



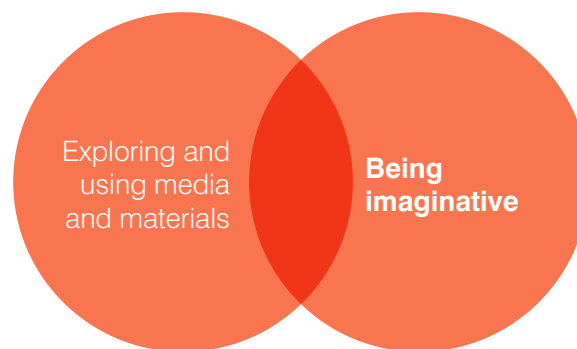
# Expressive Arts and Design: Being imaginative

## Introduction

Expressive Arts and Design (EAD) is one of the **four specific areas** of learning in the EYFS framework.

Expressive Arts and Design involves supporting children to explore and play with a wide range of media and materials, as well as providing opportunities and encouragement for sharing their thoughts, ideas, and feelings through a variety of activities in art, music, movement, dance, role-play, and design and technology.

In the EYFS framework, **Expressive Arts and Design** is made up of two aspects:



## Prime and specific areas of learning

- The **three prime areas** of the EYFS are Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED), Physical Development (PD) AND Communication and Language (CL).
- The **four specific areas** are Literacy (L), Mathematics (M), Understanding the World (UW) and Expressive Arts and Design (EAD).
- The **three prime areas** should be the focus for practitioners working with the youngest children as these form the basis for successful learning and progress in the **four specific areas**.
- As children become older the emphasis will shift towards a more equal focus on **all areas of learning** as children's confidence and abilities increase.

## Supporting young children to be imaginative

Expressive Arts and Design covers the area of learning and development which was called 'Creative Development' in the original EYFS framework, along with 'Designing and Making' both of which were previously found in 'Knowledge and Understanding of the World.'

Being imaginative covers previous aspects of 'Being Creative – Responding to Experiences, Expressing and Communicating Ideas', 'Developing Imagination and Imaginative Play', and 'Designing and Making'.

Being Imaginative focuses on how children use what they have learned about media and materials in purposeful and original ways. They represent their own ideas, thoughts and feelings through art and design, music, dance, role play, and stories. Practitioners should provide a stimulating environment in which creativity, originality, and expressiveness are valued.

## Progress in EAD: Being imaginative

### **Under threes**

*'Any focus on the prime areas will be complemented and reinforced by learning in the specific areas, for example expressive arts is a key route through which children develop language and physical skills.'*

[Tickell Review of the EYFS, 2011]

### **Early Learning Goal for Being imaginative**

*'Children use what they have learnt about media and materials in purposeful and original ways, thinking about users and purposes. They represent their own ideas, thoughts and feelings through design and technology, art, music, dance, role play and stories.'*

[Statement from Draft EYFS Framework, 2011]

## What quality looks like in practice

*The following three scenarios describe the early years practice which exists in a nursery offering early education and full day care for children from three months to five years of age. The values and pedagogy of the owners, managers and practitioners of the nursery have been influenced by the Reggio Approach in northern Italy, and by the Forest School Approach in Denmark. Creativity, in the truest sense of the word, is fundamental to the practice in the nursery.*

### Under twos

Within the nursery the indoor environment, even for the youngest children, provides a safe, secure but challenging space. There is an emphasis on how children explore light and dark along with reclaimed and natural materials, across the age groups.

In the baby room there are several different types of mirrored equipment and a large light box for the babies to access and explore independently. They use the mirrors to explore themselves and what they look like, as well as the toys and resources which are provided in the room. The windows in the room are large enough and low enough to allow the babies to experience the natural light which is essential to their wellbeing, but an excellent blackout system allows the practitioners to change the light levels so that those babies who choose to do so can explore the light box and the patterns, colours and designs created by the different transparent, translucent, and opaque resources.

The older babies and toddlers have free access to baskets of natural and reclaimed materials which are placed on the floor to make them accessible to all children. Very few toys are provided in the nursery as the practitioners prefer to spark the children's imagination and exploratory drive by providing open-ended materials for them to discover.

