

Pillar 4. Providing appropriate structure

Key points

- Appropriate structure in the foundation stages is provided when
 - there are playful teaching scenarios **and** strong learning intentions;
 - resources and/or tasks are conceived in a playful way;
 - the tone remains light and engaging;
 - several threads of learning are often integrated into each session; and
 - repetition and rehearsal are part of the ongoing process when appropriate.
- Structure is appropriate to the individual when
 - learning is delivered in chunks that are small enough to be manageable for the child;
 - the structure is made explicit to and transparent for the child;
 - the teacher does not assume previous knowledge on the part of the child;
 - the structure matches the child's level of development; and
 - the sequence of learning matches known developmental pathways.
- Plan, do, review is often an appropriate framework.
 - Planning is enhanced when
 - children themselves are involved in the planning;
 - the activities are related to the children's real world experience so that they can make a realistic contribution; and
 - it does not take so long that the activity itself is much curtailed.
 - Reviewing is enhanced when
 - children themselves can make a record of what they have done in a fun way; and
 - children can enjoy reporting what they have done.
 - Planning and reviewing activities can be good ways of introducing literacy and numeracy skills.

Sometimes, rote-learning is appropriate.

This is a frequently observed error in classrooms. e.g. Does the child know the difference between left and right or how to skip and number?

Try to find ways to relate letters and numbers to activities that children have spontaneously undertaken (e.g. showing them a book which has a similar theme to their artwork; talking about sums if they are sharing out toys, playing board games).

Without reading schemes and mathematics work schemes, the teacher needs to have secure knowledge of the order of concept development.

Drawing out 'play plans', as in the Tools of the Mind curriculum¹, is more effective than oral plans because the drawing is a mediator for memory.

Plan and review times together should take less than half the total available time.

Terms such as remember, memory, plan, think etc.

QLI indicators of success

- *Multiple skill acquisition*: Children show progress across all curriculum domains. Weaker children show slower but definite progress.
- *HOTs*: Children can talk about what they are learning and what they have learned in the past and are beginning to develop a language of thinking.
- *Concentration*: Children can stay on task for a reasonable time without frequent adult intervention.

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Cameo 1. Mathematics task time: Making top-hat buns

A small group in a Year 1 class

Coming back from the microwave where the chocolate was melted, the children show signs of great excitement.

It is important to do something for others as well as for yourself.

Giving reasons for your answer is an important skill but still very difficult for many children of this age.

The number line does not stop at 10; there is planning for progression even though many children will not count past 10 in their first year.

The teacher, Mrs Casey, is making top hat buns with six of the children. She reviews their progress so far: "First of all what did we do? We ... melted the chocolate in the microwave." She starts giving out the bun-cases— two to each child — while assigning children recipients for their buns: "You're going to make one for yourself and one for Mrs O'Hare next door." She then asks them: "If there are six people making buns, how many buns are we making?" One girl puts her hand up; a boy, Sean, blurts out, "I know: twelve." Mrs Casey: "How do you know that's twelve?" Boy: "Because two and two and two ... makes twelve." Mrs Casey opens a packet of marshmallows, starts counting them out to each child in pairs. She gets children to count the total number by twos in unison, gets to twelve, then playfully doles out an extra marshmallow: "And another one, right?" Children protest enthusiastically. She gets them to say how many that would have made (13). Sean shows her 13 on the class number line. The children begin to spoon chocolate into the bun cases. She asks them what is happening to the chocolate. One child eventually gives the right answer, "It's getting hard again." The teacher tries to link this with the melting at the start of the session and asks what is making it hard but nobody seems to understand. She leaves that topic and ensures that everyone gets the support needed to succeed in making the buns. When finished, the children proudly move to give the extra bun to the intended recipient.

She prompts their memory, having waited and got no response.

Several of the children are counting in twos in an undertone; this helps young children to think.

Deliberately she makes a mistake and encourages them to correct her 'mistakes' by her light-hearted response to their correction.

The chocolate is hardening fast now and she needs to encourage and support the stragglers or they won't be able to finish their buns. She abandons the attempt to draw their attention to the science, realising that the children are too focussed on making the buns to pay attention. She will bring it up again at the plenary

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Cameo 2. Whole class session: Mathematics games

Year 1/2 composite class

Notice that although this is a structured session, it not formal or dry. The activity makes children really focus on the digits.

The number line acts as an aide-memoire and therefore as an aide to thinking.

The whole class has a chance to see why the wrong answer did not fulfil the criteria.

The movement in this game is helpful for those children who find it hard to sit for long periods. All the children are actively involved.

The children must cooperate. There are opportunities for peer-peer teaching.

In the first game, the teacher gives clues about a number between nought and ten. "This number has no curves when it is written and it is somewhere between 2 and 6." The children look at the class number line hanging overhead and after a few moments, some put up their hand and the teacher chooses who will answer. If some child gets it wrong, the teacher asks why it must be wrong. When she gets a correct answer, she reiterates slowly to the class why it's correct — because it meets with the conditions in *all* the clues. Some of the clues in the game are easier than others to give everyone a chance. Easier clues refer to shape or limit the range on the number line. Harder clues involve 'more than' or 'less than' statements. Children are given time to think before the teacher asks for an answer. The children show strong engagement.

In the second game, the children are divided into two teams and given a number each up to 10. Each team has to form a number line (the class number line is hidden). The teacher calls out a number and the designated child in each team comes up. Then the next number is called and must find the right position relative to the first. Those who go wrong are helped by their team mates, sometimes being physically moved into place. The children are very enthusiastic and there is much discussion amongst them. The first team to finish correctly wins.

This is training in memory skills as the children must remember two pieces of information at once.

Giving reasons for your answer is a foundation skill for higher order thinking.

This is appropriate differentiation without the children being aware of it.

Very simple games are highly engaging for children in this age group.