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12

IRRESISTIBLE
ACTIVITIES



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INTO SPRING

Dealing with big feelings

HOW TO BECOME A
CO-REGULATOR

IDEAS TO
KICKSTART
A LOVE OF
NATURE

Spot and
scaffold
schematic
play



WAYS TO
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NUTRITION:
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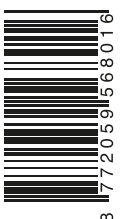
WHAT
QUALITY
LOOKS LIKE

EYFS focus:
Understanding
the world

p.37

Why representation
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Hello



As we head towards spring, we're also entering a new chapter with Covid restrictions lifting in England. Early years settings have seen a record number of cases over the winter, with staff absences presenting a real challenge, but you continue to offer invaluable support to families whilst tackling the many issues exacerbated by Covid (p72).

Your vital role in supporting children's wellbeing can't be underestimated. See page 32 to hear from Pebbles Childcare about professional love and the importance of outdoor play, and turn to page 62 to find out how Busy Bees nurseries support children with a range of wellbeing of activities.

We also have expert advice from Nikky Smedley on helping children through feelings of injustice (p13); Sarah Watkins explores how to support children to build resilience through the everyday magic of outdoor play (p11); and on page 30, Tamsin Grimmer explains how we can support young children with their big feelings, through co-regulation.

This issue also includes a new 'EYFS focus' on 'Understanding the World': Jamel C Campbell shares ideas for ensuring an inclusive practice (p38); Carley Sefton recommends engaging outdoor activities (p42); and Helen McGonigal shares 8 ways to help children care for the environment (p46). For more ideas and inspiration, sign up to our new fortnightly newsletter at teachearlyyears.com

Michelle Tempest - Editor



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When children feel a sense of injustice, we must recognise their emotions, says Nikky Smedley.



THE EXPERTS...



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- Please be aware, some regions in England have devolved funding for which we may not have coverage.
- Funding is limited and only available for the remainder of the 2021-22 academic year.

Nursery Now

News and views from the early years



In brief...

In their 'Rethinking Pupil Premium' report, Teach First call for an increase to the early years pupil premium rate, to align with the current primary school rate.



The Duchess of Cambridge visited the Lego Foundation PlayLab, Denmark, on 22 February to discuss the Copenhagen Infant Mental Health Project (CIMHP) and learn about Denmark's approach to early childhood.



The DfE's weekly pulse survey ran from 10 January until February half term, collecting weekly data on Covid-related absences. To find out more, visit tinyurl.com/PulseResults1

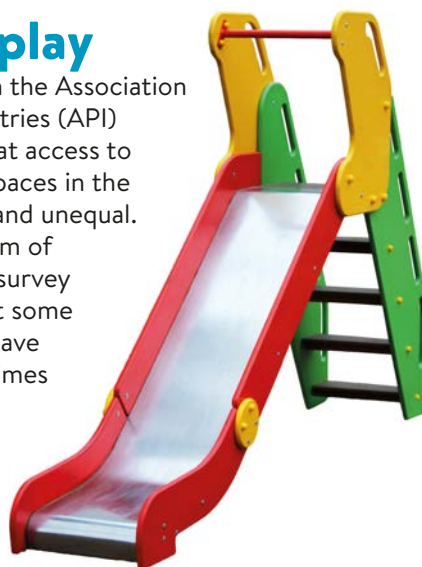


From 21 February, childcare providers no longer need to notify Ofsted of Covid-19 cases at early years settings. This applies to cases of Covid in both children and staff members.

Equal play

A study from the Association of Play Industries (API) has found that access to public play spaces in the UK is unfair and unequal. Their Freedom of Information survey revealed that some UK regions have almost five times the free-to-access play provision of others.

The Equal Play campaign is calling for ring-fenced central government funding for play, to enable local authorities to provide EVERY child with a safe, high-quality playground nearby. To find out more, visit tinyurl.com/EqualPlay



“Children in London have access to almost five times fewer public playgrounds than children in Scotland”

EQUAL PLAY REPORT

Staffing
56%

NURSERIES THAT SAID IT HAS BEEN HARDER TO RECRUIT NEW WORKERS.
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TWEET TALK

@tamsingrimmer

Can we stop talking about behaviour management and start talking about relationships, restorative practices and understanding & supporting children please! #lovingpedagogy

@EvolutionChildC

Did you know that a child's active engagement in music can have many positive effects on their development? #music

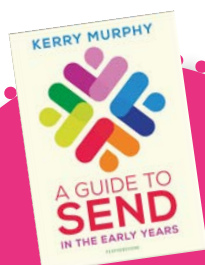
@PACEYchildcare

With the topic of vaccines seemingly in the press on a daily basis, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities discuss the importance of the MMR vaccine in the early years and how to combat vaccine anxiety in our recent blog: tinyurl.com/PACEYBlog1



“Poverty pay in childcare is a disgrace – especially when parents are struggling to pay huge costs.”

FRANCES O’GRADY, TUC
GENERAL SECRETARY



Look out for...
A Guide to SEND in the
Early Years by
Kerry Murphy.

Call for cash boost to childcare

Analysis by the Trade Union Congress (TUC) shows that around 173,000 childcare workers across the UK would benefit from raising the national minimum wage to £10 an hour. TUC has called for an urgent cash boost to the childcare sector, and an immediate increase to the

minimum wage. This would mean better wages for childcare workers, and help to ensure that childcare is affordable and available for families.

Around 160,000 (93 per cent) of those who would benefit are women. And almost half (46 per cent) are aged between 18 and 24 years old.

TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady said, “Every worker should be paid a living wage – not least when they are looking after our precious children and grandchildren...

“Good quality, affordable childcare is vital for our economic recovery after the pandemic. Ministers need to fund childcare properly to lift wages and support working parents.”

To find out more, visit tuc.org.uk



BRITISH SCIENCE WEEK

British Science Week takes place from 11 to 20 March – a 10-day celebration of science, technology, engineering and maths. See page 58 to find out how you can join in, and turn to page 14 where Jules Pottle explores the benefits of embedding scientific language at an early age.



60%

OF PARENTS SAY THEY’RE GIVING THEIR CHILDREN MORE SUGARY OR FATTY SNACKS THAN BEFORE THE PANDEMIC. A NEW BETTER HEALTH CAMPAIGN AIMS TO HELP FAMILIES IMPROVE CHILDREN’S DIETS. TURN TO PAGE 34 FOR SOME HEALTHY FOOD SWAP INSPIRATION.



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Early years educators work in a range of settings including full day care, children's centres, preschools, reception classes and as childminders. They may either be working on their own or supervising others to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements set out by Government for the learning, development and care of children from birth to five years old.



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“Struggling children need 30 funded hours too

They're facing unprecedented barriers to development and need to be prioritised...



MOST PEOPLE READING THIS WILL KNOW THAT the early years are fundamental to children's lifelong achievement. A child's development by 22 months serves as a strong predictor of educational outcomes at age 26. Early intervention is better for children's long-term health, happiness and wellbeing and therefore better for society, too.

Given this, you would think the government departments focusing on levelling up and building back greener would be talking about how they can support the youngest citizens, their families and the early years services. But a recent report by The Centre for Social Justice found that just one per cent of adults in England believe children under five have been prioritised by the government during the coronavirus pandemic.

The pandemic exposed challenges of inequality and disadvantage which date back decades. We saw it clearly among children returning to nursery with language delays, poor personal and social skills, physical development delays, an increase in child obesity and poor oral health. A whole set of barriers to their development.

INCREASED SUPPORT

In response, LEYF has increased the number of fully funded hours from 15 to 30 for over 100 children who were really struggling. We suggested this should become policy and be made available to children across England, but this was rejected by the Department for Education.

Things are not getting easier since the end of lockdown. Parents continue to face challenges such as reduced access to childcare. There has been a 12 per cent reduction in settings in areas of deprivation, which locks out those children who most need access to affordable, high-quality early years settings. In addition, family support networks are much reduced.

Ofsted also warned the pandemic will leave a legacy of child abuse, neglect and harm, as vulnerable children have slipped out of sight of public services. Let's hope the 75 new Family Hubs join forces with

existing Children's Centres and deliver a strong, well-integrated support network for parents.

We need to look carefully at the experiences of babies born in lockdown, too. The 'Babies in Lockdown' report (tinyurl.com/babiesinlockdown) highlights the issues faced by parents and inequalities between families and communities.

Many babies born during lockdown are now beginning to start nursery. We are still settling children without their parents or with limited parental involvement unless the weather is good and we can do much of the settling outdoors. This is the generation of babies who have had limited social opportunities, saw the majority of faces covered by masks and may have missed some key elements of becoming communicators, including learning to read body language and follow cues.

STAFF WELLBEING

Covid has also meant that many staff are no longer willing to work in a highly stressed, low paid, low status sector. This is not a surprise! The Duchess of Cambridge's research found that working in early years is much misunderstood by society. Therefore, we need to focus on the wellbeing of staff who remain. I recently wrote a handbook with Lala Manners, focusing on how to use the nursery day to support the wellbeing of adults and avoid the unhelpful and depressing messages about gyms and diets.

Wellbeing needs to run through the whole day for children and staff and not be something you do before and after work.

We also need more training and development for staff to help them address the increased level of needs among children. Maybe it's time to go back to basics and retrain on child development, how children learn and the power of the pedagogical conversation.

Covid has shone a light on disadvantage but also on the power of human kindness. The early years can keep that light shining by advocating for children and reminding people of our contribution to building a fair and equal society, starting with our youngest children.

We need to look carefully at the experiences of babies born in lockdown



June O'Sullivan MBE is the CEO of the London Early Years Foundation. Visit June's blog at leyf.org.uk/junes-blog or connect on Twitter @JuneOSullivan



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SARAH WATKINS IS AN ASSOCIATE LECTURER, FOREST SCHOOL LEADER AND AUTHOR.

Ordinary magic

Sarah Watkins explores how to build resilience through outdoor play...

OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, it has become even more important for us to support children in developing resilience so they can begin to understand difficult situations and manage them. Early years settings provide crucial stability to children whose families have been affected by bereavement, isolation and financial hardship.

Professor Ann Masten, who has studied resilience extensively, stresses that resilience is not a rare or special quality; it develops through “the everyday magic” of relationships and interactions.

If we can protect the basic systems that enable children to adapt to difficult circumstances, they have a better chance of developing well even in the face of severe adversity. So, what are these systems and how can we further protect and develop them through outdoor play?

RELATIONSHIPS

Resilience is first and foremost developed through connections to caring adults and strong friendships with peers. Masten views resilience as being ‘distributed’ in the child’s relationships with all the key people in their life.

To build these consistent, trusting relationships through outdoor play, we need time, and leaders who understand the importance of investing in building these vital connections. We also need to feel comfortable outside. Having free access to good-quality waterproof clothing for adults as well as children can make being outside a much more enjoyable experience.

The outdoor play space can offer important friendship building opportunities. ‘Honey pot’ areas such as swings, sand and dirt digging areas, and water play zones help children to bond, communicate and develop conflict resolution skills.

Children need quiet areas, too – these could be permanent structures



or we can give children the means to construct their own quiet spaces with tarpaulins, sheets, crates and other loose parts.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

A manageable level of stress can be healthy for developing protective systems. Young children are adept at inventing their own challenges and collaborating with each other to resolve them or extend them.

I see the outdoor space as a wellbeing lab: if we can provide children with open-ended materials and as much access to nature as possible, they will naturally engage in “what if...” thinking.

SELF-EFFICACY


Feeling competent and able to exert some control over the immediate environment is a resilience builder and helps children see themselves in a positive light. Marty Rossman (2002) found that children who were given manageable responsibilities at the age of three or four years old were more likely, as adults, to have good relationships, experience success and be self-sufficient.

Giving children access to resources outside enables them to make decisions about what they need and to be responsible for managing their own outdoor

space. When children feel listened to, this can act as a buffer against the effects of disadvantage, and children enjoy being involved in solving ‘problems’ such as how to accommodate the bike riders and the mark makers. Being responsible for sweeping and cleaning the play area is also a great way to promote physical movement.

SELF-REGULATION

Children enjoy having roles and responsibilities, and meaningful tasks and activities help them begin to understand and control their own mental processes (Whitebread, 2019). Children are best placed to decide what is meaningful to them, and outdoor play, which is self-initiated and directed, enables them to control the pace and make decisions at every step. When things don’t go to plan, we can build resilience by taking the role of sensitive and invested mediator – not as the decisive authority.

 Sarah is the author of *Outdoor Play for Healthy Little Minds – Practical Ideas to Promote Children’s Wellbeing in the Early Years* (Routledge, RRP £14.99). Follow Sarah on Twitter: @mini_lebowski



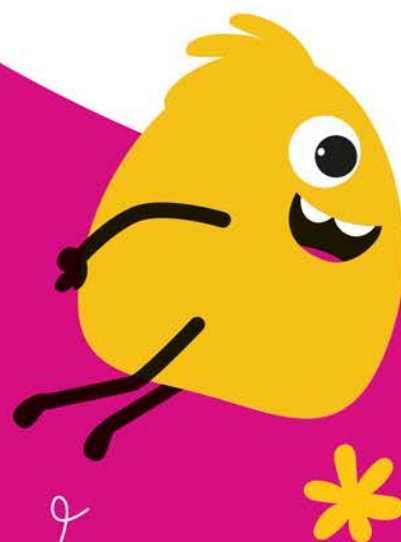
BRITISH
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NIKKY SMEDLEY IS A WRITER, EDUCATOR AND PASSIONATE ADVOCATE FOR THE CHILD.

HOW TO SPEAK CHILD

Recognise their emotions

WHAT ANNOYS YOU ABOUT HOW ADULTS SPEAK TO YOU?

“When it’s just not fair!” P

No prizes for guessing that this little child had recently been the victim of a perceived mis-carriage of justice, so the issue of fairness was at the forefront of their mind.

When you’re a very young child, you have next to no control over the workings of your everyday life. You put your faith in those who do have the control – family, carers, teachers – and trust that they have your best interests at heart.

Imagine then, how earth-shattering it can be when a child feels that faith and trust has been betrayed.

“The golden rule is to quell emotions and talk calmly

BROKEN PROMISES

As adults, we can see that if playtime ends before a child has their turn on the tricycle – like they’ve been promised – another playtime will happen, and they can have their turn then.

This measured overview is impossible for a young child. As far as they’re concerned, a promise has been broken and they start to realise that things don’t always happen the way that adults say they will. It’s a hard lesson to learn, especially when there might also be issues of insecurity around object permanence.

I’m sure I’m not the only one who remembers complaining about unfairness, only to have that stinging rage compounded by being told, “Life isn’t fair!” It may be a truism, but it doesn’t help smooth troubled waters.



Complaints about a lack of fairness tend to fall into two categories: situations where circumstances conspire to scupper egalitarianism, or situations when an individual fails to get their own way. It’s a tricky dichotomy. The reaction to both is usually the same, but we want the child to be able to see the difference between the two. Thankfully, we can apply the same techniques to both situations, while helping the child see the truth of the matter.

QUELLING EMOTIONS

Firstly, acknowledge the child’s sense of outrage. It’s a real and important feeling for them, and dismissing it will only lead to a greater sense of frustration and injustice.

The golden rule is to quell emotions and talk calmly. Show your understanding in a clear description of what has gone on, recognising their emotional reaction: “You waited so patiently to have your turn on the tricycle, and now playtime has ended before you got to have a go. I can see how upsetting that is for you.”

This approach is also good for us grown-ups. Remaining calm and pragmatic gives us an objective standpoint while helping us to be more even-handed in the future.

Which leads me to the importance of modelling. I try to control my reactions to unfairness and injustice, in a way that I’d like to see my children react.

It’s no good teaching our children, then having a tantrum when we miss out on our favourite biscuit... even if it is the last one!

Nikky’s book *Create, Perform, Teach!* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, £15.99) is out now.

LEARN MORE

As part of the How to Speak Child project, Nikky has been collecting interviews with children about how adults communicate with them. She’ll look at a selection of prominent themes over the course of the series, but to read more now, you can...



head to the How to Speak Child blog, at howtospeakchild.com/blog



join her Facebook page at facebook.com/Howtospeakchild



JULES POTTLE IS A PRIMARY SCIENCE TEACHER AND AUTHOR.

Science *talk*

Jules Pottle explores how to embed subject-specific language at an early age...

Teachers are in conversation with children all day long. My voice is often croaky by the end of a school day, not through 'teaching from the front' but through being in constant conversation: listening, explaining, questioning, checking in with my children's wellbeing.

In educational settings, we are constantly communicating and using vocabulary. We clarify and refine what children are saying to us and sometimes we playfully get it wrong to elicit more conversation with the child.

In my first few years as a teacher, I remember reading to the whole class from a text that was completely accessible to most of the children. One child, however, kept stopping me with questions, to the point where the flow of the story was completely lost.

I said, albeit gently, "Just listen... see if you can work out what is going on in the story," to which she replied, "But there's so much I don't know!" That little voice has stuck with me.

As teachers, we need to make sure that children are immersed in language, in vocabulary and discussions about the meaning of those words. Conversation with children, where their words are listened to, respected and responded to thoughtfully, is what encourages children to keep talking.

We need to use as many words as possible, using them time and time again, from birth, to really give our children the best chance at accessing texts and thereby succeeding within our education system.

FOLLOW THEIR INTERESTS

The early years classroom is the one place where a child's personal interests can lead their education. So, the first thing we need to do is listen to what a child is

interested in and then seek to keep the conversation going, seeding that talk with vocabulary for the child to try out for themselves. There are particular questions which lead to conversations whilst others close them down.

Reading stories with the language of science or history embedded within them will help... but non-fiction texts also play an essential role

Consider these two approaches to answering a child's question:

Child: "If I put an ice cube in the puddle, will the whole puddle turn to ice?"

Adult 1: "No"

or

Adult 2: "I don't know. I've never tried. Shall we have a go? Where do you want to put the ice cube? What happened? That's interesting – what would you like to try next?"

Which of these answers will do justice to the child's question? Which will lead to the most conversation? We must all remember to keep the conversation going, like adult 2.

This has a particular importance when we consider science. There are many factors which contribute to our

young people's success in science at KS5 and beyond.

A recent study by the EEF and the Royal Society (2017) reported that:

"...in correlational studies of science learning, the strongest and most consistent predictor of pupils' scientific attainment has undoubtedly been how literate they are."

It also reported that "the mediating role of reading comprehension between SES (socio-economic status) and science attainment is independent of measured intelligence."

TAILOR VOCABULARY

Exposing all children, of all abilities, to a vocabulary-rich environment will raise attainment through improved reading and comprehension.

Reading stories with the language of science or history embedded within them will help children to access the vocabulary they need through their educational journeys, but non-fiction texts also play an essential role, even if they don't seem as cosy when choosing a bedtime story.

The process of acquiring the science-specific vocabulary needs to begin as early as possible to give every child the best chance at achieving their academic potential.

In short, there is a huge benefit to simply filling the environment with vocabulary, so listen to what children are saying and keep the dialogue going. Introduce science-specific words as early as you can.

There are many three-year-olds who can correctly use the names for dinosaurs. Why not extend this to plants, insects,



types of material, science equipment, names of planets or words for processes like dissolve, melt, heat or freeze?

Fill the environment with books that will spark curiosity and conversation, setting those words in concrete memory, even before they are fully understood.

Jules Pottle is a teacher and author, whose books include *Jasper the Spider* (Artful Fox Creatives, 2021). Jules has worked on *1000 Words STEM* (DK, 2021) and *1000 Words Nature* (DK, 2022).

