

CASE STUDY

E.L.M Project Report: Autumn 2016 – Spring 2017

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As a school serving the Greenstead community we were invited to take part in the Early Literacy Matters (ELM) Project alongside other schools and pre-school settings in the area.

Following Making it REAL training we embarked on a project comprising three literacy events and two home visit sessions working individually with each of four focus families.

Our focus families were identified following an initial event during which the project was explained to parents and those who were interested were invited to sign up. Of the families who expressed an interest we selected four families. For us a huge benefit of this approach was its suitability for families with a diverse range of backgrounds, cultural and educational experiences, the findings of the EPPE study that **“What parents do is more important than who they are”** enabled us to confidently offer the programme to any of our families.

1. Early Writing Workshop.

- This was held twice in the day to allow both Morning and Afternoon families to attend. All parents were invited.
- 21 Families of the 38 on roll attended the session.
- A short presentation was held for parents in the school hall outlining the skills needed to become a writer and looking at how these could be developed through age appropriate play based activities.
- The children were then brought into the hall and parents spent approximately an hour with their parents using a range of resources designed to develop motor skills, build muscle strength and encourage early mark making skills.
- During the session I joined families and talked to them about how they could build upon activities and develop them in the home environment,
- Many parents described a “Light Bulb Moment” that occurred for them during the session as they hadn’t realised the importance and relevance of activities such as climbing and swinging in their child’s development.
- The parents of one child responded to the session by saying **“We thought she needed some writing practice books, I didn’t know that going to the park and the playground could help her writing!”**



2. Home Visit 1

- The first series of home visits included two key activities and a chance to chat informally with parents about how they could support their child's literacy development.
- Each child was given a copy of 'Each Peach Pear Plum' and a cardboard magnifying glass to keep. I shared the story with the child alongside the parents and the child used their detective's magnifying glass to spot some of the characters. As we shared the story I encouraged the child to 'teach' their parent about the rhymes and stories the characters were associated with.
- For the second activity the children were each given a set of three story dice featuring characters, settings and objects. The child rolled the dice and together we created a story using the character, setting and object which they had rolled. Throughout the activity I modelled to parents how to scaffold and support the child as they developed their ideas to tell a story and add detail.
- We discussed how parents and children could work together to continue to make up stories gradually.

3. Library Visit

- Once again all families in the setting were invited to join us, this time for a visit to the local library and again we repeated the visit in the morning and afternoon sessions.
- Families collected their child from Nursery and we walked to Greenstead Library where we enjoyed singing and stories led by two members of the library team who were also part of the ELM project.
- During the visit several parents signed their child up to join the library.
- Some parents indicated that they felt reassured and encouraged to use the library service by the staff who pointed out that there were no late fines for children's books and that young children were welcome in the library. This was further reinforced following our singing session as a parent commented that **"I thought you had to be really quiet in the library! I never brought him (her child) because I thought he would be too noisy for the library."**



4. Home Visit 2

- Originally I had planned the second one to one session with our focus families to take place as a home visit however due to some difficulties scheduling and getting supply cover we had to revise this. Instead the second set of sessions was conducted in school but in a quiet area away from the classroom.
- This did not appear to have a negative impact and in fact the balance of beginning the project in their familiar home environment and continuing within the setting seemed to give parents the confidence to then engage within the school setting in a way that they had previously not demonstrated.
- The focus for this session was on environmental print and on books.
- The families were given a game of Logo Lotto \ Pairs which had been made with a range of familiar logos and symbols. I explained how young children use and relate to environmental print and then modelled how to play the game, encouraging both the parent and the child to comment on the logos they identified. We talked about colour, shape, pictures and their experiences if they recognised the logo. One parent laughed and commented **“He knows when we see McDonalds, I didn’t think it was that great that he recognised it until now!”**
- The second activity in this session involved sharing the story ‘The Train Ride’ and encouraging children to join in with the repetitive language. It was very pleasing to see parents picking up on the emphasis I was placing on the repeated refrain and encouraging their child to join in with that section.
- The child and their parent then created a story map drawing train tracks onto paper and sequencing pictures of the different things that were spotted during the train journey.
- Each child was encouraged to share their story map with someone at home to tell them the story. They were also given a copy of ‘The Train Ride’ to keep along with the logo lotto game.

5. Town Visit

- The four focus families who had been involved in the home visit programme were invited to join us for a visit into Colchester town centre.
- We funded their bus fare into town to ensure that there were no barriers to their participation in the visit.
- The visit had two focus areas; environmental print and books.
- Each family were given a scavenger hunt sheet of environmental print photos taken in the Culver Square area, the children along with their parent(s) hunted for the different signs, logos and other print in their pictures.
- When they had completed this activity the children looked at their name cards and tried to find the first letter of their name on a sign in the area.
- The group then moved on to Waterstones where we had arranged to have a short story session. Children modelled to their parents how they could do “good listening” for the story, the parents followed their

children's lead and everyone enjoyed the story of 'The Fish Who Could Wish.'

