



Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

The Early Years Team:
Facilitating and Funding
Peer to Peer Support in
Gloucestershire.

January 2017



Contents	Page
Rationale and Background	3
Peer support	4
The National Context	4
Ofsted	4
The Local Authority Context	5
Early Years Lead Practitioners	6
The Excell Directory	9
Inspiring Creative Play	10
The Bristol Standard	12
Storymaking Network	14
Early Years Professionals Network	15
Other peer to peer support groups	15
Summary	16

Rationale and background

Provision for professional development for the Early Years workforce was recognised statutorily in the late 1990s, and provided for by Local Authorities (LAs) in England, following the introduction of significant government financial support for the Early Years sector.

More recently the change of government in 2010 brought a change of emphasis and a reduction of many statutory requirements. As a response to financial restraints all LAs have taken measures to re-shape professional teams that provided early years quality support.

Though many LAs and city boroughs utilised teachers and practitioners from their maintained Nurseries and nursery classes as beacons of good practice to play a leading role in developing the EY workforce, Gloucestershire LA had (and has) no maintained Early Years provision.

During this time Gloucestershire LA approached Early Years professional support with rigour and imagination, using highly experienced Early Years practitioners and qualified Reception and Nursery teachers as System Leaders to provide training and regular 'in-house' advice for Early Years settings and schools. Their role included supporting the understanding of pedagogical improvement and modelling positive attitudes towards professional reflection and self evaluation throughout the EY sector to effect a cultural and professional change.

It is important to note that, at this time (late 1990s – mid 2000s), EY practitioners were less accustomed to the concept of continuous professional development and there were fewer opportunities for them to improve their own education, achieve new qualifications or to access other training opportunities. The opportunities afforded to Early Years practitioners in Gloucestershire put Gloucestershire at the vanguard of this type of work.

Present day

Today, the statutory requirement for qualifications in the EY sector is more rigorous and many EY practitioners have studied honours degrees and some are embarking upon a Masters degree.

Continuous professional development is now an expectation; local authority early years duties are now considerably diminished.

Despite large reductions in the numbers of LA professionals delivering CPD and offering support and challenge for EY settings, demand for training, advice and support has grown as a result of practitioners' professional self-reflection and national expectations. Gloucestershire has continued to develop innovative ways of

expanding Peer to peer support in order to utilise the professional skills and expertise of its EY workforce, in particular from practitioners in settings that are judged as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.

Peer to Peer support

Peer to peer support occurs when people provide knowledge, experience, emotional, social or practical help to each other. It commonly refers to an initiative consisting of trained supporters (although it can be provided by peers without training), and can take a number of forms such as peer mentoring, listening, or counselling. Peer support is also used to refer to initiatives where colleagues, members of self-help organizations and others meet, in person or online, as equals to give each other support on a reciprocal basis.

Peer to peer support is distinct from other forms of social support in that the source of support is a peer, a person who is similar in fundamental ways to the recipient of the support; their relationship is one of equality. A peer is in a position to offer support by virtue of relevant experience: he or she has "been there, done that" and can relate to others who are now in a similar situation.

The National Context

From a national perspective peer to peer support has never been more necessary. Standards required from settings rise, and LA support focuses upon those settings that have a Requires Improvement or an Inadequate Ofsted outcome. Government focus is firmly placed upon providing parents with affordable childcare (30 hours) and prioritising the progress of children at risk of delay. (EYPP / Ofsted survey: 'Unknown Children- Destined for Disadvantage').

The introduction of 2yr olds into school is an important initiative supported by Ofsted (HMI Ofsted Annual report 2015) to enable vulnerable families to access EY education and care for their children.

Ofsted

Ofsted Inspectors are required to establish whether a setting is either providing support for other settings or receiving it.

If so, inspectors will include this information, giving the names of the setting(s), in the 'setting details' section of the report. This will include any such activity over the previous 12 months. Where a setting has received support from the leader of another setting, it will be important to establish the extent and the impact of this, to

determine whether that leader should be nominated for recognition by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector as an exceptional leader.