The owners of the nursery employ a member of staff with an arts background to work with the staff and children across the nursery. The babies and toddlers are no exception and they have been involved in many projects which support their artistic and design capabilities. Paintings on canvases which the babies have produced unaided add beauty to the baby and toddler rooms and to the nappy changing area.

### Two- to three-year-olds

The two- and three-year-olds explore light using an overhead projector and light boxes. A cosy, dark space under the stairs is a favourite place for the children to reflect and play quietly. A small light box provides an interesting medium for the children to explore colour, shape, pattern, form, and line using everyday resources.

The visual artist and the practitioners support the children's creativity and imagination in many different ways using light as the medium. In a darkened room, the children are encouraged to make large-scale movements using torches and fibre optic lights. The children and practitioners make pictures and patterns by placing a battery operated light in a shoe box, covering it with black paper and creating light pictures and patterns by puncturing small holes in the black paper for the light to shine through.

Wherever possible, the practitioners provide real life objects for the children to use in their role play. Real pots and pans, kitchen tools, a very old mixer, kitchen scales, telephones and ornaments are collected by the practitioners. Not only are these resources either free or inexpensive, they put a value on the children's imaginative play which is often difficult to achieve using cheap, plastic imitations. Hats, bags, cloaks, gloves, shoes, umbrellas, and even glasses and a walking stick are favourite items of choice and inspire the children to be different characters in their play.

### Four- to five-year-olds

The oldest children have access to a large studio space in which they can explore a wide range of media and materials, choose to listen to or make music, or spend time designing and making things which interest them.

The studio is furnished with industrial metal shelves which contrast interestingly with the beautiful assortment of baskets and boxes in which resources are stored – reclaimed and natural resources, a rich variety pencils, crayons, pastels, inks, paints, fabrics, and papers as well as a range of tools and equipment which the children

might need to express their thoughts and ideas.

The artist and the practitioners will often introduce a 'provocation' or stimulus to fire the children's interest and imagination. These might range from a collection of old cameras, the caretaker's python's skin or a visit to a local art gallery. The practitioners then build on the children's interests and fascinations to inform what they plan to offer them next to nurture their interest and develop their skills.

This approach is furthered when the children go for weekly visits to a local forest where they are taught the necessary skills to enable them to 'imagine what might be' in the context of the risky freedom they enjoy in the woods. The stories which are told and the adventures which ensue encourage the children to be imaginative as they build, draw, sing, dance, act and story-tell in the exciting environment of the forest.

In order for the children to be imaginative, the practitioners must first have the imagination themselves to see the potential for developing children's creativity across all areas of learning.

## How to help young children to be imaginative

Use these reflective questions to think about how you might support young children to be imaginative.

### Under twos

- Do all practitioners recognise that children's imagination and creativity can be fostered by responsive adults from babyhood?
- Are natural and reclaimed materials used to engage babies' and toddlers' interests and fascinations?
- Do we make the most of the indoor environment by giving babies and young children opportunities to explore the effects of light – both natural and artificial?
- Have we considered how the games we play with babies will encourage their imagination – peek-a-boo or hide and seek, for example?
- How well do staff model pretending and imagining – are they willing to act out being animals or characters in stories they read to the children?
- Have we tried introducing resources to inspire reflection and imagination, such as bubbles to blow, different fabrics to handle, or a range of music to listen to?
- Do we focus observations on the occasions when we see individual children being imaginative, or demonstrating their curiosity?
- In what ways do we show parents the importance of supporting their children's imaginative play?

### Two- to three-year-olds

- As a staff do we have a shared understanding of what imagination and creativity mean?
- Is the learning environment arranged to ensure that two- and three-year-olds can easily and independently access the resources they need to support their learning and development in 'being imaginative'?
- Do we give children opportunities to explore light and dark using dark dens, torches, light boxes, and overhead projectors?
- How well do we make provision for imaginary play by providing real everyday items for the children to use in their role play?
- Are all practitioners willing to join in children's imaginative play if they are invited to do so?
- Do we provide links to communication and language and literacy by introducing magazines, telephones, or walkie-talkies into imaginative play?
- What techniques do we use to involve children in imaginative play, particularly those who do not find it easy?
- Could we improve the ways in which we show parents examples of their children, and others in the group, being creative and imaginative across all areas of learning?

