

Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning



- **What is a characteristic of effective learning?**

A child's time in the early years is critical to their development throughout school and later life. Characteristics of effective learning (CoEL) is a term that has remained unchanged in the recently reformed EYFS framework and a term that provides an essential structure for practitioners to support children and make sense of how the children in their setting are learning.

The characteristics of effective learning focus on three key elements; engagement, motivation and thinking.

There are three characteristics of effective learning in the [development matters document](#);

- **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*
- **Creating and Thinking Critically** – *children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.*

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- **Why are characteristics of effective learning key to development?**

A characteristic of effective learning is not necessarily something a practitioner must 'do', but an understanding of how children learn and develop. At times, teachers and those working in the EYFS focus on *what* a child is learning, whereas it is vital for practitioners to take a step back, reflect, and think about *how* learning in the early years is taking place.

Making observations and knowing how to support children as individuals is at the heart of understanding the importance of the characteristics of effective learning. Practitioner awareness of these characteristics will ultimately lead to improved teaching and learning outcomes.

- **How are the characteristics of effective learning used in early years settings?**

Often the characteristics of effective learning are referred to in the observation process. In early years settings, children are observed regularly to understand their stage of development and current learning processes. Adults in the setting use observation as a reflective tool. They notice what a child is doing and what characteristics underpin a child's learning. Is the child engaged? Is the child playing and exploring? Is the child beginning to develop their own ideas? Is the child creating and thinking critically?

Playing and Exploring



- Finding out and exploring
- Playing with what they know
- Being willing to 'have a go.'

Children are natural explorers. From birth, children engage and make sense of the world around them. They are curious about their environment and everything within it. Children want to play, learn and explore to find out more. At the early years foundation stage, practitioners think carefully about providing engaging learning environments that suit the individual child's interests and sensory play experiences that stimulate their curiosity, leading them to deep and meaningful playing and exploring.

Many young children at this stage are shy in a new and unfamiliar setting, and so a part of a practitioner's role is to help develop their confidence and willingness to try. Children need to be offered activities and toys of interest to them. Using familiar resources to develop children's skills will help children to feel more comfortable and at ease. It will enable them to build their sense of self and, in time, increase their confidence to try more. During play situations, children need to know that things go wrong. Things could go wrong, but it is ok for things to go wrong, and by getting things wrong, we learn.

Early years practitioners are there to model and show the children how to play, discover and use the resources provided without being overbearing.

Active Learning



- Keeping trying
- Being involved and concentrating
- Enjoying achieving what they set out to do

Active learning focuses on a child's motivation and drive to engage and persist in learning. But how do we keep a child encouraged to explore, learn and try?

In the EYFS, children need to have learning opportunities in an exciting and enabling environment. This can be done by providing opportunities for new or unusual play; a range of open-ended, problem-solving resources that challenge and evoke questions. Making it enjoyable, instilling a sense of the unknown and wonder will also ensure it is engaging.

Children's motivation increases when they work collaboratively. Practitioners can plan opportunities for collaborative play and learning, encouraging talk and sharing ideas.

A motivated child will display more concentration, and with the modelling, support and scaffolding provided by adults, are more likely to persevere.

Together, identify and achieve goals and celebrate them, no matter how big or small.

Allowing children to leave their creations for others to see rather than tidying them away will motivate them to keep on trying the next time too.

Creating and Thinking Critically



- Having their own ideas
- Making links
- Choosing ways to do things

The early years practitioner plays a significant role in this characteristic. Careful observations of children can provide practitioners with opportunities to guide individuals to the next step in their learning. Children may need support with their ideas to make links and connections and to help their understanding of new concepts.

Children must have an environment with many opportunities for different ways to express themselves, such as role-play, construction and art. Children need to receive positive opportunities to play with adults and to have access to open-ended activities and begin to seek alternative possibilities to play situations.

Creating and thinking critically is about supporting a child over time, using and modelling language skills effectively to show a child your thought processes and how theirs may look.

This characteristic is about giving children time to experiment, think and talk, to ask questions, leading to a deeper and different understanding of the world.