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Closing the
attainment
gap

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Editorial

Closing the attainment gap

Beatrice Merrick

This issue of the Journal celebrates the completion of Early Education's Department for Education (DfE) funded project Learning Together About Learning, which focused on the implementation of Early Years Pupil Premium in England, helping to develop and disseminate examples of good practice in using the funding. The project ended with a series of six dissemination events held in locations around England, and outcomes were also shared online - the project resources and final report can be found at www.early-education.org.uk/eyp

Those events were the inspiration for this issue. While not attempting to capture everything covered within the events, we have kept the same mixture of a "keynote" reflecting themes central to EYPP and intended to provide inspiration for a broader range of approaches to the funding, coupled with examples of how practitioners, from within the project and beyond, have experienced the process of seeking to develop strategies that will help accelerate learning for their eligible children.

Our keynote article comes from Kathy Ring, and focuses on how painting can help children to develop deep thinking and understanding. It chimes with a key theme of the project that the best approaches to closing the equity gap are those which build on established early years principles and practice, and deepen the expertise of the staff team to support children's learning more effectively.

Also included are three case studies, two of which come from LTAL project networks. From outside of the project, Comet Nursery School report on their action research, taking an evidence-based and inclusive approach to using EYPP. Under the auspices of the project, our Hertfordshire network gives an account of working with a consultant to review how they could engage with parents to support children's learning. Our Barnet network writes up how they focused on practice within the setting, using video of staff interactions with children as a professional development tool.

Finally, we include a book review of Julie Fisher's new book focusing on how adult-child interactions can support children's learning – a reminder of the importance of practitioners having access to recent research and professional literature in supporting their development.

After only one year of EYPP, it is still early days to see results, but practitioners who engaged with the project have been developing their thinking and engaging in much reflective practice as they focus on how this small pot of funding can be used to make a difference. Throughout the project many practitioners and local authority colleagues have generously shared their experiences of developing new systems and processes and finding innovative and creative uses for EYPP. The project allowed us the luxury of creating communities of practice who were able to share their learning, and they told us this was an enormously valuable process. However, it did take time and effort to build networks, and it often needed someone to take the lead. Our challenge going forward is how to support further development of such communities – how many local authorities have the resource to do this, and where they have not, will others – teaching schools, professional associations, etc – take on this role? We will continue to explore ways to support providers in making best use of EYPP in future.

While EYPP funding is only available in England, the equity gap is a concern across the UK. This issue should also be of interest to colleagues in Wales, considering how to use Early Years Pupil Development Grant (an initial review of which has recently been commissioned), and in Scotland in relation to Scottish Attainment Challenge – or anyone else wrestling with the thorny issue of how to create more equitable outcomes for children in the early years.

Beatrice Merrick is Chief Executive of Early Education

Moving towards deep thinking and understanding: a focus upon painting



Kathy Ring

Throughout my career I have been researching the environmental factors that impact upon young children as meaning makers. As a classroom teacher I became fascinated by how decisions made by practitioners, in terms of organisation of time, space and materials, shaped children's experiences and ultimately their achievements. With hindsight I recognise that the following key questions have underpinned my reflection upon practice in the many early years settings I have been privileged to visit:

- ▶ Which materials and tools should all children have access to on a daily basis and why have they been chosen?
- ▶ How should these materials be organised to ensure the children use them independently as part of their freely chosen multimodal meaning making?
- ▶ Have practitioners researched these materials alongside the children, become familiar with their properties and with the possibilities for their use?
- ▶ Is practitioner thinking driven by children's ideas, fascinations and preoccupations so that the planning of provocations and enhancements maintains children's intrinsic motivation and provides appropriate challenge?

My previous research has emphasised the importance of young children being able to move within and across the symbol systems of object play, drawing and writing (Ring, 2010). It recognises that building children's confidence and skills in one mode of expression enables them to take the leap of moving into the unfamiliar.

As part of this previous project I also gained evidence of many young children failing to find provision for other modes of meaning making, for example working with paint and clay, satisfying in terms of appropriate challenge. Problems included:

- ▶ lack of everyday availability of quality materials
- ▶ over prescription by, or narrow expectations of, practitioners in terms of how materials should be used and what should be produced
- ▶ lack of understanding by practitioners of the possibilities of working in greater depth with both 3D and 2D materials
- ▶ lack of value for children's use of art materials being reflected in the increasing use of the term "messy area" to describe the part of the setting where they have access to them. (NB definitions of messy include: untidy, dirty, careless, and disordered).

These problems can lead to children finding practitioner expectations lack challenge (children become bored), or are over challenging (children become anxious in their attempt to please). Many practitioners who have taken part in my research have commented that it is in supporting children's use of traditional art materials that they have the most difficulty in interpreting the expectations of statutory requirements and non-statutory guidance, particularly in relation to the Characteristics of Effective Learning (Early Education, 2012).