DK also has an Early Years Collection of books selected to support all areas of the new EYFS Statutory Framework. Visit: tinyurl.com/DKearlyyears

HOW TO PROMOTE CHILDREN'S LEARNING IN SCIENCE

- Get alongside children as they are playing. Chat with them about what they are doing.
- Read stories with a STEM theme, such as *Forest*, by Brendan Kearney (DK, 2022) and chat about what you have read.
- Get out and about in the forest, a park or a museum and talk together about what you have seen or done.
- Share non-fiction books, written for the very young, such as *1000 Words STEM* (DK, 2021). Chat about the words in the book.
- Invite parents into the setting to model playful book sharing and book talk.
- Engage in observing nature, in kitchen science or in forest school activities and talk about what you have seen and done. Use vocabulary such as freeze, melt, mix, heat, tree, leaf and seed.
- Provide equipment to instigate scientific activities, such as magnifying glasses, pots nets, tweezers, water play, thermometers (child-safe ones), torches, model insects, model dinosaurs, toy cars and play-tools. Use this vocabulary as you talk with the children about what you are doing.
- Train staff to engage children in conversations with open questions and curiosity, rather than closing down the conversation with a closed question or a definitive answer.



JESS GOSLING IS AN INTERNATIONAL EARLY YEARS TEACHER AND AUTHOR.

“Small steps can make a real difference”

*Do transition points fill you with dread? The daily routines of a Reception class can be a challenge, but **Jess Gosling** has a few ideas to keep your classroom stress-free...*

Small steps can make a real difference

1 Create calm: use a schedule

Think about your transition points and how best to create a calm atmosphere. Small steps can make a real difference, and working this out is trial and error! In class, talk through a visual timetable – using pictures or photos of activities – at the start of each day and explain the transition points.

Don't forget to go back to the timetable throughout the day, taking off each activity as it's done. See if the children can explain to you, or their friends, their schedule and share what they need to do at each transition point.

I have known teachers to use the ‘mission impossible’ song as it helps speed up tidy time!

4 Be clear about expectations

When starting the day or after a break, show photos of what the children need to do to get ready for lunch, how to pack their bags, and what waiting in a line should look like, and sound like! You can show photos electronically or print them for display.

Next, ask the children to ‘teach’ the class teddy what they need to do. Have fun with it – the teddy should get mixed up and do silly things! When transitioning around the school, remain clear about expectations.

2 Use an expert!

Once the class are clear on the steps needed for a transition, bring a member of the class to lead their peers as an expert! Children love playing ‘teachers’ and you will find the whole class will concentrate on their peer, whilst that child will be empowered and more confident.

You will need to initially scaffold this, by explaining there are a number of steps to complete a task (such as pack bags, go to lunch) and modelling how to order these.

3 Music can motivate

If you love a good sing-song, music works wonders with transitions! In tidy-up times especially, use a familiar song to signal it's time to pack up. I have known teachers to use the ‘mission impossible’ song as it helps speed up tidy time!

Make sure the children know what to do when they finish tidying – do they help others, or sit on the carpet? When transitioning to home time, have a song ready to sing for those who have finished, so you can help the slower packers. When lining up, a simple ‘line up, line up’ melody will remind everyone of the task.

5 Keep daily routines consistent

Don't make changes to your timetable if you don't have to! Of course, things crop up like special events, but otherwise, you should keep the same routines and transitions. When special events change a routine, talk this through with your class beforehand.

If you have cover teachers don't leave them unsupported, be their knight in shining armour by sharing what you do, such as whether the children tidy up before leaving the room. If any children struggle with routines make sure this is clear, as they will likely struggle with you gone.

6 Make sure you praise

Praise your children when transitioning, such as 'Wow, Angela, you put your bottle in your bag and put it on your name label!' This encourages others to follow and reminds them what you are looking for.

Some children may become special helpers to support others who struggle with jobs. When the whole class transitions well, pile on the encouragement. Ask teachers in the wider school to point this out, too. Five 'teacher comments' equal a party! Children thrive on praise and keeping the ethos a positive one helps them immensely.

7 Seating and space

I once had a class who almost had the domino effect when they were lined up behind a door and the Head strode in! My solution: give them space and a place to line up outside. When your class leaves your room, put things they need near the door (like a water bottle), to help them to remember to take it.

If you give them a space outside by labelling the floor, you can stop the squabbles for front of line space. As an added bonus, you can also put them next to children they behave well with! You can bring them into the class in small groups or as a line, to stop the door bottle-neck!

REMEMBER

- Transitions, when repeated and consistent will get easier
- Clearly recount the steps for a transition
- Keep your expectations high
- Address any issues straight away

For more
ideas and information
from Jess, visit [jessgoslingearly
yearsteacher.com](http://jessgoslingearlyyearsteacher.com)





EMMA DAVIS IS AN EARLY YEARS LECTURER, PHD STUDENT AND FOREST SCHOOL LEADER.

The voice of the child

Emma Davis explores how to tune in and empower children in everyday practice...

WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK about 'the child's voice'? In simple terms, it's acknowledging that children communicate in many ways, more than just verbally. By listening and looking, we can tune in and interpret what the child is telling us.

Children join settings with different experiences and backgrounds which can contribute to a vibrant, diverse environment. It's vital that every child is heard, respected and can flourish in a supportive environment.

CHILDREN FEEL HAPPY, SAFE AND VALUED

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) states that every child deserves the right to be heard.

When we listen to a child, we are becoming an advocate, ensuring their needs, interests and characteristics of effective learning are reflected in our provision and practice. The child's voice becomes 'seen', represented in the resources, the way the environment is set up, activities planned, and in our interactions and routines. This reinforces that the environment belongs to the child – it is not about us as educators and our own intentions.

Listening to and interpreting the child's voice helps them feel valued. We contribute to raising their self-esteem, developing confidence and creating a space in which the child feels happy, safe and valued. Children learn that their ideas and interests matter and are valued by those around them. This influences the child's time at the setting, giving them confidence to engage, interact, explore and play in a

supportive environment which holds the children at the centre. We recognise children as being unique, capable individuals to whom we are accountable.

PROMOTING THE CHILD'S VOICE IN PRACTICE

Tuning in to the child's voice starts with attachments and knowing the children well. It relies on a strong key person approach, with educators having time to build relationships with children and their families.

When educators know the children well, they gain an insight into their personalities, how they learn and interact, giving us a glimpse into their world. We then need to be open to the children, sharing in their wonder, being available to them and engaging in active listening.

Here's some ideas to try out in your setting:

Loose parts play: This type of play is open-ended, with no right or wrong. Children are therefore free to be creative, following their innate drive to explore and be curious. Natural loose parts in particular prompt discovery and questioning as children marvel at textures, colours, patterns and shapes. With time and space to fully immerse themselves, children imagine and seek to express themselves creatively.

Technology: Educators can encourage children to use technology to take photographs of their favourite things. This could be play spaces, resources, things they have found, or even each other. Compile these into a slideshow to look at with the children, giving them

an opportunity to talk about why they have captured a particular image.

This offers an insight into their time in the setting which we may not usually be aware of. It's also a good idea to create photobooks from the images children have taken, with them freely available for children to look at and reflect on.

Observations: Educators can benefit from having time to stand back and watch children playing and learning. Observations are a powerful way of understanding children and how they interact with the environment and each other. We gain an insight into their friendships, preferred areas to play, level of development





...there should be a culture of listening, whereby everyone understands that listening is much, much more than just acknowledging words

Reflection: Make time to reflect with the children – the end of the day is particularly good. Encourage the children to share their favourite moments from the day, giving them time to think and share what was special for them. It might be something we didn't even spot but that holds value to the child.

These moments, alongside observations, will help educators to build a picture of popular play areas, learning experiences and resources, which can then be used to inform planning.

DEVELOP A CULTURE OF LISTENING

Tuning in to the voice of the child can be an empowering, enriching experience. We develop an insight into their experiences, giving us something to build on in terms of extending interests and moments of wonder.

Children's authentic views are valuable in creating a setting that recognises the child's voice and the impact it can have on establishing an environment that is meaningful to the children, seeing them as co-creators.

Importantly, there should be a culture of listening, whereby everyone understands that listening is much, much more than just acknowledging words. There should also be opportunities for professional development and time to talk with leaders to make sense of the child's voice. All children have a voice and it is up to us to enable them to be heard.

Emma Davis is an early years lecturer, PhD student, forest school leader and mental health first aider. Follow Emma on Twitter: @EmmaDee77

and skills such as resilience and determination.

It's useful to observe at different points of the session to bring a more meaningful perspective. The child can tell us so much through their play – we just need to value the practice of observing and interpreting.

Art: This can incorporate many mediums, with children sharing their thoughts, ideas and views in a visual form. This is especially powerful for children who might be a little less confident with verbal communication or are non-verbal. Art can be accessible to all and encourages conversation, wonder, critical thinking, trial and error, and experimentation. Educators can

tune in as children make comments on their own creative expressions.

This whole practice values the creative experience over the end product. However, it is a great idea to display children's artwork at their level so they can see that it holds value. Scribe the child's comments to reflect their voice as a way of capturing their responses.

Take home bags or boxes: This involves children taking home a bag or box to fill with items that are special to them – it could be absolutely anything. The value is in building links between the setting and home, enabling an alternative way for the child to share something meaningful to them.

THE KEY LIES WITH THE EDUCATORS

- creating time and space to get to know the children
- making time to play and talk
- observing children's interactions
- building relationships
- helping children feel respected and worthwhile members of the setting.

Spring is in the air

Develop children's artistic talents as they enjoy a sense of spring with these creative ideas from **Jude Harries...**

Spring materials

NESTING FOR BEGINNERS

Spring is the time for birds to build nests, ready to lay their eggs. Ask the children to collect nest building materials to help the birds. Find sticks, twigs, moss, and grass and make piles on the ground or on plants for birds to find. Alternatively, let children choose collage materials to make a crafty nest. Provide shredded paper, straws, ribbons, string, wool, strips of fabric, and invite children to stick them into a nest shape on a paper plate. Cut out egg shapes or birds to add to the nests.



FORAGED NATURE CUFFS

Wildflowers and weeds flourish during spring! To make foraged nature cuffs, cut rounds from paper towel rolls and cut a slit along one side so they fit on children's wrists. Put double-sided sticky tape on the outside of the cuffs. Go on a walk and look for spring treasures to stick on the cuffs. Remind children to only pick a few daisies and dandelion, and leave other flowers for the bees. Add leaves, pieces of bark and grass. The cuffs won't last long so let children take them home straight away.

SAKURA TREES

Make some model Japanese cherry trees to give to mums on Mother's Day or as Easter gifts. Go outside with the children and find suitable branched twigs. Stick the twigs into lumps of plasticine or clay at the base of flowerpots or yoghurt pots that can be decorated later. Add blossom using torn or scrunched small pieces of pink or white tissue paper, glued or wrapped around the twigs. Alternatively, use pompoms as blossom.



Playing with colour

PAPER MAGIC

Give each child a paper towel and ask them to fold it in half. Ask children to draw a simple outline of a rainbow or flower on the top layer of the folded towel using a permanent marker. Lift up the top half and they should see that the pen has gone through to the lower layer. Colour in this lower image with washable markers. Place each towel into a shallow tray of water and watch the colours from the lower layer appear on the top layer as if by magic! Remove quickly and leave to dry.

OUTDOOR PAINTING

Let children start with some water painting, using a variety of brushes and pots of water. Can they watch their paintings disappear when the sun comes out? Make some 'fizzy paints' by mixing bicarbonate of soda (two cups) with cornflour (one cup), then add water until it makes a thick consistency. Divide into smaller bowls and add food colouring. Let the children paint pictures on the playground floor or pavement with their new paints. Make the pictures fizz by squirting vinegar out of a squeeze bottle. Don't forget to film their reactions!



RAINY WATERCOLOURS

Look at images of paintings by JMW Turner, such as 'Waves breaking against the wind'. He specialised in watercolour landscapes and paintings of the sea and liked painting outside whatever the weather. Ask the children to cover their paper with a wash of water. Add thin streaks of different watery colours such as blue, green and yellow. Watch the colours spread on the wet paper. On a showery day, invite children to paint pictures and then take them outside and wait for the rain to fall and spread the colours.

Songs and music

SAKURA, SAKURA

In Japan, spring is the season of cherry blossom or 'sakura'. Look at images of these beautiful trees online. Go to mamalisa.com and listen to a recording of the traditional song 'Sakura, sakura' or listen to it on YouTube, sung by Japanese children or played on the classical instrument – the koto. Teach the children these English words to sing along:

Sakura, sakura,
Cherry blossoms everywhere,
Clouds of blossoms in the air,
Blanketing the ground and sky.
Lovely colours floating by.
Sakura, sakura,
Spring flowers in full bloom.

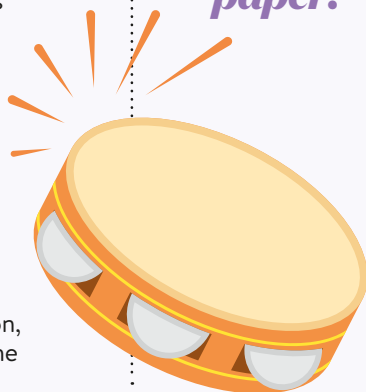
MOTHER'S DAY SONG

It's Mother's Day on Sunday, 27 March. Talk about all the different things our mums do for us and make them a special model 'sakura' tree (see above). Teach the children this simple thank you song, to the tune of 'You Are My Sunshine':

You are my mummy,
My lovely mummy,
You make me happy
When I feel sad.
I want to thank you
And say 'I love you',
And wish you a Happy Mother's Day!

WAKING UP MUSIC

Provide the children with tiny shakers made from plastic eggs or small containers filled with dry rice or lentils. Ask them to make quiet, shaky sounds as plants and animals begin to stir. Use long, scraping sounds on guiros or homemade scrapers such as empty plastic ridged bottles as children stretch. Play louder taps and bangs on tambourines as children punch the air and stand up. Add tuned percussion, playing from low to high in pitch as the children wake up and start to dance.



TIP:
Share Snail Trail by Jo Saxton with the children and discover famous paintings by artists including Picasso, Pollock, Dali and Matisse. Let the children create their own snail collage using torn coloured paper.

Springtime dramas

TIME TO WAKE UP

Ask the children to curl up as small as they can and pretend to be fast asleep. Slowly narrate 'waking up' as they wriggle fingers and toes, stretch out arms, uncurl, yawn, sit up, stretch legs, kneel up, stand up, stretch and spring into action. Children can choose which animal to be as they wake up. Repeat, but change the narrative to a seed waking up and growing into a plant with roots, shoots and flowers.

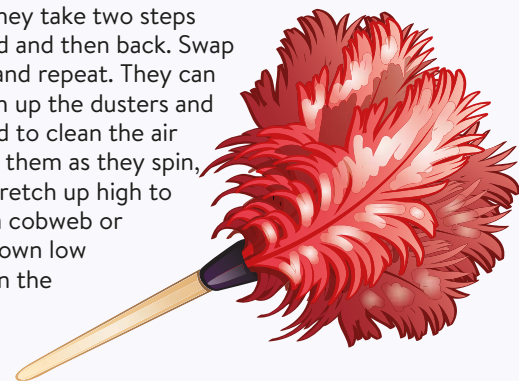
THE MYSTERY EGG

Explain to children that they are going to act out a story about a mysterious egg. Plan a picnic, letting the children choose suitable food and mime preparing, packing and eating it. Choose a picnic site. Ask one of the children to pretend to find a large egg. This could be a flat shape cut out of cardboard or made from papier mâché. What are they going to do with it? Leave it alone, take it home? Pretend that the egg hatches suddenly. What emerges? Can the children help the chick, dinosaur or dragon find its mother?



SPRING CLEAN DANCE

Create a spring-cleaning dance to some spring music ('Spring Cleaning' by Fats Waller). Invite the children to stand in a circle and provide cloth dusters. Ask them to hold their cloth at one corner and wave it in the air as they take two steps forward and then back. Swap hands and repeat. They can scrunch up the dusters and pretend to clean the air around them as they spin, then stretch up high to reach a cobweb or bend down low to clean the floor.



UNDERSTANDING THE NATURAL WORLD

Children learn through playing. Encouraging them to play outside as spring awakens, and to interact with the natural world as they play, will help children to learn how to care about nature. Many of these activities work outside and provide opportunities for the children to understand the world around them as they develop their expressive arts skills.

As the children work together to find spring materials, sing songs, make music, and improvise drama and dance, they will be learning how to play cooperatively.



Jude Harries is an author and teacher of music and drama, with experience of working with children aged nine months to 11 years.



"Thank you for the opportunity to witness something so beautiful. We will definitely use your company again."

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Story provocations

Adam Marycz suggests some activities to extend children's learning...

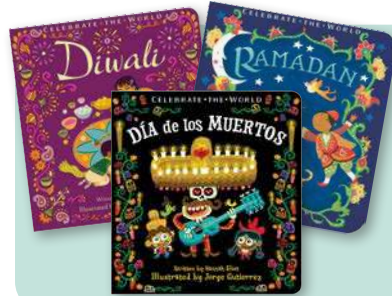
Retell the story

The area pictured changes regularly based around the children's interests. We created this display when the children showed an interest in space after reading the story, *Whatever Next* by Jill Murphy. The children were provided with the same resources the bear found in the story to travel to space – a cardboard box, a colander space hat and a teddy – and their interest developed from there.

All the books featured were on our bookshelf and some are non-fiction, such as the board book, *Moon Landing* by Jill McDonald, which, along with the solar system posters, built on the children's knowledge.

We also used a space-themed wallpaper sample – a free, simple and effective way to transform the area and change its purpose.

The children use this provocation to retell the stories as well as to deepen their knowledge of space and rockets. The photo shows the provocation when it was first introduced, and the children then used our continuous provision to extend the resources even further.



HAVE YOU READ...

There are three other books in the series celebrating cultural celebrations by Hannah Elliot. These are *Diwali*, *Ramadan* and *Dia de los Muertos*. They are a wonderfully written way to introduce these festivals to children in early years in an appropriate way.



cultures and cultural festivals from around the world. But please ensure you research appropriately using information provided by members of said community to deepen your knowledge of these cultural events before educating your children.

Inspiring art

The art featured in books can be used to inspire children's creativity. The uniqueness of each illustrator means children are exposed to a constant flow of ideas. The images within books therefore, are inspiration for children to explore different ways to express themselves.

One of my favourite provocation set-ups to encourage children to tell stories through art is using the book *Junk DNA* by Clare Thompson. The 'junk' that is used can be free and easy to collect. I would also recommend getting a magnetic board if possible as this makes it easier for the objects to be held in place when creating your art.

Junk DNA-inspired art enables the children to constantly change what they have made and it's accessible to children who may not yet be confident with their mark making skills.

Provoke conversations

If you read 'the big interview' with me in January's We Are Early Years newsletter, you'll know how I believe books are a powerful tool to help children understand communities and festivals from around the world.

Lunar New Year by Hannah Elliot tells of many of the traditions celebrated. *Tastes of Lunar New Year* by Cheryl Yau

Chepusova shares some of the foods eaten by people all around the world during Lunar New Year.

Also included in this display was a copy of the 'Zodiac Calendar', chopsticks, authentic fortune cookie packaging and red envelopes as a conversation provocation.

Even if none of your children celebrate Lunar New Year at home, it's vital you use the opportunity to enrich their knowledge and understanding of



READ MORE

Adam Marycz is an early years teacher, manager, writer and podcast host.



Follow Adam on Twitter @adamyleader and Instagram.



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LAURA MOORE IS AN EARLY YEARS CONSULTANT.

INSPIRING RESOURCES

Rich conversations

Laura Moore shares five essential resources to support language and communication in your setting...

1 PICTURE BOOKS

Reading to children frequently and sharing high-quality texts cannot be underestimated.

When children are exposed to a variety of books, such as fiction and non-fiction, rhymes and poems, they are introduced to new words, concepts and themes which can extend their vocabulary, support the development of language structure and introduce them to unfamiliar topics.

