

Cash flow

Collaborate to make the most of EYPP funding, explains *Di Chilvers*

The Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) funding, introduced in April last year, has led to some creative thinking. In the case of Rotherham, it has proved to be the catalyst for three private nurseries and three schools working collaboratively to share and develop practice. In the process, it has shown how pooling resources (money and ideas) can inspire best practice – and empower practitioners.

Following the belief that ‘No-one knows as much as all of us’ (Aly McNicoll 2008), the group worked as a ‘community of learners’ for six months, evolving into a forum through which to raise the quality of learning and teaching in settings. A rewarding side-effect was the increased confidence of the participants, who improved their leadership skills, wrote case studies and shared their practice at larger professional events.

To establish the most effective use of the EYPP – and so justify their spend – the group carried out research on how best to narrow the gap in children’s achievement through:

- the Talk for Reading self-evaluation – in particular, aspects of the Unique Child and Positive Relationships with families
- a local analysis of the developmental needs of children in the cluster group.

The findings enabled the group to make informed decisions and led to a focus on two key areas:

- Engaging families in children’s learning and development through a partnership approach and early home learning
- Development of communication, language and literacy.

ENGAGING FAMILIES

The partnership used the Every Child A Talker (ECAT) stepped approach to parental engagement as a model for reflecting on how to involve parents in ‘authentic, everyday, real-life’ experiences to support their children’s learning and development.

It is these everyday events and

routines of family life that provide the basis of an authentic partnership with parents – and are often overlooked as learning opportunities for children.

A welcoming smile, quick chats and displays of genuine interest in family affairs – how the party went, if grandma is feeling better – build relationships and trust.

Informally sharing observations and learning stories (with photographs) also breaks down barriers and provides an insight into children’s interests – the vital link between home and nursery.

The stepped approach helped group members to recognise that the key to partnership with parents was to take small steps together and focus on the children. Few parents had turned up for a ‘Reading and Early Phonics’ meeting. Now participants realised that sharing a learning story with parents would be a much more effective way to engage families as it sparked their interest and willingness to engage in a meaningful conversation.

CASE STUDIES

Listening to parents

The nursery team at Springwood Whizzkids wrote a case study called ‘Small Steps – Involving parents using the ECAT stepped approach’.

The team started by devising a whole-setting action plan to involve parents in a ‘Book Month’ but soon realised that they ‘had jumped straight to the top step of collaboration, totally missing out the steps of communication and involvement’.

In response, they turned to ‘the basics’. To enthuse parents, the nursery bought a tablet to set up email communication with their families and started to email regularly to parents one or two photographs of the children at play. Parents soon emailed back, and the conversations between nursery and home had begun.

To encourage involvement, the team started asking open-ended questions alongside the photographs – for example,

Right: children at Springwood Whizzkids enjoy a tyre swing.

Below right: Aaron in a photograph emailed to parents



‘Aaron really enjoyed this activity. What does he like to do at home?’ So, an informal and ‘authentic’ dialogue has evolved, increasing practitioners’ knowledge of the children and parents’ understanding of their child’s learning and development.

Playing, talking and learning together

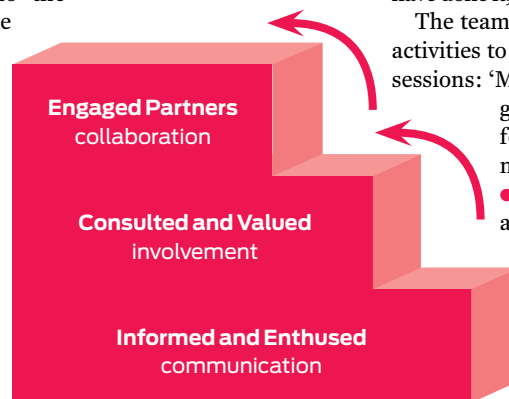
At East Dene Primary School, the Foundation Stage team looked at ways to use the EYPP funding to support children’s early reading and writing in partnership with their parents.

