



Orson sits on his mother's lap to read a book, pointing to the pictures and following her fingers as she names what appears on the pages.

Orson looks to his mother to check for confirmation of what he has identified and shows a physical response to what is happening in the pictures.

PRACTICE IN PICTURES

Read with me

Sharing a book creates a partnership between a young child and their carer that will promote their attention, social awareness and a habit of reading for pleasure. *Anne O'Connor* shows why

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF SIREN FILMS



Orson is sitting on his mother's knee and together they are looking at a book. Mum points to the pictures and talks about them. Orson points too, and follows mum's finger as she names things.

When she asks him to find the teddy, he points and then looks at mum to check with her. She praises him with a 'well done'. Her reaction pleases him and he looks now to dad and grins at him.

Mum draws his attention to the picture of a baby going to bed and talks about how the baby gets a kiss goodnight. Orson gets a kiss too and mum says 'night night' to the baby.

Bedtime is a familiar routine to Orson and he is able now to connect with his own past experiences and transfer his knowledge to this new situation. He babbles 'bye bye' and he and mum wave goodnight to the baby in the book.

GOOD PRACTICE

Around the age of eight to 12 months, babies develop the fabulous and important skill of pointing, and use it at every opportunity.

Babies now realise they can draw the attention of others to something

and use their finger to point in one of two ways:

- imperative pointing means 'I want it'
- declarative pointing means they want you to share their interest in it.

Looking at books together is a great opportunity for practising this latter skill and reinforces for the child the concept of 'shared perception' – that both of you can be looking at the same thing with mutual attention.

This is probably a result of the natural turn-taking that has gone on between the child and carer during their affectionate 'conversations' in earlier months. The difference now is that the baby is aware of this joint focus.

This is an important stage of development. It has a bearing on future learning, linked as it is to the ability to 'pay attention' and to 'sustained shared thinking' (*Practice Guidance for the EYFS*, p9). But it is also important for social and emotional development, as it connects with the ability to work out what other people might be thinking or feeling and to read expressions.

A baby checking to see the look on their mother's face as they point to the right picture, or put an object in

their mouth, is engaging in 'social referencing' – assessing the reaction of the adult to determine their response to a new experience.

2 Early reading involves adult and child in what Marian Whitehead describes as a 'partnership of mutual pleasure' (*Developing Language and Literacy with Young Children*, p74).

Babies and toddlers show their enthusiasm for books and pictures by gazing and smiling, squealing and babbling, grasping and scratching at the pages, bouncing up and down as well as pointing and talking. Soon this involves naming images and joining in with the words and rhymes, lifting the flaps and turning the pages, and ultimately talking about the story and the characters.

What makes it a mutual pleasure, though, is that it happens in a safe and nurturing atmosphere, where the interactions are warm and affectionate and where both adult and child are relaxed and comfortable.

3 In a reading 'partnership', there is always a 'tuned in' older partner with a sense of how much of the task they need to carry, while all the time allowing the younger and less experienced partner to contribute and perhaps take the lead.

Early years practitioners need to consider the role of each player in this

reading 'partnership' when sharing books with babies:

- With babies, don't feel it's always necessary to start at the beginning of the book or to finish the book every time. Tune in to their interests and let them return to a favourite picture or page.
- Take your time and wait for their responses. Their reactions to what they are seeing and hearing may well be slower than you expect.
- Repetition is important in building familiarity, so don't worry about reading the same book over and over again, or answering 'What's that?' questions for the hundredth time!
- Remember the value of 'parentese' – the sing-song way of talking that encourages babies to tune in to adults and helps them make sense of sounds and words.
- Facial expression is important too, so make sure you connect and make eye contact some of the time when you are sitting side by side, or with the child on your lap.
- The cuddles and warmth associated with early reading experiences build up positive feelings about books and reading, so don't underestimate their contribution towards a lifelong interest in reading and subsequent literacy skill.

4 As children grow, they still need frequent opportunities to snuggle up with an adult and share a



REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Maria Robinson, *From Birth to One – The year of opportunity*, OUP
- Marian Whitehead, *Developing Language and Literacy with Young Children*, Paul Champman Publishing

FURTHER INFORMATION

The stills are taken from Siren Films' 'The Wonder Year – First year development and shaping the brain'. For more information, visit www.sirenfilm.co.uk or call 0191 232 7900.

book – particularly as unrealistic pressures to acquire phonic and decoding skills at an ever earlier age continue to increase, at the expense of reading for pleasure.

- Make the most of opportunities for nurture and affection when sharing a book with an older child. By all means draw their attention to the print, and ask questions about the plot, but don't subject them to a page-by-page question and answer session.
- Continue the partnership approach by gradually allowing them to take on more of the task, but still providing help with the hard bits. You can only do this really well by tuning in to what the child knows and, for example, leaving them time to offer up the one word on the page that they remember, or to comment on the letter they know is in their name.
- Don't forget to be a good role model for reading. Leave the paint pots unwashed for a few minutes and go and sit down on the sofa with a book, by yourself. It's a sure thing that you won't be on your own for long, so be ready to cuddle up and enjoy! ■



LINKS TO EYFS GUIDANCE

- UC 1.1 Child Development
- PR 2.3 Supporting Learning
- EE 3.3 The Learning Environment
- L&D 4.2 Active Learning