



# Every Child a Talker

## Give your book corner a makeover! 2. Some ideas to try out

Having carried out the survey, share it with your colleagues. You might decide to make huge changes straight away, or focus on changing one aspect of the area at a time and seeing what happens. Why not ask the children what they would like? And ask yourself the big question: 'Do we need a book area at all?' If the answer is no, then how can children have lots of experience with books?

### **Do all the adults in your setting like books?**

Who is passionate, and who needs some support?

Plan for two adults to share books at a time with the children, and learn from each other.

Collect props to illustrate a story, and share these with the children. Use a Storysack to generate excitement among the staff and children.

Remember, a book does not have to be read all the way through. Ask the children first: "Do you want me to read all the words, or shall I *tell* the story. Or do *you* (the child) want to tell me the story?"

### **How much time do adults spend in the book corner?**

If you want children to spend time in a space in your setting, you need to be there frequently. You can model how children should behave; share books; chatting, act out little stories etc

### **How much time do children spend in the book corner?**

If some children never visit the area, then we have some work to do! This makes us think about the layout, the type of books, and especially their attitude to books. If the answer is 'A lot of time!' then the chances are you have got things right. We also have to think about taking the books to where they like to be (that's another topic entirely!)

### **What do they do with their time?**

There's nothing wrong with children using the book area to chat, play games, sit and think, rest, and act out role-play. All of these behaviours can be developed by you to include books.

You might like to think about turning your book corner into a role-play area; e.g. a bookshop, a bookshop for babies, or a library.

### **Do the books match the needs and interests of the children?**

The key points to think about here is the age and stage that your children are at, how individual children relate to books, and what the children are interested in. If you can match the right type of book to the children you care for, then you are well on the way to enticing them to share the books. The key thing is to get the right balance between stories, rhyming books and information books.

**What books do children like? What do they want to look at on their own or share with adults?**

Observe the children, and ask them and their parents. Add a few books that the parents know they like at home. Also think about comics (lamine pages to make them survive!) and books and annuals related to TV characters.

**What is the absolute favourite children's book for adults?**

Tell the children the results, and put the book on display. Ask the parents what they liked when they were little, and put this on display and share it with the children too!

**What is the absolute favourite book among the children?**

This can be fascinating to find out! In one setting it was 'The tiger who came to tea'. Display the books prominently. Take photos of the children reading their favourite book, (ask them to choose their favourite page that they want to appear in the photo). Lamine the photos and display them at the children's level in the book area.

**Do children have a choice about the type of books they can look at?**

Ask them what they would like to read. Put away the books that never get chosen. If you have new books, show them to the children at group time. Try introducing one at a time, and ask the children what they think about them.

**Are the books the right *quality* (hard cover/soft cover, large/small/ pop-up/noisy)?**

Children react differently to different types of books, depending on their interests, ages and stage of development. Try introducing interactive books that squeak or make a noise. However be prepared to share pop-up books with children, and don't be afraid to limit 'special books' (possibly expensive and fragile) to times when an adult will be there to share them.

Also bear in mind that not all children respond to stories! Some enjoy information books most, or comics, or books of photographs of themselves or their friends.

What condition are the books in?

Sometimes books look tatty because they are well loved! However no books should be displayed that are torn or have pages missing. If books are getting ripped, then take a close look at how they are being handled or stored. If they are being squashed into a rack then reduce the number of books in the rack. Help the children by showing how to care for the books.

**What *quantity* of books is there?**

You can have too many books! Experiment with putting out just a few books. Or ask children at the beginning of the week what books they would like to look at. If you have your books stored in a crate or boxes, ask the children to look at what is in the crate and decide what they would like to look at.

Or visit your local library and get a collection of books for the week.

**Are there a variety of books?**

Most book areas have mainly story and rhyme books. Introduce more information books. These can often be borrowed from your local library.

You might like to experiment with books in different languages and scripts; and particularly if you have children from different language backgrounds. Involve parents in discussions about why you are doing this, and ask them to help you make good choices of books and stories.

**How are the books displayed?**

This is a very important question. Experiment with asking children about their favourite books, and where they would like to put them so that everyone can know.

**How are the books stored?**

Books need to be easy to tidy by children on their own, so that the books don't get damaged. However it is always good for adults to supervise tidying up. At this time you can get lots of answers to the questions we have been asking!

Try wicker baskets or plastic containers of different sizes.

**What furniture is in the book corner? How is it used?**

Any cushions need to be the right size, clean and used properly. If they are not, then they are not needed. The same applies to little sofas or chairs. Ask the children what they would like to sit on, and experiment with what they tell you.

**What is on the floor?**

If it is a rug, it needs to be clean. If it is dirty, clean it or replace it. A clean area will encourage children and adults to stay!! Encourage the children to take their shoes off before sitting on the rug. This keeps it clean, but also calms the children down, and makes the space special.

**Are there any displays? Do children look at them?**

The best displays are at the children's eye level (which in the book corner will be very low! Laminate any pictures, so children can touch them without them getting spoiled. Experiment with photos of children with books. Try putting up the displays with the children. Ask them what pictures they would like to have there.

**And finally... do you need a book area at all?**

If you are squeezed for space, or the children need turning on to books, you could do some of these things:

- Have the books in small crates and put them where the children play (especially if the books are related to what they are playing; e.g. books about cars and fire engines where the children play with these things outdoors).
- Roll out a 'book rug' with cushions every morning in the middle of the floor, and scatter books and a few cuddly toys on it: (this will need an adult on it for most of the time to make sure that children don't slip on it. Encourage the children to take their shoes off before they sit on the rug.)

**One last thing... visit other settings that are like yours, and find out what works for them.**

**Michael Jones**

**Early language consultant [www.talk4meaning.co.uk](http://www.talk4meaning.co.uk) [jonmic57@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jonmic57@yahoo.co.uk)**