

update



Leading Learning through
Action-led Research and Innovation

THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE LAUREL TRUST

ISSUE 8 • SUMMER 2022



Welcome to the Summer 2022 Update

It has been another year of continued challenges but Trustees are aware that our partner schools have shown amazing resilience, thoughtfulness, and imagination in working to keep the research projects on track. We are seeing high quality practice emerging around children's learning and well-being. We thank all teachers and leaders involved in the projects who have shown continued commitment and enjoyment through these difficult times. Currently we have 18 collaborations of schools ranging from the rural South-West to the far North-East of England. From our point of view we remain as realistic and pragmatic as it is possible to be in enabling the projects to continue successfully.

Bill Goddard, Chair of Trustees, The Laurel Trust

Note: this is a stock image

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Newham talks



The Newham Communication Project (NCP):

a programme of professional development aimed at supporting early communication for children aged between two and three in PVI

settings and nursery classes in schools across the London Borough of Newham.

By **Melissa Prendergast**, Assistant Director of the East London Research School based at Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre

Supported by Newham's Covid-recovery fund, this project has provided an important opportunity for Newham's maintained nursery schools to work with the wider early years sector in the borough, helping young children to bounce back from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

High-quality early years education and care is central to ensuring that every child gets the best possible start to life and learning, and that the impact of

the pandemic is mitigated over time. This project draws on the evidence base for improving children's early communication and also builds on the learning acquired in the course of the Manor Park Talks programme. The project is led by the East London Research School (ELRS) that is based at Sheringham Nursery School and together with the other maintained nursery schools in Newham, builds on the methodologies that have previously been piloted and proven to work in Newham.



We are delighted to congratulate **Dr Julian Grenier**, Headteacher of Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre in Newham and Director of the East London Research

School, who received a CBE for his services to early years education in the Queens Birthday Jubilee Honours List.

Sheringham

Nursery School and Children's Centre

Communication is fundamental to children's learning, thinking and emotional wellbeing. We know that communication and language skills are central to later educational achievement, employment and health (The Institute of Health Equity, 2020).

Early evidence suggests that the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdowns that so restricted young children's opportunities to play and socialise, has had a negative impact on children's communication and

development. This is especially true for disadvantaged children. If we want children to bounce back from the effects of the pandemic, a focus on early communication feels important.

This focus on early communication is reflected in changes to the EYFS Statutory Framework and Development Matters with increased attention given to early language and extending vocabulary (Sept 2021).

How has the NCP worked so far?

The project has passed its midway point and undergone an intermediate evaluation. Since the projects launch in September 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic has created significant challenges for settings, especially in terms of staff absence and stability. Despite these challenges, mentors, PVI managers and early years leaders have welcomed the programme with enthusiasm and worked hard to support the implementation of the project's strategies. The implementation of the project has been 'messy' as a result of the pandemic and the additional pressures placed on settings. However, this has been a valuable

learning experience for the ELRS team and shown that with some flexibility, timely adaptation and strong buy-in from participants, it is still possible to support change.

The programme is currently reaching almost 40 PVI settings and schools across Newham, including some nominated by the local authority as needing additional support. At the beginning of the project, participants attended a series of twilight training sessions that were planned in accordance with the EEF's Guidance Report 'Effective Professional Development' (2021). We thought carefully about the content of the training and the mechanisms we would employ to support participants in this behaviour change training. The twilights began with an introduction to the research evidence that indicates the most effective ways to support children's communication and language. The aim of this was to build motivation by demonstrating that the strategies used in the project are techniques based on robust research. We then delivered a session on how children typically learn and develop early communication, before

“We thought carefully about the content of the training and the mechanisms we would employ to support participants in this behaviour change training.”

introducing the strategies we wanted the practitioners to use in their settings. Ensuring there was a secure understanding of typical language development meant that practitioners would be able to understand the impact of their pedagogy and identify with improved accuracy children whose language might be of concern. Training included a strong focus on children learning English as an Additional Language and on children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The final section of the twilight training focused on ways that managers and early years leaders could support the practitioners in their own settings to develop their knowledge and skills, and implement the strategies of the project.



These twilight sessions were held online and were extremely well attended. Despite this training being remote, we have been delighted to see the growing confidence with which participants have shared their ideas, experiences, and asked questions. It is evident from these interactions that there has been an increased awareness of the impact of the strategies and the changes that needed to be made.

