

# Case studies: Characteristics of Effective Learning

Characteristics of Effective Learning		
A Unique Child: how a child is learning	Positive Relationships: what adults might do	Enabling Environments: what adults might provide
<p>Mia is lying on her back under an elastic strung between two chairs. She has been increasingly aware of her arms, watching them as she moves them in front of herself. She swings her arms and bats the two wooden spoons hanging from the elastic, and her whole body shakes with excitement. After two sessions with the spoons, on another day there is a metal spoon tied on as well, and she focuses intently as she swings her arms, sending the spoons dancing and knocking into each other.</p> <p><b>CoEL:</b> Mia is finding out and exploring, becoming involved, and is making links between her bodily actions and the spoons' movements.</p>	<p>Mia's key person, Sara, chose a time when Mia was fed, comfortable, quiet and alert before introducing her to the new resource. Sara sat quietly nearby to give Mia confidence as she explored the spoons. After a few minutes when Mia turned her head away, Sara saw that Mia was choosing to finish the activity, so she removed the string and elastic, and chatted with Mia.</p>	<p>Sara responded to Mia's interest in exploring the action of her arms by using everyday materials to create the object for Mia to explore, and to experience agency by making the spoons move. After two days when Mia had enjoyed making the wooden spoons move, Sara decided to add a metal spoon, thinking that the new element might rekindle Mia's interest.</p>
<p>In the heuristic area Anya was intrigued by the cardboard cups. Initially she spent time transporting the pegs from one cup to another. After she repeated her actions with high levels of involvement, key person Kimberley said to Anya, 'Oh look my cup is upside down.' Anya smiled and copied. 'Balance,' she said as she tried placing a cup on top. After trying lots of times she became frustrated as the cups kept sliding down on top of each other. Kimberley suggested placing the cups in the middle and demonstrated to her. Anya was motivated to keep trying and came up with the idea to turn the cups around and then place them on top of each other. 'I did it!'</p> <p>Leonie and Verity were intrigued by the pegs and focused on transporting them and slotting them onto the side of the wooden box. Verity placed the pegs behind her if they didn't fit but Leonie had the idea to try them on the other smaller box, adapting her strategies to overcome her challenges. Together the children and Kimberley categorised the pegs. Kimberley</p>	<p>Kimberley was highly attentive to the children's individual explorations, seeking to understand what they are interested in and then supporting them as needed to reach their own goals. She offers suggestions and language to help children become more aware of strategies and concepts, but respects the children's own ideas.</p> <p>The emotional climate is one of relaxation and security, so that children feel free to explore in their own ways.</p>	<p>Provision of plentiful open-ended resources and time for a heuristic play session allow children to explore concepts in their own ways. Kimberley wonders whether Anya is exploring moving things through a transporting schema while Leonie and Verity were both transporting and investigating size. She decides that for the next heuristic session she will enhance learning opportunities by adding more resources that encourage children to explore size and shape, as well as utensils to support the transporting schema.</p>

<p>modelled using mathematical language, saying 'That peg is too small' to support their mathematical concepts.</p> <p><b>CoEL:</b> The children demonstrated learning behaviours in Playing and Exploring; in Active Learning as they were highly involved, persevered with challenge and took pleasure in meeting their goals; and Thinking Creatively and Critically as they came up with new ideas of ways to use and sort the materials.</p>		
<p>In the setting's natural outdoor environment, Ralph used his hands to explore the leaves. He repeatedly threw them into the air and watched them landing all around him. Alex discovered fallen leaves in the riverbed, and had the idea of using a wheelbarrow to collect the leaves so the group could continue their exploration indoors. While collecting leaves Alex discovered a feather. He was fascinated by this, and used his fingertips to rub together across the feather. The leaves and the feather became a key area of interest within our sensory area in the room.</p> <p><b>CoEL:</b> The children showed curiosity which led their explorations. They were involved and concentrating, repeating actions and looking carefully at what occurred and at features of things. They had their own ideas about what to do.</p>	<p>The children were confident to explore freely in the natural environment, knowing that the adult was nearby if needed but feeling trusted and capable of engaging in their own ways. The adults were responsive to the children's own ideas, following the lead of the children's interests.</p>	<p>Unstructured time in the natural outdoor environment supported the children to be relaxed and to engage in their own ways. Although the area was familiar, the changes of nature provided a constant spark for children's curiosity and explorations.</p> <p>To support the children to further explore concepts and links they were making, the adults decided to add a variety of feathers to the sensory area, ranging in size to include peacock and ostrich feathers. To develop the exploration of hard and soft elements, they then added coconut shells and bamboo sticks as contrasting textures to the feathers.</p>
<p>Sam and Leo planned together that they were going to make books. Sam said his would be about football because it was for his dad who liked football, and Leo said his would be about trains. They chose paper, folded and stapled it while discussing what would be in the books. They both drew pictures, and did some mark-making on the pages while saying aloud what the marks said. They helped each other think of some initial letters they needed to represent some of the sounds of words they wanted to say. When they were finished they eagerly took them to show to their teacher.</p> <p><b>CoEL:</b> Sam and Leo were highly motivated, made plans, used strategies they had learned, showed persistence in completing the tasks they had decided on, and showed satisfaction in meeting their own goals.</p>	<p>Their teacher listened carefully to their initial ideas, and encouraged them to tell her a bit more about their plans. Sam and Leo chose to work together, and their relationship was a positive factor in their activities as they enjoyed each other's company and supported each other's ideas and efforts. Their teacher showed that she valued their independent ideas and activity, and drew the books to the attention of the boys' parents at the end of the day.</p>	<p>Sam and Leo knew that the routine of the day gave them a period of uninterrupted time when they were in charge of their own activities, and it was framed in a plan-do-review structure. Resources were readily available for them to choose and use according to their own ideas, and knowing where to find everything increased their independence. They knew they were responsible for leaving the area with tools and resources returned to where they belonged.</p>

