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Wellbeing comes first

Hello, and welcome to the first issue of *Teach Primary 3 to 7*. If you are already familiar with our sister titles *Teach Primary* and *Teach Early Years*, you'll feel right at home; if not, come in, don't be shy – we're a friendly bunch! As you will have no doubt surmised from the name, our focus here is firmly on the younger children in your school – those learning within the Early Years Foundation Stage, be that in a nursery or Reception class, and in Key Stage 1. These are age groups that can sometimes be left in the shade of those operating at the 'business end' of primary education – but, as you well know, what goes on in the early years and infants lays the foundations for everything that follows, for better or worse...

Working with young children presents a unique challenge for teachers. Perhaps more than at any other stage, the core focus on learning and development must be balanced with a regard for pupils' emotional wellbeing, and this is a theme that runs across this first issue. For many tiny three- and four-year-olds, entering a school environment for the first time is a truly daunting experience; that increasing numbers lack the skills of independence they require to cope with the demands placed upon them, only exacerbates the problem. Later, making the step up to KS1, when the familiar trappings of early learning are often discarded, isn't always much easier. As Alistair Bryce-Clegg notes from page 24, get the crucial periods like this wrong and the impact on attainment can be significant.

There is, of course, no single way to ensure positive wellbeing – every child is unique, after all – but there are things you can do to help. On the topic of stepping up to KS1, Alistair stresses the need to "harmonise approaches to teaching and learning at the point of transition" to reduce the negative impact – an approach wonderfully illustrated by Carterhatch Infant School, whose uncompromisingly child-led approach to early years is now being rolled out in Year 1 to great effect (see page 21). Finding ways to boost confidence and self-esteem also pays dividends – something as simple as planning regular time outdoors in your grounds, or educational visits further afield (page 48) can make a real difference, as can giving children a way to share their worries when it all gets a bit too much (page 41).

Of course, having caring and attentive teachers on hand to guide children through the early months and years of their formal education is what matters above all , and you'll find plenty more here to help you reflect on how your classroom and your practice are meeting each individual's needs. We hope you find it useful.

Jacob Stow
Editor

FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF

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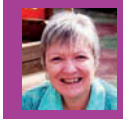
teach PRIMARY

Staffroom

Sue Cowley – author and teacher trainer who helps to run an 'outstanding' preschool.

James Clements – English adviser and the founder of ShakespeareandMore.com



Judith Dancer – early years maths specialist and author.

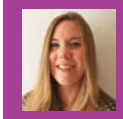
Alistair Bryce-Clegg – award-winning consultant who writes and trains around all aspects of early years.

Richard House – early years campaigner and trained Steiner Kindergarten teacher.

Adele Devine – author, teacher at Portesbery School and director of SEN Assist.

Kirstine Beeley – former primary teacher, author and educational consultant.

Michael Jones – writer on children's language development at talk4meaning.co.uk



Charlotte Hacking – Learning Programmes Leader at the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education.

Neil Farmer – former early years teacher and Foundation Stage consultant.

In this issue...

News & views

Features

Specials

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breaktime

Ideas, news and views from the world of primary education...

Parent governors spared

The new broom sweeping through the DfE has cleaned up another of the previous regime's policies – parent governors have been spared the axe, Education Secretary Justine Greening has announced. The role's imminent demise had been outlined in the Education for All white paper, with the plans attracting criticism from schools, unions and many MPs at the time. Now Ms Greening – who has reportedly served as a parent governor herself for 15 years – has talked of "the vital role" mums and dads have to play in school improvement, during an appearance before the Commons Education Committee. Plans to push forward with a fully academised school system remain alive, for now...

Recognising great practice

The 2017 Shine A Light Awards are now open for applications. Run by The Communication Trust and Pearson, the Awards aim to recognise the contributions of staff teams, settings and individuals across England who work to support children and young people's speech, language and communication. There are a range of categories, including 'Early Years Setting of the Year', 'Primary School of the Year' and the 'Communication Champion' award. For more details or to apply, visit **shinealightawards.co.uk** before 11.59pm, 12 January.

Quick lesson

MAKE YOUR OWN ANIMAL SHELTER...

1 Creatures of all kinds need shelter to stay warm and dry – what animal homes can you find in your local woods or grounds? Can your class make a hideaway for a creature of their choosing based on what they find?

2 Let children choose a location and the materials they wish to use – sticks, leaves, branches and logs are a good place to start, but how can they be combined? What else can they find outdoors to use?

3 Test kids' creations – which shelter copes best with the elements, and why? Try remaking the winner so that it's big enough for children to get into.

If you're looking for more ways to learn outdoors, the Forestry Commission has produced an early years teacher's pack full of curriculum-linked activities. Download it for free at **forestry.gov.uk/earlyyears**

10% *Rise in pupils excluded for physically attacking adults. Of the 610 permanent exclusions from state schools in England in 2014–2015, 290 involved children in primary schools. Visit bit.ly/2cXY77c*

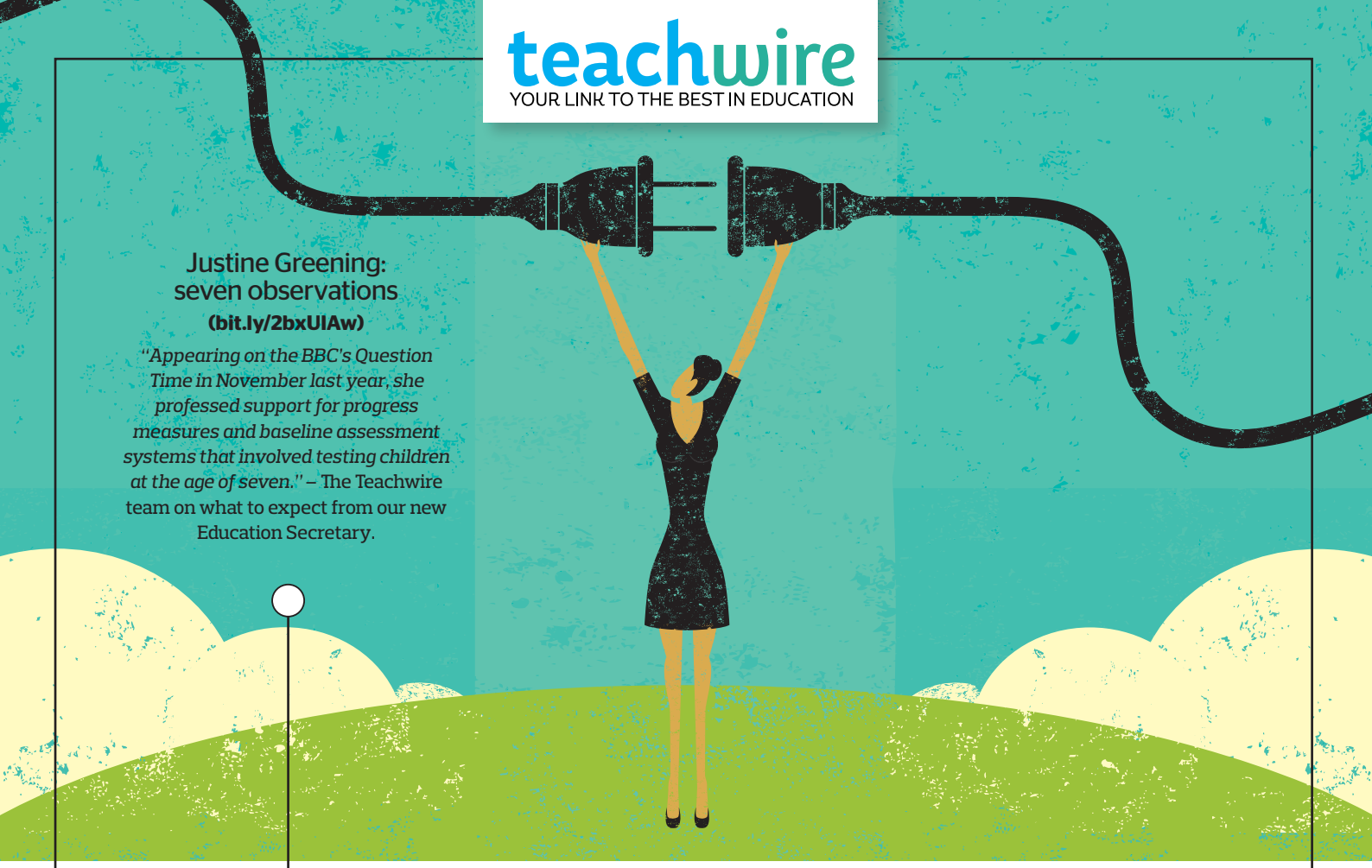
TAKE PART

Beep Beep! Day | 23 November

Brake's fun event for early years and Key Stage 1 returns with engaging activities and resources to help children learn the road-safety basics. It's a great way to raise money for a good cause too – why not invite your children to come dressed in their brightest clothes in return for a £1 donation?
For more information, visit brake.org.uk/beepbeepday

Christmas Jumper Day | Friday 16 December

Save the Children's Christmas Jumper Day is back – and on Friday 16 December silliness will be sweeping the nation. By donning festive knits and donating £1 to Save the Children, your pupils will help save children's lives. Sign up for your free fundraising pack full of tips to inspire you to plan a great day for you and your children at christmasjumperday.org



Justine Greening: seven observations

(bit.ly/2bxUlAw)

"Appearing on the BBC's Question Time in November last year, she professed support for progress measures and baseline assessment systems that involved testing children at the age of seven." – The Teachwire team on what to expect from our new Education Secretary.

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Inspiring talk

(bit.ly/2b62R7W)

"Outdoor provision is particularly important for supporting talk. Not only are there exciting things outside, there's also space and the possibility of not being heard, which for some children is very important." – Anna Ephgrave on nurturing speech.

Positive questioning

(bit.ly/2aXObpl)

"Adults often feel embarrassed or intimidated by a silence in a conversation, but children need up to 10 seconds to process question or comments." – Kathy Brodie explains how to get the most out of our conservations with young children.

1066 and all that

(bit.ly/2ct2BCV)

"It's one of the most famous battles in our history, but if you were to ask us what we learnt about it, all we could really tell you is that William won..." – Natasha Dennis and Tonya Meers suggest going cross-curricular with the Conquest.

The Steiner approach

(bit.ly/2cKraJl)

"Steiner argued that 'Education is a journey, not a race' and said it was necessary to provide 'Education for the head, heart and hands'." – Andrew Brookes on why prioritising imagination over knowledge and technology is the key to producing well-rounded adults.

Deliver your own CPD

(bit.ly/2cDpUEH)

"Being seen as someone who runs effective in-house CPD can be very important to your career progression." – Paul K Ainsworth offers eight tips for those who want to plan their own training (and catch the head's attention!).

"Nobody don't likes me"

Having a good vocabulary is essential to emotional wellbeing – those teaching in the early years shouldn't lose sight of either, says **Debra Kidd...**

Among students of child language acquisition, there is a classic text (McNeill, 1966) that goes something like this: "Nobody don't like me," a child says to his mother. "No," she responds, "say 'nobody likes me'. Cue further failed attempts, before the child finally has a light-bulb moment: "Oh! Nobody don't likes me."

The focus here is on the acquisition of grammar, but of course, few people can read those words and not want to yell, "Tell him he's liked!" It's an example of what happens when we ignore the emotional needs of a child because we are so focused on their 'progress'. The text was written in 1966 but when you hear government ministers bemoaning the fact that two-year-olds are running around nurseries "with no sense of purpose" (Liz Truss, 2014) or that the most important aspect of early years education is to ensure that children are 'school ready', it seems we've not really moved on.

When children arrive at school, there is one thing that will make the most difference to their future. It's not being able to recognise the letters of the alphabet or count to 20, but being able to articulate their ideas and needs. Vocabulary impacts on far more than academic success. It allows us to convey our feelings to others, to assert our needs and to build strong social networks. It is both intellectually and socially necessary, and impacts on both behaviour and emotional health.

Increasingly, Reception teachers report that they are dealing with children with extreme language delay. Others report gaps in vocabulary of several thousand words between the most articulate and the least. While Hart and Risley's claim of a 30 million-word deficit in their oft-quoted research is deeply flawed, there is nevertheless compelling evidence that a vocabulary gap matters and that children will, on the whole, carry with them the vocabulary of their parents – in itself very much dependent on experience.

Experience, knowledge and vocabulary are linked. Thus building vocabulary means pulling together a wide variety of experiences for children, both practically in the form of trips and visitors, and imaginatively, using stories and play. Extending and developing vocabulary in school is the single most important thing a teacher can do. Children need to spend more time talking than they do writing, and making this shift happily improves both reading and writing – a win-win situation.

Encouraging talk takes effort. We need to constantly extend and develop the thoughts and utterances of children – even at the very simplest level. If you are dealing with delay in which the child is still in the holophrastic stage of single-word utterances, or even simply pointing to convey their needs, you need to extend every single interaction, taking care to add in additional information. "Cup? Ah, let me pass you the big, red, cup – is that what you wanted? Lovely. What about a drink of juice in that cup?"

You've both extended the request, adding in adjectives to describe the cup, and also asked questions, indicating a two-way conversation and modelling that more information is helpful. These techniques (extending and questioning) can be applied to almost any interaction you have with a child. If they draw a picture, build a Lego structure – whatever it is they are doing, engage them in conversation and give them plenty of opportunities to have to explain and describe their actions, thoughts and motivations. The same rule applies for older children with more language – always extend. Don't dumb down your language either. If a four-year-old can deal with the words Pokémon or Tyrannosaurus Rex, they can deal with anything.

Expose children to as many stories and as many opportunities for role play as you can. Stories show children a wide range of perspectives, opinions and language registers, and taking on the roles of characters encourages children to extend vocabulary into the world of the character, pulling them out of the confines of their own experience. Puppets, soft toys, dressing-up clothes, figurines, etc. should all be freely available to children throughout primary school. They are powerful triggers for talk.

And most of all, listen to them. Don't get distracted by progress targets, SPAG and phonics tests at the expense of their wellbeing. Don't be the mother who corrects her child's grammar instead of finding out why they think they are not liked. Unhappy children don't learn.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Debra Kidd has worked in education for over 20 years, teaching children from the ages of four right through to post-graduate students. She has delivered CPD nationally and internationally.

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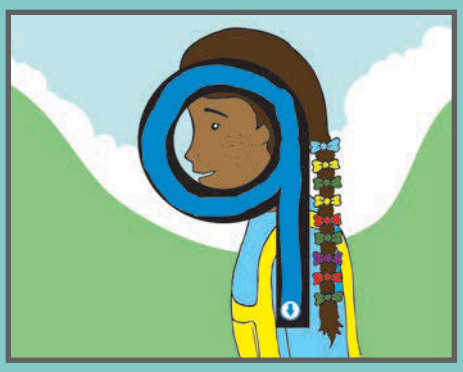

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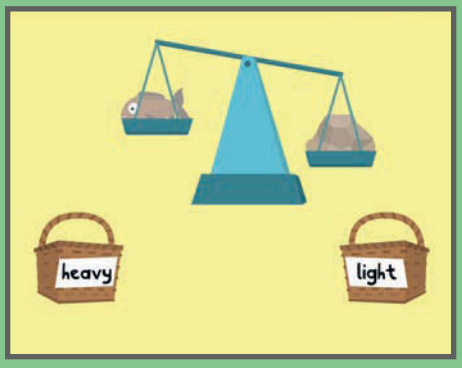

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"We can all learn from early years"

Nursery and Reception might seem like the lost world to the rest of us, but the best Foundation Stage classrooms are home to some truly inspiring teaching, says **Julie Price-Grimshaw...**

First, a confession. I used to avoid going anywhere near the early years (and was slightly uneasy about Key Stage 1). When one of my colleagues asked about my 'problem' with early years, I said, "I just don't want to teach in any classroom that's got a spare underwear cupboard." In truth, I was scared because I believed that early years teaching was something that required a special set of skills, and felt that I didn't possess these skills myself. I wasn't alone; when I was leading an inspection once I asked my colleague to come with me to the early years unit, where we saw children playing with piles of jelly on one table and cooked spaghetti on another. He looked on with horror and said, "I'd rather deal with a bunch of Year 9 deviants!"

I maintain my belief that working with children in the early years requires a special skill set. However, I also believe that not only can all practitioners develop some of those skills, but that the great majority of teachers would benefit from looking closely at high-quality teaching and learning in the early years. It is truly fascinating. Now, when I visit a school, I can't wait to go into the early years classrooms.

My change in attitude came about because I was seeing some strategies that didn't seem to work. Many teachers were told that the single most important thing was to 'share the learning objective at the beginning of the lesson' and some believed that if this wasn't done, learning simply wouldn't happen. What I saw was pupils switching off as teachers read out objectives, some of which were very difficult to understand. Teachers would then get frustrated if the learning didn't progress as they wanted. They'd told the pupils what they were learning – wasn't that enough? Well, no, because telling pupils what you want them to learn doesn't guarantee anything.

One day I was inspecting a school where everything in Years 1 to 6 was built on sharing and copying learning objectives. Unfortunately, it wasn't working particularly well. I went to the early years unit and what I saw took my breath away. The staff had frozen toy dinosaurs in blocks of ice and then placed them in a landscaped dry aquarium. Children, dressed as 'explorers', were watching the ice melt, revealing the dinosaurs. They made notes in their notebooks. They talked about what they were seeing and asked lots of questions. Skilled staff had set up a perfect situation that led to exceptionally high-quality learning. It was no surprise that children in the early years made outstanding progress.

Early years staff tell me that, over recent years, they've felt bogged down by various framework changes and assessment requirements. Nevertheless, I often find that the early years is the place to go if I want to see great learning. I never cease to be amazed by the ingenuity of early years practitioners in creating situations that generate a genuine appetite for learning. Just before the summer break I watched as a group of four-year-olds played with a large water container with a tap, working out that the tap ceased to work when the water dropped below a particular level. Their conversations were enthralling. Watching a little girl playing with a doll's house and making up wonderful stories about her characters was a joy, especially as it reminded me of my own favourite activity as a child.

Whatever is imposed upon us, this creativity that fosters a real passion for learning must never be lost; in fact, I would like to see many of these strategies replicated in classrooms from Year 1 to Year 11 and beyond. The most skilled early years practitioners know exactly when to lead and when to step back. They know what questions to ask and how to answer children's questions in such as way that it leads to more learning. And, importantly, they never undervalue the power of creativity and imagination. I recently heard the author Skye Byrne say, "I believe that imagination is intelligence." I know that many of you will relate to this.

I'm already looking forward to my next early years visit.

Julie's book *Self-propelled learning and effective teaching* is available on Amazon.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julie Price Grimshaw is a teacher, teacher trainer, and education consultant (selfpropelledlearning.co.uk). She has been involved in school inspections since 2001.

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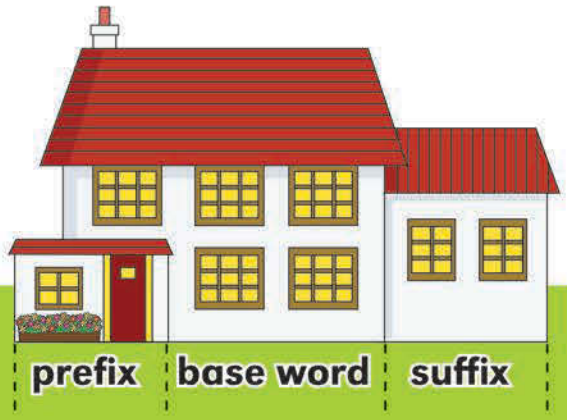

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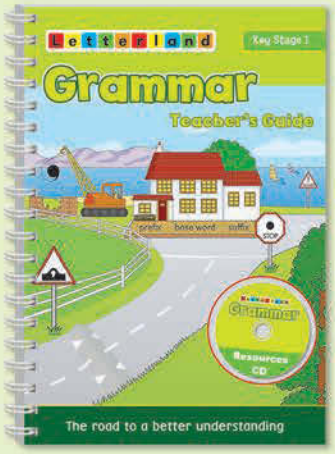

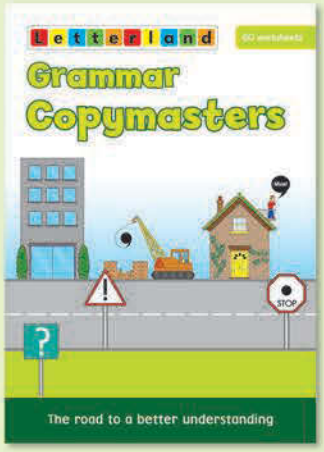

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Do the right thing

Helping young children learn to regulate their own behaviour is just as important as teaching them their times tables, says **Sue Cowley...**

One of our key goals as educators is to teach our children how to regulate their own behaviour. Not only will this help them succeed at school, it's also crucial in creating a properly functioning society. Rather than encouraging 'good behaviour' to earn a reward or to avoid a punishment, our aim should be for children to 'do the right thing' because it is 'the right thing'. This is as much a part of an education, as learning to read or do your times tables.

Nursery: Starting to separate

Although some children ease smoothly into an early years setting, for others transitions can feel traumatic. One of the first behaviours children need to develop is the confidence to cope with new places, people and experiences. Small children see themselves as being at the centre of the universe; they must learn that sometimes their immediate desires cannot take centre stage, that other people matter too. The children begin to play their part in a community of learning where everyone works together. To help achieve a successful separation...

> have a clear settling-in policy that supports children and parents/carers in making the separation.
>develop links between home and school, using home visits and frequent communications;
> build confidence gradually; have lots of routines to help children feel secure.
> incorporate children's interests into your day, e.g. by using 'show-and-tell' activities or by basing the learning around the children's favourite topic.

Reception: Learning to listen

In order to learn effectively, children need to learn how to listen. Early on, listening happens mostly in small groups, or one to one. But by the time children start Reception they must be able to listen as part of a class. The ability to focus on what the teacher (and their peers) are saying will stand them in good stead for their future school careers. To develop good listening behaviour...

> incorporate lots of listening activities into your day; create opportunities for children to learn how to do it.
> gradually increase the amount of time you ask children to sit still and listen as a class;
> encourage active listening by speaking slowly, enunciating clearly and using tone and facial expressions.
> use pauses when you speak to your class; encourage children to bring their attention to you, rather than you doing all the work to get them focused.

Year 1: Increasingly independent

When I ask teachers about the behaviours that worry them, they often mention children's overdependence. "They're constantly asking me for help," they say. To an extent, this is normal – your children admire and want to please you – but a key aim is to help them become independent learners. We can sometimes be guilty of encouraging overdependence. It's a tricky balance between supporting children's learning, and letting them make their own mistakes. To build independent behaviour...

> strike a balance between repeatedly showing your children how to do things (e.g. tying laces) and letting them have a go (messily) by themselves.
> accept that mistakes are part of learning; don't try to short circuit the process by doing too much of the work yourself.
> give the children structures to encourage them to separate their learning from your teaching, for instance, asking them to try 'three before me' (i.e. three strategies they use before asking for help).

Year 2: Extending empathy

It can take children a long time to understand that other people have feelings, and that their behaviour impacts on others. Empathy is at the heart of better behaviour, because when we're working as a class group, we must understand that what our peers need is as important as what we need. To help develop empathy...

> be explicit about how behaviour has an emotional impact on other people: "How do you think Jenny felt when that happened?"
> encourage sharing, turn-taking and kindness; highlight social and emotional skills.
> use stories to build empathy; stories help us to understand how other people experience the world and to literally put ourselves 'in someone else's shoes'.
> model the behaviour you want to see; how does your own behaviour make children feel?
> be honest when you make mistakes, and never be afraid to apologise when you get it wrong.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sue Cowley is an author and teacher trainer, and helps to run her local preschool. She is the author of *The Seven V's of a Great Early Years Setting.*

ADD SOME DRAMA TO THEIR PLAY

Looking for ways to keep your children's learning playful and productive? Introducing opportunities to explore stories and learn in role will have the desired effect, says **James Clements...**

Play sits at the heart of how young children explore new ideas and build an understanding of the world. Opportunities for play are vital as, for children, play *is* learning. The greatest challenge for teachers lies in keeping the best aspects of play central to the classroom as children grow older. How can we keep them learning and ensure it's a meaningful and productive part of the curriculum? One solution is drama. Not the type of drama that is about putting on a play or performing a class assembly, but the playful type of drama that gives children the opportunity to explore stories, characters and issues. This is the type of drama that might well be indistinguishable from play, but for children can give them a very real and valuable experience. Let's look at two examples of recent projects that bring drama and play together...

'The Three Little Pigs'
Oak Class (Reception)

1 Introduction
The project begins with the children listening to different versions of *The Three Little Pigs* over a week. They listen to the teacher tell the story, share books and even explore an interactive app version.

2 Play
Once they're familiar with the story, the children then have the chance for some unstructured play, exploring the characters and acting out the story. The role-play area is set up as the inside of a half-finished brick house, with simple wolf and pig costumes for the children to use. A rail of other costumes stands nearby, so children can introduce new characters should they wish. They also have a pile of foam bricks so they can finish constructing the house.

The small world play table features models of the characters and the raw materials (straw, sticks and building blocks) for the children to play the story, creating their own houses for the pigs whenever they wish.

3 Drama
In role as one of the pigs, the teacher arrives to ask the children for their help. She's worried because she's heard a big bad wolf is coming to eat her. Would the children be able to help? Over the next two afternoons the children work on two tasks:

> Firstly, every child designs a wolf-proof house. They draw their buildings, adding anti-wolf devices. As well as the obvious solid bricks, high fences and strong locks, the children invent a whole host of other features: wolf detectors that sound an alarm, wolf-sized holes dug in the ground, and even a special type of wall that squirts out a jet of cold water when huffed and puffed upon.

> Secondly, the children are taken in small groups to build a new house for the pig out of boxes and large pieces of cardboard. They have complete control of the process, with the teacher in role as the pig sitting forlornly nearby, worrying about the wolf. She interjects to settle any disagreements, keep everyone involved ("What do you think, Tom?") and hurry them up ("I think I can hear a howl getting closer!"). Once the house is finished, the teacher urges the children to hide inside, before returning in role as the wolf to try (unsuccessfully) to blow the house in.

Over the course of the project, the children have the opportunity to draw and write for a real purpose; to work together as a team, practising their communication skills; to become familiar with a story in a variety of different ways; and to have a lot of fun. Time well spent in an EYFS classroom.

'Adventures in Space'
Beech Class (Year 2)

1 Introduction
As a hook to the unit, a mysterious poster appears in the classroom asking for volunteers to travel into space. Of course, the teacher denies all knowledge of the poster and where it has come from.

2 Drama
The next morning, the teacher begins the lesson in role as the captain of the *Starship Nautilus*, explaining that he's looking for a crew for a mission to explore a newly discovered solar system. He tells the children that there are four different roles available on

board and over the course of the morning the children will have the chance to try them out, before applying for a job.

3 Play

The children move around a carousel, trying out each of the different roles on board the ship. They are:

> Engineering Officer – the children are presented with junk modelling materials and challenged to create a new piece of equipment for the ship.

> Science Officer – using books and tablets, the children research the outer planets of the solar system and beyond.

> Communication Officer – the children are given a sheet of unfamiliar hieroglyphs and the key to translate them. They must read a message and write a reply.

> Security Officer – there are two tasks: PE exercises to prove their fitness (overseen and recorded by a TA) and a map of the spaceship to annotate, identifying possible sources of danger.

4 English

Then the children write a job application for one of the roles. They need to think carefully about the requirements of the job and why they are particularly suited for it. They are encouraged to reflect on their personal attributes and to draw on the play tasks from earlier. While some of the children reflect on themselves ("I'm good at talking and listening to my friends"), others throw themselves into role and make some creative additions to their CVs ("I have a black belt in lightsaber fighting" and "I speak 16 galactic languages and know all the types of alien"). Claims that will certainly help them to stand out when applying for a real job one day!

5 Drama

In role as the crew of the *Starship Nautilus*, the teacher and children spend an afternoon in the hall devising and acting out the story. The teacher narrates parts of the story with the children performing alongside. In other parts, the teacher takes on the role of different characters, and other sections are games undertaken in role. Over the course of the afternoon the children crash-land a spaceship, explore a strange planet and encounter hostile aliens. Thankfully, they make it back safely in time for the end of the day.

Drama and play give children the chance to explore new ideas and concepts, and to behave in different ways in an imaginary world where anything is possible. As Maria Montessori famously put it, "Play is the work of the child." So no matter how old the class are, head to the hall and get the children working hard!

GET YOUR ACT TOGETHER

FOUR HANDY TECHNIQUES FOR DRAMA AND PLAY...

Teacher in role

The teacher plays a role in the drama, prompting action, asking questions or leading the children through the story.

Hot-seating

A character from the drama is interviewed by the group about his or her behaviour or thoughts. As well as the teacher, different members of the class can take the role of the same character.

Whoosh!

The teacher narrates the story and the children can join in, taking up roles as characters (or even scenery!) and performing them. When the teacher says "whoosh!" the children return to their seats ready for the next section.

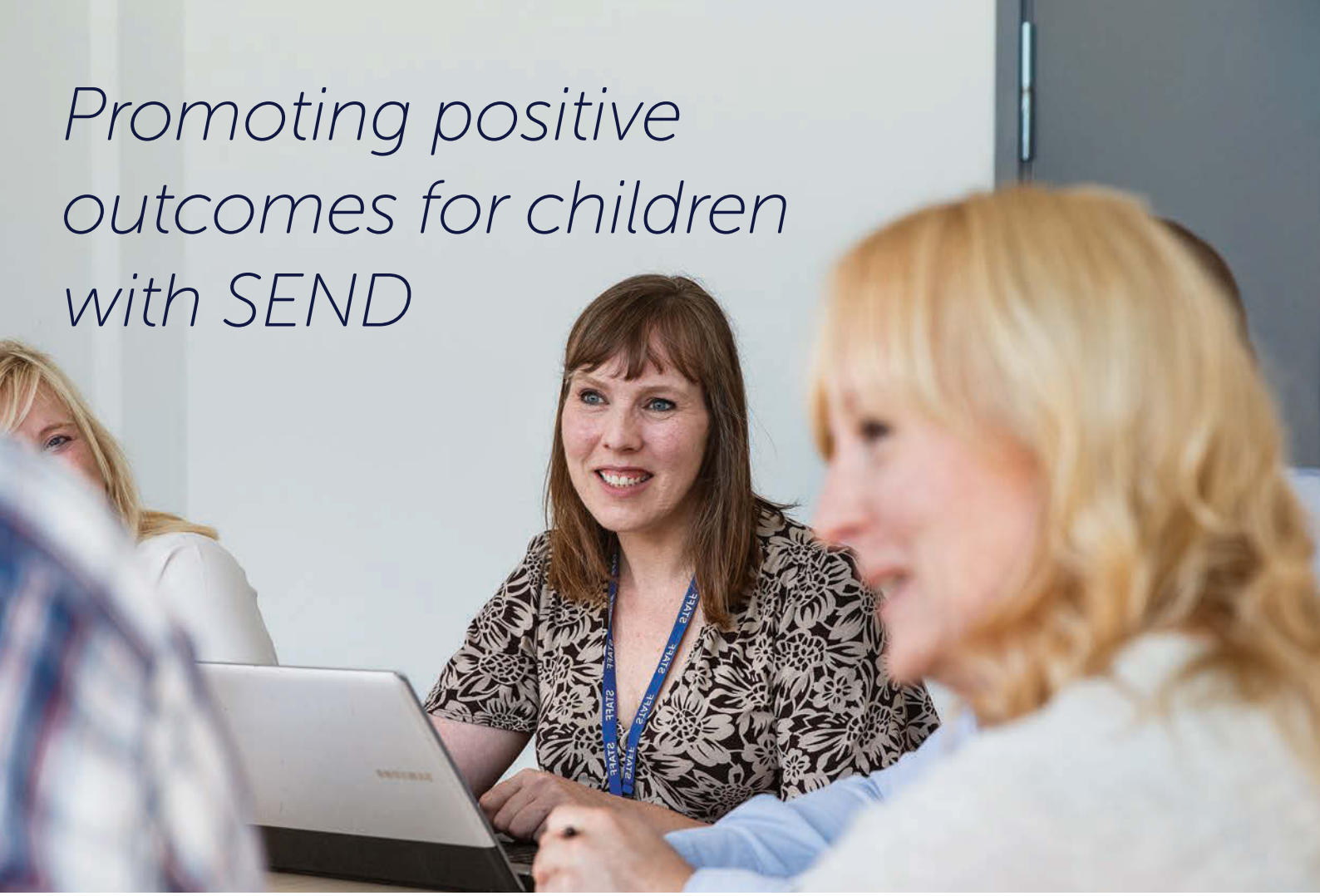
Thought-tracking

While taking part in the drama, children can be asked to freeze. When tapped on the shoulder, they share the thoughts of their character.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Clements is an English adviser and the founder of ShakespeareandMore.com. Twitter: @James_ShMore

Promoting positive outcomes for children with SEND



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"ASSESSMENT? *It doesn't have to be this way"*

Chaos, a fiasco, ridiculous – **Jennie Jones** shares some choice words on her most recent SATs experience...

