



“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).

Tracie Hanberger has been working in Early Years for over 17 years. She is currently the lead practitioner in Saplings Nursery at Houndsfield Primary School. Tracie oversees the Nursery and two-year old provision. Tracie considers her role a privilege, supporting young children’s foundations for life. She says, “Every child is unique and special, seeing and supporting them to grow and develop as their time in nursery progresses is such a blessing~.



A conversation with an EYCP Champion

“The simplicity and power of interactive reading is magical- I love that it’s accessible to all children.”

Tracie Hanberger, 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.

Tracie Hanberger is an EYCP Champion from Houndsfield Primary School in North London. As a champion, Tracie is the practitioner in her setting who advocates for and leads the EYCP programme.

Tracie started the programme in November 2024 and, so far, has had 1 full day of training, 3 x 1 hour training, 1 visit from her mentor and 3 hub meetings where seven settings get together.

I wanted to get a feel of Tracie’s participation in the EYCP programme so far.
We talked...

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

I am enjoying my role as a champion, and I am very happy that I was asked to take part in this project.

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

So far, this project has deepened my understanding of the [ShREC Approach](#). We used it during our practice previously, but I can't say I was very confident with the strategies. However, the training on the launch day has made things much clearer for me. ShREC is now a way of 'being' - communication doesn't have to be speaking, it can be an action or body language.

I love the analogy of the 'piece of cake'. We shouldn't divide our attention equally between all the children, like 30 slices of cake that are all the same size. We need to work out which children need a 'bigger piece of the cake' (or intention). It constantly makes me stop and think about who I am supporting and how much.

I have also learnt about the importance and practice of [interactive reading](#)- this was a brand- new concept to me. It's such an enjoyable and rich experience for both the children and staff. Spending time dedicated to interactive reading has encouraged some of the quieter children to find their voice and feel empowered as well as learning new vocabulary.

Which aspect of the training has having most impact so far?

Since starting the course, I have looked at our learning environment and been working out how we can add more books and make it even more interactive.

I've added an adult sized sofa into the reading area. This has had a big impact- both adults and children are able to enjoy books more comfortably and it makes the book area so much cosier. Children go and sit there on their own accord and pick up books.

We have also been looking at the quality of books that we provide - this is work in process. I am also working on having books around the learning environment in different areas, not just concentrated in the book area. I can already see that since we started the EYCP the children's interest in books has increased.

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

It's a close call!

The ShREC strategies are so effective and can be used in all areas of learning, so I think that's important.

However, the simplicity and power of that [interactive reading](#) is magical- I love that it's accessible to all children.

It's got to be both.

Going forward, what do you see as your main 3 challenges?

Time is always a challenge, especially when you are in the busyness of the nursery day after day. However, I'm confident that we can incorporate what we're learning into our daily life in nursery.

Another challenge is funding good quality books- but funding anything new is always difficult!

Thirdly, change is hard on staff. Sharing new practice and ways of doing things can be tricky. However, I've been able to share interactive reading in our team meetings- now everyone knows about the main concept and benefits.

So, we're making progress despite the challenges.

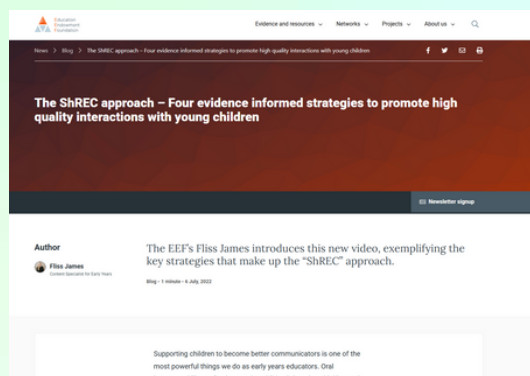
Is there one more thing you're bursting to say about the programme so far?

I'm going to be sad when it is over! I'm enjoying networking with other staff and learning so much about the ShREC approach and interactive reading.

By Caroline Vollans

Further reading:

[EEF: The ShREC approach – Four evidence informed strategies to promote high quality interactions with young children](#) (blog and Youtube Video)



[EEF: EYES on the Early Years – Interactive Reading](#) (YouTube video)

