

What are the key ways that young children learn?

•playing

Playing – indoors and out, alone and with others, quietly or boisterously – allows children to find out about things, try out and practise ideas and skills, take risks, explore their feelings, learn from mistakes, be in control and think imaginatively. Playing is an important centre of learning for young children.

• being with other people

As well as developing emotional security and social skills, being with other people – other children and adults – stimulates ideas and involvement that move learning forward.

• being active

Young children need to move, and learn and remember things by taking experiences in through the senses as they move. Sitting still for too long can disrupt learning.

• exploring new things and experiences

Children's deep curiosity leads them to use all their senses to explore in real hands-on activities, and then put the information together in their own minds to form ideas and make sense of the world.

• talking to themselves

In 'self-speech' children use out-loud thinking to clarify their thoughts, regulate their activities, take on imaginative roles and rehearse their skills.

• communicating about what they are doing with someone who responds to their ideas

Even before they can talk in words, children are keen to share their ideas through sounds, gesture and body language. Talk helps children to understand what they experience. It is important that they have a chance to express their own ideas, as well as have conversations to hear other people's ideas, extend their thinking, and use language about learning.

• representing ideas and experiences

Children deepen their understanding as they recreate experiences or communicate their thinking in many different ways – in role-play or small world play, pictures, movements, models, and talk.

• meeting physical and mental challenges

Working out what to do, trying hard, persevering with problems, finding out and thinking for themselves are opportunities for developing real understanding. These challenges may occur in play, or in real-life or planned activities.

• being shown how to do things

Children learn skills by watching others or being shown how to do something. Adults or peers may directly instruct, model, guide or demonstrate.

• practising, repeating, applying skills

Rehearsing skills in similar tasks or new contexts helps children to build mastery, to enjoy their own expertise, and to consolidate what they can do.

- **having fun**

There is no place for dull, repetitive activities. Laughter, fun, and enjoyment, sometimes being whimsical and nonsensical, are the best contexts for learning. Activities can be playful even when they are not actually play

This extract is taken from “Learning, Playing and Interacting”, DCSF (2009), and I believe summarises what children will experience and learn through when attending our setting.