

An A to Z of learning

I is for..interest-led

The team at **Rachel Keeling Nursery School** explain how they truly value children's interests and support these by using them as the basis for engaging projects

ENRICHING LIVES

At Rachel Keeling Nursery School, we aim to ensure our children develop characteristics to enrich their lives. Resilience, confidence, empathy, independence and joy are a few of the dispositions we prioritise. Over time, we have organised our school in a way that promotes these, and supporting our children to have autonomy and agency is a key part of this journey.

Before children start at our school, we meet them and talk to them and their families about what interests, excites, comforts or may worry them – and note these down.

We strive to build relationships, so our children feel secure to share their interests and communicate their needs and feelings. Staff are skilled in observing and listening to our children. Being careful not to interrupt or ask too many questions, and truly valuing children's areas of interest and expertise, are vital.

Our environment enables children to be autonomous throughout their session. We aim to offer meaningful, first-hand core experiences to help develop children's ability to persevere. We also ensure we value the process, and not only an end product.

Our staff work in three-week cycles, so they can support sustained learning over time. Children can return and master experiences and share their mastery with others.

A BAG PROJECT

One example of interest-led learning came from child 'M', who was observed engaged in a transporting schema: from the home corner to the snack area, from the sand to the water, from the library to the garden.

M was offered various means of transportation: a basket, purse, trolley, wheeled cart, truck, backpack and bag. After trying them all out, M settled on a bag,



and was then given opportunities to explore a range of bags, including one from home. As a follow-up, a small group of children were supported to design, make and test their own bags.

First, they researched bags using books and a variety of bags brought in from home. Then they went shopping as a small group, with families and a staff member, for fabric, bringing back some interesting pieces!

Next they were supported to measure and cut their fabric. They sewed the bags and added handles, pockets, embellishments, buttons, and one child even used a zip. Throughout they showed great perseverance and problem-solving skills.

They then tested the bags by going shopping with them. Some of the bags came apart, which made the children realise that their bags, though lovely, were not great for carrying tins. The children mended their bags and displayed them as part of our Summer Exhibition.

This project lasted for more than half a term – though not all interest-led learning needs to take place over long periods. Children worked at their own pace, taking the lead and choosing when to work on their bag. The practitioner who oversaw this work ensured that the children could access their bags when they wanted by storing them in an accessible basket.

Children are enabled to research their interests and explore them.

Below: a bag from the fabric project



IN SPACE

Another interest that emerged was space, which children explored through resources, books, music and the support of a keen adult. It also enabled a previously very quiet child to show that they knew the names of many of the planets. The theme became contagiously popular, with other children joining in and sharing their knowledge and joy.

One child, 'L', while climbing in the garden, noticed the moon in the daytime sky and commented on this to an adult. The practitioner took time to find out, and note down, what L already knew about the moon.

They asked L for his ideas about why the moon was visible in daylight. In response, the practitioner supported L through using books and the iPad, pondering, thinking aloud and asking questions to find out about this phenomenon. L was able to go home that evening and proudly share his findings with his siblings.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Are your adults available to observe, respond sensitively and tune in to children?
- Are children's interests truly valued?
- Can you support staff, children and families to focus on process and not end products? ■



Rachel Keeling Nursery School is an Outstanding setting in Bethnal Green, east London