Ofsted inspectors are asked to nominate leaders who have been instrumental in raising standards and improving children's prospects, especially in previously under-performing schools and settings. They look for 'leaders who take risks, put themselves out there and spread good practice beyond their own setting or school. They are reformers who have turned their ambitions for success into reality, and raised standards for children not only in their own schools (and settings), but at others nearby.'

LA context

Within Gloucestershire LA the Early Years Team has responded to the challenge of facilitating high quality continuous professional development through peer support by promoting and supporting, over many years, the development of many initiatives designed to enable EY settings and practitioners to drive their own CPD.

Early Years Advisers promote, train and support practitioners to develop their ambitions, knowledge and skills including the development of an understanding of Leadership in Early Years and Practice.

Leadership of learning is holistic and encompassing. It nurtures, is caring and influencing, using a democratic, diffused and collaborative leadership style, inclusive of the whole community of children, parents and practitioners.

Practices identified and encouraged are;

- o Leading whole setting pedagogy
- o Leading pedagogy for children
- o Leading knowledge
- o Leading continuous professional learning
- o Leading knowledge for parents

This document seeks to illustrate and celebrate the innovative ways in which The Early Years Team is facilitating and funding Peer to Peer support and Systems Leadership in Gloucestershire.

Early Years Lead Practitioners (EYLPs)

Background

Gloucestershire's strategy for Early Years Lead Practitioners is informed by research conducted locally by Dr Elaine Hallet and Dr Guy Roberts-Holmes, Institute of Education: University of London in October 2010. This research looked at the contribution of the Early Years Professional Status role to quality improvement strategies in Gloucestershire. The research generated a model of early years leadership of learning focussing on:

- Leading change
- Leading reflection

Initially the Early Years Lead Practitioner (EYLP) role in Gloucestershire was tested through pilot activity in the summer of 2011.

An Early Years Lead Practitioner is an excellent practitioner who has achieved the very highest standards of early years practice as recognised through a rigorous assessment process. They are paid to share their skills and expertise with other practitioners.

All Early Years Lead Practitioners have a passion for early years best practice, which they already share with colleagues and families in their daily work. They are champions of effective early years pedagogy and outstanding practice as expressed through the EYFS, and Ofsted's criteria for good and outstanding.

The distinctive function of the Early Years Lead Practitioner is to provide pedagogic leadership within their own and in other settings, driving forward improvements and raising standards in teaching and learning through leading: whole setting pedagogy, pedagogy for children, knowledge, continuous professional learning, knowledge for parents, change and reflection.

Early Years Lead Practitioners have a wide range of skills for leadership of learning and all:

- demonstrate leading practice in Good or Outstanding Early Years Foundation Stage pre-school or childminder settings
- demonstrate a positive working relationship with all colleagues
- are enthusiastic about, and committed to, developing their own professional attributes, knowledge, skills and understanding
- are up to date with current research and are well informed about recent developments in early years
- demonstrate that they lead CPD and provide support for staff.

Recruitment, training and support

Expressions of interest in becoming an Early Years Lead Practitioner are invited from practitioners in good or outstanding settings, through the GCC Early Years website.

Lead Practitioners are provided with regular bespoke training annually and they access high quality training and conferences locally and nationally.

EYLPs receive:

- support to provide records of activity undertaken
- funding to come out of ratio while working as an EYLP
- access to a planned programme of CPD from the Early Years Team, for example in coaching skills, outdoor learning, Communication Friendly Spaces.

Current context

- There are 8 Daycare EYLPs from 7 settings.
Two EYLPs share the role.
- And 7 Childminding practitioners from 6 settings.
Two EYLPs share the role.

Each Lead Practitioner carries out a total of 10 'support sessions' per year. These visits are brokered by the Early Years Locality Advisers. Each Lead Practitioner works across the whole of the county according to need.

