

CONTEXTS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING: THE EARLY YEARS PEDAGOGICAL CONTINUUM

Pedagogy is the professional term for teaching. It means the set of approaches which enable learning to take place. Within an early years setting, teaching and learning takes place through an interactive process between:

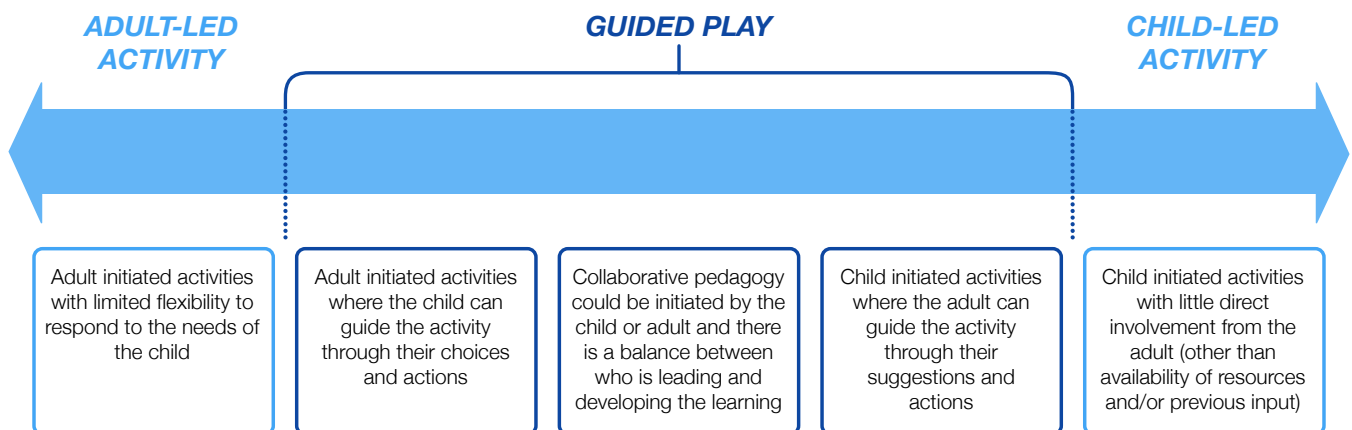
- an educator and a child/children
- a more experienced child and their less experienced peer/s
- a child and their environment

Put simply, the educator's role is to ensure they apply effective approaches to positively influence as many of these different interactions as possible.

A common misconception about opportunities for learning in the early years is that there are two distinct contexts it can take place, either through adult initiated activities (such as group sessions) or through independent free play as children access the continuous provision the adult has provided. However, these contexts are in fact the opposite ends of a broad spectrum of many different and subtle contexts teaching and learning can take place.

Building on the work of others (Miller & Almon, 2009; National Strategies, 2009), we have put together the Early Years Pedagogical Continuum. It attempts to illustrate the range of ways educators support children's learning and development and that this spans adult-led and child-led learning opportunities.

Figure 1: The Early Years Pedagogical Continuum



In the Early Years Evidence Store you will find that the recommended approaches and suggested practices can be applied by educators across the continuum. For example, the approach of ‘teaching and modelling vocabulary’ could be implemented through the practice of ‘commenting’ as

highlighted by the scenarios in the boxes below. You’ll also find our understanding of where these interactions may be placed on the continuum:

Scenario 1



Gemma is making fairy cakes with some of her key children at a table. They each have a bowl and a spoon and their own set of ingredients. Gemma comments on what is happening to her mixture “*mine is dry*”. She then comments on what the children are doing and says “*look at yours. This looks dry too. I think we need to add some more milk to your mixture*”.

Scenario 2

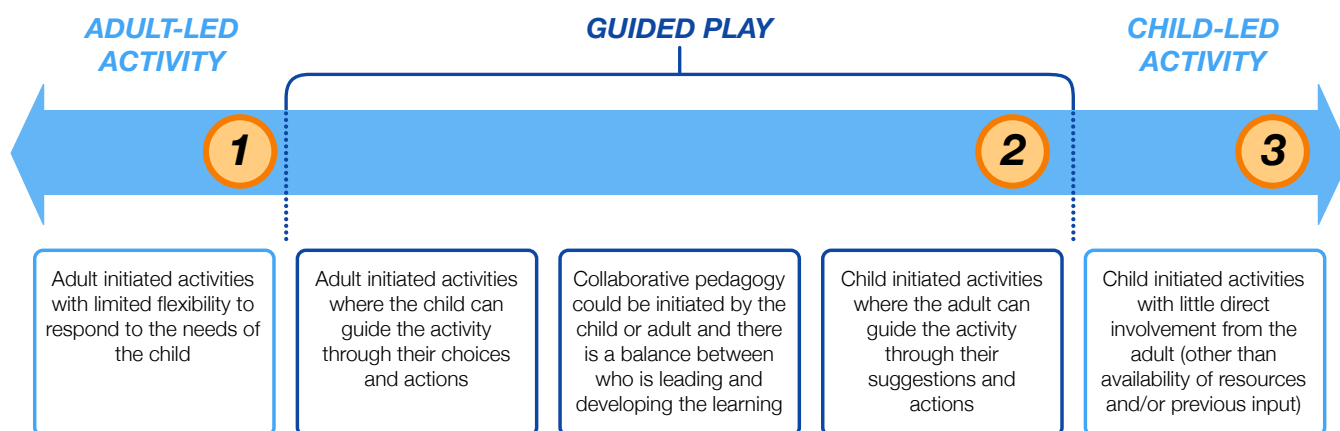


Elena joins some of the children in the sand tray. The children are filling up different sized containers and then emptying them out. Elena comments on Reuben’s play “*Wow Reuben your bucket is nearly full, mine is not full yet*”. “*Ewa your bucket gets full so quickly.*”

Scenario 3



Aaron and Joshua have chosen to play with the water. They are exploring the water wheel and different sized containers. Aaron says to Joshua “*I have got a big one*” as he picks up a large container. He begins to fill it up with water.



Children in early years settings spend less time in adult-led learning opportunities than their older peers. One of the complexities and joys of being an educator of children in the early years is finding ways to promote learning opportunities when the children are playing and leading the interaction. Adult-initiated sessions and small group work can influence children's self-initiated activity if educators sometimes join in with children's play.

How can educators promote learning without leading the play? The **Early Years Evidence Store** can help. It lists the approaches and practices educators can implement across the continuum of contexts learning takes place. This can support educators to try to positively influence as many interactions as possible.