Alver Valley Schools
Early Years Project

Enhancing Sustained Shared Thinking within Early Years settings through action research

Two Strand Project

EARLY YEARS NETWORK

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT GROUP

Early Years Action Research Project Group:

Enhancing sustained shared thinking within Early Years settings through action research

The Rationale

Literature points to communication and language and self-regulation in the early years as indicators of future success (Timmons et al., 2016, Robson et al., 2020).

Research and experience informs us of the importance of high-quality Early Years education focused on these prime areas. Development Matters advocates practitioners increase their focus on children who are struggling with their learning to **stop gaps in learning from widening**, as '**gaps at the end of the Early Years will, on average, double by the end of primary schooling'** (Development Matters 2021:6).

The contention is that some children that fall into the SEN support bracket in later years have not had the **right provision** or **early intervention** to meet their **communication, language and PSED** learning needs, and by improving pedagogy in this area **less children will fall behind** and later need SEN support.

‘Communication and language approaches that emphasise the importance of spoken language and verbal interaction for young children’ as an area of good impact (6 months+) low cost with a strong evidence base (EEF EY toolkit).

Highlighted are the benefits of approaches that ‘explicitly support communication through **talking**, **verbal expression**, **modelling language**, and **reasoning’** alongside approaches such as **reading aloud**, **discussing books**, and **explicitly extending children’s spoken vocabulary**. Also advocated are **approaches aimed at developing thinking and understanding through language**, such as SST, a focus of this project.

Outline of Action Research

A collaborative action research project:

Evaluate and develop each setting's practice in communication and language with a focus on adult interactions, SST and emotional wellbeing, framed by current research.

Multi-sessional approach:

- Inputs on developing SST
- training in the use of SSTEW
- focused input on arising areas for development.

Gap tasks for settings:

- Settings used SSTEW tool to evaluate own setting
- Gap tasks to develop practice
- Findings, actions and areas to develop shared with group

Shared Sustained Thinking

"An episode in which two or more individuals "work together" in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend" (Siraj-Blatchford, *et al.*, 2002:9)

Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R. and Bell, D. (2002), Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY): DfES Research Report 356. London: DfES, HMSO.

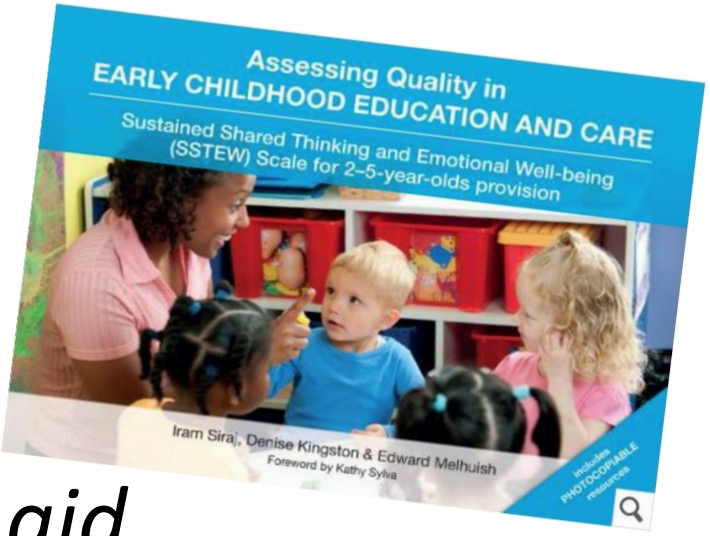
Skill Development in SST for Practitioners

- Understand Sustained Shared Thinking (SST).
- Identify episodes of SST in practice.
- Know how to promote episodes of SST.
- Know how to use Shared Sustained Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Tool (SSTEW tool) to audit own setting identifying what supports or inhibits SST.

Skill Development for Practitioners

- Interpret findings, identify own areas for development and action plan.
- Know how to use an evidence base and action research to improve practice.
- Measure the impact of change.
- Develop skills in leading change.
- Develop interactions, environment and pedagogy that support communication and language development and SST.

Sustained Shared Thinking & Emotional Wellbeing Scale Tool



The SSTEW scale tool was designed to aid practitioners to close the gap between theory and practice supporting practitioners and researchers understanding and identification of high-quality interactions including what supports and barriers this.