The research project: creating studio spaces in early years settings

My keynote presentation for Early Education, as part of the project Learning Together About Learning, drew upon my ongoing action research project with early years practitioners in the north of England. As each practitioner develops a studio space within their setting, we are working together to develop our understanding of what constitutes appropriate challenge for young children in their use of a range of what might traditionally be termed "art" materials. The title of the project reflects the strong influence upon our thinking of the Reggio Emilia Approach and the work of Malaguzzi.

We are looking closely at some of the materials we would want to include in the space, the reasons why we would include them, and how changes we make in provision and organisation impact upon children's behaviours with them. Our focus upon paint, clay and the arranging of 3D natural materials recognises the affordances of looseness and flexibility of representation that these materials allow. It is these affordances that particularly support young children in powerful transformations of thinking that are part of their playful process of making meaning.

Developing understanding of young children painting

Analysis of change over time by practitioners taking part in the project is still in process and is initially being carried out under the following headings:



- ▶ This is where we were
- ▶ This is what we tried
- ▶ This is what happened
- ▶ These are our new behaviours

For some practitioners involved in the project the journey of thinking in depth about these materials has just begun. Practitioners working with early years children in primary schools can find the way forward has to be negotiated if their prospective studio space is sited outside their classroom in a shared area. The comment “other adults do not like ...” is a familiar response in discussion across settings.

What has been a common response from all participants taking part in the project is the need to allow children more time to use a material in the way they choose to. All talk of gaps in their knowledge of what to do next and some talk of the rush on their part to “get the children producing something that I can recognise”. We have found inspiration in sourcing reading that has reflected our experience and has taken our thinking forward, in particular *Supporting Young Artists* by Epstein and Trimis (2002) and *Making Meaning* by Narey (2009).

Not all the practitioners are at the beginning of their journey, however, and one setting has had a designated studio space for some time. The following cameo of a child and an experienced nursery teacher gives an example of narrative gathered as part of the project. It is an example of a practitioner capturing the process of painting primarily in images and reflecting deeply upon what she sees and

hears. She responds by making provision that allows the child to take his interest deeper and then by documenting using images and interpretive narrative that captures and communicates the co-construction of meaning taking place between them and her joy in the experience.

Cameo

Painting seemed to have captured three 3-year-old boys’ attention and they spent a long time working in the studio, generating several pieces of work during the course of the morning. This interest was noticeable; it was a significant step for the boys to demonstrate such high levels of involvement in this self-chosen activity.

I wonder if this interest will continue?

Both Harry and James chose to work in the studio the following day. Through a series of observations and interactions, it became apparent that size was an important attribute, which fuelled Harry’s interest. At one point I offered him a choice of two paintbrushes, a fine one and a thicker one. Harry was clearly dismissive of the finer one and pushed my hand away. This gesture gave me a very strong, clear message - Harry was into “big”. I responded by offering Harry the choice of working on a much larger scale - a larger sheet of paper was offered. Harry was delighted.

I waited with a great sense of anticipation to see how Harry would interact with these materials; it was like waiting for a great artist to begin his performance. This is how he started....

Harry chose to work at the easel. He expressed his preference for the orientation of his paper, selected a jar of red and yellow paint and began to paint.

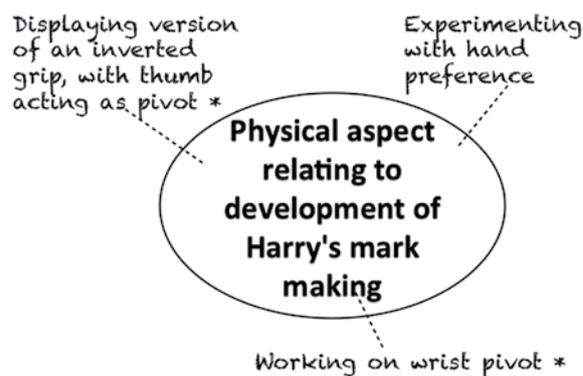
Harry dipped his brush in the bright red paint and transferred it onto his large paper, using short up and down movements of his brush. His head tilted, his gaze transfixed, watching the effect created with each and every stroke of his brush. With a small rotation of his wrist, he began to move the brush across from side to side. He dipped the same brush into a jar of yellow paint and repeated these movements. Soon, he began alternating between both colours.

Harry’s physical interactions with colour and paper gained momentum as he began spreading the paint wider and higher across his paper, with outstretched arms, swapping hands intermittently. At the height of this creative frenzy, he grabbed a jar of white paint. The white immediately had the effect of softening the riotous tone of his explorations. There was a noticeable change in tempo as Harry entered the final stage of his performance. “I’m finished now,” said Harry. Harry’s painting silently captured and absorbed the richness of his encounters with the movement, colour and texture of paint.

Next, Harry asked for some “more big paper”. I realised with hindsight that what I had witnessed was just the prelude. It was now time to let the dance begin....