- The children were then invited to choose a book which they would like to buy and keep. This was funded as part of the project and the parents were advised that they could choose a book up to the value of £10 (funded as part of the project.) Prior to reading the story together I had explained to the children why I chose the book to read to them, it was interesting to notice parents then discussing the merits of different books with their children as they looked for one to buy **"This one has got lovely colourful pictures"** one parent commented and another said **"This one looks like some funny things happen in it - Look!"**
- The parents spent a long time with the children looking at the books which were available, one parents said to their child **"Let's have a good look first so you can choose a really special book, we can look at it at bedtime and show Daddy."**
- The Waterstones manager had been very pleased to have our families visit and gave all the children some book related stickers which were, of course, gratefully received!

Family Case Studies:

T – female – 3 years old at start of project

T's lives with her Mum and Step Dad, she is an only child but has a close relationship with extended family. T's Mum had a negative experience of education and has extremely low self-confidence commenting that **"I really want to help her but I am just not sure I know how to be a good Mum. My partner says I am doing the right things and I know she is doing well but I am just not that confident."** This was a key factor in encouraging her to take part in the Making it REAL home visit and event programme as we felt that it would help to increase Mum's confidence in her own ability to support her child.

T was extremely excited when I visited the home and wanted to show me her toys, some crafts she had made that morning and her bedroom! Once the tour was over T engaged well with the activities and although Mum was quiet to begin with she soon began to join in. During the visit I explained how she could continue the activities and Mum was very keen, suggesting that when Step Dad got home T could show him her new book and story dice and that perhaps they could make up another story that afternoon. Before I left Mum asked me if I had time to meet Step Dad who worked in the office below the flat. He was extremely enthusiastic about the programme and said **"You keep telling her she is doing a good job and I will too and maybe one day she will believe it!"**

T and her Mum attended all of our literacy events and one to one sessions and Mum's confidence noticeably improved throughout the project. At the end she commented **"I really enjoyed it and so did T, it's funny how sometimes it's the little things that you don't really think about that can make a difference."** In addition they joined and have utilised the local library.

L – Male – 3 years old at start of project

L lives with his parents and younger sibling. Both his parents are very involved in his education and have strong desire to provide every opportunity they can to encourage and support his academic and emotional development. When we initially met for his Nursery induction home visit they were keen to demonstrate his existing understanding of letters and numbers. My motivation in working with this family was to help widen their understanding of the things that lead up to a child successfully becoming a writer, reader and mathematician and to highlight the benefits of play based learning.

L and his parents attended the Early Writing workshop and his parents engaged really well with the short presentation at the beginning highlighting the importance of developing both gross and fine motor skills, muscle strength and co-ordination. Dad commented on this when I joined the family enjoying hammering some pin tacks in a Tap A Shape activity; **“It’s really interesting, L loves things like this and I hadn’t realise that it could help with writing.”**

During our Library visit L was initially reluctant to leave his Mum and younger sister but with a little encouragement he joined me sitting on the carpet with the other children. He joined in enthusiastically with the rhymes and laughed at the book we shared. L left the library with a large pile of books he and his sister had borrowed!

At the end of the project L’s Mum thanked me and said they had both really enjoyed it. She loved the resources they had been given and felt that L had enjoyed the special trip at the end and the one to one sessions very much.

J – Male – 3 years old at start of project

J lives with his Mum, Step Dad and younger sibling, Mum is expecting baby number 3 in the summer. J has sometimes found it difficult to engage with activities not of his own choosing and sometimes finds it hard to manage his feelings. Mum and Step Dad have expressed concern over this. J enjoys energetic, loud play and his attention can often be difficult to maintain.

Mum spent time during her childhood in care and has in the past had some support from Social Care but is not currently receiving support. She has engaged with practitioners freely when we have initiated conversation but does not usually instigate contact.

J was keen to show his Mum, Step Dad and sister some of the resources at our early writing event. Mum was thrilled that he sat and played with her enthusiastically showing her what he could do with the resources.

On our home visit Mum, two grandparents and younger sibling were present. Despite the large audience J was completely captivated by the activities, he hunted for nursery rhyme characters in the ‘Each Peach Pear Plum’ book using his magnifying glass and Mum really engaged well with all the activities. J responded really well to his Mum and she quickly picked up some of the strategies I was using for example commenting on something near to the object he was looking for to give a clue to what he was looking for without taking over!

