

TEACHING COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE IN A CHILDMINDER SETTING ACROSS AGE PHASES

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INTRODUCTION

Claire's Little Farmers is a rural childminding setting situated on a farm, catering to children aged 1 to 4 during term time. Claire, the childminder, brings over 25 years of experience working with children, including 18 years as a Primary School teacher and 7 years as a childminder. Additionally, Claire has served as a Childminder mentor for the Department for Education.

FOCUS: IMPACT OF JOINT EXPERIENCES ON COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

This section examines how shared experiences within the childminding setting contribute to collaborative talk and the overall development of the children. Drawing on teaching approaches highlighted by the Education Endowment Foundation toolkit, the discussion centres on observed interactions and developmental outcomes.

The evidence presented is rooted in direct observations of the children, focusing on their progression in communication and collaboration. These joint experiences, facilitated by adult modelling and active participation, support the development of key cognitive and linguistic skills, as demonstrated in the outcomes noted within the setting.



INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCES AND COMMUNICATION

The farming environment serves as a catalyst for curiosity and engagement. Insights from the Education Endowment Foundation highlight the value of interactive reading to support cognitive and linguistic aspects of communication, particularly through familiar stories. In Claire's setting, children are introduced to farming stories accompanied by small world resources. Key language, including nouns, adjectives, and verbs related to animals and their actions, is taught and modelled by the adult.

Following the storytelling session, children engage in play with small world farm toys that relate to the story. This play provides further opportunities for the adult to model language and for children to practise and apply the vocabulary they have learned. The experience is then deepened through real animal interaction, allowing children to use language in a real-life context and sparking awe and wonder. Such activities are a regular feature of the setting.

COLLABORATIVE TALK AND PLAY

The Education Endowment Foundation emphasises the importance of teaching cognitive and linguistic communication skills through interactive reading and collaborative talk. After returning indoors, the children wash their hands and have a snack. During snack time, collaborative conversations are encouraged, with the adult modelling turn-taking and identifying the children's interests from the walk. Subsequently, the children play with small world farm animals, independently arranging fields and pens. They discuss features such as the number of legs, eyes, and noses, mimic animal sounds, and use tractors to move bales of hay, drawing on previous experiences from the garden.

This type of play fosters collaborative conversations and language development, involving both verbal and non-verbal interactions based on shared experiences. Even the youngest child participates, bringing animals, pointing to fields, and engaging in meaningful interactions with peers.



OUTCOME

As a result of these activities, the children demonstrate progress in communication and increased collaborative interactions.

CONCLUSION

Through walks, books, and small world play, children in the setting develop their vocabulary and social communication skills, enabling them to engage in collaborative communication appropriate to their stage of development. The adult acts as a sensitive mediator for younger children, while older children are able to problem-solve and build on each other's ideas, both collaboratively and independently, often re-enacting experiences they have shared.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION IN YOUR SETTING

Reading stories about the environment, modelling vocabulary, and providing opportunities for children to experience what they have read first-hand can be a valuable learning opportunity. Supplying resources that enable children to revisit and relive these experiences with friends can spark collaborative conversations. The environments explored need not be far away; a local park, the seaside, the shops, or even the garden can provide meaningful experiences.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Visit the Education Endowment Foundation and use the Early Years Toolkit to identify areas of practice that can be enhanced.

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/early-years/evidence-store/communication-and-language>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My name is Claire Summerson, and I am a childminder located near Whitby. I have nearly seven years of experience in childminding, following an eighteen-year career as a primary school teacher specialising in the EYFS. Additionally, I have served as a childminder mentor for the Department for Education. I am also the mother of two sons and the wife of a farmer.