Be sure to have a diverse range of picture books throughout your environment which are easily accessible to all and reflective of both your cohort and society.

2 STORY OR SONG SACKS

Engaging children actively in books or songs through the use of these sacks provides opportunities for them to embed new vocabulary and explore language concepts.

Creating these resources doesn't

need to be expensive or tedious. You can get creative and make things to match objects, themes or key characters from the book, or build up your collections over time from jumble sales or charity shop finds.

Store them in a zip lock bag, along with the book or song card, and include them within your continuous provision so children can access them on their own or with their peers.

3 OPEN-ENDED RESOURCES

These are items that don't have one designated purpose and so can be used in a range of ways. Providing children

with these resources means they don't need to limit their play, or have a set outcome.

As a result, children feel comfortable in their child-led play and are more likely to explore and use a rich range of vocabulary independently.

Offer things such as wooden peg figurines, natural materials in a tinker tray, loose parts, cardboard boxes... the list is endless. They are invaluable items and are often easily sourced around the home or in the natural environment.

4 STORY TELLING DICE

These cubes are perfect for supporting communication and language development in a creative and imaginative way. Each face of the die has a random image on it so when the children roll numerous dice, they can make their own story to include the pictures displayed. This allows children to build their own tale, as bizarre as they wish.

Often children follow the story structure from familiar tales, so you could start with 'Once Upon a Time' or use the theme of a favourite book as a guide.

Model the use of the storytelling dice initially by having a go yourself – it's really fun!

5 YOU!

When it comes to supporting the development of communication and language, our back-and-forth interactions with children from an early age are crucial.

Language-rich, quality conversations build children's language effectively. So through our role as adult, we need to ask key questions, comment on what they are doing and echo what they are saying by extending their sentences using new vocabulary.

I always include educators in my inspiring resources list as I feel it's important for us to realise and remember the vital role we play in the lives of young children in our care. Be proud of the impact you have!

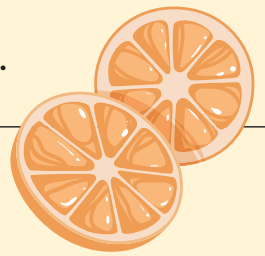


For more great ideas and inspiration, follow Laura on Instagram: @lauraloveslearning





CHRISTINA LAW IS THE DEPUTY MANAGER AT SANDHILLS WOLVERHAMPTON.



Is your nursery **HYGGE**?

Use this Danish concept to create a sense of security and wellbeing in your setting...

Hygge (pronounced hue-gah) is a Danish concept that focuses on increasing your wellbeing by focusing on the comfort of everyday routines and your surroundings. It's the art of creating feelings of cosiness, happiness, familiarity, simplicity, comfort and contentment. This can be achieved via the simple act of lighting a candle, snuggling under a blanket or sipping tea by the fire when it's cold outside.

WHY DOES IT HELP IN EARLY YEARS?

Applying the concept of hygge within early years settings helps you to create a home-from-home feeling. In turn, this creates a sense of security and wellbeing that helps children to feel calm and relaxed, and to explore and investigate with confidence.



Focusing on children's wellbeing is fundamental for their development and continuing progress. Nurseries adopting a hygge approach have seen a positive effect on children's behaviour – a calming atmosphere allows for increased engagement and helps children focus on their own interests in play. It also promotes self-confidence and peaceful play, which in turn helps to children to manage emotions.

THE CORE ELEMENTS

To create the hygge approach in an early years setting, consider the 10 core elements highlighted by Meik Wiking (author of *The Little Book of Hygge*).

- **ATMOSPHERE** – creating a cosy and relaxing, homely atmosphere
- **GRATITUDE** – taking time to reflect and talk about what they are grateful for
- **PRESENCE** – focusing on their current interests in the present moment
- **HARMONY** – enjoying playing together and not focusing on competitiveness
- **PLEASURE** – promoting happiness and wellbeing
- **TRUCE** – learning to manage conflict and share experiences
- **EQUALITY** – respect for others
- **COMFORT** – a relaxing and comfortable environment
- **TOGETHERNESS** – spending time with friends and family
- **SHELTER** – a space to relax

These are achieved through careful changes to the children's environment and the way we approach learning.

HYGGE IN PRACTICE

At many of our nurseries within The Old Station Nursery Group, we strive to create a hygge environment.

At our Sandhills Wolverhampton nursery, for example, the emphasis is on ensuring there is a calm, relaxing and warm environment. This is also reflected in the interactions that practitioners have with children. In teaching, hygge is about focusing on the process and not the end product. Practitioners focus on the children's current interests and allow them time to explore, talk and investigate.

There is calming music playing in the rooms along with calming scents. Indoor lighting is



“Music has a powerful and transformative effect – it can help to improve moods and reduce stress levels”

rarely used. Instead, we use twinkly lights to soften the atmosphere.

Each room has been carefully designed to incorporate a homely feel, with cosy corners providing a space for reflection or reading. There's minimal clutter in the rooms to promote a relaxing learning play space.

When we opened Sandhills, Wolverhampton we were able to design and incorporate the hygge approach from the beginning, from the careful planning of the nursery's layout using natural furniture to the warm, neutral colours of the walls.

Our rooms provide a cosy feeling and feature cushions, rugs, soft blankets and lamps. Dens and teepee tents give children opportunities to relax and snuggle down throughout the day.

Twinkly lights, LED candles and soft glow lamps provide an ambient atmosphere for children to explore and investigate in. These are used alongside the natural light that shines through the large windows and doors.

We have calming music playing throughout the day to enhance the relaxing atmosphere. Research has shown that music has a powerful and transformative effect – it can help to improve moods and reduce stress levels.

Music also contributes to better memory and cognitive skills and allows for children to build confidence and develop their concentration skills.

We use essential oil diffusers that emit scents like orange, lavender and peppermint to create a calm and relaxing atmosphere. Different smells can help to improve mood, stimulate olfactory memories and can have a holistic effect on the body.



“Hygge is all about enjoying the simple pleasures in life and the environment around us”

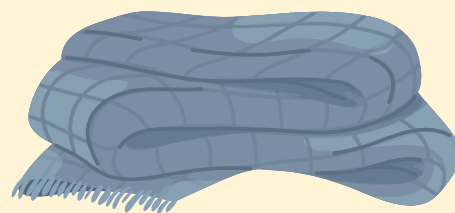
We change the essential oils to suit the season. For example, we have pumpkin spice around Halloween and cinnamon or clove for the Christmas period.

ENJOYING THE OUTDOORS

Children's interests are at the forefront of learning. At our settings children are able to move activities around the room and to the outdoors. Hygge is all about enjoying the simple pleasures in life and the environment around us, so it's important to enjoy the outdoors and to bring nature indoors.

We take the children on nature walks and bring back natural resources such as fallen leaves, branches, feathers and flowers.

They also enjoy doing simple activities like baking, planting flowers and reading stories. We find that children progress and develop a lot better when they are given the time to practise their skills in their own time, and as much as they want to.



INCORPORATING HYGGE AT HOME

Hygge can be incorporated at home, too. A lifestyle that helps celebrate warmth and calm can be good not just for children, but for everyone.

Create changes that help you feel happy and enjoy the simple pleasures in life. Start by enjoying your surroundings – do something as simple as going for a walk to enjoy what nature has to offer. Try to use soft lighting at home and create cosy areas to relax in. Reading is beneficial in reducing stress and helps you bond with your child. It improves brain connectivity, vocabulary and comprehension, too. Remember to unwind and give yourself and your child time to reflect on the day and week.

Hygge is a long-term investment in self-care and a commitment to providing warmth and happiness around you. It's all about making the most of precious moments and enjoying the simple things in life.

Sandhills Wolverhampton is part of the Old Station Nursery Group. To find out more, visit theoldstationnursery.co.uk





LYNNETTE BROCK IS DIRECTOR OF SCHEMAPLAY COMMUNITY INTEREST COMPANY.

Schematic play

Lynnette Brock explores how we identify schemes in play, and scaffold children's learning opportunities...

SCHEMES ARE OFTEN REFERRED to as 'patterns of repeatable actions/ behaviours' (Athey, 2007:114). The early scheme operations in young children's play are the foundations – the pre-requisite skills – to later complex operations, such as reading, writing and adding, and everyday operations such as driving and cooking (Siraj-Blatchford and Brock, 2016).

Operational schemes also enable us to make sense of the objects, images and words around us; the figurative schemas. For example, a young child might recall, draw and discuss what a watering can is. But they will only be able to do so if they have used a watering can or seen one being used; they have had first-hand experience of the operations of a watering can – to contain and pour water from (containing and trajectory scheme applications). Every golden nugget of knowledge has two parts – a schema (figurative knowledge) and a scheme (operational knowledge).

Tune into how children are applying schemes and offer a range of objects and contexts to support their interests. Anchor investigations and learning extensions in the child's schemes (what they can already do), so that new learning is within their reach. The child can see for themselves that there is something they feel confident to do in the new activity offered, and this empowers them to take on the risk of the 'new' – to be motivated to engage in new challenges.

Observing schemes

Schemes are best observed when babies and young children are given opportunities to lead their own play. During child-led, free-flow play provide resources across a range of contexts for children to apply their schemes to, and support this with timely and appropriate guided activities to extend their investigations. Here are a few of the most commonly observed schemes in young children's play:

Trajectory: This is an interest in lines (vertical, horizontal and diagonal). Babies exploring this scheme might be observed kicking, reaching for objects, or visually following an adult's movements. Young children might enjoy dancing with scarfs and throwing balls, as well as moving their bodies in a variety of ways (up, down, backwards and forwards), including moving their feet and hands up and down in paint. They will also be keen to get moving – crawling up and down ramps, and they might find lining-up objects in vertical or horizontal lines or dropping objects from a platform a huge fascination. Rhymes and stories with props will support these interests, such as the rhyme 'Hickory Dickory Dock', with a toy mouse that runs up and down the clock.

Containing and enclosing: Children applying a containing scheme are often observed continually putting things into and out of different types of containers – the fascination is the inside, outside and the barrier between the two (Siraj-Blatchford & Brock, 2021). Treasure baskets can facilitate early independent exploration of this. Different types of containers; fluid objects such as ribbons, socks and fabrics; and solid objects such as small balls, blocks and bangles, all facilitate the child's exploration of how objects fit (or do not) into containers (early exploration of capacity). Supply baskets, buckets, bags, carts and boxes for children to explore. Add groups of objects, so they can enjoy filling and emptying the containers. Provide opportunities for children to contain themselves, for example with cardboard boxes or tents, (discovering how they fit – further exploring the inside, the outside and the barrier between the two).

Transporting: In the transporting scheme, "A child may

move objects or a collection of objects from one place to another, perhaps using a bag, pram or truck" (Athey, 2007). The transporting scheme often develops after the child has applied the trajectory and containing schemes in a variety of contexts and they now draw upon these two competencies to explore how they can be combined. In combining them, the child may start to explore quantity, space, volume, size, weight and other material characteristics of the objects being moved from one destination to another (Brock, 2022). They might also explore spatial awareness, journeys/mapping, orientation and start to develop some appreciation of force, momentum, inertia and friction.

Children learn as they follow particular patterns of behaviour. It's exciting for us to find out what their investigations are and then to let children know that what they have found out is important, and there is more discover.

SchemaPlay Community Interest Company provides early years SchemaPlay™ training. For further information please contact: admin@schemaplay.com





Why I Love...



Chelsey Allen, nursery teacher at Berkswich CE Primary School, explains why Ten Town gets children excited about numbers

“Children have developed their subitising skills

Ten Town is fantastic at supporting our children's mathematical knowledge and practical number skills. They have really developed their subitising skills by playing the 'marble hunt' activity, while the 'build a bridge' game has improved their understanding of number bonds. Children love playing these games on both the interactive whiteboard and as hands-on activities in the classroom. There are lots of other practical activities that are all easy to follow and implement in small or large groups – a real time saver!

“I can ensure learning is embedded

Our children love logging in at home and their parents have enjoyed being able to support their children's learning. This has been an invaluable tool during the COVID pandemic and it's also given parents an insight into the exciting resources that we use in school. It's great to be able to monitor every child's progress and see how successful they have been at each challenge. While being able to 'lock' activities, means that I can ensure the learning is embedded before we move on to the next number.



“Children explore everyday challenges

The number characters provide a fantastic range of activities and opportunities to support the children, not only in their mathematical development but across the whole EYFS. Through the characters, children can explore everyday challenges and wonders. Thelma Three is a great way of introducing the idea of making good choices, Freddie Four the explorer has helped to develop an understanding of the wider world and Fiona Five has been a real champion in encouraging healthy eating and exercise.

“Helps us highlight mathematical moments

We make the most of learning moments throughout each day and have found Ten Town to be an amazing resource in helping us highlight mathematical moments. We use the number cards to record how many children are in class and the number bags to encourage children to collect the corresponding objects whilst exploring outside. They also love writing to the characters and finding the correct Ten Town stamp before posting their letters. Ten Town is not only educational but a fun and engaging resource which our children adore!



Ten Town is an award-winning numeracy resource designed by former Reception teacher Rebecca Sandy. Created specifically for early years children, the engaging world of Ten Town focuses on building strong basic number skills, with an exciting range of online content along with the opportunity to apply knowledge in practical activities that encourage learning through play.

To find out more, visit tentown.co.uk



TAM SIN GRIMMER IS AN EARLY YEARS CONSULTANT, TRAINER AND AUTHOR.

Emotional regulation

Tamsin Grimmer explores how to support young children with their big emotions...

WE ALL HAVE DAYS WHEN WE FEEL out of sorts, or our circumstances change, turning a good day into a stressful one. At these times our emotions can get the better of us and we feel less than in control. We are dysregulated and need every ounce of self-regulation to remain calm and refrain from doing or saying something we shouldn't!

Some people refer to this increased rush of stress hormones as being in a state of 'fight, flight or freeze'. When this happens, we are unable to think rationally until we return to a state of calm.

UNDERSTANDING SELF-REGULATION

Sometimes self-regulation is not totally understood by those working within early childhood education because it's regularly equated with children simply controlling their behaviour. Although this is part of the story, in reality, self-regulation is more complex with both cognitive and emotional elements.

Cognitive regulation enables us to plan, make decisions, use executive functioning skills and remain flexible in our thinking, whereas emotional regulation is about managing our powerful thoughts and emotions in order to regain feelings of calm when stressed or overly emotional.

As adults we develop ways of overcoming this stressful state, for example, through taking a deep breath or counting to 10. However, children don't yet know how to deal with these feelings.

BECOMING CO-REGULATOR

Part of our role as educators is to help children regulate their emotions by becoming a co-regulator and actively listening and remaining attuned to their emotional states.

Co-regulation relies on a foundation of warm, responsive and trusting relationships between adults and children. Adults need to provide a stable environment with a consistent routine and predictable boundaries to help children feel safe and secure. When adults interact in the moment, coach and role-model instruction to scaffold children's learning, they are acting as a co-regulator by helping children to regulate their emotions and teaching them strategies to use in the future.

SOCIAL SITUATIONS

Part of the process of learning how to self-regulate is recognising our emotions and understanding social situations and etiquette. In the revised EYFS, the self-regulation Early Learning Goal (DfE, 2021) talks about children regulating their behaviour 'accordingly' and 'responding appropriately' which, although a little vague, means being in touch with our emotions and knowing how to respond when we feel that way.

Children need to know that it might be appropriate to clap during show and tell in the classroom, but not during prayers in assembly, or they can use a loud voice to cheer a friend on during a sports day race but should keep their voice quiet in the library.

Although waiting also forms part of the Early Learning Goal, we must ensure



we avoid these times in our schools and settings and do not set children up to fail by expecting them to wait because they will find it very difficult. Effective educators will limit waiting or sedentary times, keeping any that are unavoidable as active as possible, by encouraging children to sing, move or copy actions.

NURTURING SELF-REGULATION

Our ability to self-regulate is also linked with empathy which is the ability to imagine how we would feel if in the same situation as others. This relies on our understanding that other people think and feel differently from us, which is about Theory of Mind, a skill that develops over time. Research shows that young children struggle to understand this concept and even at the age of four or five many children



*Co-regulation
relies on a
foundation
of warm,
responsive
and trusting
relationships*

stresses them? Becoming a behaviour detective (Grimmer, 2022) can help us find out why they are behaving in a certain way or what their trigger points are and then we can strive to address these causes.

We may need to teach calming strategies or build their resilience, so that when they encounter problems or difficulties, they will persevere and try to find a solution rather than give up. We all face challenges and get stressed at times, so role-modelling how to be resilient and remain calm can help.

LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

Our priority when supporting children's self-regulation should be to build loving relationships with the children and be attachment and trauma aware, because in so doing we are better placed to act as a co-regulator and coach them, in the moment, through their big feelings and emotions.

It's also important to remain calm ourselves, and directly teach children how to recognise their stressors and how to react when they feel that way. Then one day, when faced with a panic trip to a busy supermarket, they may not buckle under pressure but instead will take it in their stride!

**Tamsin Grimmer co-authored
Supporting Self-Regulation in Early
Childhood (published by Routledge,
2022), with Wendy Geens.**

**Find out more at tamsingrimmer.com
or follow Tamsin on Twitter:
[@tamsingrimmer](https://twitter.com/tamsingrimmer)**

will not have grasped this yet.

However, research also indicates that children who are able to self-regulate are well-adjusted, socially competent, cognitively more able and ultimately more successful in life. In order to nurture self-regulation, we need to adopt a loving pedagogy and ethos which accepts children's emotions, promotes positive dispositions, responds mindfully to their behaviour and teaches them strategies which they can use independently.

DEALING WITH BIG EMOTIONS

When children experience big emotions, we need to offer calm and continuous reassurance, support and warmth whilst simultaneously developing their emotional intelligence by talking about emotions, sharing stories which describe

a character's thoughts and feelings, and engaging in role play and pretence play which encourages children to adopt different perspectives.

Educators can also use any incidents that arise throughout the day as opportunities to problem-solve and use conflict resolution techniques, for example, when two children find it difficult to share a resource, acknowledge their feelings then pose it as a problem to be solved: "We have a problem, guys – both of you want to wear the superhero cape, what can we do about it?"

Early childhood educators tend to know their children really well which is very important, however, how well do we know our children emotionally? For example, do we know what helps them feel calm or if anything in particular

TIPS FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- Remain calm and non-judgemental.
- Acknowledge, accept and label the child's emotions.
- Become a behaviour detective and try to work out why they feel that way.
- Actively teach children calming strategies.
- Use an emotion coaching approach.



CHLOE WEBSTER AND BRIDGIT BROWN ARE OUTSTANDING REGISTERED CHILDMINDERS.

"A loving pedagogy instils confidence"

*TEY speaks to **Chloe Webster** from Pebbles Childcare about professional love, and the benefits of outdoor play all-year-round...*

PEBBLES CHILDCARE IS AN AWARD-winning childminding business run by Bridgit Brown and Chloe Webster.

"I met Bridgit when we were working together at a day nursery – she was my manager," explains Chloe. "Bridgit later set up her own business as a registered childminder and was receiving daily enquiries. As a childminder with smaller ratios, she needed to look at ways of expanding to meet that demand, and that's where I came in."

"We've been working together since 2016 and are both registered childminders. From a business point of view, it made sense that I registered as a childminder in my own right rather than as a childminding assistant."

"You can only be in sole charge of the children for two hours as an assistant; being a registered childminder allows me to offer continuity of care for a reduced number of children if Bridgit's away."

PROFESSIONAL LOVE

Pebbles Childcare embeds the principles of Dr Jools Page's work on professional love and Tamsin Grimmer's research on developing a loving pedagogy in the early years.

"When Bridgit and I had been working together for about 8 months, we attended a conference in Brighton where Dr Jools Page talked about professional love in early years settings (PLEYS).

