

# Developing pupils' mental models across a scheme of work - Early Years

**By Maria Craster**

Despite the fact that we teach topics/themes/core texts that break up the year, the vast majority of the EYFS is one long continuous curriculum that runs from birth to Year 1. Thinking of it like that helps to remind practitioners of the need to build up pupils' mental models across the EYFS, as they need to frequently revisit their learning and make those cross curricular links to develop now and be able to achieve success in learning as they get older.

The key way that I do this is through the explicit teaching of vocabulary; both topic specific and general conversation. In our setting both high frequency words and new story nouns are introduced and repeated with an action to help our students who struggle with communication to also retain the vocabulary. This is an approach that is used throughout the school, as we know that the use of consistent non-verbal's (such as 'yes' and 'no') allows students to free up some of their working memory. I try to use BSL as frequently as possible for this, i.e. in our retelling of 'The Leopard's Drum', we used the BSL signs for each of the animals. These signs then acted as a piece of scaffolding for students who needed it when retelling the story.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, I use retrieval practice in both this series of lesson and all (see Rosenshine for more on this). Quizzing is something that I initially found challenging to incorporate into EYFS but found that once I had dedicated a considerable amount of time to embedding the routines with pupils, i.e. TTYP, Show Me (see TLAC for more on these AFL techniques) I discovered that it was an incredibly useful strategy to ensure children were retaining key knowledge and vocabulary from previous sessions.

Finally, in this scheme, as with all schemes, I made sure to create lots of opportunities for modelling following an, I do, We/You do approach. My EYFS works in a way that not all students will engage in the same activity at the same time as we need to develop the whole child and think of their Characteristics of Effective Learning. However, this being the case it is crucial that all students have the chance to observe and participate in writing opportunities. Writing is particularly important as we can see from data that that is the area where most children struggle to achieve. Pre-writing activities and talk in particular, such as we see in this scheme with opportunities to re-tell and engage in class discussion, are key. More students are entering school working below the expected standard for Communication and Language so, we need to first embed these prime areas before moving onto the specific.