They recognised that children need first-hand engaging experiences that enable them to use all their senses, explore possibilities and make decisions through their play. Such experiences build children’s confidence and interests, leaving them eager to talk about their experiences, because ‘If I have done it, I can tell you about it’.

The team suggested engaging activities to parents through two sessions: ‘Making and exploring glitter dough’ and ‘Different ways of early mark-making’. These:

- were fun, welcoming and informative, making parents aware of the importance of their children’s language acquisition

Below: the ECAT stepped approach





- showed parents how to promote their children's communication and language through the activities
- started with a short explanation, then staff moved around the group modelling open-ended questioning and interaction with children
- were an opportunity to chat with parents about the benefits of the activities to their child's development and learning.

After each session, the children were given a gift pack and a book with a reading buddy gift so that they could continue the activities at home. The glitter pack included three play-dough recipes, salt, flour, food colouring, glitter and a storage jar in which to store the dough. The mark-making pack included a lightsabre, paint, a decorating paint brush, big chalks, shaving foam, a dry-wipe board and pen and examples of children's early mark-making.

When Billy became Batman!

At Granby House Nursery, the aim was to develop partnerships with families and support home learning in all areas, especially language, by tapping into children's interests.

One example of how this was achieved was in the nursery's support of Billy, whose home language is Punjabi and whose favourite activity was dressing up, especially as Batman. To support his interest, his key worker Kirsty:



- began to talk to Billy's mum about his interest in Batman and showed her some photographs
- provided copies of the photographs when his mother requested them
- laminated some photographs and shared them with Billy – he was very excited and talked a lot about them. He greeted his mum at the door, 'Momma, me look Batman'
- kept up a dialogue with Billy's mum who continued to talk to Kirsty every day and asked to see more photographs
- created a communication diary about Billy's week at nursery to share at home. This worked very well and encouraged the family to talk and read together
- showed Billy's mum his learning

MORE INFORMATION

- Talk for Reading Pack – see <http://watchmegrow.uk> for details
- The Rotherham LA EYPP Case Studies can be found at www.foundationyears.org.uk
- The partners in the Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Early Years and Childcare Service's EYPP project are: Aston Springwood Whizzkids, Pollywiggles at Treeton and Coleridge Primary School, East Dene Primary School, Bramley Sunnyside Infant School and Granby House Nursery – Parkgate

story and explained how well he is progressing, especially in his language development.

In her case study, Kirsty recorded how the support benefited Billy's development, her partnership with his family and her own professional development:

Building self-esteem 'Billy was so proud of the photograph and was excited to take it home to share with his family. He loves his communication diary with all the photographs of him. We look at it together before he takes it home and talk about what he has done.'

'As Billy's key worker, I believe my confidence has developed as much as Billy's. I am so proud of the way his language has progressed. Billy is now able to have a two-way conversation, compared with using simple sentences a few months ago.'

Supporting social development 'By breaking down the language barrier, social skills become easier to use. Being welcoming and sensitive through sharing Billy's interests together have led to him coming to nursery eager to talk and make friends.'

Developing communication skills 'Communication skills have improved because the language barrier has been broken down between the family and setting. Mum finds it easier and has grown in confidence, talking with us and sharing things Billy has done at home. We are using a shared language of the photographs of Billy to talk together, connecting home and nursery.'

Supporting language development 'Through Billy's interest in Batman, we have broken down the language barrier for both Billy and his mum. He always wants to talk about Batman to everyone at home and nursery and we have noticed how his use of English is increasing every day.'

Building relationships 'By listening to Billy's mum when she asked for a photograph, the relationship developed and so did her trust. We are building on this, taking small steps, and taking the lead from Billy and his mum.'

Developing confidence 'Billy's and his mum's confidence has grown due to the relationship that has developed between home life and the nursery.' ■

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