

16. Learning in the Early Years Policy

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Our Image of Young Children

We believe that right from birth, children are strong and confident learners. They are the first great researchers who explore, test their ideas, solve problems and try to make sense of their world.

We believe that learning is social in nature so we encourage and support children's interactions with other children and adults.

We understand that young children learn through seeing, hearing and doing. They are active learners and we aim to ensure that their environment promotes and protects the use of all senses.

Our Responsibility

We believe it is our responsibility to support children to enjoy learning, be confident to take risks ask questions and understand that confusion and doubt are part of real learning. We aim to fulfil our responsibility by planning projected learning experiences, linking to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum requirements. We understand that these experiences need to be challenging but achievable, so that children's self-image will not be harmed.

We listen carefully and respectfully to children so that the experiences we plan build on their interests, strengths and questions.

Young children need time and space to learn effectively. We, therefore, place a high value on time and offer children many opportunities to repeat, revisit and reflect on their previous experience.

Our Aims

We, therefore, aim to support young children:

- to be confident, independent and aspirational;
- to form and maintain positive relationships, to work collaboratively and be valued members of the community;
- to take responsibility for themselves, each other and their environment;
- to question, challenge and solve problems creatively;
- to know their strengths and to have the confidence to take risks;

- to know that their ideas will be heard and respected and that they can make a difference.

Self-image

We understand that without positive self-image, learning is impossible. Therefore, creating esteeming experiences and activities are central to teaching and learning in the early years at North Nibley Pre-school. This requires a community of people within the setting who really look and listen for young children's interests, strengths, and the questions they are asking (either verbally or non-verbally) and the problems they are trying to solve. The experiences that we create to scaffold, challenge and prompt their thinking will have the potential to either detract or enhance their self-image. It is, therefore, vitally important that the adult-originated experiences do no harm to a child's self-image or image as a learner.

Rationale for Relationships and Interactions

Child to Child Interactions

We believe that young children are born trying to make sense of their social world and that human life is essentially co-operative. When adults stand back a little and listen to children's interactions, we are more likely to understand the questions they are asking, their preferences and competencies.

We, therefore, aim to provide young children with opportunities and time to solve problems together, play together, eat together and make decisions and choices together.

Adult to Child Relationships and the Role of the Adult

We believe that the question of 'who am I' cannot be answered without reference to the evaluations of others. We, therefore, aim to protect and promote children's self-image by establishing supportive relationships with our children.

We believe that young children have rights and needs that are best supported by the ways in which we interact with them.

We believe that children have the right to:

- warm, respectful and responsive relationships;
- trust the adults who work with them;
- genuineness;
- be treated consistently and predictably;
- work with adults who understand them, who listen and look; and
- work with adults who value all children regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, ability/disability.

In planning, supporting and stimulating learning, the adult's role is one of a researcher, analyst, planner and facilitator. We may stand aside to watch and gather evidence for planning (formative assessment) and then analyse and 'sum up' that evidence (summative assessment). We then plan developmentally appropriate learning experiences for the children. During this process, we may scaffold the children's learning through our thoughtful interactions with them.

Scaffolding might include:

- providing a commentary;
- supporting children to make comments;
- encouraging independence and risk taking;
- sometimes holding back and allowing children to discover 'imbalances' in their thinking and hypotheses;
- role modelling;
- answering children's questions;
- asking questions to stimulate thinking but not to close down children's ideas;
- listening and observing children's patterns of behaviour (schemas and interests); and
- making timely changes to the learning environment to provoke and challenge children's thinking, imagining and research.

In all these ways we promote and protect young children's self-image and learning within the context of meaningful relationships and interactions.

Adult to Adult Relationships

Working in a profession that requires a great deal of humanity, patience, empathy and energy can leave reserves for relationships with colleagues a little depleted. However, we know that very young children watch, imitate and make deductions about the quality of relationships between adults. We, therefore, aim to support our interactions with each other through a range of support systems. These might include mentoring, colleagues, staff meetings, staff appraisal, local networks and generally promoting a culture of 'openness and mutual support'.

We believe it is vital that support systems are available for staff so that respectful trusting relationships can be modelled for young children.

Related Documents

- Policy for Learning in Early Years
- Policy for Assessment, Planning and Record Keeping
- Rationale for Time Organisation
- Rationale for the Physical Environment.

Rationale for Time Organisation

Alongside the quality of relationships and interactions, we believe that time in young children's learning deserves very high regard. We know that the nature of young children's learning is based upon emotions, making meaning and hypotheses. We also understand that to establish memory trace, young children require many opportunities to repeat and revise their thinking and ideas.