I'm a Year 2 teacher of 20 years' experience who has only just survived this academic year, despite working in a great school with a supportive leadership team. All because of the SATs.

I've taught Year 2 for 10 years now, so have experienced SATs in all their forms. I spent the last 12 months waiting for the next DfE missive to hit my desk, wondering what I'd have to change in, or add to, my ever-growing assessment folders. When the panic really struck, I had to contend with the 'clarifications' – mixed messages that were quickly outdated, adding to the sense of confusion. I spent hours making, sourcing and updating resources – if anyone out there wants a quick money-earner, three reading books featuring all the common exception words and suffixes would be great!

My class worked very hard. They are bright, intelligent children, and tried their best to learn and achieve as many of the standards as they could. We had SPAG lessons, booster groups and regular tests alongside as much fun, active, creative, child-centred learning as I could cram in, while trying to ignore rising levels of stress and exhaustion. I spent an average of 10 hours every weekend assessing and tracking, and for what? I knew that even with the best teaching and highest level of learning, a number of my children, alongside other Year 2 children across the country, would just not be independently using exclamation sentences or accurately spelling suffixes on at least three separate occasions naturally in their writing. They are not failing the assessments, the assessments are failing them.

Picture the scene, I'm sat at home with a pile of 30 books and my two writing assessment folders. I'm marking their writing and praising their efforts, because that's what I do. I highlight the use of words like 'sarcastic', 'unbelievably' and 'inter-galactical', none of which are spelt correctly. I'm praising the use of speech – for example, the child who said Traction Man was thinking 'This is not the time to be dollying around' as he put on his green knitted romper suit with matching bonnet. I want to enjoy their writing, but instead I'm scanning it for contraction words, common exception words and suffixes. I would love to know who thought the word 'steak' (as in medium rare) was an appropriate common exception word for six-year-olds to be assessed on, a word they would use naturally three times in their writing!

I hate my checklists and highlighter pens because they are not there to inform my future planning; they're there so I know exactly why children are going to fail Year 2. With one missing standard, only two evidences of exclamation sentences or not enough common exception words correctly spelt, they are relegated to working towards Year 2 standards.

It doesn't have to be this way. I have no problem with assessing children, finding areas of difficulty and planning and teaching to address these. It's the secure fit concept that's wrong when applied to these assessments. One statement requires children to use and spell most words with common suffixes. The only problem is, what does most mean? If one moderator thinks it's 70% and another thinks it's 90%, how are these results comparable? Have open, honest and challenging standards with agreed percentages and then at least we'll know what we're aiming to achieve and surpass.

Some might say I'm overreacting, that the rules aren't that strict. Well sorry, they are. My life began again on 22 June 2016 when we put in our data. I slept, I read (books, not work!). I reintroduced myself to my husband, who hadn't really seen me for four months. I stopped crying, stressing, not sleeping and hiding in my cupboard. Of course, in the last week of term, the interim standards for 2017 arrived... and so it begins again.

But I'm determined this year will be different. My class will enjoy teaching and learning, and so will I. My class will do their best, and so will I. My class will continue to enjoy school, and so will I. I will turn my back on piles of paper and folders, and focus myself on what's really important: the education, happiness and successful future of my class, and my mental health, wellbeing and the moments of joy this job brings every day.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennie Jones is a primary teacher from London.

HANDS-ON MATHS

Don't take the sedentary approach to mathematical learning in Reception – it pays to be practical, says **Judith Dancer...**

I am a very lucky person as I have had the privilege, for over 25 years, to visit many children and their teachers in schools. As an early years maths specialist, I have seen many changes in both the content and the teaching strategies used during the Reception year. Schools vary enormously, but I am becoming increasingly aware of a decrease in high-quality outdoor play, and an increase in sitting down indoors and passive 'maths' with books, cards and pictures, and an emphasis on written numerals.

Here I want to stress the importance of practical maths experiences throughout the Reception year. If you already provide lots of 'hands-on' maths, then you will be reassured and may pick up some new ideas. If you are working in a less practical learning environment, this article may prompt you to rethink how your school is meeting the needs of young maths learners.

The primary aim of early years practitioners should be to nurture all children as confident, capable mathematicians for the future. Of course, *what* children learn is important, but *how* they learn is even more crucial. Young children, throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage and beyond, learn through investigating, exploring, talking, problem-solving and, quite simply 'doing' things. In the Reception year, children need adults who create a continuous learning environment that supports their growing mathematical understanding and also provide experiences which focus specifically on aspects of maths learning.

The Early Learning Goals for Mathematics are not always as transparent as they could be, but the goal for numbers is quite clear when it states 'using objects, they add and subtract'. There is no reference to written calculations, although of course, many children will develop their own mathematical mark making to support their mathematical thinking. Children need to be able to calculate in practical and meaningful situations. Another emphasis in the ELGs is that children will 'use everyday language to talk about size, weight, capacity, position'. Adults need to be very clear about the mathematical vocabulary children need to hear and use, model its use on a daily basis and provide practical experiences that promote mathematical talk.

Using number rhymes

On entry to the Reception year, children will have had very different experiences. Some will be very confident with a wide range of number rhymes that will support their early number sense. But others may have no knowledge of number rhymes. At the beginning of the year, focus on a set of core number rhymes every day – focus on one rhyme each week so that children become confident. Make collections to support the number rhymes and use them with planned activities. Bake real currant buns, splash speckled frogs in the water tray, fit 10 soft toys in a cardboard box bed, or knock down 10 green bottle skittles.

Authentic resources

Children need access to authentic, real-life resources that they can use to explore their growing mathematical understanding. These could include the following items:

> Measuring tapes
> Real coins, with wallets, purses and money boxes
> Kitchen balances and scales and bathroom scales – digital and mechanical
> Sand timers, kitchen timers and stopwatches
> Clocks and watches – digital and analogue
> Measuring jugs, spoons and kitchen equipment
> Spirit levels and plumb lines
> Address books, calendars, diaries, recipe books and phones
> Tinned foods, empty food cartons and real vegetables

ASSESS YOUR PRACTICE

EIGHT THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN PLANNING FOR PRACTICAL MATHS LEARNING IN THE RECEPTION YEAR...

> Are number lines, number squares and height charts regularly *used* by adults and children?
> Do children have access to *authentic* resources to support their maths learning?
> Do practitioners *identify* children's own mathematical learning throughout the provision?
> Do maths displays *celebrate* children's maths learning and support further learning?
> Are *number rhymes* used, on a regular basis, to support children's understanding of number?
> Is *mathematical vocabulary* and talk modelled on a daily basis, alongside all speaking and listening?
> Do children have opportunities to explore shape and space on a *large scale* – with hollow wooden blocks and den-making equipment?
> Do practitioners *plan* specifically for maths in home corner and role-play areas?

– to find out more about 'heavy' and 'light'

Children are far more likely to use these real-life resources for real purposes, apply their knowledge and also utilise their own home experiences.

Number lines, number squares & height charts

Group times are a great opportunity to model the use of a giant number square and to order numerals on a washing line. But many children, particularly at the beginning of the Reception year, need visual clues to the meaning of number symbols. Consider making a number line with the children – using the correct number of photographs of the children on each card. Make a number line to 10 or 20, and display a laminated version outdoors. Try to include irregular arrangements as part of the display, as well as dice formats to support subitising skills and to avoid an over-reliance on the strategy of always 'lining things up' to count.

Using collections

Children need opportunities to investigate collections of interesting objects that can be sorted in a variety of ways – things that can be explored, moved, played with, talked about and organised. They also need access to bags, trays, baskets, stacking boxes and other containers that make organisation easier. These collections can enhance resources in a maths reference area:

> Natural objects – pebbles, shells, conkers, twigs
> Boxes and bags
> Buttons, beads or badges
> Socks and gloves
> Neckties – that can be used as non-standard measures
> Treasure, including bangles, necklaces and beads
> Key rings and fridge magnets

Promoting mark making

We need a reason to write, and so do children. Make the most of children's competitive instinct to encourage them to use tallies to score for target games outdoors. They may begin by using pebbles or beads to keep a tally, but encourage them to use clipboards, flipcharts or whiteboards and markers to keep score too. Value their own recording – using pictures, symbols, dots, numerals or a mixture of these. Model the use of a 'five tally' – four vertical lines and one horizontal across, to support counting in fives and tens. Develop maths mark making caddies too – plastic tool boxes, or covered cardboard bottle carriers filled with exciting resources to support mark making. Consider adding fancy markers, small lined note pads, special post-it notes, sticky labels, flexible animal-shaped rulers or large coloured paper clips to the caddies.

EXTRA IDEAS

Exploring mathematics in the early years should be fun for both children and adults, but sometimes it can be hard to know where to begin and where to find out more. On the Foundation Years website you can find 10 'at-a-glance guides' designed to help you – visit foundationyears.org.uk/mathematical-resources

Further reading

Foundations of Mathematics: an active approach to number, shape and measures, Skinner, C and Stevens, J (2012) Bloomsbury

Mark Making Matters: young children making meaning in all areas of learning and development, DCSF (2008), DCSF Publications

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Judith Dancer is an early years maths specialist and author.

"CHILDREN DON'T WANT TO BE BORED"

At Carterhatch Infant School, pupils in nursery, Reception and Year 1 are being given the freedom to learn through play every day – and they've never been more engaged, as *TP* discovered...

Leaving preschool behind and entering primary proper is a major milestone in any child's life, but it doesn't signal the end of the early years: those in the Reception year follow the same EYFS framework utilised in PVI settings and nursery classes across the land. There is a sense in many quarters, though, that Reception should be a more formal take on the Foundation Stage – teacher-led provision, designed to prepare children fully for the more structured environment of primary school proper.

Undoubtedly many Reception classes are more formal than other early years settings – and there's a debate to be had about whether that's a good or bad thing – but there are also those who embrace free-flow and the value of play in the same way as any high-quality nursery or preschool. Certainly nobody could accuse the Reception provision at 'outstanding' Carterhatch Infant School, situated in the London Borough of Enfield, of being too formal: here children are allowed to pursue their learning without adult interference for the majority of every day. But it doesn't stop there, as the school's uncompromisingly child-led philosophy has been extended into Year 1, giving children the freedom to learn through play for far longer than is the norm.

If you're now imagining a chaotic free-for-all, teachers locked in cupboards for their own safety, think again. "Everyone who visits us comments on how calm it is here," Anna Ephgrave, Assistant Headteacher for Early Years, tells us, "but what they're actually saying is, 'The children are busy, they're occupied.'" Anna isn't exaggerating; it really is noticeable how engaged children are at Carterhatch – and afforded the freedom to explore their own interests, they're flourishing...

1 Get them involved

For Carterhatch's Reception-aged children – split across three classes – and those who attend its sessional nursery class, every day is a blank canvas. Classrooms and sizeable outdoor areas alike offer a host of resources to fire imaginations, and opportunities to practise physical skills abound. Within these areas children are encouraged to make a beeline for whatever takes their fancy, and stay there until they've had enough. There are, it's important to say, clear boundaries in place to ensure children access what's available in an appropriate and educational manner – intensive one-to-one coaching is employed from the outset to teach them about the school's routines, how to share resources and use them safely, and how to tidy away after themselves, for example – but there are no pre-planned, focus activities at all.

To some, it might seem a slightly laissez-faire approach to educating children with so much to learn, even more so when you consider that the school's intake includes above average numbers of children with EAL, Pupil Premium funding and special educational needs; but there is a very simple belief behind the practice: children learn best when they're tuned in to what they're doing. "When a child is totally absorbed, digging in the mud, for example, we don't actually know what they're learning, but that's not necessarily what's important – what's important is that they're deeply engaged in it," Anna explains. "I see it all the time at other schools: an adult will call the children to come and do a focused task, they get up because they're good children and their brains switch off. They do the task, then go back to where the real learning's happening, while the adult's attention is focused elsewhere.

"Our only measure of quality here is Ferre Laevers' Levels of Involvement – that's how we assess every child, every bit of equipment and every adult," she tells us. "If we're not getting Level 5, we keep changing things and changing them and changing them until we are."

2 Less is more

With children very much in charge of their own learning at Carterhatch, teachers and assistants take a back seat both indoors and out. However, this doesn't mean that no teaching takes place. "Ten minutes of teaching at the right time is worth 10 hours of teaching when children aren't interested," Anna says. "Our staff look out for the moments when children have been deeply involved, but suddenly come across a little problem. Their involvement might drop or they might abandon what they're doing altogether if the adult isn't there to step in and get them over that little

PLACES TO LEARN

A great deal of attention is paid to the learning environment at Carterhatch. "The environment is the key," Anna explains. "Everything is out here – there's nothing in cupboards – but it's all immaculately stored and organised, and the children know that if they've finished with something, they have to put it back."

An emphasis has been placed on challenging children – trikes have been sidelined in favour of bikes, for example: "A trike is not a challenge; it's not engaging, so what are they learning from it?" – and risky play is embraced. On the value of the latter, Anna is clear: "I think taking risks with wood working and climbing, for example, leads children to be able to take risks with reading, writing and maths. They know that people here are going to support them when they try to do something new, and that gives them the confidence."

hump, allowing them to carry on. So while there are no pre-planned activities here, you will see adults working with groups, responding to children's interests."

Not only does this approach leave children free to pursue whatever is enthusing them at any given time, it also allows staff to make swift interventions to support their learning and development. "Often, when teachers see something happening that indicates children need support, they will plan a focus activity to look at it at a later date, maybe the following week. But by then the children's interests will have moved on," Anna argues. "If you see three or four children who are writing their 'a' the wrong way, that's the time to step in and show them how to do it the right way, rather than waiting. If, as is the case here, the adults aren't sitting do a focus activity, they're free to respond to those moments."

Though free of forward planning, teachers at Carterhatch certainly don't have it easy. "Working in this way can be very difficult," says Anna. "When we arrived this morning, we didn't know what was going to happen, and every day is like that. Staff have to be confident, and they have to be willing to follow the children, whatever they're doing. The children have amazing ideas, so it's about having the resources and the staff who can work with them."

3 Time to play

Moving from a Reception class with a stringently child-led pedagogy to Key Stage 1 can be a shock to the system for young children, and steering learning too far towards the academic too soon is counterproductive in Anna's view: "In many schools, Year 1 feels like secondary school, with formal, subject-specific lessons and an approach that implies 'one size fits all' – which, of course, is wrong," she says. "Ill-fitting education leaves many children bored and stressed, and extinguishes their desire to learn. In many schools the curriculum has been narrowed down to virtually nothing but literacy and maths – as if these subjects are ends in themselves, rather than being tools that can lead to exciting learning in infinite areas. It's a tragedy for many five- and six-year-olds in England."

The solution at Carterhatch has been to extend practice from the early years up to Year 1. Play is now the focus, and while some concessions are made to the demands of the curriculum, the result is very much a continuation of the Reception year. "With all learning in Year 1, no one has told the children what, where, when or how to play," Anna stresses. "They pursue their own interests, ideas and challenges in a superb enabling environment, supported by responsive, skilled, empathetic staff. Each day we have short, direct, adult-led teaching slots for reading, phonics and maths. But these are timetabled at the beginning and end of morning or afternoon sessions, so that there are still long periods where children can get deeply involved in their play – applying their literacy and maths skills where appropriate, in order to further their learning.

"When you talk about play in a learning context, some people instantly dismiss it as something like a few games of Connect 4, Snap or Hangman, but for me, play is 'whatever a child does in order to satisfy her desire to learn'. It's a serious business."

OBSERVING LEARNING

Key roles

At Carterhatch each Reception teacher is key person to every one of the children in her class, while the nursery class's teacher fulfils the same role for those in her care. This way of working has, under Anna's guidance, replaced a more traditional system that saw some groups of children made the responsibility of learning assistants. "It wasn't equal for all the children," Anna says. "It's a lot for teachers to take on, but ultimately they have responsibility."

Focus children

In Reception most observations are recorded after the event, leaving teachers free to observe and teach in the classroom. To manage their workload, they focus on three children each week, each child receiving this attention once per term. "At the end of the week they end up with a learning journey for each child," Anna says. "Inside, each entry includes an observation, identifies an opportunity for teaching and details the teaching that has taken place – we call this our planning, so we have to show how we're influencing children's development by making suggestions, modelling and encouraging. It's that traditional cycle of observation, assessment, teaching and outcome in a snapshot."

4 Try it yourself

"Some people say, 'Fine, this works for you, but it wouldn't work anywhere else,'" Anna tells us. "Well, yes, it can – if you get the environment right, and you get the adults working and being responsive. I don't think you need a lot of space necessarily. I do consultancy all over the country and have been to schools, nurseries, preschools and childminders and set this up."

However, as Anna notes, the pressure from above to adopt a more formal pedagogy is intense enough to dissuade many. "There's a big culture of fear in education at the moment – that children won't get their required levels in Year 1 and Year 2," she says. "A lot of headteachers don't have an early years background. They don't understand how a very formal Reception can damage people in the long term. They still think that if you sit children down earlier, they'll be better off. They don't believe you can get children reading and writing and using maths working in this way, but you absolutely can."

Anna Ephgrave is the author of *The Nursery Year in Action* and *The Reception Year in Action* (David Fulton). Her new book, *Year One in Action*, will be published in 2017. Visit routledge.com

"Children at this stage want to be active, autonomous and unique learners – exploring, discovering, creating and taking risks. In other words, they want to play."

ANNA EPHGRAVE | ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER FOR EARLY YEARS

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

A traumatic transition from Reception to Year 1 can set young children's attainment back, so let's make sure we take the time to get it right, says **Alistair Bryce-Clegg...**

As adults we can find the transitions that we make in our lives nerve-wracking and unsettling. Whether we're starting a new job or moving to a new area, we often don't feel happy and settled until things become a bit more familiar.

Children experience these sorts of emotions too – in fact they are likely to be greatly magnified. As adults we have a great deal of prior knowledge and experience of life to draw on, whereas children have significantly less. They don't know from experience that everything is likely to be all right, or have strategies for dealing with the situation if it isn't. For this reason, good transitions are crucial both for children's emotional wellbeing and their potential for attainment.

Help them feel 'at home'

The greatest inhibitor to attainment in schools is children's self-confidence and level of anxiety. When children feel comfortable and 'at home' in their environment, they are far more likely to succeed. During the period of adjustment that follows a transition, children's potential for maximum attainment is drastically reduced.

To help alleviate the anxiety that children might have, it is really useful to harmonise approaches to teaching and learning at the point of transition. If children are moving between settings then this can be tricky, but if they are staying with a setting and moving to the next year group it's a far simpler process.

As well as having some quality time to discuss transition with all of the adults who will be involved, it is really valuable to assess children's emotional welfare, wellbeing and involvement before and after transition. Tools like the Leuven Scales for Wellbeing and Involvement are a good resource for this. One thing to keep at the forefront of your thinking is that children should enjoy the transition process – not just experience or endure it, but actually enjoy it. For this to happen it needs to be planned well in advance. If practical, pre-transition visits should be regular occurrences throughout the year, and not start up in the last week of the Summer term!

The most important things to remember about transition is that effective transition takes time, and that it should be considered a process rather than an event.

A transition project

The advantages of this approach to transition are highlighted by a project I was involved with. Its purpose was to take eight different settings in one local authority and work with them to create an approach to transition that minimised the potential for anxiety and maximised the potential for attainment. Each setting was given a very basic outline of what the focus of the project would be and what they would be expected to produce. The main indicator for success was going to be academic attainment and children's levels of wellbeing and involvement using the Leuven Scales.

I asked each of the schools to choose six Reception children at the beginning of the project and to carry out a Wellbeing and Involvement assessment on them using the Leuven Scales. This assessment would be carried out again as these children moved into Year 1, to see if the setting's existing transition arrangements had had any effect on the results. A year later the same process would be carried out again on six different Reception children in the Summer term, and then again on those children in the Autumn term of Year 1.

Settings were also asked to record more detailed learning logs on all children from each cohort, keeping an example of their reading, writing and mathematics attainment when every Leuven assessment was done.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

> 'Transition is a process not an event. Good transition takes time to achieve.
> One of the biggest inhibitors of children's attainment is their self-confidence. Happy children make effective learners. Are your children happy in their new learning space?
> Where senior leaders understand and support effective transitional, social, emotional and academic outcomes are significantly better.
> Children who do not reach a Good Level of Development by the end of Reception are not going to have made it over the summer holidays! A good Foundation Stage approach on entry to Year 1 is essential for all children.

THE RESULTS

Of the 48 children who were tracked through the first transition, 16 maintained their scores in both wellbeing and

involvement after moving to KS1, while 32 dropped at least one scale point in both wellbeing and involvement. The largest drop in score for wellbeing was 3 points, and the largest drop in score for Involvement was 3 points. The results at this stage indicated that the methods used to support children through this period of transition had a significant impact on the outcomes observed.

The following year, in all settings there was a significant difference in the number of children who maintained their scores during the transition. In those which had seen the least number of changes in staffing or management during the project, all children maintained their end of Reception scores, and in one setting with very effective and embedded transition arrangements, some children actually increased their score.

Overall, 40 children maintained their scores in both wellbeing and involvement. These children had all scored highly in their Reception assessment. No children dropped at least one scale point in both wellbeing and Involvement following transition. The largest drop in score for wellbeing was 1 point, and the largest drop in score for involvement also was 1 point. In one setting all the children maintained their score in both areas.

ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT

Unsurprisingly, there was a direct correlation between levels of wellbeing and involvement, and academic attainment. For children whose levels of wellbeing and involvement fell on entry to Year 1, their academic attainment also dipped. On the other side of the coin, children's attainment also improved in direct correlation to the improvement levels in their wellbeing and involvement. (The children who were tracked using the Leuven Scales across all eight schools were a broad mix of gender and ability. As some children left during the project and their scores could not be completed, the results represented average attainment across all children in all schools.)

LESSONS LEARNED

The results gathered from the project demonstrated that if transition is to be truly effective in maintaining children's interest and enjoyment in school, which will ultimately impact on their potential for attainment, it must be a thought-out and valued process. More specifically, it was apparent that it was important for settings to ensure continuity between different year groups. One of the practitioners involved described children's transition in Year 1 as "hitting a brick wall" – in their setting the changes in EYFS practice had been huge, but this change had not been reflected in Year 1, where practice had remained the same.

Importantly, in settings where the headteacher or senior team had a more in-depth knowledge of the EYFS, progress had been good, but where knowledge was limited, progress was not as developed. Similarly, in settings where practitioner knowledge was developing or not embedded, progress had been slow – but at these times the project became more about effective teaching than transition.

> *To help alleviate the anxiety that children might have, it is really useful to harmonise approaches to teaching and learning at the point of transition.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alistair is an award-winning consultant who writes and trains around all aspects of early years and transition to Year 1. For more information, visit his blog at abcdoes.com. His new book, *Effective Transition into Year One*, will be published by Bloomsbury in Spring 2017.

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10 years of **Toxic Childhood**

A decade ago we warned that children's mental health was being unnecessarily compromised – now things are even worse, says **Richard House...**

Almost 10 years ago to the day as I'm writing this article, writer and fellow childhood campaigner Sue Palmer and I had an open press letter published under the provocative title 'Modern life leads to depression among children' (see goo.gl/6aX6te and goo.gl/TnpVfv). In that letter of September 2006, we expressed our grave concern "at the escalating incidence of childhood depression and children's behavioural and developmental conditions", seeing the latter as stemming from "a lack of understanding, on the part of both politicians and the general public, of the realities and subtleties of child development".

We continued, "In a fast-moving hyper-competitive culture, today's children are expected to cope with an ever-earlier start to formal schoolwork and an overly academic test-driven primary curriculum. They are pushed by market forces to act and dress like mini-adults and exposed via the electronic media to material which would have been considered unsuitable for children even in the very recent past." And we went on to argue – most controversially at the time – that "the mental health of an unacceptable number of children is being unnecessarily compromised, and that this is almost certainly a key factor in the rise of substance abuse, violence and self-harm amongst our young people".

Within hours, the letter had turned into a global news story of tsunamic proportions, with headline news reports appearing across the world's media – Sue and I becoming somewhat improbable media celebrities for weeks to follow. Within a few years, Sue and I were even being approached by school examination boards asking for permission for the letter's text to be included in GCSE and A-level examinations! – such was the cultural impact of the letter, signed by over 100 of the most eminent educationalists and psychologists we could find.

The idea for the letter had emerged from conversations we'd had around the publication earlier that year of Sue's iconic book *Toxic Childhood* (see goo.gl/l1tHwi), with Sue having researched the phenomenon of 'toxic childhood' over several years and me bringing my Steiner background and a severe critique of technological 'modernity' to this meeting of critical minds. Readers may well know that Sue's book has been an international bestseller ever since, the second (and completely updated) edition of which came out last year.

I wish that I were merely reporting an historical event here, but unfortunately not only has nothing much changed since 2006, but on many indicators of children's mental heath and wellbeing, things are substantially worse than they were even then – with a litany of recent research studies reporting massive and burgeoning child mental health issues, with children as young as four or five routinely placed on psychotropic medication, violent attacks launched on teachers, and – scarcely believably – some early-childhood suicides.

In 2006, our dire predictions were commonly dismissed as 'scaremongering' by some high-profile academics, and yet everything we said then has been proven to be correct – and tragically, if anything, a substantial underestimate of just how bad things were. There's also an important link to mental health here, and the ways in which children's development is being inappropriately speeded up in deeply harmful ways – both by a commercially driven technological culture and by anxiety-driven politicians more concerned about 'the needs of the economy' than about the appropriate developmental needs of young children. In previous columns I have coined the term 'accelerationism' to connote these noxious developments.

Perhaps even more shockingly, the *Sunday Telegraph* recently carried a front-page report titled 'Modern life is killing our children' (see goo.gl/M2pBvL). Later this year, Sue, Dr Sharie Coombes and I will be publishing an anniversary open letter which will focus specifically on children's mental health. Parents, teachers and policy-makers need to start looking seriously at how we can protect our children from the worst anti-child excesses of technological modernity – and my columns in forthcoming issues of *Teach Early Years* magazine, for those who read it, will be looking more closely at this vexed subject.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard House is an early years campaigner, a trained Steiner Kindergarten teacher and co-founder of Open EYE and Early Childhood Action. Email richardahouse@hotmail.com

Walk their walk

There are simple steps you can take to scaffold school success for children with SEN or autism, says **Adele Devine...**

You have been invited to a party and really don't want to go, but have no excuse. You say you'll check your diary and hopefully be able to make it. But if the person asking could get inside your head they'd hear you thinking, "No, no, no way! I'd rather do anything, but..."

What if work gave you that same feeling? Of course, work stretches ahead for days, weeks and years – time to look for a different job? Our SEN students may feel this dread about going to school. They may dig in their heels, fake illness, melt down or shut down – anything to avoid those days, those weeks, those years... School is a social minefield, school is full of demands, school can produce anxieties, which may show physically or be internalised emotionally.

So how can we overcome these barriers? How can we support and scaffold success?

Support parents

Start with a home visit, where you will learn so much about parents' support networks (or lack of), their trials, their fears, their hopes and aspirations. Think of the parent as the root or foundation, needing support, nurture, a listening ear and understanding. Build their trust. Let them know that you will never judge. Communicate openly and keep an eye out for that 'last straw'. Look in their eyes and keep on suggesting respite, explaining that the stronger they are, the better they will be at supporting their child.

Improve transitions

Provide visual information before a child transitions. Send home photographs and names of the teachers and children, who will be in the new class. Send home a list of ideas for introducing uniform (if this will be a new thing). Most schools now do 'changeover day', where all students go up to their next class, but this is not enough for all.

If school policy is to mix classes up every year, allow parents the chance to express concerns and preferences. Ensure the parent is not overanxious about change because this will be passed on to the child.

Get their attention

Use the child's interests. Don't start a session by telling the children to sit on the carpet. Think how crowds gather at markets. Gina Davies (ginadavies.co.uk), who is the creative genius behind 'Attention Autism', explains in her training that we must provide "an irresistible invitation to learn". A child should want to come and look and see what is happening. They learn that you are interesting, visually exciting and worth watching.

Provide schedules

Sometimes it seems that schedules are reduced to a tick-box exercise, but used properly they provide a lifeline of information, enabling the child to know what's happening next and helping them to stay on track. Provide a whole-class schedule, but break information down further if necessary with a 'now and next' schedule.

Draw on a wipe-clean whiteboard to break down the structure of a session and cross things out as they finish.

Movement breaks

When a child wriggles, squiggles, fiddles and can't sit still, it's either because the activity they're engaged in is not sustaining their attention, or that it has lasted too long. Rethink how you structure the child's time and make things manageable. Maybe they will need to join the group a little later to avoid waiting. Maybe they will benefit from access to some calming deep pressure before the session starts.

Provide sensory integration equipment, for climbing, bouncing, swinging, etc. A child may require an OT referral and access to an individual sensory diet.

Trust & Time

Build the child's trust. If you say something will happen then it should happen, but if things do change unexpectedly provide a visual such as a 'whoops!' symbol showing that this was not what you had in mind – 'whoops!' it's raining, etc. Have time timers or egg timers close at hand. Ten minutes watching a sand timer will be easier to tolerate than not knowing how long there is to wait; some children need to know.

