

# Our learning journey together

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Published 19 September 2014

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 Early Years lesson study
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## Purpose

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

**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 (CPEE) project funding. **Rationale for the project:** 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 this project and doing this development work was to help promote language and learning with children who have English as additional language. I also joined the group to improve on my practice and learn new things.

### Who were the identified target learners?

The target learners in the Camden Early Years Learning Cluster project: Early years pupils in Children's Centres and Primary schools. White British children entitled to free school meals and black and minority ethnic groups.

My target learners:

Child A has special needs and has a statement. She is not always confident to speak out in small or large groups. We have been encouraging her to take the lead and play teacher in a small group, then when she is more confident encourage her to take the lead in a large group. Child B has English as additional language. She is not confident to talk in a group and is still learning English. She did a lot of pointing when she wanted something. Child C has English as additional language. He finds it hard to concentrate in a large group.

### What specific curriculum area did you intend to have impact on?

The main aim of the Camden Early Years Learning Cluster project was to improve outcomes both for children and adults by supporting early year's practitioners in the effective

implementation of the recently revised Early Years Foundation Stage Framework [EYFS]. Specific objectives were to:

- Increase practitioners' understanding of and confidence in using the newly introduced Characteristics of effective learning.
- Enhance early years practitioners' teaching skills particularly in promoting children's Creating and thinking critically [Having their own ideas, Making links, Choosing ways to do things]
- Develop a sustainable model of practitioner development and partnership which will support children's learning, particularly those in disadvantaged groups.

As a participant, I intended to focus more on the characteristics of learning to improve on my practice. I have been studying pedagogy more which I want to implement in my teaching within in my room. In our planning we wanted to focus more on the characteristics of learning, going into more depth about what we wanted the learning outcomes to be for the children and the adults.

### **How were you intending to improve pupil learning?**

In the Camden Early Years Learning Cluster, we intended to improve pupil learning through improved teaching approaches. During the project, partner schools and centres used the Lesson Study collaborative research approach to improve the quality of adult/child interactions in teaching contexts (a key focus in the improvement plans of all the settings involved). Research shows that high quality early years provision makes a difference to the attainment of these groups (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009) and that this is associated with high quality interactions between adults and children. The Lesson Study approach is appropriate since it facilitates participants' reflection-on-practice, collaboration and sharing of good practice, whilst allowing settings and practitioners to 'own' the development process.

The project focus was on **Creating and thinking critically** where children are encouraged have their own ideas, make links between different aspect of learning and choose ways to do things (EYFS, 2012) Although young children are inherently curious and proactive in play, the structural, social and pedagogical contexts are likely to influence the extent to which they can fulfil their potential as active learners. Adults have a significant role in making opportunities for children to engage in active learning. In this project, EY practitioners developed action plans which identified how children would be involved in planning and reflecting upon their activities, how they would be supported to make choices which are informed by their particular interests and, finally, how they would be supported to assess their own learning in their particular setting.

We wanted to improve learning by intervening and directing the children less, using more open ended questioning. We wanted the children to take the lead more, and make choices themselves by talking together.

## What were your success criteria?

**Success criteria – CEYLC Project** In collaboration with partner settings, the 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** For target children to be willing to have a go, keep trying, choose ways to do things, express their own ideas in a small and large groups.

## Methodology

### What did you do - what teaching approaches did you use?

For my first Lesson Study session (October) I planned a structured activity where the children sat at the table. I showed them picture cards as a time table so they knew what was coming first, next and last. They did a sharing game of passing the box around the table to each take an object out and explore what they have taken out the box. They each in turn had to show their friends what object they had and what you could do with it. One child had a ball with lights inside; they explained it's shiny and can roll. We finished the session with a book. In the post-lesson discussion we talked about how the children will be focused on the routine picture to help them understand and help with concentration but to put a surprise element to the activity. This was my first activity.

The second Lesson Study session (January) was retelling Rosie's Walk. I had read the book to the children each day. I photocopied the book and cut the pictures out, then asked the children to retell the story by choosing what they would like Rosie's walk to be. I had 4 children and 2 glue sticks; the idea was for the children to turn-take and talk about who's turn was next with the glue sticks. The children chose how they wanted the story to start and finish. I wanted the children to take the lead and for me not to ask them too many questions. The activity was repeated through the week with different groups of children and the outcome was different each time. I talked in the post-lesson discussion how I had wanted to sit back, not ask too many questions, let the children take the lead and work together to retell the story. I found this difficult as I knew how the story was structured and wanted to put my input in, but I managed to sit back and let the children enjoy the activity.

My third Lesson Study session (April) was a story activity about a bus going on a journey. I read the story then ask the children if they would like to build their own bus or transport from community blocks. The children took the lead and built a bus; they put chairs in the bus, and they found a circle shape for the steering wheel. The children first built a bus, then an

aeroplane. They were discussing where the bus or aeroplane was going. They took turns to be the driver. They talked about numbers and destinations of different bus routes that I never knew they had the knowledge of. I asked them questions from time to time without interrupting their play. I was a passenger on the bus and when it was time for me to leave I asked to get off, and told the children to carry on their journey. They carried on the activity for another 30 minutes after I left. In my pre-lesson study discussion I had said I wanted to set the activity up then let the children take the lead and for me not to ask too many questions. I wanted the activity to carry on once I had left, so this worked really well.