<p>The reception class had recently been to the bird sanctuary and the warden (Theo's Dad) had come into class to share bird stories. Robin listened attentively as Theo's Dad read the story of the thirsty crow. As soon as the story was finished, Robin said to Theo, "Shall we find out if the water goes to the top?" Together they went to the water area, took the tallest tubes from the shelf and filled them half full of water. Theo picked up the basket of stones and the children added them one by one to the tubes. "Look," said Robin excitedly, "the water's getting higher". "Mine was on number 7, now it's on number 8," said Theo. Both boys continued adding stones until the water ran over the top. "Now the crow will be able to drink and he won't die," said Theo. They went quickly to tell the teacher what they had found out.</p> <p><b>CoEL:</b> The boys learned through exploration; they set a problem, had original ideas and decided how to proceed; they made mental links between the story and practical experience; they were motivated to find out and were satisfied by their success.</p>	<p>Their teacher had taken note of the children's fascination with birds. She planned trips, activities and visitors to support this. While Theo and Robin explored their ideas in the water area, their teacher watched the boys from a distance. Later that afternoon she made time for the boys to demonstrate their experiment to the class, showing her interest and supporting their satisfaction in their achievement. She introduced vocabulary to help the children explain what was happening, and used the language of learning: "<i>wondered</i>", "<i>thought</i>", "<i>tested</i>", "<i>found out</i>", "<i>experimented</i>", to help the children become more aware of their processes of learning.</p>	<p>Engaging in the wider community through the visit to the bird sanctuary supported the boys to make connections between their experience, the book, and their previous knowledge about water and volume.</p> <p>The environment was planned with rich, open-ended resources that allowed children to experiment and investigate. Staff regularly modelled and encouraged this.</p> <p>Children had extended time to follow their own enquiries and had freedom and permission to use resources in open-ended ways to explore their ideas. Resources were organised so that children knew where to find and return them.</p> <p>The structure of the day was flexible to allow children to share and celebrate what they were learning.</p>
<p>Shreya watched with fascination as the tadpoles in the tank started to grow. She excitedly shared the non-fiction book with her Grandad, explaining the changes. Alongside the tank, the teacher had added sentences and pictures of the frog life cycle. Shreya ordered the pictures quickly. She picked up a sentence card which said, 'Soon after this it is a frog and hops on the ground'. Shreya read the sentence, sounding out the word 'soon' and hesitated over 'ground'. She looked for the phonics display and saw the picture of a boy who had pricked his finger. 'Ou!' said Shreya and sounded out 'ground'. She continued, engrossed, until she had matched the five sentences to the pictures.</p> <p><b>CoEL:</b> Shreya showed her interest in the tadpoles, and welcomed the challenge of reading the text about the subject she was interested in. She was involved and persisted to complete the task she had chosen, could decide when she needed support and remembered and applied a strategy to help her.</p>	<p>Families were encouraged to come into the classroom on a daily basis for the first 30 minutes of the day to get involved in child-initiated learning and play, which gave Shreya a chance to talk about her learning with her grandfather.</p> <p>There was a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere in the class, and children felt safe and were comfortable with making mistakes. Through encouragement to try things out for themselves, children developed independence and confidence in their own abilities.</p>	<p>The classroom assistant was passionate about introducing wildlife to the children. He regularly set up displays and opportunities for children to learn and explore throughout the seasons. He made time every day to share children's curiosity, help them find answers to their questions, adding new elements to stimulate their interest. Children's drive to find out meant they didn't give up easily.</p> <p>Staff systematically taught new skills including phonics. They used memory aids which they displayed to enable children to find help independently. Staff provided meaningful opportunities to read and write which offered an appropriate level of challenge.</p>