

To what extent does child-led learning influence a child's engagement?

Children often lead their own learning through play (Department for Education, 2012). An effective practice report from Estyn shows how learning through play support children's independent learning (Estyn, 2019). One essential element of the Foundation Phase and upon which the Foundation Phase is built upon is learning through play (Welsh Government, 2018). The Foundation Phase in Wales is also where enhanced and focused activities take place. Some of these activities such as the enhanced activities are child-led activities. It is important that practitioners plan for both child-led and practitioner-led activities with an appropriate balance between both (Estyn, 2010). This is particularly important to this research task as the participants are from a year one class. The Foundation Phase Framework for Wales 2008 emphasis that children aged three to seven should experience a balance of activities both inside and outside which are both child-initiated and practitioner-led activities (DCELLS, 2008a). Structured educational play such as the continuous provision activities in the classroom, even if that play is initiated by practitioners, can be seen as child-led learning (DCELLS, 2008b). Activities like these may use the practitioner as a facilitator and be able to provide scaffolding, support and may model certain behaviour that is desired (Maynard, et al., 2013).

Professor David Geary states that "child-led learning simply does not work" (Severs, 2020). Geary suggests that primary knowledge will naturally expand unlike secondary knowledge as long as the environment around the children allows for children to explore, play and have social interactions (Severs, 2020). However, others voice the opinion that child-initiated learning can be difficult to get right especially in the early years of education. Barber offers six steps that enable child-led learning to be effective. These include making sure that the practitioners are listening carefully to the children, ensuring that the practitioner joins in with the children's playing in order for children to engage in meaningful interactions, ensuring that children's ideas are valued by the practitioners, establishing that the right amount of support is given by the practitioners, making sure that the practitioners are encouraging children to use problem solving skills and finally making sure that positive praise and reinforcement along with effective feedback is given by the practitioners (Barber, 2017). As a consequence of COVID-19, child-led activities are becoming more popular especially when home learning is concerned. As teaching live with younger children can bring up safeguarding concerns child-led learning can be considered a more suitable way of learning whilst children are at home to learn (NEU, 2020).