



## The 'In the Moment Planning' Approach in an Early Years Setting

### Fictional Case study

The manager of an early years setting has recently been trained around the In The Moment Planning (ITMP) approach (Ephgrave, 2020). Upon reflection, she feels that this approach could be beneficial for the children and staff within the setting. The move to ITMP will aid the children's critical thinking skills, imagination and creativity. It will also allow the practitioners to spend more time interacting with the children and there will be less paperwork. The approach was put forward to the practitioners but was met with some resistance. Some of the issues raised were, changes to the setting, interfering with children's play and not covering the curriculum. All practitioners wattended ITMP training before the approach was adopted.

This paper will examine the 'In the Moment Planning' (ITMP) approach (Ephgrave, 2020, p.28) and how an enabling environment may support children's development. It will consider how a child's engagement could be affected by their health and wellbeing. The paper refers to the above case study and discusses the changes made in an early years setting to incorporate the ITMP approach. This would involve changes to planning, environment and the role of the practitioner. The paper will explore the impact the social environment has on a child's development, by discussing Bronfenbrenner (1979) and the concept of Hygge (2017) in an early years setting. The ITMP approach allows practitioners to develop children's learning at that moment by observing them, interacting at the right moment to enhance their development (Ephgrave, 2020, p.99). The paper will also discuss the negative impact of change on the setting and the need for flexibility when using the ITMP approach.

The ITMP approach is a child-led environment that allows children to become deeply engaged (Ephgrave, 2020, p.6). To utilise this approach, the setting in the case study will need an enabling environment and this may help them feel safe and secure. An enabling environment allows children to be in control of their learning by being able to select the area, the resources and what they want to do (Ephgrave, 2020, p.12). This is in line with the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) which stated that "every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities". Ephgrave, (2018, p.15) suggests that children may become more deeply engaged when they have autonomy and are able to choose what they would like to do. Self-selected and open ended resources will allow the children the autonomy they need. High engagement means there will be no need to change the environment, however, if the levels of involvement drop, changes will need to be made (Ephgrave, 2020, p. 61). "If the resources are carefully selected, they can be used all year round as the children will use them differently everyday" (Ephgrave, 2018, p.41). Resources should not be set out for the children, but everything needs to be available and accessible for free choice. Montessori (1912) supported this, suggesting that resources should be accessible allowing the children to become responsible for their own learning. Mooney (2014, p.39) stated children "should not have to interrupt their work to get the attention of a busy teacher or ask permission to use materials they need". This new approach could be difficult for existing and new children, they may struggle to choose their own resources, or children may not know how to interact with their peers and may struggle with not having as much guidance from adults. Nutbrown (2012, p.20) suggested that children need to explore the world themselves in a well-planned environment this will enable them to foster independence and enquiring minds.

Some children benefit from nature play as it is freely chosen, unstructured and offers open ended playful interactions with nature and their peers (Wilson, 2020, p.16-21). Conkbayir (2017, p.12) believed that "very young children learn through active learning". When children are highly involved it is more beneficial for their brain development. Healthy brain development requires input from practitioners that is reflective, consistent and positive, this will aid the children's self-regulation in time of stress. A type of play that may aid the children's development is loose parts play. This offers open-ended activities and will aid the children's creative thinking skills. It uses open-ended materials that can be moved, manipulated, dismantled and reconstructed in many ways (Smith-Gilman, 2018, p.90-103). This type of play can promote social competence as it supports creativity and innovation. Loose parts come with no set of directions and can be used alone or combined with other materials, enhancing children's imagination, supporting problem solving, reasoning and finding solutions (Daly et al., 2014, p.24). It may also support children's sustained shared thinking by encouraging them to work with their peers or adults, allowing them to share ideas, think of solutions and enhance their learning (Brodie, 2014, p.58). Nicholson (1971), introduced this pedagogical approach, he believed it enables children to learn using everyday objects, allows them to experiment, enjoy and find out things for themselves (Daly, Beloglovsky, 2015 ,p.19.). The case study highlights that significant changes are needed within the environment, this is important to encourage open ended and purposeful play. It will aid the children's critical thinking, imagination and creativity, which is one of the characteristics of effective learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage framework (Department For Children, Schools and Families, 2009, p.10).