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The SSTEW Scale Tool Design

Subscale 1 - Building trust, and independence

Item 1: Self-regulation & social development

Item 2: Encouraging choices & independent play

Item 3: Planning for small group & individual interactions/adult deployment

Subscale 2 -Social and Emotional Wellbeing

Item 4: Supporting socio-emotional well-being

Subscale 3 Supporting & extending language & communication

Item 5: Encouraging children to talk with others

Item 6: Staff actively listen to children & encourage children to listen

Item 7: Staff support children's language use

Item 8: Sensitive responsiveness

Subscale 4 - Supporting learning & critical thinking

Item 9: Supporting curiosity & problem-solving

Item 10: Encouraging sustained shared thinking through storytelling, sharing books, singing & rhymes

Item 11: Encouraging sustained shared thinking in investigation & exploration

Item 12: Supporting children's concept development & higher order thinking

Subscale 5 - Assessing learning & language

Item 13: Using assessment to support & extend learning and critical thinking

Item 14: Assessing language development

Assessing Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care. Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Scale for 2-5 yr olds provision. Iram Siraj, Denise Kington and Edward Melhuish. First Published 2015

Sub-scale 4. Supporting learning and critical thinking

Item 11. Encouraging sustained shared thinking in investigation and exploration

Inadequate		Minimal		Good		Excellent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.1 Very little exploration and investigation is encouraged. 1.2 Staff show little understanding of science/ maths/problem-solving or concepts.*		3.1 Staff set out activities and open-ended resources deliberately to encourage exploration. 3.2 Staff discuss children's explorations and investigations with them. 3.3 Staff encourage children to make connections between what they observe and their previous experiences or with follow-up activities. They make use of pictures (e.g. in books or on the computer) and other resources to support this.		5.1 Staff encourage the children to use their imagination and creativity to explore and experiment. They encourage children to bring resources/scientific equipment from area to area.* 5.2 Staff model exploration, excitement, and wonder for children to watch and then engage with. 5.3 Staff point out, share, and explain the actions and interests of the children as they occur. They introduce simple scientific and explanatory concepts.* 5.4 Science/maths activities are organized so that they build upon previous activities and explorations.*		7.1 Staff model using scientific/problem-solving approaches for the children to watch. They support careful watching, prediction, anticipation, and evaluation through talk and action. 7.2 Staff use scientific words, e.g. 'dissolve', linking these to the children's experiences, as well as to more familiar ideas as they occur.* *N/A permitted: see supplementary information.* 7.3 Staff talk about and encourage parents/carers to join in with their children's scientific/problem-solving activities and explorations.

Example Item

Examples and supplementary information

1.2 During activities where these ideas and concepts could be explored, opportunities for this are ignored – e.g. during cake-making no mention of melting, liquids, and solids and/or changes that are seen during heating/cooling or mixing, etc.

5.1 Staff encourage children to play with resources in an exploratory way, e.g. mixing paint to look at colour change rather than painting, freezing small toys in ice to discover and talk about melting. They encourage children to use scientific and maths resources in their play, e.g. pipettes, magnifying glasses etc.

5.3 Examples might include discussion of different textures and surfaces and how they affect play and movement, e.g. rough textures slow down the ball and bike, the smooth slide helps to make you go fast. Other examples might be: it is loud because it is close, it looks small because it is far away, and pointing out shadows, animals, insects, and how plants move and grow etc.

5.4 Progression should be evident in **planning and other records or assessments**.

7.2 Staff link scientific ideas to experiences, e.g. while playing with magnets, introduce the words 'attract' and 'repel'; while cooking, introduce 'melting', 'liquid', 'solid'; while using forces when playing outside, for instance, introduce the words 'push' and 'pull' so that the children have direct experience of these ideas and concepts as they are discussed. Then also make links to familiar ideas and concepts: it is melting like your ice cream does on a hot day, the magnet attracts like a big hug and repels like a push down a slide, or the wind is blowing you away.

Example Item

Assessing Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care. Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Scale for 2-5 yr olds provision.
Iram Siraj, Denise Kington and Edward Melhuish.

