

We've explored...

## hats

A delivery of hats at one setting in Scotland gave children the chance to try them on and discuss their different styles and functions, as well as set up a role-play hat shop. By **Annette Rawstrone**

There are hats galore at Poppies Pre-school in Laurencekirk, Aberdeenshire since the setting received a donation of beautiful secondhand hats earlier this year. They expected two or three hats, but more than 40 were delivered, leaving staff excited to see what the children would choose to do with the generous gift.

### the setting's ethos

Poppies Pre-school is a Frobelian nursery, resulting in an holistic approach where what children can do, rather than what they can't, is the starting point for each child's education. 'We're very much led by the child,' says nursery head Sharon Imray. 'Relationships, connections and community are at the core of our practice. They're the crux of everything.'

Being community-orientated is how the hats found their new home at the pre-school in February after a local hat hire company donated the elaborate headwear that they no longer needed. They have proven to be a fantastic provocation. 'You never know what will happen when you put provocations out,' says Sharon. 'So it's best to leave the children alone with their play, watch and observe.'

### what they did

Children and staff unpacked all the formal hats together and had rich discussions about where they had come from and what events they may have been worn at. They explored the hats and admired their different colours – from vivid pink and red to black and more neutral tones – styles and adornments, including elaborate feathers, bows and ribbons. 'There was a lot of exploration around the hats because a lot of the children hadn't seen that type of formal hat before,' says Sharon. 'All the donated hats were women's, so we did add in some men's hats to make it equitable, but to be honest, they didn't get picked much.'

Looking at the hats led to children talking about the different reasons why people wear hats. These hats were designed to wear at formal occasions, such as weddings, when people get

dressed up in their 'finery'. It was discussed that people also need to wear hats as part of their uniform or for religious and cultural reasons, as well as to protect their heads or keep them warm.

There were so many donated hats that it was decided to share the generous gift with the community. They invited the school nursery to select some and gifted a batch to a care home.

'The first thing the children wanted to do was create a hat shop, which was quite unusual because they don't normally engage in role play like that,' says Sharon. 'So we organised that with a couple of mannequin heads and some mirrors.' Some of the hats still even had price tags on.

The children tried on the hats in front of the mirrors and talked about which ones were their favourites. 'Some of the hats had head bands on, they commented on the feathers and there were lots of conversations around colours,' says Sharon. 'The size of some of the hats amazed the children because some were pretty spectacular, big hats. We had fun watching the explorations as the children tried on the hats and commented on them.'



Children started to talk about how the hats were made, so staff took the opportunity to share *Clara Button and the Magical Hat Day* (see Book corner), which led to discussions around how hats are made and designing hats.

Many of the children enjoy sewing, and the pre-school has plenty of resources for this (see Further information), so they used their skills to redesign and embellish some of the hats. 'We now have Spiderman patches hand-sewn onto one of the beautiful hats,' comments Sharon.



## what they gained

Sharon comments on how important it is that practitioners listen to children and follow their interests. 'It would have been easy to be stifled by a hat shop and a very predictive and narrow learning experience,' she says. 'By allowing the children time to explore,

we had much more in-depth conversations, and the play and learning went in many different directions. The learning and play from the hats went on for a very long time.

'For us, it's always all about the play – the role play, having meaningful conversations, giving children choices and preferences to play in their own individual way. The hats were a lovely gift to receive and they've kept on giving because the possibilities with them are endless.'



## extension activities

- Sharon recently lost a friend to brain cancer, so it seemed appropriate for the pre-school to take part in the charity Brain Tumour Research's Wear A Hat Day event. Children and staff brought in hats from home or wore the donated hats. They discussed that they were raising money to help scientists find a cure for brain tumours.
- At Easter, the children visited the local care home to entertain the residents with an Easter bonnet parade, modelling hats that they had created themselves and some of the donated ones.
- Fortunately, the King's coronation happened while the children were exploring the hats, so staff were able to link this event. They got to see images of King Charles wearing a crown and a lot of the guests in elaborate headgear. A crown became a popular choice of headwear in the home corner.
- 'We were interested to see what the younger children, many of whom are toddling now, would make of the hats,' says Sharon. 'While the toddlers wore the hats, the babies were more interested in feeling the different

textures of the hats, feathers and ribbons.' They used the big hats to play peek-a-boo, and a child who often carries around her baby doll and enjoys wearing hats put one on her dolly too. Another child was fascinated by the Easter chicks that had been sewn on a hat and told a story about them.

- During the summer, Sharon shared with the children about her son's upcoming wedding and took in the hat that she was going to wear for them all to see – a turquoise hat with purple and pink flowers on. They were impressed with the hat box that it was kept in, and it inspired the children to get the hats back out for more role play.



### → FURTHER INFORMATION

- 'Get set to sew!' by Annette Rawstrone, *Nursery World* (August 2023)



**Clara Button and the Magical Hat Day** by Amy de la Hays and Emily Sutton Clara loves hats, and when her brother Ollie breaks her favourite, Mum takes them on a special hat day out.



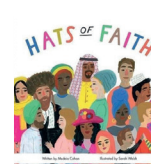
**The King's Hats** by Sheila May Bird and Mark Beech King Charles III is finding his new crown just a little heavy to manage.



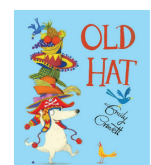
**The Queen's Hat** by Steve Antony A sudden gust of wind sets off an adventure for the Queen, the Queen's men and one very special hat through London.



**I Want My Hat Back** by Jon Klassen The quirky story of a bear whose hat has gone and he wants it back.



**Hats of Faith** by Medeia Cohan-Petrolino and Sarah Walsh Children are introduced to the shared custom of head covering through accurate terminology, phonetic pronunciations and bright, beautiful imagery.



**Old Hat** by Emily Gravett Harbet likes his comfy knitted hat, but cannot keep up with the latest fashions. Will he ever fit in?



**You Must Bring a Hat** by Simon Philip and Kate Hindley The only rule for attending this party is you MUST bring a hat. But what if you don't own a hat? Find out in this tale that builds to a surreal and hilarious ending.

