

Early Years Foundation Stage – Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning

1. What is teaching?

Teaching should not be taken to imply a 'top-down' or formal way of working. It is a broad term which covers many different ways in which adults help children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities; communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what you are doing, facilitating and setting challenges. It also takes account of the equipment practitioners provide, 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 take account of their interests and dispositions to learning (characteristics of effective learning) and use this information to plan children's next steps in learning and monitor their progress.

The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage states:

'Each area of learning and development must be implemented through planned, purposeful play and through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated play. As children grow older it is expected that the balance will gradually shift towards more activities led by adults to help children prepare for the more formal learning of Year 1'.

Characteristics of Effective Learning

In planning and guiding children's activities, practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn, and reflect these in their practice. These three characteristics of effective learning are:

- **playing and exploring** – children investigate and experience things and 'have a go'
- **active learning** – children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties and enjoy achievements; and
- **creating and critically thinking** – children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas and develop strategies for doing things.

2. What do the characteristics of effective teaching and learning look like in a good setting?

Playing and exploring:

- Adults provide a wide range of stimulating resources which are accessible, open-ended and relevant to children's interests

- There is flexible space indoors and outside for children to explore and move around freely
- Adults join in play sensitively, fitting in with children's existing play ideas
- Children have uninterrupted time to play and explore
- Adults provide additional props to extend children's imagination and creativity
- Adults only intervene in children's play to support, stimulate or extend children's learning when needed.

Active Learning:

- Adults observe and reflect on what arouses children's curiosity and interests
- Children have opportunities to exercise choice over their activities – setting their own goals and methods
- Adults ensure children have time and freedom to become deeply involved in activities
- Adults encourage children to persist with difficulties, trying again or in a different way
- Adults provide stimulating resources and experiences related to children's current interests to encourage their involvement
- Adults observe children and note signs of deep involvement and sustained concentration
- Adults recognise and praise children's successes.

Creating and thinking critically:

- Adults show and talk about strategies – how to do things, including problem-solving
- Children are encouraged to learn together and from each other
- Adults foster a learning community which focuses on **how**, and not just **what** we are learning.

As part of the daily routine practitioners ensure that:

- There is sufficient time for children to create their own play and explore their own ideas
- Children play and their thought processes are not interrupted
- Time is allowed for children's play and creativity to reach its own conclusions
- Children have the time and necessary resources to solve their own problems
- Children have opportunities to explore different ways of doing things and find alternative uses for objects.

The Environment – practitioners ensure that:

- A wide range of resources are readily accessible and visible to children
- Practitioners allow children to move resources freely around to support their play and ideas
- Play and learning consistently take place in all areas, including outdoors
- Practitioners observe and support children’s play without inhibiting learning and creativity
- Open –ended resources are provided which have no intended outcome of use.

3. How do practitioners promote the characteristics of effective teaching and learning?

Play and exploring – what practitioners do (or don’t do)

- How do practitioners encourage children to explore and develop their own ideas?
- How do practitioners help children achieve new things, without doing it for them?
- How do adults encourage children to develop new interests and gain new skills?
- How do practitioners encourage children to try new things and take risks to succeed?
- How effectively do practitioners monitor how children play and adapt activities accordingly to support learning
- How effectively do practitioners help children learn by getting things wrong and trying again?

Active learning – how do practitioners promote learning?

- How do practitioners support every child’s interests and motivation for learning?
- How do practitioners provide an environment and daily routine which encourages children to develop independence, curiosity and the ability to explore?
- How do practitioners organise resources to enable children to explore their own ideas and creativity and move around freely; for example between inside and outdoors?
- How often do children experience ‘open-ended’ resources and benefit from activities which have no adult–defined learning outcomes?
- How effectively do practitioners monitor children’s engagement in activities and know when, and when not, to intervene without inhibiting learning?

- How does the daily routine and organisation of activities encourage children to have sustained time for concentration, engagement and extended thinking?

Creating and thinking critically - how do practitioners support this?

- How do practitioners support open-ended thinking by not always settling on the first idea or outcome?
- How do practitioners model being 'a thinker' and finding out things you don't always know?
- How do practitioners encourage children to solve problems, identify solutions and overcome challenges?
- How effectively do practitioners value children's questioning, conversations and suggestions?
- How well do practitioners listen to the voices of all children, especially those known to be quieter, speak English as an additional language, or those with an individual learning need
- How well do practitioners respond to what children are doing, saying and plan appropriate linked activities?
- How well do practitioners encourage children to reflect on their own learning?

N.B. – the term 'practitioner' refers to adults who are working with children for example; teachers, teaching assistants and children centre workers.