that children explore and discover their immediate world. It is here they practise new ideas and skills, they take risks, show imagination and solve problems on their own or with others (Early Years Matters, 2017).

it's not "just play"

Play is an essential part of early learning.

It is the lifeblood of the learning process.

As children play they are developing the cognitive, socio-emotional and physical skills they will need to take them into a successful adulthood.

They are developing their curiosity, problem solving, intentionality, flexibility, and verbal & non verbal skills.

Socio-emotionally they are developing their emotional intelligence - learning confidence, cooperation, negotiation, sharing, empathy and how to communicate appropriately.

Physically their fine motor and gross motor skills are being practised and developed.

It's not "just play" they are
skills for life!

Play is not frivolous. It is not a luxury. It is not something to fit in after completing all the important stuff. Play is the important stuff. Play is a drive, a need, a brain-building must-do.

Jeff A Johnson & Denita Dinger
(Let Them Play)

The EYFS - What is it?

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is a play based curriculum that supports an integrated approach to early learning and care from birth to 5 years. It supports us to deliver quality early education and childcare experiences for all children.

The EYFS is divided into prime and specific areas of learning these are -

Prime Areas:

- Communication and Language
- Physical Development
- Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Specific Areas:

- Understanding the World
- Mathematics
- Literacy
- Expressive Arts and Design

Research into early child development shows that children learn more rapidly during their first three years than in later life; whilst all areas of learning are important and inter-connected, the three Prime areas are crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, building their capacity to learn and form relationships and thrive. The specific areas will enable them to be self-motivated learners who are confident to succeed.

Prime Areas

Communication and Language

Involves children being provided with the opportunity to experience a language rich environment; develop confidence in expressing their wants, needs and feelings and being able to speak and listen in a variety of contexts.

Physical Development

Involves children being encouraged to be interactive and active in their learning and develop control, coordination and movement. They are supported in understanding the importance of physical activity and how to make informed healthy choices at meal times.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Involves supporting children in developing a strong, positive sense of themselves, and of others; form strong attachments and relationships and develop respect for others to develop their social skills and learn how to effectively manage their feelings. This area also supports the children in understanding appropriate behaviour and develops confidence in their own abilities.

Specific Areas

Literacy

Encourages children to link sounds and letters and begin to read and write. Children are given access to a wide range of reading materials to ignite their interest.

Mathematics

Encourages opportunities to develop and improve counting skills, understanding and using numbers, calculating simple addition and subtraction problems and to describe shapes, space and measures.

Understanding the World

Involves supporting children in making sense of the world around them and their community by providing opportunities to explore, observe and find out about people, places, technology and the environment.

Expressive Arts and Design

Enables children to explore and play with a wide range of media and materials, as well as encouraging the sharing of thoughts, ideas and feelings through a variety of activities in art, music, movement, dance, role-play and design and technology.

Characteristics of Effective Learning

Playing and Exploring

Supports children's engagement and investigation and to experience things through being willing to 'have a go'

Active Learning

Supports children's motivation to learn by helping develop their concentration, ability and will to keep trying when challenges occur and celebration of completing a task.

Creating and Thinking Critically

Supports children's thinking skills through developing ideas, making links between differing ideas and create strategies for completing a task.

Real and Wooden Items Vs Plastic Imitation

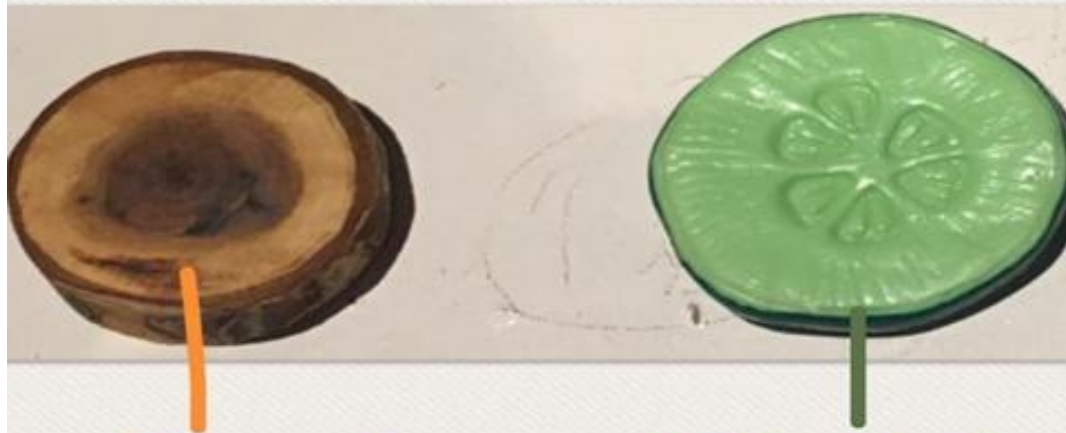
We believe that children learn more through exploring real items over their plastic imitation.

