What is the impact when children in the Early Years lead their own learning?

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Introduction

Sacred Heart Primary School is a two-form entry primary school In West-houghton, Bolton (England). There are currently around 400+ children on roll with 60 Reception children sharing one big learning space. I decided to use the teaching of Early Years science to develop my research project and enhance my own professional development. The research project focussed on the teaching of Early Years Science, how effective this was and if the teachers fostered and maintained the children's curiosity when teaching them about the world around them. Although this was the main theme to my research, I wanted to evaluate the impact that this then had on the students and their long term learning.

Intervention

A full term of learning were central to the planning and preparation of lessons. The topic was chosen based on the amount of children that independently chose to work in that are.. Almost 85% of the children wanted to spend time in the dinosaur area . When asked by the teach-ers why they chose that area, the children responded with statements such as 'I love dinosaurs,' I want to do my work about dinosaurs, 'I love the dinosaur books'.

Teachers then planned a half term's worth of work on dinosaurs in-cluding a school trip.. Teachers used a number of approaches to assess the children's learning such as a conversational approach.

Research Methods

I decided to use a mixed methods approach for validity purposes and, therefore, used a semi structured interview with the reception teachers (interviews were conducted separately, again for validity purposes), direct observation of a group of children (3 girls and 3 boys chosen at random) and a semi- structured interview with the children pre and post project.

Findings after research

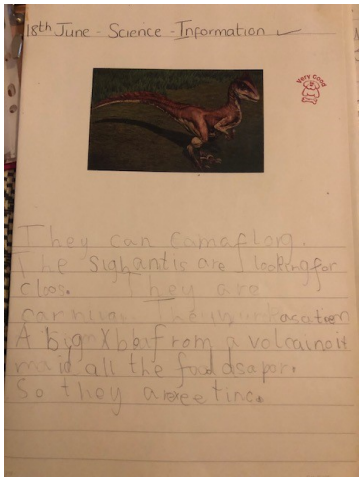
My findings suggest that learning is no longer surface learning but has been embedded, scientific vocabulary was being used confidently and the children could enthusiastically talk about their learning. Their inde-pendent written work again showed that the learning had been em-bedded and teachers commented upon the improved care that was taken when producing those specific pieces of work, as well as the enthusiasm to want to complete work.

Review of current practice and literature

"When you liberate and channel the energy and enthusiasm of young children, they can be amazing explorers of the world."

Four Marks Primary School in Hampshire conducted a similar re-search project in which they created a sequence to illustrate the child initiated approach to scientific enquiry, and I decided to use part of this myself.

Although Sheridan, Parmling Samuelsson and Johansson (2009) argue that we should just 'let children be children' and 'it is better to be left alone than having to learn'. Brostrom has challenged this claiming that when children are active learners , they can still be 'children' while learning about natural phenomenon and the world around them, thus preparing them for life long learning.



Images of the work produced during the dinosaurs topic linked to art, maths, writing and DT.

Findings before research

Children were taught scientific concepts based on the ideas of the teachers in the Early Years. Areas to chose from where picked by staff and were not based on the children's likes and preferences. Therefore, when talking to the children about what they had learned, they struggled to articulate this and did not use any scien-tific vocabulary.

Implications for future practise

Teachers have decided that their curriculum will be child led, taking on board the interests of children while imparting and extracting scientific knowledge.

Children who are usually disengaged were more willing to par-ticipate in lessons

100% of the children said that they loved the topic and could recall lots of facts when asked 2 months later.