Alongside the twilight training programme, participants attend a hub meeting fortnightly. Six of Newham's maintained nursery schools has a nominated trained mentor who is working with a 'hub' of schools and PVI settings local to them. Settings are benefitting from the expert help of their mentor who provides responsive bespoke support focused on implementation. Social support from their peers and mentor is an important mechanism in embedding change. Feedback from the meetings has revealed some excellent examples of managers sharing their work and supporting each other to ensure that the NCP strategies are used by every practitioner, every day and with every child.

What are the strategies of the NCP?

The overarching aim of the project is to promote 'listening to children and having conversations with them'. Multiple turn conversations are our goal because these sustained interactions give children rich experiences, full of opportunities to develop their communication and express their thoughts and feelings. Conversations are powerful for language learning because they allow children to hear new language, rehearse skills in a social context and receive responsive and adaptive feedback from adults.

There are four strategies in the project that promote listening to children and having conversations. The first strategy is **ShREC** which stands for **Share** attention, **Respond**, **Expand** and have a **Conversation**.

1. Share attention means making time to really tune into the child, join their play and crucially pay attention to the child's focus of attention. Getting down to the child's level is important. This step shows the child that you want to spend time with them and they are valuable.

2. Respond refers to the action you take after giving all your attention and in response to the child's non-verbal and verbal communication. This step needs to be responsive and adaptive to the child's developmental needs. Acknowledging their communication in a warm and responsive way with eye contact, smiles and nods is important. You could also make a brief comment about what they can see, hear or feel.

3. Expand also needs to be responsive and adaptive, pitched for that individual child, just above their level of development, scaffolding their learning. Labelling objects might be an appropriate expansion for some children who are in the early stages of language development. For others it might be adding a word or two, recasting what they have said and turning it into a sentence. The expand could also be about making links, offering suggestions or giving explanations.

4. Conversation is our ultimate aim and by this we mean a serve and return interaction with multiple turns.

Fliss James (Evidence Lead in Education at ELRS and teacher at Sheringham Nursery School) has developed 'The ShREC Approach' with the Education Endowment Foundation as part of her role as Content Specialist for Early Years.



“Six of Newham's maintained nursery schools has a nominated trained mentor...”

She has written a blog and created a graphical representation of the approach.

There are three other strategies that we see as weaving through ShREC.

'Comment more, question less' is the first strategy we use to encourage conversations. It is important we don't overload children with too many questions. Sometimes a question is useful, as it can cue a turn but too many questions may shut a conversation down. The most effective questions are open questions. Simply saying "I wonder..." can promote children to think and respond. The comment could be anything from narrating the child's play, recapping what they have said, responding with an enthusiastic "wow... look at that..." to more sophisticated comments you find in sustained shared thinking.

10 second rule is the second strategy. This is about giving children time to process what the adult has said and then time to respond. Ten seconds can feel like a long time but we need children to feel that we aren't in a rush and we are dedicating our time and attention to them.

The final strategy is **shared book reading** where books are used as a vehicle for rich conversations. It is a dialogic approach where we introduce vocabulary to children and have back and forth interactions. Here we are moving away from the idea that books need to be read from cover to cover to a silent audience.

HIGH QUALITY INTERACTIONS IN THE EARLY YEARS

The 'ShREC' approach

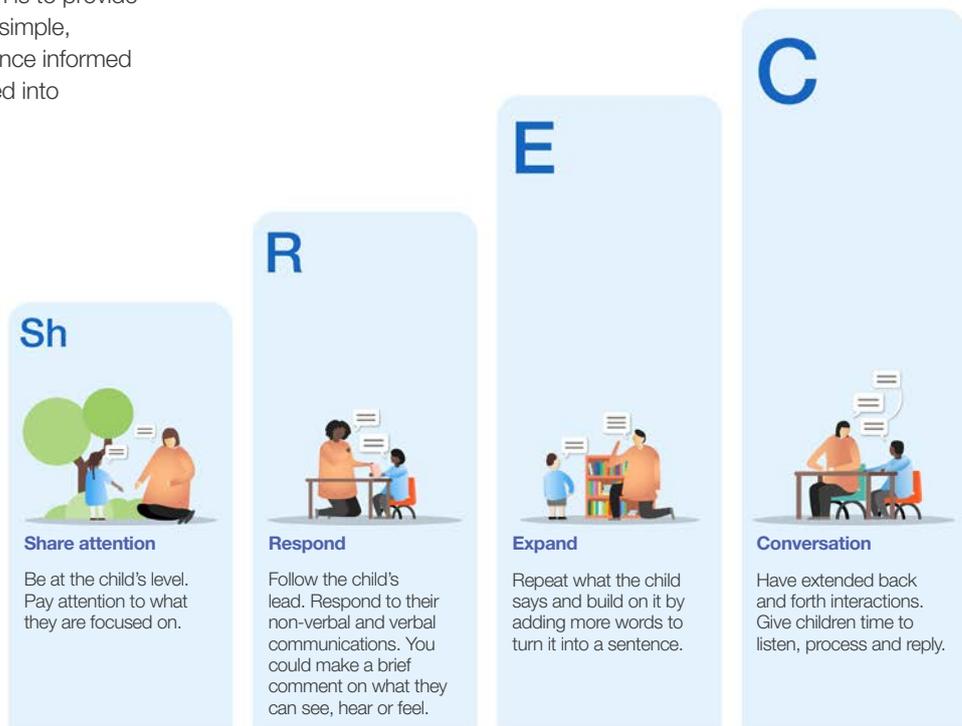
The aim of the ShREC approach is to provide early years professionals with a simple, memorable set of specific evidence informed strategies that can be embedded into everyday practice.