We are gradually replacing our plastic toys with wooden ones or where possible the real version of the item, but does it really make that much of a difference? Can wooden toys or real items support children's development more than plastic ones? YES!

Wooden and natural resources encourage creativity and imagination in young children. Most of the time, plastic toys can only be used for their purpose which can restrict children's thinking skills. Natural items can help children to develop fine motor skills and express their thoughts and ideas as they manipulate and explore them.

By having wooden resources in a Nursery setting, children can expand their imaginative play, encouraging them to think about how the equipment can be used or what they can represent rather than using the resource for what it looks like, due to its colour or pattern.

Open-ended Materials & Loose Parts



This can be a cucumber, a tomato slice, a burger, a bun, a pancake, a cookie or cracker, a piece of cheese, money, a coaster, a stool and so much more! It is limited only by a child's imagination.

This can be a cucumber.

Wooden Bricks Vs Plastic Castle



A plastic knights castle can only ever be a plastic knights castle. We believe that by using wooden or natural resources this enables children to be more creative and use their imagination; whereas plastic toys can only be used for their purpose. The children could use the wooden blocks to build their own knights castle, the children might knock this down which becomes a part of their role play and they need to use their problem solving skills to work out how they are going to fix the castle. The children can use their imagination to turn the castle into a temple, a boat, a church, a car or whatever they would like it to be, the only thing that is limiting them is the child's own imagination. By using more wooden and natural items that encourage children to use their imagination more, we believe this will really add to the children's play and open up more opportunities for them to learn.

Real Items

Real and natural resources allow children to explore their senses, if a child is role playing with a plastic pineapple then they might pretend to eat it. If a child is role playing with a real pineapple the children can feel the unusual texture of a pineapple that is interesting to feel and touch, it can be cut into pieces and you can then smell and taste it and it is more visually interesting to look at. The real pineapple stimulates the senses much more than the imitation of a pineapple can and therefore opens up more learning opportunities. When using real items children can be taught how to look after them properly as if they throw them they can break, it supports the children to learn about sound, taste, texture, sight and smell as opposed to plastic items that are all very similar, often feeling the same, being smooth in texture with no smell or taste.

A plastic pineapple can only ever be a plastic pineapple where as a real pineapple can be used in the home corner in role play when shopping, it can be cut up and used in a real cooking activity! The children can look at the difference between the inside of the pineapple and the outside skin, this opens up many more learning opportunities and experiences for the children.

Loose Parts



Children usually prefer play that stimulates their curiosity and gives free reign to their imaginations and creativity. We believe that one of the best ways to enhance their natural curiosity is to introduce a wide variety of the materials we call "loose parts".

Loose parts are synthetic or natural items and materials that children can move, manipulate, control, and change while they play. Children can carry, combine, redesign, line up, take apart, and put loose parts back together in almost endless ways. Loose parts possess infinite play possibilities.

They offer multiple rather than single outcomes: no specific set of directions accompanies them; no single result is inevitable. Unlike a jigsaw puzzle, whose pieces are meant to be fitted together in a specific way to make a single picture, loose parts can be joined in many ways.

Children can turn them into whatever they desire: a stone can become a character in a story; an acorn can become an ingredient in an imaginary soup. These objects invite conversations and interactions, and they encourage collaboration and cooperation.

Some loose parts you might find in our setting are:

- Gravel
- Stones
- Slate
- Sea Shells
- Pine Cones
- Conkers
- Acorns
- Sticks
- Fabric
- Tyres
- Leaves
- Glass Pebbles
- Pegs
- Bottle Lids
- Corks
- Buttons



How Do Children Learn Through Using Loose Parts?