Figure 1: Learning opportunities through painting



* A range of small scale activities will be available within continuous provision to ensure Harry is able to strengthen and develop his fine motor skills.

Figure 2 Physical aspect relating to development of Harry's mark making

Harry's brush strokes were big and bold, sweeping colour both vertically and horizontally across the paper. His whole body rocked gently from side to side, forwards and backwards. It was like watching a great maestro create and conduct his own beautiful symphony of colours and textures across this space, with an awe inspiring flow of energy and vibrancy.

Harry showed evidence of being independent, resourceful and learning to look after himself and his chosen materials. When he ran out of paint he tried to dip his large brush into a small jar of paint. This did not work so he tried to transfer some paint from the jar onto his brush by using a smaller brush. Finally, he tipped out the paint in the jar into his larger tin. Towards the end of the session, Harry helped clean up the studio area that he had been working in and learnt about how to look after his brushes.

The child featured in the cameo was offered an environment of co-participation where there was deep respect for his ideas and where he contributed to the knowledge making process. Harry was given time and space to have ideas and see them through. The nursery teacher stepped back, enabling his activity to lead her support for learning.

Following this episode of meaning making Harry's work with paint on a large scale continued and was extended when James, having observed Harry, began a similar process. They worked in parallel, on either side of a large easel, walking around occasionally

to silently review each other's work. The practitioner recognising the possibilities that the opportunity to work on an even larger scale might bring for the boys, suggested that she support them in covering a wall in paper, from ceiling to floor. They readily engaged with this, and they particularly enjoyed the problem solving involved in working with larger quantities of paint, larger brushes and trying to work "up high". With interest being shown by a larger group of children in the setting, this became a natural platform for engaging in cooperative work for example taking turns, sharing and being aware of others around them, as well as developing a sense of spatial awareness, coordination and balance.

In this environment the children were given the authority to be innovative.

They were supported by:

- ▶ the everyday availability of quality materials
- ▶ value being given to children's use of art materials through the provision of a clean, well-ordered and thoughtfully provisioned studio space where key, open-ended materials can be engaged with over time
- ▶ recognition of children's need to have ownership of the content of their meaning making and broad expectations of practitioners generally, in terms of how materials should be used
- ▶ a knowledgeable and sensitive practitioner who continues to research and gain further understanding of the possibilities of the materials made available within the studio space as part of continuous provision

- ▶ practitioners encouraging children to work in greater depth, over a long period of time, with self-chosen materials. Their documentation demonstrates their emphasis upon the process of children's interactions with materials and upon gaining access to the thinking and understanding underpinning and driving children's intrinsic motivation.

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Octopus and noodles: how we used the EYPP to broaden our horizons

Lisa Clarke and Fran Paffard

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

We have this quote on our nursery’s walls – and had it in mind when faced with the excitement and challenge of spending the EYPP wisely. There are complications for us in merging the remit of the EYPP with our early years principles. While the larger statistics show the “gap” for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and as a team we are passionate about changing that picture, we know both from research and from our own experience that disadvantage does not translate simply into predictable educational needs.

We have Jack, a child who fits the EYPP criteria but in every way is a busy, sociable and high achieving learner, while another boy whose parents work and do not qualify for EYPP is in dire need of all kinds of support. We are uncomfortable too with a requirement to provide an intervention that is exclusive to a group of children within our firmly inclusive nursery. We have had many discussions about the ways in which we can make a difference to our EYPP children in a way that will also impact on our wider community.

Call us a picky bunch, but we take issue too with the idea of a “deficit” view of children and families who qualify for the EYPP. While the wider impact of disadvantage is undeniable we are wary of generalisations about the needs of children based on income, and worried by the assumptions often made about children’s language and abilities. We were aware that many schools, knowing how critical language is to educational achievement, were choosing to spend the EYPP on speech and language therapists but we felt this to be a remedial approach, starting from an assumption that there was a “problem” with our children,

rather than an inequality in the wider world that we had an opportunity to address. Jack is a good example of this, you would have to search hard to find a more articulate four-year-old than Jack, he can talk to you fluently about Superman and family life, and has a broad (sometimes startling) vocabulary. A focus on language support for Jack would hardly meet his needs.

With this in mind we took an “evidence-based” approach, looking both at our own school data, and at wider research on successful impacts on children’s learning.

