

More than counting: language and maths

Most young children will be involved in some form of counting during each day (e.g. Practitioners asking 'how many fingers/ ducks/ currant buns etc.?'; sharing counting stories, rhymes and songs.). But there is so much more to early maths development than counting, and here are some examples:

- *Positional words* like 'next to, behind, in front, above, below'.
- *'Same and different'*
- *Time*: 'now, soon, later, today, tomorrow, yesterday, lunchtime, home time, next'.
- *Addition and subtraction*: 'how much, how many, lots, not many, more, gone, take away, less, sort'.
- *Measurement*: 'long, short, tall, high, gigantic, enormous, tiny, medium, large'.
- *Problem solving vocabulary* (e.g. *grouping, sharing, halving*): 'sort out, same, different, in half, swap, share'
- *The properties of shapes*: shape names, 'point, lines, round, curve, top, bottom, sides'
- *Comparative language* ('few, fewer, fewest' etc)
- *Descriptive words generally* ('flat, pointy, straight, curvy, wavy, smooth' etc)
- The *rhythm* necessary for the language of pattern (red, blue, red, blue)

We can support children in many aspects of maths by engaging them in incidental chat, often while they are involved in practical play and exploratory activities we have set up. Many of the ideas and concepts mentioned above will come up spontaneously, or can be introduced and expanded, in sessions at the play dough table, in the sand, in the water, while playing with bricks and construction, while cutting and sticking, or while playing outdoors. Playing with sets of stacking beakers or nesting boxes, for example, can promote lots of new ideas and language.

It is important to bear in mind that many children learning English as an additional language may already be able to express these ideas in their mother tongue, and will learn English words and phrases quickly during these activities.

Songs and rhymes are great for introducing and developing maths ideas, and particularly if they are accompanied by actions, signs, toys and pictures: ('The wheels on the bus'; 'When Goldilocks went to the house of the bears'; 'Five currant buns' etc). But possibly the best way to help children really get to grip with maths ideas is through stories...

... See '*Language, maths and stories*' for more ideas!