



“Let’s talk about the Early Years Conversation Project”



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Mandy Young has been an Early Years teacher since 1994 and is now Deputy Head teacher of a maintained nursery school in Stratford, London Borough of Newham.

Mandy is committed to the learning and development of young children, focussing on providing creative and explorative learning opportunities. She enjoys supporting colleagues to develop their pedagogy.

Mandy is currently training to be a Forest School lead.



“Since I joined the mentoring team of the Newham Communication Project, I’m feel like I am the oldest mentor in town.”

Mandy Young, EYCP mentor

This blog is part of a series focussing on the experiences of participants in the Early Years Conversation Project. The [Early Years Conversation Project](#) (EYCP) is a programme designed and delivered by the [East London Research School](#) (ELRS) and funded by the [Education Endowment Foundation](#) (EEF) and the DfE through [A Brighter Start - East London’s Early Years Stronger Practice Hub](#). It aims to develop the interactions of practitioners with children, to improve the communication and language skills of two and three year olds.

Mandy Young is a mentor for the EYCP. As a mentor Mandy helps settings put what they have learned on the EYCP training into practice. Without good implementation, a programme will fail.

I wanted to get a feel of how Mandy is finding her work. We talked ...

Having been involved with the Newham Communication Project, would you say EYCP is a progression?

Over time the project has become more streamlined.

The course content is very clear, including examples of the strategies in practice. These enable adults to see the strategies in action- the less confident practitioners can imitate the practice until they are confident to make their own.

For mentors, workload expectations are more structured with clear timetables and templates in place.

Overall, what is your experience of introducing the EYCP in settings?

I find that settings are enthusiastic about the new learning style they are about to adopt.

I'm always clear about how I will deliver the project: I establish visit dates and hub meetings at the start of the course – this way everyone knows what's what. I also let them know about the online and face to face sessions in advance.

Doing this shows immediate commitment from both parties – it also helps me manage my workload and pre-empts the inevitable changes.

Of the strategies used, which would you say has most influence on changing practice?

I find that the main strategy which practitioners are most reflective about is the [10 second rule](#) from the [ShREC approach](#).

Often practitioners are unaware of how much they dominate conversations with children. They begin to realise that building a conversation involves waiting, listening, tuning in to the verbal and non-verbal cues that children share.

It's a simple but powerful strategy that I think should be used widely, not just for this programme.

How would you say you are most useful as a mentor?

I feel my role as a mentor is to clarify and model the strategies and to praise colleagues when they use them.

Using videos of our practice is a wonderful tool to support this. Although it can be unnerving at first, practitioners often comment that it enables them to see where they are doing well and where they need targeted support.

Their willingness and ability to recognise the need to change is brave and integral to the success of the programme.

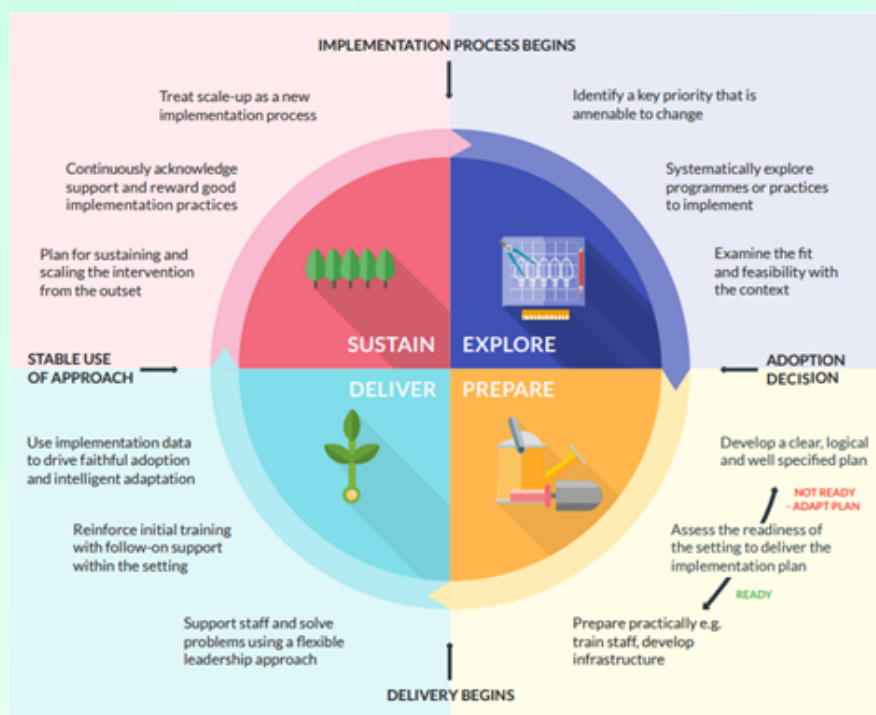
You sound optimistic about the EYCP. What would you say this is down to?

For an initiative to be successful, it's important that everyone is on board and understands why change is needed. EYCP Leads are vital here as they research what is working and not working in their settings and explain this to their teams.

They also ensure that the resources, support and time is available so that practitioners feel able to make changes.

EYCP leads also make decisions around prioritising what their settings will focus on - too many initiatives overwhelm staff and 'dilute' its impact.

So, I'd say the efficacy of the EYCP lead is critical to the programme's success. The EEF implementation cycle in the [Guide to Effective Professional Development in the Early Years](#) (p18) is a good tool for helping Leads to keep on track.



How do EYCP Leads work with staff to get them on board?

The training package is designed for EYCP Leads and Champions, so one of the challenges is how to share the practice with staff and parents.

I see this happening in several ways:

- Having staff meetings and parent workshops dedicated to this is beneficial.
- The EYCP Lead and Champion need to demonstrate the strategies in their practice. Good practice is infectious!
- It is important for EYCP Leads and Champions not to become anxious about delivering everything at once. Organisational change can take 3 to 5 years, so it is important to steadily embed practice.

●One setting I work with placed interactions at the core of their teaching and learning observations. The leadership team look out for examples of where staff use the ShREC strategies. It has proved effective to both offer praise to staff or gently reminding them what they could do next.

●Another setting I worked with designed a small fold out pamphlet (attached to their lanyards) which highlighted the 4 strategies so that staff always had a reminder at hand. This was also given to agency staff so that everyone adopted the same approach to language development. It worked very well.

Finally, can you say in one sentence your main thought about the EYCP?

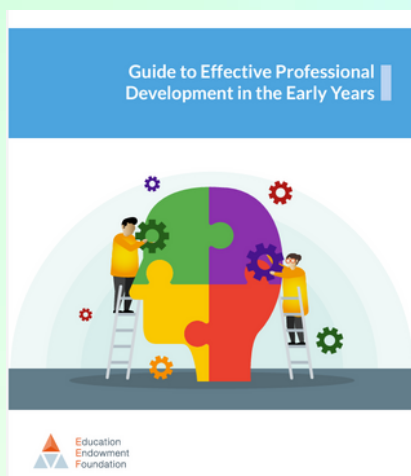
In a nutshell, an important, well-planned project with practitioners who are committed to changing their practice will, over time, lead to improved outcomes for children.

What more can we ask for?

By Caroline Vollans

Further reading:

EEF: [Guide to Effective Professional Development in the Early Years](#)



EEF: [Professional Development Conversation Cycle](#)