School context

Comet is an inclusive Nursery School and Children’s Centre set in the rapidly changing area of South Hackney. Hoxton may mean hipster beards and coffee roasters to some, but for our families it is still in the 10% most disadvantaged wards in the country. This is an area of deprivation with poor housing but a richly diverse community, ethnically and linguistically; 14 different languages are spoken, the main language being Turkish, and many families originate from different African countries. Comet has been rated as an outstanding school in its last three inspections and has a highly qualified and experienced early years staff team. We have 90 children on roll in the nursery school and, since January 2015, have taken 32 2-year-olds all eligible for the early education entitlement. We have had the children’s centre since the nursery was rebuilt in 2009 with a reach of 482 families. We work within a cluster of children’s centres surrounded by ten Super Output Areas, all of which are in the top 10% most deprived localities in the

UK. In September 2015 we also became part of a teaching school alliance working with other primary and nursery schools across East London. Over a third of our children qualify for EYPP. Our data does confirm that many children begin at Comet with lower than expected levels of language whether it is English or another home language, we also know that many children start with limited “understanding of the world”. However we also see children on entry as learners: “Every young child has the potential, the instinct and the ability to learn.” (Gopnik, Melzoff & Kuhl, 1999). We take from the Education Endowment Fund research the effectiveness of early communication approaches, and the impact of parental engagement. These findings are of course reinforced by the EPPSE project’s findings that it is not who your parents are, or how rich they are that matters, but what they do with you.



Looking more specifically into the early findings on the Schools Pupil Premium we have taken inspiration from successful initiatives focused on: widening the child’s experiences to raise aspirations and develop recreational interests; family support; and ensuring children have access to the highest quality teaching. The OECD data confirms that the UK is worse than many other countries in the developed world at “narrowing the gap” and has one of the strongest relationships between socio-economic status and educational outcomes. The reasons for this is may be complex and hard to address through one small piece of funding but we are determined to do what we can. EPPSE also tells us that “sustained shared thinking”



is where children progress in their learning. The Froebel Project (1972-76) challenged the belief in a “fixed IQ” and saw extraordinary cognitive gains attributable to three major factors: high quality responsive teaching; nurtured parental involvement; and enriched educational experiences. In particular Bruce and Athey took families and children from a crowded housing estate every week out and about, into fresh air, play facilities and new experiences (Athey, 2007). Drawing on these many threads of our thinking we came to a perfect storm in the creation of our “natural explorers” project.

The project draws on the strengths and enthusiasm of our staff team for Forest Schools, and for gardening and outdoor learning. It also builds on a small research project carried out in partnership with the University of East London last year, involving parents in “talking science” with their children. Our “natural explorers” are our EYPP funded children and we engage the children in all kinds of learning outside the classroom, both outdoor learning in the nursery and in trips out into the wider world. In this way we provide those rich educational experiences, provocations for talking and thinking that broaden children’s horizons, that address their “Understanding of the World” and their language. Bourdieu has influenced our views on the need to create cultural capital for our children, not simply by broadening their experiences but by creating that “habitus” which gives children the attitudes and dispositions of self-efficacy (Bourdieu, 1977). In the same way that Forest Schools are often assumed to be about “nature study” but are actually about developing dispositions of

confidence and resilience, we see cultural capital as not about taking children to art galleries but about providing children with the empowerment to take on the world in all its variety. A discussion about a dog pooing in the street has given us as much depth of scientific and environmental thinking as the coral exhibits in the London Aquarium.

Zoe’s story

Zoe is a New Zealander, generally a good sign in early years’ practitioners. She is passionate about the outdoor world, a Forest School enthusiast, and a listener to children, one who effortlessly engages them in sustained shared thinking. Using EYPP funding to release someone “grown” from within our own staff team, has enabled us to support children’s learning through a highly skilled staff member who also benefits from intimate knowledge of the children and established trusting relationships. Zoe is able to share her own cultural capital with our explorers, she listens and extends as Hafsa looks for the “bones” in the octopus we bought from the fish shop, and ponders with the children on the best branches to build a den within the Forest School sessions. She models both the awe and wonder of the natural world, and the characteristics of effective learning of exploration, having a go, resilience, choosing new ways to do things, and a sense of achievement when the den is finally built.

We have also used our EYPP funding to buy in specific expertise but again our approach has been slightly leftfield. We have bought in a gardener to share her knowledge and skill in growing things with children and parents. Example – children are busy potting up and

tending tomato seedlings. Again this project that started with our natural explorers has swiftly burgeoned out to incorporate our children’s centre too. Last but not least we have used our funding for those trips out and about that have broadened our children’s horizons.

One example of the fluid growth of our projects would be Amanda’s fascination with the world under the sea. Amanda is not one of our EYPP children but our everyday practice of building on children’s interests meant that her interest sparked a blaze of fascination across the nursery. Amanda wanted an octopus in the nursery, and although we couldn’t oblige with a live octopus we did go with her to the fish shop to buy one to examine. This caused a huge flurry of scientific observation and “hands-on” discovery as children puzzled over the eyes, the beak, the tentacles and looked for the “bones”. This experience generated an amazing array of language such as “wibbly”, “squidgy” and “slippery” as it did a high degree of sustained shared thinking. We decide on further trips; one to the local pet shop to buy fish we could keep in the classroom, and one to the London Aquarium. For this major outing children made their own packed lunches, took the bus across London, walked by the Thames and entered the strange subterranean world of the aquarium. Ironically the octopus was in quarantine, but the children were amazed by coming eye to eye with a ray, gently touching a starfish, puzzling over how jellyfish swim and counting the teeth on a shark.