### Four- to five-year-olds

- How do we ensure that we foster children's imagination and creativity across all areas of learning and development?
- Do we appoint staff who demonstrate at interview that they can be imaginative themselves, and who value children's developing imagination and creativity?
- Are the resources we provide to support children's imaginative expression rich in variety, quality, and quantity to appeal to individual interests and learning styles?
- Do we make sure that children have the space and time necessary to become deeply involved in imaginative expression?
- How well do we act as provocateurs to stimulate children's imaginative play, exploration and representation of their ideas and thoughts?
- Are our perceptions of what is acceptable or preferable in imaginative play related to gender, perhaps hindering the learning and development of some children, in particular boys?
- Could we make more of the opportunities which light provides, both indoors and out of doors – investigating shadows and 'imagining what might be' in the outdoor area after dark, or on a visit to a wood or local park in winter?
- How well do we work with parents to help them see how being imaginative and demonstrating creativity is fundamental to children developing an enquiring mind? What could we do to improve what we currently offer?

## Ideas for parents

*Being imaginative focuses on how children sing, dance, move, paint, draw, make models, and perform in imaginative ways, using their developing sense of creativity.*

### Helping your child to be imaginative

There are lots of easy ways you can help your child to use their imagination.

You could use the ideas below as starting points to help you do this.

#### Under twos

- Babies often react to light – both natural and artificial – which is essential to their wellbeing. Try using light to capture your baby's attention and to make shadows with your hands for your baby to see.
- Babies and toddlers love playing with mirrors. Provide your baby or toddler with mirrors so that they begin to look carefully at the world around them. Try using a mirror next to where you change nappies to distract your baby and to encourage him to lie still.
- Collect some natural materials – cones, leaves, bark, twigs – and put them into a basket for your toddler to explore and arrange.
- When your toddler paints or draws a picture, put it into an inexpensive frame to show that you value it. You can re-use the frame many times.
- Tell your baby or toddler familiar stories and act out the role of the characters using appropriate voices to encourage her to use her imagination.
- Encourage your child to role-play the different things which you do on a daily basis – putting dolly or teddy to bed, making cups of tea, going shopping or washing the car – and enter fully into this imaginative play.
- Play guessing games where you hide a toy or household item under a cloth or blanket for your child to imagine what might be hidden there.

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#### Two- to three-year-olds

- Make a dark den by putting a dark tablecloth, curtain, or blanket over a table. Encourage your child to play creatively with torches, shiny objects, mirrors or fluorescent fabric or paper inside the den.
- Go on a shadow hunt out of doors, in your garden, in the street, or in the park. Look for all different types of shadow and imagine what they might be.
- Make a prop box which includes hats, bags, shoes, glasses, scarves and pieces of fabric so that your child can dress up and imagine being someone else in their play. You could add fairy wings, animal masks, or pirate treasure depending on your child's interests.
- Play music with different tempos and beats for your child to dance to. Join in when music you like is on the radio.
- Act as an audience for your child when he wants to sing or dance.
- At bath time, make up stories about the toys she plays with in the bath.
- Talk about family members and encourage your child to imagine what family members are doing. 'What do you think Grandma is doing this morning?', 'I wonder what Emily is doing at school?'

#### Four- to five-year-olds

- Listen carefully to the stories your child invents when s/he is playing with a toy farm, fairies and princesses, or pirates. When the play is finished you could encourage your child to tell you the stories s/he imagined happening.
- Choose a favourite story and imagine you are acting out the story with your child – 'We're going on a bear hunt' by Michael Rosen or 'The three billy goats gruff' are excellent stories for sharing in this way.
- Have fun creating imaginary names for people or animals you see in the street, or invent words which describe the sounds you hear when you are out for a walk.
- Provide homemade or bought percussion instruments. Record the rhythms and songs which your child creates.
- Talk about colours you see in more detail – look at the different shades of colours you find around the house

or on a walk. Try asking your child to find the different shades of colour you find on the paint cards which are free in DIY shops.

- Go for a visit to a local gallery to look at the pictures there. Encourage your child to think about what you saw when they are painting or drawing at home.
- Collect offcuts of wood or visit a creative recycling store (often called Scrap Stores which can be located online) for your child to create 3-D models.