Nurturing Young Minds: Embracing a Child-Centred Approach to Early Years Pedagogies
In the vibrant and ever-evolving world of early years education, the pedagogical approach you select plays a crucial role in shaping children’s learning journeys and personal development. No matter what pedagogy you embrace, the most important principle to remember is that children should always be at the centre of your approach. This guide will help you navigate and implement various pedagogical approaches while keeping the child’s well-being and development in focus.

Before delving into different pedagogies, it’s essential to grasp the overarching philosophy that places children at the centre of learning – embracing the idea that children are active learners, curious, and capable of driving their own learning experiences. It’s important to recognise that each child is unique in their interests, abilities, and learning styles, so adapting your approach to cater to these individual differences will allow you to get the most out of the children and give them the best start in life. Developing strong observational skills to understand each child’s needs, interests, and developmental progress will often guide your teaching decisions.

Remember...

Integration and Flexibility:

✏ Recognise that no single pedagogical approach fits all situations perfectly.
✏ Be open to blending elements from different pedagogies to create a customised approach.
✏ Adapt your teaching methods as you get to know each child better.

Reflect and Collaborate:

✏ Regularly reflect on your practices and their impact on children’s learning.
✏ Collaborate with colleagues, parents, and caregivers to ensure a cohesive approach supporting the child’s development at home and in the early years setting.
Anyone can introduce a new pedagogy into current thinking. That was what people like Rudolph Steiner, Friedrich Froebel and Maria Montessori did in the late 1800s/early 1900s. They looked at what was happening in education, challenged it and came up with a different approach. This is still happening today, through current research. It can also be happening in your setting as you assess and reevaluate your practice. Nowadays, practice tends to be evidence-based, whether national, international or within your setting.

Who can start a pedagogy?

What is pedagogy for?

Some pedagogical approaches may help children to learn better than others but there is no hard and fast rule as to which will be better for which children. That is why having an evidence-based approach is important. Where researchers can prove that certain practices are helping in teaching, these practices can be adapted to benefit others. For example, using phonics to help children learn to read has been adopted by many schools and is championed by Ofsted. However, it is not the only method to teach children to read. What is important when considering which pedagogy to follow, is to look at the children in your cohort and choose methods and practices which will best suit their needs.

Pedagogies usually fall into one of two categories:

- A pedagogical approach that encompasses a broad teaching philosophy (e.g. Forest schools, child-centred learning)
- A pedagogy attributed to the theories of a particular person (e.g. Steiner, Montessori, Dweck)

Different educational pedagogies

Forest School

These outdoor-based settings emphasise nature exploration, risk-taking, and a connection to the natural world. Key features include outdoor learning environments, hands-on experiences in nature, and an emphasis on well-being and resilience. The approach is nature-centred, focuses on experiential learning, and promotes the development of outdoor skills.

Constructivist

In constructivism, learners are believed to create their understanding of the world around them, based on their own experiences in everyday life. This approach would allow children to take a more active role in their learning, using their existing knowledge as a foundation on which to build more. Practitioners may use a lot of hands-on techniques and ask children to form their conclusions about their discoveries, for example, “the taller you build the blocks, the more likely they are to tumble”.

Parenta.

Working together for our children
Child-centred

Adopting a child-centred approach to learning is similar to the constructivist approach in that children lead their learning, and the practitioners are facilitators, helping and enabling the students to learn. In practice, this means that children are no longer confined to desks, listening to the teacher impart information. Children are encouraged to find their project through play, move around as the motivation takes them and learn as they go.

HighScope

This approach promotes active learning, decision-making, and adult-child interactions. Key features include the “Plan-Do-Review” process, child-led small group activities, and daily routines that encourage independence. It emphasises the promotion of active learning through hands-on experiences and interactions, engaging children in decision-making and reflection using the “Plan-Do-Review” process, and encouraging adult-child interactions to scaffold learning. The approach is child-centred, focused on active learning, and involves goal setting.

Play-Based

Recognising the importance of play in early childhood development, this approach provides ample opportunities for children to explore, create, and learn through play. Key features include open-ended materials, imaginative play areas, and a focus on social and emotional development. It involves designing a learning environment that encourages free play, exploration, and creativity, providing open-ended materials to spark the imagination, and actively engaging in play with children to support their learning. The approach is child-led, fosters creativity, and promotes the development of social skills.
**Waldorf/Steiner**

Founded by Rudolf Steiner, it prioritises holistic development and a connection to nature. Key features include an emphasis on imaginative play, storytelling, arts, and an unhurried approach to early learning while limiting the use of technology in the early years. It follows a play-based, artistic approach with a delayed introduction to academics.

**Montessori**

Developed by Maria Montessori, it emphasises self-directed learning and individualised education, with a focus on creating an environment rich in age-appropriate materials that promote self-directed learning and encourage independence and self-discipline. It involves observing and guiding children while providing materials as needed. Key features include prepared environments with specialised learning materials, mixed-age classrooms, and a holistic approach to child-led, hands-on development.

**Reggio Emilia**

Originating in Italy, it centres around child-led project work, creativity, and collaboration. Key features include a focus on the hundred languages of children (creative expression), the use of ateliers (creative studios), and the importance of documentation. This approach fosters a collaborative and project-based learning environment, encouraging children to explore and express themselves through art and inquiry-based projects while also documenting and displaying their work to celebrate their learning journey.

