

Developing language in Early Years

It is important that you provide high-quality interactions to pupils to support their language development. This can be done through strategies which engage pupils in discussion about the activities they are completing, or experiences they are having. There is a distinction here between talking *with* pupils and talking *at* them (EEF, 2018). Talking at pupils tends to be more passive, while talking with pupils is more interactive; interaction is important for language development, because it gives pupils the opportunity to practise their speaking skills.

There are a variety of different frameworks that can be used as a guide to support you when interacting with pupils during everyday activities, such as Sustained Shared Thinking (EEF, 2018). This framework enables teachers to expose pupils to Tier 1 and 2 language.

Sustained Shared Thinking

Sustained Shared Thinking is when two or more people work together to solve a problem, clarify an issue, evaluate activities, or extend a narrative (Melhuish et al, 2004). During a task, the pupil(s) contribute their ideas and the teacher aims to extend and develop their thinking further by (EEF, 2018):

Tuning in

Listening carefully to what is being said and observing what the child is doing.

Showing genuine interest

Giving whole attention, eye contact, smiling and nodding.

Asking children to elaborate

"I really want to know more about this."

Recapping

"So you think that..."

Giving their own experience

"I like to listen to music when cooking at home."

Clarifying ideas

"So you think we should wear coats in case it rains?"

Using encouragement to extend thinking

"You have thought really hard about your tower, but what can you do next?"

Suggesting

"You might want to try doing it like this."

Reminding

"Don't forget that you said we should wear coats in case it rains."

Asking open questions

"How did you....?"; "Why does this...?"; "What happens next?".

Through these strategies, you can probe pupils to engage in conversation about the activities they are doing, which in turn develops their language. When doing this, it is also helpful to model using full sentences to respond to questions and encourage pupils to do the same.

Sustained shared thinking in action

Watch the video below to see an example of a Reception teacher using elements of Sustained Shared Thinking when

working with a pupil during free flow activities. There is a video sharing an example from a mainstream setting and one from a specialist setting. Select the video that best suits your context.

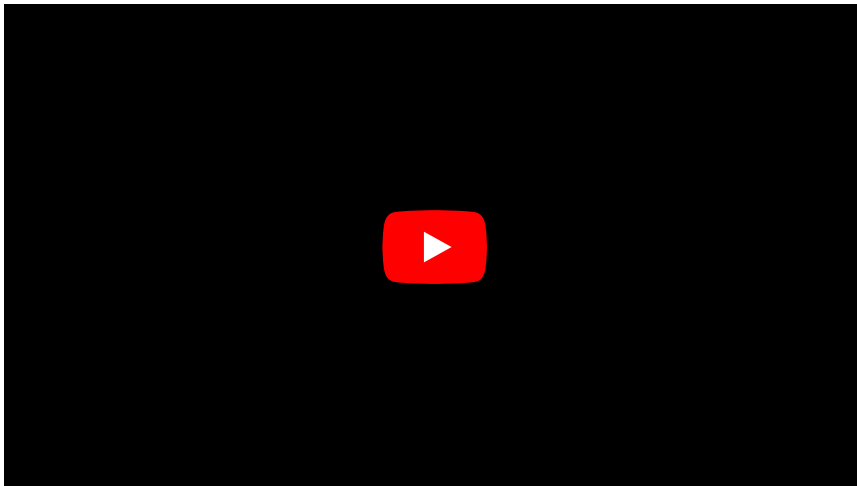
Early years



Direct Link: [Sustained Shared Thinking - Bethan Hughes at Reach Academy](#)

Direct Link to an audio described version of this video: [Sustained Shared Thinking - Bethan Hughes at reach Academy \(this link opens in a new window/tab\)](#)

Specialist



Direct Link: [Sustained Shared Thinking Ellen Tinkham School](#)

Direct Link to an audio described version of this video: [Sustained Shared Thinking Specialist Setting \(this link opens in a new window/tab\)](#)

Explicitly teaching vocabulary

It is also important to explicitly teach pupils key vocabulary. When teaching any vocabulary, it is helpful to ensure that it is related to the topic that pupils are learning about (EEF, 2020). Teaching word meanings at the start of a topic and revisiting them throughout means pupils are more likely to comprehend the content being taught during lessons. It also means they are regularly exposed to the vocabulary throughout the topic, making it more memorable. They can hear it being used in context and have multiple opportunities to apply it during speaking and listening, reading, and writing.

There are many ways that vocabulary can be explicitly and implicitly taught. Watch the video below to see what this might look like in practice.



Direct Link: [Teaching vocabulary - Bethan Hughes at Reach Academy](#)

Direct Link to an audio described version of this video: [Teaching vocabulary - Bethan Hughes at Reach Academy](#)