

Effective learning and teaching in the Early Years

Published September 18, 2015

To discuss this case study, please contact us via email customersupport@camdenlearning.org.uk



Key Points

- Camden Early Years Learning Cluster improved children's progress/attainment
- Practitioners' expertise facilitated setting-to-setting support and improvement in practitioner knowledge/skills

Purpose

What were your reasons for doing this development work?

To use research on the characteristics of effective learning and teaching and the lesson study approach to improve early years practice across Camden settings.

Who were the identified target learners?

- All children in the early years especially those who data showed were not making expected or better progress
- Participating early years practitioners

What were your success criteria?

- Good or better progress for target children
- Improved EYFS outcomes
- Improved staff confidence and knowledge

What did you do? (What success criteria did you use?)

Over the two years of the Camden Early Years Learning Cluster, 30 settings across Camden were involved. The project began with a full day on research at start of Autumn term looking at research and lesson study using the Jean Lang version of the Lesson Study Handbook for Early Years.

Each setting identified their own priorities for development and participants divided into study groups, depending on the area they wished to focus on.

The study groups visited one of the settings in their group each term, to observe, discuss and plan a study lesson cycle – they also looked at environment, planning, staff deployment

Study sessions were held at Thomas Coram and a review session in June.

What specific teaching resources did you use?

- Jean Lang's [Lesson Study – Early Years Handbook](#)
- Professor Sue Rogers book, Institute of Education Literature review of effective early years practice
- Usual resources found in early years settings, especially those that encourage open-ended investigation.

Outcomes and Impact

What has been the impact on pupil learning and teaching?

Participants had a better understanding of best available research on effective pedagogy and interactive strategies and were more confident in using the Characteristics of Effective Learning in planning for the EYFS.

From their research practitioners identified the following as important factors in effective teaching-

- Starting from the child's interests, if interested young children will concentrate for extended periods.
- The importance of flexibility and optionality to keep the interest of children, giving them autonomy and freedom in decision-making
- Children often understand /able to do more than practitioners think so importance of analytical observation and reflection
- Children can achieve far more through exploring resources independently before carrying out structured activities.
- The importance of groupings and the motivation they generate, size matters
- The value of 'low threshold – high ceiling activities' in mixed groups
- Collaboration and peer to peer learning was hugely supportive – both for the children and for adults
- The watchful child is learning
- Use of challenges to solve which lead to high levels of engagement – problem solving approach with children identifying problem/solutions
- The power of story as a motivating situation for activities. Exciting and engaging stories were a highly motivating place to situate activities
- Attunement is central to delivering an engaging and inspiring curriculum. It is only via reflective observation of the child's needs and interests that you can plan to support and extend their learning through stimulating and engaging activities
- It's important to make time to work at being a reflective practitioner, really knowing how your children learn best. Through thoughtful observation practitioner's can plan to foster independence in the children's learning by engaging them in activities that are well matched with their Zone of Proximal Development.
- Trying new approaches and sometimes moving outside of one's natural comfort zone might be daunting, but it can really pay dividends.
- Making time for professional dialogue is a great tool for developing teaching skills
- In order to encourage children to be more willing risk takers in their writing and become willing to 'have a go' the focus doesn't always have to be on accurate

spelling, finger spaces and full stops. Taking risks and having a go are lessons to learn in their own right before they become a requisite part of everyday writing activities. If the emphasis is on the mechanics of writing too early on it can undermine confidence and motivation.

- The importance of building children's confidence in writing alongside their phonic / spelling / physical skills Embedding writing in the activities of the day – not an activity in isolation

- The importance of creating a motivating, meaningful context for writing – children need a reason to write (superheroes were a winner!) and maybe some exciting new media to write with too.

- Embedding writing in the purposeful activities of the day – not an activity in isolation – and in making it context-embedded they became more meaningful to the children so they were keen to participate.

- Role play offered lots of possibilities to bring text alive and inspire children to write for their own purposes.

- Exploring unusual/less common materials for drawing and mark making was a great motivator for some reluctant mark makers.

All 12 settings reported improvements in children's progress in learning in areas identified at the start of the project, particularly in writing and for boys. Practitioners reported increased confidence in their own ability to use the characteristics of effective learning and the children's. In particular children were more independent, prepared to take risks, engaged and motivated

Evidence of impact on pupil learning and teaching/leadership

Evidence of participants deploying a wider ranges of pedagogical strategies in their teaching in response to learning through the project

Understanding :-

- Greater attunement with the children as individuals – improved adult ability to tune in and extend learning in the moment which is more important than elaborate plans and expensive resources

- Practitioners building on children's current interest more and introducing them to new things that will interest them

- Practitioners recognising adults' tendency to talk for too long and intervene in activities too much, which limits learning – leave space for children to think, comment and respond/initiate

- Embracing new strategies/ pedagogy and the confidence to be led by the children

- Making time to reflect deeply on children's actual learning [rather than how the activity went] and using this in to plan next steps

- Focusing on planning on opportunities for learning rather than managing task/s

- Not over planning , being open to new possibilities that may occur during the session, too much focus on narrow outcomes can lead to missed opportunities for learning

- Practitioners being flexible to manage the unpredictability of EYFS- the importance of the learning, not the plan

- Practitioners not being be afraid of letting children take risks and to taking risks themselves.

Quotes from participants:-

'Level of development/results higher than last year'

"All children progressed throughout the year"

"Better outcomes compared to last year... 7/30 reached a GLD... across 17 aspects there was an increase in outcomes... even the children that didn't make a GLD have progressed in terms of the CoEL"

"The three target children have made good progress – 2 children have moved from 30-50 months to ELG and one child has moved to secure 40-60 months from 30-50 months"

"Children are becoming more confident"

"Children in the group [initially] were not confident in contributing to discussions....[now] children feel confident to try out new vocabulary and language in a safe and supported environment"

"Valuing their non-verbal communication and not just always wanting them to talk whilst doing an activity has brought out a great deal of enthusiasm from the children who are not normally the chatty ones in class"

"Children are more self-directed, confident in making their own choices and asking for adult's help and support where needed"