Another example of developing cultural capital would be our plans for Chinese New

Year. We are based in an area with a lively Vietnamese community and so decided to take our natural explorers out for a meal. Many of our children, and even parents, had never been to a Vietnamese restaurant, or indeed to any restaurant. We won't easily forget the surprise when we ordered a table for 12 and 8 of the customers turned out to be 3- and 4-year-olds. The children loved using the picture menus to order, found unconventional ways to use chopsticks and battled with enthusiasm with the challenges of eating noodles. Other customers were impressed by how sensible and engaged our children were, and again we were blown away by the richness of the thinking and language that the trip fostered.

To return to Jack, as an example of our EYPP children. He is a lively articulate child who enjoys playing with his friends, some of which are close friends whom he sees out of school. He is often to be found in a group outside. He has a broad knowledge of the world and clearly has developed and used his language as part of his home life. He is easy to engage in opportunities for sustained shared thinking as he participates enthusiastically in whatever is going on but we noticed that even though he always looks busy and engaged he often needs time and space to practice his skills. He seemed to lack confidence in more creative experiences, ones that required him to think more deeply about what he was doing and what he wanted to achieve. This was noted when involved in transient art with leaves, branches and pebbles outside. He would stay for a short time, watch other children, try it out but then leave. This happened time and time again and for longer periods until he gradually developed confidence in his skills and what he wanted to produce. Now he often takes on the lead role in the group, directing other children and using his well-developed language skills to negotiate while extending his vocabulary through scaffolding by practitioners.

Jade's Story 4-years-old – EYPP

Jade has made huge progress during her time with us. She has had a traumatic and disrupted early life but is now living with dad and her wellbeing and resilience has increased considerably. She has now developed excellent language skills and a broad vocabulary. On entry data showed she was working at 22-36 months but in her second

term she had made rapid progress; the best fit is 40-60 months. For her, like Jack, it has been the experiences, trips and involvement in meaningful activities and experiences that have supported her progress. (and feeling safe and secure with dad). Before dad she was a poor attender – 77% and always late. She is now at 90% attendance and never late. Jade came to the aquarium trip and enjoyed looking at the photos in her special book afterwards. "I didn't touch the star fish 'cause I was a little bit scared."

Amanda's story 4-years-old non – EYPP

Amanda is not an EYPP child but she is a child, like all our children, with both needs and abilities. When she started she was very quiet, lacked confidence and showed low self-belief in her skills. She was identified as needing support for her speech and language development. This was provided by our SALT.

She also attended language groups led by our LSAs. Amanda has been so enthralled with life under the sea and particularly octopuses that her interest has become irresistibly infectious to others. She uses the iPad and non-fiction books to find out information on octopuses. She loves to go on trips and will always ask the practitioner if it's her turn. Her confidence has greatly improved especially as she is now a confident and clear communicator; she no longer requires speech and language therapy. She was so excited to go to the aquarium, so much so that her mum said she had woken up really early and got herself ready for school. She is curious, fascinated, interested, and creative, without her input our EYPP children would never have engaged with our aquatic explorations.

We have been using the Every Child a Talker monitoring tool alongside our usual recording systems of special books, observations and mapping to the *Development Matters* statements. Even in the early stages of EYPP funding we can see rapid advances both in children's language and in their understanding of the world. Our aquarium trip has led to major interest in non-fiction books and continues to create a buzz. While we first planned our use of the EYPP funding with areas of development in mind, perhaps the most startling advance has been in children's characteristics of effective learning. As a school we have been thinking particularly about children's creativity and critical thinking and our Forest School and transient art projects have really enhanced children's skills

in this respect. However we have also really noticed advances in children's persistence, their willingness to "have a go" and their curiosity.

Zoe has been really enthralled by the changes in the children: "The provision has expanded their ability to use abstract language and we have been able to scaffold the conversations about past events. Being able to do a lot more trips has really expanded the children's ideas for role play as they gain more understanding and knowledge of the world around them."

Our Forest School work and gardening continues as the spring advances. Our living eggs have hatched into chicks causing another explosion of excitement and absorption. Jack is out and about making sculptures from branches and leaves, and learning how to persist when he makes a fire. Those things that are most powerful in children's learning are often the hardest to measure but we are feeling confident that on every measure, tangible or intangible, our natural explorers are gaining. They are creative and critical thinkers, active learners who play and explore, are resilient and curious, and are teaching us now about the power of rich experiences to educate a child and change the world.

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Filming adult-child interactions to support reflective practice: the use of EYPP in Barnet Early Years Alliance (BEYA)

Anna Woodward and Pam Czerniewska

Starting points

The EYPP/BEYA (Early Years Pupil Premium/Barnet Early Years Alliance) project formed part of Early Education's Learning Together About Learning (LTAL) project. Both the national and local projects were predicated on the assumption that partnerships between preschools can improve the outcomes of children of low income families through sharing of expertise, and pooling of pupil premium funding to access resources and external professional support.