The manager of the nursery in the case study needs to ensure all the practitioners have suitable training on children's health and wellbeing. Without this they may not be able to enhance engagement and development through the ITMP approach. The practitioners could use the Leuven (1994) scales of wellbeing and involvement to monitor children's, level of wellbeing and engagement in play. The Leuven

(1994) scale has various levels that can be used as an objective way to measure the engagement of an individual or group of children (Clegg, 2015, p.14). It can also allow them to address low wellbeing promptly by working in partnership with the child's family to explore possible underlying pressures (Faux, 2011, p.27-28). If children are secure and engaged "the setting has an environment and staff who are meeting their needs" (Wang, Degol & Henry, 2019, p.1090). Engagement is a key factor in children's learning, (Ephgrave, 2020, p.6) and promotes resilience in children. A skilled practitioner would be able to identify low wellbeing, and this should continuously be monitored to ensure involvement. The McMillan sisters (1914) believed that as a consequence of these factors children could not be expected to learn effectively (Conkbayir, Pascal, 2014, p.33). This is also referred to by Pound (2006, p.77), who says that "Young children's brain development appears to be particularly sensitive to stress". She also mentions that high levels of stress can lead to brain cells and neural connections being destroyed. These may be needed for later learning, as it could prevent developmental delay. Bronfenbrenner, (1979) believed that the world in which a child grows will have a major influence on their development. He also said that a child's first transition from home could affect their view on education, so practitioners need to ensure they make it a positive one. This can be done by creating a safe, nurturing environment where children feel comfortable enough to take risks in learning and feel supported (Bates, 2019, p.74). The Danish approach 'Hygge' focuses on living in the moment (Smith, 2017, p.1), and has other similarities to the ITMP approach. Ephgrave (2020, p.6) firmly believes that the more secure and settled a child is in their environment the more involved they will be. Similarly, Hygge concentrates on social activity, strong community and friendship ties as it is believed that working together, playing alongside peers helps strengthen bonds. Hygge suggests that the environment should use natural materials to create a homely feeling within the setting (Smith, 2017, p.16). Another similarity is open-ended resources. Smith (2017, p.16) states children need "space to work on a large scale on their own projects with open ended resources". This will support the development of schematic play and will encourage them to think in imaginative ways. The manager and practitioners from the case study could use some of the Hygge concepts within the setting to ensure high wellbeing and happiness in the children.

The practitioners in the case study will need to observe the children and wait for a moment in which they feel they can extend a child's development and learning (Foundation Stage Forum, 2017). This demonstrates Bruner's (1976) Scaffolding theory (Conkbayir, Pascal, 2014, p.90). He defined it as aiding children through a process with adults working alongside children to support and enhance their learning. Bruner (1976) stated that this method can be highly effective and extremely motivating for children (Gray, Macblain, 2015, p.73). Van Kuyk (2011, p.133-146) agreed with Bruner's theory (1976), and said "Through self-regulation the child can reach a normal level of development. Through scaffolding by the teacher, the child can reach an optimal level of development". The practitioners in the case study voiced their concerns about interfering in children's play. They need to be able to identify the difference between interaction and interfering. When a child is deeply involved in play or concentrating on achieving a goal, intervention from an adult may become interference. The children may not have the cognitive development to hold a conversation with the adult at the same time as being absorbed in an activity. There are times when a child may bring the conversation to the practitioner. This interaction would be relevant and helpful to the child. It also could enhance, rather than interfere with, the children's concentration and thought process (Fisher, 2016, p.80). Every time a practitioner interacts with a child, they are observing the individual child and assessing them. They plan instantly and are ready to respond at the right moment to support children's wellbeing and learning. These interactions are very important and a powerful teaching moment (Fisher, 2016, p.80). The National Strategies document 'Learning, Playing and Interacting'(2009, p.23) states babies and children are "experiencing and learning in the here and now, not storing up their questions until tomorrow or next week. It is in the moment of curiosity, puzzlement, effort or interest 'the teachable moments' that the skilful adult makes a difference".

