

Using Research to Improve Quality in the Early Years

Professional Development from A+ Education

A+ Education's aim is to improve children's outcomes through evidence-based professional development designed for Early Years practitioners. Our approach is based on using research tools as a framework to:

- raise quality in Early Years Foundation Stage with **lasting effect on child outcomes** in later key stages;
- **diminish the difference** between disadvantaged children and their peers;
- develop expertise for **sustained improvement**.

Our approach uses five essential **'active ingredients'** which support quality improvement. They both inform and are the subject of our professional development. The content of our courses is based directly on research evidence about how *children* learn and how that learning can best be supported. The structure is based on research evidence about how *adults* learn and how that learning can best be supported.



Research evidence and theory

Our professional development draws directly on the latest evidence and theory, making this both explicit and accessible.



Support to put evidence and theory into practice

The research tools we use provide a framework to support practitioners in understanding how to translate research into practice within their classes/rooms, and what this might look like for their children.



Support for team-based quality improvement

We provide active support for a whole-team approach to improvement, and also encourage networking between early years settings and schools to build effective communities of practice.



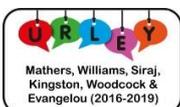
Observation

We use research tools such as the Environment Rating Scales to support practitioners to identify effective interactions (e.g. by analysing DVDs of practice), evaluate whether these interactions are currently happening in their classes/rooms and act on that evidence to improve practice. We also use a range of tools to support practitioners in tuning in to children, using careful observation of key outcomes as the basis of assessment which feeds directly into practice.



Feedback

Feedback is a powerful tool for improvement. We use research tools such as the Environment Rating Scales to provide feedback through observation.



The use of research tools to guide quality improvement is currently being evaluated as part of a large-scale randomised controlled trial, funded by the Education Endowment Foundation, which will test impact on children's outcomes. EEF funding is highly competitive and only approaches showing real evidence of promise are selected. *A+ Education Ltd* is collaborating with the *University of Oxford* and *University College London* to develop and deliver the 'URLEY' programme (Using Research to improve Language in the Early Years). Although the findings will not be published until Spring 2019, the development and evaluation work is already informing the professional development programmes offered by A+ Education.



Combining the active ingredients within our approach to quality improvement

The following elements of successful professional development come together for effective implementation of the approach, with improvements to child outcomes at the core.



Child outcomes

Child outcomes are at the heart of our approach. Based on extensive evidence, our professional development courses focus primarily on developing early language and communication, the foundational skills which children need to become competent and capable learners and to succeed in KS1 and beyond.

Early language skills are one of the strongest predictors of later outcomes, especially literacy. Children with strong language skills at the age of five are much more likely to be strong readers at the age of 11.
Save the Children, 2015 (Ready to Read)



Practitioner Courses

Our courses are designed for all early years practitioners, teachers and teaching assistants, as well as those in a leadership role. Attendees will learn to use research-validated tools to support self-evaluation and improvement, by gaining a deeper understanding of how children learn, evaluating current practices and identifying areas for development. Our toolkit provides a framework to support practitioners in understanding how to translate research into practice within their classes/rooms, and what this might look like for their children.



Mentor Courses

These courses provide high-level professional development for individuals responsible for supporting quality improvement, enabling them to mentor others in the approach (i.e. using research tools to support quality). Drawing on evidence about effective coaching and mentoring, these courses are designed to increase the impact of the practitioner courses by preparing mentors to support in-class/room implementation.



Partnerships and project planning

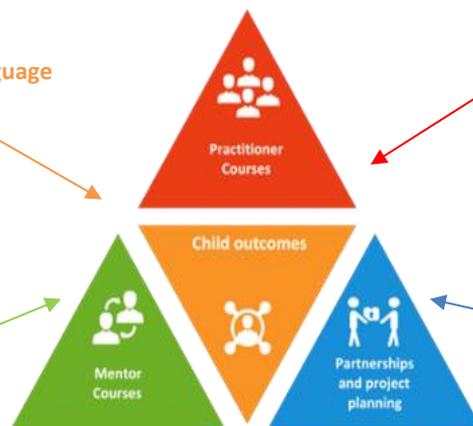
We work in partnership with those who commission us to co-construct effective quality improvement projects; combining elements to ensure professional development programmes are focussed on child outcomes, build on current practice and are designed around local priorities and budget.

Example of a quality improvement project led by a local authority

Making Every Interaction Count:
supporting communication and language development for 3-5-year olds

3 local authority mentors attend 5-day course alongside practitioners and receive an additional

2 half day workshops to prepare them for their supporting role



20 practitioners (2 per school/setting) attend a 5-day course

Project launch for participants and school leaders/setting managers

Follow up workshop towards the end of project to support sustainability

To see more project examples, please visit <http://www.aplus-education.co.uk/Professional-Development/>

Available courses and other building blocks of your project are described in detail overleaf.