We aim to plan learning experiences that build upon previous knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes. These experiences will need to allow the children time to repeat and rehearse their skills and knowledge.

In order to promote learning, these experiences may need to be changed to incorporate slight variations over a period of time.

In our planning, we work with a timetable to build order and flexibility into our work. However, we aim to avoid the 'tyranny of the timetable' and have the confidence to adapt our time organisation to meet the changing, daily interests of the children.

In organising our time with children we aim to balance the need for child initiated and adult originated work. Before children begin the Foundation Stage, they will require plenty of opportunity to initiate their own learning. This balance will shift very slowly until at the end of the Reception year, when children's time for learning will be managed more through adult originated experiences.

Time is organised on a daily basis following High Scope principles but with flexibility also at the heart of our time organisation. We aim to provide children with the opportunity to plan part of their day and be supportive to achieve what they set out to do. We also aim to offer time for the children to reflect on their experiences and be listened to by other children and adults.

Time sitting still is kept to a minimum, as we understand the difficulties young children have in sustaining this level of physical control and concentration.

Time is organised for outdoors to reflect our belief that the outside is an extension of our indoor rooms. Where possible, there is no defined time for outdoors, thereby offering the children choice about their learning environment. If outdoor time is managed through a timetable, then outside space is still organised to develop young children's thinking, emotions, social skills, cognitive and communication skills as well as their physical ones.

In summary, time is organised to enhance children's natural rhythms for learning and to be both ordered and flexible.

Related Documents

- Policy for Learning in the Early Years
- Policy for Assessment, Planning and Record Keeping
- Rationale for Relationships and Interactions
- Rationale for the Physical Environment

Rationale for the Physical Environment

We believe that the physical environment has the potential to stimulate, provoke and enhance learning for young children. We understand that young children learn holistically and through all their senses. In this way, the physical environment offers opportunities for children's research and investigations. Our aim is to create a generous learning environment through careful considerations of the physical environment we offer to them.

We believe that the environment needs to be welcoming, stimulating and flexible. This involves an environment that promotes every child's progress in social interactions, cognitive and communication skills, dispositions and physical environment. We also aim to offer materials and equipment that reflect a wide variety of different cultural experiences.

In creating a generous learning environment we aim to follow these broad guidelines:

- provide 'psychological comfort' and be 'physically friendly';
- support children's sensory-motor approach to learning;
- establish order and flexibility;
- create spaces for relations and options;
- promote choice and independence;
- provide a balance of found and manufactured materials – open-ended materials;
- provide for personal space and retreat;
- create challenging opportunities; and
- provide variety – design and construct timely changes to inspire and stimulate children's curiosity and research.

Related Documents

- Policy for Learning in the Early Years
- Policy for Assessment, Planning and Record Keeping
- Rationale for Relationships and Interactions
- Rationale for Time Organisation
- Equality and Diversity Policy

It is essential that our setting reflects fully the rich multi-cultural community to which our children and families belong.

Policy for Assessment, Planning and Record Keeping

At North Nibley Pre-school, staff observe children daily to record and note each child's learning and interests. This information is then used to plan activities to develop the child's individual learning.

The observations form a major part of assessment of each child's learning and development. One observation gives a clue, and the build up of continuous observations can be used to reflect on a child's progress from various viewpoints, eg. relationships, development in play, mathematics, language, literacy or imagination. What a child can do (rather than what she/he can't do) is the starting point in the child's education.

The observations are collated into a profile called the 'Learning Journey'. This is done online using a system called Tapestry. For every child the journal is arranged into the seven areas of the Foundation Stage Curriculum.

A child's 'Learning Journey' is a living record document and is supported by the continuous gathering and collating of a variety of materials. Records can take many forms: observations; photos of children's drawings, mark making, paintings etc; documentation; learning pathways or maps; and a record of the child's involvement at events in the community and at home.

Parents and carers are invited to share and add to their child's 'Learning Journey' (Tapestry) on a daily basis. Parents are encouraged to make comments about the child's development on the observation. Our aim is to work in partnership with parents, establishing a continuing dialogue between home and North Nibley Pre-school in order to share and understand together the needs of each child. We recognise and value parents as well as a child's experiences and achievements within their own family and community cultures.

The 'Learning Journey' is each child's progress file and is available at all times. When children leave the setting they take with them a pdf file of their 'Learning Journey' and a summative report. This is a useful record of their achievement not only for the child and his/her family, but also for the staff at the child's next Pre-school, nursery or school.