The manager within the case study needs to work with practitioners, listening to their worries, discussing and supporting them during the changes. It is important that each practitioner is supportive of the change in order to have an effective transition to this approach. The manager of the setting needs to understand that change will take time and adjustments. All staff including the manager need to consider

the children's rights who attend their nursery to ensure non-discrimination within the setting. This will be in line with the UNCRC (1989) who believe that non-discrimination applies to "every child regardless of their ethnicity, sex, religion, language, abilities or family background" (UNCRC. 1989). This will also ensure inclusive practice (Department for Education, 2014, p.10). Once the staff have been on training for ITMP they will understand that it is a flexible approach and can be adapted to suit the needs of the setting and children (Early Years Staff Room, 2019). The practitioners would also be able to see that less paperwork would give them more time to observe and interact with the children (Family, 2017). Ofsted suggests that teaching should not be taken to imply a formal way of working, it is a term that describes the many different ways in which adults help young children learn (Ofsted, 2015). Dewey (1938) believed that adults should guide and facilitate learning and experiences within children. He suggested that how an adult creates these experiences is key to effective learning. Dewey (1938) strongly believed in the uniqueness of every child and argued that early years settings, and schools should consider the individual nature of children's learning and should actively work to support these different learning styles (Gray, Macblain, 2015, p.45). Froebel (1937) had similar views to Dewey (1938), believing that children's motivation to learn came from within. Froebel (1937) also believed that a good quality educational environment, and a wide range of resources that are suitable for children's age and ability are required to support a child's learning journey (Conkbayir, Pascal, 2014, p.23). ITMP supports Dewey's (1938) and Froebel's (1937) theories by allowing the children to become active participants in their own learning. It is a 'child-centred approach' with the practitioner there to aid the children's development once they are engaged in an activity of their choosing. This gives the practitioner the opportunity to observe the children's interests, allowing them to seize the moment when children first show curiosity, then support their next steps immediately. A skilful practitioner will observe a child before interacting, as the best interactions are not planned for in advance (Foundation stage forum, 2017). They also need to be flexible in their practice in order to adapt to different children's needs and learning styles.

To conclude, this essay has highlighted many positive impacts connected with ITMP; a view supported by the majority of the literature accessed. However, there must also be high levels of wellbeing and involvement for the approach to be effective. "Children who feel positive, engaged and involved will learn better. Settings where children's sense of wellbeing is nurtured are the most effective in ensuring high quality outcomes" (Clegg, 2015, p,14). There are many aspects of different theoretical perspectives which are visible within the ITMP approach. Montessori (1912) and Ephgrave (2020) both have similar views that children should have responsibility for their own learning. This approach does exactly that, by providing children with opportunities to make their own choices when choosing resources and how to use them. Giving children freedom of choice aids the development of their self-confidence and self-esteem. Children's learning can still be enhanced by practitioners in the moment using Bruner's (1976) scaffolding theory (Conkbayir and Pascal, 2014, p.90). This approach not only gives children freedom, but also practitioners, by limiting the amount of planning and paperwork. It then gives them more time to observe and interact with the children. This may indirectly boost the wellbeing of the staff as it could reduce stress levels and improve their time management (Family, 2017). A negative factor highlighted by the case study was a lack of understanding and willingness to change to this approach from practitioners. This approach needs to be a whole staff approach, the manager could allow the practitioner to have an input on evaluating how this approach is working after a period of time. Working together to look at the best way for this approach to work within the setting. The practitioners will then be able to see that this approach is flexibility, the approach can easily be adapted to suit the needs of different settings and children's different learning styles. This approach cannot take immediate effect as it will take time to embed.

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