"We could instantly relate to the concept of professional love and feel very lucky that we were able to put it into practice so naturally – it



"There's a professional boundary and we're providing a service, but it's not 'just a job'"

encompasses everything we do and are about.

"Our setting is very much a home-from-home," says Chloe. "There are days when some children come in and just need to sit on the sofa with you and be cuddled. Or times when they don't need active play but need to rest in the book corner on their own for a while, and we're able to follow their lead in terms of what they need emotionally."

"I think that's where we have fully embraced professional love – yes, we do love the children and no we're not going to get in trouble for saying that. There's a professional boundary and we're providing a service, but it's not 'just a job'."

"When I began working with Bridgit, a new baby started who was around 6

months old. She was a bit unsettled as a new starter, so I lay on the floor beneath the fairy lights, cuddling her."

"I instantly felt that I should

be doing something else – actively playing with the children or filling in paperwork. Bridgit came in and reassured me: 'This is exactly what she needs right now. You're meeting her needs and that's all I care about.'

"Developing a loving pedagogy instils confidence, independence and resilience in the children, and will support them to grow into well-rounded, emotionally intelligent and secure young people."

HEADING OUTDOORS

Another way in which Pebbles Childcare fosters independence is through plenty

of outdoor play. “We pride ourselves on raising hardy children and we’re firm believers that anything you do indoors can be replicated outdoors with many more benefits,” says Chloe.

“We’re big advocates for outdoor play in all seasons. We’ve invested in splash suits; the children keep wellies here; and we do bag changes for the season so they have appropriate clothing.

“We teach the children that there’s no such thing as bad weather, as long as you have the right clothes. If we taught them that we only go outside in the summer, that’s not real life,” explains Chloe.

“By going out in all seasons, they can immerse themselves in nature and experience changes throughout the year, and that learning is phenomenal.”

Bridgit and Chloe even took part in beach school training: “We started the beach school sessions in January, so it was pretty cold but we persevered!” Chloe tells us. “By August, the children were exploring the coastline independently.

“Beach school is similar in many ways to forest school. Sessions are child-led and encourage children to follow their curiosity, develop leadership skills and grow in independence. The children learn to have a respect for the sea and the elements, and know that they’re unpredictable.”

LEARNING THROUGH NATURE

The benefits of outdoor play in the early years are well established – from relaxation and wellbeing to developing an understanding of risk. Bridgit and Chloe make time to explore and discover hidden gems in their local area that present new outdoor learning opportunities for the children.

“We don’t have a huge garden space, so we utilise what’s available elsewhere and make the most of natural resources,” says Chloe.

“It’s great to learn to climb the steps of a slide – and we do visit playgrounds – but being out in the woods or at the beach provides opportunities to climb sand dunes and huge hills, or to listen to birds singing or explore different textures and terrains. We have 2-year-olds who can tell us if the tide’s in or out!

“I appreciate that we’re very lucky to have so much available to us. There’s a

“By going out in all seasons, they can immerse themselves in nature”



nearby stream that runs into a small waterfall. We visited with the children in the summer and returned in the winter to see that it was frozen. That kind of learning’s only possible because the children have the opportunity to go out in all weathers.

“Heading out also enables us to bring children’s interests to life, whether that means accessing local businesses in the community or going out into nature,” Chloe explains.

“We might have planned activities for the day, but if the children say, ‘We saw some snails yesterday and we’d love to find more,’ we can be spontaneous.

“That’s the beauty of what we do – it’s flexible, fluid, child-led learning, and a hands-on approach to outdoor play does wonders for children’s confidence, independence, attention spans and resilience.”

Pebbles Childcare is an Outstanding registered childminding setting in Worthing, West Sussex.

To find out more, visit
pebbleschildcare.co.uk
or read their blog at
pebbleschildcare.blog



EDWINA REVEL (RNUTR) IS THE PROGRAMME DIRECTOR AT EARLY START NUTRITION.



HEALTHY SUGAR *Swaps*



*Making food swaps can have many health benefits and ensure we are providing children with access to balanced, nutritious food, says **Edwina Revel**...*

DID YOU KNOW, CHILDREN ARE having over twice the recommended amount of sugar? With over half the sugar coming from drinks and snacks.

Having too much sugar can lead to painful tooth decay – every 10 minutes a child in England has a tooth removed in hospital.

As set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage 2021 reforms, early years providers are required to promote the good oral health of children. This has been included because good oral health habits need to be formed from an early age. Making food swaps are a great way to ensure children are not consuming foods that are too high in sugar and to support them to learn how to make healthy choices and develop an enjoyment and love of food.

How much is too much?

Children under four to six years should have less than 19 grams (five cubes) of free sugar each day. There are no guideline limits for children under the age of four, but it's recommended they avoid sugar-sweetened drinks and food with sugar added to it.

To meet these guidelines, we need to be aware of the free sugars added to foods, such as sweets, cakes, biscuits, chocolate, and those that occur naturally in fruit purees, juices and pastes.

Cutting down on the intake of free sugar can help to reduce the risk of tooth decay and type 2 diabetes, and help us to improve health outcomes for children.

AGE	RECOMMENDED MAXIMUM SUGAR INTAKE
Under 4 years	No guideline, but it's recommended to avoid food and drinks with added sugar
4-6 years	19g per day (~ 5 sugar cubes)
7-10 years	24g per day (~ 6 sugar cubes)
11 years and above	30g per day (~ 7 sugar cubes)

Ref: NHS

1 cube  = 4g sugar

There are some sugars that we don't need to cut down on, such as those found naturally in foods like fruit, vegetables and milk.

Many food and drink products contain excess sugar and carry misleading health claims, making nutritious choices challenging. For example, if a child has a juice drink (two cubes of sugar) and a sugary yoghurt (six cubes of sugar) they would exceed the recommended maximum daily sugar intake (19g / five cubes of sugar)!

We have plenty of tips to support your early years setting to be sugar aware.

Read the labels

While you might not actively add a lot of fat, sugar and salt into the foods you

prepare in your setting, it's important to recognise that a lot of the packaged foods we buy can contain these ingredients – sometimes without us knowing it!

A label reading card has three colour coded columns- green, amber and red, which corresponds to low, medium and high. The aim of label reading is to try and choose products which are labelled as low (green) or medium (amber) in saturated fat, sugar and salt and to limit those that are labelled as high (red).

Swap sugary cereals

Breakfast is an important meal for children, providing them with energy to fuel their day and lots of important vitamins and minerals. Cereals are a great breakfast option and it's important to choose those with a low (green) or medium (amber) sugar content.

Avoid cereals labelled as high (red) in sugar and remember to always read labels by looking at the per 100g column, not per serving.

Swap sugar-coated or chocolate-flavoured cereals such as frosted flakes,

“Snacks should be viewed as ‘mini meals’, using the same nutritious foods as meals do



honey crunch cereal or cereal bars. Instead, choose low sugar cereals, such as porridge, wheat bisks or shredded whole wheat. You could occasionally choose medium sugar cereals, such as corn flakes and crisped rice.

Check out our favourite breakfast ideas at tinyurl.com/ESBreakfasts

Rethink snack time

Snacks are an opportunity to offer children additional energy and nutrients between meals, without adding sugar to their diet. Snacks should be viewed as 'mini meals', using the same nutritious foods as meals do!

Many processed fruit-based snacks are high in sugar. Dried fruit bars, jellies, melts, fruit-based biscuits and wafers, purées and fruit juices are often very high in sugar, and the sugars in these foods can damage teeth.

These foods are not recommended between meals, even if they are sold as snacks.

Hydrate the right way

The amount of sugar that is found in children's drinks can be surprising. A quarter of the sugar they consume comes from sugary drinks. Remember, water and plain milk are the only tooth-friendly drinks for children in your early years setting and at home.

Make sure water is freely available for children to help themselves to throughout the day. You should avoid offering fruit juices, diluted fruit juice, squash, fizzy drinks, flavoured water and drinks containing added caffeine or other stimulants.

If parents are offering juice drinks at home, recommend offering them at mealtimes only, in an open cup and diluting it one part juice to ten parts water.

SNACK SWAPS

Swap sugary snacks such as cereal bars, dried fruit, flavoured yoghurts, muffins, jam and chocolate spreads, for more nutritious options:

- plain rice cake with cream cheese and blackberries
- sliced fresh fruit, such as melon, pear, kiwi, orange
- plain Greek or natural yoghurt topped with fruit, such as berries, mango, rhubarb, grated apple
- Scotch pancakes with banana and strawberries
- bean dips, hummus, mashed strawberries

*Offer age appropriate textures

Check out our favourite snack ideas at tinyurl.com/ESSnacks

What's for dessert?

When we think about toddler desserts and puddings, the foods that often come to mind are sugary treats, such as chocolate cake and ice cream. However, nutritious desserts and puddings are a great way to provide young children with energy and essential nutrients, such as calcium and iron.

Puddings made with cereals (such as rice or oats), milk and fruit can be included as part of a healthy, balanced



diet for young children. Here are some of our favourite options for children:

- fruit crumbles
- homemade fruity flapjack
- fresh and tinned fruit
- fruit salad
- plain yoghurt with fruit
- rice pudding
- custard

Check out more pudding ideas at tinyurl.com/ESPuddings

USEFUL RESOURCES

Visit Early Start Nutrition for lots of recipe ideas and training to support you to plan food provision:

earlystartgroup.com/nutrition

Download the free Healthier Families NHS Food Scanner App:

tinyurl.com/FoodScanner1





Elevator PITCH

Why freestanding outdoor play provision is perfect for early years and nursery settings

1 WHY FREESTANDING EQUIPMENT?

Freestanding equipment offers a best value solution for early years settings due to the fact that there's no installation cost. All equipment is moveable (by two adults) – this allows interchangeable theming for all settings, especially those with restricted outdoor space.

3 FULL ONLINE SERVICE

All enquiries are dealt with via email, so there are no follow-on sales calls or upselling from your initial enquiry. Our in-house delivery service means that each order will be handled by the RE:PLAY team, from your order through to our free comprehensive delivery.

“Shadsworth Infant School has used RE:PLAY for several different projects. They are always our ‘go to’ company when we are developing outside areas”

GILLIAN CROMPTON, HEAD TEACHER

2 BUILT TO LAST

All of our outdoor provision equipment is manufactured to meet with BS EN 1176 guidelines. Made from locally sourced pine radiata and redwood timber, it's also treated for Use Class UC 4 - BS EN 335-1.

4 BUY WITH CONFIDENCE

After 12 years in the outdoor play industry, our knowledge is unsurpassed. We supply all goods on invoice*, so no upfront payment is required; we offer 30 Days payment terms as standard.

*Applies to local authority run settings only.

To find out more about RE:PLAY Direct, visit replaydirect.co.uk



EYFS FOCUS

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD

In each issue, we focus on a different area of the EYFS to bring you advice and activity ideas for your setting...

“Understanding the world involves guiding children to make sense of their physical world and their community”

EYFS Framework 2021

People, culture and communities

38 Jamel Carly Campbell shares some ideas for ensuring an inclusive pedagogy and culture in early years settings...

Past and present

41 Susan Drury offers creative inspiration with a free ‘Past and present’ resource from Plazoom.

The natural world

42 CARLEY SEFTON shares activity ideas to help kickstart children’s love of nature.

46 HELEN MCGONICAL explores ways to support children to care for the environment.



JAMEL C CAMPBELL IS AN EARLY YEARS EDUCATOR AND CONSULTANT.

Representation matters

Jamel Carly Campbell shares some ideas for ensuring an inclusive pedagogy and culture in early years settings...

I'VE ALWAYS ASSOCIATED HOW we identify ourselves as the most important factor of community and culture. From the Foundation Stage, we are immersed in experiences that develop our individual knowledge of

how our family, culture and community does things.

How they cook and prep food, how they dress, the daily rituals, celebrations, religious beliefs, household structures, games, language, family relationships, music, art, teaching, history....

As we become more aware and our understanding of the world develops, so does our sense of belonging. We then begin to make comparisons with the people we come in contact with: our peers, teachers and even people

Children need to feel a connection to their surroundings, feel proud of who they are and feel acknowledged

that cross our paths. For example, a child who is a Rastafarian noticing that an adult has hair that's in locks, which is associated with the Rasta faith.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY

Children notice difference and similarities – they are soaking up information, constantly assessing

Activity sheet

BRINGING IN THINGS FROM HOME

Create a space where children can bring things from home and have them displayed.

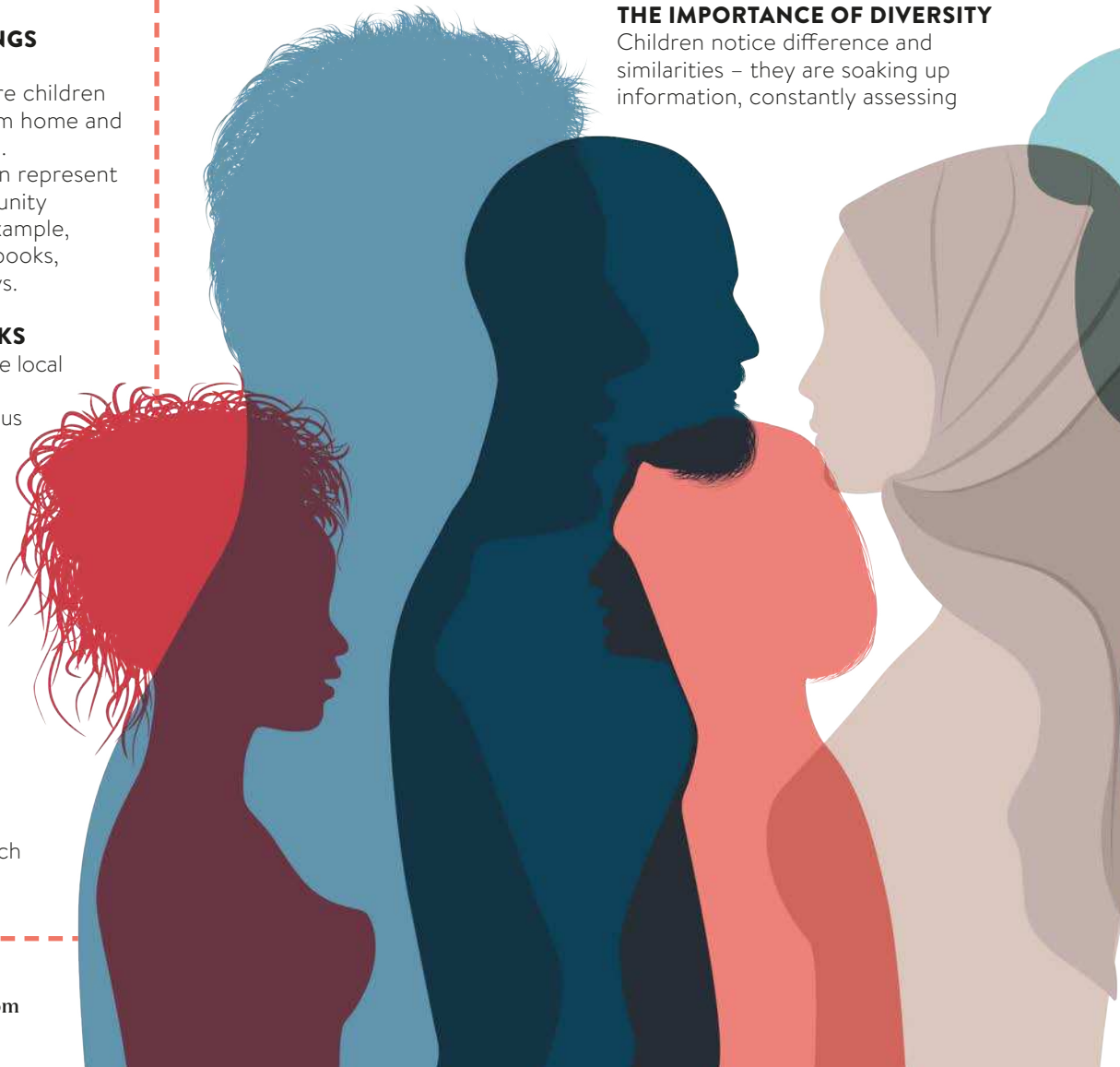
These objects can represent their culture, community and interests. For example, materials, clothing, books, instruments, and toys.

COMMUNITY WALKS

Try to get out into the local community: visit the market, shops, religious establishments and community spaces.

Talk to children about the purpose of these key locations and give the children space to talk about what these places mean to them.

Allow children to take pictures, draw pictures and create a scrapbook about their experience, which can then be shared within the setting.



their surroundings, which is shaping their perception of the world. We often associate familiarity with safety and often, children are going into a setting for the first time which is an unfamiliar environment.

When they enter the space, they're assessing it based on past experiences and what they're used to – they are trying to make connections. The smells, the music, the environment, the resources and the people are all being assessed. (Is this space safe and can these people be trusted?)

This is why I stress the importance of diversity within in our teaching/early years workforce, the resources we use and literature. Connection and representation matters. Children need to feel a connection to their surroundings, feel proud of who they are and feel acknowledged. Each child is unique and our approach is based on a child-centred pedagogy.

POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

The EYFS principles tell us that positive relationships are warm and loving and foster a sense of belonging. Enabling environments value all people and value learning. They offer stimulating resources and spaces, inside and outside, relevant to all the children's cultures and communities.

As early years educators, it's crucial to illustrate that we are familiar with children's community/ culture, and we acknowledge and appreciate what makes them unique. (Not just through annual themes or cultural topics.) Through this approach, positive relationships can be formed and a foundation for learning can be built.

I understand that some settings may only have one particular community attending or they may find it difficult to represent other communities, but it's just as important to have resources and toys that represent the wider community or

invite people into your setting, so your children have those experiences.

So, when they do go out into the wider community, they are familiar with different cultures and communities and they don't feel as anxious or unsafe, because they are going into an environment that they are aware of.

It's essential for children to feel that they're a valid part of the setting and we must ensure that their voices are heard.

Create space for them to make contributions and suggestions to the daily planning and activities.

Let's make our settings a place where representation matters and

FURTHER READING FOR ADULTS

Supporting Identity, Diversity and Language in the Early Years
by Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Priscilla Clarke

Conversations that Make a Difference for Children and Young People by Lisa Cherry

FURTHER READING FOR CHILDREN

The Proudest Blue by Ibtihaj Muhammad with S. K. Ali

The ABC of African & Caribbean Food
by Rochelle Watson-Senayah

My Skin, Your Skin: Let's talk about race, racism and empowerment
by Laura Henry-Allain MBE

Hey You! An empowering celebration of growing up Black by Dapo Adeola

that includes inclusive policy, practice, pedagogy and culture that supports our children, their families and our teams.

Jamel C Campbell is an early years educator, consultant and children's author. Jamel is passionate about the early years, and the importance of having a balanced, diverse and inclusive workforce, curriculum and pedagogy.

Follow Jamel on
🐦 @JamelCarly or
Instagram: jamel.carly

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CARE SUPPORT SERVICE

Easing Isolation & Exhaustion



We provide support, respite and home care to families who have children aged 0-19 with congenital heart defects or feeding issues across the North West of England.

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- ♥ CQC Registered and fully insured
- ♥ Minimum of 2 hours support each week
- ♥ Fully trained support workers (Hoist, Meds, Suction, CPR, Vent etc)

This service is free to access for families who do not qualify for a funded care package from local authorities or CCG's. To refer a family or indeed yourself please get in touch or complete our simple Referral Form online.



LAGANS FOUNDATION

info@lagans.org.uk 01204 800300 www.lagans.org.uk

Books to support mental health and wellbeing in the early years.












LITTLE TIGER

www.littletiger.co.uk



SUE DRURY IS LITERACY LEAD AT PLAZOOM.

