

Natural links

How can practitioners work within the Prime areas while also introducing children to the Specific areas of development? *Penny Tassoni* considers how the different aspects link together

PHOTOGRAPHS AT NOAH'S ARK NURSERY, LONDON, BY JUSTIN THOMAS

Over the course of this series, we have looked at two-year-olds in relation to the Prime areas of development. These areas have 'priority status' and are, of course, looked at during the Progress Check at Age Two. But there are four other areas of development that also form part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and which settings are expected to cover too. So in the final article in this series, we look at ways in which we might work with the Prime areas while also introducing children to the Specific areas of development.

STARTING POINTS

The Prime areas have to be the focus for our work with two-year-olds. They are, as is often said, the building blocks for children's overall development. When it comes to the Specific areas, a good tip is to be aware of the existing links between them and the routines, play and activities that you already use to support the Prime areas. This works particularly well where children's development is not yet secure within the Prime areas and so planning particular activities for a specific area of development would not be appropriate.

LITERACY – READING

While no one expects children to read at two years of age, we do know that early exposure to books is extremely helpful in shaping interest and learning about the nature of print. We also know that sharing books with two-year-olds can develop their language, as they hear the structures of sentences and link new words to meaning using picture and context.

This means that there is a very natural link between the Prime area of Communication and Language, and Literacy. In addition, sharing a book with a child in a way where the child is snuggled in next to the adult

is a great way to strengthen the adult-child bond, so there is a natural link to 'making relationships'.

When it comes to writing, two-year-olds are often very interested and some are clearly starting to explore the relationship between the spoken word and writing. These children have often seen adults (or older children) write and talk at the same time – for example, 'Let me put your name down "I-L-K-ER, ILKER"'

Writing children's names in situations that are of direct interest to them also links to 'self-confidence and self-awareness' within Personal, Social and Emotional Development, as children can feel pride when someone takes time to 'honour' their name.

The type of writing activities best suited to two-year-olds exploring the power of marking also link to two other areas of the EYFS, Physical Development and Expressive Arts and Design.

Large sensory activities such as marking with water, sand and gloop help children to strengthen and co-ordinate their gross motor movements and the use of tools helps them to control their hand movements. In addition, when we provide children with a wide range of interesting materials to mark and explore with, both aspects of Expressive Arts and Design are being tapped into.

MATHEMATICS

While formal mathematics is unsuitable for two-year-olds, it is important to recognise and foster this age's natural instinct for mathematics. Most adults working with two-year-olds will have seen that they understand 'all gone' or 'no more'. They also have an acute awareness for quantity and are quickly able to spot a child who has more of something than they do.

In terms of links with the Prime areas, mathematics has a strong link to Communication and Language. Two-year-olds, whose language

should be developing rapidly, need adults to link what they are seeing and doing to the mathematical word – for example, saying 'You can have more, if you want' when a child is picking up a bag of large beads.

Two-year-olds' play is also a fertile ground for mathematics as they engage in transporting, posting and enclosing activities. Again, all it takes for these wonderful examples of child-initiated play to become 'mathematics' is for children to have a range of different resources that will help them to explore differences in quantity, size and shape and the occasional adult interaction that draws their attention to the mathematical concept. 'I am not sure that the suitcase will fit in the microwave; it may be too big!'

Through play and routines, there are links, of course, to the other two Prime areas of development. The





‘The world’ involves learning about surfaces, textures and the natural world

two-year-old who is attempting to stuff the suitcase into the microwave has carried it there. She has probably used her fine motor skills to undo the lock and pack it full of bits and pieces that have taken her interest. Her sense of purpose links neatly to the aspect ‘self-confidence and self-awareness’.

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD

The three diverse aspects of Understanding the World can be linked easily to play and activities that support the Prime areas.

‘People and communities’

‘People and communities’ links to Personal, Social and Emotional Development and in particular ‘making relationships’. Two-years-olds who are showing attachment to their key person and spend a lot of time

SKILLS FOR PRACTICE

- Spend time reflecting on the Specific areas of development and how children are experiencing them through the routines of your session or day.
- Make sure that activities and play opportunities are sufficiently creative and open-ended for children so as to facilitate
- Understanding the World and Expressive Arts and Design.
- Work with parents and, if needed, other staff to show how the Specific areas of learning can be introduced as part of meeting children’s existing play needs rather than through formal activities.

with them will start to learn that sometimes their key person does not like the same things that they do.