**The Curiosity Approach**

Developed by Lyndsey Hellyn and Stephanie Bennett in the UK, this is a child-centred approach to early years education and childcare. It prioritises creating beautiful, homely environments with natural materials to foster children’s curiosity. It promotes independence, child-led learning, sensory experiences, a connection with nature, and documentation of children’s learning. Parent involvement and continual professional development for educators are also key components. This approach believes that nurturing children’s innate curiosity in inviting environments lays the foundation for lifelong learning and critical thinking.

**Some influential thinkers in educational pedagogy include:**

**Carol Dweck**

Carol Dweck first coined the term “growth mindset” and her work which purports that intelligence and learning can be developed and improved. It is the opposite of a ‘fixed mindset’ in which the person believes that they have a limited intelligence or set of abilities that cannot be extended beyond a certain limit.

**Friedrich Froebel**

This German pedagogue is known as the father of kindergartens and his work outlined the importance of play in learning.
Howard Gardner

Garner suggested that there are ‘multiple intelligences’, and some children naturally lean towards maths say, whilst others gravitate towards arts or music, with none seen as better than the others. His theories purport an individual approach to teaching. One article states that “Gardner points out that everyone has strengths and weaknesses in various intelligences, which is why educators should decide how best to present course material given the subject matter and individual class of students”.

Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori opened a house for children in 1907 in Italy. She taught five main curriculum areas: practical life, sensorial, maths, language and culture and used a prepared environment to help her children learn. She often advocated a less-cluttered environment with more space and open-ended resources that allow children to make their own decisions.

Jean Piaget

Piaget influenced pedagogy with his theories of cognitive development. He suggested that children differ from adults in their view of the world and the best way to understand them was to see the world from their perspective and understand how they develop over time.

Lev Vygotsky

This Russian theorist focused on the value of play and how children learn based on their environment and coined the term ‘zone of proximal development’. He suggested that children learn with the help of a ‘more knowledgeable other’ (the teacher/practitioner) who helps them develop their knowledge to the next level. His work has influenced our view of ‘scaffolding’ where children are helped to learn something new in small steps.

Conclusion

In any early years setting, the child’s well-being, development, and learning should always be central to the pedagogical approach chosen. By embracing a child-centred philosophy and adapting your teaching methods to meet the unique needs of each child, you can create a nurturing and enriching learning environment that sets the foundation for a lifelong love of learning. Remember that the most effective approach is one that prioritises the child’s growth and happiness above all else.
**MARKETING SOLUTIONS**

- Our childcare websites generate genuine interest and leads from parents and carers
- We specialise in designing and building childcare websites so you can rest assured that our team know what Ofsted and parents/carers are looking for

**SOFTWARE**

**NURSERY MANAGEMENT - ABACUS**

- Save hours by reducing planning time by 50%
- Speedy invoicing to all parents and carers in minutes
- Instant view of all financial reports
- Manage payments and track debt

**EYFS LEARNING JOURNEY TRACKER - FOOTSTEPS 2**

- Record meaningful and detailed EYFS observations
- Improve essential safeguarding and save hours of time
- Reduce your workload and spend more time with the children
- Identify at a glance each child’s development pathway

**ONLINE DAILY DIARY - DAYSHARE**

- Share every magical moment of each child’s day with their parents and carers with our online diary software

**PARENT PORTAL APP**

- Bringing parents and carers closer to their child’s day by providing a timeline of their progress
- Download Parent Portal App on Android or iOS

**FEES COLLECTION**

- We collect fees, allowing you to focus on childcare, not credit control
- Fee collection reduces stress about pay day
- Maintain good relationships with parents
- Eliminate bad debt from your setting
- We operate on a 98% success rate across the board

**TRAINING**

Increase employee motivation and keep staff for longer within your setting by offering training - the ideal tool for you to develop your team.

Parenta courses include:

- Level 2 Childcare Diploma for the Early Years Practitioner (RQF)
- Level 3 Children and Young People’s Workforce (Early Years Educator) (RQF)
- Level 5 Early Years Lead Practitioner
- Level 3 Team Leader/Supervisor

PLUS ... Parenta offers a free recruitment service - no fees!

**ONLINE CPD COURSES**

No deadlines, no time restrictions, no classroom! Support your staff or further your professional development with our online CPD accredited courses

**MARKETING SOLUTIONS**

**WEBSITE DESIGN**

- Our childcare websites generate genuine interest and leads from parents and carers
- We specialise in designing and building childcare websites so you can rest assured that our team know what Ofsted and parents/carers are looking for

**BRANDING & DESIGN**

- Showcase your setting with branded products. From newsletters to logos and prospectuses to business cards, we take care of all your branding needs

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

- We assist you with setting up and using your social media accounts in no time to help you increase your setting’s visibility

---

**Working together for our children**

**0800 002 9242**  **hello@parenta.com**

Follow us on social media @TheParentaGroup

www.parenta.com

Parenta, S02 Second Floor, Knightrider House, Knightrider Street, Maidstone, Kent, ME15 6LU

Updated 15/09/2023