SENSORY ISSUES

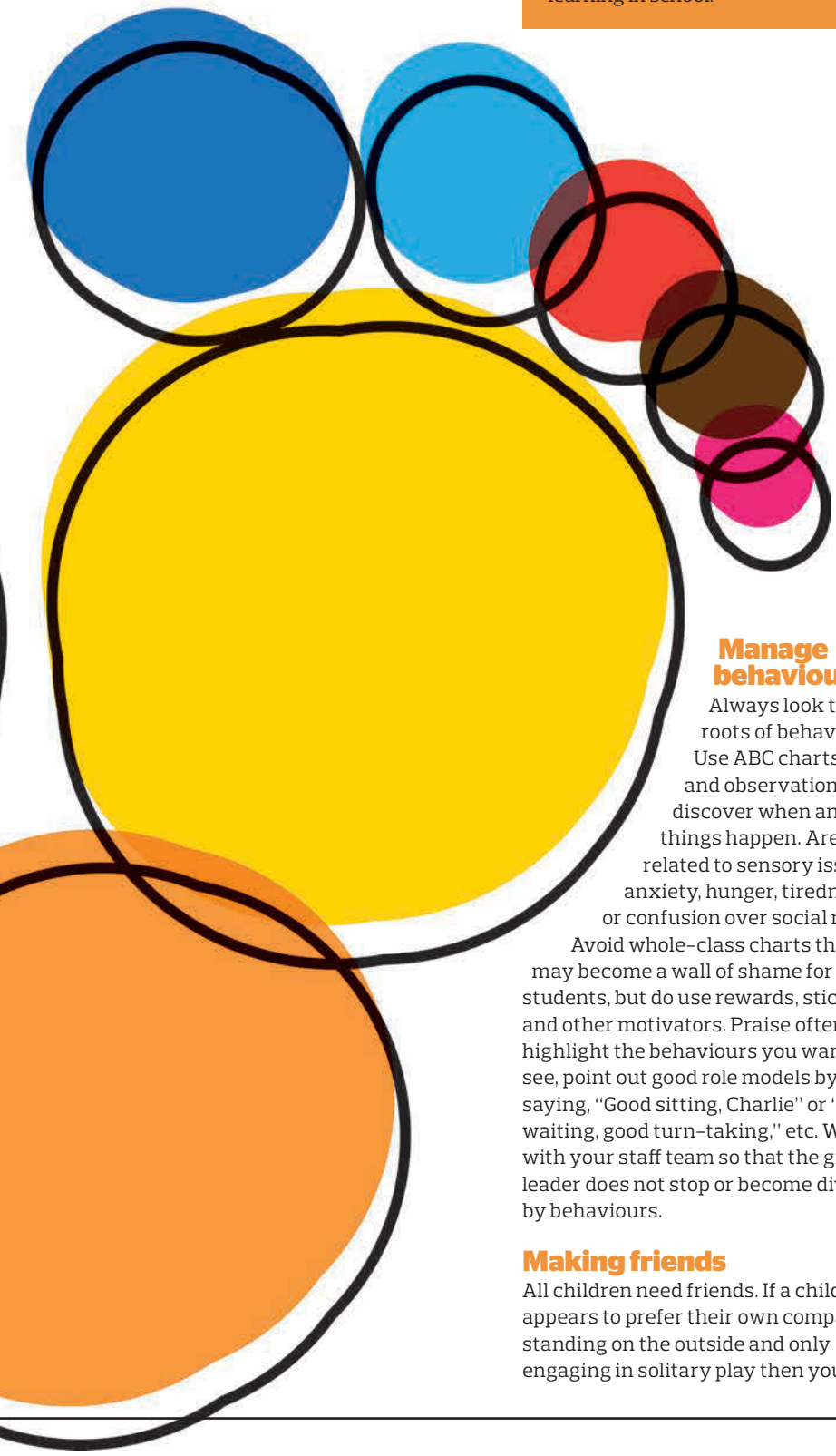
IS YOUR CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT PRESENTING PROBLEMS FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?

THE PROBLEM

Sounds, smells, touch and tastes, lighting, temperature and the presence of overstimulating displays can all cause extreme discomfort and anxiety in children with special educational needs. Sensory issues can cause meltdowns, sensory overload, withdrawal or refusal, all of which can severely disrupt children's learning in school.

THE SOLUTION

Look at your classroom and ensure that there are options to change lighting and that displays are not visually bombarding. If a child covers their ears or shows distress, show empathy; try to hear what they are hearing. Provide access to ear defenders, sunglasses, a quiet area or a dark den. Create calm, be completely consistent and never ever shout.



Manage behaviour

Always look to the roots of behaviour. Use ABC charts and observations to discover when and why things happen. Are they related to sensory issues, anxiety, hunger, tiredness or confusion over social rules? Avoid whole-class charts that may become a wall of shame for some students, but do use rewards, stickers and other motivators. Praise often, highlight the behaviours you want to see, point out good role models by saying, "Good sitting, Charlie" or "Good waiting, good turn-taking," etc. Work with your staff team so that the group leader does not stop or become diverted by behaviours.

Making friends

All children need friends. If a child appears to prefer their own company, standing on the outside and only engaging in solitary play then you must become a bridge to interaction. Do not be forceful, but mirror the child's play, show interest in their interests and copy their vocalisations. Gradually you will become more interesting, other people will become more interesting, and play skills, interaction and communication will develop. Read more about Intensive Interaction by visiting intensiveinteraction.co.uk.

Raising self-esteem

Children listen to how we talk about them and build a self-profile. Ensure that your comments at drop-off are all about their 'can dos', brimming with joy at their 'wows' and hope about what they may be capable of doing next. Show empathy if things do go wrong. Let them talk it through or use Comic Strip Conversations (by Carol Gray) to explain the thoughts behind events. The child must respect your rules, but know that you love them unconditionally, care deeply and will always have their back.

Final thoughts

Henry David Thoreau observed, "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away." Observe the child, try to hear with their ears, see with their eyes and walk their walk. Get to know who they are, what they love, step to *their* beat and learn together.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adele Devine is an author, a teacher at Portesbery School & director of SEN Assist. Her latest book, *Flying Starts for Unique Children* (JKP, £16.99), is available now.

From Counting to Calculation

Dr Paul Swan and **Kelly Norris** explore the development of young children's numeracy skills...

Counting involves much more than just stating numbers one after the other. According to Gelmann and Gallistel (1986), children learn and observe the following principles of counting:

> **Stable order** – the counting numbers must always be said in the same, conventional order
> **One-to-one correspondence** – exactly one counting number is applied to each object being counted
> **Cardinality** – every number is inclusive of every other number before it – hence the last number in the count describes the size of the entire set and not the last object counted.

And furthermore, ideas about how to count:

> **Order irrelevance** – the items can be counted in any order; provided the above principles are followed the count will still be correct.
> **Abstraction** – the same principles can be applied to any set of discrete (separate) objects, regardless of their size or identity (buses, ants or jumps).

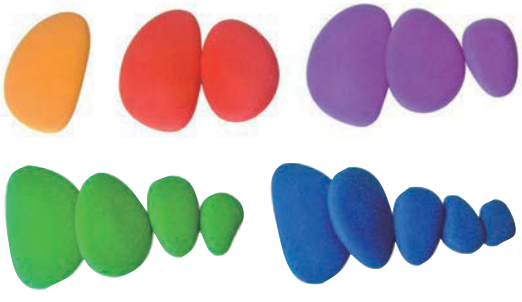
When these principles were first proposed, it was thought that children needed to understand each of them in order to be able to count successfully – that is to say, the counting principles precede counting skill. Subsequently, this has caused great debate, with much evidence indicating that students may learn and reinforce these principles through many successful counting experiences – skill may precede true understanding.

Subitising

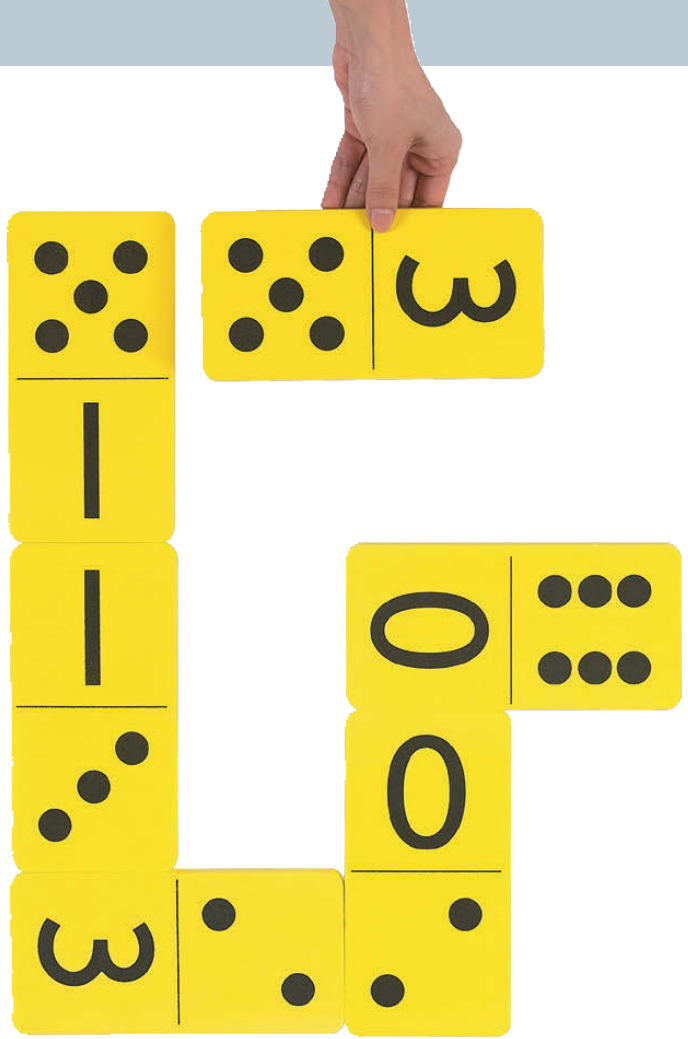
Subitising is one pre-existing skill that is pivotal to developing an understanding of cardinality. As children learn to count small collections (up to 3 or 4), the last number of the count matches what they know to be the size of the collection (through subitising). Hence, the subitising ability helps to confirm the principle that the last number describes the size of the entire set. This cardinality principle can then be applied to counting collections which fall outside the subitising range (above 4).

More complex counting

After developing the ability to count items first in a line, then in more complex arrangements (which involves keeping track of what has been counted), children then learn to count out. Counting out is harder as the counting words need to be coordinated with the motor action of producing the item. This ability is extended to progressively larger collections.



At this point the child is a competent counter, provided they have materials that can be counted: they can solve simple addition and subtraction problems which involve adding or removing some items from a collection by modelling the actions with objects and counting the result. Crucially, students then move beyond counting items that can be perceived (seen, heard, felt) to items that are imagined, such as counters that are covered by a cloth or hidden by a box. Hence, seeing items being counted into a bag or hearing coins fall into a money box is quite different from being shown four counters that are then covered by a box and then shown another, visible counter, and being able to say the total size of the collection is 5. The latter example involves counting mental representations of objects and is the beginning of the ability to think about number in abstract ways, removed from physical objects.



Abstract counting

A critical step occurs when students develop the concept of numbers having their own magnitude, independent of the objects they represent. That is, 5 is always one more than 4 and one less than 6, regardless of whether it is pencils or elephants that are being counted. Children recognise that numbers higher up in the counting sequence (e.g. 8, 9) have greater value than those lower down (1, 2). Furthermore, they realise that it is reasonable to talk about numbers in abstract ways, such as to say "five is more than two" rather than "five cows is more than two cows", or "3 plus 2 is 5" rather than "if there were three cows and two more came there would be five". This conceptual structure is referred to as the "mental number line", as evidence indicates it is represented in the mind as a left-to-right number line.

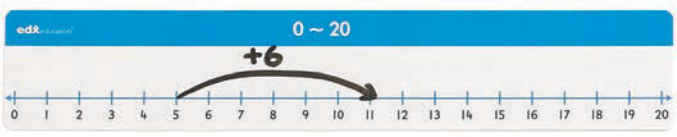
This representation begins with compression at the higher end, with children perceiving 3 and 4 as being further apart than 33 and 34, but gradually becomes more evenly distributed (linear). The mental number line enables children to learn simple arithmetic facts (i.e. number combinations), which become the cornerstone of more sophisticated strategies.

The mental number line

As the mental number line and memory develop, children become capable of their first efficient counting strategy: Counting On. Counting on involves making a judgement about which number in the sum is largest, and then counting on an amount equal to the smaller number, e.g. 2+5 is 5... 6, 7. The mental number line enables children to judge the larger of the two numbers, whilst greater sophistication in reciting the counting sequence means they can start the counting sequence at any point, whilst an understanding of the counting principles leads children to see that it is acceptable to start the count at 5 rather than needing to count the whole collection again. At this point children are keeping track of two mental number lines: one which is the count (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) and another that counts the counts-on (6 and 7 as 1 more, 2 more).

Conceptual subitising

The human brain only has a certain amount of 'mental workspace' at its disposal, and counting procedures that take too long and involve too much effort (e.g. counting from 1) may not lead to the brain learning and storing problems (e.g. 4+6) together with their solutions (e.g. 10). One means through which number combinations may be learned is through conceptual subitising. Quite distinct from perceptual subitising, which involves little or no attention or calculation, conceptual subitising relies on pattern recognition and/or knowledge of part-part-whole relationships. Children may recognise the standard dice pattern for the number 6 without counting, or they may see 2 groups of 3 dots and recognise that the total of 2 groups of 3 is 6. While certainly rapid, conceptual subitising does involve more complex mental processing.



Dr Paul Swan is an award-winning author and mathematics educator, and is working with Edx Education to develop high-quality maths resources. The Edx Education range is distributed in the UK by Commotion Distribution – for more information, call 01732 225 821, email info@commotiondistribution or visit commotiondistribution.com

LEARNING TO CALCULATE

In addition, as students use faster strategies (e.g. counting-on) they arrive at their answers more quickly and the brain is able to make links between the problem and answer, so that once the student has solved the problem correctly a number of times, it no longer needs to calculate the answer that has been stored in long-term memory. These known number combinations make possible a host of other efficient counting and calculation strategies that draw upon known facts to create short-cut strategies, which in turn lead to other number combinations being learned. However, it is important to note that instruction in counting-based strategies alone (e.g. counting-on) is often not sufficient to move children from counting-based to memorisation strategies. Most children need explicit instruction in counting strategies such as those described below:

> Count on from the larger number 1, 2, 3 or 0
> Bonds to ten
> Doubles
> Near doubles
> Bridge Ten

Changing ROOMS

Truly enabling environments are those that entice children to learn and ensure they have no shortage of opportunities to do so. **Kirstine Beeley** suggests nine ways you might improve yours...

During the early stages of the school year you'll no doubt be considering how best to set up your classroom to maximise children's learning. What areas should you create, what displays should you prepare, and how on earth do you fit everything into one tiny room? It can be a challenge, but don't despair – by thinking a little differently, it's possible to plan your environment to ensure that learning becomes a part of the very fabric of your setting...

1 Space to learn

Children naturally need space to move, learn and think. It is not a requirement that there be one table/chair for every child, and a rethink about what furniture you actually need can have a dramatic effect on how your room looks, feels and works.

Young children tend to gravitate to the floor to play, so make sure low-level learning spaces are available. How many children do you actually ever want sitting at any one time? Can focused group input be on a carpet or outdoors? By losing tables and chairs and making your room more open and free flowing, children will be able to access their learning and exploration more freely. Less is definitely more when it comes to working spaces in classrooms.

2 Places to talk

Now you've got more space to work with, you can look more carefully at how your classroom is used. Does everything in your room serve a specific purpose when it comes to supporting learning? Language and communication skills are the route by which children access every other area of learning, so encouraging their development has to be a priority when planning your spaces. Creating small, cosy spaces and nooks where children can explore and talk freely without the pressure of adult intervention is vital in the early years. Using canopies, arches and even the tables you no longer need helps to provide children with spots where they feel safe and secure enough to share their thoughts.

3 Invitations to explore

The key to igniting learning in young children is to grab their imaginations and tap into their natural curiosity. Providing invitations to play that draw children in and encourage them to ask questions and find answers will help to nurture higher-level thinking. Try moving away from traditional display spaces and develop areas for investigation and exploration. Provide children with the tools to explore their own thinking with access to books, magazines and the internet alongside your 'investigation stations'. Encourage children to be 'can't keep away' rather than 'hands off'.

4 Sensory exploration

When setting up any classroom, remember how children learn: every time they explore something using their five senses, their developing brains fire and rewire, and brain connections are formed. This being the case, providing lots of opportunities for sensory play and exploration has to be central to any set-up. Add textured objects and treasure baskets to explore, create different scented play-dough for sensory stimulation and look for ways to add smell, texture, sound and even taste to your ongoing provision, for example, your sand and water trays.

5 Planning for independence

Another factor to think about as you set up your classroom is the development of independence. Children who are independent are likely to be happier and more confident, and will access new experiences more readily. How does your

setting encourage independence past children putting on their own coats, or getting dressed and undressed for PE? Are children able to self-register in the morning? Can they serve themselves snack? Are they able to choose what they create with, play with or build with? Are resources readily accessible and easy to move to where they want to play? Can they access the play-dough themselves, or even make their own play-dough? Look to build in every opportunity you can for children to do things for themselves and make their own choices.

6 Creativity & problem-solving

It's important that we foster creativity in our children. In our ever-changing and increasingly high-tech world, employers favour those who are able to think for themselves, explore their own ideas and think imaginatively about the world around them. Thus the education we provide in our settings needs to encourage this creative process and critical thinking at every stage. Moving from adult-planned and -directed art activities where children all try to produce a replica of each other's work, to a system where they design, create and explore making their own creations is an effective way to encourage diverse thinking. Providing access to plenty of open-ended resources also encourages children to explore and create from their own imaginations at the same time as working cooperatively and problem-solving.

7 Praise the process

Moving away from traditional displays – i.e. where things are created to display – and instead ensuring that the process of learning is celebrated is useful in that it encourages you to focus on the importance of skills-based learning. Adults will start to record and discuss the process a child goes through rather than simply praising the end product. Create your displays to show off the learning that's going on across your classroom, rather than them becoming labour-intensive wall decorations. Plan activities that help children to build their skills rather than something to show off at the end of the day.

8 Child-led learning

For learning to have a real effect on children it has to be meaningful and linked into the children's own world. Letting the children take the lead on what they want to explore, learn and investigate not only ensures their full engagement, but also helps to link areas of the curriculum together into experiences that children will enjoy and remember. Even in Year 1 (and even Year 6, come to think of it!) the full curriculum is accessible if your classroom is designed and set up with independent play-based learning in mind.

9 Indoors & out

Outdoor learning does not become less important as children reach school age. Those children who work better outdoors do not suddenly become indoor learners, hence even those teaching in KS1 should make provision for children to access open-ended learning and play outdoors as much as possible. Please remember that outdoor learning is distinct from indoor learning – it is not what you do indoors brought out through the door into the sunshine. Make sure you embrace all that nature and the seasons have to offer, and step away from the laminator! When was the last time you saw a plastic sign in the middle of a woodland, or noticed a number line pinned to a fence in a field?

GET STARTED

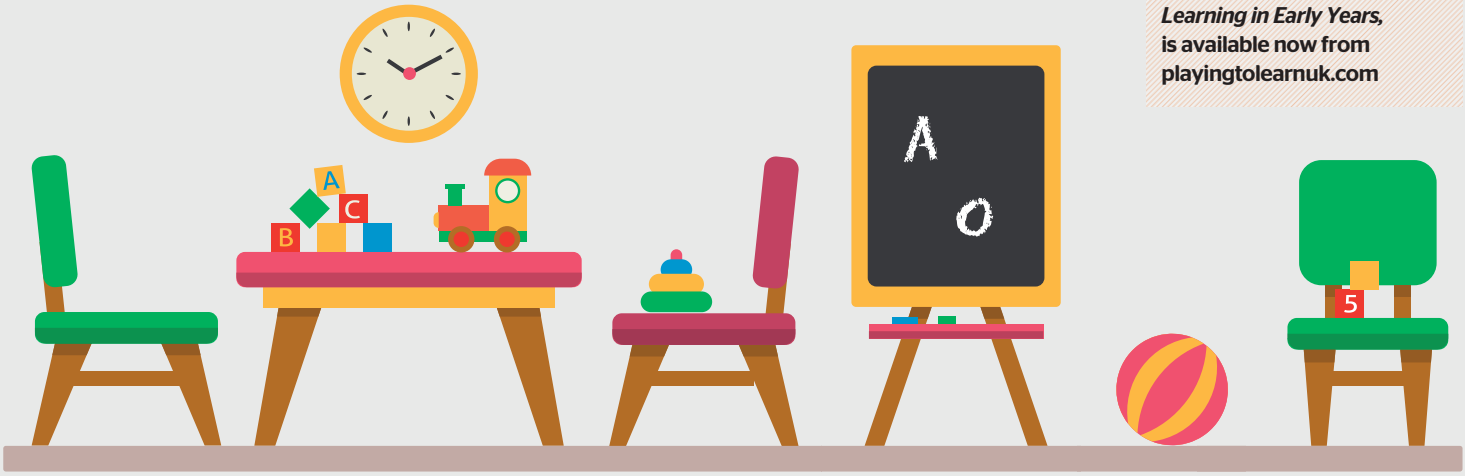
WHEN UPDATING YOUR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, KEEP THESE POINTS IN MIND...

> Make spaces for learning by losing tables and chairs.
> Make learning available at different levels to encourage children to play naturally.
> Soften your setting and make spaces for children to talk and feel safe and happy.
> Make sure you stimulate senses as part of the play on offer.
> Plan for skills rather than end products.
> Make everything exciting and engaging.

Finally, remember that all children are different and what worked last year will not necessarily work this year, or even this term! Be prepared to watch and listen to your children, and adapt the environment around them and their interests. Let them guide you through their world – don't force them into yours.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kirstine Beeley is an author and educational consultant. Her new book, *This is how we do it! Characteristics of Effective Learning in Early Years,* is available now from playingtolearnuk.com



Toilet *Troubles*

Why are more children starting school in nappies and what can you do about it? ERIC's **Rhia Favero** shares some advice...

Talk to any Reception class teacher and they'll tell you that more and more children are walking through the school gates still in nappies. Getting out of nappies and being able to go to the toilet independently is one of Public Health England's 10 indicators of being ready to start school, and those who can't are at a disadvantage because they miss out on education each time they're taken from the classroom to be changed.

Tackling this issue is important to ensure all children get the best start in life, but recognising when a child is in nappies or pull-ups because they have a continence condition like daytime wetting or constipation is also important as these children will need extra help to manage their condition.

Providing support

Whilst 'lazy parenting' is often blamed for late potty training, the culprit is more likely improved absorbency of nappies. Today's nappies are so efficient at drawing moisture away from the skin that children no longer feel uncomfortable when wet, which used to be the sign parents looked for to know their child was ready to use the potty. This normally occurs between 18 months and three years old, but every child is different and will learn at different times how to use the toilet. Parents should not feel pressured to start potty training just because their child has reached a certain age or because other people are potty training; having said that, as a sign of school readiness, children should be able to toilet independently before starting school (of course, schools cannot refuse admission to a child still in nappies).

There are several things you can do to help families tackle potty training long before school starts and to minimise the impact that wearing nappies has on a child's ability to participate in education:

1 Share information

Send potty training information to all parents of children due to enter Reception class. This will give parents several months to crack toilet training before school starts. Parents can notify the school in advance of the term starting if their child won't be trained in time, or if they have developed a continence problem like daytime wetting or constipation.

2 Suggest parents seek help

There are various places parents can go for help if they're struggling with potty training. Health visitors and children's centres can give advice and information about parenting groups. There are lots of books available to help with potty training too, or parents can contact a charity that specialises in children's bowel and bladder issues for one-to-one support.

3 Use parents' potty-training tactics

Talk to parents to find out how they are training their child: find out what words they use for wee, poo and potty, and replicate the reward system they use to encourage their child to sit on the toilet (small and instant rewards like stickers are great). If toileting at school mirrors toileting at home, the child has a better chance of achieving dryness sooner.

4 Prepare for accidents

It's not good practice to ask parents to come and change their child if they have an accident; schools should be capable of dealing with it. Don't get hung up on needing two people present when changing a child – this is not a legal requirement. Ask parents to provide spare clothes and continence products like nappies, pads and wet wipes, and store these in an accessible place. Get training for staff if necessary.

5 Be aware of continence conditions

Some children starting school in nappies will have a bowel or bladder problem and may occasionally have wetting or soiling accidents. These children will need extra support from staff to help manage their condition and overcome it, if possible. The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced a statutory duty on schools to support children with medical conditions, including continence problems. Ask parents to notify you before school starts if their child develops a bowel or bladder problem. This will give you time to establish procedures to support the child.

ERIC, The Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity has a free guide to potty training which can be downloaded from eric.org.uk. Parents can also call or email ERIC's helpline on 0845 370 8008 (9.6p per minute, plus service provider charge) or helpline@eric.org.uk. ERIC also runs training seminars for professionals.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rhia Favero is Communications and Campaigns manager at ERIC.

The perfect blend

Children in early years need play-based learning, not formal learning... or do they? Drop the either/or thinking and give youngsters the best of both worlds, says **Jeremy Hannay...**

Who's cooler: Superman or Batman? Who would win in a fight: Wolverine or Cyclops? Growing up, my eldest brother and I loved to read comic books, and these were the sort of questions I have fond memories of us arguing about, each taking an opposing stance. That was until our younger brother started to read comics and joined in the conversation. At that point something changed for me. I went from truly believing that there were only two possible positions, to understanding that, firstly, perhaps there was another option we hadn't considered, and secondly, it might be possible that we were *all* correct.

The world is full of these false dichotomies, where two ideas are presented as being directly opposed to one another – or the *only* two options – when in reality they aren't at all.

This paradigm has been proven to me over and over again as a class teacher, school leader and doctoral researcher: solutions are rarely as simple as one idea or the other, and very often the truth lies somewhere in-between. And education has its fair share of false dichotomies.

I've met many early years consultants who stare seethingly at me when I suggest that we need to provide more formal opportunities for reading, writing and mathematics in our nursery and Reception. "That is not the way they learn", "They need to choose their own learning experiences", "Research says...more play, more self-initiation, more child-led..." etc., etc.

Suggesting that children in Reception should sit at desks to write, or on the carpet for whole-class instruction, is met with frustration and cynicism. These people believe that teacher-directed learning and child-initiated learning are mutually exclusive. But at Three Bridges, we don't think it's so clear cut, and believe that a balanced approach involving both priorities is what's best for our youngest learners. Not only is our way or working supported by recent large-scale research, it provides our disadvantaged pupils (baseline: 93% below, 60% significantly below) with the social, emotional and academic capital they need to flourish as readers, writers and problem-solvers. It's the structure of learning that provides them with the freedom to learn.

Daily dose

A typical day for us involves a morning of more-structured English and maths programmes, characterised by whole-class and mastery-group instruction, followed by a free-flowing afternoon with opportunities for make-believe, experimentation and unstructured group play.

Our English programme includes a teacher-led session using the Sounds-Write approach for quality-first phonics, and an active and integrated Talk 4 Writing story time. We vary the activities that follow. There is a whole-group writing session, and break-out mastery groups for learners who need more focused time

with an adult. The idea is to bridge the gap between our high- and low-performing learners that is traditionally seen upon entry to Year 1.

Pupils start writing on individual lines before moving on to four-line tramlines as the year progresses. This transition is supported with our custom-made whiteboards and books, and is guided by our teachers' professional judgement. Pupils are encouraged to be independent and select their own writing tools, in addition to regulating their partner-talk using speaking frames, which foster talk in complete sentences. There is reading of high-quality and creative texts with a focus on reading for meaning, in addition to pupils engaging with books they can read independently.

In line with the rest of the school, our children learn to make inferences, predictions and connections. They create mental images and identify text features. They learn letter-formation, handwriting control and the joy of being able to express themselves using the written word, all while building their vocabularies and creative voice through oral and written approaches deeply embedded within the Talk 4 Writing pedagogy. Our youngest people go on to leave our school among the best in our local authority. Seeing the joy on their faces when they have taken an idea in their heads and purposefully written it down for someone else to read is tangible evidence of 'literacy as freedom'.

Question time

In maths we use adult-led instruction via the Singaporean method. It's an approach we use throughout the school and one that complements our beliefs about quality-first pedagogy across all subjects. Children are introduced to a problem while sitting on the carpet, and through concrete materials and pictorial representations they are skilfully questioned in order to determine multiple solutions. They talk to each other and have many opportunities for oral formative feedback.

Then pupils work on practical, hands-on activities at tables, slowly building towards using more abstract concepts such as numbers and symbols, as preparation for lifelong learning. They discuss cardinality and ordinality, rational and irrational counting, number bonds to 10 and the use of 10-frames for numbers to 20. It is crucial that all of the children leave with strength in making connections, finding patterns, a well-rooted number sense and the ability to communicate and articulate their thoughts.

Our afternoons, however, closely resemble other Foundation programmes. We have a strong emphasis on child-initiated activity, play, make-believe, art, music, and movement. Our children typically play at self-chosen activity stations or tables, both indoors and outdoors. This offers them a range of materials to stimulate language and cognitive development, with open-ended and themed activities such as finger-painting, sand and water tables, a dress-up area, a puppet theatre, blocks, cars and trucks. Here, our teachers are primarily supportive rather than directive, engaging individuals or groups in conversations about what they are doing or plan to do. They introduce themes, often based on the children's interests, and discuss key concepts such as numbers, shapes, colours and vocabulary that connect to greater learning.

Meet in the middle

This congruence between thoughtful teacher-direction and child-initiation is seamless. Most importantly, though, our children are happier than they have ever been. No love of learning has been lost – if anything, it is on a steady rise. Where we used to put limits on learning, children now have the freedom to express themselves and make meaning of the world using language and conventions.

For years we've been told it's either teacher-directed or child-initiated learning – one or the other, that they're mutually exclusive. But, we must have both. They operate in beautiful harmony, woven together by talented and passionate teachers. Our children often enter the school with limited social, emotional and academic capital, but they leave our early years setting from a position of joy, confidence and creativity. They have a bank of nursery rhymes to draw on, a variety of stories and language features with which they speak and write, phonics and language skills to support reading and meaning-making, and the capacity to collaborate with each other and adults in magical ways, happily moving their learning forward as independent, courageous and talented young people.

FORMAL AGREEMENT

FOUR REASONS TO USE TALK 4 WRITING IN THE EARLY YEARS...

1 IT PROVIDES A SECURE START
Every early years child becomes a writer when they learn a story orally from beginning to end and intelligently investigate its components to form initial ideas about grammar, punctuation, and sentence level work.

2 INNOVATION IS ENCOURAGED
After learning a story orally, children invent their own versions. The way in which they learn to copy, transform and combine ideas forms the building blocks for all creativity.

3 IT'S GREAT FUN
Pupils absolutely love learning and retelling a story using actions and different intonations. Re-enacting the giant from *Jack and the Beanstalk* or huffing and puffing along with the Three Little Pigs is engaging and effective for everyone.

4 RESEARCH BACKS IT UP
This approach is rooted in recent and relevant research, considering both how we learn and how early years children begin to write (Chambers, Cheung & Slavin, 2016).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeremy Hannay is deputy headteacher at Three Bridges Primary in Southall.

PREPARED TO SUCCEED

Planning a route to outstanding outcomes in the early years is not straightforward, but there are practical steps leaders can take to avoid commonly encountered pitfalls, explains **Sarah Quinn...**

Many early years leaders find themselves in the job overnight as there is no one else to do it. Some strive for the position only to find they are working with unsympathetic school leadership who have not fully embraced the teaching versus play concept. Some have difficulties turning around the thinking of existing staff members locked into the 'but we've always done it this way' mentality. Some leaders are part of the teaching staff in a unit, so have to be the consistent and strong model of excellence; others are in closed classrooms and must make a conscious effort to monitor what is happening elsewhere.

Whatever your situation, preparedness and being proactive (rather than reactive) is the key to your success. As a leader, you will want to build yourself a 'toolkit' of important documents and information to enable you to tackle your own situation: from statutory audits and quality evaluations, to the development of training and research material. Do this as a team, and it can have a significant impact on getting colleagues on board with your vision.

Researching in the classroom

Two of the main issues facing early years leaders are, firstly, finding a method to track and measure the progress of early years children, and secondly, ensuring all staff understand how to 'teach' in early years. One of the best ways to tackle this is to develop strong in-class research.

When I ask leaders how much research they do in class, they invariably say "none", but when we really start to look at the solutions they have developed to solve problems, explore curiosities and to close gaps, they realise that research happens as a part of everyday practice. When leaders start to record this research they, by default, build a pack of training materials for existing and new staff members to learn from.

Some settings I have visited choose to record their research and the outcomes of their phase meetings using a creative 'floor book' method: similar to the floor books you might use to collate children's learning journeys, these are a powerful tool as contributing to them requires members of your team to carry out research, and consider their own opinions and others' ideas. At the end you are left with a tangible record of the research that can be used as a training tool in future.

