



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



Caroline Vollans is the lead writer and editor for Sheringham’s SPH. Caroline is a psychoanalyst and writer. She writes for Nursery World, family and the Foundation Stage Forum, and is author of Wise Words: How Susan Isaacs changed parenting (Routledge 2018) and co-editor of Putting the EYFS Curriculum into Practice (Sage 2023).

I have worked in childcare and Education for over 20 years. I currently lead the ‘Terrific Twos’ at an amazing school. I love my job and have a passion for learning through play, so the EYFS is my chosen playground so to speak. - Tenisha Mallick



A conversation with an EYCP Champion

“Using this approach is exciting and rewarding and should be used in every Early Years settings by all staff.”

Tenisha Mallick, EYCP Champion.

This blog is a 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.

Tenisha Mallick is an EYCP Champion. As a champion, Tenisha is the lead practitioner in her setting who advocates for and leads the EYCP programme.

I wanted to get a sense of how Tenisha is finding the EYCP programme and her work. We talked...

What are 3 main things that you've learnt from the training so far?

Well, to start with, I've found the training very informative and use it in my daily practice, especially the [ShREC](#) approach and [Interactive reading](#).

Secondly, I think that because we are more aware of letting the children take the lead, they are growing in confidence- we notice that they are a bit more forthcoming and willing to have a go when we're reading together, for instance.

I think the third thing I'd say is that I've learnt to use the ShREC approach throughout my working day, not just when looking at books. It has helped me to be more aware of not asking too many questions and allowing the child enough time to respond.

How do you feel about your role as a champion, Tenisha- are you still glad you put yourself forward?

Yes, I enjoy being a champion- I have found using the techniques and approaches beneficial in practice, so no regrets!

I think getting the staff on board is probably the most important aspect of my role. So far, I think the best way of doing this is to use the approaches and model them. Seeing it in practice enables them to recognise the benefits. So, yes, I think this is the best way to get staff interested and involved.

What do you see as your main 3 challenges?

Oh I'd say:

Staffing, work load and time.

It's hard to know what to do about this- a new programme takes time and increases our workload, so it's to be expected. If only we had more hours in the day, huh!

And, yes, unfortunately staffing can sometimes be a challenge, but staff do get ill- we are only human after all!

I'm always open to any suggestions if anyone has any.

In terms of children's communication and language development, what do you think is the most significant or effective aspect of the programme?

The thing that seems to have most effect is following the child's interest- the sharing attention and responding strategies of ShREC.

Allowing the children to have enough time to think and respond is important- it's so easy to jump in too soon, so being more conscious of this is key. It takes time but you do get into the habit of it.

Do you think you are seeing any impact on the children as yet, Tenisha?

Yes, I'm noticing many of the children responding well- they are showing development in their communication and language skills and growing confidence about using their own voice.

I often hear the children use the vocabulary that I've used and modelled during interactive reading and play which makes me smile. I'm so proud of how well the staff have adapted to this approach and how great the children are doing in Elderberries class.

Is there one thing in particular that you're bursting to say about the programme so far?

Yes! It's exciting and rewarding and should be used in every Early Years settings by all staff.

Using this approach with children doing interactive reading or during play is so simple, yet so effective and impactful. It becomes second nature; so much so that we use it with other daily tasks such as nappy changing, washing hands and even snack time.

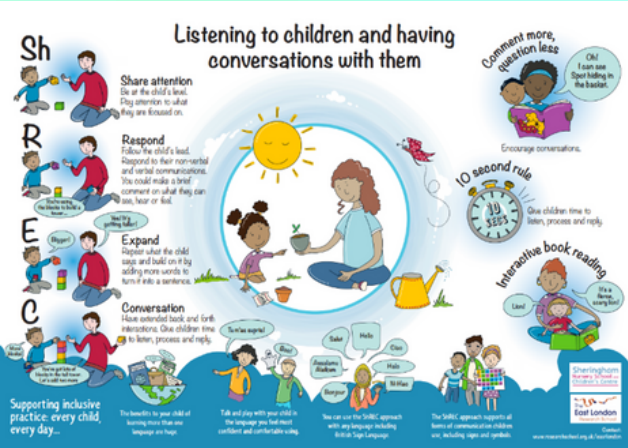
Can we get together again at the end of the training and see how it all went?

Yes, I would like that- we can catch up and see if any of my answers have changed!

By Caroline Vollans

Further reading:

Free downloadable poster: [Listening to children and having conversations with them](#)



EEF blog: [ShREC approach- 4 evidence informed strategies to promote high quality interactions.](#)

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The ShREC approach – Four evidence informed strategies to promote high quality interactions with young children

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Author

Fliss James

Content Specialist for Early Years

The EEF's Fliss James introduces this new video, exemplifying the key strategies that make up the "ShREC" approach.

Blog - 1 minute - 6 July 2022

Supporting children to become better communicators is one of the most powerful things we do as early years educators. Oral language skills are fundamental to children's learning, thinking and

EEF Early Years Evidence Store: description of [interactive reading](#).

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Communication and Language

Approaches and practices to support communication and language development in the early years.

Approaches for supporting communication and language development

Communication and Language Overview

1. Teaching and Modelling Vocabulary

2. Teaching and Modelling Language

3. Interactive Reading

4. Teaching through Collaborative Talk

5. Teaching and Modelling Social Communication Skills

Introduction – using the Evidence Store

Information on how to make use of the Evidence Store is provided in the boxes to the right. There is also a multilingual summary of

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