

## **Using the observe-plan-cycle to co-construct the curriculum with children**

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The observe-assess-plan cycle recognises curriculum making as a continuous and responsive process. Practitioners recognise (*observe*), reflect upon (*assess*) and respond to (*plan for*) children's learning. What practitioners observe, notice and assess is informed by what they already know about a child, or a group of children, and by what children know, understand and are interested in. The cycle enables practitioners and children to co-construct the curriculum, informed by the interests and experiences that children bring from their home and community cultures. This approach to curriculum starts from the principle that every child has the right to learn and play in contexts that are meaningful and culturally relevant. The curriculum integrates, but is not determined by the EYFS goals.

A co-constructed curriculum begins with practitioners recognising that babies, toddlers and young children learn through making sense of their environments, experiences and interactions, and building their knowledge, skills and understanding. Individual and shared interests become the springboards for inquiry, exploration and investigation. The observe-assess-plan cycle allows practitioners to pause, think and work out children's purposes, intentions and motivations. The next step is taking time for reflection and dialogue with children and families, and using professional knowledge to inform practice. Reflection on practice is a collaborative process that involves professional conversations about children's learning and development, and informs curriculum design.

### **Using the observe-assess-plan cycle to enrich interactions**

As well as providing a broad overview of provision, the observe-assess-plan cycle can inform everyday interactions between children and practitioners. The aim is to support learning and development in dynamic and responsive ways. Fisher (2016) makes an important distinction between interacting and interfering. Her research with practitioners shows how paying attention, through careful observing and listening, enables practitioners to tune in to children's authentic questions, inquiries and interests in play, exploration and relationships. In well-resourced environments, children express their interests through play, gestures, movement, talk, mime, markmaking, rhythm, music, dance and digital technologies.

Interactions can unfold in response to the different ways in which babies, toddlers and young children use multiple modes of interaction and communication. The process of observation-in-action informs meaningful interactions that connect with children's interests, intentions and [funds of knowledge](#). ([hyperlink here](#))

### **Co-constructing a connected curriculum**

Young children learn through planned and spontaneous opportunities to connect their existing knowledge and ways of knowing with new experiences. In a responsive approach to curriculum-making practitioners can use the observe-assess-plan cycle to recognise, revisit and extend children's interests and inquiries over time. Supporting children's progress towards the early learning goals is embedded within this approach, because children are putting their knowledge, understanding and skills to work in meaningful and relevant activities.

#### **Case study: Making Chapati**

Adeel (aged 2 years, 8 months) flattened a lump of clay to form a disc that he slapped between his hands. His key worker shared the observation with Adeel's mum who explained that Adeel enjoys helping to make chapati at home. As a result, the practitioner was able to understand that Adeel was using clay to express an interest in baking and cooking. In response, practitioners planned a series of adult-led activities in which Adeel and his peers were able to experience preparing chapati and other types of bread. Additional cooking utensils and stories about baking were added to the continuous provision to encourage play and exploration. These experiences offered meaningful contexts for extending Adeel's skills, knowledge and understanding.

Some settings plan the curriculum using a programme of topics or themes. In these cases, practitioners might want to review the extent to which their choice of topics can incorporate the diversity of interests and experiences that children bring from their homes and communities. Additionally, topic-based approaches that include opportunities for play and exploration will enable practitioners to use the observe-assess-plan cycle to recognise and respond to the interests and questions that children wish to explore within each topic focus.

Reference:

Fisher, J. (2016). *Interacting or interfering? Improving interactions in the early years*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Further reading:

Tovey, H. (2020). *Froebel's principles and practice today*. The Froebel Trust, accessed online <https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Froebels-principles-and-practice-today.pdf>

Hedges, H. and Cooper, M. with Lovatt, D., Murphy, T. Spanhake, N., Harper, B. and Ashurst, L. (2014) *Inquiring minds, meaningful responses: Children's interests, inquiries, and working theories*. New Zealand Council for Educational Research, accessed online <http://www.tlri.org.nz/tlri-research/research-completed/ece-sector/inquiring-minds-meaningful-responses-children%E2%80%99s>

Wood, E. (2020) *Building your curriculum: Knowledge, part 1 – a matter of fact*. Nursery World, accessed online <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/features/article/building-your-curriculum-knowledge-part-1-a-matter-of-fact>