Background evidence

There is strong evidence from longitudinal studies carried out as part of The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE 1997-2004, subsequently extended to 2014) that preschool education has a continued positive effect on outcomes through a child's primary education (see Sylva et al, 2004 Final Report: Effective Pre-School Education: A Longitudinal Study funded by the DfES 1997 – 2004 and based on 12 technical reports).

While there are variations in the effects, children are advantaged by attendance at preschool, irrespective of factors such as cognitive ability and home background, in comparison with children not accessing preschool.

The EPPE studies highlight the importance of high quality preschool. Early years settings with more highly qualified staff promote children's intellectual progress more effectively than those with less qualified staff. This effect was found in areas of deprivation where children's outcomes at Key Stage 1 were higher if they attended settings with graduate-level staff (Mathers & Smee, 2014).

Currently, funding is not available to provide graduate staff in all preschool settings. However, initiatives are looking at ways for preschools to share expertise and thus raise the quality of staff training.

The EPPE research studies looked closely at factors that appeared to affect the children's outcomes and highlighted four preschool practices that needed further investigation:

- ▶ adult-child verbal interactions
- ▶ differentiation and formative assessment
- ▶ discipline and adult support in talking through conflicts
- ▶ parental partnership with settings and the home education environment.

(Sylva, et al, 2004)

The first two areas were chosen as the Phase 1 focus of the EYPP/BEYA project (see below). "Partnerships with parents" was identified as a focus for Phase 2 of the EYPP/BEYA project.

EYPP/BEYA Early Years' settings

12 settings were selected for the project. They were selected as those:

- ▶ showing positive interest to be involved.
- ▶ having identified EYPP children
- ▶ representing a range of early years' provision from community preschools to an attached mainstream nursery
- ▶ able to send a staff member to project meetings and the Early Education dissemination event.

Details of their characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Background information of children

Monitoring information (following a template supplied by the LTAL project) was provided for the EYPP children in each setting and also for non-EYPP children

Summary of EYPP child priorities

Each setting identified priorities for each EYPP child. Table 2 provides some examples.

Table 1: Details of EYPP/BEYA Project settings

Type of provision	Number of EYPP children	Number of qualified teachers/ equivalent in the nursery
PVI	2	1
PVI	2	0
PVI	1	0
PVI	1	0
PVI	8	1
Maintained School	12	1
Maintained School	4	1
Maintained School	6	1
Maintained School		1
Maintained Nursery	2	2
Maintained Nursery	2	1
Maintained Nursery	4	1

Initial meetings and target setting for EYPP/BEYA project

Following discussion with individual preschools, themes arose around:

- ▶ setting whole staff targets for children
- ▶ developing children’s interactions with adults and peers
- ▶ supporting family wellbeing
- ▶ developing staff knowledge through shared expertise and use of an external professional consultant.

From this it was agreed that the first phase of the project would focus on developing staff reflective practices focusing on adult-child interaction, and target setting based on the reflections. It was agreed that the project would involve staff filming themselves in interaction with EYPP children and using this for in-depth reflection on language and learning opportunities, and for formative assessment of the child’s development.

Phase 1: Developing Reflective Practices

Video/film has been recommended as an effective tool in education and in speech and language therapy for many years (eg Cummins & Hulme, 1997) though it remains in little use in early years settings. Only one EYPP project setting regularly used film for whole staff reflective practice, although some senior leaders had used it occasionally with individual staff. Some settings were filming short clips of children for discussion with parents around a child’s achievements (eg using Tapestry).

Brookhill Nursery School - part of Barnet Early Years Alliance (BEYA) - has been filming and reflecting on practice with all staff members for the past two years. Weekly whole staff meetings discuss one example of adult interaction with a child. Staff have

developed a protocol that ensures comments are positive and constructive. Following the discussion, targets are agreed for the child and strategies are developed for all staff to follow. Follow-up filmed sessions are discussed by all staff so that progress can be reviewed and new targets and support strategies developed. Staff have found this to be an effective monitoring and planning tool and a way of developing their interactions with children.

Table 2: Example of priorities identified for EYPP children

What is your data telling you?	What are you going to do differently or more of?	How will you know it has made a difference?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Some children require support with developing their ability to communicate effectively. ▶ Some children require support with speech and language development. ▶ Some children require support with PSE and developing relationships with peers and adults in the setting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Filming practitioner and child interactions to reflect upon their effectiveness and ways in which they can be improved. ▶ Staff to watch these as a whole team and reflect together – creating opportunities to upskill all staff and therefore create opportunities for CPD. ▶ Setting next steps for practitioners and children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Evidence of next steps being achieved can be found in subsequent films and recorded in the evaluation sheets.