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

Lesson plans, Picture cards and props. Rosie's Walk by Pat Hutchins Books about the characteristics of learning. Books about pedagogy.

### **What CPD experiences, materials, research and expertise have you drawn on?**

**CEYLC:** The Institute of Education provided a day's initial knowledge creation workshop on research into effective teaching. Participants devised action plans for their settings identifying ways to improve adult: child interaction. The series of lesson study visits took place through the year, each including a post-lesson discussion. (For more on lesson study, visit [lessonstudy.co.uk](http://lessonstudy.co.uk) ) There were 7 other teachers and educators in our cluster group (from Eleanor Palmer PS, Agar CC, Kilburn Grange CC, and Canton PS) and the Head of Thomas Coram Centre, plus an EY expert from the Institute of Education.

We met at the setting of the lead practitioner for that lesson. Before the lesson the cluster group shared the lesson plan, discussing how to develop the focus Characteristics of Learning through our teaching approaches. The target children were discussed and our specific aims for them, and how they were expected to respond to the lesson. The lesson took place, with the cluster members observing a target child each. (The lesson study booklet provides a structure for this.) Post-lesson, the group met again to share feedback, discussing how each target child responded – what they were thinking, talking about and doing, and whether this met or exceeded expectations, and how the teaching approaches worked, next steps, etc.

Lesson study worked well for me in planning the activity, breaking each stage of the activity down and planning the needs of individual children. I often referred back to Peter Dudley Lesson Study booklet which encourages you to reflect on the planning and learning and to analyse the study session. In the pre-lesson meeting, our cluster would discuss about the children and what to look for in the activity. It is useful to have a discussion so the adults can say a little bit about the children and what you want to achieve in the activity – always remembering not to feel under pressure when being observed by other professionals, and to remember there is no right or wrong outcome to the activity. It's about what the children have learnt as well as the adults.

Camden had a monthly meeting with all the Camden staff on the CEYLC project to support

with the lesson study plans and any other support you needed on the project. We all discussed each other activities and looked at how we could change our practice if we needed to. We had training on the Characteristics of Learning and how to implement them in to our planning so all staff can be more familiar with them. These monthly meetings were very useful to support our professional development and help us embed it in our thinking and teaching.

## **Outcomes and Impact**

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

My target children have learnt much more English and become independent in their play. They are able to problem-solve more for themselves without the adults stepping to help most of the time. All of the children have become more confident and are able to express themselves in large groups as well as small groups. They enjoy taking the lead at activities, 'being the Teacher' as they call it. Child A is now confident to take the lead in a large group. Child B has lots more English words, can talk using sentences and likes to share what she has done at the weekend with her friends. Child C is now more confident to express himself in English and in a small group. He still benefits from small group work.

### **Evidence of impact on pupil learning**

My evidence of impact is through observing the target children's progress over the year.

### **What has been the impact on teaching?**

The biggest impact for me is to let the children think more for themselves rather than the adults always helping them. For example, when I set the play dough table I would have normally put the play dough in 4 heaps each with a rolling pin and some cutters. Now I put the play dough in the middle of the table with the rolling pins and cutters in a container so the children need to share out the play dough and choose what they would like to use with the play dough. When the children are at an activity I observe a lot more rather than keep asking questions. I think a lot more about asking open-ended questions without interrupting their play or disturbing what they are doing.

### **Evidence of impact on teaching**

A new planning sheet is being made for September to include the characteristics of learning and a little about pedagogy.

### **What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?**

We have discussed our lesson study and made packs with information in about how to think

about the characteristics of learning when planning. Next year two more staff are going on the new CPEE course to help support me and implement more changes to staff practice.

### **Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership**

Changes to planning and evaluation; further CPD for more staff.

### **What is the crucial thing that made the difference?**

I think going to visit schools has made a difference: working alongside teachers and other knowledgeable professionals. When I was being observed it was good to know that we were not being judged as with an Ofsted inspection. The facilitators made me feel at ease, explaining there is not a right or wrong way to do these lesson plans, it is about learning and changing my practice.

### **What would your next steps be?**

To practice what I have learnt and to change my learning behaviours within in the class room. To continue on next year's Camden EY Learning Cluster, which I have already signed up to.

## **Sharing Practice**

### **If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where should they start?**

Sign up for the course next year and visit centres who have already taken part. Make yourself familiar with the Lesson Study approach. Do lots of reading and research. I am happy to talk about my time on the project.

### **What would be the essential elements to include?**

Lesson study and lesson plans looking at the characteristics of learning in more depth. Pre and post-lesson discussions within the cluster group.