Measuring progress

One of the main curiosities I have had over recent years is how we track children's progress throughout the whole of their educational journey, from entry to primary education to exit. This, of course, includes early years, but for too long Foundation Stage classrooms have been viewed with suspicion by many teachers. I still hear people say, "I don't go *down there*, I'm Key Stage 2," to which I always reply by pointing out that all staff need to see where children start to have a full understanding of their

"Leaders must ensure that their staff fully understand the science behind, and the stages of, play.

learning needs and the barriers that must be overcome to ensure they are happy and therefore learning.

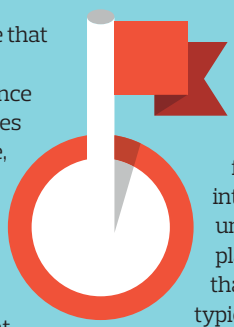
Of course, this swings both ways, and early years staff must take the time to examine the expected academic leaving points of children (versus the actual leaving points), too. One of my colleagues can often be heard saying, "It's not the people's independent republic of early years," and I absolutely agree. There is much to learn from seeing the big picture of a child's primary experience.

Keeping in mind that the Development Matters document is not statutory and was written as a developmental guide, and yet has somehow turned into a default method of tracking progress, I spent time working with a group of early years leaders to see if there was a better approach we could adopt. Our solution involves using key assessment criteria written in an accessible 'I can' style – for example, 'I can seek challenges and take risks in new experiences', or 'I can initiate activities around my own interests.' I have developed a list of 'I can' statements for nursery and Reception baseline, and progress and planning for two-year-olds, nursery and Reception children – all based around good observational practice and using a 'teach, practise, apply' method (see panel for more details). This list can be found in Focus Education's Early Years Leadership Toolkit, and I thoroughly recommend developing a list of your own, based on your own observations in the classroom.

Learning through play

When it comes to 'teach, practise, apply', what has intrigued me over the last few years is that the word 'teach', when applied to early years, has lost its meaning. We have always talked about teaching in early years to mean any interaction or structure provided for the youngest children that helps them learn a new skill, practise something, or do it by themselves: teach, practise and apply. This can, and should, be through well-thought-out play that enables children to gain the skills we want them to gain, while becoming more and more curious about the world.

With this in mind, leaders must ensure that their staff fully understand the science behind, and the stages of, play. For example, teachers should be aware that children might be expected to start interacting with others in their play at three to four years old; at ages four to six, they might be playing together, with shared aims and cooperation.



We also want our staff to understand how to use children's play to aid learning, by using their fascinations and interests, and understanding schematic play – the behaviours that small children typically demonstrate when playing. The use of the word 'teach' as it relates to early years has even been defined by Ofsted, as some leaders felt that 'teach' could only refer to formal approaches. We now know that this is not the case – and it is up to leaders to build their own kit of 'tried-and-tested' approaches and observations to embed this method of learning in the classroom.

PROGRESS & PLANNING

USING 'I CAN' STATEMENTS SIMPLIFIES THE ASSESSMENT EARLY YEARS PROCESS...

> 'I can' statements are key assessment criteria for early years, designed to break down the learning steps for children from the age of two to five, enabling teachers to assess and plan in more detail over the seven areas of learning.

> The statements are more targeted and specific than the Development Matters statements used in the past – there are many learning gaps in the latter because the document was only meant to be a guide (for example, it makes no mention of children learning anything about teen numbers, so this has been added into the 'I can' statements).

> Our solution also includes baseline statements in the same style to support the initial assessment of children entering nursery and Reception. The statements are written in such a way that assessment between early years and Key Stage 1 should be smoother as it is essentially the same system being used, whereas the Development Matters system is totally different to the National Curriculum for Key Stage 1 and 2.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Quinn has 20 years' experience working in primary education and today supports schools, children's centres and local authorities across the country. The topics discussed here are covered in detail in her 'Early Years Leadership Toolkit,' available now from Focus Education.
For sample pages or to order your copy, visit focus-education.co.uk

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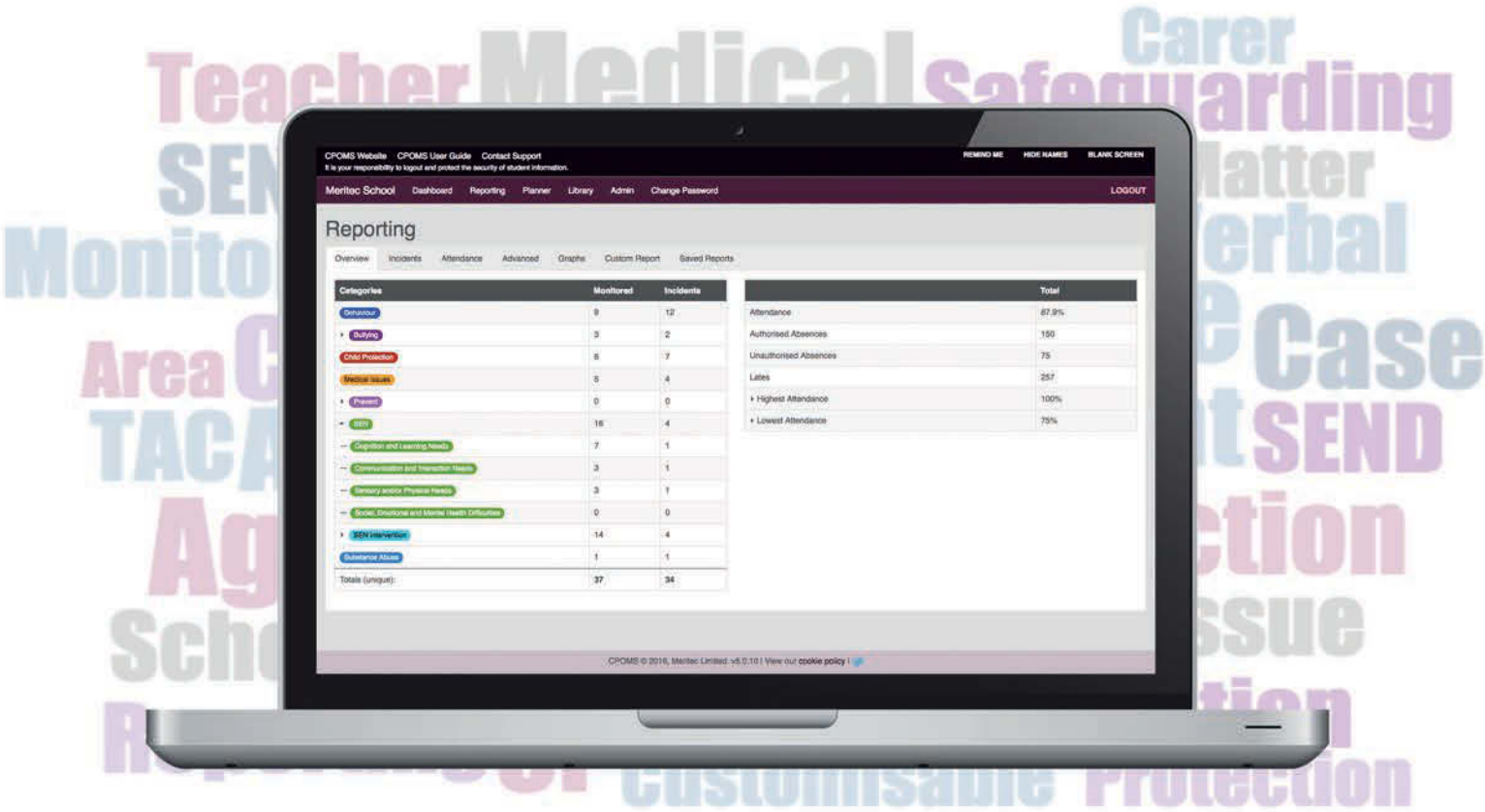

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What are you worried about?

Having someone – or something – to confide in can go a long way to helping children cope with their anxieties. **John Dabell** suggests breaking out your Guatemalan worry dolls...

It would be nice to think that children don't worry but of course they do. Worrying is a natural part of being human. We are hard-wired to be anxious because it is this anxiety that saved us from the Sabre-toothed tiger. For children, Sabre-toothed tigers appear as problems associated with friendships, bullying, family, tests, moving home, having a new teacher or where their new pencil has vanished to; children worry about lots of things and sometimes these anxieties can keep them awake at night and plague them during the day.

Some children are only too keen to share their concerns with others, but not always with adults. Sometimes they feel they have no one to turn to. Even trusted adults can be excluded because children may feel embarrassed or afraid to disclose. This is where we need a third party to step in.

In modern paediatrics and child psychiatry soft toys and puppets play an extremely important role in helping children to open up and share their uncertainties and fears. They act as soothing friends, listeners, confidants and sources of comfort to mollify doubts and apprehensions. There are also little dolls from Central America that do a similar job. 'Worry dolls', as they're known, were originally created generations ago by indigenous people from the Highlands in Guatemala and date back to Mayan traditions. They have their origin in the Spanish term *Muñecas quitapenas*,

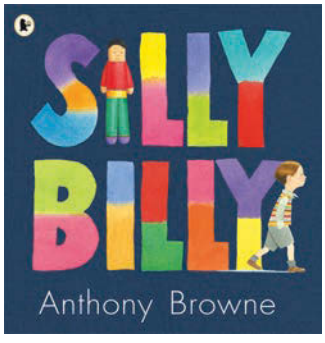
which means "Dolls remove worries". The hand-crafted dolls are clothed in colourful traditional Mayan costumes, stand about 2 1/2cm tall and usually come in a set of six, in a box or bag. A small piece of wood is used for each doll's body and it is dressed in remnants or scraps of clothing.

Sleep easy

The original idea was that when someone had a problem that was keeping them up at night, they would tell their worries to one of these dolls. They would then put the doll under their pillow before going to sleep, and the doll would 'worry' for them during the night, enabling them to sleep peacefully and wake up feeling refreshed and worry-free. A different doll in the set could be told another worry the next night, and so on. Traditionally parents would remove the doll during the night, symbolising that the worry had gone away, but others choose not to remove the doll, saying that the doll is getting rid of the worry. It's a great concept. Talking about things that worry us is a trouble shared even if there is no one there to listen. Worry dolls can help dampen worries or absorb and share anxieties, rather than a child bottling everything up and not telling anyone.

Using worry dolls in class

Worry dolls can be part of building resilience, self-care and developing psychological capacity. When you have a PSHE focus on emotional wellbeing and helping children develop strategies to deal with worries then



Anthony Browne's *Silly Billy* (Walker Books) is a must. For those not familiar with the story, it is all about Billy, who is a bit of a worrier. He worries about hats, birds and all manner of other things, and they keep him lying awake at night. Although his mum and dad tried to reassure him, Billy's worries continued to hound him – until he goes to stay at his grandma's, and she introduces him to worry dolls.

The text is the perfect way to talk about worries because some children might laugh at Billy for being worried about shoes, rain and clouds. This provides you with the perfect opportunity to point out that different people worry about different things. This can lead into a discussion about types of worries and what to do if something is bothering you.

TO BEGIN...

Read *Silly Billy* as a class and talk about Billy. Discuss what he worries about and what happens when he gets worried.

> What does he do when he feels worried?
> What does Grandma say Billy should do? Does it work?
> Why do you think the worry dolls work? Does everyone get worried sometimes?
> Share with children a recent time you were worried and what you did about it.

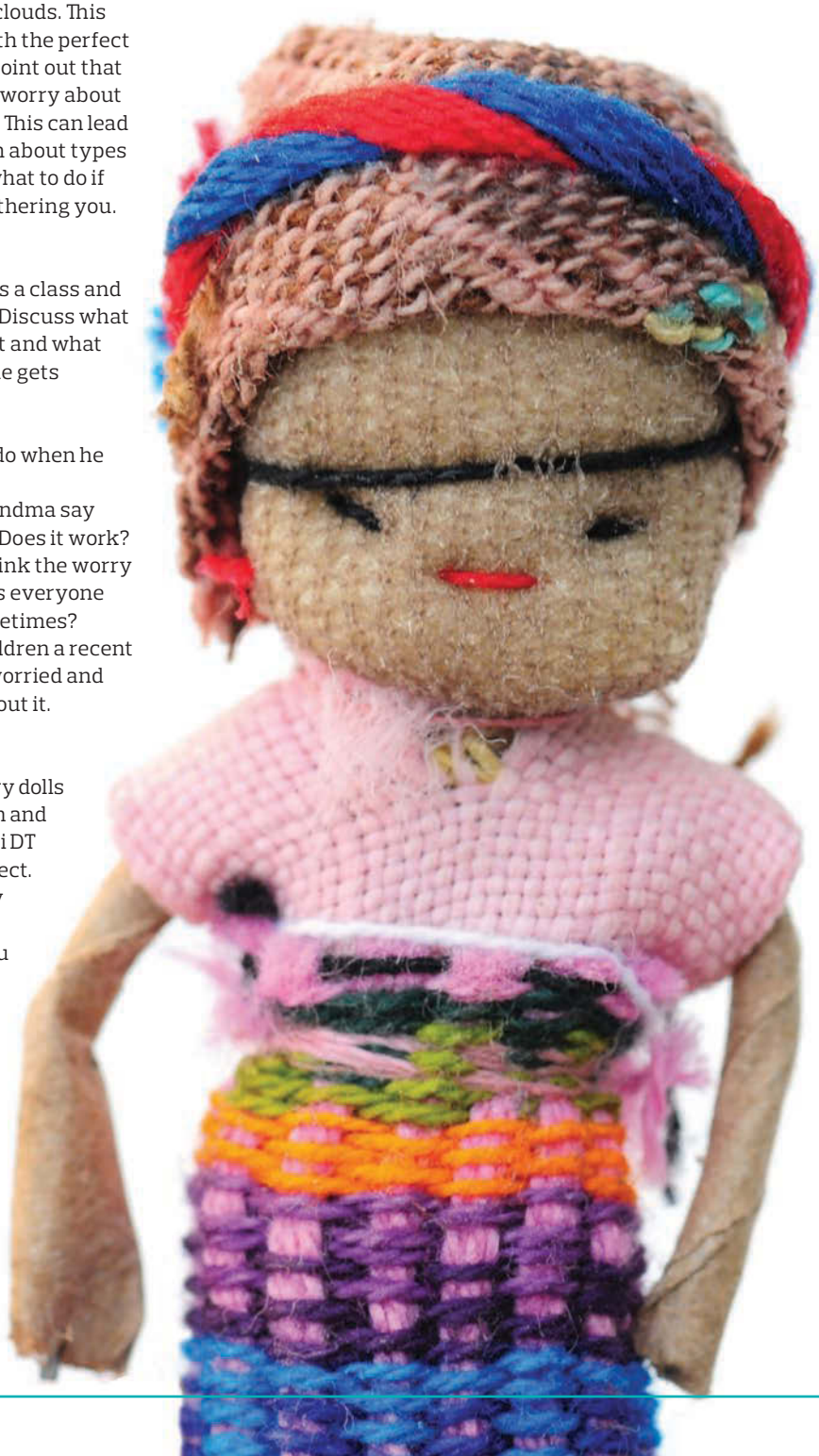
ACTIVITY

Make some worry dolls with the children and turn it into a mini DT and Science project. They fit perfectly within a topic on 'materials' as you can look at the properties of different materials, including wood, plastic and cotton. There are lots of ways to make worry dolls and plenty of video websites that show you how to make them. Clothes pegs wrapped in colourful wool or thread or dressed in different pieces of fabric are the simplest projects.

WHAT TO DO

You will need: Wooden clothes pegs, pipe cleaners, thread, wool, remnants of materials, glue.

1 Make a face on the top of each peg using paint or pens.
2 Wrap a pipe cleaner around the centre of the peg to create arms and fold down the edges to make 'hands'.
3 Tie a long piece of thread around the centre of the peg and knot leaving approximately 7cm of thread off the end of the knot.
4 Begin wrapping the thread around the middle of the peg then wrap it up and down each arm. Continue wrapping down the legs.
5 To create trousers, wrap each individual leg. To create a skirt, wrap both legs. Once the body is wrapped the way you like it, cut the thread leaving about 7cm. Tie this to



the extra piece you left at the beginning to finish off the project (keep the knot in the back of the doll).

PLENARY

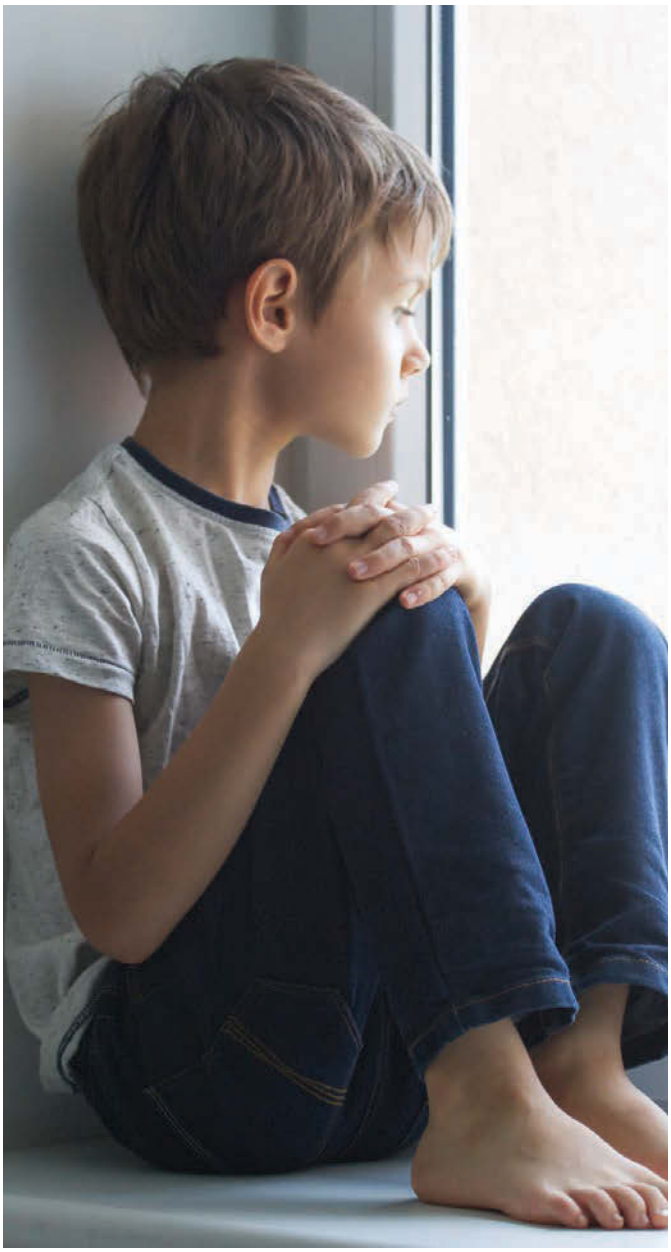
Delve into the meanings and messages at the heart of *Silly Billy* by asking the following questions:

> How did Billy feel before he told Grandma about his worries?
> What did Grandma say when he told her about his worries?
> Do you think Billy did the right thing telling Grandma about his worries? Why?
> Is it better to tell your worry dolls or to tell a grown-up about your worries?
> Why is it better to tell a grown-up?

The bottom line, of course, is that children should always be encouraged to speak to a responsible and trusted adult about anything worrying them. Keeping feelings inside is not good for emotional wellbeing, but worry dolls can at least help. Ask children who they talk to if they are worried about something. Reassure them that they can always talk to you if they are worried and they could practise by telling their dolls first.

It works!

For the classroom, making a worry doll is a great activity for children to get hands-on and to talk about who they can talk to when they are worried. At the end of one year as my parting gift to a delightful class of Year 2 children I decided to give them all a little box of worry dolls. I explained what they were, where they came from and what they could use them for. When it came to the next academic year I had a few parents tell me how brilliant the worry dolls had been. One girl used hers as a way of dealing with the transition from being an only child to being a big sister, and one boy used his to talk to about moving up to Year 3. There were also examples of a worry doll being used because of a sick pet and another because a child's teddy "wasn't very well" – all worries, great and small!



"Putting problems into words can blunt their emotional impact, helping to wash worries away or at least dilute them.

Worry dolls might not work for everyone in terms of a strategy but psychologically they are sound enough as faith and belief can play an important part in helping children shed mild and moderate, occasional worries. Severe anxiety certainly requires more professional interventions, but the dolls can still serve as a function as a friend to talk to. Children like worry dolls because they are small, colourful and friendly – and you can expand the concept to include a 'worry jar' or 'worry box'.

Once your children have made their dolls, why not encourage them to take them home? They can be used as a basis for talking about worries and for reading *Silly Billy* again. Children need to remember that there is nothing wrong with being a Silly Billy...

ARE YOU WORRIED?

USING WORRY DOLLS IN THE CLASSROOM REQUIRES SOME CARE, BUT DON'T BE PUT OFF...

THE PROBLEM

The use of worry dolls divides opinion. Some may argue that children could feel let down and betrayed by worry dolls that don't remove their worries. In some cases, when children 'believe' their worries will go away, they do, but in most cases they don't.

THE SOLUTION

Be careful not to sell the idea that the worry dolls can solve all of life's problems, as children will see them as some kind of magic. Instead explain to the children that the dolls can help by listening to their troubles, and that whilst they may not be able to remove worries completely, it is far better to talk and share than not say anything at all – putting problems into words can blunt their emotional impact, helping to wash worries away or at least dilute them.

Offering worry dolls that can worry with children or on their behalf, sharing the worry, is a more realistic proposition than saying the dolls can remove the worry completely. In my experience, children are not that naïve anyway; they understand that the dolls are not god-like, but they do see them as little friends to share their thoughts with, and as a comfort blanket or layer of protection.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Dabell is a former primary school teacher who now works as a writer, editor and reviewer of educational resources.

Finding MEANING

If you want to boost your children's happiness, give them the chance to lend a helping hand, say teacher **Alexia Barrable** and neuroscientist **Dr Jenny Barnett...**

The true nature of happiness is often discussed but rarely agreed upon. It is elusive and multifaceted. It is not simply about having fun, not just about enjoying ourselves. Adult humans look for and find meaning in their lives, and children, it seems, are no different.

In many developing countries children have no choice but to work for, or otherwise serve, the families and communities they live in. Serving others is something that is thought to increase our happiness at a deep level yet, in an effort to let our children enjoy their childhoods, we can sometimes risk depriving them of this opportunity to find a deeper sense of meaning in everyday life.

There can be a real satisfaction in knowing that your actions are in some way making a difference in someone else's life – that

you are an integral part of something bigger than yourself. But here lies a challenge: how do we add meaning and purpose to our children's lives without overburdening them with responsibility? Thankfully there are simple ways that teachers can incorporate meaningful activities into their children's days...

Appointing monitors

Zoe is walking down the corridor full of purpose. She is holding a bunch of papers tightly to her chest. Zoe is what many teachers would privately characterise as 'difficult'. She has a troubled background and chaotic family life and is often involved in fights in and out of school.

Yet, give her a job and she jumps at the opportunity to be helpful. She is, in fact, one of my most-used helpers. It starts with me sending her on errands simply to give her (and me) a break from the classroom, a chance to have a breath and an opportunity to calm any tensions. What I find, though, is that Zoe's mood instantly improves, after being helpful like that. She returns to class having a completely different approach to things and is even able to work cooperatively with others, something she usually finds challenging, to say the least. There is a deeper satisfaction she gains from being part of the community like that – it adds value to the picture she has of herself and she takes pride in her actions in relation to serving her classmates.

Primary school teachers have known for years that most children respond very well to being given jobs. In my class I have several chores that are shared amongst the children. I, like many other teachers, have a monitor chart pinned to our board and children's names rotate on a weekly basis. Jobs include taking the register to the secretary, helping people line up, making sure chairs are properly tucked in so that no one trips and an eco-monitor, in charge of the recycling.

The benefits are many: being a monitor gives children a boost in their self-esteem, makes them feel more connected to the whole and keeps them out of trouble. Children, when given responsibility for something and when they feel that they are trusted to do something well, rarely let me or the group down. Even children like Zoe, who often mess around, or inadvertently get 'lost' when walking around school, seem to find such chores meaningful and fulfilling.

Keeping pets

I enjoy teaching George. He has a wealth of general knowledge that challenges me and quirky interests which he shares regularly with the class. So I am not the least bit surprised when, one morning, he turns up with a jar full of dirt...

During registration we go through our usual routine of sharing news. When George's turn comes I am eager to find out about his jar and its relevance. "Oh, it's not just dirt," he beams at me. "I've brought in some snails. From my garden,"

I freeze and wonder if I misheard. Or rather, I hope I've misheard. "Why is the lid off?" I ask tentatively, though slowly I start realising that we're in trouble.

"I thought they needed to breathe!" he explains, sensibly.

I pick up the jar and peer into the mini-garden lovingly constructed by George. "One, two, three, four," I count with dread, then look at him. "How many did you have?"

"Hmm." He seems unsure. "Five? Or seven? I can't remember..."

Several minutes later, with half of my literacy lesson wasted hunting snails, we have located one more and are relatively certain that we've caught all of them. At breaktime I sit at my desk and wonder if there is any way I could use these little creatures to my advantage...

Knowing that there are benefits to the responsibility of looking after a pet, and that looking after someone else is a good way to increase meaning in one's life, I decided to keep George's snails as classroom pets. The kids were delighted when I shared the news that they were going to have their very own snail farm, and took responsibility from the get-go, finding a suitable container for them to live in, instructions on how to look after them and designing a rota of care for them. Even pupils who are rarely motivated by academic work were keen to come to school and put in some work to make the snails' lives better.

We kept the snails for a few weeks and then, one rainy autumn day, ceremoniously set them free with a wish that they might have a happy life out in the wild. They added to our happiness over several weeks: the children simply enjoyed looking after them, and at the same time they added meaning and purpose to our days.

"Giving to charity can boost happiness. My colleague and I decided to link our topics to relevant charities, e.g. when learning about rainforests, we looked at charities like WWF and Rainforest Alliance.

HELPING OTHERS

CHILDREN IN KS1 CAN FIND FULFILMENT SUPPORTING THEIR PEERS IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE...

THE IDEA

Research confirms that volunteer work improves several aspects of our wellbeing: happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, sense of control over life, physical health and mental health. But how can we get our pupils to volunteer when their days are so full already?

With a colleague in Reception I decided to give my seven-year-old pupils the opportunity to look beyond themselves and spend time assisting others by reading stories to younger children...

IN PRACTICE

When I told my children that we would be reading stories to the younger kids, their reaction was mixed: some were excited, others weren't impressed. On the agreed day, we joined the little ones in the library. We put the children into pairs and threes and left them to it. To our surprise the level of engagement was one of the highest we had ever seen. The older children rose to the occasion, presenting a caring, warm side towards the little ones; the little ones loved being read to and seemed very much at ease.

THE OUTCOME

When questioned later it was clear my pupils had benefited in many small ways. Their self-esteem and happiness received a boost: they felt like useful members of the community because they had helped someone else, which added meaning and satisfaction to their lives.

This article is an edited extract from *Growing Up Happy* (£13.99, Little, Brown), which features a host of easy-to-use activities designed to boost children's wellbeing throughout their early and school years. Visit littlebrown.co.uk

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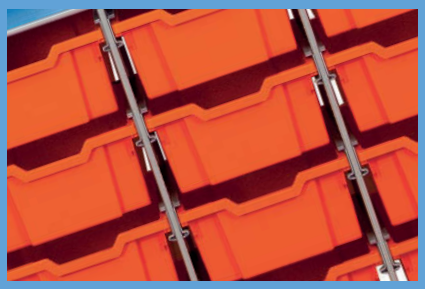

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built to be flexible...

Gratnells trays can be used singly, in systems, and as an integral part of mobile trolley units or digital storage and recharging resources. From arts and crafts to hi-technology, **Gratnells** makes more of the learning environment through nursery, primary and secondary schools.

Gratnells

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Outstanding storage

A **Gratnells** tray opens the door to so much more...

The unique design of a Gratnells tray has made this basic item the building block of a comprehensive approach to learning room creation – one that extends from simple storage into racking systems, mobile units, bespoke fittings and digital management systems.

INNOVATION

Now established as a brand leader in the education market, Gratnells has mastered the art of space management with stackable systems and integrated furniture design. Its product innovations include Callero modular storage, HappyStack and GratStack deep tray systems and a range of trolleys, including new PowerTrolleys for syncing and storage of digital equipment.

ORIGINALITY

All of this is built upon the success of the tray. Designed and manufactured only by Gratnells, this original design is produced to be durable, flexible and vibrant, with more than 30 standard colours available. Impressive though the product features are, it's the benefits to teachers and learners that have made the Gratnells tray a ubiquitous part of the learning environment.

BALANCE

From early learning stages through to secondary education and beyond, the value of a product range that offers the optimum balance between inspiration and good order cannot be overstated.

OWNERSHIP

For the pupil, the Gratnells tray is often the first 'owned' element of schooling: a personalised part of the learning room that belongs to the individual but is part of the group structure. It offers easy access to work, materials and possessions, facilitates self-directed learning and for the teacher is an easy way to create order along with a degree of self-reliance for pupils.

VALUE

For proud parents, perhaps nothing in the early years of school represents a child's progress so well as the exploration of a Gratnells tray, cataloguing and archiving the term's work. For designers and architects too, the Gratnells-based system is a valued and integral element of any learning space it inhabits, with colour options ranging from soothing to stimulating, and offering a means to display, present, archive, and file educational materials.

HERITAGE

With more than 200 years of history behind it, Gratnells continues to engage with schools, developing and redefining its approach with a 'learning rooms' philosophy that still uses the tray as a cornerstone of form, colour and system.

For more information on Gratnells' range, call 0800 169 6854 or visit gratnells.com

PLAN A TRIP

Nothing broadens children's horizons like escaping the confines of the classroom, so don't wait to take them out and about, says **Vicky Wilcher...**

When we talk about learning outside the classroom (LOtC) for children in Key Stage 1 and below, we are usually thinking about activities in the school grounds or very local community. Planning educational visits further afield can seem a demanding task with younger children who are less independent and need more support. However, young children derive huge benefits from encountering the wider world through carefully planned trips that support their developmental needs.

Why do it?

Children in early years and Key Stage 1 often have limited experience of the world beyond their own family and community. Educational visits support social and personal development by introducing them to new places, and encouraging them to engage with new people, whether that be farmers, museum curators, park rangers, or other staff at a venue. These people introduce them to new vocabulary and concepts, and broaden their horizons.

Educational visits begin to develop pupils' independence, too. The travel to the venue can build children's confidence, regardless of whether it's somewhere close enough to walk to, or involves travel by coach or even public transport. Although there are plenty of adults on hand, there is unlikely to be the same adult:child ratio as when the children are out with their parents, so they can begin to take some responsibility for ensuring they keep with the group, and learn how to conduct themselves in public spaces. Whilst some may worry about the risks involved, educational visits are in fact the

ideal opportunity to teach children about risk and how to conduct themselves safely and appropriately.

Children develop their physical abilities through exploring different environments. In the early years, negotiating unfamiliar terrain such as cobbled streets at a heritage site, or undertaking a comparatively long walk independently, help to develop their physical skills and stamina. Equally, educational visits can grow children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural awareness. A visit to a place of worship, for example, can help them find out about their own and others' ways of life, and learn to respect cultures different from their own. A visit to a recycling centre introduces them to the idea of sustainability and their impact on the planet. Contact with nature makes children more environmentally aware.

Progression & development

Schools committed to delivering high-quality LOtC often introduce visits from a very early age, recognising that the more experiences children have, the more they will be able to engage with the world beyond their classroom. The importance is to offer progression. Educational visits for young children are likely to be shorter and closer to home than during Key Stage 2, in order to build children's confidence outside the classroom and lay the foundations for future activities. If a four-year-old can have an adventure at a local farm and spend time in an unfamiliar location without parents or another family member present, they will start to develop the confidence and resilience needed for a more adventurous experiences higher up the school.

Taking children on educational visits from an early age encourages them to think beyond their own experience, shows them the breadth of opportunities and experiences open to them, and helps to develop them as independent learners who are confident to grasp the opportunities outside the classroom. For children in the 3–7 age group, a comparatively simple activity can be an adventure: encountering animals at a farm, exploring the local park, even visiting the local library or high street all offer new experiences.

