

BLOG

MAY 2023

TEACHING THROUGH COLLABORATIVE TALK IN AN OUTDOORS SETTING



INTRODUCTION

The EYFS statutory framework document illustrates communication and language as 'underpin[ing] all seven areas of learning and development' (Department for Education [DFE], 2023). With such a weight placed on this aspect of child development, it seems logical that settings and practitioners should explore a variety of approaches to promoting and fostering this skill within children.

INTENT

Within our EYFS setting we aim to provide all children in attendance with a keen interest in and affinity for the outdoors, as we spend large portions of our day engaging in outdoor play and Forest School sessions. Considering the aforementioned point by the DFE, we strongly believe that the outdoor environment can facilitate and grow a child's communication and language capabilities through combining a stimulating outdoor environment with the approach of teaching through collaborative talk.

IMPLEMENTATION

Children are undeniably fascinated by the world around them, and will often actively seek out others in order to share their findings, observations and the experience of exploration. At our setting we have created a range of stimulating outdoor spaces that draws together the natural wildness that is inherent with being outside with opportunities for children to cultivate and enhance all aspects of their learning.

By establishing this breadth of outdoor spaces the children have a wide array of stimuli to indulge in their inquisitive side, leading to natural conversations, discussions and conferences occurring, which can be enriched further via the active input of a practitioner.



Staff are acutely aware of the potential power that group interactions and exchanges can have on a child (not only from a communication and language viewpoint but on wider curricular scale) and are constantly on the lookout for these interactions. Practitioners might engage the children at various points throughout the collaborative talk session to stimulate different cognitive functions (perhaps best exemplified in **Bloom's Taxonomy** [Anderson et al., 2001]) dependent on the ages and stages of the development of the children.

An example of how this might occur can be exemplified via a practitioner asking a small group of pre-school aged children who are investigating how to climb a tree 'how can you work together to climb the tree?' and 'what can you do to safely get back down?'.

This broad scope of the questioning to all children present prompts a more focused combined sharing of ideas and thinking through using collaborative talk.

Another practical example that illustrates this point can be seen when children explore the different weather patterns around them, as they might initially ask questions or offer comments on what they can see.

Upon listening to the children's input an adult is then able to scaffold their cognitive thinking and language, for instance offering new descriptive words (e.g. 'overcast', 'humid', 'breezy'), exploring ideas as to how they think the weather is formed or encouraging them to engage their full range of senses.

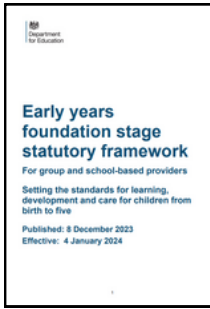
IMPACT

This combination of a cognitively energising outdoor learning environment and high-quality verbal interactions with practitioners and their own peers can impact children extensively. From a communication and language standpoint the children are able to hear and practice new vocabulary immediately in relevant and applicable situations, strengthening their confidence to use context-specific language correctly. Practitioners are then able to test and extend this vocabulary by implementing new stimuli in familiar activities and environments; an example of this could be a practitioner attaching a rope to a tree as an aid for climbing, as this would help create new scenarios for the children to use and explore the previously learnt language. This confidence can also extend itself over to a child's social capabilities, as this continued exposure to group talk wherein thoughts are shared in a safe, stimulating and respected zone allows children to find their voice and realise that their contributions to a collaborative talking session do have value. The development of a child's social capabilities in this way lends itself well in additionally helping children to make friendships and good bonds with their peers.

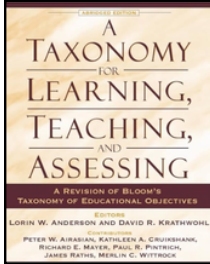
SUMMARY

Through our focus on providing children with a rich outdoor learning environment we have found that this forms a strong foundation for the children to engage with one another, encouraging them to communicate more freely and openly. Coupled with the input from our experienced practitioners the children are able to access a vast array of learning opportunities that can ultimately aid them in progressing all areas of their development.

REFERENCES



*Early years foundation stage
statutory framework.* 



Anderson, L., Lorin, W., Krathwohl, D. and David R., [Eds] (2001) A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. New York: Longman.