

# Planning for Dinosaurs – how we put pedagogy into practice

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Helen Holgate

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To discuss this case study, please contact us via email [customersupport@camdenlearning.org.uk](mailto:customersupport@camdenlearning.org.uk)



## Key Points

- Camden Early Years Learning Cluster – Lesson Study action research
- One participant's experience in EY lesson study

## Purpose

### **What were your reasons for doing this development work?**

The Camden Early Years Learning Cluster, initiated by the Thomas Coram Centre and including Camden schools and children's centres and the Institute of Education, benefited from the Camden Partnership for Excellence in Education project funding.

Rationale: There have been significant improvements in Camden's Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) results and a renewed focus on effective pedagogy in early years settings. However there is still a significant gap between outcomes for certain groups of Camden children. Only 12% of early years settings in Camden have been graded as outstanding. This suggested that investments needed to be made in the professional development of practitioners across Camden, in order to improve outcomes for all children.

My reason for joining the project and doing this development work was to build upon changes I had made in my practice during the previous academic year designed to enhance the progress of boys in their writing. It appeared that the changes we had made had benefited the children, but I wanted to interrogate this further to ensure it was not specific to the previous year's cohort. I also sought to further develop the improvements to our planning and embed the Characteristics of Effective Learning into our teaching of writing in Foundation Stage.

### **Who were the identified target learners?**

In line with many other schools, the consistent "gap" in our data was with boys and writing. I selected three boys to focus on, each of whom began Reception with a clear resistance to writing. Child A had a very positive approach to learning in general, but this did not extend to writing. He would engage only when asked by an adult and remain in the focus activity for the minimum period possible, regularly asking whether he was finished yet. Child B found the mechanics of writing very daunting and his parents reported that he had not engaged in any mark making activities in his previous setting and not chosen to paint, draw or engage in art activities. Child C began Reception slightly below expected levels in literacy and mathematical development. He avoided mark making and adult focus activities in Nursery unless directly asked, much preferring role-play and physical games.

## **What were your success criteria?**

### **Success criteria – The EY Project**

In collaboration with partner settings, this approach and a formal evaluation of the project is facilitated by early years and evaluation experts from the Institute of Education. Key indicators include

- Evidence of research/ lesson study techniques informing practice
- Evidence of change in teaching practice
- Evidence of project resulting in change in confidence/knowledge and improved teaching

### **Success criteria – target pupils**

- An increased level of confidence in writing for the target group – we will see children writing because they want to, they will take ownership of their work and will not be saying “Have I finished yet?” or “Can I go now?”
- A greater proportion of boys will achieve the ‘Expected’ level of development in their EYFSP in line with last year’s data.

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

Over the course of the three lesson study sessions I sought to develop a practical approach to writing activities, incorporating all three strands of the *Characteristics of Effective Learning* into each of the activities planned. I wanted to move away from the writing table and writing books and to make the writing more purposeful

### **Session 1**

My first session was in the afternoon late in the Autumn Term. I knew that the children would need a very active and engaging task to encourage them to elect to write by that point in the day so needed to plan a very motivating task. Our topic was Food and Festivals and the current theme was The Little Red Hen. For the session I enlarged, printed and then laminated ten images of hens each with a CVC name and a number 1-10 on the reverse side (i.e. Jed 1, Ben 5 etc.) and attached them with ribbons to different objects around the outside space on our ‘Island’. I then collected a group of six children including my target children and we went to a set of wooden seats on the Island where they found The Little Red Hen large hand puppet with a letter addressed to ‘Reception’ and a large sequinned bag. I supported the children in reading the letter from the Little Red Hen, who explained that her friends had been frightened by the Sly Fox and asked the children for their help to find them. Inside the bag were sequinned capes (to be helpful superheroes!) and six clipboards with a recording sheet attached. The children had to find the laminated hens, sound out the hen’s names, identify the number and then write the name into the correct box on their sheet. The activity proved very popular; the target children plus three other class members joined the ‘hen hunt’ and were keen to complete the task. The activity was very popular and the children were highly motivated, but still worked cooperatively, helping each other to find the hens and pointing out hens that they had already found to their friends. All the children met the Learning objectives

for the session and Child B responded particularly well by blending and reading the names of the hens independently for the first time. The other members of the class were also very interested and the activity continued into the next day, with several children choosing to repeat the hunt a number of times. Some of the children were able to access the activity independently but the majority needed support, either with the reading or the recording, or both. We repeated the treasure hunt activity the following term using Gingerbread Men, as our topic was Traditional Tales, and the children were delighted to return to a familiar activity but this time were able to attempt it independently. (See Lesson Plans)