Curriculum support

The EYFS and Key Stage 1 curriculum have a strong focus on practical experiences. As well as developing personal and social skills, educational visits enhance curriculum learning – a visit to a farm, zoo or nature reserve, for example, can support learning about animal and plant identification, habitats and food chains. Children can develop their scientific skills by observing, measuring and recording in different contexts, and improve their spoken language skills and vocabulary by talking about what they have observed.

A local church, museum or monument offers an engaging approach to the study of local history, and introduces children to the idea of using sources to understand and ask questions about the past. A local theatre, music venue or arts centre can inspire children by giving them the opportunity to meet people working in creative industries, hear live music performed and see stories they have read brought to life.

Educational visits also support cross-curricular learning and help pupils to make links between subjects.

Case study
St John's Catholic School, London

St John's Catholic School in London has a strong focus on learning outside the classroom. Every curriculum area is enriched through educational visits. LOtC is firmly embedded within policies. Staff are expected to run at least one educational visit each half term to enhance curriculum learning and are given clear guidelines and support to achieve this. This philosophy runs through the school, from Reception up.

Pupils take part in frequent bus and tube visits to places such as the local market, London Zoo and the River Thames to inspire literacy projects. The market visit also shows pupils in Year 1 what fruit, vegetables and fish are like away from the more packaged environment of a supermarket.

Staff feel that giving children these experiences from a very young age builds their confidence and increases their safety. The more often pupils use public transport, cross roads and step outside the classroom, the better they become at managing risk. To encourage this, staff explicitly and consistently teach safety rules that pupils can also use with their families. The school also has appropriate measures in place for taking young children off-site; there are clear staffing ratios for visits and pupils wear high-visibility jackets on public transport.

St John's offers a wide range of visits that are closely linked to the curriculum. Educational visits for early years and Key Stage 1 pupils include a trip to the theatre for Reception and Year 1 to introduce live performance and link to their topic for the term; a visit by Year 2 to a recycling centre as part of their topic on 'Recycling, Reusing and Reducing'; exploring different types of building for Key Stage 1 geography; and a visit to the Museum of London as part of the 'Fire of London' topic in Year 2.

As a result of its high-quality LOtC, which is embedded within the curriculum, St John's has achieved the LOtC Mark (Silver) award.

The Council for Learning Outside the classroom LOtC Resource Packs provide lesson plans for teaching the curriculum outside the classroom, separated by key stage and subject: lotc.org.uk/resources/lotc-resource-packs

VENTURING OUT

FIVE TIPS FOR PLANNING EDUCATIONAL VISITS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN...

INVOLVE THE CHILDREN IN PLANNING: Talk to them before the visit; ask what they might want to find out at a venue or what they would particularly like to see. Discuss potential risks, and how they can keep themselves safe.

WORK WITH VENUE STAFF: Discuss your learning outcomes with them, and any special needs your children might have.

VISIT THE VENUE IN ADVANCE: This is your opportunity to plan the practicalities of your day; with younger children it's even more important to know where the toilets are, check refreshment facilities and decide your travel plan.

DON'T PLAN TO DO TOO MUCH: It's tempting to cram a day with activities, but children need time to get to know the venue. Allow time for them to explore and follow their interests.

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Brilliant Residentials

Taking young children out of familiar surroundings for an extended period might sound stressful, but it's both easily achievable and thoroughly worthwhile, explains **Kim Somerville...**

In 2009, set up as a special initiative by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Learning Away began working closely with 60 primary, secondary and special schools to demonstrate the positive impact that high-quality residential learning can have on children, young people and schools. The schools have developed and tested a huge range of new and exciting residentials that are inclusive and affordable, ranging from camping in the school grounds, to staying in Hampton Court Palace. What's more, there's something for children in Year 1 upwards – residentials aren't just for older kids!

The impact

The impact of the Learning Away experience was robustly evaluated over a five-year period by independent evaluators. This evidence showed that Learning Away residentials can lead to improved resilience, relationships, achievement and brighter brilliant futures for young people. The direct benefits for young children include the development of personal independence, self-confidence, cooperation and trust, risk management, self-respect and self-esteem.

Perhaps most importantly, the research suggests that by developing residentials in an effective way, schools can achieve significant breakthroughs in learner engagement and progress that cannot be achieved in any other educational context or setting.

Case study: The Pilot Partnership

The Pilot Partnership in East Birmingham is one group of primary and special schools that has seen compelling evidence of the positive impact a residential learning experience can have on

pupils in Key Stage 1. Located in a particularly deprived area undergoing rapid, major shifts in its ethnic profile, the schools' families face daily challenges in their lives that frequently interrupt learning and can limit aspiration.

A key aim for the partnership's programme is to 'reinstate enjoyment into the curriculum'. Residentials are held at local centres and consist of three visits that begin in Year 1 or 2, develop in Year 3 and are completed in Year 5. The residentials have interconnecting, progressive themes and are based around some of the challenges that the schools and community are experiencing. The goal is for residentials to be seen by the wider school communities as a natural and integrated learning tool for all children. They are based on curriculum themes – Respect for the World, Citizenship and Other Cultures, and The Arts – and feature a range of creative activities, some teacher-led and some facilitated by external experts.

The residentials support the partnership's work in tackling prejudice and there has been a determined effort to include children who would not normally take part in such activities, sometimes for cultural reasons.

Louise Edwards, Director and Learning Away Coordinator of The Pilot Partnership, has no doubts about the benefits of providing residential visits for children in KS1. "Although the prospect of taking such young children away overnight seemed daunting at first, the benefits have far outweighed any concerns," she explains. "Afterwards pupils are more confident and able to think beyond themselves. They return with a fire for learning and want to continue with the work they've undertaken during the residential.

"Building the curriculum element around the actual residential makes an enormous impact, as the residential is then an integral part to the work rather than an 'added' activity. Most of all, for many of our pupils, it has widened their horizons and hopefully started them on a journey of learning outside of the classroom that they will continue into adult life."

First steps

Convinced of the benefits but unsure where to start? Well, Brilliant Residentials are school trips with at least one overnight stay, which are:

> Designed and led by teachers and, where appropriate, students
> Inclusive and affordable for all students
> Deliberately and collaboratively planned to meet students' specific learning needs
> Planned so that learning is embedded and reinforced back in school
> Part of a progressive programme of experiences
> Designed to include a wide range of new and memorable experiences
> Designed to allow space for students to develop collaborative relationships with both peers and staff
> Evaluated rigorously
> Supported by senior leadership and school governors.

You can get access more advice, case studies and a range of free resources for early years and KS1 at learningaway.org.uk/resources/early-years-ks1. Good luck!

Kim Somerville is coordinating the Brilliant Residentials campaign with schools and providers nationwide, to help many more young people benefit from residential experiences. Join the campaign to support Brilliant Residentials by visiting Learningaway.org.uk or follow @LearningAway #BrilliantResidentials

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Let them out!

For young children learning to adapt to the demands of primary school, time spent in the fresh air is invaluable, says **Juno Hollyhock...**

One of the joys of each new school year is watching the influx of small people making their way into primary school for the first time, fresh from their early years settings. Still with that dewy bloom of enthusiasm on their faces and with the concept of SATs testing some way off, these tiny warriors troop into their new classes swamped in uniforms that drag on the ground as they walk, hauling around oversized, cartoon-themed lunch boxes like recalcitrant Dobermanns, as though they have a life of their own.

But while it's a pleasure for us adults to greet these new arrivals, for the children themselves the experience can be somewhat overwhelming. Things change at primary school – there is a whole new raft of expectation that carries with it an air of mystery or, for some, dread. What happens inside the classroom will be a departure from what has come before for many: learning will steadily become more formal, tests more important and behaviour regulated in a more general way than they will have experienced in their previous settings. There is no reassuring nap room around the corner, peer pressure grows stronger, food, toilets and smells are different, and the comforting images on the walls are replaced by letters and numbers – this is real school.

For this reason, one of the most important areas for a child at primary school is the outside space. In the fresh air they can re-engage with nature, reminding themselves of the comfort it brought back when free flow was more commonplace. They can play freely, with whom they choose, no longer confined to defined groups or project tables. Much of what is outside will be familiar and recognisable – and every child needs a degree of something recognisable in order to be comfortable.

> *Try to introduce new pupils to their outside spaces early on – it's an ideal way to help them to settle in and settle down.*

Try to introduce new pupils to their outside spaces early on – it's an ideal way to help them to settle in and settle down. Introductory meetings, parents/carers evenings and transition days that help familiarise children with the school grounds build capital for later on: this is somewhere that they already know and can feel comfortable and safe in. Summer events and activities that are open to the community are also a great way for children to get into the school grounds early and begin to explore with the safety of people that they know around them.

A great outside space enables children to take some control over how they interact with their environment and will build confidence and resilience the better to face the challenges of being a pupil in a classroom. For new pupils, being given the chance to manage a part of their school grounds, maybe by helping to paint a fence or plant seeds, engages them earlier in that space and helps them to shape what happens around them.

Alongside all of this is the 'hidden curriculum' of the school grounds. The underlying message that tells children how much they are valued by how well looked-after their space is. A school playground that's designed to have cosy nooks and crannies; that's well kept and pleasing to look at but which also incorporates interesting and fun wild spaces; that has equipment kept where children can get to it easily and space to sit in the shade as well as to run around in the sun, all tells a nervous child the story that they are valued and cherished – that this space is their space, one that can be a place of refuge and friendship.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Juno Hollyhock is executive director of Learning Through Landscapes – a UK charity dedicated to enhancing outdoor learning and play for children. For services and resources, visit ltl.org.uk

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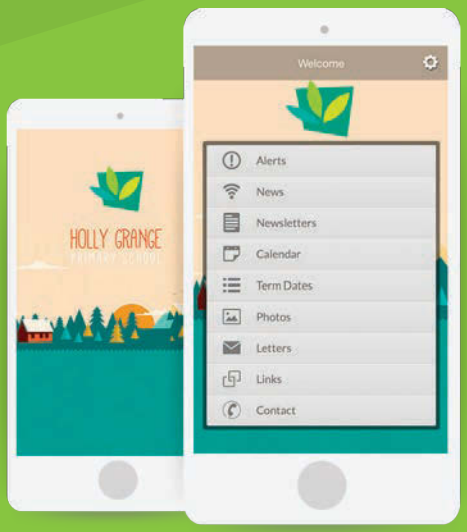

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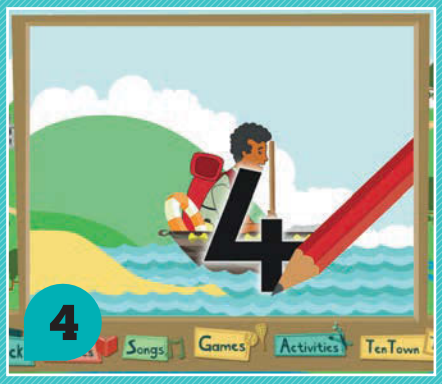


Top of the class

Resources and activities to bring fresh inspiration to your classroom...

Book it in

1 As one of the largest publishers for primary schools in the UK, Rising Stars' range of teaching, learning and assessment resources are now trusted by over 14,500 schools. Each product it publishes aims to solve the needs of teachers and senior leaders right across the country, from its maths textbook series and infant reading scheme, to robust assessments and niche products that help to save you hours of time. Head to the website to find out more.
risingstars-uk.com

Recycle here

2 Leafield Environmental has expand its range of recycling options with this new brightly coloured bin designed specifically to collect batteries in schools. It's available in three sizes – 30-litre (£65), 18-litre (£55) and 10-litre (£44) – and features a pink WRAP-compliant lid and recycling label clearly communicating its intended purpose. The lid features a 48mm hole, while the black base has cut-out handles for easy emptying and is made from 100% recycled plastic (subject to availability).
leafieldrecycle.com

Stories for all

3 Signed Stories is a children's storybook app with a simple goal: to improve literacy for deaf children and those with SEN by bringing the best children's literature to life with exciting animation, narration, music and engaging sign language (both British and American). It provides a fully inclusive experience for children to enjoy the joy of storytelling with their family, friends and classmates. Signed Stories is available to download on the App Store now.
signedstories.com

Support that counts

4 Ten Town is a character-based numeracy scheme designed specifically for the early years. It combines online activities with a wide range of physical resources as well as printable support materials, all aligned to the EYFS. The scheme focuses on developing strong basic numeracy skills with particular emphasis on number formation and reducing number reversal. Ten Town has now extended to cover numbers up to 20. The new content is based around Tia Ten, a celebrity chef, who invites the Ten Town characters onto her TV show. In each episode they introduce a new number and reception class maths topic. **tentown.co.uk**

Exercise for the mind

5 Tatty Bumpkin runs a national programme of yoga-inspired sessions for babies and children aged 0–7 years in nurseries, preschools and schools. Its inclusive, child-led and story-based sessions are fully aligned to the EYFS – each story is accompanied by full EYFS links and notes – and the sessions have been developed by yoga teachers, paediatric physiotherapists and educationalists. The imaginative stories and role play employed encourage children's self-regulation skills, with individual sessions supporting physical, social and communication skills.
tattybumpkin.com

Get a sweater on

6 How can you keep your kids cosy and help to raise some money for a great cause this winter? By getting your class to take part in Save the Children's Christmas Jumper Day! This year's event takes place on Friday 16 December, and by wearing a silly festive woolly and donating the suggested £1, children will be saving lives. Sign up today at the website listed below for your free fundraising pack, or call **0808 281 1031.**
christmasjumperday.org

Take a CLOSER LOOK

It's all too easy for the little things to pass under our noses, but put beneath a microscope they can inform and excite in equal measure, says **Carey Fluker Hunt...**

Really good non-fiction is a must-have in every classroom. But while it can transform the experience of emerging readers who aren't engaged by storybooks, it can struggle to compete with picturebooks, both in terms of quality and production values, and may it may not grab the attention and interest of children who like a more imaginative approach.

Cue *Tiny: The Invisible World of Microbes*, an information book that's as aesthetically pleasing as it is authoritative, and one that has much to offer KS1 children. It's the latest in a series of non-fiction titles by former zoologist Nicola Davies and takes a look at the invisible world of microbes; a topic that could, in other hands, be challenging for this age group. But Nicola knows her readers, introducing her subject in a friendly-yet-respectful manner, and in a way that makes no assumptions about prior knowledge. She provides hard facts, but always in context (do *you* know how many microbes there are in a single drop of seawater?) and complex ideas are explored in a way that makes it possible for children to relate.

Nicola's informal style is complemented by Emily Sutton's charmingly restrained illustrations, which, with their nostalgic colour palette and decorative appeal, add something very special to the text.

Tiny is a book that brings science and art together, warmly and confidently, in a way that makes perfect sense. Read it, add it to your book corner, and let it inspire you to create some wonderful learning opportunities for your class.

KEY STAGE 1

It's good to talk

Read the book together, making sure that everyone can see the pictures. What do your children think about it? Is there anything they would like to ask the author as a result of reading this book, or wish had been included? Does this book remind them of anything else they've read? What do they think about the pictures, and what would it have been like to read this book without them?

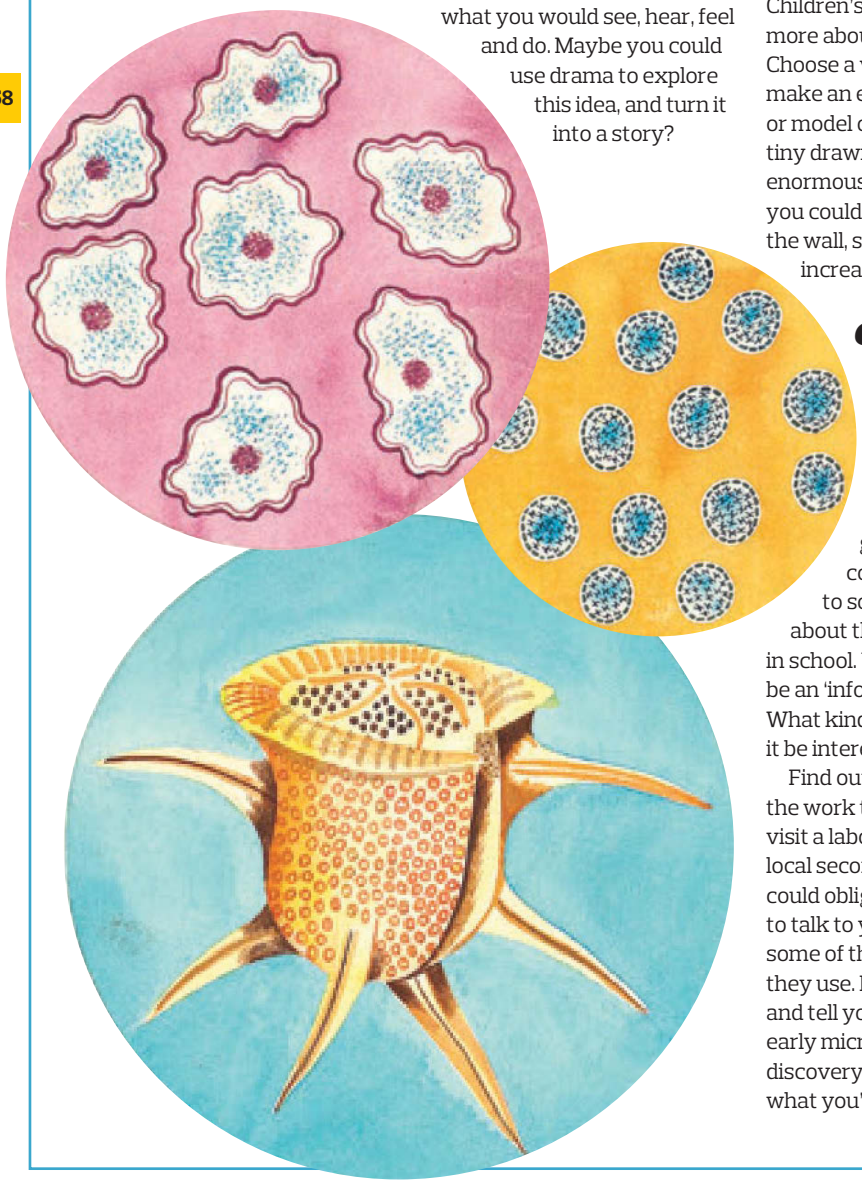
Who would your children recommend this book to, and why?

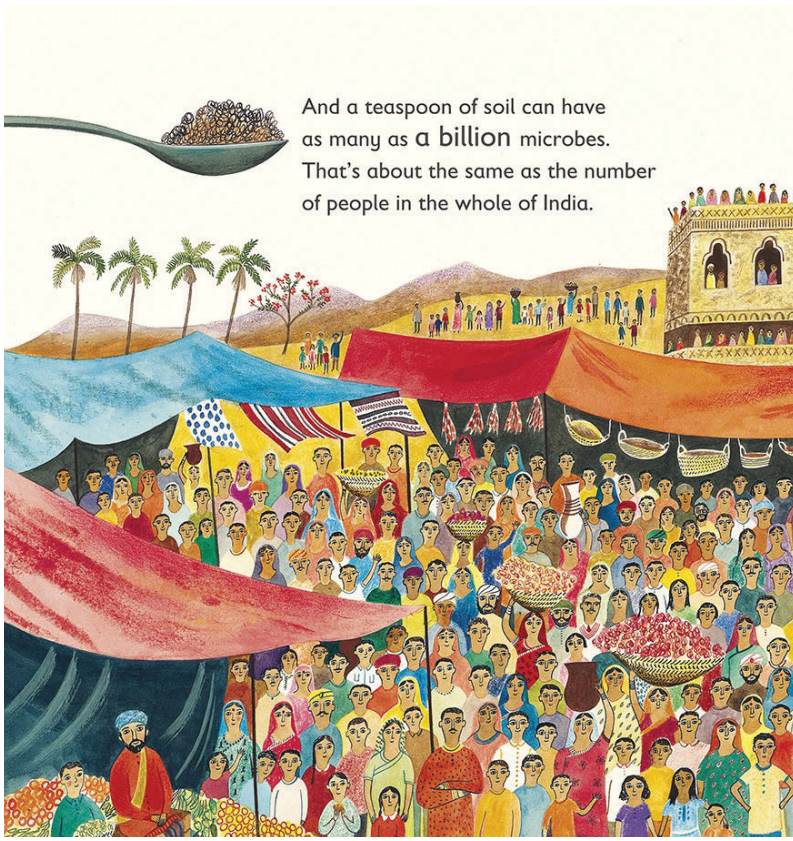
The 'voice' in this book seems to be talking to the reader as a friend. Who do your children think the 'voice' belongs to? Find out about the author, and how she knows so much about the natural world. Visit nicola-davies.com/about.php to hear Nicola talking about her love of animals.

If your children were going to write a non-fiction book, what subject would they choose? Make a list of their suggestions and add books on these subjects to your reading corner. Leave the list on display and revisit it from time to time, to see whether children are becoming aware of other subjects and expanding their interests.

Little and large

This book is all about tiny microbes. Find out about other very small creatures (such as minibeasts) and big ones (such as the blue whale). What would it be like to be much smaller or bigger than you are? Talk about what you would see, hear, feel and do. Maybe you could use drama to explore this idea, and turn it into a story?





Look at *Actual Size* by Steve Jenkins (Frances Lincoln Children's Books) to find out more about size and scale. Choose a very tiny animal and make an enormous drawing or model of it. Or, make a tiny drawing or model of an enormous animal. Perhaps you could create a size line on the wall, showing animals of increasing scale.

Going for gold

Set up a treasure hunt in the school grounds or local park. Create clues that rely on observation as well as deduction, and get children working cooperatively in teams to solve the puzzle. Talk about the experience back in school. What did it feel like to be an 'information detective'? What kind of information would it be interesting to explore?

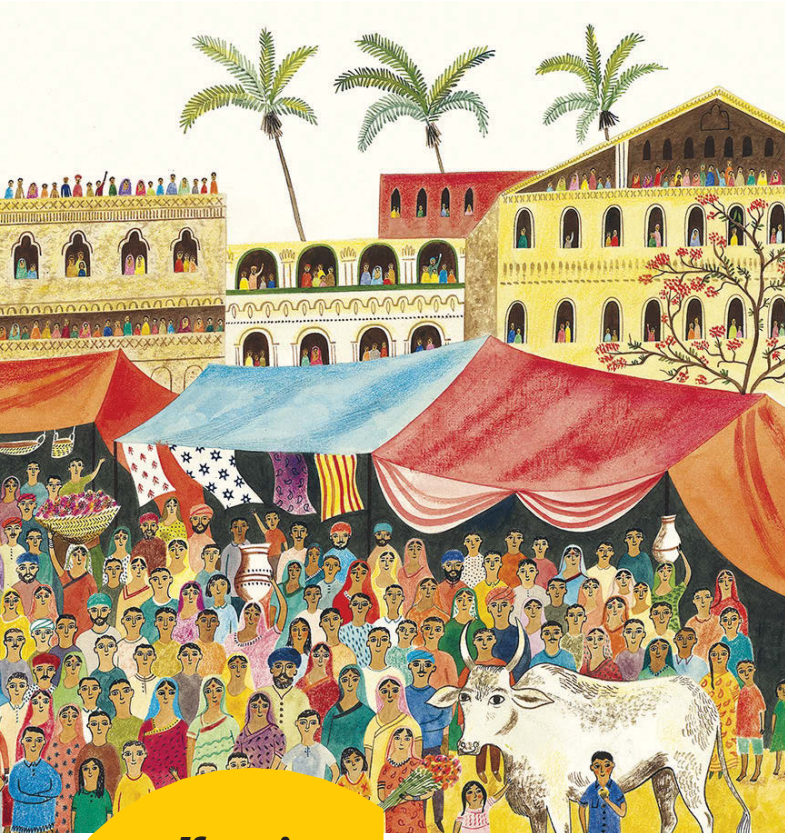
Find out about scientists and the work they do. If possible, visit a laboratory (perhaps your local secondary or high school could oblige) or invite a scientist to talk to your class and show some of the instruments that they use. Do your own research and tell your class about early microscopes and the discovery of microbes. Relate what you've learned to your children's experiences during the treasure hunt: scientists are like detectives, searching for a special kind of knowledge and following clues.

Set up a role-play area with white coats, lab benches, beakers, test tubes and other props and materials, including plenty of notebooks, reference books, information charts and pencils, and invite small groups to explore and interact. You can also include junk modelling materials, plasticine and other tactile resources in case children want to design and build equipment of their own.

What are your children inventing, discovering, creating or exploring? Ask them to talk, draw and write about it.

On closer inspection

Bring a microscope into school and show your class how to look at slides. Make observational drawings, like scientists, and label them. Look at Emily Sutton's drawing of Paramecium and compare it with microscopic photographs and diagrams found online. If you like, you can explore the structure of Paramecium by taking children into a large space such as the school hall and asking half the class to join hands to create a circle (this is will be the outer wall of the organism) while the others



If you've enjoyed Tiny, look out for...

- ***A First Book of Nature*** **by Nicola Davies and Mark Hearld (Walker Books)**
- ***What's Eating You?*** **by Nicola Davies and Neal Layton (Walker Books)**
- ***Creaturepedia*** **by Adrienne Barman (Wide Eyed Books)**

huddle to create the nucleus inside (shown in red in Emily Sutton's drawing) and the food holes or 'vacuoles' (which are shown as yellow with red spots).

Paramecium and other microbes look very different from other creatures, but they are still alive. What do living creatures need and do, as far as your children are aware? (Breathe, eat, drink, sleep, excrete, reproduce) How can we keep the world safe and healthy for all living creatures?

Behaviour patterns

Look at the way Emily Sutton has drawn the microbes in this book. Compare her drawings with photos taken from the internet, then make some drawings of your own. Create 3D models of microbes, using junk materials or papier mâché, then paint and hang them from the ceiling.

The hardback version of *Tiny* includes microbe-patterned endpapers. Use your microbe drawings to create patterns, or get help cutting the outlines into lino tiles so that your children can print with them. Monoprinting (using a layer of paint on a shiny surface, drawing a shape with your finger, then placing paper over the paint to capture the image) is also effective with simple outline designs such as these.

Double the fun

Explore the way that microbes split and multiply by using a natural material such as grains of rice or dried beans. As a whole class or in groups, investigate the number pattern produced as the 'microbes' reproduce. This can be done by counting carefully, grouping the rice or beans on a large sheet of card, and labelling – or, you can get children to group themselves to show how the numbers increase. Is there a way to work out how many microbes you would have after each split without counting them? (If you have four microbes to start with, you add four and four to make eight after the split – they double each time.)

Make microbe number pictures by choosing a number, then drawing that amount of microbes in a pattern on your paper. To help them, children can look at the double-page spread in the book that shows the E Coli microbes. Can they make their microbe number pictures beautiful? Do they look better if they use a single colour, or more than one? What happens if they work with a partner or a group?

Busy, busy, busy

Read the book again and make a list of all the things that microbes do. What would the world be like if those jobs weren't done? Imagine you're a microbe and talk about yourself and your life. What do you do, and what do you think about it? Perhaps you could write a report for the *Microbe Gazette*.

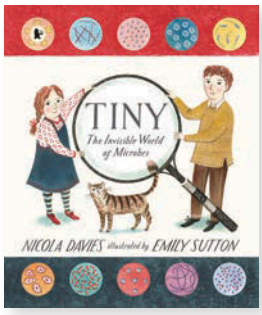
Change and decay

Get hold of some Petri dishes or use see-through lidded containers. Put a small quantity of cheese, apple or bread into each container and close the lid. Explain that the food will begin to decay as time goes on and that you're going to watch what happens and make scientific notes. Talk about safety ("We're not going to open the containers because...") and fairness ("We're going to look at each dish at the same time each day, and we're not going to mix them up").

Put some of the containers into a fridge, some in a cool place and some in a warmer place. Observe the changes that occur by making sketches, taking photos and writing notes. Which food starts to decay first? And in which location does it decay most quickly? What else do you notice, and what have you learned?

Post photos and reports on the classroom door or noticeboard (or school intranet) so that parents and carers can follow your investigation. Write about what you've done and illustrate it. In small groups with an adult helper, invite children to talk about what they've done and record using a camera or mobile phone.

Be sure to talk about food safety (washing hands, using fridges) and re-read *Tiny* so that children can make connections between their investigation and the book. Can you design and produce some health advice posters for your school, using what you've learned?



TURNING THE PAGE

AT THE END OF YOUR PROJECT, BRING THE WHOLE THING FULL CIRCLE BY MAKING YOUR OWN NON-FICTION BOOK...

> Work together to research, write, illustrate and create a whole-class, non-fiction book. Ask children to choose their favourite subject and find out about it, then write a report and illustrate. Look at *Tiny* for ideas to help you make your writing more interesting.
> Either make a class book to use or buy a large, plain sketchbook from an art supplier. Then decide how to organise your information: will you arrange the reports alphabetically, or by theme? Use encyclopaedias to discover how others have solved this question before making your decision.
> Add a contents list and an index before sharing your book with children in another class.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carey Fluker Hunt is creative projects manager at Seven Stories, the Centre for Children's Books in Newcastle upon Tyne. Find out more about Seven Stories at sevenstories.org.uk.

UP FOR DISCUSSION

If young children are to develop into confident readers and writers, we must help them learn to share their ideas, says **Michael Jones...**

Reading Kathy Brodie's excellent articles on language development, recently (see *Teach Early Years* magazine issues 6.1 and 6.2 – Ed.), reminded me of some exciting work that we developed as part of the Every Child a Talker (ECaT) project. Research shows that children with well-developed language are more likely to achieve more than those who enter Reception with poor language skills. Improving children's vocabulary is an important starting point. However, one of the key skills that children need in order to have a successful start in reading and writing, is the ability to talk about ideas.

Children particularly need to be able to talk about something that has already happened, and ideally to explain all about it to someone who wasn't there at the time. This ability to talk about something out of context helps children to understand and talk about events and ideas in stories, including what happened, what is going to happen and to explain how the people or animals in the story felt. Being able to use language in a decontextualised way is crucial when children come to write their own stories. This can seem like a very big challenge for practitioners working with children with delayed language or who are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. However, even very young children can develop the ability to use language out of context, as I found when I talked with three-year-old Antonia about a worm she had found...

Antonia and the worm

Antonia was a very quiet little girl from a Spanish-speaking family, who had been in her preschool class for six months. She had recently been diagnosed with *otitis media* – otherwise known as 'glue ear' – which had affected her hearing. Antonia's speech and language therapist felt that this hearing impairment was the main reason for Antonia's delay in developing her home language and only being able to say a few words in English. Antonia tended to play alongside other children, and when I joined her in the digging area, she was digging in one corner, while two other children were busy nearby. As Antonia was digging she found a worm, which in Spanish is *gusano*. Our conversation went something like this:

Antonia: Look!
Michael: Ah yes! A worm.
Antonia: Gusano! (Screws up her face in disgust)
Michael: Gusano? Gusano?
Antonia: Gusano.

Michael: We say 'worm'. You have found a worm.
Antonia: Wom (looks disgusted).
Michael: Oh! You don't like the worm? Let's show the other children.
(We go to show the two other children)
Michael: Look! Antonia has found something. What is it, Antonia?
Antonia: Gusano.
Other children: It's a worm! She's got a worm!
Antonia: Wom! Wom!

With my help, Antonia had successfully talked about something with two other children. This was an achievement in itself, but now I wanted to see if I could help her talk to an adult about what we had done. I stayed with Antonia for another five minutes and then she wanted to play in the sand. I could see that another member of staff, Jackie, was there, so I said to Antonia, ''Shall we tell Jackie about the worm?'' As we walked over I said, ''You found a worm. It was a wiggly worm. Let's tell Jackie about your worm.''

When we arrived at the sandpit, I held Antonia's hand and both Jackie and I crouched down so that we were at her level.

