

Every Child a Talker Every Adult Involved



**Children and
Learning**

Sharing ideas through stories and small world play

We know that children learn language (and probably everything else!) by being *involved* in activities. By 'involvement' we mean really focusing for long periods of time. *Sharing* their thoughts and ideas with each other and/or adults, is also important for learning, and especially if this is *sustained* for a good length of time. Research shows that children learn quickly when they are regularly involved in '*sustained shared thinking*'. But we also know that settings are lively and busy places, and it can often be a challenge for practitioners and children to get involved in 'sustained shared thinking'. This is especially true when children are at early stages of learning to talk, or learning English as an additional language.

But it can be done, and here's a recipe for how we did it at The Children's Centre @ the Mall, Ashcroft and Ramridge Children's Centre, Ramridge Primary and Lewsey Children's Centre:

Ingredients:

A group of children (six maximum)

Two adults (minimum requirement)

A good animal story book like 'Cock a Moo Moo', or 'Mister Gumpy's Outing'

Soft toys or puppets and small plastic animals for each of the characters in the book

A table covered with large sheets of white paper, stuck down by masking tape.

Coloured felt pens

A nice colourful rug

Method

Place the rug in the book corner and spread out the soft toys and puppets and the story book. Invite some children to come and play.

Adults decide which of you will lead the session, and who will support.

Encourage the children to play with the toys, but with children taking the lead and with adults responding. (Adult-supported play)

Lead adult introduces the pictures from the story, while the children are playing.

At an appropriate time, lead adult tells the children you are going to tell them a story.

Children hold their toys while they are involved in the story. (Adult-led activity)

Replace soft toys with small pastic toys and involve the children in adult-supported play.

When the time is right, take the children and the small animals over to the table.

Encourage them to play with the animals on the table, and to draw a farm/fields/ a pond/a river, or anything they want to, with the felt pens. (Initially adult-led activity). You might want to add some other materials like corks and lolly sticks, plasticene to add to the creativity. Adults gradually reduce your lead so that children become involved in a long period of play and creativity with each other, with supporting adults. Eventually adults can step back completely and observe what children are doing and saying.

Time taken

Up to 90 minutes!!

Points for discussion

This type of activity needs two adults to be available throughout, so this needs to be planned for. There are distinct advantages to working in this way:

- Children can be involved in lengthy periods of sustained shared thinking, with adults and each other.
- Adults introduce a story and engage children in conversation, so there are real opportunities for language and vocabulary development.
- Children choose to join in, but are free to move in and out of the activity whenever they like (except at the story part, when children need to know that if they are staying for the story then they need to stay for all of it). This increases involvement as the children have chosen to be involved on their own terms.
- Adults have the chance to work together and develop their ideas and share observations.
- The children's involvement is sustained by the adults moving between adult-supported and adult-led styles.
- Children of all abilities are drawn to this type of activity.
- Children learning English as an additional language fully benefit if the adults try and use a few words in children's mother tongue, or if an adult speaks this language.
- Combining creativity, story and language in this way maximises learning and enjoyment.
- If this activity is repeated during the week, many children can benefit. Gradually this can become a child-initiated activity.
- Planning to share the same story at large group story time ensures that children can be fully involved at story time.

