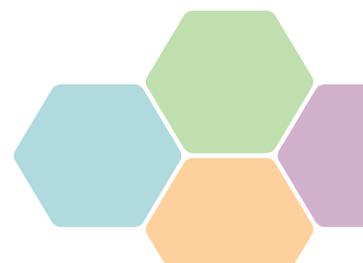


Manchester Buddying Case Study: Using quality improvement to narrow the gap



Background

The projects took place in the context of a recent restructuring of Children's Services in both education and the wider Early Years and Sure Start. From this were identified a number of new roles, the appointment of new staff and the possibilities of new ways of working that built upon already successful work but also maintained continuity and transparency. There was a continued focus on raising standards and expectations of quality in all settings and the projects aimed to develop these further, taking expectations to the next level through a rigorous Quality Assurance programme that used existing lead settings, schools and practitioners. The overall aim was to create highly skilled leaders and a confident workforce across all sectors and Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, with the capacity to make continued improvements and overcome existing barriers by working together to improve outcomes for children.

What was planned?

To build upon existing networks that brought practitioners from a variety of settings together to create opportunities for Early Years locality partnerships between schools, settings, health and social care. These partnerships aimed to strengthen leadership, share experiences and information with peers and parents and deliver effective joint training for leaders and build a collegiate atmosphere of respect and learning. The partnerships were led at district level by managers and headteachers who were already familiar with the needs of children and families in their localities. Five interrelated projects were planned. These were:

- **1.1 Visioning event** This event facilitated the formation of a shared vision to deliver the Early Years Outcomes Duty (EYOD) and initiate the Early Years Programme to take forward entitlement, quality assurance and access to high-quality Early Years provision.
- **1.2 Developing the role of the key person within Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) settings** Also called the Intimacy Island project; this developed an approach to implementing the role of the key person in settings to promote the emotional well-being of children.
- **2.1 Early Years Locality Partnerships** These locality partnerships led the coordination of Children's Service delivery around objectives including transition, quality improvement and setting evaluation, data sharing, inclusion of children with additional needs, vulnerable children who did not access any provision before entering school, learning and development.
- **2.2 Communication strategy for childminders** trialled and evaluated models of communication between childminders and linked providers.
- **3.1 EYFS networks** developed and extended previously formed informal buddying arrangements between schools and settings. Settings were encouraged and supported by children's centre teachers to develop use of resources to support particular areas of learning and development.
- **3.2 ReFocus networks** brought together Early Years practitioners to explore and share creative approaches to learning and practice that allowed greater freedom of expression for both children and adults and a better understanding of how to support children's creative development.
- **3.3 EYFS conference** Planned for spring 2010 as a conference experience for practitioners from all settings, including childminders, to reflect on current practice and use new ideas to develop further.
- **4. Building on the Parents as Partners in Early Learning** project as a model of good practice and to focus on positively impacting on the home-learning environment.
- **5. Developing the use of key data systems** by launching an electronic version of the EYFS Record of Achievement and establishing a shared system for collection and transferral of information/data across settings and key stages.

What was done and when and how?

The visioning event has led to improved structures being created, the creation of a transparent process for working with settings, and the implementation of a Quality Assurance (QA) process to support commissioning and a common framework for all to use. The Quality Framework increased membership to 50+ practitioners and leaders and is a representative cross-section of the Local Authority (LA). It has been externally validated and is now at completion stage.

The Intimacy Island project involved five schools, four private day nurseries and two linked local authority day-care centres. Practitioners shared plans, learned from each other's approaches, and explored new ways of creating support for children and families.

Early Years Partnerships have delivered on the City Council's vision for district working in which service delivery is aligned as close to the child as possible. A flow of information between all carers (childminders in particular) in the child's day ensures that an accurate picture of the child is created and their individual needs are met.

EYFS networks facilitated meetings of practitioners from all settings to share and develop practice within the Sure Start locality. Through the forum of termly meetings, different areas of learning and development have been explored and developed. Plans for the EYFS conference as a forum for developing shared thinking around current themes are being finalised and will be a fitting culmination of this work.

Dissemination of the Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PPEL) project has taken place and been developed into formal multi-agency buddying 'team around the child'.

A city-wide data group has been established and has met. The launch of the Record of Achievement (RoA) was supported by further training around the observation, assessment and planning cycle to support consistent judgements, both from Learning Support Officers and identified outsourced input.

Impact and verification

Three examples of outcomes are provided:

Early Years visioning

- The vision statement is now adopted across the city.
- It shapes the delivery of EY services and the implementation of the EYOD.
- External validation of self-evaluation framework (SIP role) 'Manchester Leading Quality – a quality assurance framework for all settings delivering EYFS' is completed. Writing process has involved key partners, LA services and exemplified multi-agency team working.

Early Years Locality Partnerships

- Developing Assessment for Learning protocols and better sharing of data.
- Language and communication development.
- Improved practice and working with parent/carers.
- Connecting children using emerging technologies.
- Evidence of smoother transitions for children and families.

Communication strategy for childminders

- 'From me to you' diaries have been successful.
- Communication boards and child's camera have received positive feedback from parent/carers and schools involved.
- Child's voice present at all stages.
- Greater reflexive practice taking place.

Lessons learned and next steps

- Ensure that project outcomes are threaded into new practice in Early Years settings.
- Future dissemination – training planned (Key Person, Parents as Partners in Early Learning), EYFS conference planned, reports shared with a wide audience.
- Networks - EYFS and Muse prioritised – slimming down of all other networks.
- EYL Partnerships – embedded – expectation that there will be planned ways to work together beyond the life of the project.
- 'From me to you' – city-wide strategy for communication across the child's day.
- Further development of and support for assessment tools.
- Quality Assessment Framework in place and used across all settings (including schools); structure that will support; SIP role trialled and working; transparent process in place; leaders not just managers – new relationship with settings.

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