Michael: Jackie, Antonia and I have been in the digging area.
Jackie: Have you? Was it nice? (Antonia says nothing)
Michael: Yes, it was. And Antonia found something, didn't you? (Antonia nods) Yes. We found something wiggly.
Jackie: Oh! Was it a worm? Antonia, was it a worm?
Antonia: Yes. Wom.
Jackie: Oh, you found a worm! Was it nice? Did you like it?
Antonia: (Screwing up her face) No!
Jackie: Oh! You didn't like it? You didn't like the worm?
Antonia: No!
Jackie: Shall we tell Mummy?
Antonia: Yes. Mama. Gusano.
Michael: Yes. Gusano. You can tell Mama you found a gusano, a worm.

Sharing ideas

Later in the session, the children were sitting in a group for story time. Jackie and I were leading the group, and we asked the children to tell us what they had been doing outside. As usual, the more confident children were able to explain what they had been doing. Jackie was keen to involve Antonia, so said, ''Antonia was busy outside, weren't you, Antonia?''
At the sound of her name, Antonia looked up. ''Antonia was digging, and she found something wiggly.'' On hearing the word 'wiggly' several children called out ''worm!'' Jackie continued, ''That's right. Antonia, what did you find?'' Jackie waited for five seconds and then said, ''You found a...'' To which Antonia said, ''Wom.''

So Antonia had successfully talked in a group about something that only a few other people knew about. A short while later it was time for the children to be collected by their parents. Jackie made a point of talking to Antonia's mother.

Jackie (holding Antonia's hand): Mummy, Antonia has been busy today. She has been digging in the garden.
Mum: Oh! That's nice!
Jackie: Antonia, tell Mummy what you found when you were digging. What did you find?
Antonia: Gusano. Wom. Wom.
Jackie: That's right. You found a worm, didn't you? (Antonia smiles and nods her head.)
Mum: In Spanish we say 'gusano' for worm. Shall we see if we can find some in our garden? (Antonia smiles and nods her head.)
Jackie: And will you tell us all about it? (Antonia smiles and nods her head.)

With this short series of conversations, Jackie and I had been able to boost Antonia's vocabulary, while at the same time helping her to share her experience with other children and adults who hadn't been there. Antonia's response in English may have only involved the word 'worm', but this was the start of a child with significant language delay being able to talk about events that had already taken place, and how she had felt about them. The next day Jackie followed this activity up by sharing with Antonia and the group a storybook about a worm and a non-fiction book about mini-beasts, which Antonia took home to talk about with her family.

This is a simple technique that can be applied to all children, to help them develop the skills they need to talk about something out of context. It is the beginning of their ability to share ideas.

HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN TALK ABOUT IDEAS

> Share an experience together.
> Talk about what you are both doing.
> Help the child to talk to other children about what you are doing.
> Take the child to tell another adult.
> Talk to the child about what you might say to her parents at home time.
> Help the child describe to her parents what you had been doing together.
> The next day, repeat the activity and talk about what you had done yesterday.

Michael's latest book, *Talking and Learning with Young Children*, is published by SAGE. To receive a 20% discount on the purchase price, visit sagepub.co.uk, add the book to your basket and enter discount code UK16AUTHOR2 at checkout.*

*Valid until 31/12/2016, cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Jones is a writer on children's language development. Visit talk4meaning.co.uk

Since the launch of Talk Boost KS1 over 58,000 children have benefited from the programme.

Talk Boost KS1 from I CAN, the children's communication charity, is a targeted, evidenced based intervention that is delivered in primary schools by classroom teachers and assistants. The intervention is proven to narrow the gap between 4-7 year olds with language delay and can boost a child's communication by an average of 18 months after a 10 week programme.

Visit www.talkboostks1.org.uk or call 020 7843 2515 for further information

Talk Boost KS2

You may also be interested in Talk Boost KS2, a Key Stage 2 intervention for children aged 7 to 10 with delayed communication and language skills.

Find out more about Talk Boost KS2 on our website: www.talkboostks2.org.uk or email talkboostks2@ican.org.uk

How to encourage communication

Supporting speech, language and listening skills in your classroom should be your number one priority, says **Mandy Grist...**

Think about everything you've done since you woke up this morning. How many times have you had to use language, and how difficult would it have been if you couldn't? Speech, language and communication underpin everything we do, and although it's easy to take these skills for granted, there are currently over a million children in the UK today who struggle with them.

Worryingly, the EYFS Profile results show that a fifth of children starting school don't meet expected levels in communication and language, and this figure rises significantly in more deprived areas. This is a real problem, particularly given what we know about the importance of early language for later academic success. Analysis published in the 'Ready to Read' report from Save the Children showed that a child's vocabulary ability at age five is strongly associated with their reading ability at age seven. Further evidence shows that one in four children who struggled with language at age five did not reach the expected standard in English at age 11.

Children with poor language skills also face real difficulties when learning to read, as many of the skills required for reading are speech and language skills. A good vocabulary, being able to listen and pay attention, the ability to decode words – all are crucial to literacy. Essentially, if you want to support a child's reading, first support their talking.

Practitioners working with children in Key Stage 1 have an important role, not only in supporting and developing early language skills, but also in helping children prepare for the challenges of Key Stage 2. The KS2 curriculum places greater demands on language skills; children need to understand more complex and abstract language, and use more varied vocabulary and grammatical structures. They need to be able to use language for learning, to think, plan and problem-solve independently. At the same time friendships and interactions with peers become more verbal and important. Providing children with the foundation language skills they need is crucial to later success.

Best practice in the classroom

There are lots of different things that you can do to create a communication supportive environment for all pupils, including those with delayed language or speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Here are five ideas to get you started...

1 DEVELOP LISTENING SKILLS

Practise and reinforce good listening behaviours, for example, looking at the speaker, keeping still, thinking about the same thing as the speaker. Give children praise throughout the day when you observe good listening behaviours being used.

2 BUILD IN THINKING TIME

Children need time to process and understand language, and to think about what they want to say. This might just involve encouraging children to 'have a think' before answering a question, or you might introduce the 'no hands up' rule, where children have to wait 7–10 seconds after the question has been asked before they can answer.

3 USE VISUAL SUPPORT

Use visual support in combination with spoken language to remind children what they should be doing. This may be a visual timetable or breakdown of the steps needed to complete a specific task. They can be used to support children in a number of ways; children with difficulty understanding language may benefit from the extra processing time they allow, and the extra visual support can also be useful to children who are learning English as an additional language.

4 FOCUS ON VOCABULARY

Pre-teach key topic words. It helps children to learn and recall key words if they are supported to think about what the word means, how it links to other words that they already know and what sounds are in the word.

5 INCLUDE SUPPORTED GROUP WORK

Working in a group helps children learn the skills to interact successfully with others. Introduce just one skill to start with, for example, turn-taking, so that children have the opportunity to observe and practise this before moving on. At first the adult might need to take a lead role, modelling behaviour or providing appropriate language. Over time, however, it should be possible to reduce the amount of adult support needed.

I CAN's *Talk Boost KS1* programme is a structured and robustly evidenced programme that can boost a child's communication by an average of 18 months after 10 weeks of intervention. Visit www.ican.org.uk/talkboost

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mandy Grist is I CAN's Lead Adviser of Communications.

Inspiring ILLUSTRATIONS

Picture books are often perceived as a first step into reading, but encouraging children to create their own can have wide-ranging benefits to later literacy learning, explains **Charlotte Hacking...**

What do our children think of as 'good writing'? One child I asked said it's when "it has a capital letter at the beginning of each sentence, a finger space between each letter and a full stop at the end of every sentence"... This isn't an isolated example – there's a real danger in the current climate that children are focusing too much on the technicalities of writing at the expense of being creative.

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE)'s Power of Pictures project was set up to help teachers redress the balance by utilising the engaging illustrations and prose of high-quality picture books to inspire creative story-writing – and following two years of action research, we've found that the following approaches can make a real impact on children's engagement and achievement...

Responding to illustration

Children are naturally drawn to illustrations in picture books. Their interest in images and their ability to read them can be developed through planned interventions with an emphasis on talk, focusing their attention on elements such as facial expression, body language, use of colour and framing, where our gaze is directed, and the perspective the illustration is seen from.

Children need time to enjoy and respond to pictures, and to talk together about what the illustrations contribute to their understanding of the text. They can discuss their interpretations and use personal experiences to empathise with different characters and situations. Such discussions are inclusive and help make a written text more accessible. Focusing on illustration contributes to children's ability to read for meaning, express their ideas and respond to the texts they encounter, and is an engaging way of developing critical thinking, vocabulary and the ability to think from different points of view.

Drawing inspiration

Illustrating characters alongside an enabling adult or illustrator gives children a starting point in the process of bringing characters to life. Those who are less confident can see where to start, the shapes that are used to build up characters, and how detail such as proportion, facial expression, clothing and props adds layers of understanding about character and emotion.

Giving children the time to illustrate their own

characters as part of their idea development is vital. They need to explore and experiment, trying out different ideas in a range of media. They can then talk about which ideas work best for them and which characters they feel speak their story. Throughout this process children's thoughts will be focused on the character, allowing descriptive language and narrative ideas to develop, readying them for the writing process.

Learning through play

Exploring narrative through play helps children to step into the world of the picture book and explore it more completely. Opportunities for small world play, with props, puppets or using dioramas based on a known or new story, promote talk about the shape of the story. They encourage children to discuss key elements such as character and plot, experimenting with the 'what ifs?' and making decisions about how they create action in the setting. As they play, alone or with others, they practise their narrative skills and 'try on' the different characters using different voices to bring them to life. Through drama and role-play children imagine characters' body language, behaviour and tones of voice in ways they can draw on later when they write.

Developing narratives

When creating a picture book, the author considers the relationship between the words and images, ensuring they have distinct roles. When planning and developing ideas for picture book narratives, children approach the process in different ways and should be supported to do so. Some, like some authors, may think of the words in writing first and then the images that will accompany them. Others may think of the pictures first before composing accompanying text, while others will work with a combination of the two.

Throughout the writing process, children must be given materials and space to allow them to plan and compose ideas in different ways. Providing personal sketchbooks to develop ideas in and out of taught sessions is helpful.

During their planning, children must work out how their story will develop. The simplest way to do this is by using a storyboard. It's useful for marking out the key spreads in a story within a given number of pages, usually 32 pages or 16 spreads. Less experienced writers might want to work with fewer spreads to help begin to structure their story.

Working on small 'thumbnails' allows children to experiment with, and work out ideas for, developing a visual sequence, how spreads will look in a finished book and how words and images will work together on the page. Children can also plan ideas for book covers, front and endpapers, title pages and dedications, allowing them to use and understand the language of picture book publication.

Responding to writing

You can help children become reflective writers by giving them the chance to talk about themselves as writers, voice their views, listen to others and develop new knowledge and understanding. Just as an author would work with an editor, children should have opportunities to help each other by having their writing read aloud, and responding as readers, allowing them to support each other as they compose and structure their ideas. Writers can tell response partners what they are pleased with in their writing, or what they may be struggling with. Response partners should reflect on the impact of the narrative and illustrations on them as a reader. Children can then redraft sections of their work, based on these conversations.

At the final stage of the writing process, children should have time to support each other with transcription proofreading, looking at spelling, punctuation and grammar, and consider the quality of the entire piece before publication.

Making books

Publishing their work for an audience helps children to write more purposefully. Making books provides a motivating context within which children can bring together their understanding of the entire writing process. They should be encouraged to explore and experiment with the language of picture books by investigating different forms (e.g. interactive books with pop-ups and flaps, hardback books with dust jackets, and e-books). Let them try out their ideas to see how the physical book will work for the reader before publishing their finished book. This is as important as drafting, redrafting and editing their writing.

Along with author illustrator Ed Vere (*Mr Big*, *Banana*, *Max the Brave*), Charlotte devised The Power of Pictures project, investigating how to read and explore picture books in the primary years and the impact illustration can have on children's writing. Find out more about the project or book your place on a 2016–2017 Power of Pictures course at clpe.org.uk/powerofpictures

A CLOSER LOOK

HOW TO GET MORE FROM PICTURE BOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM...

1 **USE PICTURE BOOKS WITH CHILDREN THROUGHOUT THE PRIMARY YEARS –** appreciate their value as a vehicle to extend literacy skills and a tool for learning about structure in narrative, as well their role in supporting children with EAL or lower levels of literacy.

2 **SPEND TIME LOOKING CLOSELY AT ILLUSTRATIONS –** treat them as pieces of art; appreciate all the small details that provide information for children to infer and deduce beyond the words on the page.

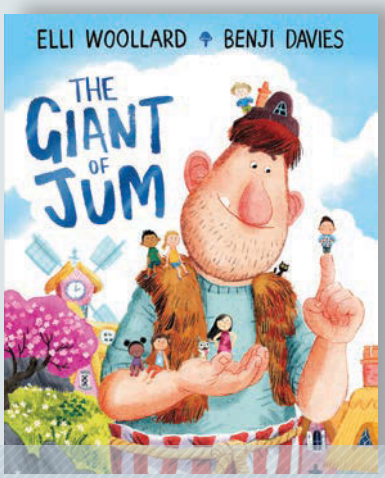
3 **ALLOW CHILDREN TO INTEGRATE DRAWING WITH WRITING –** provide time regularly for children to draw before, alongside or after writing to explore and extend ideas. Teachers using this approach found that it enabled children to be more descriptive and use better vocabulary.

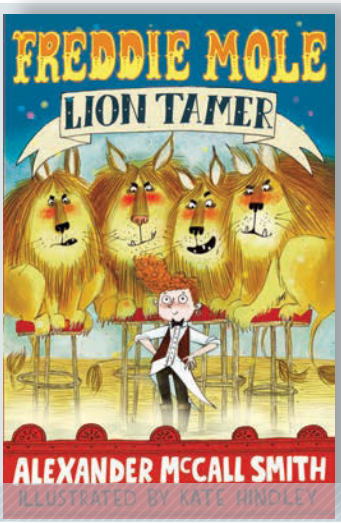
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charlotte Hacking is the Learning Programmes Leader at the CLPE, an independent UK charity with a global reputation for high-quality research and professional development into literacy and teaching.

Book club

Helen Mulley and Zoe Heslop review five new children's titles that will excite, challenge and enlighten your class...





There's a Bear on my Chair

(Nosy Crow, hardback, £9.99, ages 2–6 years)

This clever, funny book plays on a feeling that most children will recognise: the very specific sense of impotent frustration that is felt when someone else is sitting on a chair you know, but cannot exactly prove, is 'yours'. With smart, sassy wordplay, classy typography and endearing, enduring illustration, Ross Collins captures the increasing irritation of the mouse who is convinced his place has been usurped with affectionate accuracy – and the little rodent's righteous indignation is even more hilarious as it becomes clear that the polar bear with whom he is so outraged is utterly oblivious of his existence, let alone his claim on the seat in question. Internal rhymes keep the story bouncing along, and the range of options Collins comes up with for 'bear/chair' is impressive; might your class be able to pool their resources and put together a similarly lengthy and varied list for another creature? What if there were a cat on their mat? Or a flea in their tea?

The Giant of Jum

(Macmillan, hardback, £11.99, ages 0–7 years)

Everyone knows that a small boy called Jack is by far the tastiest treat possible for a grumpy giant – so when the protagonist of this witty, rhyming tale by Elli Woollard feels his tummy rumbling, of course he dutifully stomps off to look for exactly that. He knows all the right, scary threats to make; but the youngsters he meets on his search don't seem to have read the same stories as he has. All they see when they look at him is a wonderfully tall, friendly stranger who can help them retrieve a ball from the village fountain, rescue their cat from a tree, and even give one of them a lift home on his broad shoulders. And after a while, the Giant realises that actually, he's not grizzly, grouchy and grumpy as everyone has always told him – instead, he's a lovely fellow who much prefers chocolate cake to roasted Jack. Children will love this original take on a classic fairytale – and it's a great lesson in the power of language to define a person.

Freddie Mole, Lion Tamer

(Bloomsbury, hardback, £9.99, ages 5–7 years)

There's a reason why people of all ages fall in love with the writing of Alexander McCall Smith: he has a way of telling a story that is, quite simply, irresistible – and, happily, he seems to have an endless supply of them. In this gentle adventure that's perfect for newly independent readers – as well as for reading aloud – we are introduced to Freddie Mole, an ordinary boy who takes a holiday job with a travelling circus to earn some extra money for his struggling family and ends up with a starring role in the show, alongside some surprisingly friendly lions. There's plenty of showbiz sparkle and razzmatazz and a dash or two of thrilling danger as the tale unfolds, but what shines most brightly is the message that runs through all of McCall Smith's books: choose kindness. Freddie isn't especially strong, brave or clever – but he is immensely likeable, and it's his friendly personality and consideration for others that ultimately earns rewards for him and his loved ones.

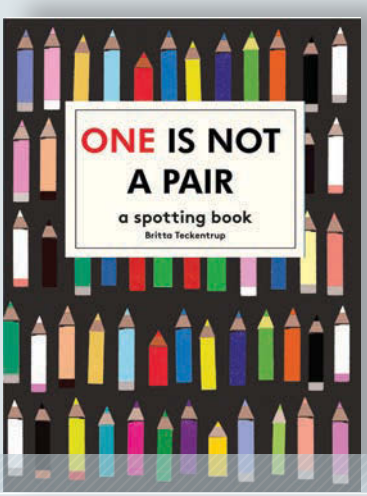
Dog ears

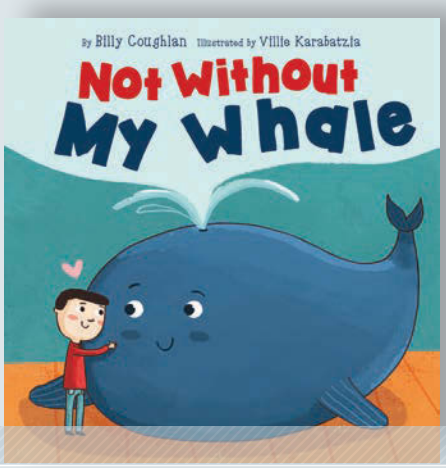
KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR THESE NEW PUBLICATIONS...

1 TROLL STINKS
(Andersen Press)
The scourge of cyber bullying is rarely far from the news these days, so a book that introduces young children to the issues in an age-appropriate fashion is must for every school library. With its cautionary tale of the damage that sending mean messages can cause, *Troll Stinks* by Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross fits the bill perfectly.

2 QUICK QUACK QUENTIN
(Hodder Children's Books)
From the creators of *Oi Frog* and *Oi Dog* comes *Quick Quack Quentin* – starring a duck with an unusual speech impediment. You see, the 'a' has gone missing from his distinctive call, and he spends the story searching for a creature who might have one going spare – after a fruitless search, enter the aardvark, who saves the day!

3 TIGER IN A TUTU
(Orchard Books)
Max isn't like other tigers – for a start he resides in the glamorous city of Paris and has access to a chaise lounge, but that's not all: he also longs to be a celebrated ballet dancer. Unfortunately without the correct kit or ballet lessons, things are looking bleak... until he makes a friend, Celeste, who helps turn his dream into reality.





One is Not A Pair

(Bonnier Publishing, hardback, £10.99, ages 4+ years)

Finding the odd one out is something that children enjoy doing from a very early age – and remains a satisfying pastime pretty much indefinitely. Few artists seem to understand the pleasure and complexity of the process as completely as Britta Teckentrup, who has now produced a third 'spotting book' to add to her previous, brilliant offerings in the same genre: *The Odd One Out* and *Where's the Pair?* Once again, she has created a series of beautiful, wallpaper-like illustrations, each with a secret to hide – and this time, she has made the challenge of discovery even trickier than before, with delightful rhyming text by Katie Haworth inviting readers to identify the single 'real' pair amongst a succession of almost-twins within subtly repeating patterns. This book could be used as the inspiration for an art project with built-in differentiation – can your pupils come up with ideas of their own to add to Teckentrup's collection? Just how difficult can they make the task?

Not Without My Whale

(Maverick, paperback, £6.99, ages 0–5 years)

New places, with different rules, expectations and people to meet can be a scary prospect at any age – and for small children, a comfort object can have an important part to play in helping them adjust to change. What happens, though, when they are faced with a situation in which a comfort object is not approved of, or perhaps even not permitted? This is essentially the dilemma addressed by Billy Coughlan in this sweet, reassuring story of one boy and his beloved whale. Arnold doesn't want to go to school – he doesn't want to sing, or do maths, and he definitely doesn't want to play football (no one ever picks him). Not without his whale, which is clearly too big, smelly and wet for the classroom. Luckily, Dora-from-next-door is a practical, cheery type, and comes up with all kinds of solutions to make his participation possible – and every time he joins in with something, his confidence grows and he becomes more at ease with his classmates. It's sound sense, wrapped up in delightful silliness; splendid stuff.

Meet the author

ALEXANDER MCCALL SMITH TALKS STORIES AND CIRCUSES

Do you think that 'running away to join the circus' is a dream most children have at some point or another? Did you?
I think any child who sees a circus must be struck by the atmosphere of romance and excitement. I certainly remember feeling that as a boy. I went to some very old-fashioned and remarkable circuses, all of which in those days had lions. Did I want to run away to the circus? I suspect that I did – certainly had anyone offered me a job I would have accepted with alacrity!

Did you have any literary heroes when you were a child?
I liked Rudyard Kipling stories and I read all the usual things – acres of Enid Blyton and Richmal Crompton. I thought that the Just William books were wonderful, and I still think that to an extent.

Did you enjoy sharing books with your children when they were young?
I have two daughters both of whom are now fully grown with children of their own. I have taken great delight in being part of their reading journey but they have also been a very important part of mine. Both were avid readers from the earliest age and now enjoy sharing simple books with their own young children. Lucy, my oldest daughter, gave me a beautiful plate a few years ago into which she had inscribed some verses by my favourite poet, WH Auden. She had attended a pottery class to learn how to do this and it was a very special and appropriate gift.

How important are illustrations in children's books?
Illustrations are a very important part of children's books. I am a great admirer of the work of Iain McIntosh who has worked with me on many of my books over the years, including my Scotland Street books and now my School Ship Tobermory series. We have known each other for a long time and he really is at the top of his game right now. Kate Hindley has done a terrific job with Freddie Mole. I don't actually see my characters as I write so it can be quite a surprise when I am introduced to them by an illustrator. Kate has really caught his spirit and imagination.

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WHO WAS SAINT HILDA?

How do Anglo-Saxon princesses differ from those we have today? Get your class to consider the issues, says **Alf Wilkinson...**

TODAY YOU WILL...

Decide whether you think Hilda was a significant person

Locate her in time

Compare Hilda to other significant people to explore similarity and difference

Hilda of Whitby was born in 614 AD. She was an Anglo-Saxon princess who, for 33 years, lived in the royal family of Northumbria and carried out the duties of a princess. Aged 33, she decided to dedicate her life to God, and became a nun. King Oswiu gave her land on the cliffs in Whitby to build an abbey, for both monks [men] and nuns [women]. Unusually Hilda, a woman, was put in charge. She was famous for her teaching and her advice – many important people came to her with their problems. Soon after she died in 680AD, Hilda was made a saint, and miracles were said to happen near her grave. It was very unusual at that time for women to be important. Studying Hilda provides a starting point for KS2 when children will study Anglo-Saxon Britain.

Starter activity

Collect photographs of Kate Middleton from the newspapers or internet or, if you prefer, use a fictional Disney princess to prompt discussion of what a princess does. Make a class list. Ask the children what princesses do all day, and if they think princesses are important. Tell them they are going to study a princess called Hilda, who lived a long time ago. Do the children think Hilda would have done the same things as Kate Middleton/the Disney princess? How would they be similar/different? Remember, if you use the Disney Princess, to explore the difference between fact and fiction.

Main activities

1 What's significant?

Discuss with the children their idea of significance. Is it the same as important, or famous? Talk about some famous people they know of, and ask why they are famous. Who decides if someone is famous or not? You might start this by discussing who is significant/important in their own lives, and trying to tease out some idea as to what they think makes someone significant.

2 Where in time?

Create a class timeline covering the period 2000BC to 2000AD, if you wish to introduce the idea of BC and AD, or from the birth of Christ to today. Help the children identify where on the timeline Hilda was born and when she died. There are many ways of doing this: a living timeline using the children as pieces to move around the classroom; on the whiteboard; or along one wall of the classroom. It's important that children realise that Hilda lived a long, long time ago. How you do this will, of course, depend on what work you have previously carried out on time and timelines.

3 Asking questions

Download an image of Hilda from the internet – there are no contemporary images but there are plenty of her as Saint Hilda. Ask the children to come up with a list of questions they would like to ask her. Compile a class list of the best five 'history' questions. Discuss where they might find the answers, including the fact that there might be some questions we can't find the answers to, as it was so long ago. Try to find answers to the questions. Return to the introductory activity where they tried to predict how Hilda and Kate/Disney princess would be similar and different. Can they answer this question in more detail now?

4 Think again

Finally, ask the children if they now think Hilda was a significant individual, according to their own definition of 'significant'.

Extending the lesson

> You might similarly compare the life of Hilda running the Abbey at Whitby with the life of Mother Teresa, the nun whose work in Calcutta, India led to her being made a saint in September 2016.

> Pull the activity together by asking the children to compare the two periods: how similar/different were Anglo-Saxon Britain and today? You might focus on the life of women, or the place of religion, rather than society as a whole.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alf Wilkinson taught for many years and is now retired. He is a member of the Historical Association Primary Committee, and the editorial board of their journal, *Primary History*.


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SOL-FA SO GOOD

Sam Dixon sings the praises of a tried-and-tested musical system that helps to improve vocal pitching and the ability to recognise intervals between notes...

TODAY YOU WILL...

- Learn a scale with solfa names and hand signs
- Make a solfa wheel
- Learn a two-part song

Thanks to *The Sound of Music*, everybody knows the names of the scale: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, Ti, Do! But the origins of this system are not so well known, and its merits stretch well beyond Julie Andrews' dulcet tones.

The story begins with an Italian Medieval monk, Guido of Arezzo, who wanted to help his cathedral singers learn their chants more easily. He took the first syllable from the first six lines of a Latin hymn, "ut – re – mi – fa – so – la" with each syllable corresponding to a note in the ascending scale. 'Ut' became 'Do' and later on 'Si' was added as the seventh note in the scale. In the 19th century, the system was developed by Sarah Ann Glover (who changed 'Si' to 'Ti') and made popular in England by the Reverend John Curwen, who developed hand signs to visualise each tone.

There are two systems: 'the fixed Do', where the syllables are always attached to fixed pitches ('Do' is always C natural); or the 'moveable Do', where 'Do' represents the first tone in any scale. The beauty of the system is that it removes any confusion when young children learn 'letter names' for notes (A, B, C, D, E, F, G) and enhances their ability to pitch correctly.

Starter activity

Ask if anybody knows the song 'Do Re Mi' from *The Sound of Music*. Sing the song and explain that the words come from a musical scale called Solfa. Explain that each note in the scale has a corresponding hand sign (you'll find a graphic illustrating these at bit.ly/2cDdChB).

Main activities

1 Know your notes

Each note in the scale has a different 'personality' and a different job. One may feel like it's about to lead on somewhere new, another makes it sound like you've reached the end of the song. The following verse helps define the 'character' of each pitch and is a fun way to learn the scale (sing each line on the relevant pitch, with the accompanying hand sign):

Do super strong like a fist
Re always sliding up and down
Mi super stable so it's flat
Fa always feels falling down
So also strong like a slap
La a balloon floating up
Ti always pushing to the top
Do super strong like a fist

After the children are familiar with this mnemonic, see if they can sing each ascending note of the scale with the correct hand sign.

2 Make a Solfa wheel

A solfa wheel is a visual way to practise the scale. It's also helpful to illustrate that 'Do' at the 'top of the scale' is the same as 'Do' at the bottom, just an octave higher.

Give each child an A3 sheet of paper, with a picture of a circle divided into seven equal 'pizza slices'. Ask them to write the name of one note in each section, so that the scale goes up one pitch at a time as you go clockwise round the circle. Colour each slice:

Do = Red
Re = Orange
Mi = Yellow
Fa = Green
So = Blue
La = Purple
Ti = Pink

Sing around the wheel, clockwise, pointing to each slice. Can you sing it backwards?

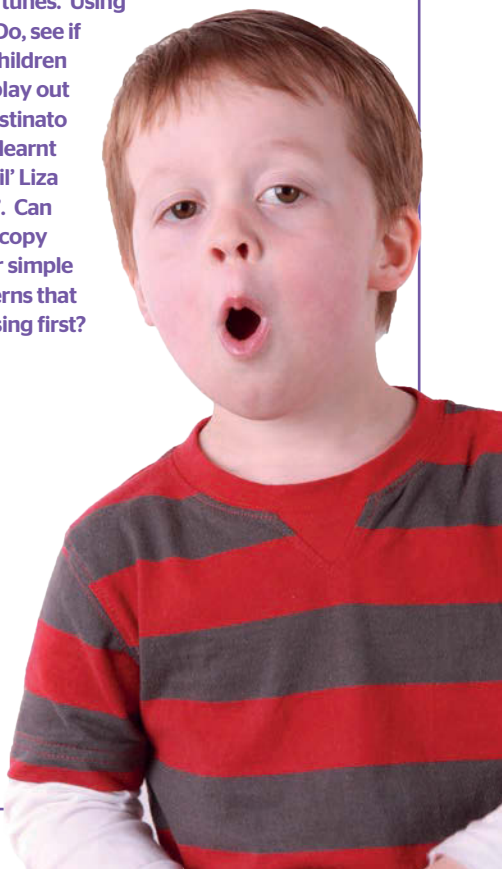
3 Lil' Liza Jane

This American folk song is easy to learn (access the score at bit.ly/2cBOEi2 or view a live version of the song at bit.ly/2cl5WzL). Teach children the melody first. Explain that a repeated melodic phrase that fits over the melody is called an *ostinato*. Teach the ostinato with hand signs.

Split into two groups and sing both parts together. Have the ostinato group start first to provide an introduction.

Extending the lesson

> Use a variety of tuned percussion (e.g. hand bells, xylophones) to explore simple solfa tunes. Using C as Do, see if the children can play out the ostinato they learnt for 'Lil' Liza Jane'. Can they copy other simple patterns that you sing first?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sam Dixon teaches class music at Brighton College Pre-prep and Prep school. Her original songs for children can be found at songchest.co.uk

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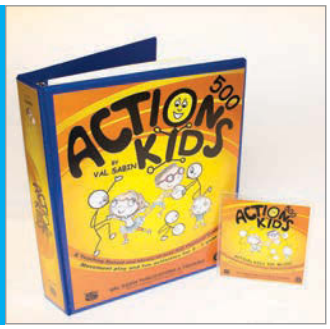

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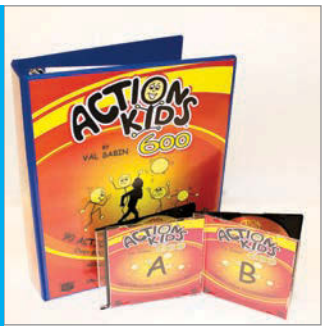

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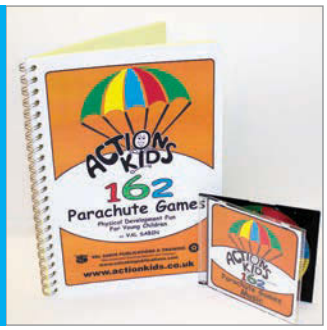

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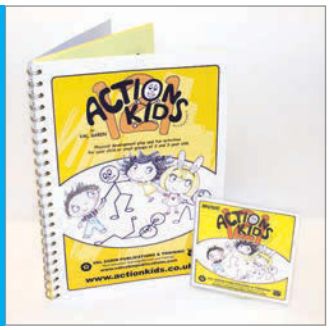

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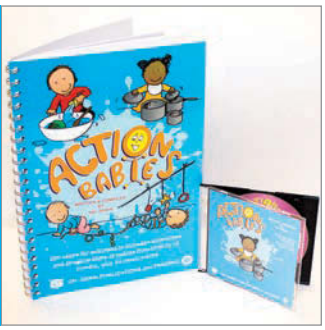

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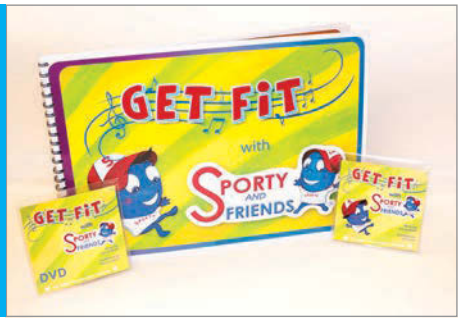

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CREATE WITH SHAPES

Armed with paper squares, rectangles, triangles and circles, your children can produce a geometric masterpiece, says **Judith Harries...**

TODAY YOU WILL...