Building blocks for your quality improvement project



Practitioner Courses

- Aims**
- To gain a deeper understanding of how children learn, and how to support that learning through a strong evidence-based adult-role.
 - To establish and embed effective observation and assessment of children's development.
 - To develop an effective and sustainable self-evaluation and improvement cycle including engaging team members in the approach.
 - To articulate and evidence best practice and progress to others, including Ofsted.
- Audience** **Early Years practitioners, teachers, teaching assistants. Early Years coordinators, room leaders, setting managers/leaders. Others with responsibility for supporting quality improvement in schools and settings - combined with mentor course.**
Suitable for groups of between 12 and 30 delegates to encourage community of practice and offer value for money.
- Course structure** 3, 4 or 5-day courses planned with several weeks between course days to allow time for implementation within the setting. Offered as full or half days.
- Content** Course content focusses on building practitioner knowledge and understanding of the **distinct skills that children need to become proficient communicators alongside rich contexts** for promoting these skills (incl. routines, books, play, science). The longer the course, the wider the range of contexts.
Explicit links to the *Early Years Foundation Stage* help practitioners to **build on existing practice**.
- Costs** For guide prices please visit <http://www.aplus-education.co.uk/pricelist>

"(The course) has really helped to transform (our staff's) understanding and approach and I think it will have a lasting impact on the work we do with children...I feel it has had the most impact on changing understanding of pedagogy than any other course our staff have been on."

Birmingham Head Teacher (July 2016)



Mentor Courses (continues overleaf)

- Aims**
- To develop an understanding of the role of mentor/coach when using research tools as part of improvement support.
 - To enhance observation skills using the Environment Rating Scales (ERS).
 - To gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of using the ERS to measure and record changes in quality.
 - To improve the impact of practitioner professional development by preparing mentors to support in-class/room implementation of the approach, including supporting practitioners in joint observations.
- Audience** **Early Years Leaders/Managers, Specialist Leaders in Education, Local Authority Advisors or others with responsibility for supporting quality improvement in schools and settings - combined with practitioner course.**
Suitable for groups of up to 12 delegates.



Course structure 1 – 5-day mentor courses. Offered as full days/half days either alongside the practitioner course or as a separate course.

Content Course content will be designed to suit your specific context and could include: the characteristics of effective mentoring/coaching, developing the role of a mentor/coach within your specific project/context; high level training in using the ERS for observation (including guided observation visits); gaining a deeper knowledge of the ERS tools and an introduction to using the ERS reliability.

Costs For guide prices please visit <http://www.aplus-education.co.uk/pricelist>

“As a Specialist Leader of Education, I will be able to support my schools more effectively with action plans that inspire and support change in a positive way.”
Hales Valley Teaching School Project delegate (March 2018)

Aim

- To maximise the impact of your quality improvement project.

Every project is unique, and we will work with you to co-construct an effective quality improvement project to meet your identified priorities. Our approach caters to all from local authorities, teaching schools and partnerships to individual settings or school.

Alongside the practitioner and mentor courses other elements might include:

Project launch for participants, leaders and managers

Designed to promote engagement and provide an overview of the approach. In addition to potential course delegates, we encourage attendance from team members who will be involved in implementing the approach within the classroom (e.g. teaching assistants) and from senior leaders. Usually 1.5-2 hours.

Specialist mentoring

Our highly experienced mentors can offer support to practitioners and their teams on their quality improvement journey using research tools and evidence-based approaches.

Follow up workshop

An opportunity to come together after working to implement the approach for a period of time, to refresh, review and plan for continued sustainability.

Audits and guided visits as part of wider projects

Guided small group visits provide an opportunity to practise using the ERS as an observation tool within a setting, either using selected items from a particular scale linked to your PD programme or one of the ERS tools as a whole. Our highly experienced observers can complete audits, using one ERS tool or combinations of tools as required to meet your project aims.

Evaluation

To evaluate the impact of your project. This would include summary report including headlines from mentoring support visits, feedback from Early Years team, evaluations of training, observation data and / or any additional evidence collected.

Costs For guide prices and more details about additional elements please visit For guide prices please visit <http://www.aplus-education.co.uk/pricelist>

“It has been so important to have the follow-up training. It keeps things ‘alive’ and networking going. Really great training.”

Sheffield School Practitioner Course Follow-up delegate (March 2017)

