



Early Reading Connects

Treasure Time

At First Steps Nursery School, Sheffield, a seven week programme, 'Treasure Time' is proving an excellent way of getting parents and children to communicate. Margaret Peart, practitioner, explains.



The aim of Treasure Time is to help develop communication not only between adult and child but also between the children. We also wanted to get to know the new parents/carers and children before they started at the nursery school and for them to get to know us. So we developed a seven session programme to enable this.

We started by creating a communication-friendly environment that was welcoming, comfortable and peaceful. We used a quiet meeting room adjacent to the nursery school rooms and decided to limit numbers to 12 adults with their children.

Each adult was given a Treasure Time scrap book in which to record observations and stick photographs and hand-outs. The programme leaders took photographs and also noted observations to share later with the parents. Each session had a clear focus and was supported by handouts and information from appropriate sources, including Early Reading Connects.

This is what we did in each weekly session:

Session 1

Chairs for the adults were arranged in a semi-circle at one side of the room. We talked about patterns in children's play and how close observation of a child helps us to adapt our responses accordingly.



The children enjoy discovering what's in the basket

Session 2

Treasure Time baskets and heuristic play were the focus. We put out a range of objects such as pine cones, fabric, brushes, empty boxes and pieces of

wood. The children were then encouraged to experiment with them. It provided a good opportunity to get parents thinking about the adult's role. Heuristic play requires a supportive adult who is observant and responsive, but who allows a child to explore freely and facilitates this without intervening. This can be a novelty to many adults.

We gave the parents an empty treasure basket which they took home and filled with the sort of things they had seen their children playing with at Treasure Time. Each parent had observed their child's individual schema (or patterns in play) and would have chosen objects that they knew were going to interest and excite. Some children were fascinated by sound, so would have included crinkly paper or rattles. Others were attracted to shiny, sparkly objects or objects that move or open.



Scarves are fun to lay with

Session 3

We followed up on the first two weeks by tracking the development of two older children. The lead practitioner brought in photographs, scrap books and work from her own two children between the ages of 2.5 years to 7 years and showed clearly how schema, spotted in very young

children, can develop; how hands-on exploring in the early years lays the foundation for work and play of the older child. For example, a very young child might be observed lining up objects, a common aspect of a trajectory schema, leading to the ability to join words, form sentences and sequence thoughts and ideas.

Session 4

In this session we looked at developmental movement play. It was a lot of fun. We used scarves and lycra to encourage a range of movement and experimentation. At the beginning of the session we used music to promote listening and then held up scarves, moving them gently in time with the music to capture the visual attention of the children. We all sat around the brightly coloured lycra holding onto it, stretching it, moving it up and down and singing songs. We bounced balls on the lycra, moved underneath it and turned it into a swing for the children to be rocked in.

Sessions 5 and 6

We concentrated on communication, language, rhymes, books and music. We listened to music, looked at books, sang songs, moved to the music and rocked the children.



Mum and child rock in time with the music

Session 7

The final session was a chance to reflect on the whole programme and relate the themes we had covered to the day to day practice in the nursery school.

Parents/carers agreed how useful the programme had been, and different from other groups. They found it gave them a better understanding of their child's play and more confidence about their parenting skills. One parent enthused, "It has been a good opportunity to watch her develop....to observe more and not rush in to help her." One parent appreciated "making time to enjoy the stages, even the difficult ones." As we moved through the programme, the setting up of our resources became increasingly more tailored to the needs of each individual child. One parent commented how good it was to "allow my child to learn and play - the way she wants to." This was a direct result of close observation of their play and exploration. We demonstrated to parents how simple adaptations of toys and equipment will engage their child's interest and foster learning.

We are looking forward to running the sessions again this year and will probably change very little as it worked so well!