First published 2015

Sub-scale 3. Supporting and extending language and communication

Item 5. Encouraging children to talk with others

Inadequate		Minimal		Good		Excellent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.1 Children are discouraged from speaking more than is necessary. 1.2 Staff talk to children primarily to change their behaviour and to manage routines. 1.3 The noise levels within the setting are not conducive to talk, e.g. too noisy due to music or songs being piped into the setting.		3.1 Children are allowed to speak whenever possible. 3.2 Staff attempt to engage in conversations with most children within the group.*		5.1 Children are encouraged to talk to each other during activities and throughout the day. The staff model and support this. 5.2 During adult-guided activities the children are given resources (etc.) that support, and are grouped to support, talk.* 5.3 Staff ensure that each child who wants to speak has the opportunity to do so. They interact with individuals and small groups to support this. 5.4 Where children are reticent or unable to talk and/or have English as an additional language, alternative methods of communication are employed, e.g. photographs, pictures, symbols, puppets, gestures, tape recordings from home.*		7.1 Children are encouraged to choose and lead interactions, conversations, and/or play. 7.2 Children are encouraged to take more turns in an interaction, possibly giving longer and more complex answers as staff allow for this by increasing their waiting time, adding comments, and asking simple questions. 7.3 Where children are reticent about interacting with others, staff play alongside the children, taking cues from them and following their lead, waiting to be invited to communicate.* 7.4 Staff provide running commentaries of individuals' and/or small groups' actions etc. to support longer play and interactions with other children.*

Cycle of Action Research

- Preparation
- Audit Training
- Audits in settings
- Data analysis and Planning Core Team
- Leading change input including action planning
- CPD
- Audit
- Repeat!

Leading Change Session

Process of completing the audit

+ PLUS	- MINUS	! INTERESTING

NEXT TIME I WOULD…

Reflect on your audit - Identify what is the audit telling you as an individual setting?

+ STRENGTHS TO CELEBRATE AND SHARE

-DEVELOPMENT POINTS:
FOCUS FOR CPD OR QUICK WIN?

Change Process

What is your relationship with change like? Work/home

Chosen change?
Enforced change?

Dimensions of change

Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plans	Success
	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plans	Confusion
Vision		Incentives	Resources	Action Plans	Anxiety
Vision	Skills		Resources	Action Plans	Slow Change
Vision	Skills	Incentives		Action Plans	Frustration
Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources		False Starts

Source: Knoster, Thousand and Villa

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Action Plan

Area of focus *(Question)*	Why/example	What we want to see	Action/timeframe/who	Review impact
Item 1 Self-regulation and social development. How consistent are behaviour expectations upheld by the whole team?	On audit 12.22 Running indoors and outside was discussed in group time this was not consistently picked up on by all.	Staff redirect in appropriate behaviour stating what the children should do. Staff congratulate children when they follow the rules well "I saw you…"	Leader to remind the team about expectations around running indoors and what to do/say/script? if they encounter this. **Completed date:**	
Item 11 Encouraging sustained shared thinking in investigation and exploration.	Low scoring item on the audit. Children need to be encouraged to problem solve developing skills of – careful watching, prediction, evaluation.	Increased episodes of SST Children engaged in investigation and explorations. Staff clear about their role to support this aspect –supporting making connections, providing resources, planning activities, modelling scientific language/problem solving approaches.	Introduce weekly open-ended exploration activity with a small target group (Mr C plan and lead). Photos in a floor book (to share the process with other staff). Activity then in the environment for the following week and adult briefed in how they can support and interact with children. Possible focus for further CPD?	Touch base with Mr C weekly. Review in February (6 weeks).

CPD

CONTINUOUS

Your continuous provision is all about providing children with the tools for adventure. But Luke didn't jump into battle with Vader without practicing with his lightsaber first...

So our continuous provision should be enriched with resources that are...

FAMILIAR OR SIMILAR

Over the next few days we'll cover:

Culture & Curriculum - Telling your story!
Continuous & Enhanced Provision - Tools for adventure
Aesthetics - The deep dark woods
The Role of the Adult - The guides

Sustained shared thinking in an explorative context

Hampshire Services

- The role of the environment in providing opportunities to stimulate scientific thinking.
- Explore the COETL and how these are the basis of scientific enquiry.
- Explore effective interactions and how SST looks in a scientific context.

