



Foundation Phase: Talking Point

CURIOSITY BUILDS

MYSTERY BOX

WONDER AWAITS

In this issue, we are following the lead of Canal Playgroup in Powys who have incorporated a 'Mystery Box' into their Foundation Phase planning.

Chris Thomas, Playgroup Supervisor at Canal Playgroup explains how the 'Mystery Box' came to be an integral part of their planning.

Setting the scene!

Canal Playgroup is based in a multi-use community hall. Necessitating the setting up and clearing away of all equipment and displays for each session.

...until one day in October 2016, when during a staff discussion the question "what would happen if we didn't put anything out?" was asked.

Staff were keen to encourage child-led play to develop the children's imaginations, thinking skills, questioning skills and inquisitiveness.

The Mystery Box concept was explored and it was decided we'd trial it and let it evolve.

What is a Mystery Box?

Without the children seeing, objects are placed in the Mystery Box (or bag). The children then use their sense of touch to explore the object without removing it from the box. The objects tend to be related by a theme which can then lead to further discussion.

A Mystery Box can help to develop the sense of how things feel (stereognostic sense) and refine all the senses overall. It stimulates and cultivates the children's intellectual curiosity and has endless options for use in the setting (i.e. the type of box or bag used, the items placed in the box, the curricular area being taught). Even a toddler will enjoy exploring objects and vocabulary with the Mystery Box material.

Reference: <http://bit.ly/2r0LxGL>



The following Monday we launched the Mystery Box. The first box had Bob the Builder toys in it. This led to the children asking for sand, measuring tapes, tools and dressing up. We also discussed the importance of keeping safe whilst building, and what to wear to be seen and protected. We also embedded some maths into the theme by using blocks to build towers, and counting and sorting them into groups. The children also asked for junk modelling to build their own ideas.

Other themes included Under the Sea which then turned into pirates, and another was linked to RSPB week. The children made bird food, used recycled materials to make bird feeders, learnt about the birds and went outside to take photos - we make sure we post plenty of pictures on our Facebook page for parents & families to see.

All Mystery Box ideas come from the children. At the start of every week, we sit down with the children, and encourage them to put forward ideas which are written down and represented on a mind map. The staff ensure that as the mind map is developed all the children's ideas are included and carried out.

When the children arrive at playgroup on a Monday morning they are always excited to find out "what's in the box?" Over the course of the week the children (& parents) bring in their own items to add to the themes.

By encouraging child-led play we have seen an immense improvement in the children's behaviour, confidence, social and language skills. We have also found that the quieter children who usually observe the others are beginning to develop their own ideas of play. It has sparked the children's imaginations. With lots of open questions being asked; "I wonder what...", "I wonder if...", "I wonder how...".

Conclusion

In September, we will be moving from the community hall to a setting of our very own! We can only envisage the children's play going from strength-to-strength as they will be able to leave their projects and ideas in situ rather than having to pack them away at the end of each session.

Feedback from parents has been very positive and encouraging. Many think it's a brilliant idea as it shows that we listen to their children's views, making them feel valued.