There is a maximum potential of 80 daycare and 60 childminder support opportunities. These support sessions are generally used as visits to individual settings (generally each setting receives two support visits, at the Adviser's discretion).

Each EYLP works with practitioners collaboratively, providing appropriate challenge and support, to secure high quality early learning and care. They contribute to the continuing professional development of practitioners ensuring that priorities identified by the Locality Adviser are addressed and support is tailored to meet the needs of individuals/groups.

Early Years Lead Practitioners provide different types of support for settings, including:

- Demonstrating best practice in their own setting, and welcoming visitors from other settings, as arranged through the Early Years Team
- Follow-on coaching and mentoring support for individual practitioners who have visited their setting to observe best practice
- Leading/facilitating or supporting a CPD event for practitioners

- Specific expertise, for example in early language development, Storymaking or the enabling environment.

In addition they:

- Work in partnership with the Locality Advisers to run or support group meetings.
- Advise on Local Authority working parties and assist to develop plans for the future in an LA context
- Are represented on the Early Years, and Schools' Forums.

Successes/ Impact and challenges

- Recent data indicates that settings supported by an EYLP continue to maintain or to improve upon their Ofsted inspection outcome.
- Feedback from settings highlights an overwhelmingly positive impact of EYLP support, including confidence gained by leaders and managers, the development and embedding of reflective practice in settings and a commitment to continuous professional development. Comments from evaluation forms include:

'The visit will be of great benefit to my setting and the children we care for. Some fantastic ideas taken from this visit.'

'Very helpful visit, given us lots of things to think about and look forward to meeting EYLP again. Already been discussing with other joint manager ideas to move forward that we discussed at visit.'

- Lead practitioners have embedded a programme of moderation ensuring accuracy of judgements against the ages/stages of EYFS. This process is modelled by EYLPs in their practice and in networking with settings, and is used to inform and encourage other settings about the process.
- EYLPs have enthusiastically developed their role by beginning to facilitate meetings for groups of practitioners, with the support of EYLAs.
- EYLPs have maintained Outstanding Ofsted outcomes in their settings, indicating that the role of EYLP supports their own practice as well as the practice of supported settings.
- An EYLP who has specific expertise in training and supporting settings in developing Communication and Language has joined the EYLP programme and visits will begin in 2017.

Challenges facing the EYLP programme focus mainly upon capacity and uncertainties around LA budget constraints.

The EXCELL Directory

A recent innovation in Peer to peer support in Gloucestershire is the EXCELL Directory (Excellence in Childcare, Education, Leadership and Learning). Launched in September 2016, it aims to link practitioners across Gloucestershire to share knowledge and develop skills.

The Gloucestershire EXCELL Directory builds on existing peer to peer support initiatives within the county. It enables Outstanding settings to link with other settings in order to share their expertise.

The directory is a showcase of Outstanding early years practitioners who have elected to promote themselves in order to offer support to other settings. This offer of support is without financial recompense. It is organised entirely by the setting seeking support and the setting offering support.

An Outstanding setting that is a member of the EXCELL Directory:

- demonstrates deep knowledge and understanding of early years pedagogy with reference to recent and relevant research
- has a positive working relationship with all colleagues and other professionals
- has a wide range of skills for leadership of learning
- has a commitment to continuing professional development for staff
- has a desire to work collaboratively with others, providing appropriate support, to secure high quality early learning and care.

EXCELL members provide different types of support for settings, which might include:

- demonstrating best practice in their own setting, and welcoming visitors from other settings
- offering follow-on support for individual practitioners who have visited their setting to observe best practice
- leading/facilitating a CPD event for practitioners
- sharing specific expertise, for example in early language development, Story Making or the enabling environment.

All settings regardless of Ofsted Grade will be able to access support from settings in the EXCELL Directory. It will be the responsibility of the settings requiring support to contact the setting offering support. Support will not be overseen or Quality Assured by the Local Authority. Ofsted, as the sole arbiter of Quality, has graded the settings in the directory as Outstanding. Settings may wish to consider when the Ofsted Grade was achieved.

