

We've explored...

Firefighters

Children at one setting have been role-playing being firefighters. **Annette Rawstrone** reports

A fire engine pulling up alongside Vanessa Nursery School in Shepherds Bush, west London sparked the children's interest in the work of the fire brigade which continued for weeks.

'We really believe that if the children are interested in something then we can teach them anything,' says head teacher Michele Barrett. 'The fire engine arriving was just one of those moments, but a few weeks later it was a pick-up truck delivering boulders. These opportunities are happening all the time and we feel that if there is something more interesting going on than what we'd planned, then we go with it, otherwise we'd miss valuable teachable moments.'

The children were excited to spot the fire engine and watch the firefighters go into a neighbouring building. A teacher who was with the children noticed that they were intrigued and discussed with them what the firefighters may be doing and what they could be there for.

'The teacher talked to the small group of children about what they know about firefighters. She used their knowledge that they put out fires as a starting point,' says Ms Barrett.

'Once she had gathered their general and generic comments she questioned and prompted with "I wonder..." questions, such as that they hadn't heard a siren and there was no smoke so why were they there? If there was not a fire then what else could they be doing? Someone suggested that there could be someone stuck in the building or a cat could be stuck up a tree.'

SAVING PEOPLE

The conversations speculating about what the firefighters could have been doing continued for a few days and a small group of children found helmets and jackets and started to role play being firefighters.

'It was in the summer term so they had a lot of experience of role play and had their own ideas that they could run with,' says Ms Barrett. 'They were able to use the small

The fire engine; connecting a hose; and answering an emergency call



All aspects of firefighting were explored



outdoor area well for their role play, such as going up the ladder to save people from the treehouse and using hoses to put out fires in the nearby block play area. Eventually they were putting out fires all over the garden. A teacher then started to role play with the children and expand on their knowledge.

'If children see something, then they will often role play it and then their interest will probably end, but this play continued because she was able to give input, such as showing them pictures, offering thoughts and ideas into the role play.'

Many of the children had been on a nursery trip to the local fire station so they were able to bring this knowledge into their play. They also used an iPad to find out more about what firefighters do, the protective clothes that they wear and, inevitably, watch *Fireman Sam*. Some children were also interested in the fire engines, what they look like and how the design has changed over the years. They used wooden blocks and tyres to build their own fire engines.

The teacher added extra layers to the children's role play and investigations by questioning how the firefighters find out when there is

a fire. It was decided that someone phones them, so some children set up a small office space where they could answer the phone, take notes and write down the address. They discussed how they could find their way to the fires, and some children knew that there are maps on mobile phones. This led to them learning about post codes and inputting them to find locations, as well as looking at A-Z maps.

'Children took it in turns to decide what the emergency was and phone up, with fire always being a favourite,' says Ms Barrett. 'Pets are also a big topic, so a cat stuck up a tree was popular, along with people stuck in lifts, with children going up the climbing structure to rescue them.'

A new aspect was included when the teacher questioned what the firefighters do when they are not attending emergencies. They discussed shift working and the need for a place for them to sleep at night and a kitchen. Some children used home corner resources to create a kitchen space for the fire station so that they could make tea and sandwiches for firefighters returning from a job.

NATURAL AND PLAYFUL

Rich vocabulary was used during the role play, including 'debrief'. 'If you have got a great teacher then

they can bring in lovely vocabulary and ideas in a natural and playful way,' explains Ms Barrett. 'The untrained eye would not look at it as teaching but as play. It's a skill.'

Over the course of three weeks, the majority of the nursery children joined in the play with a core group of two girls and three boys keeping it going. 'Our staff do well at taking children's interests as far as they can go and then moving on when it starts to wane. They leave the resources so children can return to the play even when the big focus changes,' Ms Barrett says.

'This time children continued to use the hoses and buckets but in a different way. They started to get the water to travel through gullies in the sand tray and through tubes and tunnels. They also worked out how to attach the hoses to water butts.'

When reflecting on the children's investigations, what stands out for Ms Barrett is the children's strong ability to be creative, think through new ideas and problem-solve, such as thinking about how to get something off the climbing frame or put a fire out.

'They were also collaborating as a big group in a small space with limited resources,' she adds. 'There were a lot of discussions about who does which role. Something significant happened across all areas of the EYFS.'



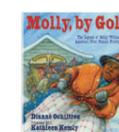
fiction



Flashing Fire Engines
by Tony Mitton and Ant Parker
Join a trio of animal firefighters as they jump aboard a fire engine.



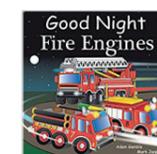
Busy Fire Station
by Rebecca Finn
An interactive board book encouraging young children to help firefighters slide down a pole, climb a ladder and spray a hose.



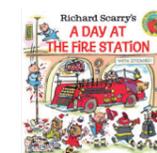
Molly, by Golly!
by Dianne Ochiltree
In this, the legend of America's first female firefighter, fire station cook Molly jumps to the rescue when the volunteer firefighters are ill and there's a house fire.



George's Dragon at the Fire Station
by Claire Freedman and Russell Julian
Open Day turns into chaos when Sparky the dragon gets stuck sliding down the fireman's pole, sends a fire bucket flying and steps on the hose... but saves the day.



Good Night Fire Engines
by Adam Gamble and Mark Jasper
Firefighters and their gear from helmets to hoses, hydrants and heavy rescue vehicles all feature in this adventure.



A Day at the Fire Station
by Richard Scarry
A funny day of fire station chaos complete with out-of-control hoses, sliding down hoses and ultimately saving the day.



Maisy's Fire Engine
by Lucy Cousins
Maisy and her friend Cyril rescue a frightened cat from a roof.



Spot Goes to the Fire Station
by Eric Hill
Spot visits his Grandpa at the fire station and decides he wants to be a fireman too! Donning a fire helmet, he slides down the pole, climbs the ladder, sounds the noisy siren, and soaks Grandpa with the hose.

non-fiction



Firefighter (People Who Help Us series)
by Rebecca Hunter
Follow a real firefighter through a typical day, including whom he interacts with and his equipment.