

“The development and use of communication and language is at the heart of young children’s learning.”

(Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage, 2000)

It is recognised that children learn in a holistic way and that the use of communication and language is at the heart of all their learning.

Learning to speak initially emerges out of non-verbal communication. It is as children express their needs and feelings, interact with others and establish their own identities and personalities that these skills develop. Without these vital communication skills children are unable to participate fully in the communities they reside in.

It is important that practitioners value children’s talk and appreciate the importance of making time for conversation with young children, both on a one-to-one basis and within small groups. Careful observation of children will enable practitioners to plan for and provide opportunities that will best develop their speaking and listening skills.

Practitioners can encourage conversation and extend the use of language through everyday situations such as changing routines, mealtimes, shopping and cooking. The learning environment should reflect the importance of language through books, labels and signs, and adults should provide a rich menu of songs, stories, rhymes, poems and jingles on a daily basis.

An effective, open partnership with parents is vital, as they most easily understand their child’s communications and can help overcome any barriers that may occur. Practitioners and parents working together is a positive way of helping with the learning process.



Context for learning: Lunchtime at the nursery
Thomas: 13 months

What did Thomas do?

On entering the room with Teresa, Thomas sees his sister, Sophie, and acknowledges her with a smile. He keeps looking at her intently as he crosses the room. He also becomes excited when he hears Sally the cook's voice and looks around to find her. Teresa asks Thomas which chair he would like to sit in (choice of two) and he leans towards the second one. Teresa offers a choice of spoon. Thomas indicates his choice by saying "Poon, poon." Teresa talks to Thomas about the food that is being prepared: "What can you smell? I think it's your favourite today." Thomas responds through facial expressions and squeals of delight. When the food arrives and is placed on the tray, Thomas reaches out with both arms towards his bowl. Teresa sits with him and encourages him to talk by asking: "What is it?" When Thomas points to the side table and says "Juice", Teresa acknowledges his communication and shows her understanding by saying: "Oh, I can see you want your drink now, do you?"

Links to Early Years Foundation Stage

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Dispositions and Attitudes; Self-care
 Begin to indicate own needs, for example, by pointing.

Communication, Language and Literacy

Language for Communication
 § Create personal words as they begin to develop language.

Language for Thinking

§ Understand and respond to the different things said to them when in a familiar context with a special person.

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How did the adult support Thomas's learning?

- § By providing two-way exchanges to encourage conversation.
- § By providing opportunities for Thomas to make choices.
- § By encouraging imitation and labelling.
- § By using personal words that Thomas creates as he begins to develop language.

Next steps

- § Plan opportunities for talking together.
- § Provide play materials for Thomas, which encourage labelling and imitation.
- § Share observation with Thomas's parents.

Context for learning: Visit to the park
Keeley: 2 years



What did Keeley do?

Keeley and Sarah often visit the local park. On the way they pass the duck pond. Keeley says, “Look, look, ducks! I like ducks! Lots and lots and lots! I feed the babies first!” They feed the ducks with the bread Sarah has brought from home. “Come on, Sarah! I want to go now!”

At the park Keeley rushes ahead. “I want the swing and the slide and the sand and the climber!” “What do you want to do first? Let’s go to the swing,” says Sarah. “No! No! No! Slide first! Look at me! Look at me!” replies Keeley. Keeley runs ahead, keen to reach the slide. At the slide Keeley tries to push ahead of the others. Sarah reminds Keeley that she must wait her turn and let the others go first. Keeley enjoys several turns on the slide, calling out to Sarah to watch as she comes down.

“Now, Keeley. It is nearly lunchtime and we must go soon. What would you like to do last of all?” “I want to swing up! Up! Up!” says Keeley. “Higher and higher!” says Sarah. “Higher and higher!” says Keeley.

How did the adult support Keeley’s learning?

- § By encouraging the development of conversation and understanding.
- § By supporting Keeley’s growing vocabulary.
- § By using language to communicate meaning.
- § By providing opportunities for Keeley to make choices in her learning.

Links to Early Years Foundation Stage

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Self-confidence and Self-esteem

- § Express their feelings with warm, mutual, affirmative relationships.

Communication, Language and Literacy

Language for Communication

- § Learn new words very rapidly and are able to use them in communicating about matters which interest them.

Language for Thinking

- § Are able to respond to simple requests and grasp meaning from context.

Next steps

- § Provide small world activities for Keeley to recreate her experiences.
- § Use books and photographs to encourage Keeley to reflect on and talk about the day.
- § Continue to use the local environment to expand Keeley’s experiences.

Context for learning:
Small world play winter train scenario
Bradley: 4 years



What did Bradley do?

