

To what extent does the introduction of themed book displays in the construction and role-play areas increase independent engagement with non-fiction texts in a P1/2 classroom?

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What did you plan to do and why?

In my P1/2 classroom, I planned to introduce themed non-fiction books into the construction and role-play areas.

I planned to observe how children interacted with these texts during independent play and whether their engagement with non-fiction books increased over time. Observations focused on the frequency of book use and the ways children used the texts within their play.

I chose this area of focus because informal observations and learner voice suggested that children were naturally drawn to fiction texts during story time, but were less likely to access non-fiction texts independently. Research highlights the importance of providing meaningful opportunities for literacy within play-based learning environments and ensuring that reading materials are relevant to children's interests. By embedding non-fiction texts directly into areas of play, I hoped to promote curiosity, support early information-seeking behaviours and encourage children to engage with a wider range of texts independently.

What has happened in your enquiry?

I initially introduced themed non-fiction book baskets within the construction area, selecting texts linked to children's interests. While children showed some curiosity, engagement was limited and books were not regularly accessed during independent play.

In response, I adapted the provision by introducing small world play set-ups linked directly to the books. For example, books about maps were paired with a small world construction site containing roads, vehicles and figures. This provided a meaningful context for the texts and helped children make connections between reading and play.

Following this change, engagement increased significantly. Children independently accessed the books, referred to photographs and labels, and used information from the texts to enhance their play.

Learners were involved throughout the enquiry. Their interests informed the selection of books and resources, and through learner conversations they shared their views on the provision. Towards the end of the enquiry, children took ownership by selecting their own non-fiction books and creating corresponding small world play experiences, ensuring the enquiry remained responsive to their interests and ideas.

What impact has this enquiry had?

I know the enquiry had a positive impact through a range of evidence gathered throughout the process, including observations, photographs, learner conversations and examples of children's play.

At the beginning of the enquiry, observations showed that children rarely accessed non-fiction texts independently within the construction area. While some children showed curiosity towards the books, engagement was often brief and they generally required adult prompting to interact with them. The books were not being used as a meaningful part of play.

Following the introduction of small world play experiences linked directly to the texts, I observed a noticeable increase in both the frequency and quality of engagement. Children began choosing books independently, referring to photographs, labels, diagrams and captions to support their play. They used information from the texts to influence their designs, conversations and decision-making within the construction area.

Photographic evidence captured children regularly accessing the books during play and using them alongside resources. Learner conversations demonstrated increased curiosity and understanding, with children discussing facts they had learned and making links between the information in the books and their play experiences.

A particularly significant piece of evidence was the increased learner ownership observed towards the end of the enquiry. Children independently selected non-fiction books from the class and school libraries and created their own small world play experiences inspired by the texts. This demonstrated that children viewed non-fiction texts as valuable resources for learning and play, rather than simply books to be read with an adult.

Collectively, this evidence suggests that embedding non-fiction texts within meaningful, play-based contexts increased independent engagement and encouraged children to use texts purposefully to support their learning.

Analysis of the evidence suggests that the books alone were not sufficient to increase engagement. Children were most motivated to access non-fiction texts when they were embedded within meaningful play experiences. The small world environments provided a purpose for reading and encouraged children to use texts as tools for learning rather than viewing them as separate literacy activities.

Through this enquiry, I learned that the context in which books are presented is just as important as the books themselves. Children learned that non-fiction texts can help answer questions, provide information and support their play. This was evident in their increasing independence, curiosity and ability to make connections between texts and real-world experiences.

What are the implications and next steps?

This enquiry highlighted the importance of embedding non-fiction texts within meaningful play contexts. Children were more likely to engage with books when they were linked to hands-on, interest-led learning experiences. As a result, I will continue to incorporate non-fiction texts across play areas and involve children in selecting books and resources.

The enquiry also raised new questions for future exploration, including whether this approach would increase engagement in other areas of the classroom and what impact it may have on children's vocabulary development and understanding of non-fiction texts over time.

References

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