

## Understanding Sustained Shared Thinking

Definition of sustained shared thinking:

*'Sustained shared thinking' occurs when two or more individuals 'work together' in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity, extend a narrative etc.*

*Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend the understanding. It was more likely to occur when children were interacting 1:1 with an adult or with a single peer partner and during focussed group work.*

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project (2004)

Many theorists believe and research shows that sustained shared thinking is fundamental to how practitioners approach children's learning and development.

### What does it look like?

Sustained shared thinking is best described as those times when you are totally absorbed with a child, in conversation or in an activity with a genuine interest on both parts to find out more.

Sustained shared thinking can happen anytime, anywhere and only requires time and interest on the part of the participants. It can be one to one or in a small group, especially when there is shared group interest. The important aspect is the 'meeting of minds' and subsequent learning that occurs on both sides. As a practitioner, you are likely to be aware of a connection and that you and the child/ren are fully engaged in the activity or conversation.

These occasions present important opportunities for the practitioner to see a child's world through their eyes. They will reveal much about the child including their level of cognitive development, schemas and self esteem. The child may also be learning things such as social interaction, a technique, how to think creatively, cause and effect and factual information.

The theories about sustained shared thinking contributed to the original EYFS which explicitly stated that sustained shared thinking should be a part of a child's creativity and critical thinking (EYFS 4.3). It is also indirectly described in **all** of the areas of learning and development.

This is because the longitudinal research project The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project (2004) clearly identified that the 'most effective settings encourage sustained shared thinking' and that it is a 'necessary pre-requisite for the most effective settings'.

The EPPE Project concluded:

*'In addition to sustained shared thinking, staff engaged in open-ended questioning in the settings where children made the most progress and*

*provided formative feedback to children during activities. Adult 'modelling' skills or appropriate behaviour was often combined with sustained periods of shared thinking; open-ended questioning and modelling were also associated with better cognitive achievement.*

*RECOMMENDATION: Encourage episodes of 'sustained shared thinking' with the children.'*