

Doing child-centredness from an embodied perspective

Pedagogy is more than what you say, it is also what you do and express with your body. Children also make sense of the world through their bodily interactions with it. Child-centredness therefore requires environments around the child that support them to be drawn into and inspired to participate in the environment to support their sense making. The educator will have a role in establishing the environment but they will also engage with the children that they work with through bodily exchanges, such as gesticulations and facial expressions. The bodily exchanges of the educator can determine things such as children's feelings of attachment, autonomy and so on. Pedagogical tact, as a part of child-centredness from an embodied perspective, refers to the educator's ability to be in touch with the children that they work with. This entails:

- Meeting the child where it is
The educator develops a sense of the inherent norms, values and skills that guide the children. The educator should meet the child with openness, treating the child as a mystery and wondering with them. The educator should refrain from pre-conceptions and understandings of the children.
- Enacting a sensitive, intimate and personal relationship with the child
The educator should coordinate their movement and speech (such as tone of voice) to that of the children's. In practice, the educator engages actively with what the children say and do and continues the interaction from this point, while also considering the direction that the interaction may take.
- Creating the environment
The educator should create an environment that is habitable for the children, with situations that inspire the children to move beyond what they usually do.

Considering child-centredness from an embodied perspective has something of a romantic ideal, whereby children make sense of the world through their bodily interactions with it. Potentially, the role of the educator is marginalised, with them providing little more than a stimulating environment for the children to engage with, but in recognising that the educator is also a part of the bodily exchanges that the children encounter in ECEC, the educator takes on a role of guiding how the children engage with the environment, while forming attachments with the children.

There is a strong democratic focus in the embodied perspective as the child's point of view is visible. Children are autonomous, as in their engagement with the world *they* set the paths that *they* want to follow. The educator can support the child's autonomy through their bodily expressions towards the child, such as gesticulations and the tone of voice that they use.

Children's learning and development are supported in how the educator establishes the environment and responds to the needs and interest of the children. Environments will be developmentally appropriate, with resources that stimulate the children's engagement with the world.

Child-centred documentation

Documentation represents an artefact that makes selected aspects of children's learning tangible and recognisable. Documentation can support communicating with colleagues, families and children to reflect on the content and consider new opportunities for learning.

The object of documentation (what is focussed on) can differ:

- The children's products
The educator documents what each child has completed. However, if only the educator documents the product it will be documented according to an adult model of performance, so children could participate in the documenting.
- The children's levels of achievement
The educator documents what each child is able to achieve across different (mainly standardised) tasks.
- The children's thinking processes
The focus in this documentation is each child's intellectual process of intentionally undertaking an activity. For example, a child may follow a series of goal-oriented actions, and the educator would document the child's actions, their reflections on emerging obstacle in the situation, and problem solving. The ongoing process of thinking is the object of documentation, rather than the child's product and the educator may ask questions of the child to elucidate their thinking.
- The contextual elements of the learning situation
In framing the situation as the object of documentation, the educator looks to appreciate the scaffolding interventions that promote children's learning and identifies opportunities to evolve the design of the learning environment in support of children engaging in new and meaningful situations.

There are different forms of documentation (standardised tasks, check lists or rating scales, learning stories and ministories - making learning visible), but each is focused on a specific unit, such as those listed above. The focus of the documentation can determine the form that the documentation takes.

There is a developmental ideal within child-centred documentation. Child-centred documentation recognises children's learning and their ability to achieve the intended goals. The focus on the child's development and ability can support the child's participation in ECEC through identifying both strengths and areas for support.

As a democratic approach, child-centred documentation recognises children's theories of the world and their ability to use them to solve problems. Child-centred documentation values the multiple paths of children's learning, whereby the educator highlights the various meaningful and creative paths that children take when engaged with stimulating activities. With no single, pre-defined path, the child's perspective is made visible.

Child-centred documentation recognises how children participate in the learning environment. Educators identify the environment, resources and other aspects that will scaffold children's engagement and thinking in the learning environment. Child centred documentation from a romantic perspective is of the child in the world, as opposed to reaching pre-defined norms.

The Power of Stories for Child-Centred Practice in ECEC

This course is composed of six modules starting with the child and their own most personal stories and moving outwards to consider children in relation to other kinds of narrative. Each module addresses a particular story genre followed by examples and activities to promote discussion and some final reflections, with folder of additional material for further reading.

Several fundamental considerations underpin the modules:

- childhoods are diverse in characteristics and origin;
- all children are not only entitled to the same rights, but are also acquiring shared responsibilities;
- education and care are intertwined, making education first and foremost a form of care.

Stories of all kinds, including those that children create and explore, have extraordinary educational potential for children's holistic development. These modules encourage critical reflection about the power of stories and the role they can play in the development of child-centred practice in learning environments.

Early Childhood Education and Care offers children the opportunity to relate to particular life stories by interacting with others who might learn using different paths and rhythms, and have diverse needs and potentials. In such settings, children from varying socio-cultural, ethnic, political and economic backgrounds mix and are thus able to value difference. This process becomes an invaluable form of learning because it serves as a necessary fertiliser for the development of their human capacity for empathy, so vital to the pursuit of equity.

Empathy has been part of our human condition even from the earliest ages. Discussions about moral dilemmas arising in children's daily lives represent an inexhaustible source of stories and this must have a prominent role in the classroom. These stories can provide solutions to the most varied of situations: from solving a dispute over an object, to reconciling opposing decisions, or – as a four-year-old girl once did – finding a fair way to share a packet of biscuits by establishing a criterion to decide priority of having had breakfast (or not), or of being more or less hungry, as opposed to merely distributing the biscuits in a mathematical way. When educators provide opportunities for the youngest of pupils to experience how justice is enacted, we nourish stories around the empathy that characterises us as human beings.