

Adult interaction

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Adult interaction

- Children's learning is effectively developed by observing and responding to children's interests
- Knowing when to intervene
- What kind of support is appropriate
- The difference between interaction and interference
- When to provide the right answer or help them
- Adult interaction and pedagogy

Observing play

- Simple, stereotypical, very repetitive
- Occupied, lack of energy, interrupted, going through the motions
- Distracted /Interested/ in-between, comfortable not challenging selves, some care for details
- Creativity, not totally absorbed, moments of intensity, not so easy to distract
- Very intense, talking to self, lots of energy, problem solving, determination, thinking things through, individual touch

- **Concentration** - deep or easily distracted (NOT attention span)
- **Energy**- the way child is talking, moving, facial expressions
- **Complexity and creativity** - individual touch, on edge of capability, really going for it
- **Facial expression and posture** - alert body
- **Persistence** - prepared to put in effort to prolong it, asking for things to support
- **Precision** - paying attention to detail
- Reaction time - very alert and focused or short lived
- **Language** - way of talking about it
- **Satisfaction** - wallowing in it

An observation of three children

By Stella Louis

- Sarah (4 years) had spent twenty minutes in the sandpit outside, digging a hole and pouring water into it with a small plastic watering can. Patting the sand, which became soggy, and sprinkling dry sand on the top. She then left and pushed a doll across the garden in a pushchair, went to the block play area indoors, and watched some children constructing there, but only briefly stayed and then moved on and went to the paint area. Here, she paused, and then she took a potty pan and put a spoon of yellow paint in it from a large tin in the middle of the table. There were five large tins of paint, red, blue, yellow and black and white. She scooped a scoop of water from a jug in the middle of the table, to mix the paint. She used the different sections in the potty pan to make different colours, red, yellow and green then she painted a person.

An observation of three children

By Stella Louis

- James (just 2 years) arrives at the painting table. He begins to shovel, spilling as he goes, paint into a potty pan. The adult greets him warmly. Hello James, are you wanting to do a painting, or would you prefer to make mixtures? Look over there you could make mixtures at the mixture table. Shall I show you? He goes with her, and happily mixes gravel, sand and clay into sludgy bits in a potty pan.

An observation of three children

By Stella Louis

- Valeria (3 and a half years) joins Sarah. She watches, and the adult asks would you like a potty pan? Take one from the shelf if you would. Valeria does this. 'Now just take one spoonful of the colour you like! Valeria does this. 'Now add one scoop of water, and mix it with your spoon! Quite soon Valeria has made green out of yellow and blue, and her intense concentration suggests that she is finding this very interesting to do.

Adult -child interactions

- Sarah, James and Valeria are all being offered what they need now.
- Sarah needs to be allowed the autonomy, (to make choices and decisions and to use her skills and techniques) to mix her own paints.
- James is not ready to mix paints for himself, and will just waste expensive resources if he is allowed to ladle paint everywhere, and splash water onto it, but he is ready to learn how sand, clay and gravel behave when in contact with water. He can learn about the properties of materials.
- Valeria is ready to mix paints, but she needs a great deal of adult support as she is in the early stages of learning how to do this.

At what point should adults intervene?

- The ideas feelings, relationships and physical development and embodiment of each of these children, being nurtured by the adults.
- The adult did not crowd Sarah with too much attention when she was needing personal space.
- The adult respecting 'James' needs, diverted him into something appropriate for him without making him feel bad about using the paints inappropriately, because he couldn't yet understand.
- Valeria was given help sensitively, in a way, which will build her confidence, skills and autonomy.

What level and kind of support is appropriate?

- All the children are learning in ways, which can be linked with areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage, (EYFS).

When does interaction become interference?

- All the children are self-motivated because they are encouraged to be so. Their motivation to learn is not crushed, but nurtured.
- Each of the children is developing self-discipline. This helps children to concentrate well, and to learn effectively.
- Because they are given choices, allowed to make decisions and given sensitive help as and when it is needed, Sarah, James and Valeria are able to learn in ways which are right for each of them as individuals. Adults are supporting and also extending their learning.

When do adults tell them the right answer or help them?

- Adults are emphasising what the children can do, rather than what they can't do. The tone and atmosphere is very encouraging and not judgemental or critical. This builds self-esteem and confidence.
- The adult knows that Sarah needs the personal space to mix the paint colours, and then symbolically represent a person in her painting. The person is her mum. In this way she can develop as a symbol user.
- James benefits from lots of talking with the adult about what he is doing and going to do.
- Valeria also needs lots of talk, about mixing paint and getting its texture right. Language, talking and listening to each other, is an important and central way in which children become symbol users.

Adult interaction

- It might look as if the adults are only there in the background, but in fact they are central. Adults working with young children, either in group setting or in a home based setting, are key to helping children develop and learn. Adults create warm affectionate atmospheres, which open children up to learning and help children to know themselves, respect themselves, like themselves, and engage with their learning very positively.

- Adults also create the physical environment both indoors and outdoors. Sarah shows us how important it is to learn without external pressures from adults, she does concentrate well, but in between the sandpit and the painting, she needed time to meander and transition from one intense time of learning into the next. She isn't purposeless or aimless, but making a transition from one educational experience to the next.
- This contrasts with James who needed to find his focus, helped by the adult, or Valeria who needed help to keep her focus with confidence.
- The people we meet, the environment and atmosphere, are as important as what we learn. We do our best work with helping children to develop and learn when we observe what they find of interest, and what they show us they would be interested to learn.

Key points to note

- Give children time to explore and develop their thinking
- Support and challenge children's thinking by getting involved in the thinking process with them
- Developing learning experiences through child-initiated learning experiences
- An awareness of children's interest