PLAY OR EXPLORATION

WHAT IS SCHEMAPLAY™?

Schemaplay™ is a programme created by Lynnette Brock and John Siraj-Blatchford.
Based on the seminal work of Jean Piaget, Friedrich Fröbel, Tina Bruce and Chris Athey.

Today we'll use it as a base for our training however there are more areas not covered which can be accessed separately.

HOW WE CONSTRUCT KNOWLEDGE

We make connections between our experiences.

Sustained shared thinking in a mathematical context

Hampshire Services

- To consider the role of the adult in supporting mathematical thinking
- The role of the environment in providing opportunities to stimulate mathematical thinking

Hampshire County Council Providing an outstanding service to children and families

Group trends by subscale

Subscale	Benchmark Average score	End Average score	Difference
Subscale 1 building trust, confidence & independence	3.6	5.3	+1.7
Subscale 2 social and emotional well-being	3.8	5.7	+1.9
Subscale 3 supporting and extending language & communication	4	5.4	+1.4
Subscale 4 supporting learning & critical thinking	2.7	4.7	+2
Subscale 5 assessing learning and language	3.4	5.4	+2

Group trends by item

Subscale	Item	Benchmark Average score	End Average score	Difference
Building trust, confidence & independence	1 Self-regulation and social development	3.8	5.1	+1.3
	2 Encouraging choices and independent play	3.2	5.3	+2.1
	3 Planning for small group and individual interactions/adult deployment	3.7	5.3	+1.6
Social & emotional well-being	4 Supporting socio-emotional well-being	3.8	5.7	+1.9
Supporting & extending language & communication	5 Encouraging children to talk with others	4.1	5.4	+1.3
	6 Staff actively listen to children and encourage children to listen	5.1	5.7	+0.6
	7 Staff support children's language use	3.4	5.4	+2
	8 Sensitive responsiveness	3.3	5.1	+1.8

Group trends by item

Subscale	Item	Benchmark Average score	End Average score	Difference
Supporting learning & critical thinking	9 Supporting curiosity & problem-solving	2.7	4.6	+1.9
	10 Encouraging sustained shared thinking through storytelling, sharing books, singing, & rhymes	3.2	4.8	+1.6
	11 Encouraging sustained shared thinking in investigation & exploration	2.6	4.7	+2.1
	12 Supporting concept development & higher order thinking	2.2	4.8	+2.6
Assessing learning & language	13 Using assessment to support & extend learning & critical thinking	3.2	4.9	+1.7
	14 Assessing language development	3.4	5.2	+1.8

Impact: Participants summed up the benefits :

It has helped us to further develop our environment and helped us with high quality interactions.

It's led to an improvement in the quality of interactions and engagement.

It changed my perspective on how adults should interact.

The audit helped shape actions to improve practice on multiple areas.

More frequent episodes of SST.

Extension of the language and vocabulary introduced.

It's impacted our planning as well as provision and our interactions with children.

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Impact: Participants summed up the benefits :

It changed my approach to staff development.

The feedback is more geared to next steps and meaningful learning with evidence from the audit.

The audit focus on culture and responsiveness was clear and made us focus on that for all adults as the audit score is limited to the lowest practice seen.

Staff are more aware of the need for evidence-based practice and the team is being much more reflective and responsive to the children's needs.

Time to work with others using a research-based tool to work on setting improvement was a real benefit.

It was collaborative.

My setting has improved!

Impact for the Group

- Audit data from the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being Scale audit (SSTEW) Benchmark to Endpoint shows an increase in average scores across all settings and all subscales of the audit.
- Clear evidence base and rationale for change at setting and group level provided by the audit tool data.
- Settings were empowered to implement an action plan for change, including quick wins and longer-term objectives.
- The audit tool was supportive of focusing attention on the most pressing areas for improvement at a setting level.
- The audit tool, when utilised effectively, can be supportive of bridging the gap between research or theory and practice, as it describes what good practice looks like in the area being audited.

Impact continued

- Data enabled the core team to ensure training was targeted rather than generic.
- Use of the audit tool midpoint to celebrate progress and refocus on sticky areas that required further work enabled settings to reflect on the impact of changes made to date and consider their next steps, **revisiting the impact supports embedding change**.
- The collaborative nature of the project meant settings could also learn from the shared experience of implementing change and use of the audit tool, where common barriers existed to share how they could also be addressed.