## **Session 2**

Session 2 took place first thing in the morning during the Spring Term and formed part of the class topic on dinosaurs, but was also a way of introducing Rights Respecting ideas into our topic work. Again, outside. The children (3 target children plus 3 other boys in our class) came upstairs into the outside shelter to discover a large dinosaur nest with eggs in it. First we discussed what sort of eggs they might be (they quickly assumed dinosaurs as we had visited the Natural History Museum in the preceding week) and the children decided how to get the baby dinosaurs out. The children had a selection of pens, large A4 card tags and scissors. The boys had some great problem solving ideas for how to get the dinosaurs out and using the scissors soon retrieved them all and chose one each. Having selected their dinosaur we then discussed what the baby dinosaurs would need to grow and be safe and happy and the children wrote the instructions on the tags and attached them to the dinosaurs. They were all very engaged in the task but in different ways. Child A and his friend were focused on writing the dinosaur care plan and Child A wrote several versions because he wanted to get it 'just right'. Child B worked hard to sound out and complete a sentence working largely independently. Child C was very interested in drawing his dinosaur and chose to draw around the dinosaur on his card and then labelled it with several related words. He found the task quite difficult and looked for support to sound out his words. Two of the other group members became fascinated by creating a home for the dinosaur with their card, pens and some straw and worked together on this task with high levels of involvement, continuing after our Lesson Study session had finished.

In our follow up discussion we discussed the areas we could improve (having a longer period of time for the activity, only having eggs that could open as some of the eggs were solid, which made the nest look realistic, but was distracting) and centrally the value of allowing the two boys to explore their interest in building a home for the baby dinosaurs, rather than asking them to stop and write as originally intended. As a group we decided it was valid to encourage them to pursue their interests, and this was validated when the both chose to come and write their dinosaur care plan on a different day.

## **Session 3**

My final session was in Summer Term when the class had just embarked on a new topic, 'In the Air'. My focus children were part of a group of children in the class who had an interest in, and experience of, aeroplanes. Over a period of days prior to the Lesson Study session they had been working collaboratively to build shared aeroplanes with the large Community Play blocks. For the session I had a plane shape laid out for the children to find (had I had a longer session we would have

made this collaboratively) where we sat and read the 'If I Could Fly and Aeroplane...' book together, talking about the different places featured in the story and referring to the map which we had been looking at on previous days. We then talked about going on holiday and I began to unpack the suitcase looking at each of the items (swimming costume, towel, sun cream, goggles, favourite story book) and discussing what sort of place I might be going to and comparing it with the next case (woolly hat, gloves etc.). We then talked about what they like to take on holiday with them and I introduced the idea of writing lists of what to take. All the children were quickly engaged with writing their lists. Child B wrote lots of ideas (more than I have seen him write before) as he was very keen to list all his cuddly toys that he wanted to take. Child A wrote a long list and shared his holiday experiences with the group, suggesting that Lanzarote had great swimming pools, was always sunny and had volcanoes you could visit, reflecting the he thought everyone should go to there on holiday! Child C also wrote more confidently and quickly than usual, sharing his experiences of flying to Ghana and comparing the differences in the climate with London. The other boys included in the group were equally engaged discussing airport experiences and one child making a careful plan for travelling to visit his grandparents in Australia with his new baby brother.

In the subsequent discussion we decided that the activity was motivating for this group of children because it was well matched to their interests and experiences, but would not be successful for children without experience of flying to different countries. It was also felt that writing lists elicited more writing than usual as the children were free from the constraints of writing sentences.

Throughout each of my sessions I attempted to make use of open-ended questioning and 'phatics' to move the children's conversations and thinking on, ideas introduced to our group during the initial workshop delivered by Dr Sue Rogers from the IoE at the outset of the project.

### **What specific teaching resources did you use?**

**Session 1** – clipboards, pencils, recording sheets, laminated pictures of hens with a CVC name and number 1-10 on the reverse side, outside garden space

**Session 2** – large ModRoc dinosaur nest lined with straw, large papier mache dinosaur eggs containing tiny model dinosaurs, clipboards and felt pens

**Session 3** – large community play blocks in a shape suggesting an aeroplane, a home-made book- "If I was an aeroplane", selection of child-sized wheelee suitcases (one packed with items suggesting a trip to a hot climate & one suggesting a cold climate), clipboards with rectangular paper to write lists, pencils, very large laminated world map

The **Characteristics of Effective Learning** can be found in section 4.4 of the [2014 Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Handbook](#)

## **Outcomes and Impact**

## **What has been the impact on pupil learning and teaching?**

The Lesson Study Project has ensured that the Characteristics of Effective Learning have become central to my planning and practice, rather than an extra aspect added on. We have set out to consider the Characteristics as an underpinning for all the Areas of Learning.

Child A and Child B achieved 'expected level of development' in their EYFSP and Child C is working very securely at 40-60 months. All three boys are confident and secure writers who now choose to engage in writing activities independently as part of their role play. They all view themselves as 'real writers' and are very proud of their achievements.

For the other children in the group there has been a greatly increased interest in independent writing, particularly through role play (signs, lists and instructions) but also book making; 'Deadly Sixty' books became very popular. Throughout the class the children have a distinct sense of ownership of their work.

## **Evidence of impact on pupil learning and teaching/leadership**

An example of planning that shows the approaches I now use is attached below.