



Learning Together About Learning

Putting sound early years principles into practice

A DfE funded project to support the introduction of Early Years Pupil Premium

Newsletter issue 4

WELCOME

The focus of this newsletter will be on what can be learnt from recent research on inequalities in the early years and consolidating or developing parental engagement.

DISSEMINATION EVENTS: BOOK YOUR PLACE NOW

We are entering the last term of the project in its current form and are busy finalising the dissemination events. Each includes a keynote speaker, a knowledge café-style event to share the learning from our project networks, and a plenary session to summarise key findings. The focus of the keynote speakers will be on an element of practice that makes a difference to outcomes for children such as adult interactions or influencing the home learning environment. Each event will have a different keynote speaker and network participants, so you could book on more than one.

- 9 February 2016 – Newcastle – Anne O'Connor
- 23 February 2016 – Stockport - Kathy Ring
- 29 February 2016 – Plymouth – Liz Stratton
- 3 March 2016 – Cambridge – Stella Louis
- 8 March 2016 – Birmingham – Marion Dowling
- 17 March 2016 – London – Julie Revels

Events run from 11am-3pm and cost only £25 per person, so why not use some of your EYPP funding to bring some of your team along to listen to an inspirational speaker and hear about the journey others have made in relation to EYPP funding and closing the gap in their settings.

Booking online or download a flyer at:

www.early-education.org.uk/learning-together-about-learning-project-dissemination-events

Do share the news about these events as widely as you can. We look forward to seeing you there.

Points for consideration from recent research reports

1. *Tackling inequalities in the Early Years: Key messages from Growing Up in Scotland*

A recent report on the Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) project has useful lessons for using EYPP. The data was collected from two cohorts of families over a 10 year period, including a range of potential risk factors such as low birth weight, smoking, alcohol intake, health of both mother and child and poor diet. The older group were born in 2004/05 and so were about 11 at the time of publication and a second group who were born in 2010/11, who were about five. There were 10,000 children randomly chosen using child benefit records. The data was divided into the highest and lowest fifth earners and the differences between the data of the two cohorts were compared to see if outcomes for all children were improving.

Some interesting findings from the survey were that:

- scores for widening vocabulary improved between the first and second cohorts for children in the lowest quintile and for problem solving. Parents in the lowest quintile were also sharing books more with their babies than the previous cohort. This shows progress in improving outcomes over the period.
- There are differences in terms of the risk behaviours such as that mothers in the highest quintile for income were more likely to drink alcohol during pregnancy than the lowest quintile (34% compared to 11%). However, when babies were 10 months old 45% of mothers in lowest quintile reported drinking 5 units or more of alcohol compared to 20% in the highest quintile.

The study also highlighted some key factors that were seen to make a difference in overcoming inequalities:

- a rich home learning environment can improve cognitive development regardless of socio-economic background
- high quality early education and childcare can help reduce inequalities in cognitive development
- being born to an older mother can help children be more resilient to a range of negative outcomes
- improving the mental and physical health of mothers has a positive effect on health and cognitive development of their children
- supporting parenting skill can protect against adversity and disadvantage.

The study showed it is worthwhile considering the role of partnering health visitors in developing parenting skills as well as ensuring positive parenting strategies impact on grandparents who are involved in the caring of the child. This shows that it may be sensible to consider multigenerational parenting support and finding ways of ensuring all of the significant adults in a child's life have a consistent approach and in depth understanding of positive parenting skills.

The supportive home learning environment includes opportunities to share books, play games which focus on words as well as mathematical concepts, and to visit a range of places. The report shows:

that being read to every day at 10 months, being actively involved in daily home learning activities at 22 months and visiting a wide range of places at 22 months were all significantly related to vocabulary ability even after taking account of socio-economic backgrounds.

...Analysis highlighted the significance of parent-child attachment and home learning activities for all children but particularly so for children whose parents had lower educational qualifications.

This adds to the weight of evidence for settings who are currently developing or extending the range of experiences they have in their loan libraries and the ideas of how parents can use these at home.

Low parenting skills are defined as low levels of parent-child connection, low levels of control of the child's behaviour and high levels of parent-child conflict.

The study goes on to state that parents from the lower quintile are less likely to attend more formal support services as they feel stigmatised by them and feel less comfortable in these situations. They are also less likely to seek help from written sources. This group of parents report they find the group situations uncomfortable and prefer one-to-one support.

Settings can audit their strategies for sharing and disseminating information in the light of this study.

Growing Up in Scotland (2015) *Tackling inequalities in the early years: key messages from 10 years of the Growing Up in Scotland study.* Edinburgh: The Scottish Government.

2. Supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils: articulating success and good practice

This research paper published by the Department for Education in England looks at measures in place in successful schools. These have resulted in “building blocks for success” and are listed below:

1. Promote an ethos of attainment for all pupils, rather than stereotyping disadvantaged pupils as a group with less potential to succeed.
2. Have an individualised approach to addressing barriers to learning and emotional support, at an early stage, rather than providing access to generic support and focusing on pupils nearing their end-of-key-stage assessments.
3. Focus on high quality teaching first rather than on bolt-on strategies and activities outside school hours.
4. Focus on outcomes for individual pupils rather than on providing strategies.
5. Deploy the best staff to support disadvantaged pupils; develop skills and roles of teachers and TAs rather than using additional staff who do not know the pupils well.
6. Make decisions based on data and respond to evidence, using frequent, rather than one-off assessment and decision points.

7. Have clear, responsive leadership: setting ever higher aspirations and devolving responsibility for raising attainment to all staff, rather than accepting low aspirations and variable performance.

The report found that:

More successful schools have been focusing on disadvantaged pupils' performance for longer and appear to have developed more sophisticated responses over time. Leaders in more successful schools said it had taken a period of around three to five years to see the impact of changes they had introduced feed through to pupils' results.

...In order to make further progress, the research indicates that they need to support pupils' social and emotional needs, address individual pupils' learning needs; help all staff to use data effectively and improve engagement with families.

Overall, this research suggests that there is no “one size fits all” solution to closing the attainment gap. Instead, a number of measures are required, tailored to each school’s circumstances and stage on the improvement journey. These measures include setting a culture of high expectations for all pupils, understanding how schools can make a difference, selecting a range of evidence-based strategies tailored to meet the needs of individual schools and pupils, and implementing them well.

This is consistent with the wider literature on school leadership (Bloom et al, 2014; Fullan, 2014; Hattie, 2009; Seashore Louis et al, 2010; Leithwood and Seashore Lewis, 2012; Robinson et al, 2009) which highlights the importance of leadership focused on learning, including the following behaviours of headteachers and senior leaders:

- setting values and goals, and instilling a sense of urgency to achieve them
- creating a commonly owned plan for success and empowering staff to take collective leadership for achieving success
- focusing on high quality teaching and identifying the learning needs of individual pupils
- using resources effectively, including staff resources
- installing strong data systems, analysing results and making sure everyone acts on them
- being willing to challenge the status quo, take risks and explore innovations
- being outward looking, including building external networks and partnerships.

Macleod, S., Sharp, C., Bernardinelli, D., Skipp, A., & Higgins, S. (2015). Supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils: articulating success and good practice: Research report November 2015. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-the-attainment-of-disadvantaged-pupils

SHARING THE LEARNING WITH PARENTS

If parents have a good understanding why they are being encouraged to do something then they are more likely to take part. This quote from [Home learning matters a brief guide for practitioners](#) by Kim Roberts sums this up well:

I'm quite logical and need a good reason to do things. I couldn't see the point of doing the same thing over and over again with my baby. Then I joined a dads' group and the worker said,

'Well, actually, with repeating this activity, which is probably boring you to tears, you're actually reinforcing the connections in your baby's brain and then it grows . . . because it's like a road and you're reinforcing a road and it stays there, so obviously your child is able to do more things from that.' That's really good. So now I can see the point and know that what I'm doing is actually making a difference and is important.

A father

Chapters 3 and 4 of this publication have some really useful information on barriers parents and settings may be facing. There is also a useful diagram depicting the 'learning stairs' showing stages parents may go through as they move from support to independence.

Using websites that cater for specific groups can be a good way to share or gain information and to understand different perspectives, eg [Dad info](#) or the [fatherhood institute](#). It may give an insight into what engages some fathers.

[Working with Families where there is Domestic Violence, Parent Substance Misuse and/or Parent Mental Health Problems A Rapid Research Review](#) looks at supporting parents who are particularly vulnerable due to domestic violence, alcohol or drug misuse.

The National Parent Forum of Scotland have put together a [report](#) which has recommendations as well as actions that can be put in place. The recommendations and actions could be used as an audit for your practice.

[Working with parents to support children's learning](#) is an article from Nursery World. Whilst it was written in 2006, there are still important messages in it. There are some self-reflective questions which can be used as a basis for staff discussion. In addition there are some useful case studies.

This [video clip of Dr Karen Mapp On Parents As Agents Of Change](#) looks at a campaign of 3 a day – “talk, share and encourage”. It highlights that parental engagement doesn't always have to take place in the setting.

FINALLY

Please could you continue sharing your ideas about how you are spending your EYPP funding, any formats or systems you develop, ways you engage your parents in their child's learning and any partnerships you establish, so that these examples of effective early years practice can be celebrated and shared. Thank you. Share by contacting caroline@early-education.org.uk