“When done well, high quality interactions often look effortless but they are not easy to do well.”

EEF Guidance Report, Preparing for Literacy



This resource supports the 'Preparing for Literacy' guidance report.



WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

We have used the midpoint evaluation process to review the project, intensify support where needed and make intelligent adaptations. We learnt a huge amount from the Manor Park Talk pilot and that learning continues in this NCP iteration. It is important to be reflective and responsive while a programme is running, not just once it is over.

Mentors will continue to support settings in hub meetings up until the end of the project in July. All the projects' participants will then gather for a celebration event where managers and leads will share their experiences of the programme. We see this as a knowledge exchange event where we can all learn from each other, co-constructing the project so it will be embedded into settings

beyond the end date. The event also provides us with a final opportunity to gather feedback which we can then pull together in our end of project evaluation. This is will then shape possible future iterations of the project. ●

If you would like to know more about the Newham Communication Project, contact Melissa Prendergast, Assistant Director of the East London Research School based at Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre: melissa.prendergast@sheringham-nur.newham.sch.uk

Changing times



Measuring the impact of change: a practical approach



Dame Pat Collarbone and Simon Edkins ran a highly regarded consultancy based on leadership and organisational change. Together they have worked nationally and internationally with schools and small organisations through to system-wide change. Their article offers some strategic and practical considerations around change and provides a basis for thought and discussion.

From our regular contact with schools we know that Covid has been particularly disruptive for the education sector and the effects of the virus may well continue to be felt in the years to come. Education will continue to change in the short and longer term. School communities have adapted quickly in their practice and innovative approaches to partnership working are emerging.

Key themes schools and the education system face include: curriculum development, attendance, mental health and well-being, professional development, leadership retention, adaptive environments and innovative technology to support learning.

Change on this scale cannot be left to chance. The question is: **'How do you bring about system-wide change, school-by-school, so that the results are context-specific and designed locally?'**

Schools cannot be held solely responsible and therefore accountable - for this would be

counterproductive. A broad number of partners and stakeholders need to become involved to tackle current and future challenges. The responsibility of the school is to work with others to create absolute clarity and a strategy in pursuit of jointly articulated goals. Our research schools are already working to tackle post-covid challenges with agreed priorities and goals across their collaborations. For alliances to work, there needs to be agreement between partners on what they wish to achieve for a particular group and how they will know that they have delivered it.

Such partnerships need to interrogate the challenge and to focus on:

outcomes rather than outputs;

aligning vision and values;

strategies that are data-driven;

dialogue and engagement;

organisational adaptability.

The answer lies not in providing solutions but in building capacity and capability at a local level, so schools can develop the networks that meet their needs.

Measuring what counts rather than counting what can be measured

For change to be successful and sustainable there has to be a compelling reason to change, a clear vision of where you want to be, a coherent plan for getting there ... and a way of measuring and monitoring changes on an ongoing basis. Without all of this in place new collaborative ways of working are unlikely to be successful.

For over 30 years a key driver in the education sector has been the need to become more accountable and responsive to students, parents and employers and has seen schools having to deal with an increasingly complex measurement environment.

Many now think that centrally imposed performance measures even distract people and resources from the very activities they are supposed to encourage.

It is crucial to recognize this dichotomy and develop simple yet robust ways to measure the impact of changes, at both system and local levels and so provide meaningful information at the right time to the right people.

