

Coak, ticits and lemonaid

When I was first introduced to the idea of creating a cinema in our role-play area I have to admit I was instantly sold (and also a little annoyed that I hadn't done it before). However I could see the comments from others –“don't they watch enough TV?”, “the children in my class would just sit in there all day” etc. so the first challenge was to try to convince people that children respond to the visual stimulus of films and clips well because it is relevant and important to them.

Our children played an active part in the creation of the cinema. They had all visited a cinema before (but a trip to a cinema would be a very good start to this project) and could all suggest what props and roles we would need to generate.

After a few days of the cinema being up and running our head teacher headed towards me and handed me a slip of paper saying “keep calm and carry on”. My stomach turned. THE CALL that we had been expecting for the last year had come (and quite amusingly was in the middle of a transition session where I was surrounded with new children and their parents. I probably came over a bit strange that day!). As I triple checked everything I couldn't help but wonder what HMI would think of our little cinema.

The day arrive and, as always, nothing was given away during the observed session. I anxiously awaited my feedback and was thrilled when the inspector said that she was very tempted to get into the cinema and play alongside the children. This was affirmation that the value of this approach to literacy and role-play could be seen in the children's work and play.

The complete immersion in role-play amazed me. We had sackings and promotions everyday as well as people being asked to leave for being too noisy or throwing popcorn. One afternoon a very annoyed cinema manager stormed out of the cinema and threw his cap on the floor. I asked him what the problem was and was told, “I've had enough! I'm going on my lunch break!” and he took himself off to the snack area and calmed his nerves with a cold carton of milk – absolutely true!

The cinema seemed to give everyone a reason to write but I was particularly interested in the provocation for the boys to apply their phonic knowledge. We had signs for *coak* and *lemonaid*, a *popcorn macheen* and *ticits*. Posters for their own favourite films and suggestions of films we could play next.

We have had a cinema in our classroom a number of times since and it is always a hit. This is just part of the work that we have done in developing the way we use visual literacy in the Foundation Stage but it's a great starting point...Go for it!