How times have changed...

Cover the Past and Present ELG with this free resource pack and ideas from Sue Drury...

THE NEW EYFS FRAMEWORK CAME into effect in September 2021. Although there were no changes to the overall areas of learning, some of the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) within those areas of learning have changed, to be clearer and more specific.

The Past and Present ELG appears within Understanding the World. Children are expected to know some similarities and differences between things in the past and now, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class. This can be explored through carefully chosen books and by looking at images that show people and objects from the past.

CHANGES OVER TIME

I've created an EYFS oracy and emergent writing resource pack focused around things in the home. This appealing pack will help young learners to understand past and

present by exploring how appliances and technology that we have at home have changed over time. Most children are fascinated with objects from the past, discussing and questioning what they are and how they were used.

A range of images show appliances that children will be familiar with in their homes, including smart phones, vacuum cleaners, televisions and games consoles with matching images showing how these appliances looked in the past. The images can be used to prompt discussion about how these objects have changed over time and what has caused that change (new designs and improved technologies, including the development of the Internet and Wi-Fi). Similarities and differences between things in the past and now can be explored, using appropriate vocabulary.


The activities will support children to begin to develop an understanding of chronology,




INSIDE YOUR FREE PACK

- Things at home: past and present cards
- Heading cards: past/present, then/now
- Homes in the future worksheet
- Teacher notes with guidance on how the resources could be used in the classroom

To download this EYFS resource for free, visit plazoom.com/collections/early-years-inspiration

 [plazoomshop](https://twitter.com/plazoomshop)

 plazoom.com/blog



helping them to recognise things that were used in the past, before they were born. The images can be sorted using the heading cards which introduce key vocabulary of 'now', 'then', 'present' and 'past'. The images could also be sent home to encourage families to talk about how things have changed over time, comparing appliances used by parents or grandparents when they were young, with what is used in the home now.

Children will also have the opportunity to talk about what their homes might look like in the future, drawing and recording their ideas on an engaging worksheet.



CARLEY SEFTON IS THE CEO OF LEARNING THROUGH LANDSCAPES.

Understanding the natural world

Carley Sefton shares some ideas for getting children outdoors and kickstarting their love of nature...

AS I WRITE, SIR DAVID Attenborough's new series on plants, *The Green Planet*, has just aired and my social media is once again full of people expressing their amazement at the natural world.

But however inspiring Sir David's programmes can be, these moments of awe and wonder need to be accompanied by the creation of a deeper understanding of our natural environment at all ages.

FILLING THE GAPS

When the EYFS framework was updated last year, I was delighted to see that the new Early Learning Goals made learning about nature a key part of *Understanding the World*. But I know from talking to early years settings and schools that a common obstacle to teaching about the natural environment is a lack of confidence among staff members.

A few years ago, when working with a group of NQTs, I was surprised to learn that many weren't aware that all amphibians come from spawn, and a third of the group didn't feel confident in identifying an oak tree. When the last two decades have seen people spend less and less time outdoors, it's completely understandable that the young workforce might feel their nature knowledge has a few holes.

EMPOWERING PRACTITIONERS

The natural world doesn't have to feel intimidating; part of the joy of teaching early years about the natural environment can be that staff members get to learn about it, too. All practitioners should feel empowered to teach this area, regardless of their starting point.

There's so much to gain from supporting young children to understand the natural world around them. We know that spending time in nature is vital for children's mental

and physical health, and developing a passion for the natural world at a young age makes them more likely to keep enjoying and caring for the outdoors as they get older. Early years is, in my opinion, the best stage of education for getting children outside and kickstarting this love of the natural world.

There are plenty of brilliant resources that can support you to

explore nature, including Learning through Landscapes' own free early years resources. You can also download Google Lens to use when out and about, to help identify plants and animals.

For more ideas on how to engage your early years children with outdoor learning, visit ltl.org.uk/outdoor-learning-training

Activity sheet

MEET MY TREE

There's no better way to understand the changing seasons than by looking at trees. Take a nature walk to a local park, green space or woodland, and ask each child to choose one which will become 'their tree'.

Ask them to describe the tree using the senses: what does it feel like and smell like, what can they hear? Look for animals that may be living in it or using it, and encourage children to be as specific as possible: use the correct language so that, instead of saying there's a bird in the tree, children can identify it as a sparrow or blackbird. Similarly, help them to work out what species of tree it is.

Throughout the year, revisit the tree and discuss any changes in its colour and its leaves, taking photos of the children with their tree. Collect pieces such as fallen leaves and bark rubbings for creating tree-inspired artwork.


Developing this early personal connection with trees is important for children's understanding of bigger environmental topics in the future key stages, such as deforestation, and will also help them develop a passion for conservation.

BAREFOOT SAFARI

Why not try this idea in your setting? Animals don't wear shoes, so what does the world feel like for them? Create a 'barefoot safari' outdoors, full of different textures. Use materials such as bark mulch, rounded gravel, sand, pebbles, long grass, water, leaves and, most importantly, mud!

Discuss the different sensations children feel as they walk through the safari, and start conversations about which animals would live in different environments. You could also do some mud foot art by asking children to stand on large pieces of paper and create shapes!

More than anything, it's important to remember that simply taking children outside to explore their natural environment can create amazing, organic learning opportunities, so don't be afraid to just go on an adventure and see what you find!



...it's completely understandable that the young workforce might feel their nature knowledge has a few holes

BOOK ACTIVITY

Where's the Elephant? by Barroux is a 'Where's Wally' style, wordless picture book that shows the effects of urbanisation.

Explore the themes of the book by creating a large piece of art on a roll of paper. Half of the group should line up on one side of the paper, the other on the opposite side. One half draws nature, animals and plants and the other draws buildings, factories and shops. Even very young children can make marks to represent their understanding of the story.

They then swap sides and keep drawing their part, but this time they have to work out how to add nature to the city and how to add human activity to the jungle without disturbing it.

WIN!

A 12-month subscription to Ten Town – worth over £250

Ten Town is an award-winning resource, used in over 1,000 schools, that makes early years maths fun! One lucky school can win a 12-month Premium subscription which includes home access for their pupils. Featuring over 120 animated stories, songs and activities, it's a great way to build basic numeracy skills.

children to apply their mathematical knowledge in the classroom, in short and playful sessions. The prize, worth over £250, also includes a free set of flashcards, wall friezes and character number bags. Every entry also has the option to try out all the activities during a month's free trial.

To find out more, visit tentown.co.uk

To be in with a chance of winning this award-winning resource, visit tentown.co.uk/TeachEY

Entries close on 30th June, 2022.

Fun, practical activities

Exploring the exciting world of Ten Town, children are introduced to King One and his friends. On their journey, they earn rewards by completing engaging activities that develop a wide range of skills, including subitising, number bonds and more/less. Designed especially for the early years, Ten Town is easy to use for both children and teachers.

Aligned to the revised EYFS framework, teachers have access to over 500 printable support materials, including practical activities that allow



WIN!

A phonics resource to inspire outdoor learning with Cosy Direct

Cosy Direct is offering you the opportunity to engage and stimulate your budding readers by offering you the chance to win a whole class resource, especially to support learning outdoors. Children will be sure to delight when using these chunky, giant and free-standing Alphabet prompts.

Literacy in the great outdoors

Why not send your children on a letter hunt trail or practise initial letter sounds as part of a focused task in small groups? Cosy testers told us that these wooden tablets stood up to the rigours of their open-air space and made the perfect addition to learning Literacy in the great outdoors. Children can practise sounding out to their heart's content, develop new and jabberwocky words, making that phonics assessment a breeze!

This pack of 26 alphabet letters not only offers the chance to enhance

alfresco learning locations but will add depth and a tactile experience from the natural environment in your everyday classroom.

Guaranteed to make a real impression, these substantial wood slices stand approximately 17cm high and will make their mark on your children's experience with initial letters and associated learning.

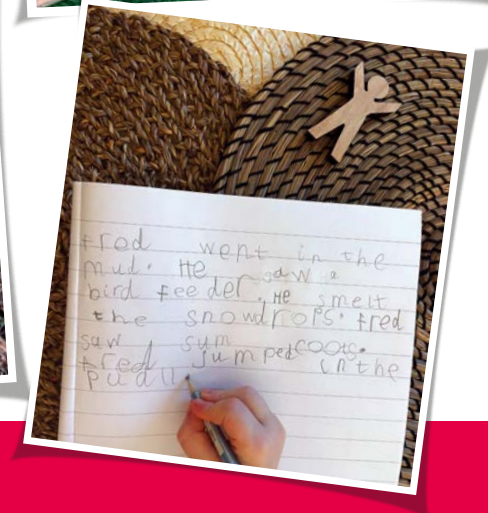
To find out more about Cosy Direct resources, visit cosydirect.com

To be in with a chance of winning this beautiful rustic resource, simply visit cosydirect.com/TeachEY

Entries close 29 April 2022



PROMOTION



WIN!

**One of our
12 Learning
Resources!**

Would you like Fred to visit you for #fredsadventurestories? Fred is on a mission to visit early years settings and primary schools for outdoor adventures across the UK.

This high-quality UK grown wooden figure is the perfect resource to support children's learning and development through outdoor play. Fred can promote speech and written language development, problem solving, emotional security and empathy as children engage in imaginative outdoor play and storytelling together.

Take a look at #fredsadventurestories on Instagram and, if you would like to receive your own Fred to inspire the children at your setting, just

email fred@outdoorclassrooms.co.uk

Use the subject line: 'Fred to stay' and include your name and postal address in the message, so that Fred can find his way to you for free. As Fred says, "Small things can make a BIG difference!"

"Fred is cross curricula and meets requirements in the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Fred's adventures heavily link with the Personal, Social and Emotional aspect of the EYFS, as well as promoting in depth Communication and Language and expanding a child's critical thinking through exploration of their natural world."

Natalia Kosmirak, Temple Learning Academy EYFS Lead

What's on offer?

- Share your #fredsadventurestories with us at @outdoor.classrooms and @teachearlyyears on Instagram to be in with a chance of winning one of the 12 available 'Fred's Favourites' photo competition prizes:
- Go Bag Maths £96, Owl Phonics Phases 2&3 £64.80, Mini-Go Bag Maths & Phonics £86.40, Mini-Maths Set £64.80, Fred's Story Creation Pack £46.20, Owl Numbers Set £24, Fred's Imagination Door £7.80, Chalkboard Ten Frame Set £64, Mini-Beast Trapdoor £104... and more!

Learn more at
www.outdoorclassrooms.co.uk

To enter now, share your #fredsadventurestories at @outdoor.classrooms on Instagram.

*Closing date 15th July 2022



HELEN MCGONIGAL IS AN EARLY YEARS TEACHING ASSISTANT AND ECO-BLOGGER.

Helping kids to care for the environment

*Young children are naturally curious about the world around them. But how do we nurture that curiosity into kindness towards the natural world? asks **Helen McGonigal**...*



1

Explore nature

Children will protect the things that they love. If they experience the outdoors as much as possible, and in all weathers too, they'll want to look after it without very much encouragement at all. Bringing the outdoors in is also important. You could have a nature table or shelf that the children can contribute to with treasures found during weekend and after school adventures. This provides a neat link to home and a point of discussion for group time, too.

2

Choose your Impact

Children in early years are exploring cause and effect, and the consequences of their actions. So, this is a perfect time to introduce the positive and negative impacts they can have on the environment with some intriguing questions and thought-provoking explorations. What happens to litter if we drop it? What happens to our rubbish when we throw it 'away' or recycle it? What happens to the waste we put in a compost bin? What happens to seeds when we sow them?

3

Create welcoming habitats

If you can encourage wildlife into your early years learning landscape, there will be plenty for children to explore and look after. Better still, you can involve the children themselves in creating those habitats. This will make them feel proactive and encourage their nurturing instincts. Planting bulbs and sowing wildflower patches will entice pollinators and birds into your setting. Installing bird feeders, bird and bat boxes or hedgehog houses, as well as building bug hotels are all fantastic activities to welcome wildlife.



4

Deal with Waste

How much waste we produce and what we do with it is a huge aspect of caring for the environment. It really helps children (and adults!) to collect waste to understand how much we create before working out how best to dispose of it. Children could start by carrying out a bin audit using a simple tally chart (great for maths skills) to work out the worst waste culprits. Include paper, snack time food waste, glue sticks or felt pens. The children can then work together to think of ways to reduce the amount of waste in the first place and recycle, reuse or rot the rest.





Grow Things to Eat

Understanding where our food comes from, and the work involved in producing it, is really important for children. As they grow older, this understanding will help them make informed choices about what they eat and where it comes from, taking into account animal welfare, food miles and growing conditions. Children are endlessly fascinated by growing their own food and it doesn't have to take up lots of room. It's really easy to grow cress, salad, herbs, dwarf beans, peas and tomatoes in pots on sunny windowsills, whilst strawberries and tumbling cherry tomatoes can even be grown in hanging baskets.

6

Read Books

There are some excellent fiction and non-fiction books available that address environmental issues. Sharing books, as we know, is a great way to increase awareness, instigate group discussion, develop vocabulary and encourage empathy. Keeping a selection of books in your outdoor area is really important, too.

7 Celebrate

When Earth Day comes around on 22 April, why not make it a whole Earth Week in your early years setting? Dress in 'green' outfits, share stories about nature and the environment, repurpose waste into useful items, carry out a waste audit or collect your waste for the week to see how much it amounts to.

8

Keep Talking

Environmental issues don't have to be saved for special days; you can introduce them into lots of conversations. When children find a bug at school, you can take photos, draw pictures, describe it, talk about being gentle, discuss where it might be happiest living and find it a home. When a toy or piece of equipment is damaged or broken, this is a perfect opportunity to talk about looking after our possessions, repairing them and where they go when we throw them 'away' at the end of their life. Discussions like these get little minds working, encourage empathy for our natural world and are great for developing language and communication skills, too.

Helen McGonigal is a teaching assistant in early years, an eco-blogger and mum of three from County Durham. Helen is passionate about education, children's literature and the environment, all of which she writes about on her blog: spotofearth.com

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

Support children to learn more about the environment through storytime...

- *The Trouble With Dragons*
by Debi Gliori
- *Tidy* by Emily Gravett
- *My Green Day* by Melanie Walsh
- *Ten Things I Can Do to Help My World*
by Melanie Walsh
- *The Journey Home* by Frann
Preston-Gannon



Creative play COLOURED PLAY SAND

Ideal for getting young children's creativity flowing, this play sand is available in a range of bright and engaging colours – choose from blue, green, yellow or purple. Each bag is screened and washed before packaging – perfectly ready for play.

£9.88 ex. VAT,
gompels.co.uk



Wonderful webs

SPIDER HOUSE

A perfect home for spiders, this wooden Spider House can be placed in any natural setting and children can watch spiders spin intricate webs across the frame. An accessible, eco-friendly educational resource. "The Spider House is simple and has the potential to spark engaging pedagogical conversations with children." June O'Sullivan MBE

£12.99 ex. VAT,
earlyyearsresources.co.uk



On the Go

GO BAG MATHS

This handy tree print tote bag is filled with resources to help teach young children the basics of maths and literacy outdoors. Includes a 10-frame forest scroll, five chalkboarded squares, tree slices, 10-centimetre sticks and rustic squares.

£96 inc. VAT,
outdoorclassrooms.
company.site

HAPPY READING!

GROUP READERS POD

This large pod is perfect for cosy conversations and a quiet reading space with friends. It can also be used for role play or a set up for small world play. Just add blankets, pillows or resources of your choice. Comfortably fits three to four children.

£275 ex. VAT,
cosydirect.
com

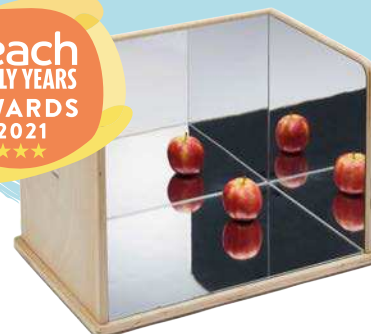


Mirror image

TICKIT WOODEN EXPLORATORY MIRROR

This solid birch plywood mirror has parallel sides to reflect images backwards and forwards to infinity. A fantastic resource for learning about reflection and mirror effects, to inspect interesting objects, and for self-observation. **£76.99, commotion.co.uk**

**teach
EARLY YEARS
AWARDS
2021
★★★★★**



BLAST OFF! CONSTRUCTA ROCKET

An innovative resource that will ignite children's imaginations! Whether it's a mission to the moon or an under-water adventure, this construction set is ideal for encouraging imaginative role play both indoors and outside. **educationaladvantage.co.uk**

**teach
EARLY YEARS
AWARDS
2021
★★★★★**





Glorious mud!

MUD KITCHEN MODULE

This simple but effective mud kitchen module creates a useful work surface with a hob and rustic shelves. Each item is designed to be both robust and portable, enabling children to use the resources in different ways. The supports are sturdy trestles made from treated timber and the planks are made from UK grown larch. **£129.99 ex. VAT, muddyfaces.co.uk**

WOODLAND CREATURES

ANIMAL SEATS

These charming carved wooden animal seats have been hand-painted and made from untreated wood grown in the UK. Can be bought as a set of four, comprising a fox, a badger, a hedgehog and a mouse, or can be purchased separately.

£130.89 ex. VAT, muddyfaces.co.uk



MESSY MATHS

MEASURING BOTTLES

This set of vibrant, transparent bottles comes in a range of quirky shapes and sizes that little ones will love. Children can fill and empty the bottles whilst discussing volume and weight. Ideal for messy maths activities, sand and water play, and more.

From £ 21.99 ex. VAT, tts-group.co.uk



Flower fun

SENSORY STONES

This set of eight realistic flower heads will inspire imagination and curiosity about the natural world. Made from a unique stone mix, perfect for mud kitchen play.

£22 ex. VAT, yellow-door.net

Walk and chalk

JUMBO PLAYGROUND CHALK

A selection of 52 jumbo, washable chalks. Children will love creating colourful art with a wide choice rainbow of colours. Perfect for outdoor mark-making. The chalks are supplied in a durable plastic case for easy transportation and storage.

From 4.25 ex. VAT, tts-group.co.uk



Dig this!

Connect with nature and hone fine motor skills with these resources...



SEED AND CUTTING POTS

These professional pots are made from recycled and recyclable plastic, this tray of 40 6cm pots is perfect for budding gardeners at your setting. **£5.68 ex. VAT, gompels.co.uk**



BIO SAND SET

The 50-piece BIO Sand Set includes spades, buckets, rakes, scoops, sieves, sand moulds and watering cans. Created from bioplastic and 100% recyclable. **£109.99 ex. VAT, muddyfaces.co.uk**



MUD PIE KIT

Mud glorious mud! Whether you dig, squeeze, ooze, paint, or simply whisk and mix, there are plenty of tools here to keep children entertained. **£32.99 ex. VAT, cosydirect.com**

More ideas!

Read *Outdoor Play for Healthy Little Minds* by Sarah Watkins, to help support children's mental health through outdoor play. **£14.99, routledge.com**





**CHARLOTTE HACKING IS THE LEARNING PROGRAMMES LEADER
AT THE CENTRE FOR LITERACY IN PRIMARY EDUCATION (CLPE).**

Why visual literacy shouldn't be overlooked

*Charlotte Hacking explores how picture books
help develop skills in early reading, talking and writing...*

AS A CLASS TEACHER, SCHOOL leader and lover of children's literature, I've always been aware of the transformative nature of picture books on children of all ages. In too many instances, these are seen by adults as a step up into reading novels, but they are a sophisticated genre of literature in their own right.

Far from being the easy option, picture books challenge readers in more and different ways than print alone.

FILLING THE GAPS

Reading pictures is just as complex, perhaps more complex, than reading print. In the best picture books, there is space between the pictures and the text – the pictures don't just simply illustrate the words.