Number of settings participating in the Excell Directory

There are currently 13 members of the Excell Directory, made up of:

Daycare 12 settings

Childminders 1 setting

Inspiring Creative Play

The inspiring creative play network and its role in peer to peer learning.

Background

The inspiring creative play network began in 2007.as a meeting for a community of people whose ways of thinking and working were based around the ethos of Reggio Emilia in Italy.

The Inspiring Creative Play network has developed from those early meetings and has a similar ethos.

Current context

The Network meetings are held once per term with at least 60 attendees with one opportunity in the summer term to join a group of around 80 people.

The network meetings are meticulously planned by a steering group of Early Years professionals whose ethos revolves around their own and children's creativity, and the many ways in which creativity manifests itself.

The steering group is made up of a mixture of people from all backgrounds, childminders, schools, nurseries, pack away playgroups and local authority early years advisers. The meetings are an opportunity to share thinking, experiences and ideas and plan for the coming meeting.

Everyone attending the steering group meeting is generous with their time, resources and ideas for forthcoming meetings.

Range of Activities and peer support

The steering group members plan opportunities for practitioners to experience the freedom of a creative environment without expectation of product. Planning focusses on creative opportunities that might not ordinarily be experienced in settings to show practitioners the benefits of these to learning and development. The intention is that practitioners will take away their ideas, learning and experiences and share them with practitioners, children and parents in their settings.

This peer to peer learning opportunity is valued by all who attend, many of whom attend on a regular basis bringing their whole setting staff. For many this is one of the few opportunities that they have to learn together as a whole staff team. During and after the meeting, ideas and creativity flow freely and this creative sharing amongst peers results in the development of creative learning environments for children. The creative ideas often influence others beyond the setting including parents.

Many settings arrange for parents to experience what the staff and children have experienced in order to give parents an understanding of their own and their children's creativity.

Evaluation

Feed back from the evenings has been extremely positive with a request for more of the same.

On two occasions collections of ideas and photographs have been published and given to all Gloucestershire settings as inspirational tools for creativity in their settings.

Successes and thoughts for the future

The Inspiring Creative Play network has facilitated numerous opportunities at many levels for peer to peer reflection and planning.

Ideally, moving forward, this network would be developed to become more locality based, in smaller groups and possibly with a lead practitioner steering it.

The Bristol Standard

Background

The Bristol Standard is a self-evaluation framework which enables and empowers Early Years settings, Childminders and Play settings to develop and improve the quality and effectiveness of their provision through an annual cycle of reflection.

It was developed by Bristol Early Years team following research by CREC (Centre for Research in Early Childhood) and comprises 7 participating Local Authorities: Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, South Gloucestershire, Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, Plymouth and Slough. It has been designed to support the process of continuous quality improvement which is a journey, not a destination.

The philosophy of the Bristol Standard is that all settings can:

'improve on their previous best'

Gloucestershire has been a participating member of the Bristol Standard 'family' of Local Authorities since 2002. A member of the Early Years Team is the Gloucestershire representative on the Bristol Standards Family Group.

Setting activity

Involvement in the Bristol Standard demonstrates a whole setting's commitment to reflective practice, self-evaluation and continuous quality improvement. It is organised into ten aspects of effective Early Years Practice so that settings can evaluate one area at a time in a manageable way. A folder is then submitted for validation and settings receive a certificate following each successful submission. This certificate is valid for one year.

Subsequently, settings submit an interim reduced submission over the following two years and then complete a Full submission every 3 years.

Training and Peer to Peer support

Training sessions, support visits and peer to peer activity help practitioners work on the 10 Bristol Standard dimensions over a year.

Early Years settings who wish to undertake the Bristol Standard quality improvement journey receive:

- an initial training session
- a support visit from a mentor during the first year
- a Bristol Standard folder and leaflets for parents

- an invitation to a Bristol Standard network meeting 3 times a year, where they engage in professional dialogue with others engaged in the Bristol Standard journey.
- a certificate of validation upon successful completion of their submission.

