



Golborne St Thomas' Teaching and Learning Handbook

Introduction

This handbook provides a clear framework for effective teaching and learning practices within EYFS.

At Golborne St Thomas', we believe that high-quality teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) lays the foundation for lifelong learning. Our approach is child-centred, fostering curiosity, creativity, and independence through high-quality interactions and an engaging, enabling environment. We ensure that all children feel valued, safe, and supported as they develop essential skills across all areas of learning.

We uphold the view that learning is underpinned by the characteristics of effective learning. In planning and guiding children's activities, practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice.

The 3 characteristics of effective teaching and learning are:

- **Playing and exploring** - children investigate and experience things, and 'have a go';
- **Active learning** - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements; and
- **Creating and thinking critically** - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.



Effective teaching in EYFS at Golborne St Thomas' is characterised by:

- **A Play-Based and Inquiry-Led Approach** – Learning is facilitated through high-quality play experiences that encourage curiosity, exploration, and problem-solving.
- **A Balance of Child-Initiated and Adult-Led Learning** – Practitioners skilfully scaffold children's learning, offering guidance and support while encouraging independence.
- **High-Quality Interactions** – Practitioners use the **ShREC approach** to engage in meaningful conversations, extending children's thinking and language development.
- **Observation and Assessment** – Continuous assessment through adult interactions within provision and observations helps tailor learning experiences to meet the needs and interests of each child.
- **An Enabling Environment** – Classrooms and outdoor spaces are rich, stimulating, and well-resourced to promote creativity, collaboration, and independent learning.
- **Modelling and Demonstration** – Practitioners model language, problem-solving strategies, and social behaviours to support children's learning and development.
- **A Language-Rich Atmosphere** – Teaching is embedded in a language-rich environment with storytelling, songs, and discussions to develop communication skills.
- **Encouragement of Critical Thinking and Problem Solving** – Children are encouraged to think critically, ask questions, and explore different solutions through play and structured activities.
- **Inclusion and Individualised Support** – Teaching is adapted to meet the diverse needs of all children, ensuring equal opportunities for learning and development.



Direct Teaching and Learning

1. Short, Focused Sessions

- Young children have short attention spans, so direct teaching should be **brief (5–15 minutes)**
- Adult, directed time should directly teach new knowledge through explicit teaching
- Whole-class sessions should include opportunities for all children to be active participants

2. Multi-Sensory and Active Learning

- Use **songs, rhymes, puppets, and storytelling** to bring concepts to life
- Incorporate **physical movement**
- Use **concrete objects and manipulatives** for subjects like phonics and maths

3. Clear Modelling and Scaffolding

- Teachers should **model** skills explicitly (e.g., how to hold a pencil, blend sounds, or count objects).
- Use "**I do, we do, you do**" approach:
 - **I do:** The teacher demonstrates.
 - **We do:** The teacher and children practice together.
 - **You do:** Children attempt independently with support if needed.



- Whilst we recognise sometimes it is appropriate to tell children what to do **through explicit teaching before then applying their knowledge** (I do, We do, You do model); we also recognise that sometimes it is appropriate for **children to learn through doing first before the practitioner intervenes with guidance at appropriate points**.

4. Small Group and One-to-One Teaching

- While whole-class sessions can introduce concepts, small groups allow for more **individualised attention** and can also be used to support children through interventions.
- Grouping should be flexible, **based on children's needs and progress** rather than fixed ability groups.
- One-to-one interactions help support children with additional needs or those requiring extra challenge.

5. Embedded within Play and Daily Routines

- Direct teaching should connect to **real-life experiences** and play
- Concepts should be revisited in continuous provision
- Teaching should be part of daily routines, such as **counting how many children are present** or **discussing the weather each morning**.

6. Encouraging Active Participation

- Use **call-and-response**, questioning, and turn-taking to keep children engaged.
- Encourage talk with **open-ended questions** (e.g., “*What do you notice about this shape?*” instead of “*What shape is this?*”).
- Allow children to **experiment, explore, and problem-solve** rather than just listening passively.

Play-based Teaching and Learning

We believe children learn best through play. We provide a balance of **child-initiated**, **adult-led**, and **guided play** experiences that support learning across the EYFS framework. We use the **ShREC** approach within continuous provision to ensure **high-quality interactions** that extend children's thinking and learning. The key elements are:

- **S: Share attention** – Engage with children at their level, following their interests.
- **h: Have conversations** – Use open-ended questions, comments, and responses to encourage communication.
- **R: Repeat and extend** – Acknowledge and build on children's words, ideas, and actions.
- **E: Encourage children** – Promote confidence, persistence, and active engagement.
- **C: Communication and language** – Foster a language-rich environment through meaningful interactions.