Look at the painting 'Castle and Sun' by Paul Klee.

Identify the different geometric shapes in the painting.

Choose particular colours and shapes to create your own picture.

This activity aims to introduce children to the work of the famous artist Paul Klee, and simultaneously develops their understanding of the properties of different geometric shapes, particularly squares, rectangles and triangles. You will need images of the painting 'Castle and Sun' (pictured, see bit.ly/2cfeKeC), plus plastic shapes, a large cloth bag or pillow case, paper and construction paper, coloured chalks, scissors, shape templates, glue and wax crayons.

Starter activity

Start by showing the children a large image of the painting. Talk about the colours and shapes they can see. Play a game of 'Guess the shape'. Let children take turns to put their hand into a small bag of shapes. Can they identify the shape just by touch? How many sides does it have?

Place some large plastic shapes in a bigger cloth bag or pillow case. Invite children to pick a shape from the bag and identify it. Encourage use of mathematical language to name and describe the shapes. Let each child place their shape onto a large piece of paper on the floor. Subsequent shapes can build up a group shape-picture of a castle. The last child can add the round sun at the top to finish.

Image: wikiart.org

Main activities

1 Skylines at night

Explain to children that they are going to create their own shape-pictures of castles, buildings or skylines. Look at photographs of city skylines at night online. Point out the different colours, shapes and heights of buildings on the horizon. Let children have a go at drawing the shape of a skyline on a strip of long thin paper using coloured chalks or pastels.

2 Making shapes

Provide each child with an A4 sheet of black paper, coloured construction paper, shape templates, scissors and glue. Ask them to cut out their own small squares, rectangles and triangles in different colours. Show them how to create two triangles by cutting a square in half. Can they work out how to create a square by folding a rectangle over to create a folded triangle? What shape is left after they have cut out the square (a smaller rectangle)?

3 Building work

Provide children with pre-cut squares, rectangles and triangles, or let them use their own cut-out shapes. Encourage them to arrange the shapes on the black paper to create lots of different-sized buildings, towers, castles, houses, blocks of flats, etc. Try to leave small gaps between each shape so they are framed in black from the backing paper. Once they're happy with their arrangement, show the children how to lift each one and glue it onto the black paper.

4 Hidden pictures

Demonstrate how to take wax rubbings of a hidden shape. Secure one shape to a sturdy surface with blu-tac then cover with plain white paper. Show how to rub using the long side of a wax crayon. Watch the shape appear. Build up pictures and patterns by securing further shapes to the surface. These can be overlapped during the rubbing process. Play hide and seek – which shape has been hidden underneath? How quickly can it be guessed as the rubbing begins? Encourage the children to name the shape in their own and others' images. Build up the shapes into a building of their choice.

Extending the lesson

> Challenge more-able children to fill a white square of card with the coloured shapes leaving no big gaps and if possible no overlaps. This will end up looking more like a jigsaw puzzle and is quite tricky to complete.

> Introduce some 3D shapes to the children. Talk about the names and properties of cubes, cuboids, cylinders, cones, prisms and pyramids. Can the children build a model of their picture or skyline?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Judith Harries is an author and teacher with experience of working with children aged nine months to 11 years.

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ROLE-PLAY SOUNDS

If you're creative, there's lots of fun to be had with phonemes and graphemes, explains **Hilary White...**

TODAY YOU WILL...

Have fun repeating different phonemes.

Make up role plays to go with the phonemes.

Explore the graphemes matching the phonemes.

Although preschoolers aren't yet ready for formal phonics work, there are many fun and playful ways of focusing on sounds. 'Role-play sounds' gives the children sensory experience of phonemes, without any pressure to learn the sounds or apply them to literacy work. Talking about what each repeated sound reminds us of and linking them to a little role-play scenario also encourages the children to use their imaginations and think creatively. The experience of both repeating and listening to phonemes in this playful way provides a useful underpinning for later phonics and literacy activities.

Starter activity

Make a list of phonemes that link to real-life scenarios when repeated, for example, *sh–sh–sh* (soothing a baby). List possible role-play scenarios to go with each sound and gather props for the different role plays. Double check that your chosen sounds are true phonemes (the smallest units of sound in the English language). The correct pronunciation of phonemes is also important if children are to blend them successfully into words at a later stage in their literacy development. If necessary, check your own pronunciation against an online recording (see bit.ly/2cyX10Z)

Main activities

1 Start small

Working with a small group, choose a phoneme such as *ch*. Ask the children to listen carefully while you say the phoneme, before trying it themselves. Once they are comfortable with the sound, demonstrate how to repeat it several times: *ch–ch–ch–ch–ch*. What does the repeated sound make them think of? Does the noise they are making remind them of anything in particular?

If necessary for the first few sounds, prompt them with ideas – in the case of *ch–ch–ch*, a chuffing train or the noise we make when we sneeze. Encourage the children to role play driving a train or sneezing, and provide props such as train drivers' hats, whistles and large white handkerchiefs. Keeping the group small will enable all the children to engage with the activity. You can also ask an assistant to help you model both phoneme pronunciation and actions.

2 Sounds like...

Continue exploring other sounds in the same way. As long as you are open-minded about the role-play scenarios children come up with, you can work with any phoneme. For some further ideas, try the following:

z–z–z – buzzing like a bee
r–r–r – growling like a dog or roaring like a lion
h–h–h – the voiceless expiration of breath to blow out a candle
u–u–u – tugging on something heavy, such as pulling your friend on the play tractor
d–d–d – someone hammering, drumming or using a pneumatic drill
b–b–b – a fish blowing bubbles
s–s–s – a hissing cat, snake or dinosaur
sh–sh–sh – sweeping up dry autumn leaves.

3 Loud and quiet

Experiment with the volume of your voices. For example, saying *ee–ee–ee* quietly suggests a contented mouse whereas repeating it loudly suggests a frightened mouse; try repeating *m–m–m* softly as you role play eating delicious food, and then say it loudly as you pretend to be an upset baby. Encourage the children to start off with the phoneme, but give them the freedom to develop the sounds in their own way, for example, turning *ch–ch–ch* into *choo–choo–choo* or *r–r–r* into roarrrr! Some of the role plays will only involve short actions, such as pretending to be a buzzy bee, whereas others will offer more open-ended possibilities. Give the children time and space to develop a role play in their own way if it sparks their interest.

Extending the lesson

> **Make grapheme cards for each phoneme, and explain to the three-and-a-half-plus age group that this is what the sound looks like when we write it. Play little games, such as displaying two or three cards and asking the children to pick the grapheme corresponding to a particular sound role play.**

> **Try making the shape of the grapheme during mark-making activities such as finger painting, drawing in sand and chalking on the blackboard.**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hilary White is a former nursery and primary teacher. As an author she has written a number of books and contributed to a range of magazines.

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"COMMENT T'APPELLES-TU?"

TODAY YOU WILL...

- Welcome someone new to the class
- Learn how to say hello and goodbye to them
- Say how you're feeling
- Tell them your name

We've got lots of talking to do with our European neighbours, so we best start working on our languages. **Dr Amanda Barton** explains how to get things rolling in Reception...

The new school year is a good time to welcome an additional member to your class and have fun learning a foreign language. The new classmate is a puppet or soft toy who speaks no English and so encourages the children to use the foreign language whenever they appear. The puppet has their own seat (or hiding place) and their character can develop over a series of lessons if you choose. Songs or chants, such as those below, are helpful in reinforcing pronunciation and meanings. They also help pupils to memorise vocabulary, especially if accompanied by actions.

Starter activity

Ask the children how we greet each other. They may be able to tell you that adults shake hands or hug each other, and that children just say 'hi'. Explain that the traditional greeting in France is to kiss your friends on both cheeks. Mime a kissing greeting while saying "bon-jour", with 'bon' on one cheek and 'jour' on the other. (Bon = good; jour = day). Ask the class to repeat after you several times. Ask pupils to stand up and greet and say "bonjour" to the children around them.

Main activities

1 Introductions

Introduce a puppet, teddy bear or other cuddly toy to the class with "Bonjour". Have a number of children greet the puppet in the traditional French way.

Ask the puppet, "Comment ça va?" to which it responds, "Bien." Hold one thumb up as the puppet says this and ask the class to translate what the puppet is saying. Encourage the whole class to repeat the puppet's response: "Répétez". Introduce different responses with gestures, asking the class to repeat after you:

Bien: one thumb up
Très bien: two thumbs up
Comme ci, comme ça: move your hand from side to side.
Mal: two thumbs down

Have the puppet ask individuals in the class how they are.

2 Sharing names

Ask the puppet, "Comment t'appelles-tu?" to which the puppet responds, "Je m'appelle Max." Ask pupils to translate for you and repeat the answer with the whole class, word by word. Vary the repetition by whispering the phrase, then saying it loudly, slowly and quickly. Max asks individual pupils, "Comment t'appelles-tu?"

Instruct pupils to choose the name of a famous person or character, without revealing it to anyone else. Pupils can write their name in their books. Pupils circulate the class finding out their classmates' famous identities and practising the sentence "Je m'appelle..." Max will be watching to make sure no one speaks any English! Older children could use the question, too.

3 Birdsong

Sing 'Two Little Dickie Birds' in French. Instruct the class to repeat the lines after you, performing the actions.

Deux petits oiseaux
two little birds (flap wings)
Assis sur une branche
sitting on a branch (arm horizontal like a branch)
Je m'appelle Fifi (finger of right hand pointing up)
Je m'appelle Blanche (finger of left hand pointing up)
Bonjour, Fifi (nod right finger)
Bonjour, Blanche (nod left finger)
Au revoir, Fifi (right finger flies behind back)
Au revoir, Blanche (left finger flies behind back).

4 Saying goodbye

Prepare to put the puppet back into their box or drawer, waving 'Au revoir' to the class. Practise this with the whole class, waving from side to side: "Au – revoir". Repeat this with the class.

Extending the lesson

> You can reinforce the new language every time you take the register or 'sing' the register with the following song, which uses the 'Nice one, Cyril' Tottenham Hotspur tune, used in a TV advert. It can be found on YouTube if you're not sure of the music:

Teacher sings:
Bonjour, Lottie
(substitute name of child)
Comment ça va?

Pupil sings:
Très bien/Bien/mal/comme çi, comme ça
Merci beaucoup

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Amanda Barton is a freelance writer, educational consultant and teacher trainer. She is co-author of *Teaching Primary French* and *Teaching Primary Spanish* (Bloomsbury, 2016), aimed at non-specialists faced with the challenge of teaching foreign languages in primary school.

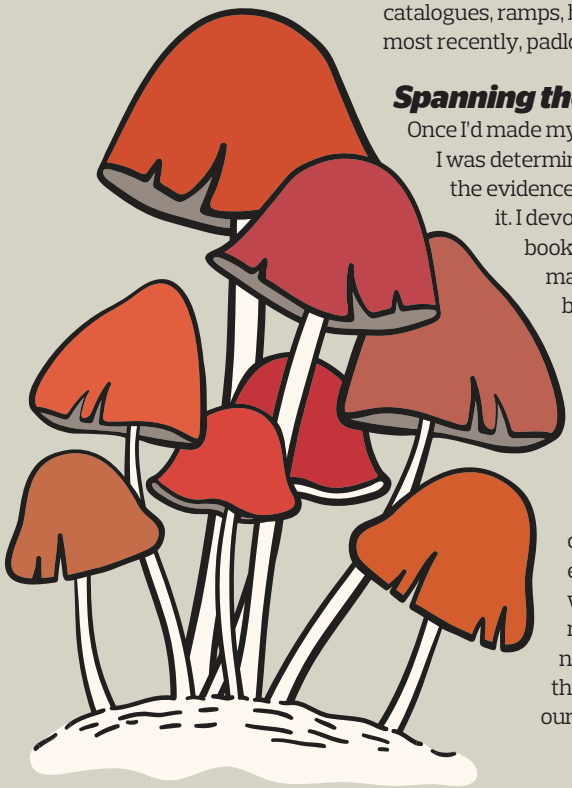
"We want to learn about mushrooms!"

A growing number of teachers are stepping away from adult-initiated activities and letting children take the lead, but how hard is it to change your approach? **Sophie Blackwell** shares her experiences...

My decision to follow the interests of our children with no prior planning or focus activities was tinged with both excitement and mild terror. When I thought about the way I'd been teaching in the past – the way in which I thought I was expected to teach – I was all too aware that I hadn't really been following children's interests at all. I was bending them to suit my own agenda, planning lessons and activities based around what I thought they wanted to learn. There was no denying the hours I spent intricately planning lessons that would somehow capture their imagination whilst ticking the EYFS boxes, but no matter how stretched my smile, or chirpy my voice, I wasn't engaging each and every child in their learning.

I was sure that there must be a better way, but the thought of stepping away from the comfort of the familiar filled me with fear. How would I make sure all the children achieved their early learning goals (ELGs)? How could I generate enough observations for each child to ensure that their learning journey was documented? How would I convince my head that this was the right way to go?

Despite my trepidation, I resolved to give over all the learning to the children: I wasn't going to do any more forward planning – the children were learning all the time; I just had to open my eyes and ears to the opportunities all around me – and there would be no more topics that we as teachers deemed interesting (the children's project choices so far have centred on mushrooms, catalogues, ramps, bones and, most recently, padlocks!).



Spanning the EYFS

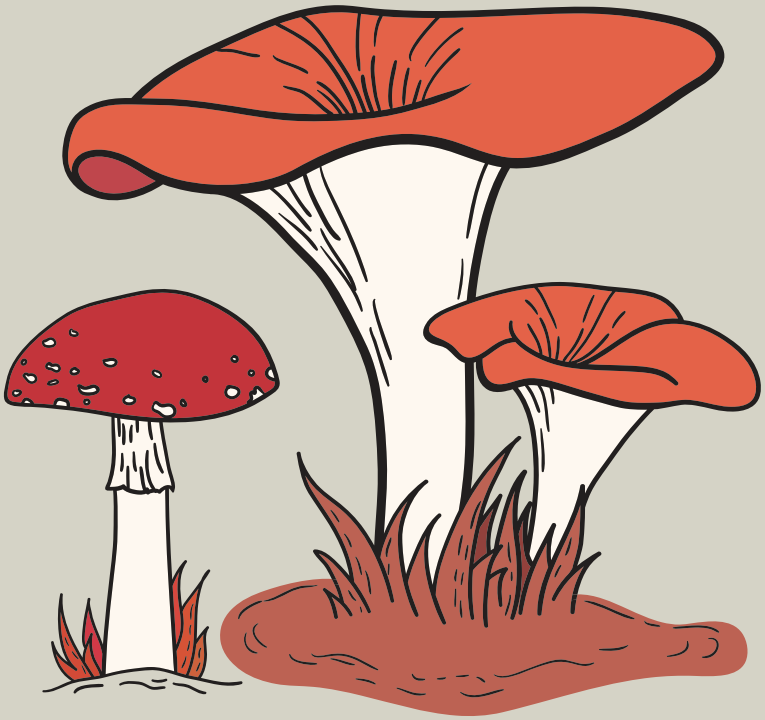
Once I'd made my decision, I was determined to find the evidence to support it. I devoured books, journals, magazines, blogs and social media, trying to decide how we could make the change while ensuring we were meeting the needs of all the children in our care.

It was well worth the effort. The first few weeks of our child-led approach were utter bliss. I couldn't believe the change in nearly every child in the class. Quiet children were finding a voice; those disengaged with learning were asking to write and count; pupils with social difficulties were working together on shared projects. Our children were happy and leading their own learning, and what's more I had no forward planning to complete or group activities to organise. However, those earlier questions still floated at the back of my mind, and the more we explored the child-led approach, the more we encountered hurdles to overcome or decisions to make.

One of the most frequently asked questions about completely child-initiated learning environments concerns how to ensure equal coverage of the ELGs. We all experience that top-down pressure, and the expectations of the Year 1 teacher alone are enough to make anyone anxious about the end of year outcomes. When you break down the ELGs and look at each one in detail, however, it's surprisingly easy to see that nearly every one can be achieved through children's everyday play.

For example, E and L were playing in our role-play area (currently masquerading as an investigation station for flowers and seeds):

L: "Can I have that jar?"
E: "The big one or the small one?"
E turned to me, "All the jars are different sizes!" she exclaimed. "They get bigger and bigger." [*Maths ELG: Talking about size*]
L: "I'm getting these (flowers) for a wedding." [*Understanding the world: Communities and traditions*]
Teacher: "Wow. You have lots of flowers there. I think you've got more than me. I've only got



FIRST STEPS

HOW TO MAKE A SUCCESS OF CHILD-LED LEARNING...

> Make sure you read all you can on child-led learning, but adapt each philosophy or method – every setting is as unique as every child, and what works for one will almost certainly not work for another.

> Don't dive in – it may be a good idea to retain a few adult-led activities a week, until you and your staff feel comfortable with the new way of working.

> Create a way of recording the learning that has taken place through child-led activities. A large A3 sheet, divided into the seven areas is an easy way of retrospectively jotting down the main projects and interests that have been followed each week.

> Pay attention to the interactions between adults and children. Sometimes becoming involved is far more meaningful than observing from a distance. Follow two or three focus children each week, but don't feel the need to record every moment.

(teacher counts) one, two, tthree, four, five."
L then counted her 12 flowers. [*Maths ELG: Counting with numbers to 20*]
E: "Put your flowers on top of that table." [*Maths ELG: Exploring position*]

In order to maximise the opportunities for learning in a child-led classroom, it's imperative that the environment and resources are carefully planned. Our continuous provision provides children with easy-to-access resources encompassing each of the seven areas, with regularly updated enhancements according to particular interests. For example, we currently have a variety of metre sticks, rulers and tape measures in the classroom after children expressed an interest in measuring the height of their classmates.

Overcoming challenges

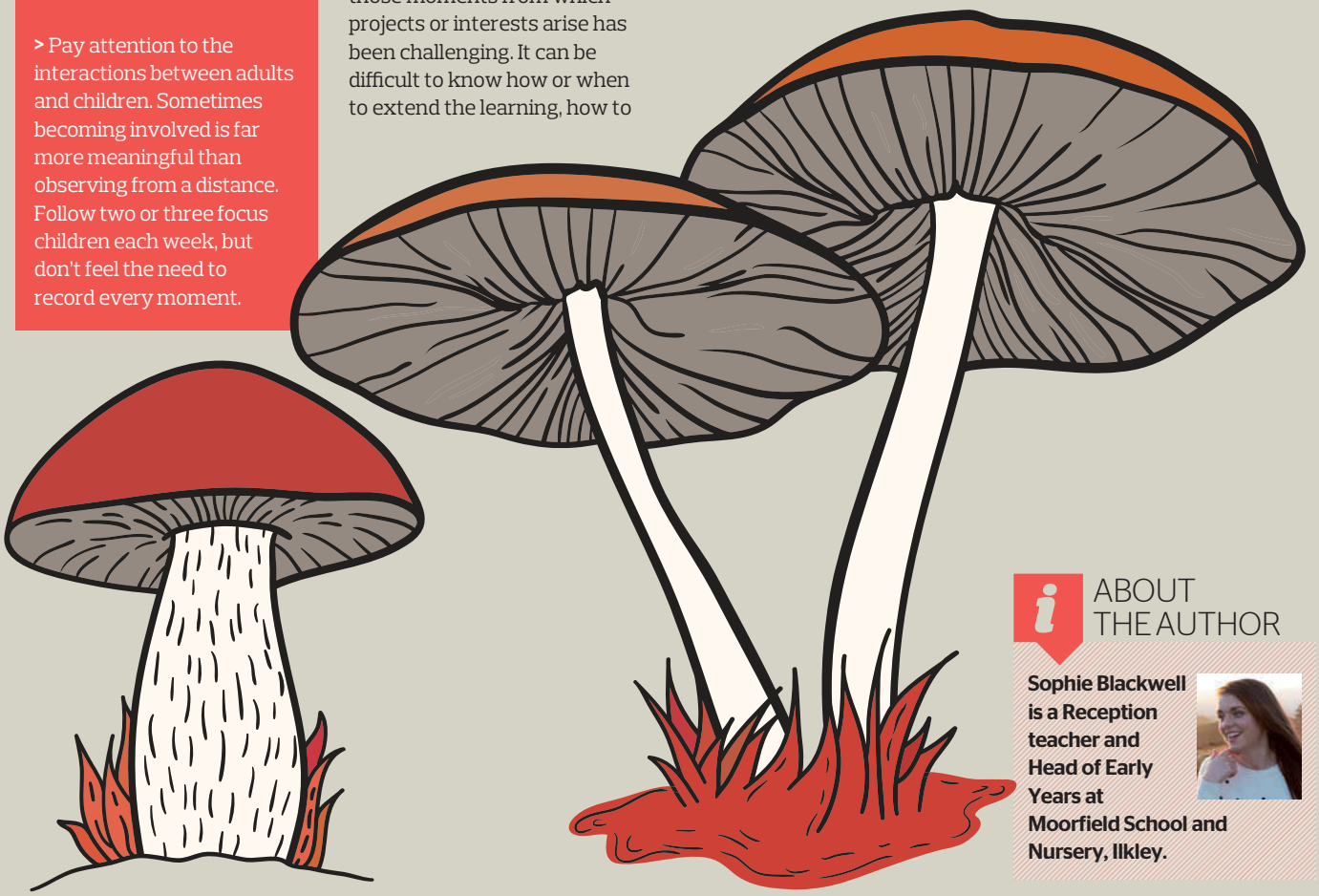
For many of our staff, finding those moments from which projects or interests arise has been challenging. It can be difficult to know how or when to extend the learning, how to look for those 'wow moments' as one of our practitioners loves to call them. The truth is that those moments can be fleeting and it is challenging at first. Apart from knowing the early years outcomes and the ELGs in great detail (and you really do have to know them very well), our most effective strategy has been to become involved in the children's play. When you aren't worrying about recording an observation – and more to the point, when you don't have a focus activity to complete – it allows you the time to really connect to the children. We support the children's investigations, offering suggestions when necessary or encouraging new thought. It's because of this that I feel I know every little soul in my class, far better than I ever have before. I know them because I spend true quality time with them each day.

> *My pupils have never been so happy, and my teaching has never been so exciting.*

It has taken the children a little while to adapt to our different way of working and to understand that if they come to me with an idea and say, "I'd like to write a story" or "I've found a seed, can we plant it?" I will respond with a resounding, "Let's do it!"

Despite all the apprehension, I know this for sure: my pupils have never been so happy, and my teaching, my cooperative exploration with those fascinating young minds, has never been so exciting. And the most recent comment from my head? "The difference child-led learning has made to our early years is outstanding."

So challenge yourself to be brave and try it – I promise you will find it liberating.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sophie Blackwell is a Reception teacher and Head of Early Years at Moorfield School and Nursery, Ilkley.

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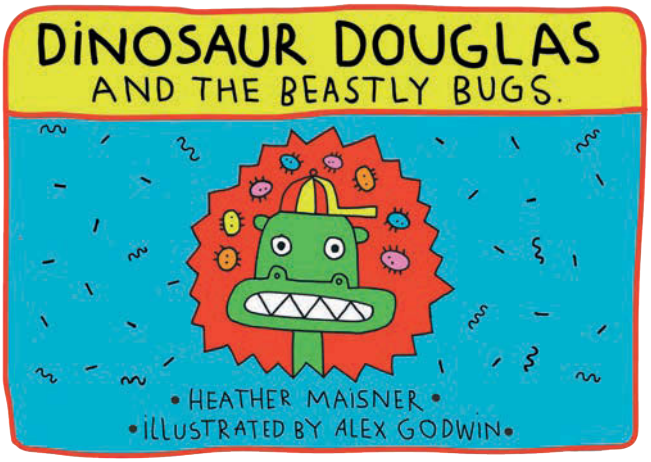

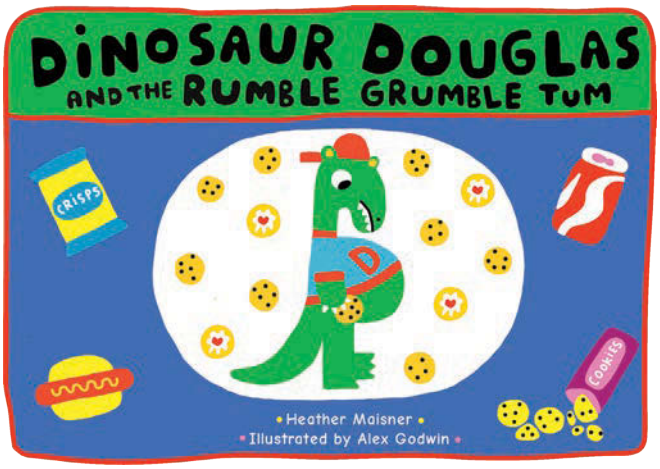

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"What are you seeing?"

To observe and assess children effectively, Reception teachers must embrace their inner child and employ a wide variety of strategies in the classroom, explain **Shona Lewis** and **Julia Beckreck...**

Assessing children's learning and understanding is complex and exacting, but it can also be exciting. To assess with perception and accuracy, you must enter the child's world and explore and learn alongside them. Young children are wonderfully open to new ideas, free from the perceptions and limits of adult minds. You must become childlike in that respect, if you hope to gain insight into what each child knows, understands and feels. With such insights you can begin to explore, play and learn alongside children, to support them in making sense of their situations, circumstances and interests.

Learning to see

Close and frequent observations of children, free from predetermined outcomes and adult perceptions are a prerequisite to any assessment that is worthy of the name. They are an integral part of the early years environment and in a Reception classroom we are constantly watching and interacting with children. Many of these observations are not recorded but stored in the memory for future conversations about the children. As a Reception class teacher this is part of your everyday practice and you should never underestimate its importance. These are the foundations on which you build the learning and teaching in your classroom.

To see and understand each child's thought processes, you must watch their behaviour in a variety of situations. Conditions must be set up in a way that allows children to follow their interests and fascinations, with restrictions only on safety and mutual regard in place. A free flow environment where they can make decisions to play and explore both indoors and outdoors, with well-organised and planned activities is essential. These activities must be offered on a daily basis to meet the physical, emotional and intellectual needs of each child. This means you must look beyond the surface. Look at the situations in which the child prefers to play alone or talks with peers and/or adults; their energy levels, indicators of wellbeing, how and when the child makes decisions and so demonstrates interests and preferences. What are you seeing? Discussions with mentors, advisory teachers and peers can all provide new learning to guide judgements on the quality and depth of the child's real learning for both the teacher and other party. Superficial judgements on what children know are not difficult to make. Adult obsessions with knowledge of colours, numbers, shapes and initial sounds are relatively easy to assess. However, this knowledge can only have any use for children when they fully understand the implications and connections with real-life, authentic situations.

In a similar way we should consider problem-solving, which provides the foundation of a young child's learning. It must be valued, promoted, provided for and sustained. Opportunities for problem-solving occur in the everyday context of a child's life. It is during this kind of learning that we must observe and understand in order to further plan and provide opportunities to extend their learning.

A new approach

How and what to observe is not always obvious. In many schools the teacher and/or the subject coordinator decide who is to be observed and then decide what behaviours or knowledge they want to assess against those deemed desirable by the powers that be. This we suggest is a pointless exercise and one that usually has little to do with the child! Teaching and assessment are interchangeable in Reception and the two must be happening together all the time in order for you to be effective in challenging the child to further explore and learn.

Consider the following alternative approach:

Set up and resource a challenging, exciting activity in one or more areas of learning, e.g. literacy development and physical development.

Example A (physical development): Construct a defined play area, either indoors or outdoors or both with an exercise mat, a timer, a skipping rope, rubber stepping stones, low balance beam and a clipboard with pre-printed sheets on which the children can record the activity times and success. Also display posters and/or images such as gym advertisements, 'keep fit' advice and healthy eating posters. This play area could be available daily, to be used as the children choose in a free flow, child-initiated learning environment.

Example B (literacy development): Set up a castle interior with puppets and finger puppets of knights, dragons, dressing up armour, cloaks, hats, feathers, etc., a pulley and bucket, brown paper bags, drums and shakers for musical accompaniment. Place carefully selected books e.g. *The Paper Bag Princess* by Robert Munsch, some picture books (those by Babette Cole would work well) on a cushion and leave the rest to the children.

During a period of the day observe the group/groups of children that decide to play in these areas. Write down, or mentally note, who plays in that area, with whom, using which resources and exactly what they do with them. Make a note of any conversations the children engage in. Make a note of any particular interests you observe, by which children and how they are demonstrating those interests. (Only write down what you think you may not remember – try to develop your own shorthand.)

It is important to know how to use these observations (see the Useful strategies section below), and you need many to get an in-depth picture of what each child knows and can do, as well as how they best learn.

Useful strategies

The following approaches will help you to assess children's learning:

By communication

Communication is a two-way process of equal giving and taking. When communicating with children, adults often fail to listen enough. So busy are they directing children what to do, and how and when to do it, that they fail in the crucial 'watch' aspect of communication as well. Teaching can sometimes get in the way of learning. Nowhere is this more important than when assessing children.

During observation used as assessing for learning, the everyday and constant role of a teacher, watching and careful listening must become an integral part of the Reception teacher's being. Listening without prejudice and preconception is a difficult skill and can be developed, with practice, in collaboration with colleagues.

By scaffolding

Supporting each child in her learning is the fundamental role of a Reception teacher and part of that role involves 'scaffolding'. This technique involves offering then giving, should the child accept, just enough support during any given activity, to enable her to acquire a new skill, understanding or insight. A straightforward example of scaffolding could be when a child is attempting to balance along a line or a beam, the adult could walk alongside the child at the child's pace, holding out a hand so that the child can take hold of it if she feels the need to maintain her balance. In this way it will be the child's decision to accept the support or not as she feels the need.

This way of supporting learning can also be successfully used when teaching reading, writing and spelling.

By knowing a child's schema

Each person has an individual way of learning and these ways of learning styles must be known and understood by a successful assessor of learning. By close, ongoing observation of children in their self-chosen play, favourite patterns of play will be seen. Recognising these means learning activities can then be provided to extend and deepen learning as children are engaged in their continuous self-directed play. The teacher's role is to recognise these patterns and to then engage accordingly with the children to support further learning and development.

By Sustained Shared Thinking

This term, sometimes shortened to SST, is used to describe 'good practice' in interactions between adults and children. Think of teaching/learning times as a partnership between the child and the teacher, where both are playing, talking and questioning together in order to solve a problem, acquire a new skill or reach a new insight. It is crucial that both participate in this activity equally, both bringing to it seriousness and enjoyment, as well as previous knowledge. Open-ended questions on the part of the teacher will help the child respond uniquely and spontaneously. This enables the teacher to know how to support the child towards a new step in her learning.

By play-based learning

There is almost universal acknowledgement that children learn most effectively when they are playing. This can be within an indoor or an outdoor environment but to be effective it must be carefully planned and understood by knowledgeable teachers. That is when significant learning is most likely to take place.