Bradley plays with the trains alongside a group of children. He is highly engrossed in the activity and is using an imaginary voice as he pushes the train round the track: "Choo choo, choo choo, everyone on the train."

An adult joins in the play and introduces a storyline about Thomas the Tank Engine getting stuck in the snow, using the book that Bradley has brought from home. Bradley likes this idea and sweeps some of the snow on to the tracks. He notices that there aren't any people and goes to find some. When he brings them back Bradley pretends to make the people work and says, "Come on mate, let's get the snow off quickly." "Okay, mate. I think the train's coming soon."

The practitioner, Marie, then starts to scoop some snow into the bucket on the digger and begins tipping it off the track, saying, "This isn't working very quickly. What else can we do to help?" Bradley responds, "I will help you too. We can do it together."

How did the adult support Bradley's learning?

- § By playing alongside the children, modelling language.
- § By using Bradley's interests as a starting point for the activity.
- § By extending Bradley's thinking through involvement in his play.

Links to Early Years Foundation Stage

Communication, Language and Literacy

Language for Thinking

- § Talk activities through, reflecting on and modifying what they are doing.
- § Use talk to connect ideas, explain what is happening and anticipate what might happen next.
- § Begin to use talk to pretend imaginary situations.

Next steps

- § Use the story to ask key questions, for example: "How are we going to stop all the snow going back on the track?"
- § Encourage children to make up their own stories.



Context for learning:
Outdoor role play
 based on the Jill
 Murphy book *Whatever
 Next!*
Saba: 5 years

What did Saba do?

Saba and her friends have really enjoyed the Jill Murphy book *Whatever next!* Saba has chosen to work outside with a group of friends using a large construction kit to make their own spaceship. They start building with enthusiasm straight away, without planning. As the spaceship begins to take shape Saba and her friends have to negotiate about who is going to fly the spaceship. "I will go first," says Saba, "and you can fly back when we go home." Once they have completed the spaceship Saba sits at the front and says, "I'm the driver. Come on quickly, get on the back. We're going to the moon." She uses a map to find her route and then says, "Right, I know which way to go now. It's going to be a long journey." When they arrive on the moon, two children go inside, collect the props from the story and suggest they have a picnic. Saba uses her own experience of having a picnic to act out the story. She helps to lay the table and then speaks to Baby Bear in a small voice: "Would you like a biscuit or some honey?" After a while, Saba instructs the children to pack the picnic things away and says, "Come on, it's time to go home now. You can drive."

How did the adult support Saba's learning?

- § By observing Saba in this play situation.
- § By sharing her observations with the other practitioners.
- § By planning further group activities with an adult, helping Saba to take a more cooperative role.

Links to Early Years Foundation Stage

Communication, Language and Literacy

Language for Communication

- § Initiate conversation, attend to and take account of what others say.

Language for Thinking

- § Use talk to connect ideas, explain what is happening and anticipate what might happen next.
- § Use language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences.

Next steps

- § Plan a task setting up a space centre, with an adult working alongside the children helping them plan and talk together before they start.



Context for learning:
Drama session in response to 'Little Red Riding Hood'
Miles: 6 years

What did Miles do?
 The children have been exploring the story of 'Little Red Riding Hood' for some time. Today they have worked in groups of three to explore the part of the story when the wolf meets Little Red Riding Hood for the first time. The adult has modelled asking questions whilst in the role of the wolf in a previous group time. Today the rest of the class are asking Miles's group some questions that they have to answer in role.
 Miles takes on the role of the wolf very convincingly. He alters his voice to sound like a wolf and stands in a threatening way with a fierce look on his face. He answers a range of questions as if he is the wolf and talks about events from the story in his answers. A child asks, "Why do you eat people?" "I like to eat juicy children," responds Miles. "I thought Little Red Riding Hood looked delicious. I wanted to eat her up."
 Another child questions, "How did you catch her?" "I made Little Red Riding Hood stop to pick the flowers so that I could get to Grandma's house before her."

How did the adult support Miles's learning?
 § By allowing time for children to explore characters.
 § By talking to the children about the characters and getting them to think about how they would speak.
 § By working with the group in role.

Links to Early Years Foundation Stage
Communication, Language and Literacy
Language for Communication
 § Interact with others, negotiating plans and activities and taking turns in conversation.
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Language for Thinking
 § Use language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences.
Links to National Curriculum
Drama
 4a: use language and actions to explore and convey situations, characters and emotions.
 4c: comment constructively on drama they have watched or in which they have taken part.
 Speaking, Listening and Learning
 8: to act out own and well-known stories, using different voices for characters.

Next steps
 § Ask the children to think about the wolf and what they have learnt about him.
 § Use these skills to explore a new story.