Training Day 1

Seven settings attended the initial training which included:

- ▶ learning walk through a BEYA setting (Brookhill)
- ▶ introduction to EYPP/BEYA project
- ▶ overview of EYPP data
- ▶ identification of concerns around identification and funding
- ▶ introduction to Reflective Practices.

The training included a presentation by Pam Czerniewska (specialist Speech & Language Therapist) introducing a framework for looking at adult-child interaction. Six areas of focus were identified when discussing adult-child interaction:

- ▶ setting the stage for interaction – opportunities for language and learning
- ▶ responding to bids for interaction – opportunities for the child to take the lead
- ▶ adapting verbal and non-verbal communication to the child's developmental level
- ▶ modelling play and communication
- ▶ providing opportunities for the child to initiate
- ▶ giving specific praise and feedback about the child's achievements.

Implementing the project

The project co-ordinators met with project staff representatives from each setting, looked at films made, and discussed ways to use films to:

- ▶ develop individual and whole staff reflective practices
- ▶ develop new targets for EYPP children and support strategies for staff
- ▶ monitor progress of EYPP children.

Results of Phase 1

All EYPP/BEYA settings have begun filming EYPP children. Comments have been positive about the value of film to reflect on adult-child interaction. For example:

- ▶ Staff have used film to develop specific targets for EYPP children and support strategies:
 - ▶ In one setting, staff identified the lack of engagement between an EYPP child and his peers. Ways to support peer-interaction are being put in place.
 - ▶ In another setting, film revealed the extent of a child's hearing loss (otitis media: glue ear). Strategies have been introduced throughout the setting to ensure communication is supported by gestures and pictures, and that the child has increased opportunities for small group sessions.
- ▶ Staff in all settings have discussed ways to use film to involve parents:

- ▶ In one nursery, a parent watched a film extract of her child sharing a book, and then filmed herself sharing a book in her home language.
- ▶ Staff in attached nurseries have discussed ways of using film in other year groups:
 - ▶ Nurseries attached to mainstream schools have talked about extending the use of film into Reception classes.
 - ▶ One nursery has discussed the importance of gaining management support for using film as an evaluation tool.

Next steps

EYPP/BEYA Early Years settings are hoping to continue to develop reflective practices. The value of sharing expertise is recognised and staff have identified future directions including:

- ▶ whole staff sharing and evaluating practice
- ▶ visits to other settings to share practice
- ▶ monitoring EYPP children's progress
- ▶ developing links with parents.

Anna Woodward is EYPP/BEYA Project Lead and Pam Czerniewska is the Project Consultant.

BEYA - Barnet Early Years Alliance was formed from a federation of three Outstanding Barnet Nursery Schools; Hampden Way Nursery School, St Margaret's Nursery School and Brookhill Nursery School. The three sites provide 550 places for 2-4 year olds. Hampden Way Nursery School and Brookhill Nursery School are a designated teaching school. BEYA also offers a Children's Centre and 4Children Community hub, and training for Early Years Educator and Early Years Teacher qualifications.

www.beya.org.uk

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Learning about learning together: an action research project in Hertfordshire.

Liz Stratton

This project involved early years practitioners from two Hertfordshire localities. These practitioners engaged in action research focused on parents whose children were in receipt of Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP). Practitioners were given the opportunity to develop ideas to trial, which they believed would support parents in further engaging in their children's learning. Following a supported methodology for measuring and recording impact, practitioners were able to pinpoint when their planned intervention began to take effect for practitioners, parents and children.

Planned Interventions

- ▶ starting up a fortnightly, impromptu, informal Learning Journal catch-up with target EYPP parents, offering a drink and a snack
- ▶ introducing activity packs to go home with children
- ▶ producing home learning packs and individual targets on planning to send home, support to fill in 'wow' sheets
- ▶ communicating small steps of progress face to face and by email, sending a camera home to record child's interests
- ▶ offering three sessions in the home supporting development of speech and language and learning through play
- ▶ producing an information booklet for each room focusing on environment and learning opportunities, to be given to parents on entry and at each room transition - booklet written from point of view of child and practitioner.



- ▶ sending a skills/hobbies/interests audit to parents to find out whether they have talents they would like to share, whether they would like to volunteer at nursery, or volunteer some time at home to support activities
- ▶ inviting parents to story time, reading in English or mother tongue.
- ▶ inviting parents to join music and dance sessions, supporting involvement of parents with EAL skills
- ▶ engaging parents in learning through verbal handovers
- ▶ engaging parents in learning about golden rules, boundaries and routines using an open day as a starter event
- ▶ empowering each key person to have more contact with parents, building relationships.

Key Findings

As clear patterns began to emerge, practitioners worked together to establish common factors which enabled effective engagement between parents and practitioners. This in turn facilitated the effective engagement of parents in their children's learning. They received support from a facilitator and from the community of learning established through regular sessions over the time of the project. Practitioners were supported in their planning for interventions, in collecting evidence of observed behavioural change and in recording outcomes for children, parents and practitioners. Each setting produced a case study from their work.



