

We've explored...

building

The children at one setting got stuck in planning and then building an outdoor play house, hears **Annette Rawstrone**

Children at Kay Rowe Nursery School in Forest Gate, east London have spent five months designing, planning and building a wooden house in their outdoor area.

Trainee teacher Rabia Rahman suggested embarking on a long-term woodwork project in order to encourage a child, who is selectively mute and has a hearing impairment, to become more involved in activities and with his peers. She knew that he was physically able and interested in construction and hoped he would be motivated by the project. What she didn't anticipate was that the nursery children – inspired by reading the *Three Little Pigs* and watching a neighbouring house extension – would decide on such a large-scale endeavour.

Ms Rahman had no previous woodwork experience so she learnt on the job alongside the children as they got a basic wooden play house concept from YouTube and adapted it to meet their abilities and design specifications.

Many of our children have limited experiences outside home and are living, in many cases, in cramped accommodation. This project has grabbed their imaginations and allowed them to be more self-confident as they have all developed skills and shared them with their peers,' says deputy head teacher Sarah Porter.

'The children have been involved in every step. They have developed confidence in using tools and it's enabled them to see a design become real. It has involved learning across the whole EYFS and been really exciting.'

OPEN-ENDED ACTIVITY

The housebuild was an open-ended activity so that children could take part in the areas that interested them, stay as long as they liked working on the house and return to it whenever they wanted. Children aged from two to five participated, with those from the attached Children's Centre also joining in with their parents.

'We are trying to equip children for the future by fostering creative thinking and problem-solving skills



The children getting involved in constructing the play house

in them. We keep things open-ended so that children can foster their imagination and creativity,' says Ms Rahman.

The children have been involved in lots of discussion while designing the house, which has encouraged their language and communication skills. Discussions included why it was important to have a roof – to keep out the rain and prevent birds from pooing in the house – and that they should include a chimney in the design so that Father Christmas could go down it.

Children opted for a pitched roof like the one next door and suggested ideas such as adding curtains, having a doorbell and giving the house a number, with '4' receiving the most votes.

'I think the build was also positive because it was led by myself, a female practitioner, which challenges some gender stereotypes,' adds Ms Rahman. 'There was lots of talk about "my dad has a drill", so it was a good experience for them to see a female doing building work. It's probably also why a lot of girls were joining in the activity.'

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DOWN THE DIY STORE

A local DIY store received many visits from the nursery school children during the build, as they

book corner

fiction



The Three Little Pigs: An Architectural Tale

by Steven Guarnaccia

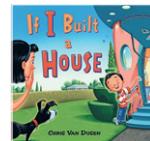
The homes of the three pigs in this quirky retelling are made out of scraps, glass and stone and concrete. Not all the houses protect the pigs, but the wolf is in for a surprise ending.



Building Our House

by Jonathan Bean

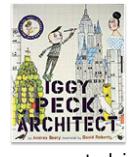
Join the narrator and her family as they pack up their old house in town and build a new one in the country. Every stage of their year-and-a-half building project is included.



If I Built a House

by Chris Van Dusen

Jack wants to build the house of his dreams, complete with a racetrack, flying room and gigantic slide. His creativity and infectious enthusiasm will inspire!



Iggy Peck, Architect

by Andrea Beaty and David Roberts

Iggy Peck has been building fabulous creations since he was two, but a new teacher's dislike of architecture presents him with a challenge.



Roberto: The Insect Architect

by Nina Laden

Roberto wants to be an architect and decides to follow his dream to the big, bug city. There he meets some not-so-creepy, crawly characters who encourage him to build a community for them all.



The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig

by Eugene Trivizas and Helen Oxenbury

Pig demolishes the wolves' houses built of bricks, then concrete, then steel. So, the wolves opt for cherry blossoms and flowers as building materials, with surprising results.

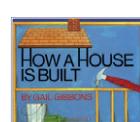
non-fiction



Let's Build a House

by Mick Manning

Children plan homes, from cabins to castles, and explore the materials and techniques needed to build them.



How a House is Built

by Gail Gibbons

Track every step of building a wood-frame house, from making plans to planting the final bush.

looked at materials and equipment, selected what they needed, ordered and paid for it themselves. Lots of numeracy skills were used as they handled money, used tape measures to measure wood and talked about size and shape.

Ms Rahman ensured that the children were introduced with care to the various tools – including hand and electric drills, saws and hammers – and shown how to use them properly. Children had to wear safety goggles while working on the build.

'It was good for the children to directly learn that tools are for a purpose, but we needed to ensure that they could use them safely,' she says. 'It was empowering for the children to learn the new skills and for them to know that they were trusted to use them. Thankfully, there was only one minor accident during the construction, when a child hit herself with a hammer and got a blood blister.'

Doing the work themselves, rather than just watching, gave the children confidence, while enabling them to develop their gross and fine motor control. They learnt about different properties of materials and how, for example, it was important to smooth the rough edges of the wood with sandpaper because it can splinter. One child commented,

'We can't use sticky tape to join the pieces because it's not strong, we need a screwdriver.'

Ms Rahman noted how the children demonstrated high levels of concentration as they worked on the build – carefully holding a nail while hammering it and practising how to use a screw and screwdriver to join two pieces of wood together.

Working on such a large construction meant that a lot of PSED was involved as

the children had to work together with their peers to get the job achieved. After buying the wood, one child organised his friends to ensure that the long planks were carried safely, saying, 'Hold it here, it's heavy.' Children also encouraged each other as they

persevered with using tools, with one child saying to another, 'Hang on in there... now you're getting it.'

FINISHING TOUCHES

The walls of the house were assembled on the ground, so a particularly exciting stage of the housebuild was when these could be lifted into position and the children could see the form of the house and its scale for the first time. They then started to work on the pitched roof and think about how to include a door.

A big decision that the children still need to make is to choose what colour to paint the house. They will then be able to return to their local hardware store and actually see the paint being mixed in a special machine. One child has already started to plan the best method of painting the walls.

While the build may have taken on a life of its own over five months, Ms Rahman's initial plan to include a specific child has worked. He has enjoyed working with his peers to create the play house and, along with many other children, has grown in confidence as the build has developed.

She adds, 'The children are feeling great pride in what they have done and lots of achievement in the end result.'