

Science in space

I have had the privilege of working with a local primary school (Cookridge Primary School in Leeds) that has taken the decision to teach much of their curriculum through their science theme – and this includes literacy and numeracy work! Over the last year they have taken science from a curriculum subject for teaching, to it leading their thinking and doing in class. What impressed me most was their work with children in years 1 and 2 (ages 5–7) at the beginning of the year, with their ‘I wonder ...’ theme. Children were encouraged to wonder what a scientist is like and the work they produced was amazing: by the end of the first term nearly all the children were generating and beginning to investigate their own ‘I wonder ...’ questions (see image).

The theme for this issue is full of opportunities to wonder. Space is such an engaging and challenging topic for children. Their innate fascination starts at a young age: my daughter, aged 2 and a half, stormed into the kitchen and dragged me to a window one dark autumn evening as she expressed with much alarm that the Moon ‘was broken’ in its crescent shape. Stars fascinate children and even early children’s television programmes include learning points (*Peppa Pig* kindly informed mine that the stars are still there during the day, you just can’t see them – a fact they still repeat in conversation three years on). Many children’s stories are also set with space themes that foster interest.

What is the downside? Space is exceptionally abstract and conceptualising much of the knowledge we have about space is a real challenge, not least dealing with the

distances involved. Although there are various models for scaling the solar system, the size and expanse is still bewildering (and I include myself as thinking that!). There are many counter-intuitive ideas to be understood, such as the Earth spinning, the Sun *not* moving across the sky, the tilt of the Earth and the seasons. These are all very complex and abstract ideas that are not easy to teach.

This issue of *Primary Science* addresses the challenge of teaching about space, with articles outlining approaches

to teaching the tricky topics, fabulous resources to make use of, the value of space science weeks and more. Teaching this topic well is fundamental to enabling children to develop accurate ideas about the Earth and space and a challenge we should embrace. You as a teacher can explore things with the children and learn alongside them as you wonder about this topic too.

Space is also an area where we can really allow the children’s imagination to shine and support science teaching. Ask your children what they wonder about space. I was once in a classroom where a pupil asked ‘If I stood on a star 65 million light years away would I be able to see dinosaurs?’ This bowled me over in terms of thinking and questioning. It reminded me that the minds of young children should not be underestimated.

So despite the challenges and complexities, use space to your advantage and get your children wondering about what is out there for them to explore.

Leigh Hoath

