

An A to Z of learning

C is for.. circuits and celebrations

From examining how electrical items work to marking festivals and holidays, the children at this setting get very involved, explain the **Rachel Keeling Nursery School** team

LIGHT BULB MOMENTS

At Rachel Keeling Nursery School, we know our children come to school with lots of knowledge and experiences from the outside world. We love to foster a thirst for learning and like to give children the opportunity to explore areas they may not have experienced yet. One such topic is electricity.

We start by introducing some interesting resources, artefacts and books related to the subject, then work over a sustained period – usually three weeks – to allow children ample opportunities to explore a new subject and develop an understanding of it.

When we explore electricity, the children handle familiar household appliances that use electricity, chargers, plugs, torches and some deconstructed objects such as printers and hairdryers. We observe and listen to the children, finding out what they know about the subject. We then make a mind map – ‘What we know about electricity’ – and note the children’s ideas (whatever they are).

Sometimes it is appropriate, depending on the children we are supporting, to further develop their thinking – ‘What we would like to know about electricity’. This begins to give the children some direction in their learning and can offer fresh thinking.

Children often show a good awareness of the need for safety when dealing with electricity – ‘It can give you a shock!’ and ‘It runs in pipes under the ground’ were some of the children’s comments when recently sharing their ideas. Children also knew some of the common things that needed electricity to work, particularly televisions, toasters and phones, and many knew that you could charge some appliances.

Children spend time exploring electrical items up close: deconstructing and reconstructing



Above: the Chinese New Year celebrations at the nursery school

them using screwdrivers and observing the components closely.

Next the children are introduced to batteries and how these also produce electricity. They explore electrical circuits, constructing them with an adult, then taking on the challenge of making one with a friend or on their own. Recently, some children powered light bulbs and propellers, and others had a buzzer!

Children are enabled to ‘wallow’ in this provision for a few weeks and often show real perseverance and skill. Many develop a good understanding of electricity and show real joy in their achievements, as crocodile clips within circuits can be tricky to connect!

Towards the end of the project, we return to our two opening mind maps and reflect on our ideas and thoughts, adding our new knowledge and editing any we no longer agree with. We usually make a book about the subject, with photographs and details of the children’s learning, which the children have access to every day in our Research Library.

IN CELEBRATION

The Rachel Keeling community is an extension of the family. Our school community is family: many of our children’s families have origins in the four corners of the globe, so we know how important it

is to create a love-filled atmosphere that enables people to feel valued and at home. Celebrations are a fantastic way to invite parents, grandparents, aunts, cousins and neighbours to be part of our family.

Across the year, we follow the natural rhythms of festivals, seasons and religious holidays. Where possible, we involve families by inviting them into school to share cooking, costumes, stories, dance, music and crafts with children, staff and other families.

We are so lucky at Rachel Keeling to have cultivated long-standing relationships with local cultural groups. Every year we welcome Step Out Arts to the nursery to share a day of celebration with our children. We welcomed in the Year of the Rat in style with artefacts, instruments, costumes, music and dance. Children enjoyed joining in with ribbon dancing, fan dancing and the Lion Dance, which moved around the whole school. Children created their own instruments and dances.

Inviting the Iroko Drummers is a favourite event during Black History Month. We celebrate with their talking drums, singing, dancing and storytelling. Families love to be part of this and often will stay to share their weaving or hair-braiding skills.

Other Rachel Keeling celebrations include Bonfire Night, Halloween, Eid, Hanukkah, Christmas, Diwali, birthdays, feast days, our own International Evening, our termly Bike It Breakfast, Graduation, Summer Fete, Summer Picnic at the Beach, new babies and, of course, sometimes even a new coat will deserve a little twirl.

We try to find the positive in the everyday, big events or small: simply being alive and feeling the sun, wind and rain on our faces in the garden is a celebration. ■

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



Below: the setting’s book collection reflects many different cultures; and building a circuit