If added to this, the key person takes time to share books full of photographs of their family members, children can start the journey of being aware of themselves in relationship to others. As children often enjoy looking at photographs of other children, a wall display or film clips on a laptop that shows children in the setting at play can be a great way to prompt children’s interest.

Of course, none of these activities take place without adults talking or children trying to communicate, and so once again there is a strong link back to Communication and Language. In addition, we should not forget that two-year-olds are automatically part of a community once they step inside an early years setting. So in the day-to-day routine of welcoming and greeting children and their families, there is a natural link to this aspect.

‘The world’

The second aspect within this area of development is the ambitiously titled ‘the world’. The potential of this aspect is vast, but one thing is for sure – ‘the world’ is something that children have to move within and touch. Thus, there is a clear link to Physical Development.

At every turn, child-initiated play links to this aspect as they discover that water poured on the floor is not as deep as when it is in the tray, or that dough does not taste as good as it looks. A walk to the park, to the local shops, or even across a soggy lawn is not only good for Physical Development but involves learning about surfaces, textures and the natural world.

So, do two-year-olds need ➤

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formal teaching about ‘the world’? Definitely not. But they do need a wide range of experiences and materials so that they can explore ‘their’ world. And while they are engaged in this, they are also gaining in ‘self-confidence and self-awareness’ as they learn that their movements directly affect objects and other children.

Of course, exploration of the world does not happen in the absence of adults and so this aspect of learning is also closely tied to Communication and Language once more.

‘Technology’

This aspect is perhaps slightly trickier to get right because active learning and natural resources are often best for this age range in terms of learning. Many of us probably have a sneaking suspicion that some two-year-olds are already getting a sufficiently high dose of technology in their homes and out and about as it is. Having said that, look out for the best naturally occurring opportunities that involve technology.

Firstly, some toys and resources may have inbuilt technology, such as the microwave that lights up or ‘pings’ when the door is shut and the animal jigsaw puzzle that moos, barks or quacks according to what piece has been correctly put in.

Then there are the opportunities that children gain from watching us and using technology – under supervision – such as digital cameras and laptops to look at images that involve themselves.

Being involved with an adult is probably the most important element in supporting this aspect and once again this means that it can link nicely back to Communication and Language.

EXPRESSIVE ARTS AND DESIGN

While the title Expressive Arts and Design may sound very grand, the aspects within it are easily incorporated into the type of play and activities that link to the Prime areas.

If we start with ‘exploring media and using materials’, it is easy to see how sensory materials used to promote physical development and allowing children to manage their feelings fit in nicely with this aspect.

For two-year-olds who are still finding resources such as gloop fascinating or are starting to enjoy mixing water, mud and leaves together, exploring and using materials is just part of their everyday activity.

It is important, though, to make sure that resources are interesting and that we allow children to combine them so as to enjoy a genuinely explorative experience.

Happily, most two-year-olds need no prompting to mix materials, so it is often just a case of organising layout and sometimes staff attitudes to allow for it.

As well as sensory materials, other opportunities included in this aspect including opportunities for music and singing. There are great links between singing and the Prime area Communication and Language, as nursery rhymes and songs are a great way for children to join in with others and also hear sounds in words.

This aspect of development should also be an empowering one for children as they learn what they can do with things and so it should also

OBSERVATION POINTS

- Observe children carefully and think about how their learning links to the Specific areas of development.
- Observe children carefully when they are engaged in play. Think about what other skills or experiences children are gaining that link to the Specific areas of development.
- Observe how many opportunities are available for children to interact with adults in ways that might support mathematics or literacy through existing opportunities.
- Recognise children for whom additional support is needed in the Prime areas.

neatly link with ‘self confidence and self-awareness’.

Finally, we come to ‘being imaginative’. The great thing about two-year-olds is that they need no encouragement when it comes to being imaginative. All they need is an environment that is enabling and adults that are supportive and understand their development. Two-year-olds show their imagination by moving and doing things so, of course, there is an automatic link to Physical Development.

While young two-year-olds are unlikely to show sustained elaborate role play, we will see this in those two-year-olds who have strong levels of language, although we may find that they are keen for us to join in too, so once again there are opportunities for Communication and Language and Personal, Social and Emotional Development. ■

Through books, there is a link between Communication and Language and Literacy

