

Title of example	Critical thinking supporting communication, language and literacy - an example of emergent writing around a festive theme
Centre submitting example	First Steps Day Nursery
Local authority/local area	Slough
Background of the provision	
<p>First Steps Day Nursery is owned and operated by Heatherwood & Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and is located at Wexham Park Hospital which is a large acute regional hospital. With around 80 families on roll, the children (aged between 3 months and five years), who attend mainly have parents working within the hospital. We also have several children enrolled from the local community. The service has been in operation for around twenty years and is currently open between 6.45am and 5.30pm, Monday to Friday. The nursery building was designed for the purpose and all rooms open onto a large garden.</p> <p>The staff compliment includes 18 practitioners and support staff. All practitioners are qualified to a minimum level 3, five to level 5 and all room leaders and Managers to level 6 (BA Hons Children's Development & Learning); the Preschool leader and the Nursery Manager hold Early Years Teacher Status. All staff are engaged in continued professional development.</p> <p>The nursery's development plan dovetails with its ongoing Bristol Standard quality improvement programme. Both are designed to ensure that all decisions benefit children, their families, the staff, and the wider early year's sector. The nursery operation specifically supports the childcare need of staff to achieve the aims of the wider Trust in providing high quality patient care</p>	
Background details to the practice	
<p>During the Festive period, our Early Years Teacher (Sarah) followed a child's interest in the festive period to lead practice around critical thinking. She was given a large red post box by a parent and a child standing with her at the time asked what the box was for and a short discussion ensued. This inspired Sarah to discuss the role of post boxes with a group of 3 year old children and extended this to support their writing practice by considering what individual children would say in a letter to Santa, inspired by the children's interests around the time of year. This would involve them discussing and critically thinking about how to communicate with Santa through emergent writing.</p>	
About the practice	

To support each child being able to think independently Sarah worked with children on either a one-one or paired basis. She asked questions designed to further her knowledge about the children's understanding of Christmas and Santa (this would later lead to philosophical discussions with larger groups of children about the nature of giving and receiving; thinking about others; being kind, sharing and caring; fictional and imaginary characters and worlds etc.).

Following these initial conversations, Sarah provided paper and pens and scribed verbatim the children's letters to Santa. To encourage writing skills practise she left space underneath each sentence for the child to write/mark make (see the photo example). The children photocopied their letters before posting the original into the red letter box. Together, Sarah and the children designed a display of the photocopied letters so their parents could read what they'd said to Santa.

Evidence and evaluation of difference to children and families

This was an appropriate and topical opportunity for Sarah to learn about the children's ideas and viewpoints on a number of levels. She engaged the children in critically thinking about their personal view of concepts including among others kindness, contacting others to express ideas, being reflective about self-behaviour and the behaviour of others and the relationship between the two, imaginary worlds where fantasy exists, aspiring to achieve an aim and reasons why they might be rewarded.

Through having their thoughts and words written verbatim they were also able to understand that thoughts become words that can be both written down for others to read or can be communicated verbally through reading out loud. Put together with practise in developing physical skills required in writing the activity encouraged literacy development.

Reflecting in the teaching context, Sarah more clearly understood the development and learning stages of individual children and her perceptions were changed in some cases. She was surprised in some instances and so revised her own thinking about children's abilities and where she could extend their learning next. She fed back her experiences to her colleagues and the children's key practitioners in order to facilitate further discussion, reflection and planning next steps and to further the professional development of both individuals and the wider team operation.

The display of letters fostered discussion between individual parents, their child and Sarah and again, in many cases parents were surprised by their child's ability. This was particularly evident for several of our boys where parents were very pleased to see their sons' writing skill (*"Did he really write that? He won't pick up a pen at home at all!"*).

Overall, the children enjoyed their critical thinking experience and their enjoyment of writing and communicating through the medium of print was enhanced. They were particularly thrilled when a few days later they received letters addressed to them at the nursery. Santa had responded!



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