By observing wellbeing & involvement

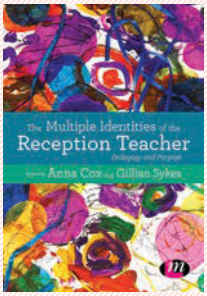
Each of us knows that how we are feeling and how alert we are will affect our performance in life, both at home and at work. Research and thinking that is highly recommended, for all those working with young children, was done at Leuven University by Professor Ferre Laevers (2006). He describes stages of wellbeing in young children and how understanding of this provides knowledge as well as guidelines to help each child reach a high level of learning. The Scales of Wellbeing are extremely supportive in helping us understand the emotional and health needs of each child and then planning and providing the appropriate next steps. However, as Laevers points out children need to show high levels of involvement too. Dubiel (2014) likened the Characteristics of Effective Learning to the indicators of child involvement.

UNDERSTANDING CHILD DEVELOPMENT

ASSESSING PROGRESS IS IMPOSSIBLE IF YOU'RE NOT AWARE OF WHERE YOUR CLASS SHOULD BE...

> Understanding why and how young children learn and how learning relates to the stages of development is vitally important when assessing children. It stands to reason that if a child is still working within the mathematical stage of one-to-one correspondence with small numbers, you should not be expected to assess whether he can tell you one more or less than a number up to 10. Similarly, if a child has very limited language there is no value in assessing if he can write a sentence.

> The Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage document (Early Education, 2012), written by people who fully understood through their research and experience how children grow, learn and develop, is an excellent starting point for students and new teachers. Sadly it has been rather downgraded as guidance for those involved in planning and implementing a successful learning environment for young children. We strongly advise reading it. Discuss it with children and colleagues, and use it to test your own observations and ideas. The Characteristics of Effective Learning section, in particular, is a good place to start as this will give you clear ideas for analysing observations and questioning practice.



This article is an edited extract from *The Multiple Identities of the Reception Teacher* (SAGE, £22.99), edited by Anna Cox and Gillian Sykes, which covers many key features of working with four- and five-year-olds in Reception classrooms. To receive a 20% discount on the purchase price, visit sagepub.co.uk, add the book to your basket and enter discount code UK16AUTHOR2 at checkout.*

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Are you willing TO TALK?

It takes time to get to know the children in your class, but don't forget that many will have come from early years settings keen to share everything they've learned, says **Jonny Keen...**

We in early years education like our buzzwords. There's 'stimulating' and 'development' and 'diversity', to name but three – and, of course, 'cohesion'. We really like things to be cohesive. Part of this refers to the way in which we converse with parents, health visitors, social workers and all manner of other professionals to make sure everything is going right for our children at every stage of their development. The idea, I suppose, being to make the early years system function like a well-oiled chain, each child moving smoothly from link to link with as little strife as possible.

But there is one link in the chain that is often ignored: the link between early years professionals and primary school teachers. The quality of communication between these two parties varies wildly, and sometimes meaningful contact can even be non-existent.

For teachers, it's important to remember that early years professionals, specifically those working in private, voluntary or independent settings, have sometimes spent three of four years caring for children before the latter move up to primary school. Not only do they often have an in-depth personal knowledge of each child and their abilities, but they have also, in nearly all cases, compiled extensive records concerning their learning development. Every early years practitioner spends a significant part of every day of the week updating plans, reviews and other paperwork concerning a child's activities. These records, if kept properly, should not just be something to show the parents/Ofsted; they should be a detailed indicator of how each child has progressed so far in key aspects such as literacy and numeracy, as well as other important information regarding behaviour and personality.

Of course I'm aware that primary school teachers have a lot on their plates, and I'm by no means suggesting that you should spend the entirety of your summer holidays trawling through a backlog of paperwork on children who are about to enter your class. There are plenty of ways schools can converse with early years settings to get the information that counts on children who are transitioning to primary school.

As a practitioner, I've had a few different experiences when preparing to bid goodbye to our preschool children. One local school routinely sends us questionnaires to fill out for each child moving from our setting to theirs. Using this, we can consult our previous records to provide a concise and relevant document that can be used to help make the changeover go more smoothly.

On the other side of the coin, it can be extremely vexing to try to organise to speak to primary school teachers only to be ignored. Thankfully this is a rare occurrence: most teachers I have met are more than eager to discuss the children coming into their classes. In truth I feel that many of the issues originate with the childcare providers themselves. Early years settings can be wildly inconsistent in the quality of care and education they offer, and I imagine that some primary school teachers may be (sometimes rightly) dismissive of anything practitioners have to say as a result. One thing that I believe would help matters is for every early years setting to employ a fully qualified early years teacher for their preschool-aged children. This would not only increase the quality of education for these children, but would also help to provide something of a bridge between preschool and Reception. But it's a fact that many settings have no staff with any teaching qualifications at all, and their preschools offer little in the way of an introduction to primary school.

In the end, there has got to be a willingness to communicate and collaborate from all parties. It must be remembered that transitions are an important and often difficult time for children, and any insight that might ease the process is really helpful. As teachers you don't have to use every piece of information that we share, but it can't hurt to get as much of it as possible. If we encourage talking and cooperation amongst the children under our care, let's set a good example here by doing all we can in their best interests.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonny Keen works at a nursery in Greater Manchester.

TAKE THE LEAD

To develop an effective Year R team you'll need to listen, inspire, keep your expectations high – and remember that you can't do it all alone, says **Neil Farmer...**

'Teamwork' is crucial, but perhaps nowhere else in school is it more important than in the Foundation Stage. Here it can make the difference between children making rapid or accelerated learning, and children making typical or inadequate progress. But how do you recruit an effective team, and how should you lead and develop it once you have the right people in place?

Recruiting and getting the best out of your team is a challenge to any leader. Through my years of supporting schools and leading teams, I have found that the most important element is empowerment – getting the right people for the right jobs working at their highest level of competency. A good leader will identify strengths within the team and put in place personalised support packages that not only develop the individual but also strengthen the core structure of the team. Too often we focus on the negative aspects, instead of strengthening what people are good at or have a natural inclination for; we try and put square pegs in round holes.

Recruit the right people

Start by being very clear and concise in your definition of the role or roles and the responsibilities they will involve. What skills and attributes do you require for each identified

WHAT MAKES A GREAT LEADER?

THERE ARE A SET OF CHARACTERISTICS OF EXCEPTIONAL LEADERSHIP. TO HEAD UP THE RECEPTION YEAR YOU WILL NEED TO:

LISTEN CAREFULLY – not just to the words people say, but to the meanings and inferences behind them.

INSPIRE OTHERS – through your everyday demeanour and how you use research to take learning and teaching forward. Have high expectations of yourself.

NURTURE YOUR TEAM – by being sensitive to others, building on strengths through a rigorous system of appraisal while having exceedingly high expectations.

BE RESILIENT AND PERSISTENT – don't allow external factors or short-term setbacks to divert you from your vision and mission. View setbacks as an opportunity for adaptation and review.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY – be clear and concise, using agreed language, and not vague in instruction and expectation so there is no opportunity for misinterpretation.

BEHAVE CONSISTENTLY – teams respond well when they know what to expect, and that you are approachable. How you behave will have ramifications on the behaviour of others.

UNDERSTAND YOUR LIMITATIONS – recognise that you can't be great at everything; effective leaders accept this and put in place around them people with different strengths to build up a cohesive whole.

role? If you start by looking at the skills required, rather than qualifications alone, you are more likely to recruit the correct person.

When working with young children there is a high degree of empathy and understanding required, alongside a developed sense of emotional intelligence. Your school's vision statement should be the driving force in the recruitment of any new staff, because the people you are looking to recruit and develop must share the same outlook and philosophy as you – albeit at different levels – otherwise you will encounter problems and conflict because what you envisage in principle is not being carried out in practice.

Do allow candidates to explain their life experiences – for example, how they might have surmounted issues and problems, what strategies they used and the impact these had on themselves as individuals. When I was recruiting members for my teams, I was always looking for that 'something extra', an almost intangible element of character and fortitude – what value could this person add to my team; what skills and knowledge do they bring that might be different but at the same time are tuned in to a collaborative way of working?

Good leaders assimilate knowledge from others into their own vision – you cannot possibly know everything there is to know about Reception practice and interpersonal relationships, so take everything you can from others to build up your own competencies, and remember that sometimes the greatest teachers do not always make the greatest leaders.

Encourage autonomy

What you need to develop your team is a 'bias for action' – with active decision-making on behalf of all team members being valued, valid and appreciated, thus engendering self-confidence and independence of thought. In a nutshell I term this 'initiative-based strategy' – a 'proactive, not reactive' state of leadership that fosters autonomy and entrepreneurship, developing innovation and nurturing champions! It is hands-on, and value-driven with leadership showing commitment to all.

Often within structures, we place people in uncomfortable situations where they cannot operate to their full potential – I suggest that we 'stick to the knitting' and stay with the business that people know. The formation of this revolves around a simple structure: teams of people who are autonomous yet driven by centralised, agreed values. Any structure, it must be remembered, merely acts as a guide for where people should be to best fit any situation. Structures are, by their nature, flexible and should be adapted as needed. Everyone should be familiar with the basic team structures, and leaders in particular must have an understanding of what the strengths of each member are, so they can match up the competency of a person with the challenge or task they're capable of. Get this right and you will have involved and engaged team members. If, however, the task is too demanding and the competency not equal, you will get anxiety; conversely if the challenge is too rudimentary and undemanding and competency is high you will get boredom – neither of which are good. This system needs to be continually reviewed as competency and confidence grows. The role of the leader here is to scaffold and support, but also allow for freedom and autonomy of action.

Develop competency

It is your role to try and engender a feeling of competency within your staff team. You will have no doubt experienced this feeling in your different roles: when time flies, things make sense, you basically crack on knowing that you are doing a great job. This is when you are operating at your maximum level. I have to add a caveat here: this state of being is extremely tiring as it uses a tremendous amount of emotional and mental energy, so you and your team will have peaks and troughs of real involvement through the course of the day. Usually this state is achieved through careful planning, discussion and intrinsic motivation. This is the most powerful form of motivation, when there is a desire to do the job at hand because it makes you feel good about yourself and the positive impact you are having on others.

There are certain emotional responses and states that you, as a leader, will have to be aware of when working with and developing your team's competencies and professionalism; these might include anxiety, boredom, low morale, complacency, etc. It is important to remember that members of your team will be, at different times, feeling all or some of the above. It is the leader's responsibility to pick up on the emotional moods of the classroom and ensure that there is a consistency of approach that allows all stakeholders to reach their full potential in a caring and supportive environment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A former nursery and Reception class teacher, head of early years and deputy head, Neil supports schools with the Foundation Stage and speaks at both regional and national events.

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Letterland Grammar Pack

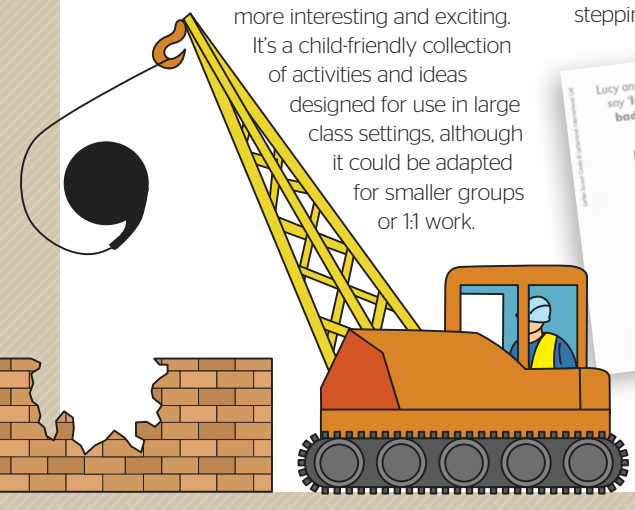
Contact: letterland.com **Reviewed by:** John Dabell

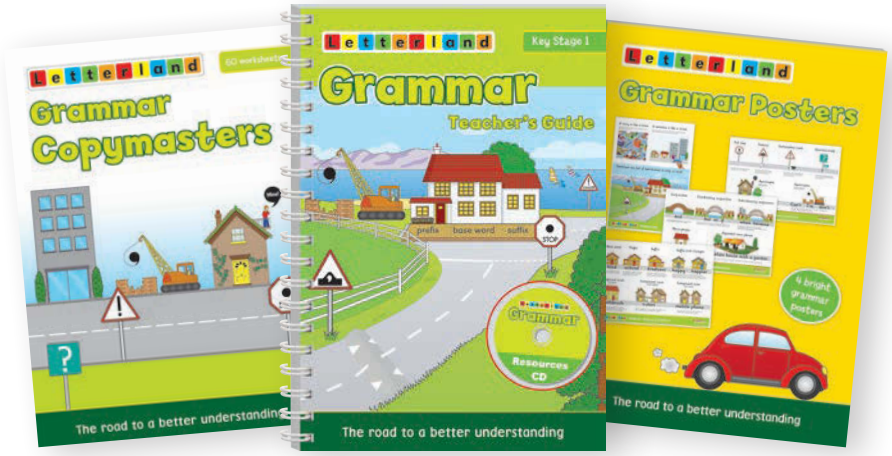
'Irony is when someone writes "Your an idiot".' When I trained to be a teacher, only one lecturer really made an impression on me – an effortlessly intellectual English lecturer with a brilliant sense of humour. One day, using a permanent marker, he wrote that sentence on the wall behind him. He got into trouble for making a mess of the wall, but his efforts to help us understand the importance of grammar left an indelible mark on our future teaching.

In education, it seems as though grammar is the new black. But really it's never gone out of fashion because it is so fundamental to English language teaching. Learning grammar is like learning to drive; you can learn all of the theory, rules and regulations, but you won't be good at it unless you practice, and until it starts to become second nature. The problem with grammar, though, is there are plenty of potholes, speed cameras and unexpected obstacles to navigate. This is where Letterland Grammar comes in, offering KS1 pupils resources to help them on the road to better understanding.

Letterland has been publishing resources to help children learn to read and write for nearly 50 years. Its latest release is a Grammar Pack that helps young learners comprehend grammar concepts, remember them and know how and when to use them when writing. The idea behind Letterland Grammar is that words become buildings and sentences become streets with punctuation as road signs.

The pack contains a teacher's guide with resource CD, grammar copymasters, grammar posters and letter sound cards, which all together makes a neat package of grammar goodies. Thankfully, Letterland Grammar is not just about learning the 'rules' of grammar, something that's sure to make hearts sink and the learning fizz go flat. No, this resource is more about finding ways that learners can make their writing more interesting and exciting. It's a child-friendly collection of activities and ideas designed for use in large class settings, although it could be adapted for smaller groups or 1:1 work.





The units and chapters cover an impressive range of topics, from capital letters and full stops to present progressive and past tense. There is a quick key in the teacher's guide with the some great analogies (all centred around streets, buildings and bridges) which form an important part of the programme. Each of the units is made up of lessons with objectives, resources, key terminology, tricks, an activity outline and examples, notes, further practice and next steps. The unit notes are very clearly written and have been thought through with obvious care and attention to detail, meaning children get to relate concepts, connect the analogies and recap previous learning.

There are plenty of supporting resources that feed into the lessons, including examples to print out or project, 173 flashcards, photocopiable 'I can do' certificates, a free image bank for making your own grammar wall displays and songs too. There is also a collection of A2 posters featuring all the key concepts.

This resource works, and it works hard. Its analogies cleverly help children on their grammar journey with plenty of pointers and travel tips to learn along the way. It focuses on a range of topics, which can be used either as stepping stones or as discrete or open-ended tasks. There is so much scope for using the resources flexibly, and children can be challenged and extended with ease.

Teaching grammar is no picnic, whether at primary or secondary, but it can be creative and fun without the migraine-inducing focus on rules. Children using this resource are more likely to acquire a very healthy education in sentence building by learning grammar in context, in steps, playing with parts of speech and punctuation and exercising both sides of the brain.

Verdict:
Punctual arrival

Letterland Grammar helps children at Key Stage 1 learn how language works and how parts of speech create meaning. It teaches them that they have choices about how they write and speak, and it will make significant contributions in helping them become confident speakers, readers and writers. Grammatical terminology is best explained through real examples in sentences and texts, which is where Letterland excels. It promotes discussion and critical conversations, offers models for pupils to play with and helps them become reflective readers and writers. The whole Letterland Grammar pack is £79, and for that you are getting the highway code, driver's license and rapid roadside recovery. All Letterland needs to do now is produce Key Stage 2 grammar activities and everyone in primary school will be happy.

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Out of the Ark Music Nativities

Contact: outoftheark.co.uk **Reviewed by:** John Dabell

As every teacher knows, being at least one step ahead of the game is vital for staying sane. That's why Christmas is on the agenda from a planning point of view early into the autumn term. You may already be thinking about staging your own version of the Nativity...

The Nativity is one of the central stories of the Christian faith, and schools around the world perform it to proud parents every Christmas. But which way do you go? Do you take the traditional route, or go upbeat and hit the fun button. I think there's definitely room for both, but if I were unsure about which route to take then I wouldn't have to look very far to find ready-made, easy-to-stage shows that tick every box...

Introducing Out of the Ark Music, which has just released two fabulous modern Nativities that have the Christmas message at their heart. First up, the glitzy *Lights, Camel, Action!* – the Nativity Strictly Come Dancing-style. Written by a highly experienced musician and composer, it's wonderfully fun and is perfect for the 4–9 years age group. It's based around the idea of the BBC – the Bethlehem Broadcasting Company – recording a special edition of their dance show in the very stable where Jesus was born. The stable is basically transformed into a dance studio, and the cast is made up of all the traditional Nativity characters, who return to Bethlehem to recall their roles in the miraculous Christmas story.

Lights, Camel, Action! comes with a script, piano music and lyrics, together with a character list and notes on staging for a 40-minute show. It also comes with a CD featuring all the songs, which have been professionally arranged and sung by a children's choir. There are backing tracks included too and a 'Words on Screen' version, so children can follow the words as they sing.

The character list for this production includes hosts, floor managers, a voiceover, a donkey, camels, wise men, shepherds, sheep, innkeepers, backing singers, Mary and Joseph, townspeople and more. The three judges are Caesar (with a nod to Craig Revel Horwood), the donkey and the innkeeper's wife. It's perfect for a large production, with 21 speaking parts available that you could easily adapt. The dances that make up this production have fun written all over them, and the website suggests choreography and includes hugely helpful dance videos for all of them should you need inspiration. The dances include a Nazareth line dance, a Camel funk, Disco Star, the Innkeeper's Tango and a Bethlehem hand jive. The script is written in a style that many children will be familiar with as it follows all the 'Strictly' clichés and one-liners that get the crowd going. It's cheesy and wrapped in tinsel, but it works beautifully for getting the message across.

A-MAZ-ING, darling!

Christmas Counts is another brilliantly inventive musical Nativity for young children, a 20-minute masterpiece of thoughtful fun. It tells the traditional story of the Nativity from the perspective of a group of census-takers around Bethlehem on Christmas night, carrying out Caesar's commands that everyone in his empire should be counted. They count every man, woman, child and house, and almost fall asleep counting sheep. They couldn't, of course, count all the angels, but once they had counted everyone there was just one person left to be counted: Jesus.

This Nativity is far more traditional in spirit and delivers the message that just as rich and poor found Jesus in the stable, everyone can find him today and that Christmas counts for everyone. There are eight songs as part of the resource, and the book comes with a character list, some helpful curriculum links, a modest script, music score and audio CD with vocal tracks and professional backing tracks. This also comes with a Words on Screen option.

Christmas Counts might not have the same showbiz pizzazz, but what it does offer is professional production, quality songs, marvellous music and a well-developed script with percussion SFX suggestions and ideas for extension work. This is a safe bet.

Verdict:
Encore! Encore!

Both *Lights, Camel, Action!* and *Christmas Counts* provide you with the chance to stage a really polished performance full of creativity, and starting at £19.95 you'd be Christmas crackers to try and write your own version when these catchy off-the-shelf musicals have been crafted and created by professional musicians. They are both colourful, diverse and inventive, with the power to breathe life, energy and fun into your Christmas production. Out of the Ark has two more quality resources in its stable. Hurrah!

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The Glitterlings

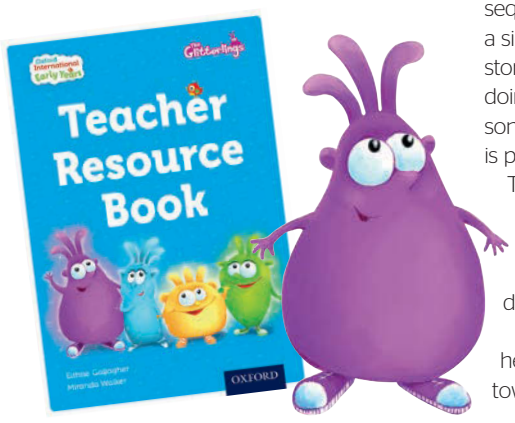
Contact: oxfordprimary.com/glitterlings **Reviewed by:** John Dabell

I started my career in Brent and I remember the playground being a vibrant place, full of languages and cultures that colourfully overlapped. The first time I was on duty my ears wibbled and wobbled. The school respected and celebrated diversity, and pupils' cultural knowledge experiences and mother-tongue languages were viewed as precious resources. Whether you have 30 languages in your school or just a handful, our respect for diversity means we're all international schools now – but do we all teach through a multilingual lens? Inclusivity is not optional but an essential component in nurturing respect for all, building a sense of belonging to a common humanity and helping learners become responsible and active global citizens. The building blocks for a better world start in early years through translanguaging and the ability of children to shuttle between languages to formulate a tapestry of words, understanding and deeper meaning. Translanguaging simply means receiving information in one language and using or applying it in another language.*

Now I've found a groundbreaking programme that has a clear focus upon multilingualism and internationalism to support English language learning and promote pupils' home language skills. The Glitterlings is an interlingual story and play-based course aligned to the EYFS Framework, and works by allowing child and teacher to learn from each other.

This twinkling and critical-thinking programme features the eponymous Glitterlings: inquisitive and gregarious hyperpolygot savants that come from two stars left of the moon. They love learning languages and want to help children discover the joy of multiculturalism and multilingualism, and why learning languages is important and something that they can do.

The programme is made up of nine Storybooks each with a supportng audio CD,



three Big Books, an Activity Book, and a Teacher Resource Book and CD. The stories are all based around stimulating global themes that are perfect for developing cognitive and emotional growth. Units include 'all about me and all about you', 'new people and new places', 'animals', 'feelings', 'homes', 'weather', 'helping and teamwork', 'expressing yourself' and 'memories'. Children are transported to different parts of the world by the blustery breeze, where they meet exciting people and learn their dynamic languages. This is perfect for using Google Earth! The books also contain tips for reading at home and fun facts, and there are opportunities to write in the books too – so they are very adaptable for class and out-of-class use.

The Activity Book goes hand in hand with the Storybooks and contains a variety of engaging things to do (draw and write, singing, listening, saying and reading together), fun stickers and illustrations. There are also craft, number, puzzle and play opportunities too. The Teacher Resource Book features yet more activities, ideas and classroom management tips, and is a must-have resource for getting the best out of the Storybooks. What stands out is the scope and sequence, with each unit theme following a similar structure involving warm-up ideas, story-time pointers, talking points, moving and doing activities, critical-thinking opportunities, songs, activity book time and quick ideas. This is platinum-level active learning.

The Big Books do what they do best, bringing children closer to the action and immersing them inside the stories. Bold and bright, they'll entice learners into a different world.

This is a unique resource because it helps young children begin the journey towards national-, international- and intercultural-mindedness, empowering them with the skills they'll need to play their part on the pluricultural and plurilingual global stage. The Glitterlings help children to know that their home language is valued and respected, and that there's a place for all languages in their classroom. The programme encourages children to embrace language learning, cherish other cultures and aspire to be polyglots themselves, and fits seamlessly into the ecology of an interlingual classroom.

Verdict:
Languages for all

Polyglots are sorely underrated in the UK as the ubiquity of English has made foreign-language learning almost redundant. But the Glitterlings can change that by helping children to tune in to pluralism, actively listen to the world around them, and see polyglotism as an achievable and natural way of being – rather than an impossible feat reserved for an intelligent few. Byron was described as a 'monster of languages'; well, the Glitterlings can help make language monsters of early learners by tapping into their colossal potential and capacity to learn. It's a resource that promotes world citizenship through diversity, open-mindedness and respect, helping children to develop the linguistic security and identity investment they need to be successful – and all at very little cost to your budget!

* These ideas and concepts form the basis of the groundbreaking Glitterlings programme. Authors: Eithne Gallagher and Miranda Walker

A bluffer's guide to teaching Key Stage 1

Planning a calm and orderly infant classroom with absolutely no patches of unexplained gunk? Forget it, counsels **Jon Brunskill** – and bring your alcohol gel...

"Hi, what do you do for a living?"

"I'm a primary teacher,"

"Oh! What age?"

"I teach Year 2."

"That... is *sooo* cute. Gosh, how old are they? Six? Adorable."

"Yeah, I know..." is what I say. It's not what I mean. Look at these grey hairs. Does adorable cause that? Any adorableness, I've learnt, is in fact a cunning disguise that these tiny whirlwinds of terror adopt to lull unsuspecting adults into a spider's web of carnage. Perhaps they have trapped you too. Perhaps, in a thoughtless and utterly regrettable 'adventurous' spirit, you agreed to take charge of a class of very small people.

Fear not! Follow this guide and you might just make it to July with your sanity intact. I'm kidding, of course; you have no chance of retaining sanity, but read on and you should at least go the right kind of crazy...

Channel the chaos

You've done everything you can to sculpt your classroom into a bastion of tranquility, with calming colours and Chopin twinkling in the background. But don't kid yourself for one moment that this will provide any sort of defence against the blitzkrieg onslaught of 30 bundles of pure energy and enthusiasm. Any attempt to control the mayhem will leave you dashing around the classroom like a clown in a suit, desperately trying to keep dozens of plates spinning in some sort of unison.

Instead, you must embrace the disorder, find your inner zen and masterfully direct small groups into contained activities. Deploy your TA like a platoon commander to the 'hottest zones' of the classroom, triage the rest by temporarily distracting them and then focus their glorious curiosity on something resembling a learning intention.

Issue high-brow reprimands

The luxury of being able to reprimand a child by using logic, reason and an appeal to socially accepted norms is no longer an option for you. Gentle, regular reinforcement of what is and isn't acceptable can become tiring and dull, so keep it interesting by referring to topical political developments and historical events.

Strike a solemn face as you declare that "You've walked into this classroom like you have no regard whatsoever for Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and I know that's a document that you really respect." Or "You can't just wander around the classroom like Caeser crossing the Rubicon – we all know how that story ended. *Shaking your head* What would the Senate think?" They're usually so confused that they'll comply with your general instruction of "stop that".

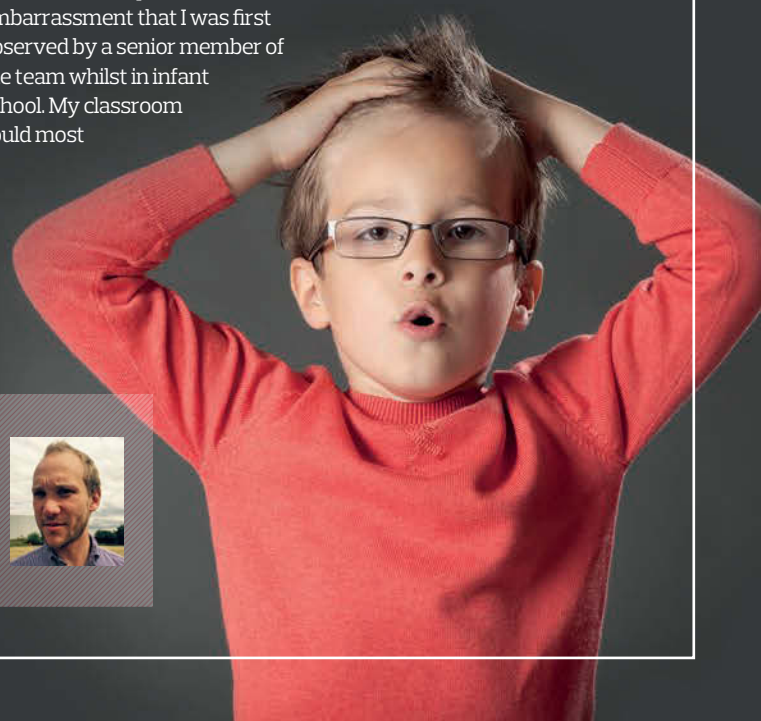
Don't touch that liquid!

I don't understand how so much snot can emerge from such a tiny person. They must have lost half their body weight with that sneeze. Keep calm, and remember to smile as you remove the thick brown-green sludge from your face, then cheerfully remind them, "Don't forget that we put our hand over our mouth before we sneeze (/release the kraken)." Snot, unfortunately, will not be the only suspect liquid you come across. Under no circumstances should you come into physical contact with a UBS (Unidentified Bodily Spillage); instead order whoever has joined the staff most recently to mop it up. And if you've just joined, pay your dues. Also: alcohol gel, my friend. Bathe in it hourly.

Learn from the masters

It was with a deep sense of embarrassment that I was first observed by a senior member of the team whilst in infant school. My classroom could most accurately be imagined by picturing the scene in Fantasia when Mickey Mouse puts on the comically large sorcerer's hat, and is soon overwhelmed by multitudes of tiny axe-wielding broomsticks reaping devastation on all in their path. Then, like the wizened sorcerer of the story, my headteacher quietly slipped into the room, subtly waved a hand and restored order in seconds. With time, you too will learn this magic. Watch closely and add any technique deployed by your more experienced colleagues to your growing arsenal.

Follow these guidelines and you may just survive your move into the lower end of schools. Sure Year 6 may moan that they have the pressure of SATs and children beginning to understand the true meaning of the word 'defiant'. But anyone who has worked in both knows that teachers of young children are the SAS of primary schools. Welcome to the club.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jon Brunskill used to teach in Year 6, but is now the head of Year 2 at Reach Academy Feltham. You can follow him on Twitter, if you like: @jon_brunskill

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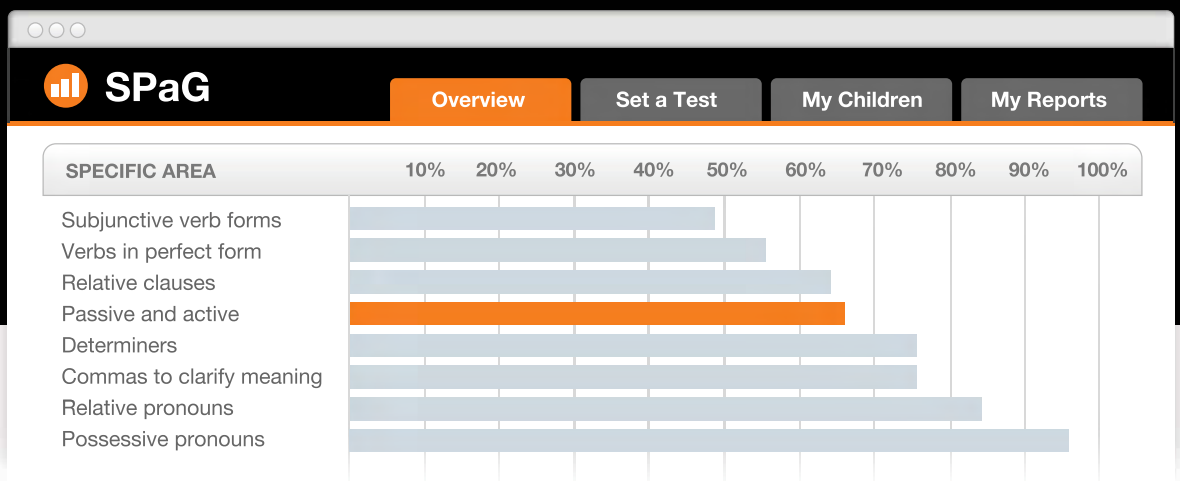

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