This takes the child reader into a very special place, in which they have to read the text, read the illustrations and then put the ideas together along with their personal experience and knowledge and understanding of the world to fill the gaps in between.

It's a really challenging thing to do and enables even the youngest children to develop a wealth of comprehension knowledge and skills.

Giving time and space to discussing picture books and responding to illustrations contained within them allows children to gain so much more from the text, and to do more of the weight of the reading work.

Through discussions around picture book spreads in a group, children are given opportunities to compose

and articulate their ideas, compare these with the ideas of others, make connections between their thoughts and the thoughts of others, and gain an ability to build on or constructively challenge the ideas of others.

A MOUSE CALLED JULIAN

In looking at Joe Todd-Stanton's *A Mouse Called Julian*, nursery children were able to recognise the facial expressions and body language of the main character, Julian, from the first endpapers, before a word of the story had been shared, connecting this to how he might be feeling and what might make him feel this way.

As the story progressed the teacher became increasingly aware that the illustrations were open enough for the children to be able to take control of conversations around the narrative, offering and developing ideas, making connections between parts of the story and inferring why things had happened or might be about to happen.

The rich, satisfying storyline, the sophistication in the illustrations and the potential for rich discussion with an enabling adult or group of peers are what will enrich language and vocabulary, develop the social aspects of reading and take children a head above in their comprehension, making inferences, deductions and connections from an early age.

COMMUNICATING THROUGH PICTURES

We must ensure that while children are learning to decode, they are also exposed to rich texts like these that support comprehension and develop their motivation to read.

*“...picture books
challenge readers
in more and
different ways than
print alone”*

**To find out more about
the Centre for Literacy
in Primary Education
(CLPE), visit
clpe.org.uk**



Young children can also use what they have learned from picture books to create narratives of their own. Being able to represent thoughts, create characters and tell stories through drawing comes naturally to children in the early years.

It's the first route to communicating meaning, before they are introduced to the symbolic system of print and the letter/sound relationships that allow them to communicate in text.

Allowing opportunities for children to draw regularly and to communicate their ideas in pictures allows them to gain key knowledge and skills that form the building blocks of writing; to take an idea, share it meaningfully, structure and develop their thinking and create authentic characters, settings or ideas for story events.

Models of illustration help children develop not only their artistic skills and abilities but also their fine motor skills, paving the way for handwriting.

Author/illustrator draw along videos show children how to create and shape characters through illustration and will give them ideas to create characters of their own.

As one Reception teacher commented, "The modelled drawing

activity completely shattered my preconceptions of what five-year-olds might be capable of drawing..."

For the very youngest children, teachers involved in our Power of Pictures programme have noticed higher levels of engagement, language development, comprehension and imagination when working with picture books and when being allowed to communicate and develop ideas through drawing.

PICTURE BOOKS TO DEVELOP VISUAL LITERACY

***Shh! We Have a Plan* by Chris Haughton**

The story has a simple repetitive text which children will quickly access for themselves as they enjoy the pictures, peopled with Chris Haughton's characteristic and comical angular and wide-eyed figures. There is plenty to discuss in regard to the actions of humans on the environment and links well to a focus on self-regulation in the early years.

MORE POWER OF READING BOOKS TO TRY

- ***Alphonse, There's Mud on the Ceiling!* by Daisy Hirst**
- ***Peck Peck Peck* by Lucy Cousins**
- ***Zeki Gets a Checkup* by Anna McQuinn and Ruth Hearson**
- ***Big Green Crocodile* by Jane Newberry and Carolina Rabei**
- ***My Red Hat* by Rachel Stubbs**
- ***Caterpillar Cake* by Matt Goodfellow and Krina Patel-Sage**

Is there a dog in this book?

by Viviane Schwarz

An inventive, interactive book in which three playful cats directly address the readers, imploring them to keep turning the pages to first hide from and then find a 'doggy friend'.

The story offers opportunities for children to talk about fears in the context of a known story and to look at how to build and form friendships, taking the needs of others into account. All essential skills to develop in the early years.

***The Story Machine* by Tom McLaughlin**

This book tells the story of Elliot, who one day finds a mysterious machine. He makes it work by accident and discovers that it is a story machine with letters that make words.

However, Elliott finds letters hard to contend with until, with the aid of his imagination and a magnifying glass, he notices a picture amongst them. This sets him off on the path to a world of his own story making. A wonderful stimulus for children to make their own stories using pictures and to develop empathy with a character who finds elements of learning difficult.

The Power of Pictures programme was part of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and Royal Society of Arts (RSA) Learning About Culture Trial. To find out more, visit tinyurl.com/clpePictures





STEPHANE BARROUX IS A CHILDREN'S AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR.

THERE IS *still hope*

*How to use storytelling to teach children
about looking after our planet*

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED DRAWING AND I WANTED TO GO TO ART SCHOOL FROM A VERY EARLY AGE.

At that time, however, there were no special courses for illustrators, so I spent a year learning visual communication, then a year in architecture. I actually became an illustrator by sheer chance. One day I bumped into a girl I knew in the street, whom I hadn't seen for a long time. She was just coming out of the office of a publisher, who was going to publish one of her stories, and she asked me if I could draw a few sketches to illustrate her story. The publisher liked them, and that's how my first book happened. That meeting in the street changed my life.

Since then, I haven't stopped. I quickly moved on to writing my own stories as well as doing the drawings, but I'm always very happy to illustrate stories by other writers.

THE EVENTS OF DAILY LIFE ARE MY INSPIRATION.

I read the newspapers every day; I listen to what people are saying, and I make lots of notes. Not all my notes end up in a book. It's important to first find the right way of approaching the story and presenting it to children. Think of it as lacing the poetry into the narrative.

All sorts of topics interest me. Ecology and the environment certainly

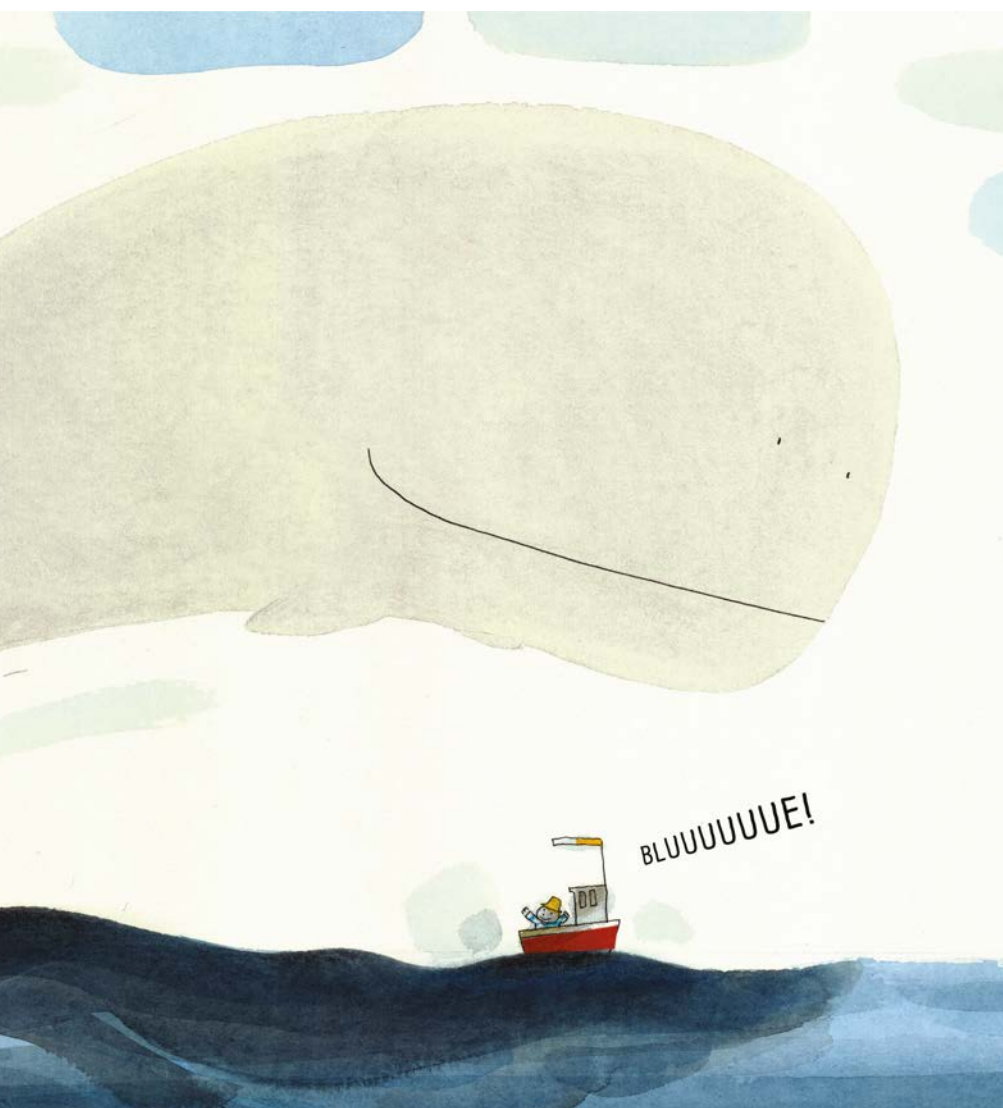
play a big part in my books, but I've also done a book about a grandfather who suffered from Alzheimer's disease.

I'VE ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT CHILDREN UNDERSTAND MUCH MORE THAN ADULTS THINK THEY DO.

Children can have fears and concerns, and it's possible that finding a book about some subject that bothers or worries them will help them in facing these things, or at least make it possible to talk about them. I especially like books that have something positive to say to children, but to do that well needs great creativity and a poetic touch.



*Storytelling
supports children to
understand the world
around them*



Storytelling can help us to introduce complex ideas about the environment

THE IDEA FOR MY NEW STORY, I LOVE YOU, BLUE, BEGAN IN THE CAFÉ BELOW MY STUDIO. I was down there reading a newspaper when I found a story about a dead whale washed up on a beach in Brittany. That sort of thing had happened before but, in this case, scientists examined the whale's body and found 16 kilos of plastic in its stomach – mostly plastic bags, but also crisp packets, plastic tubes, wrappers and containers. It was shocking, and I immediately started making sketches,

jotting down words, looking for a story plan. A few days later it was all done, ready for publishing.

I thought the topic was really important, and to make it into a story that would appeal to children might help towards saving the whales. It's incredible to me that we can put people on the moon, yet it seems we can't protect our whales, our bees, our birds...

STORYTELLING SUPPORTS CHILDREN TO UNDERSTAND THE WORLD AROUND THEM. It can help us to introduce complex ideas about the environment and the important role we can play in looking after our planet and the animals in it.

Have a look around your setting with the children. How many things are made of plastic? Count them, and you may be surprised. Explore questions together – what might happen to

HOW CHILDREN CAN HELP

- Show children which materials can be recycled into something new.
- Take part in litter picks along riverbanks and beaches to collect plastic debris.
- Explain to children about avoiding single-use bottles, cartons and straws.
- Talk about the idea that when enough people join in, small actions become big.

plastic pens, bags and jars when we throw them away?

I've been in schools where they've organised competitions to collect and weigh plastic waste from their local area and compare their results with neighbouring schools. This can also lead to discussions about the other creatures that live in the oceans, and how to protect them. Books can be a great starting point for a child to get interested in a subject and follow it up in their own way.

Children are tomorrow's grown-ups. They are the ones who will make decisions, laws and take action. We have to show them how our planet has been damaged, and that every little step towards improvement is vital. More and more initiatives for positive change are appearing, and if we stick with it, and everyone does their bit, things will change for the better. There is still hope.



Barroux is a picture book illustrator and author. His latest book, I Love You, Blue is out now (published by Otter-Barry Books, £12.99).

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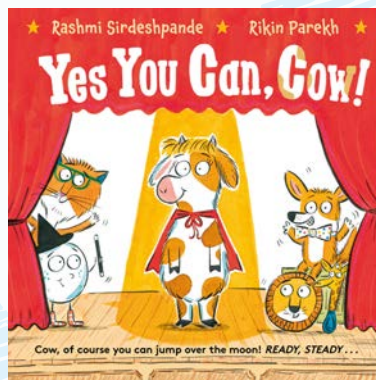
The Book Corner

GREAT TITLES TO SHARE WITH YOUR BUDDING READERS



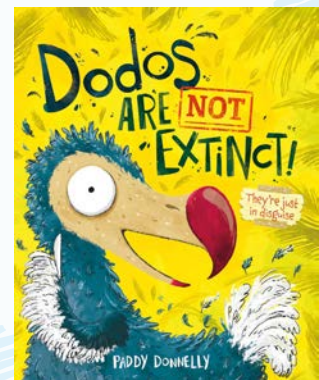
SNOWY WHITE (Farshore, £7.99)

Kingsley is the finest cat in the Kingdom. How does he know? His crystal ball tells him so! But one day, the crystal ball has a different story to tell. A new cat by the name of Snowy White has arrived. She's beautiful... she's kind... and Kingsley is determined to get rid of her. Luckily, Snowy gets a helping hand – or seven – from some very special new friends! *Snowy White* is a fresh and fun-filled take on a classic fairytale and offers a light-hearted way to help young children learn that it's who we are on the inside that counts. It also introduces the subject of living considerately and looking after our environment as Snowy and her friends each play their part in keeping Purry Tale Lane clean. Author Gareth P. Jones blends prose with rhyme in this lively story, and bold illustrations by Loretta Schauer are sure to engage young children. *Snowy White* is the third book in the 'Fairytale for the Fearless' series.



YES YOU CAN, COW! (Faber, paperback, £6.99)

"Cow, of course you can jump over the moon! READY, STEADY..." In this joyful picture book, Cow and friends are busy rehearsing for a performance of the nursery rhyme, *Hey Diddle Diddle*. But Cow has second thoughts and disappears from the stage, feeling fearful that others will laugh at her. With a little help from some familiar nursery rhyme friends, Cow starts to take small, brave steps. Can she overcome her fear of failure and become the star of the show? This laugh-out-loud tale written by Rashmi Sirdeshpande, with bright, playful illustrations from Rikin Parekh, will delight young children at story time. *Yes You Can, Cow!* is also the perfect story to help encourage the children at your setting to believe in themselves as they learn new skills, and to persevere when things don't quite go as planned. As Cow dusts herself off and tries again, little ones will learn that sometimes you just can't do it... YET!



DODOS ARE NOT EXTINCT (Yeahoo Press, hardback, £11.77)

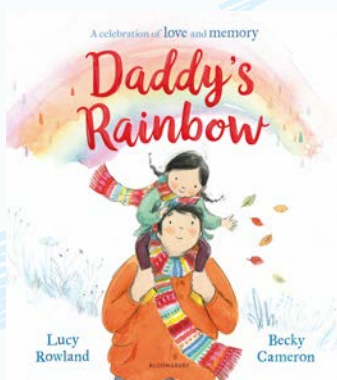
"Dodos are extinct, right?" In this hilarious picture book with bold and engaging illustrations, author-illustrator Paddy Donnelly takes us on a journey to meet dodos and a range of other extinct animals. But can you keep a secret? They're not extinct; these famous creatures are in disguise everywhere! Keep your eyes peeled. You never know who might be right under your nose. There are woolly mammoths disguised as elephants; sabre-toothed tigers with long mustaches to hide their teeth, and you might even meet a dinosaur or two along the way. *Dodos Are Not Extinct* will keep kids giggling and guessing on every page. After reading the story, extend children's learning with information at the back of the book about the endangered and extinct animals featured in the story. This delightful mix of fun, silliness and educational facts is the latest book from Paddy Donnelly, whose author debut *The Vanishing Lake* published last year.



MY MUST-HAVE MUM

(Lantana Publishing, hardback, £11.99)

Jake's mum is not like most mums. If there's a skip in the street, most mums will pass right by without a second glance. Not Jake's mum. "Look at this, Jake!" she'll shout. "We must have this! We must have this, too! And we simply must have this!" A delightful story that tells the tale of an upcycling mum and her son, with her must-have finds getting more and more unusual as the story goes on. But when Jake's mum upcycles everything in their apartment, Jake soon begins to worry that there's only one thing left to change... him! Should he be this way? Or that way? Or another way altogether? This heart-warming picture book, written by Maudie Smith, with charming illustrations by Jen Khatun, is about the unbreakable bond between a mother and son. Jake soon learns that his mum wouldn't change a single thing about him – he is perfect just the way he is.

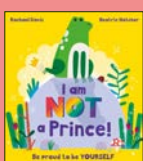


DADDY'S RAINBOW

(Bloomsbury, paperback, £6.99)

Erin's daddy sees the colour in everything. Even on the greyest days, they put on their wellies and go splashing in puddles because, Daddy says, "We can't see rainbows without rain!" But what happens when the greyest day of all comes, and Daddy isn't there anymore? This beautiful story, written by Lucy Rowland with delicate illustrations from Becky Cameron, takes us on a young girl's journey through colourful days of blue, red and orange with her daddy, to a time that's quiet and grey. But as Erin and her mummy share their memories of Erin's daddy together, they begin to see colour in the world again. *Daddy's Rainbow* is a deeply sensitive picture book about the loss of a parent and offers an ideal starting point for conversations with young children about love, loss and learning to live again.

BE YOURSELF



Inspire children to express themselves and be proud of who they are with *I Am Not a Prince* (Orchard Books) – a fairytale for the 21st century that challenges gender stereotypes.

- On a misty lagoon, magic frogs line up to be kissed and turned into dashing princes. But Hopp is a little frog who definitely does NOT want to be a prince! Ask the children to colour in a picture of Hopp, then add their own details to help Hopp transform.

- This uplifting rhyming picture book is written by Rachael Davis with vibrant illustrations from Beatrix Hatcher. Encourage the children to draw a colourful picture of themselves and be proud of who they are.

I Am Not a Prince is the perfect story to support lessons on fairytales and All About Me.

To download the activities above and more, visit tinyurl.com/ActivitySheets1

READ ALL ABOUT IT!

Have you seen these fantastic publications?

The River

(Simon and Schuster, paperback £6.99)



Rowan loves the river; it's just like he is. On some days, it's quiet and calm, on others it's light and playful, and then there are the days when it roars along, wild and angry. But when Rowan goes through a difficult winter, the river freezes – just like Rowan. Can Rowan find a way to release his frozen feelings? A thought-provoking book from Tom Percival to help children understand the idea of ever-changing emotions. Visit simonandschuster.co.uk

I Love You, Blue

(Otter-Barry Books, £12.99)




When Jonas the lighthouse-keeper is rescued from the stormy sea by a whale, they become friends. But soon Blue the whale is in great danger too, and now he needs help from Jonas. *I Love You, Blue* beautifully highlights the urgency of saving our whales and oceans. Author-illustrator Barroux's passion for wildlife protection underlies this deceptively simple story. Visit otterbarrybooks.com

Forest

(DK Children, paperback £6.99)



Follow the story of fisherman Finn and his dog Skip on their forest adventure. Written and illustrated by Brendan Kearney, *Forest* is an engaging tale that introduces children to the different animals that live in the rainforest and introduces the subject of deforestation, and how we can use ethical products to help protect the world around us. Visit dk.com/uk



Created by educators, Tapestry is an easy-to-use, secure online learning journal helping staff and families support and celebrate their children's learning from Early Years to Y6.

Engagement with parents and carers

Building and maintaining positive engagement with parents and carers deepens the early years professional's knowledge of each child, allowing you to meet their unique developmental needs.

Use **observations** to collaborate in equal partnership with parents to build a child's learning journal, providing staff with a place to record meaningful feedback with families and children.

Communicate efficiently with parents and carers, relaying news and updates via **memos**, writing central, downloadable **reports**, creating and sending **activities** for their child, and sharing the routine of their child's day through the **Care Diary**.



