



Supporting children's learning in the early years

Learning with Mini-Beasts

Narrator

Firstly, we visit Wall Hall Nursery in Aldenham, Hertfordshire. We'll be following Yvette Ayres, who works part-time but keeps in constant contact with her colleagues in the nursery team, led by Cindy Willie, the head teacher. We'll see how she observes the children, and how she reflects on their learning and development in order to plan for future learning experiences.

As well as working with the foundation stage curriculum, the team at Wall Hall base their practice on Schemer, and approach to understanding children's learning through their patterns of play. At the nursery there's a morning and an afternoon session, each with different children. The children are welcomed and introduced to the activities and experiences relating to the planned theme. These link to a particular schema. Today the theme is mini-beasts, and the schema is enveloping, which relates to ideas about covering, surrounding and containing. Cindy prepares the children to go outside and look for worms in the garden. Cindy invites Hughie to count worms.

Cindy Willey

Hughie you can be next. Can you remember how many worms we've got can you remember how many you've got, how many are there.

Hughie

Er one, two, three, four.

Cindy

Okay close your eyes cos here comes here comes the bird. Right, have a look, how many worms are there. How many did the bird get.

Hughie

One.

Cindy.

Are you sure. Let's have a look, see if you're right. What did he get. How many did he get.

Hughie

Two.

Cindy

Two, well done.

Narrator

Yvette takes a group of children outside to dig in the ground to see what they can find.

Yvette Ayres

We decided that we would look at mini-beasts and start with digging the worms because there are quite a number of children that are interested in enveloping. Enveloping is the play pattern where you see the child that digs, hides things, looks for treasure, buries things, and we felt that that would be a good starting point because we've just had half-term and it's very hard to know how the children are going to come in, therefore hard to plan for the beginning of the half-term.

Narrator

Yvette is amongst the children, picking up on their excitement and interest. We gave her a digital camera, to record her thoughts about the experiences provided, and how these developed over the following few days. Yvette reflects on what the activity meant to different children. Hughie, who we met earlier, has moved on considerably.

Yvette

Hughie very seldom writes, draws, or paints so it was really good that he actually did that. So he really was getting into using the pen for a purpose, and therefore using his fine motor skills, which he seemed reluctant to do. Cindy thought, I was talking to Cindy after the session. She wondered if it was a follow on from the day before where she'd had him on the computer, painting the worms and realising that he could actually control, and if it wasn't quite how he'd expected it didn't matter it was still very acceptable. But it was just lovely that this little boy has suddenly broken through where he wouldn't do anything like painting, drawing, and writing, has suddenly decided that this isn't so bad after all, I can do this. So, I was really pleased about that.

Narrator

Nicholas and Alex have found mini- beasts, and have handled and talked about them.

Yvette

I was watching Nicholas and Alex, and they were playing with the magnifiers looking at the mini-beasts. What did interest me was that Nicholas, when Alex gave Nicholas one of the caterpillars, Nicholas sorted them and said this is the Dad, and this is the baby, and Alex joined in with 'no no, this is the baby and this is the Dad, and this is the Mummy'. It was quite interesting that they seemed to put them in categories according to the family, the family of worms the day before always seemed to come back to the things that are familiar to them, that they're the things that they relate to really well.

Narrator

We visited the nursery again two weeks later. Yvette and the team have planned for more outdoor learning experiences, linked to the enveloping schema. The children have been invited to find buried treasure, from written maps and other clues placed around the garden. Discussion and reflection are an important part of the day's events.

Yvette.

They found lots of treasure, and they used their maps, and I was getting them to actually make a mark where they'd found the treasure so that they knew that they'd found it, and they were actually making crosses. There were one or two children that were desperately trying to draw arrows. There was Hughie and think it was James, but two of them that particularly wanted to draw the arrows.

Cindy

Did they achieve that?

Yvette

They achieved it in as much as you could see it was an arrow, it wasn't actually a point, it was kind of like this.

Cindy

That's really interesting because right at the end of the session I had some maps and Hughie came to look at it and he did draw a perfect arrow.

Yvette

Did he?

Cindy

Yes.

Yvette

Oh that's lovely, well I told him it was very good because you could actually see where it was supposed to be going even though it wasn't a perfect point then, but that's good isn't it.

Narrator

Yvette continued to reflect on how things developed, using the digital camera to record her thoughts.

Yvette

Another good thing about this particular morning this particular session, was that James was allowed in with their play as well. And that's James, with his map, going to the coach. And here's another picture of them, all together, looking at the map, and I suggested to Hughie that he could come and draw the map to show where he's going, so they didn't have a big map to open each time. And took photographs ... of Hughie in the garden ... drawing his map. And, he was showing Jacob look, here it is on my map, let's find it on your map. And there they are, playing beautifully together.

Yvette

We had an interesting half-term last half- term because most of the, well half of the group were new so we had half very young three year olds, and so ...

Narrator

At Wall Hall, Yvette is a member of a reflective team. She's able to build upon every session, by sharing her detailed observations with other colleagues. During the period when we filmed, Yvette has been able to identify significant learning and development for several children.

Yvette

They have actually they've come back fairly settled I think ...