Numbers participating in The Bristol Standard in Gloucestershire

Numbers participating in BS have remained stable over the last 2 years at approx. 150 broken down as follows:

Day Care: **90 settings**

Childminders: **20 settings**

Schools: **35 settings**

Out of School: **5 settings**

Evaluation

In the past 2 years 50 schools and settings participating in BS have demonstrated improved outcomes.

Successes and challenges

The Bristol Standard is often used to inform the participating setting's Self Evaluation Form and its use has been highlighted in Ofsted supporting literature.

Common challenges are shared by participating LAs, namely diminishing budgets impacting upon the capacity for BS mentor support for settings. LAs have risen to this challenge by facilitating network meetings and electronic communication between participants.

Storymaking Network

Background and current context

Storymaking is an educational approach developed from research conducted at the International Centre for Learning & Research, originally developed by Mary Rose and Pie Corbett.

Storymaking facilitates and taps into the stories children are creating and sharing with each other with the intention of celebrating children's own experiences and stories, developing personal, social and emotional development, key language skills, reading and writing.

In Gloucestershire the Storymaking network has been operating for 1 year and it is built upon schools and feeder settings working together to improve children's outcomes by exploring their experience of making stories together. In the most recent project, 8 schools and 36 settings have been involved in a peer to peer support model of developing storymaking, with a focus on effective transition.

Recruitment and training

Participating schools and feeder settings have been recruited through training and networking as well as those that are invited in response to identification of children's likely disadvantage.

Three sessions of training brought practitioners together physically and this was extended through ongoing email contact.

Example of range of activities of peer support group

Practitioners enjoy mutual support through the Storymaking network supported by storymaking tutors. In storymaking network meetings, participants recount and share ideas and resources as well as demonstrating and practising skills and developing new skills together.

Successes and challenges

Successes include the development of smaller communities of practice in localities, linked to feeder schools, where schools and settings are working to create a shared plan for the foundation stage that reflects development of key language patterns. Children benefit from the deepening relationships between schools and their early years settings, when a shared pedagogy and values can secure good outcomes for all children.

There have been challenges around building a community of practice that ensures that all participants feel confident to contribute from their differing starting points. The network evenings include people with a widely differing range of experience and from a large variety of provision. Getting the balance of learning, application and reflection right for all settings can be challenging.

Early Years Professional Network

The Early Years Professionals network is a peer to peer support group for practitioners with an Early Years Professional (EYP) qualification working in the preschool sector. The EYP network is held once a term and provides an opportunity for continuing professional development enabling members to share ideas and good practice, discuss Early Years issues and become involved in action research projects.

Other Peer to Peer support groups

There are several other peer to peer support groups which operate around the county but are not organised by the Early Years team. These include:

- Early Years Foundation Stage Profile cluster moderation groups
- Early Years Provider meetings
- Childminder support groups
- School cluster groups
- Reception Support groups (e.g Keeping Early Years Unique)

Summary....

Nationally, Early Years settings are at an earlier stage than schools in recognising peer to peer support as an intrinsic part of professional practice, but increasingly with reductions in Local Authority support the need for development is key.

In Gloucestershire this approach to working has been well underway for a significant number of years. For a minimal outlay the Lead Practitioner programme and the EXCELL directory are exemplary examples of effective peer to peer support.

Outstanding settings in Gloucestershire also regularly moderate judgements with partner settings and with Reception class teachers to ensure accuracy. They engage regularly in professional dialogue and sometimes collaborate to facilitate training where a joint need is recognised. They are eager to learn from each other, to recognise their own and others' expertise and to share it.

The future for all early years settings' continuing professional development lies in continuing to develop innovative ways of creating collaborative partnerships.

'Leaders who take risks, put themselves out there and spread good practice beyond their own setting or school...(sic) are reformers who have turned their ambitions for success into reality, and raised standards for children not only in their own schools (and settings), but at others nearby.' Ofsted Inspection Handbook August 2015