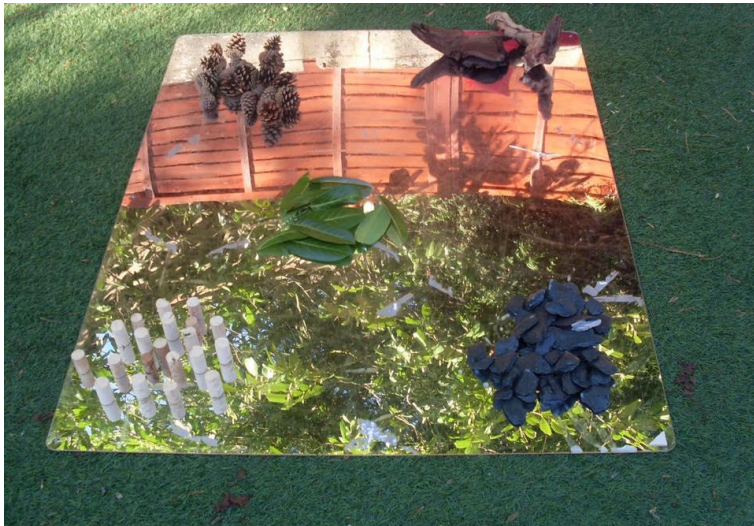
- Loose parts encourage creativity and imagination.
- Loose parts can be adapted and manipulated in many ways.
- Loose parts can be used in combination with other materials to support imagination
- Loose parts encourage open ended learning.
- Loose parts can be used anyway children choose, encouraging child led learning.

Here are some activities incorporating loose parts that you might see us do at Nursery...









Projects

We believe that by following the children's interests the children will learn much more than from choosing a theme in advance e.g space to teach the children about a particular concept, this is because themes often lack meaning to the children.

When themes are chosen without consideration of children's interests and development they run the risk of being meaningless. Children need to be involved in the process and there needs to be consideration of how children learn.

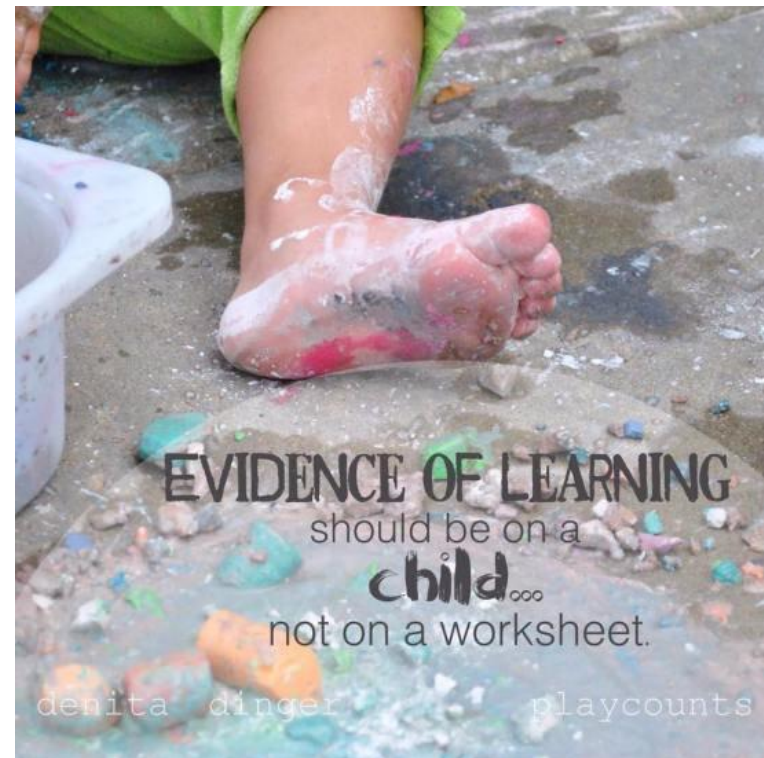
The difference between a theme method and a curriculum with an emerging focus is that that what children actually know about the subject or topic is as relevant as their interest in that content.

We observe the children during their free play and if the children show us that they are particularly interested in something then we follow this interest, planning activities to extend the children's learning and development in regards to this area. This gives the project purpose and means that the children are motivated to learn as they are interested and want to explore this further.

