

The role of the child

At the start of our learning theme, we gave pupils the opportunity to think about what they already know about the theme, and what they would like to know, prompting them to formulate their own questions. We then fed these ideas into our planning. One of the powerful elements of this is that you avoid teaching something the pupils are already know and you can identify misconceptions. Additionally, you can give them that chance to share which directions they would like their learning to go in. This builds trust, confidence, and motivation and encourages pupils to lead their learning and plan their own investigations.

We actively encouraged the pupils to try ideas knowing that they may fail. These were used as teaching and learning points. Never forget the power of making a mistake! Allow the pupils to fail and discuss as a class/group where it went wrong and what you have all learned from each other. This builds resilience and collaboration.

The role of the adult

Teachers facilitate the learning of the pupils. This is a subtle and dynamic role within teaching and learning. Teachers and practitioners use their knowledge of the curriculum and the pupils they are working with to adapt with each learning opportunity and move the pupils' skills, understanding, and knowledge forwards. High-quality interactions and modelling of metacognition play a vital role here.

We used the following pedagogical approaches when developing this:

High-quality interactions

Research findings from the SEED study consistently concluded that children made good progress with their learning and development when they were exposed to high-quality interactions on a regular basis. The most significant impact was noted between the ages of 0–5 years. Adults in early years would guide and enhance the pupils' play by commenting on what they were doing and using questions to prompt the pupils to think more deeply.



The role of the adult

Question starters

Using open-ended questions to provoke thinking has been a great success and one of the ways teachers and practitioners have supported children to develop inquisitiveness and increase levels of concentration. In early years, we used this to facilitate and develop learning during exploratory play.

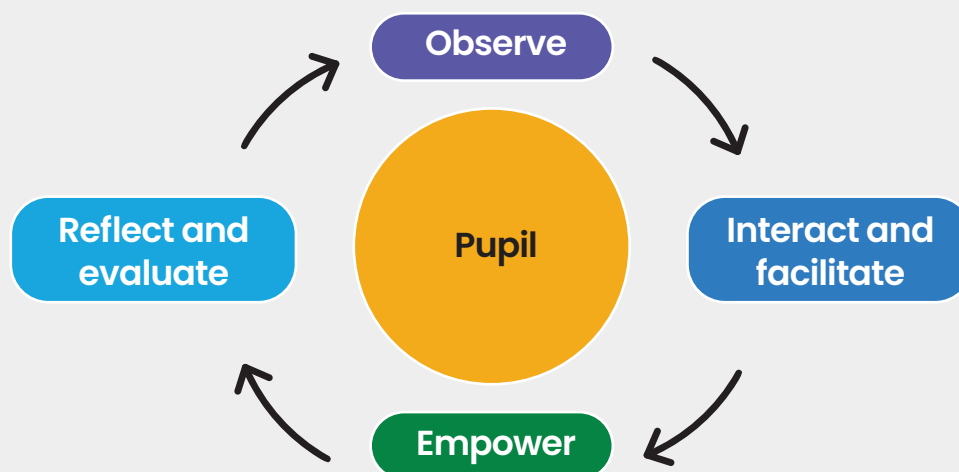
These questions support creative thinking at any age or stage of development:

- I wonder...?
- What do you think will happen if...?
- How could you/we...?
- Is there another way?
- Can you show me another way?
- What do you think would happen if...?
- How do you imagine it feels to...?
- How do you think we could...?
- What would it be like if...?
- What do you wonder about...?
- How do you think we can find out...?
- What do you think it would look like if...?
- How do you think it would change if...?
- What do you imagine it would be like to...?

In-the-moment planning

This is a pedagogical approach where practitioners and teachers facilitate learning and respond in that moment. This works well because it is most meaningful to the pupil when they are highly motivated by their current task. During these moments, the adult will skilfully facilitate learning to support development and levels of engagement.

This approach works in a cycle.