See it in action

Try Tapestry for **free** with a **no-obligation trial** at eyfs.info/tapestrytrial.html

Children with learning differences

All children are entitled to child-centred assessment, not just those who are developing typically.

The **Cherry Garden framework** is a child-centred tool created to support educators working with children with learning differences.

Development doesn't necessarily look the same for all children, and the unique interactive orchard provides the opportunity to celebrate progress and engage children and families with their learning.



Image: Cherry Garden Orchard

Encourage reflective practice and nurture staff wellbeing and CPD

Reflective practice enables early years provision to be responsive and evolve as the needs of children, families and staff change. Tapestry **Reflections** is a place to:

- **Monitor, share, and consider** a child's learning story, **adapting** your provision to support their progress.
- **Record thoughts**, have conversations, and **evidence your reflective journey** and professional development.
- **Gain insight** into the pedagogical knowledge and confidence of staff so you can **tailor CPD** to the needs of individuals and the team.



Tapestry

Visit: tapestry.info

Supporting children's learning and development is seamless with this innovative online learning journal...



AT A GLANCE

- Encourages partnership working between parents and practitioners
- Tapestry Reflections supports reflective practice in your setting
- Includes the Cherry Garden framework – a flexible, child-centred approach for children with learning differences



REVIEW BY BEN WHITE

EVERYTHING HAS BEEN THOUGHT of when it comes to Tapestry. With its holistic approach at the heart of everything it does, monitoring children's development is easy and stress-free. There is no longer the need for handwritten notes and observations with this one-stop shop for monitoring progress and developing parental engagement.

With the recent changes to the EYFS framework, the opportunity to shift to a more child-centred approach to documenting learning has not been missed and making observations of learning is quick and straightforward. I particularly like how practitioners can now add their own 'reflections' to observations. This may be a reflection on how to support a child, an area for improvement for the setting, or something linked to CPD.

Reflections could also be used by managers or senior leadership teams when monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. It will provide a valuable insight into the pedagogical knowledge within the team to highlight any gaps for further staff development. The clever 'flag' system allows practitioners to link an observation or reflection to a specific area of development and provides a quick overview of any areas that are lacking in information.

Parents love to hear about what their little ones get up to in the daytime and Tapestry does this brilliantly! Nothing is missed out when it comes to keeping parents in the loop. Of course, celebrations and observations are shared between home and setting, but there's more – key information such as mealtimes or toilet accidents can be recorded by practitioners. Memos and newsletters can be sent out at the click of the button. Activities to complete at home can also be set, with parents able to add their own photos, videos or audio files with any mobile device.

Tapestry is committed to an inclusive and child-centred approach to assessment while also aware that not all learners develop at the same pace or in the same way. Working in collaboration with an outstanding school, the team have developed 'Cherry Garden' – a unique, child-centred framework for children with additional support needs that enables families and educators to see and understand children's learning in a quick, easy and engaging way.

In addition, children have their own engaging orchard graphic to help visualise progress in picture form. On securing some learning, their 'Orchard' grows – leaves appear on trees and flowers grow petals, each one representing a new achievement.

Tapestry's online learning journal is secure, accessible and child-centred, supporting early years staff and families to work together to understand each child's unique development journey and celebrate their achievements.

To find out more, contact:
customer.service@eyfs.info

THE VERDICT

- Ready to go with the recent changes to the EYFS framework.
- A truly holistic approach to child development.
- Seamless and glitch-free online system that has all the features you will need.
- Great for senior leaders and managers who can keep tabs on pedagogical knowledge and expertise amongst their teams.

UPGRADE IF...

You're looking for a learning journal that keeps the child at the centre of everything and enables home and setting to work together in an equal partnership.

Early Years Collection

Let children spread their wings and soar into the DK Early Years Collection. Craftily curated to encompass fundamental learning goals from the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework and the Montessori Plane of Development, providing an outstanding learning environment to stimulate their knowledge, development, and creativity. These 43 child development books will inspire young readers through a diverse range of titles, positively influencing their literacy and communication skills, whilst ensuring they stay engaged and curious about the world around them. To find out more, email sales@uk.dk.com



HAVE YOU

TEY's look at the latest early years tools, toys, books and activities...

Seeh...

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Have you considered using a digital solution to support language development in the early years? Polyino is a digital picture book service with hundreds of high-quality EYFS aligned books. The user-friendly digital solution aims to include all children at storytime, including learners with SEND and EAL, as all the books can be listened to in English and many can be listened to in over 50 languages. Visit polyino.co.uk for a free trial, or book a 1:1 demo via info@ilteducation.co.uk



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Visit giottocolours.co.uk/sample



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BRITISH SCIENCE WEEK

British Science Week, a 10-day celebration of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) is on 11-20 March! The week is run by the British Science Association, a charity whose work includes encouraging and supporting STEM education for all children from the earliest years. British Science Week is a fantastic opportunity to introduce science to under-fives through the Early Years activity pack, available free on the British Science Week website. The pack is full of ideas for celebrating the week, including having a 'Dress up as a scientist' day, and there are loads of fun, interactive 'Growth'-themed activities which show how much children can learn through play. And most can be done with regular nursery supplies!

Find out more and download a free activity pack from tinyurl.com/BritishScienceWeek1



OUTDOOR ADVICE

Time outside is crucial to early development – it gives young, growing children access to one of the most enriching environments in which to access key areas of learning, from language, literacy and mathematics, to PSED, physical development and understanding the world. Timotay Playscapes has a free inspiration guide to outdoor play spaces and play equipment, packed with innovative and engaging educational ideas, which can help you bring your outdoor space to life.

For your copy, email enquiries@timotayplayscapes.co.uk or call 01933 665 151.



TODDLER TAKE-ALONG NATURE

This fun and chunky board book by Becky Davies and Ana Zaja Petra encourages little ones to explore outdoors and learn about the world of nature. Toddlers will love carrying the book around with the pair of bright and sturdy fabric handles! Each page contains simple labels to help curious explorers identify the plants and animals in their own surroundings, with bright, bold illustrations and peep-through pages for extra fun. Toddler Take-Along Nature encourages children to explore their environment by spotting different things around them – perfect for keeping kids busy when you're out and about! Available to order from littletiger.co.uk



Margot and the Magical Plant

Follow Margot's exciting new plant adventure and watch as the mystery seeds grow and change along the way – as if by magic! You can even finish the story with a photograph of your very own magical plant. Getting children excited about gardening has plenty of benefits. It's not only fun, but can also strengthen their connection to food, help them eat more vegetables and set them up with a healthy hobby for life. Margot and the Magical Plant is written by Jane Rhodes and illustrated by David Gregory. To find out more, visit margotmagicalplant.com

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JENNY SHAW IS THE LEAD ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH DEVELOPER AT BUSY BEES NURSERIES.

“We have to continually recognise and respond to what children need...”

Jenny Shaw tells how Busy Bees’ mindfulness programme supports children’s wellbeing across their nurseries...

We encourage educators to use mindfulness activities with the children every day. By doing these regularly, we’re giving children techniques in their emotional toolkit to use if they feel anxious, frustrated or overwhelmed.

When our centres reopened after lockdown, we knew this would be particularly important for supporting children’s mental health and wellbeing, and to help them adjust to being in an early years setting again.

All practitioners have easy access to the wellbeing activities on Unleashing Potential – our learning and development app – including Be Calm, which offers a range of approaches: Be Calm and Breathe, Be Calm and Positive, and Be Calm and Active.

TUNING IN

Be Calm and Breathe is a range of mindfulness activities based around breathing. This includes things like ‘handy breathing’. Children hold out their hands and breathe in as they trace up their hand, and out as they trace down. It’s a lovely, simple activity and, if a child feels self-conscious, they can practise this easily with nobody realising they’re doing it.

Be Calm and Positive involves sitting still and tuning into our senses – what can the children see or hear or taste?

There’s also a gratitude exercise where we stretch up high and think about the best thing that’s going to happen today; stretch out wide and think of the person we’re happiest to see today; then stretch out our legs and think of the thing we’re most looking forward to tomorrow.

STAMP IT OUT

All children learn and feel things differently, and some won’t feel relaxed by doing breathing exercises; they need to get that energy out instead. I was lucky enough to go over to some of our Canadian Busy Bee settings – they were the inspiration for our Be Calm activities.

While I was there, I observed a child who was about to experience a meltdown. The educator said,

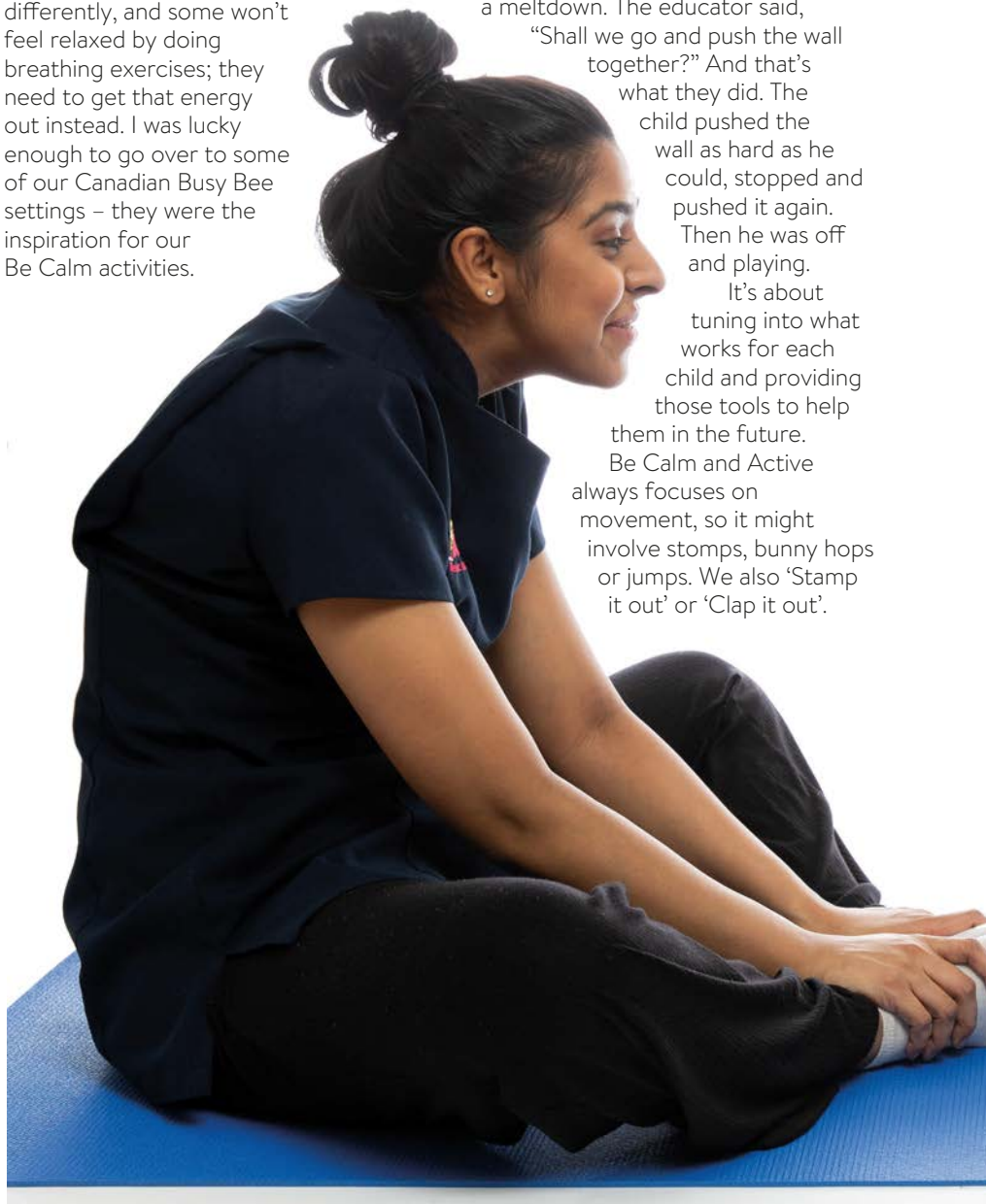
“Shall we go and push the wall together?” And that’s

what they did. The child pushed the wall as hard as he could, stopped and pushed it again.

Then he was off and playing.

It’s about tuning into what works for each child and providing those tools to help them in the future.

Be Calm and Active always focuses on movement, so it might involve stomps, bunny hops or jumps. We also ‘Stamp it out’ or ‘Clap it out’.



Together in a circle, we clap or stamp as fast as we can and gradually slow down. It's a great way of getting everything out then, together, bringing it back down again.

These exercises are also perfect for younger age groups. Babies can kick their legs or clap, and I think it's really beneficial to do these activities as early as possible, adapting them if needed, rather than saving them until preschool.

All of our wellbeing activities are accessed via the Unleashing Potential app and there's a version of the app for parents, so if we find that an approach works really well for a child at nursery, we can recommend that activity for families to try at home, too.

EMOTIONAL LITERACY

As well providing ways for children to feel calm, it's essential to support them to understand and name their emotions. As adults, we can usually say, 'I'm tired', 'I'm hungry', 'I'm frustrated', 'I'm delighted'. But when children don't have that vocabulary, that's when we see it play out in their behaviour.

The more activities that we can provide where we're naming emotions and talking to children about how they're feeling and connecting with that, the better. We use things like emotion dice – where we stick pictures of different facial expressions onto a large, foam die.

We then roll the die and if it lands on an angry face, we'll overemphasise how we look when we're feeling angry and ask the children to show us their angry faces, too. We also provide mirrors so the children can see their faces as we play.

Another activity is 'Feelings and music', where we give children an instrument and play different types of music that they can play along

to. We'll ask how the music makes them feel. Does it make them feel excited? Does it make them feel happy? Which is their favourite music?

We, as early years educators, need to tune in and recognise children's emotions, too. The most important thing is having a really strong key person approach, because you're that person who knows if something's not quite right. You can snuggle up with a story instead of that activity you'd planned, or go outside and act out being angry dinosaurs!

SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS

Since the children returned after lockdown, they've certainly needed more outdoor play and physical activities. We've also found that they've struggled more with transitions.

We often talk about horizontal and vertical transitions, and tend to pay a lot of attention to the vertical transitions of preparing children for their move to the next nursery room or going to school, but it's actually been those horizontal transitions of coming into nursery in the morning, or from the sleep room back to play again that children have needed support with.

One really simple thing we do if a child has a sleep time at their nursery, is to try and put their bed out in a similar place and make an A4 photo of that child. On the back,

we write information about how they like to sleep, so, 'I go to bed with my snuggly' or, 'I have to have my dummy'.

We then laminate the picture and place it on the bed for the child. Children have their key workers, but this way

USING OUR SENSES

For this activity, explain to the child that you're going to use their senses to help them feel calm, starting by using your eyes.

Using their senses, ask them to list the following things:

1. Five things that they can see.
2. Four things that they can feel.
3. Three things that they can hear.
4. Two things they can smell (if they can't smell anything, ask them what their favourite thing is to smell).
5. Finally, ask them to tell you one thing they can taste. This can be something they can already taste such as toothpaste from brushing their teeth or toast from breakfast or they could tell you their favourite thing to eat.

everyone knows what comforts the child, and it's instilling that sense of belonging and independence – the child feels confident to go and find their bed.

Transitions are especially important after the holidays. When children came back after the Christmas break, they had just had all that time off with their families, they may've been eating things they wouldn't usually eat, they may've stayed up a bit later or had more screen time. And this year, parents may have felt anxious about COVID, and may have been unable to spend the holidays as they normally would.

So, especially as they return after holidays, we need to feel confident that we can throw all our planning out the window and go with what the children need. Whether it's more physical activities or more quiet time and stories... whatever it might be, we have to continually recognise and respond to what the children need from us.

To try out some Busy Bees activities, visit tinyurl.com/BusyBInspiration



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No surprises

Some people like surprises, some people don't. Our reactions to them are influenced by their type – whether they are good or bad.

That seems obvious enough. Then of course there is the issue of timing. Timing is everything. A good leader will understand that. Good news is one thing, and there's often room for fun and spontaneity at work, but I mean to tell you why we need to be careful with surprises.

MEETINGS AND CONVERSATIONS

Not all decisions have a long lead-in time, but most do. When decisions are made without consulting or involving colleagues early on, it can feel like a big surprise. If you do consult at the earliest possible moment, your team will feel they have been included and their views taken into account.

These, we understand, are very valuable thoughts and feelings. Even if the ultimate decision isn't what a colleague was hoping for, or they disagree with it, they will have a deeper and greater appreciation of the process and often dilemmas leading towards it.

INVOLVING COLLEAGUES IN DECISION-MAKING

Whether they be formal, informal, planned or impromptu, everyone needs clear information about the aim and purpose of meetings.



If a difficult conversation is coming up, people need to know about it – so they can prepare for it and do their best. Recently, someone came to a routine progress checking meeting and used the opportunity to throw their power and weight around, complaining and making accusations about what they thought was slow progress. They crossed the line. It felt like bullying.

What a different scenario it would have been if they had raised their concerns in advance, rather than sharing them by surprise. It would have allowed everyone to have a sensible, professional and helpful discussion about the concerns, and address them.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

So, there you go, involve and include,

ask for input and ideas, as early and as often as you can. Prepare others to be able to prepare themselves, share considered thinking and develop solutions to problems in the future.

Not only will it build your best decisions; it will also model how to lead the process for your team. They will be all the happier for it.

James Hemsall
OBE is director of Hemsall's training, research and consultancy.
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KERRY MURPHY IS AN AUTHOR AND LECTURER IN EARLY YEARS AND SEND.

Thinking differently about difference

The term neurodiversity is gaining popularity within the early years sector as practitioners navigate their ever-growing understanding of inclusion and anti-bias practice. Neurodiversity refers to the unique neurological variations within the human mind (Walker, 2014) and was initially coined by autistic sociologist Judy Singer in the 1990s.

Put simply, neurodiversity embraces the fact that not all brains take the same developmental pathway, and while many children have neurotypical minds and bodies, others have development that diverges from this. This is referred to as neurodivergence, and this umbrella term includes autism, ADHD and dyslexia, to name a few.

BEING NEURODIVERSITY-AFFIRMING

A fundamental principle of neurodiversity, and those who believe in this idea, is that difference is not a bad thing, and so-called special educational needs (SEN) should not be viewed wholly through the lens of delays, deficits, and impairments.

Unfortunately, this remains the dominant view in the early years and can lead to children being labelled negatively – considered problems to be fixed – and reinforcing stereotypes.

However, when practitioners take a neurodiversity-affirming approach, they acknowledge that all children's development is holistic and consists of strengths, interests, differences, and areas of need.

Furthermore, practitioners recognise that neurodivergence itself, such

as being autistic, is not just a set of symptoms but is a valid lived identity for a child that should be celebrated and supported.

To be neurodiversity-affirming means that you believe in a strengths and rights-based approach to developmental differences and aim to provide support and adaptations that affirm the child's neurodivergent identity, rather than thinking that the child needs to be fixed or cured of their neurotype.

DISPELLING MYTHS

Early childhood is a critical phase of development, and what happens during these years can have a lasting impact on how the child comes to view themselves and their place within the world. It is up to us as practitioners to remain up to date when it comes to child development, and this includes challenging outdated narratives and beliefs about SEN.

For so long, we have been conditioned to view developmental differences as delays, concerns and "red flags", and then we often wonder why the parent may seem in-denial or reluctant to engage. We are often supporting children and families at the early stages of identification, assessment and diagnosis, and it is here that we can utilise a neurodiversity-affirming stance to ensure that a child's neurotype is understood from a strengths viewpoint.