Worksheets and Templates

We believe that children need time to explore concepts and manipulate materials in order to learn. cutting and sticking the life cycle of a butterfly is really just giving children practice in developing their cutting skills, not teaching them about the life cycle. The simple manipulation of life cycle models or watching the life cycle happen in front of them is much more meaningful and appealing to children. This is why we prefer hands on learning.

Worksheets and templates do not provide a meaningful context for children to learn as they can be used only one way; they typically have a 'right answer' or show an image in a way that it is supposed to look, taking creativity away from the child and does not signify the child's ability to understand the subject matter, focusing on the product and not the process of learning and exploration.



Work sheets support children to memorise concepts however we believe by learning through play children gain hands on experiences of exploring new concepts, learning to understand them and apply them in new situations.

Hands on learning gives children the opportunity to use and refine their problem solving, creativity, and critical thinking skills. It gives children the opportunity to create hypothesis, test them out, and use their problem solving and critical thinking skills to completely understand how it works.

By encouraging children to create their own representations of the world, without the use of templates we believe that this allows children to express themselves freely. This allows children to enjoy the process of learning and exploration and not focus on the outcome or product at the end.

It must not be forgotten that the basic law of children's creativity is that its value lies not in its results, not in the product of creation, but in the process itself. It is not important what children create, but that they do create, that they exercise and implement their creative imagination.

- Vygotsky

Letter of the Week

Why do we not teach children the letter of the week?

We do not teach children the letter of the week for the same reason why we do not use worksheets and templates, what meaning does the letter of the week have to the children?

We support children's recognition of letters and phonics through children's interest in writing their names on their creations and through everyday activities and Letters and Sounds games (phonics scheme). We believe children will learn more about letters and phonics through purposeful play experiences than through a letter of the week scheme.

Children Learn Through Real Experiences



Process Vs Product

Whilst it is fantastic to value work that children have produced and it can really enhance their self-esteem to see it recognised and displayed, not all children choose to learn in this way. Many parents can become frustrated if their child does not bring home tangible evidence of perceived learning, like pictures or models. Parents may wish for a nice picture or Mother's Day card rather than appreciating some of the experiences the children have had.

We try and capture moments as well as 'products' by using photos and videos and sharing them with you by taking a photograph of your child's learning moments and experiences. However, perhaps we should all be asking children, 'what have you had a go at today?' rather than 'what did you do/make today?'. This High Scope poem sums it up beautifully...

At quarter to three by the Nursery door
Having rushed round to finish the final chore,
How many times have you heard yourself say?
"Oh I do hope my child has done something today.
He just runs around and messes about
And never seems to notice the painting is out.
I wish I had a child who would make things too,
But the staff don't make him sit down and glue.
My niece brings home cardboard box models each day,
While mine comes home messy, covered in clay.
Last week he'd played pirates, and hid in a den;
The model that day was a beautiful hen!"
But how does a child bring home in his hand
The pleasure he felt today in the sand?
Has he asked you to share the wonder he felt
As he watched some ice cubes gradually melt?
The excitement of sailing the climbing-frame boat?
The achievement of fastening the buttons on his coat?
Did he tell you he washed up after his tea -?
Expertly prepared by his friend, who is three?

He gave me a cuddle around story-time,
And was keen to join in when we learned a new rhyme.
He pummelled and prodded and pounded the dough,
Then he showed he could walk round the room on tip -toe.
He persevered to finish a puzzle, quite hard,
So he hasn't had time to make you a card.
He came over and watched some children sew,
And thought perhaps next time he'd have a go.
His experiences gained were richer by far
Than tissue paper flowers in a yoghurt-pot jar.
A child can learn from cutting and sticking
(But not if all he does is the licking)
And if adults resist the temptation to say
"No! Not like that. Do it this way."
When your child is cutting and gluing
It's not the result that matters, but DOING.
So next time, don't ask your child to explain
Why he's not done a model or painting again;
And when you pick him up, please try not to say
"Haven't you DONE anything in Nursery today?"

Articles for Further Reading

- <https://www.daynurseries.co.uk/news/article.cfm/id/1563711/nurseries-ditching-plastic-toys-sticks-mud>
- <https://www.thetotempole.co.uk/home-news/life-beyond-plastic/>
- <http://www.naeyc.org/tyc/article/process-art-experiences>