[The ShREC approach](#)

As highlighted in the EEF guidance report [Preparing for Literacy](#): “When done well, high quality interactions often look effortless but they are not easy to do well and professional development is likely to be beneficial.”

So, what does ShREC describe:

1. **Share attention**

Showing genuine interest in what a young child is focused on is a powerful way to establish a connection. It lets them know that you value them and want to spend time with them. By getting down to their level and engaging in their choice of activity, you can tune in and crucially pay attention to what they look at, what they do, and what they say. Sensitively joining in with a child's play motivates children to communicate with you.



2. Respond

How we respond to a child once we have established joint engagement is dependent on our knowledge of them as a unique individual. Sensitive, supportive and stimulating responses need to be adaptive and informed by our understanding of the child's development.

What might an attuned response look like? Responding involves noticing how the child communicates and acknowledging these verbal or non-verbal communications warmly. It involves being aware of your body language.

Responses can involve making appropriate eye contact, looking expectantly, nodding, smiling. Equally, an attuned response could be narrating their activity, a relevant comment that describes what the child can see, hear, feel or articulating the link between their activity and previous learning or experiences.

3. Expand

Once the 'back and forth' rally of engagement is getting underway: the adult and child are sharing attention, the adult is responsively following the child's lead.

This is where modelling and scaffolding begins with the adult pitching their language just above the level of the child. For example, if a child gives a one-word response such as 'dog' the adult should expand on what they say by repeating and building on this utterance by adding a few more words. This helps children to use more complex utterances: 'Yes, it's a dog. A big/small/friendly/brown dog!'. Your knowledge of the child will inform what key word/s may be helpful to model.

4. Conversation

Sustained back and forth conversations that involve many turns are the goal. The beauty and power of conversation is



that it offers children an opportunity to practise talking and to receive feedback from an adult. To encourage rich back and forth conversations, comment more, question less.

It is important to note that questions can be useful in helping children to cue turn-taking in conversation. Consider how to use questions sparingly so they are most effective. 'WH' and open questions are the most useful as they invite children to elaborate. As children's conversational skills develop, adults can sensitively challenge children, shaping the conversation to incorporate more abstract topics that are removed from the here and now.



Listening to children and having conversations with them

Sh



Share attention

Be at the child's level. Pay attention to what they are focused on.

R



Respond

Follow the child's lead. Respond to their non-verbal and verbal communications. You could make a brief comment on what they can see, hear or feel.

E



Expand

Repeat what the child says and build on it by adding more words to turn it into a sentence.

C



Conversation

Have extended back and forth interactions. Give children time to listen, process and reply.

Supporting inclusive practice: every child, every day...

The benefits to your child of learning more than one language are huge.

Talk and play with your child in the language you feel most confident and comfortable using.

You can use the ShREC approach with any language including British Sign Language.

The ShREC approach supports all forms of communication children use, including signs and symbols.



Comment more, question less



Oh! I can see Spot hiding in the basket.

Encourage conversations.

10 second rule



Give children time to listen, process and reply.

Interactive book reading



Lion!

It's a fierce, scary lion!



References: Ang, L., Hanley, S. (2009) Major Park Talk: Children's Strategies Review. DfE, Institute of Education, London, UK. / Lau, F., Charlier, T., Davidson, J., Bannigan, M., McLean, C. and Theodorou, A. (2017) Early Language Development: Needs, priorities, and interventions for preschool children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. A Report for the Education Endowment Foundation, October 2017, London: The Education Endowment Foundation & Public Health England. / Tomas, R. R., Leonard, J. A., Robinson, E. T., Vlah, M. R., Mackay, A. P., Rowe, M. L., & Sabatelli, D. M. (2018). Beyond the 30-60 rule: how young children's conversational exposure is associated with language-related brain function. Psychological Science, 29(8), 1200-10. / Rowe, M., Dove, D. (2020) Judging topic quality using free descriptions, inferences, signals, and conceptual. Journal of Child Language, 47(1), pp. 5-20.



Role of Practitioners

Practitioners play a vital role in supporting children's learning by:

- Building strong, nurturing relationships.
- Implementing the **ShREC approach** to promote rich interactions.
- Question, respond to questions and engage the child in extended conversations that support sustained shared thinking
- Providing a stimulating, inclusive, and safe learning environment.
- Observing, assessing, and planning effectively to meet individual needs.
- Encouraging children to become independent, confident learners.
- Extend vocabulary, knowledge and skills
- Add resources that stimulate, motivate and engage the learner
- Demonstrate, model and work alongside the children
- Re-direct the play if necessary
- Help children to learn how to negotiate and resolve conflict
- Promote children's well-being
- Provide feedback to child/other adult/parents
- Ensure the environment is safe and secure and that the Welfare Requirements are in place