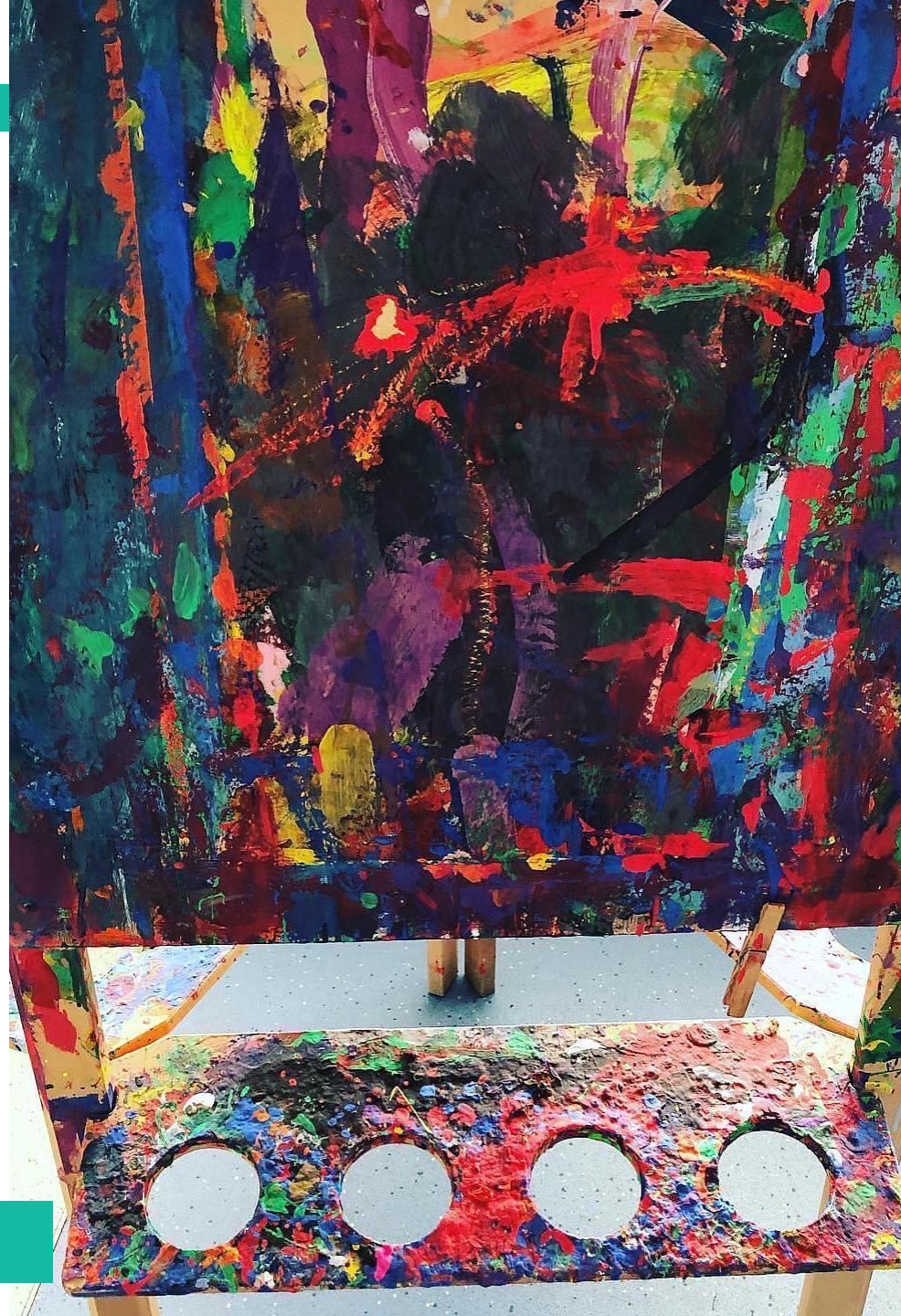
Signposting & Resources

Alver Valley **Early Years Network**

Curriculum at Alver Valley Schools

Practice at Alver Valley Schools
Spotlight Articles

Enhancing SST Case Study



Questions?

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