Identifying the primary objective of



any change at the outset and then making sure that everything done subsequently has a direct or indirect impact on the desired outcome is vital. Progress along the way needs to be carefully monitored.

Project logic: meeting your objectives

Schools and their partners must identify and deliver project objectives as measured by Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that meet their strategic objectives.

This focuses attention on describing and documenting the logic of their organisation's projects as illustrated in the table below. This is scrutinised by the Leadership in order to reveal assumptions, so that differences within and around the project team can be aired, consensus achieved and the internal logic of the project enhanced.

The flexibility of this process makes it easy to incorporate any relevant and useful measures of performance.

Identification and delivery of project objectives – the process

	OBJECTIVE	What is it we are trying to achieve?
	BENEFITS	Why it is important – what will be different and for whom?
	DELIVERABLES	What will we get?
	ACTIVITIES	How will it be achieved?
	KPIs Key Performance Indicators	How will we measure success?
	CSFs Critical Success Factors	What is needed to succeed?

Impact not inputs

Measuring whether services are delivering the outcomes that will really make a difference to people and performance is sometimes called results-based (or outcomes-based) accountability. It recognises that not all performance measures are of equal importance. The two types that are the most important are:

1. KPIs that show whether things are done well.

These 'quality of effort standards' are used to manage the work of a change programme. This can be described as the managerial focus, for example: efficiency, admin overhead, unit cost, staffing ratios etc.

2. KPIs that tell whether students/staff are better off as a consequence of the change

These 'quality of effect standards' gauge the effect of a change on

students' and teachers' lives and are almost always emergent, e.g. employment placement and retention rates, outcomes for students and cultural change. This can be described as the leadership focus.

Effective change

Schools and their partners need to ask the following searching questions:

Who are we doing this for?

What result do we want for them?

What will it look like?

What data have we got?

What do we know works?

How will we know whether we did it well?

This provides a pragmatic approach to accountability, directly linked to outcomes. It is this rigorous approach to continuous improvement, self-regulation and measurement that ensures a 'quality culture' and provides an opportunity to reimagine learning and modernise our education system to equip students with the skills they need to be productive, life-long learners.

Now is the time to move beyond isolated examples of good practice to systemic reform. ●





WHAT'S COOKING?

Some of our Trustees are very keen cooks and a cookery corner with two delicious recipes seemed apt for our final edition this school year. I have chosen a mouth-watering muffin recipe from the kitchen of Bill, our Chair, and a favourite family recipe from Davinder, one of our Trustees. To date I have failed to persuade a Trustee to apply for Master Chef or Bake Off but watch this space!

Midge's Muffins

7½ oz plain flour

6 oz sugar

3 oz walnuts coarsely chopped

1½ tsps. bicarb

¼ tsp salt

1 large egg

2-3 very ripe bananas to yield 10 oz

3 tbsps buttermilk/natural yoghurt

4 fl oz walnut oil



Heat oven to 190 degrees. Grease 10 muffin cups with butter or use paper cases to line tray. Fill unused cup 1/3 with water to prevent warping if metal tray is used.

Whisk oil, egg, mashed overripe bananas and buttermilk until blended. Add dry ingredients and beat well until evenly combined and creamy. Spoon batter into each muffin cup filling it level with rim.

Bake until golden, dry and springy. Cool for 5 minutes and serve at room temperature or warm with butter (20-25 minutes in oven).

Aloo palak (Spinach and potato)

1 large packet Palak (spinach) chopped

Lappak (scooped handful) methaa

2 large wooden spoons of sunflower oil

Potato, 1 large onion, 3 cloves garlic

Ginger (equal to amount of garlic)

Small tin of tinned tomatoes

¼ tbl salt, ¼ tbl green chilli

¼ tbl garam masala, ½ tbl turmeric

A handful of coriander

Method

Cooking time: allow up to 45 mins.

- 1 Fry diced onion in sunflower oil until golden brown.
- 2 Add garlic and ginger and fry.
- 3 Add tomatoes and cook until water burned off.
- 4 Add salt, chilli, masala and turmeric. Cook until a good earthy colour.
- 5 Add palak.
- 6 Add a lappak (scooped handful) of methaa.
- 7 Add large diced potato (quantity depends on the level of palak being cooked).
- 8 Cook until palak and potato look well done.
- 9 Add coriander.
- 10 Served best with roti. Or naan. Makes a good sandwich too.

Note: all vegetable dishes can be cooked in this manner (excluding the methaa)