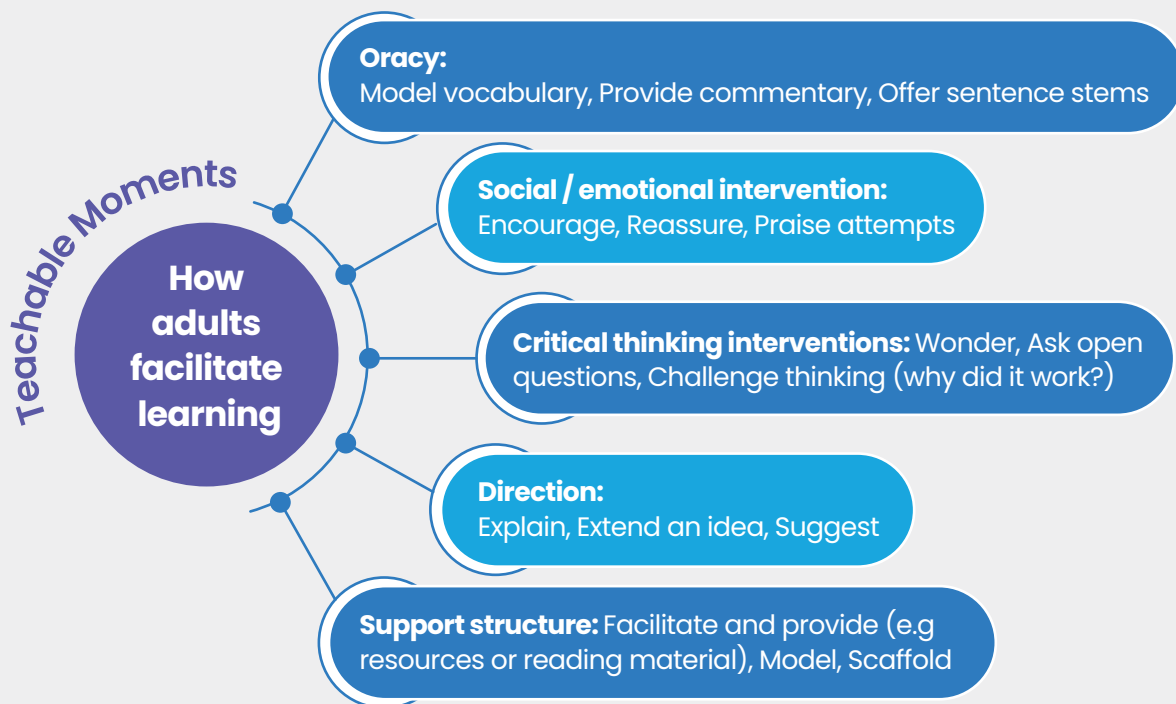
The role of the adult

1) Observe – What is the pupil doing? Consider the following while observing. Is the pupil...

- working independently?
- working with support?
- investigating?
- concentrating?
- attempting?
- imitating?
- repeating?
- ... this will inform step two.

2) Interact and facilitate – This involves several approaches. The adult will model high-quality language and vocabulary. They may provide some commentary on what they can see, or they may ask an open question such as the ones detailed above. Alongside the pupil, they can decide where they can take their exploratory learning next.

The practitioner may need to support the pupil by sharing resources or helping them learn some new information through a book or the Internet. This is where the practitioner would teach in different ways, exercising their professional judgement through analysing what the child needs at this point in their learning and which pedagogical approach is most appropriate here. Some suggestions are shown in the graphic below:



The role of the adult

3) Empower – This is where you will allow the pupil the opportunity to complete or continue with their learning. Following the teaching, it is important for the pupil to continue with independence.

4) Reflect and evaluate – This can be done independently by pupils depending on their levels of confidence. However, teachers can use this as a valuable assessment opportunity by asking children questions that prompt thinking and develop metacognition. See some example questions below:

- Can you tell me about how you...?
- What went well and why?
- Have you used this before when learning about something else?
- How could you improve things?
- Can you show me how...?
- What did you learn when...?
- If you tried this again, what would you do differently?

At this point in the cycle, if time allows, you can repeat the cycle deepening the learning experience.

Sustained shared thinking

Sustained shared thinking occurs when two or more individuals work together in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity, or extend a narrative. Both parties must contribute to the thinking, and it must develop and extend their understanding.

For young learners, this means adults providing them with prompts instead of the answers, allowing them to attempt and fail, building understanding and resilience. A crucial part of allowing children to fail is the opportunity for them to reflect on their experience with the guidance of an adult. Using explicit prompts and questioning helps to support the child to learn from their attempts. For instance, tell me about where it worked... Why? How? Which part went wrong? Why do you think that is? What else could we try? If you do it again, what will you do differently?

Sustained shared thinking is best described as those times when you are totally absorbed with a child, in conversation or in an activity with a genuine interest on both parts to find out more. Sustained shared thinking can happen anytime, anywhere, and only requires time and interest from the participants. It can be one-to-one or in a small group, especially when there is shared group interest.

The important aspect is the meeting of minds and subsequent learning that occurs on both sides. As a practitioner, you are likely to be aware of a connection and that you and the child/ren are fully engaged in the activity or conversation. These occasions present important opportunities for the practitioner to see a child's world through their eyes. They will reveal much about the child including their level of cognitive development, schemas, and self-esteem. The child may also be learning important skills such as social interaction, techniques, creative thinking, cause and effect, and acquiring knowledge.

The role of the adult

The theories about sustained shared thinking contributed to the Department for Education's 'Early Years Framework - Development matters materials and guidance', which explicitly stated that sustained shared thinking should be a part of a child's creativity and critical thinking (EYFS 4.3). It is also indirectly described in all of the areas of learning and development. This is because the longitudinal research project The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project (2004) clearly identified that the 'most effective settings encourage sustained shared thinking' and that it is a 'necessary pre-requisite for the most effective settings.'

While engaging with sustained shared thinking, practitioners can:

- Model wondering and questioning.
- Make observations and plan next steps.

Oracy and the language of learning

Having rich vocabulary and an oracy curriculum is important in supporting children to become effective communicators. This is important for them to be able to express themselves and engage with learning in a creative way.

Strategies, such as using **vocabulary pyramids**, support the sequential development of vocabulary.

