**Communication and Language: Speaking**

**What ‘Speaking’ might look like in practice**

The three snapshots below illustrate practice in a nursery in a culturally diverse area where the children and staff speak a wide variety of home languages.

**Under twos**

In the baby room practitioners talk to the children as they play with them. They look directly at the child, make eye contact and often make exaggerated facial gestures to emphasise what they are saying. The baby’s response through vocalising, facial gesture or body movement is acknowledged and the two way conversation continues.

The practitioners engage with the babies in different situations throughout the day. They talk about what they are doing, providing a running commentary that helps the child to see the association between words and actions.

The key person is aware of the home language of each of the children in his or her group and makes an effort to learn a few simple words in the appropriate language. This is reassuring for parents, but also provides some continuity for children when they are in the setting.

In one corner of the toddler room there are two large mirrors fixed low down on the wall. This has become a favourite ‘conversation corner’ where children enjoy talking to their reflections and to their friends who are playing there. Mealtimes are social occasions when practitioners talk about what they are doing and what has been happening, encouraging the children to join in.

Practitioners use every available opportunity to share with parents the importance of talking to very young children so they become used to hearing spoken language.

**Two to three year olds**

Practitioners are aware that most children of this age are acquiring language very rapidly and constantly expanding their vocabularies. Talk is a feature of daily life in the setting, commentating on what individual children are doing, talking about what will happen next and reflecting on what has already happened. Children are encouraged to join in these conversations and are given lots of time and opportunity to ask for things or say what they would like to do.

For children whose home language is not English practitioners find opportunities for the children to share their skills in their mother tongue. The other children are encouraged to listen and join in, helping them to be aware of communication in different languages.

The resources available for children to play with include toy telephones and old mobile phones which all the children enjoy using for imaginary conversations. The range of resources available reflects the children’s different cultures so all children can play with things they recognise and can relate to. There are dolls, cots and blankets to play with to encourage talk about caring for others but there is also space and resources for playing with and talking about cars, lorries and trains.

In the outdoor area there are lots of interesting things to talk about – a large mobile hanging from a tree, wind chimes, a big pile of dry leaves to explore, and a large outdoor water tray. Practitioners watch attentively to see what individual children are interested in and talk to them about what they are doing, helping to extend their vocabulary.

**Four to five year olds**

At the start of each day the children and practitioners sit together to discuss what will happen during the day. The children are encouraged to talk about what they are interested in and to express their thoughts and feelings. All children are helped to join in these conversations and given the appropriate help to do so. At the end of the session the children come together again to talk about what they have been doing. This encourages thought and reflection and helps children to practise their thinking and organising skills.

Many of the simple rules that support the smooth running of the setting, such as how many people can use the water tray at any one time, have come from discussions with the children. These provide good opportunities to model the correct use of language and to extend children’s vocabulary and ability to express their ideas and thoughts clearly.

The children’s room is well supplied with open ended resources for role play and performance. There are hats, capes, scarves, shoes, lengths of fabric, bags, small boxes and gadgets – mobile phones, large keys, clipboards and old transistor radios. The children enjoy making up and acting out a very wide range of role play scenarios based on their current interests and fascinations, including superheroes and fantasy play. A talking tubes set (a length of plastic tubing and two handsets) is in constant use to convey messages from the indoors to the outdoors and frequently gets incorporated into the children’s role play. Practitioners support and scaffold these activities helping children to develop their language skills as they develop their imaginative play.

Practitioners use stories, rhymes and songs from a variety of cultures and there are many dual language books for the children to explore. At story time the practitioners often choose to tell stories rather than reading them. This is an opportunity to turn story time into a mini performance and gives children important messages about the power of the spoken word.