When we had finished the activity Mum and J both had big smiles and Mum said **“Awww thank you, I really enjoyed that!”** She was particularly grateful for the resources they received as part of the project and agreed with J a safe place out of reach of his younger sister where he could keep “the special things the teacher has given you.”

J also loved the Story Dice and throughout the activity demonstrated an understanding of story structure and language which had not been evident in his play. I used questions to help develop his ideas and he made interesting word choices to describe some of the people and objects. J was really animated and both Mum and grandparents said **“Wow J, you are really good at stories!”** J's confidence increased throughout and he responded really well to the praise from his family.

J attended all the literacy events with Mum, Step Dad and his younger sister. In addition to the home visit described above he also attended a one to one session with myself and Mum in school. Mum's confidence seems to have grown and she is happy to instigate conversations around his development and seek ideas for how they can offer additional support to him at home.

J still loves loud energetic play but he can sometimes be found introducing storylines and narrative into this play now because he tells me **“I'm really good at stories!”** J was thrilled to discover that during the Easter holidays one of our Nursery Nurses had bought three new stories for the book box and one was 'Marmaduke The Very Different Dragon' which was the book he chose to buy at the book shop!

H – Male – 3 years old at start of project

H lives with Mum and Dad, he has an older sister and a new brother due to be born later in the spring. H has had some speech therapy but has recently been discharged. He is a follower who wants to part of a wider group but lacks confidence to try new activities or start a new game preferring to join others and mirror their play.

H's Mum was keen to try out all the activities with him at the Early Writing workshop but H became particularly shy when she arrived along with all the other parents. With some encouragement though he showed her lots of different activities and particularly enjoyed sharing with her the large floor based mark making where the children had created roads for cars.

On his home visit H was once again very shy but Mum worked really hard to get him to engage with the activities and modelled for him how to take part, we then asked if he could help Mummy with it and H began to join in.

H was very excited to join the library and get his own library card, he selected lots of books to take home and told me he was going to show his big sister when she got home.

H's Mum expressed an interest in the Making it REAL parents programme and attended some sessions although due to her advanced pregnancy she wasn't able to attend all the sessions. She said she had really enjoyed taking part in the project and had learned some new things she could do with H and the new baby when he is bigger.

Data...

Data is listed below but with a sample size of just 4 its statistical merit is extremely limited.

Assessments made for Autumn 2 were made approximately 10 days into the project after the early writing workshop and before the first home visit.

Data was then collected again at the end of the project as this coincided with our school assessment cycle. The expected progress for each child within that time frame would be 1/3 level for example from the beginning of one band to within the same band.

All of the children from the focus families made at least expected progress during the project in the Communication and Language area of learning.

Listening and Attention expected progress	75%: Expected progress	25%: Better than expected progress
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Understanding expected progress	50%: Expected progress	50%: Better than expected progress
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Speaking expected progress	50%: Expected progress	50%: Better than expected progress
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Where Next?

My own experience of the project was overwhelmingly positive, finally here was an approach that could apply to any family (no careful scrutinising of qualifying criteria to meet) and adaptable enough to work on many levels. The only criticism I have was that it felt that it was over too quickly and there was scope for a longer term project.

As a school we feel that supporting our parents and helping them to develop a positive early home learning environment is a priority. This has now formed the basis for one of my performance management targets.

I plan to develop a programme based around the REAL approach to offer to small groups of families on a termly basis. Following the REAL approach to Maths training course I am intending to incorporate both literacy and math aspects.

Initially I intend to use the following structure:

- 1 Home Visit – I feel that the initial home visit was beneficial but that in order to make the programme cost effective and viable the remaining sessions will need to take place in school.
- 4 small group (3 or 4) workshops within school time with parents attending a short session with discussion about purpose and focus of the activities first, then children joining us for activities. Two sessions will have a literacy focus and two will have a maths focus.
- 1 Library Visit (as part of our whole class visit)
- 1 Trip – probably following a similar format to our Town visit.

Funding:

- A portion of our Early Years Pupil Premium funding will be used to support the delivery of this programme alongside a commitment from the Nursery curriculum budget.
- We will seek to access any other appropriate funding streams to support our ability to reach as many families as possible.
- We know that there is a high level of social deprivation in our community and that by including resources as part of the project we will make it more attractive to families and we are able to support the children in accessing high quality resources.

In conclusion...

Greenstead is home to a diverse community who have a huge variety of backgrounds, cultures and life experiences. I have worked at Hazelmere Infant & Nursery School since 2002, in those 15 years I have met and worked with many families and almost without exception they have wanted to provide the best that they can for their children regardless of the challenges they may face. I feel that the training, support and funding provided by the ELM project has truly opened up some exciting possibilities for working alongside our families, in a way that is accessible and meaningful, to provide a better start to our young people.