One way to do this is to challenge the neurodivergent myths that can exist and offer new perspectives for families. For example, I have often heard practitioners talk about the absence of

*Neurodiversity...
has given us an
opportunity to
question our current
practice*

empathy being a "symptom" of autism. The reason for this is that the now-debunked research (Gernsbacher & Yergeau, 2019) from Simon Baron-Cohen argued that autistic children and children with Down Syndrome appeared to lack the ability to perceive the world from another person's point of view, often referred to as Theory of Mind. This became tangled up with empathy, leading to a common misconception becoming a popular belief.

A counter to this "no empathy" research comes from autistic scholar Damien Milton (2012), who explains that empathy is a two-way street, and rather than a lack of empathy, autistic children just express empathy in different ways, leading to a breakdown in shared and mutual understanding with neurotypicals (National Autistic Society, 2018).

Many autistic people report having lots of empathy and, in some cases, this can feel overwhelming. Research also suggests that neurodivergent people often grow deep emotional connections to objects and animals, which can form part of their special interests and be a place to situate their empathy (White & Remington, 2019).



This example illustrates why we must engage with research, training and support from people who themselves are neurodivergent, and who continue to challenge stereotypes that are simply not true.

To explore this further, visit Autistic Speech & Language Therapist Emily Lee's website autisticslt.com and access her FAQ section where she uncovers lots of myths about autism.

NEURODIVERSITY AND PLAY

Historically children with special educational needs have been viewed as problems to fix, and so the usual approach is to use play-based intervention programmes to train the child to behave more "normally".

This usually involves taking a child away from their everyday play and offering structured programmes with a measurable outcome. The rationale for this is that play does not come naturally to all children. This emerges from the belief that there is a 'right' or 'appropriate' way to play.

Unfortunately, lots of neurodivergent styles of play are undermined or considered non-functional. Research by Sidhu et al. (2021) states that play is diverse and by narrowing it down

by how functional it is, we miss lots of opportunities to fully understand the child's unique identity.

The reality is that play is defined by the child and we, as adults, don't get to say what is right and wrong when it comes to playing. For example, many neurodivergent children have diverse play skills involving special and intense interests.

Practitioners will often report being concerned when a child appears fascinated by one type of play. For example, a child who loves vehicles or another who engages in the same repetitive play sequences. Instead of viewing this as inappropriate play, or something to be concerned about, we have an opportunity to use this special interest as a springboard for their learning. It isn't about taking the child away from the vehicles. Rather, it is about including those vehicles as much as possible as hooks for extending learning. A neurodiversity-affirming practitioner recognises that play doesn't need to make sense to them if it makes sense to the child.

Neurodiversity is a complex and exciting concept in the early years. It has given us an opportunity to question our current practice, and to think about how we might become more inclusive.

At its core, neurodiversity empowers us to think differently about difference and it's only when we embrace this, that we can truly help our children to thrive and learn positive self-identity.

Kerry Murphy is a lecturer in early years and SEND at Goldsmiths University. Kerry is also the author of *A Guide to SEND in the Early Years* and *Little Minds Matter: Supporting the Wellbeing of Children with SEND*.

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THERESA JOHNSON IS HEAD OF PARTNERSHIPS AT PACEY.

Working with parents

Partnership with parents is central to the service you provide. Parents are a source of rich and essential information about their child, and it's important to have a two-way flow of information to strengthen a shared understanding of the child and provide the best support for them.

Think about how inclusive your setting is to all parents – dads as well as mums, parents with different abilities, cultures and backgrounds. Look at your setting through the eyes of a parent, as well as through the eyes of a child.

Encouraging an open dialogue with parents provides plentiful opportunities for them to share interests and updates from home, and for you to share information about what you are doing in the setting, and ideas for extending those activities at home.

ENCOURAGING HOME LEARNING

Giving parents the confidence to support home learning is about encouraging them to reflect on the way they interact with their children and showing them how to make the most of everyday situations to enhance their child's development.

Here's some practical ideas you can try:

1. Activity bags and boxes

Create some activity bags for children to take home and share with their families. These can be based on different elements and themes of the EYFS. Keep it simple, focusing the bag on one activity, and always include instructions for parents to carry out the activity and take it further.

2. Story sacks

You may also like to make story sacks for your favourite books; simplified versions of these can be made for the children to take home and explore. You could also include objects, activities or games related to the story with paper, crayons, play dough or plasticine.

3. Travel teddy

Pick a special teddy that goes home with the children and a diary where children can draw pictures, stick photos or write one or two words about the teddy's adventures. This can also work if the family is happy to take the teddy away with them on holiday or a day trip at the weekend.

4. Spotting learning opportunities

Suggest ideas for incorporating learning into everyday life. For example, spotting shapes on the way to your setting, counting when shopping, and matching socks when sorting laundry will all help with mathematical development.

EXTENDING HOME LEARNING

Think about how you extend children's home learning. How do you deal with things the children bring into your setting? For example, special toys, books, drawings, a leaf they've picked up on the way in.

These items are a ready-made starting point for learning and sharing. Do you encourage the children to talk about these things either to you or during circle time? Are there activities you can base around the items through the day?

COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS

Consider the different ways in which you encourage dialogue with parents. For example, brief chats at drop off and pick up times, daily diaries, online journals, or regular phone calls about the child's development. Tailor the style of communication to suit individual parents.

Build a library of leaflets, resources and other materials from organisations, local and national, that can signpost parents to support and guidance.

PACEY provides training, practical help and expert advice to early years professionals. CEY smart, their online training platform, offers a range of bite-sized courses covering nine themes for you to explore. Visit pacey.org.uk





FIONA BLAND IS AN NDNA EARLY YEARS ADVISER.

Q&A: *Reviewing quality practice*

Q How do we define quality?

A Defining quality in early years can be a challenge as 'what quality looks like' can be a very individual concept based on a person's pedagogy, experience, training and other personal viewpoints. As a team, you can create your own shared vision for what quality looks like.

Meet as a team to discuss your vision/ethos and determine quality based on related research, curriculum documents, statutory documents, staff knowledge and experience of the children you all work with. You may want to start with small steps and consider one area of practice, such as language development with babies, and reflect on what quality practice might look like for this aspect of practice.

Once you have determined what constitutes quality practice in the area you are monitoring, you can identify the evaluation resources you can use.

Involving the whole team in the process of defining what quality is will support a shared understanding, provide a range of perspectives, empower staff to take ownership of their own practice and work as a collective to deliver and maintain quality practice across all age groups.

Q Why is quality practice important?

A We know that a child's earliest years are the most formative – it is the time their brains are growing and developing billions of new connections. There is a range of available research, such as EPPE or EPPSE and SEED, that tell us that high-quality provision is critical for good outcomes for children. The 'Early Intervention: the next steps' report (2011) found that a child's development score at just 22 months can serve as an accurate predictor of their educational outcomes when they reach 26 years of age, demonstrating the incredible

importance of a child's earliest years.

Having this research data confirms not only that effective high-quality provision is important, but also that it's every child's right to experience high-quality early years provision.

Q How can we measure quality?

A When we measure quality, it's much more than a snapshot in time or a visit by a regulatory inspection body. Quality needs to be measured in a range of ways and times to ensure you get a true evaluation of all aspects of practice.

Tools you may use to measure quality:

- carrying out room audits
- peer observations
- room observations
- monitoring children's progress
- supervisions and appraisals
- external support visits from sector professionals
- feedback from specialists such as a speech and language therapist

- taking part in quality assurance schemes
- views from the children using your provision
- Feedback from parents and families

Using a range of tools to measure quality will provide you with a more holistic approach to all elements of your practice.

Q How do we evaluate practice?

A Reflective practice is a critical component of developing high-quality early years practice. With any tool that you use to measure quality, it's essential that you evaluate the impact of what you have observed/measured and evaluate this to identify the impact on



positive outcomes for children. If you cannot identify a positive impact, you will need to reflect on why this is and what else you may need to do to bring about a positive change.

High-quality practice and evaluation is an ongoing process and should form part of your everyday practice. In addition to practitioners' skills, competencies and perceptions you also need to have a realistic and honest approach to assessing quality, being able to be a critical evaluator and providing constructive feedback is essential to developing practice.

Ensure that you link your quality practice evaluations to your action plans, supervisions and business plan so that your action plan is not looked at in isolation, but is integrated into your everyday practice documents.

What makes a quality environment?

A high-quality environment incorporates a number of elements alongside the physical spaces and resources, it also includes: staff with knowledge of child development who can sensitively tune into children's needs, key people who develop secure attachments, open-ended play resources, opportunities for children to 'have a go' and face challenges, autonomy for children to lead their play and follow their interests, staff who

are reflective with a commitment to ongoing improvement, and cooperative partnerships with children's families. This list could go on and each person may be able to add elements of their own pedagogy.

Create a stimulating and playful environment both indoors and outside where children feel safe and comfortable to try out ideas, investigate, solve problems, take risks, have fun and develop interests in the world around them in a safe, well-resourced and stimulating environment. Crucially they should be supported by knowledgeable practitioners who understand how to encourage playful learning and development. Practice should be inclusive, with the children's individual needs at the heart of everything the setting does, with practitioners and children sharing and celebrating similarities and differences within their setting, local communities and wider society in which they live.

Parents and families are as unique as the individual children in your setting. Parents come into an early years setting with a wide range of experiences, skills, views and attitudes, confidence and knowledge, so it's vital that you have a range of strategies that enables parents to become part of your nursery life and to share the knowledge they have about their child. Through working with parents and other relevant professionals, you can establish cohesive and complementary ways to support children's progress at home and in the setting.

You should have high

expectations for all children to develop to their full potential, providing interactions that encourage and extend children's ideas, thinking, communication and language development. Observation, assessment and planning must be purposeful and age or stage appropriate, reflecting the journey each child has made and supporting each child's future development and learning.

Ensure a clear understanding of your role in supporting children and families to make healthy and safe choices in life. These include promoting a balanced diet for children following appropriate nutritional guidelines and a commitment to promoting children's physical development, minimising sedentary behaviour.

How do we lead quality improvement?

Leading on quality practice involves leaders and managers using research, reflection and evaluation to develop a sustainable business underpinned by sound policies, practices and procedures, to help children have the best start in life. Good leaders promote an ongoing drive for quality improvement underpinned by a good sense of self-awareness, self-evaluation and reflection. Leaders have a clear vision for the future, with aims and objectives and plans in place to achieve these. They monitor outcomes for children to ensure that all children are making good progress and any gaps in development are identified early so support plans can be actioned.

Supervision and performance management arrangements are part of the process of monitoring quality practice. These provide staff with professional discussion opportunities to reflect on their roles and responsibilities, identify training needs, support staff wellbeing and celebrate successes.

Recognising and acknowledging staff achievements are critical elements of motivating staff to continue striving for excellence.

NDNA's Quality Counts accreditation provides a holistic approach to evaluating your practice through four detailed audits and an external accreditation visit. Read more at qualitycounts.org.uk

To find out about NDNA's Review of Quality Practice, visit ndna.org.uk





DR JO VERRILL IS MANAGING DIRECTOR AT CEEDA.

68%

of London nurseries need 1-to-1 business support

In May 2021, the Mayor of London launched a new programme of business support for the capital's private, voluntary and independent (PVI) early years settings. Coordinated by the Early Years Alliance, 'Strong Early Years London' helps nurseries and childminders to access business support information, advice and guidance, and provides intensive support to those most in need.

Independent researchers at Ceeda are tracking sector trends in the capital to help inform the support programme. Our latest findings reveal a sector beset by staffing challenges and low occupancy levels.

Research conducted by Ceeda in November and December 2021 showed that many London settings are still struggling to keep their heads above water almost two years into the pandemic; 43% of nurseries and pre-schools and 32% of childminders were operating at a loss.

The survey showed occupancy in nursery and pre-school settings averaged 65% in the autumn term, and 61% in childminding provision. Overall

figures mask significant variation with one in five nurseries and pre-schools (20%) and one third of all childminders (34%) reporting occupancy of 40% or less.

Occupancy rates in the capital

Top challenges for nurseries and pre-schools included funding rates lower than the cost of delivering funded places (71%), increases in staffing costs (63%), difficulties in recruiting (52%) and retaining staff (25%), and supporting staff wellbeing (50%).

One in two nurseries and pre-schools in London were recruiting at the time of the survey (49%) for an average of 3.6 vacant posts. A staggering 96% reported difficulties in filling their vacancies. Feedback on hard-to-fill vacancies flagged level 3 posts as the main challenge, but difficulties were experienced across many roles including amongst others: level 3 posts (68% of organisations recruiting), cook (8%), level 2 posts (6%) and apprentices (6%).

A shortage of skilled qualified

staff, low pay rates, shift patterns and the impact of Brexit on staff supply were among the reasons flagged by providers for their recruitment difficulties.

For childminders, key challenges included declining demand (53%), short-term financial losses (44%), increasing costs (42%) and inadequate funding rates (41%). Two fifths of childminders were finding it hard to look after their own wellbeing (41%), up from 27% in the summer of 2021.

Supporting sector sustainability

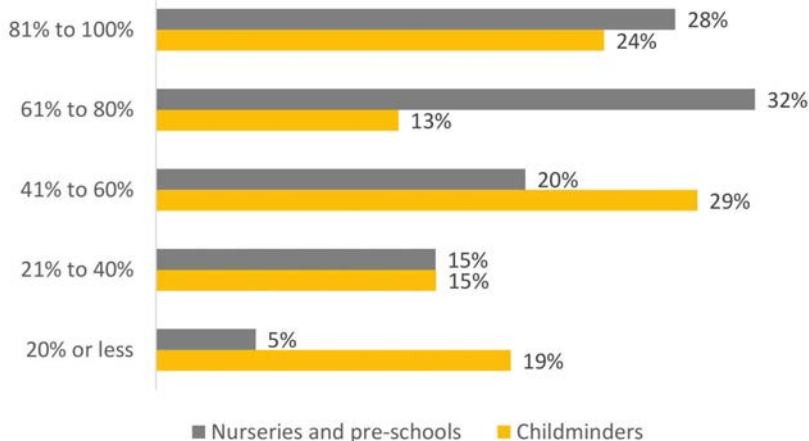
The Strong Early Years London programme provides free business support via webinars, online resources and 1-to-1 consultancy. Free 1-to-1 consultancy involves an expert working with a setting to provide support on a specific issue in their provision. When asked if there were any areas in their provision where 1-to-1 support would be helpful, over two-thirds of surveyed nurseries and pre-schools (68%) and 58% of childminders identified one or more needs.

Nurseries and pre-schools were most interested in support to help tackle workforce challenges, including expertise around recruitment (30%), staff wellbeing (26%), staff management, supervision and appraisal (20%). Demand was also high for support around regulation and inspection (37%).

Support around issues relating to Ofsted and the EYFS were also uppermost for childminders (44%), whilst 1-to-1 support in managing personal wellbeing (23%) and professional development (20%) were also in demand.

Survey feedback suggested that time is the biggest barrier to accessing free 1-to-1 support. Meeting the day-to-day challenges of Covid-19 and related staffing shortages left providers little time to focus on solutions.

Providers taking up assistance through the programme are,



Source: Ceeda



“Nurseries and pre-schools were most interested in support to help tackle workforce challenges, including expertise around recruitment”

however, feeling the benefits: “You can have no idea how much I appreciate the time you gave me today. My belief in myself is a little restored and I am looking forward to absorbing from the links you kindly shared with me.”

Larry Simpson, Petts Wood Playgroup

Neil Leitch, CEO of the Early Years Alliance, commented: “The impact of Covid-19, combined with the many pressures early years settings are already under, makes for a painful day-to-day reality for early educators delivering essential education and care within our capital.

“Early education is at the root of so many communities so, combined with years of underfunding, the absence of a national plan to support this sector to recover from two years of Covid measures can

only be detrimental to the families that rely on nursery, pre-school or childminding settings. Add to that a staffing crisis stemming from low wages, and lack of clear career pathways into and through early years, and we can see why providers are left not only struggling to remain viable, but with little time to focus on solutions to the business challenges they face.

“Ultimately, a resolution to what can only be called a crisis for our early years sector will require strong action from government. In the meantime, we are so pleased that the service we

are able to provide through the Strong Early Years London scheme represents a lifeline for those providers that access it, and we hope to successfully support many more settings in 2022.”

To find out more about free business support available to early years settings in London, please call the free helpline on 0207 697 2510 or visit businesshub.london/early-years

For information about wider support provided by the Early Years Alliance click [here eyalliance.org.uk](https://eyalliance.org.uk)

KEY FIGURES

43% of nurseries/pre-schools in the capital operating at a loss

32% of childminders in the capital operating at a loss.



“Getting new committee members is difficult”

*Far too often, excellent preschool volunteers are put off by the unnecessarily lengthy sign-up process, says the **Secret Practitioner**...*

DID YOU KNOW THAT OVER 7,200 early years settings are run by volunteers? These voluntary run settings are usually small preschools, many of which started life as parent-run toddler playgroups. They are often constituted as charities, and make up almost a third of settings in the PVI sector. And yet, they are so often taken for granted, or entirely over looked.

DfE and Ofsted announcements regularly refer to ‘nurseries’ or ‘nursery classes’, but neither of these describe the way we think about our setting. We are a preschool playgroup, proud of our mixed age pack-away provision, run from a local village hall for almost 50 years, firmly rooted in our community.

I’ve been helping to run our preschool for more years than I care to remember. I got co-opted onto Committee when my own children attended. Since that time, it has become a passion to support the work our preschool staff do. They do so much for our children, with so very little!

Perhaps we are taken for granted because people don’t realise how much responsibility is placed on parent volunteers within the sector? From overseeing finances, to looking at policies; from encouraging parents to fundraise, to dealing with Ofsted – being on a preschool committee is a busy role, but one from which you can learn so much.

In order to fulfil my role, I’ve had a ‘suitable person’ interview with an Ofsted inspector, I have had to get up to speed with charity law, and I’ve learned how to read a cashflow and understand annual accounts. As the ‘responsible person’, committee members also have legal liability for what happens in their settings.

Some days, it feels like government just wants to

put barriers in our way. Getting new committee members is difficult, because so many parents work full time these days. And when you do get a volunteer, the process for checking their suitability is so long and onerous that frequently they either give up trying, or their child has moved on to school before the checks are complete.

At present, I’m lucky enough to have a primary teacher on our committee. But, despite having passed enhanced criminal record checks to work in a school, she still had to go through the lengthy approvals process. This same parent contacted me recently, with the news that Ofsted had spotted a mistake in her application, so she would have to restart from scratch. A couple of days later, her Ofsted suitability letter landed on my doormat. Sometimes, it’s all I can do not to knock myself out face palming.

Another parent volunteer who recently lived overseas had to go to the

police to be fingerprinted (almost £100), and to the Embassy of the country where she had lived (200 miles away), in order to get a ‘Certificate of Good Conduct’.

One early battle with bureaucracy was back in 2013, when Ofsted said committee members should no longer be classed as volunteers, and consequently would pay for DBS checks. Under pressure from all sides, Ofsted caved in. But the fact that they even considered it underlines how much volunteers are taken for granted.

Far too often, potentially excellent volunteers never end up joining committee, because of the lengthy processes involved. And while I’m all in favour of rigorous checks on staff working in settings, committee members have no direct contact with children at all within their role.

In January 2022, Ofsted published guidance on ‘Reporting Incidents’. It applied to “anyone associated with the childcare”, including committee members. The guidance said that settings must report ‘significant events’ or ‘changes to health’ to Ofsted, even where these happened outside of session times. The list of potential ‘significant events’ included bereavement, or being diagnosed with diabetes. Amid another outcry, Ofsted withdrew the guidance to ‘review’ it.

But whatever the guidance says, I have absolutely no intention of prying into the private lives of any parents who are kind enough to volunteer.

If the DfE actually wants parents to have input, and volunteers to be encouraged and supported, they need to stop trying to micromanage us, and let us get on with our (voluntary) job.





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