Sensitivity and responsiveness to parents, as well as to children, was shown to be essential. Over the course of the project, practitioners were made more aware of their greeting behaviours. They acknowledged that their frustration when parents were late or forgot key items such as borrowed books led to negative body language. This was particularly evident when parents had left the premises but was often expressed to a colleague (eg by raised eyebrows) in front of the children.

This behaviour signalled to the child that their parent was not liked. Therefore, ensuring that interactions were consistently positive and respectful with parents, and crucially about parents in their absence, made a difference to the quality of the parent-practitioner relationship.

Allocating time to observe, notice and respond to parents was a key factor in building relationships. This was achieved in variety of ways. One setting made sure that parents that they were trying to engage received a consistent, daily, positive interaction from a key practitioner.

Through noticing parent need and responding with care and concern relationships were built quickly, especially when there was a crisis. For example, in one setting, a parent suddenly felt unwell at the end of a session and needed support from the setting until arrangements could be made to collect both the parent and their child.

Ensuring that strategies were persistently and consistently applied over a period of three to four weeks was a pivotal factor, resulting in observed changes in parent behaviour and engagement. This timescale allowed parents to note repeated and frequent evidence that practitioners cared about them and their child, building trust.

Parents also noted the availability of practitioners and developed confidence that practitioners would consistently spend time listening to them and their concerns. Practitioners simultaneously developed confidence in listening to parents, and supported parents in articulating positive changes noticed in their children's learning and behaviour for learning.

Relationships were significantly improved in a number of cases, and positive impact was recorded as early as three to four weeks into the project as a result of the frequency and consistency of the planned interventions.

Liz Stratton is an Independent Consultant and Trainer. More information about the project is available from lizstrattonconsulting@outlook.com or via the headteachers at Kingswood Early Years Centre www.kingswood.herts.sch.uk and Ludwick Nursery School www.ludwick.herts.sch.uk

Book review: *Interacting or Interfering: Improving Interactions in the Early Years* by Julie Fisher

Reviewed by Marion Dowling

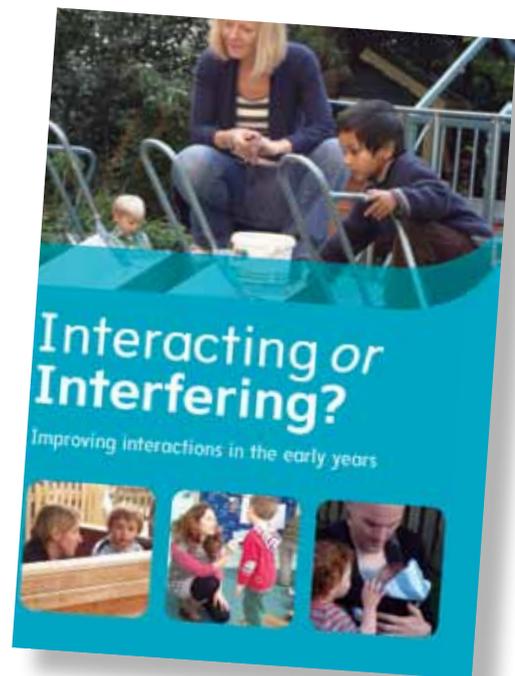
This important book tackles a fundamental question of how adults living and working with young children can ensure that each child gains something positive from interactions. The text is founded on a four-year Oxfordshire research project on adult child interactions.

Julie is a respected and experienced author. Once again she combines a scholarly approach (the book is peppered with useful and relevant quotes from research) with snippets of practice which immediately allow the reader to recognise how theory can be translated into daily contacts with children.

The structure of contents reflects the author's clear thinking. The first two chapters set the scene, emphasising the importance of improving the quality of interactions with children, and in particular the skill and sensitivity when working with babies and toddlers. The remaining chapters all follow a similar format, each focusing on an aspect from the research project and linking it to theory and practice.

The text is thorough and meticulously unpicks issues which commonly cause confusion among practitioners. For example understandings about what constitutes effective interactions are unravelled to form three clear criteria. In a later chapter entitled "Who leads the learning" the differences between adult-led, adult-initiated and child-led learning are examined together with the respective benefits for children's development and progress.

The varied and authentic transcripts derived from the research project film footage have been



carefully selected to illustrate findings across the age range from observations of babies to 6-year-olds. These are a particular strength. They illustrate important messages in each chapter and bring to life the actions, voices and views of children and adults working together.

Above all the prompts and points for reflection encourage practitioners to critically consider their role and function, noting where their work is affirmed and where there is scope for further development.

This book is both relevant, thought provoking and extremely useful for all those involved in early childhood – an excellent tool for professional development.

Marion Dowling is a Vice President and Associate of Early Education

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