

Seeking the expertise of colleagues and existing resources - Early Year

By Maria Craster

There are many different approaches to how the 'curriculum' is delivered in EYFS, with some settings providing all pre-planned adult directed learning opportunities and others following a free more 'in-the moment' approach (see Anna Ephgrave for more information on this). Personally, I try to use a mixture of both, taking lots of opportunities to follow pupils lead and empower them to run the play whilst setting out key new learning opportunities. It is hard to separate the curriculum between those discrete whole class learning opportunities and the 'activity' time when pupils are learning through play. I find the design of each are quite different.

This series of lessons focus around the Ghanaian traditional tale, "The Leopard's Drum." Due to the holistic nature of the EYFS you will find elements across the curriculum evident in the provision planning, but the adult input sessions around this theme were predominantly English based. When planning any unit of work, it is important to ensure that you have accurate information and knowledge around the topic and try to make use of specialists where you can, whether that be colleagues, parents or the pupils themselves. In the context of this series of lessons I was able to reach out to parents of two children in my class who were able to offer support in terms of their personal experiences of Ghana. Firstly, they supported with correct pronunciation of the characters in the text as well as supporting their children to prepare presentations on both Ghanaian food and dress. This not only supported the crucial link between home and school but empowered these students to take more of a lead in their learning. These sessions provided a great hook and made the otherwise slightly abstract concepts more tangible to the class as a whole. There are many resources out there to help with creating lesson plans and 'activity' ideas from Pinterest and Facebook groups to Twinkl and TES. Whilst these are all useful sources of ideas I often find them a bit overwhelming. It's hard to avoid getting swept up in the fun activity ideas, "Can you create an elephant from a paper plate?" instead of focusing on the learning objectives and curriculum, "manipulates materials to achieve a planned effect."

Before I start each new text, I take some time to look at the vocabulary that is being used, see if there are any new concepts or any opportunities to change the text slightly to provide a more interesting synonym. I find this works particularly well when doing a Talk 4 Writing project (see Pie Corbett for more on this). We need to have high expectations of our pupils; and ensure we are teaching them the correct vocabulary and facts surrounding their learning. Young children often learn misconceptions or inaccurate information that they have to then re-learn in later life, something which is much harder to do. In the context of this series of work it was a great opportunity to teach a wider range of vocabulary such as, "huge, *magnificent*". We know that the vocabulary gap is significant between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more affluent peers (see Alex Quigley for more on this) so, as educators I think we need to do as much as we can to empower young children with a wide range of lexicon.

However, we do not need to reinvent the wheel and do everything from scratch. Once you are aware of your core text and have thought about where the gaps are in your cohort's learning. Do they need more opportunities to develop their fine motor development? Or perhaps they need a bit of extra support in their self-confidence so you need to incorporate more public speaking opportunities; then plan backwards from these gaps to look at the resources out there that can help you to create these learning outcomes.