

Working with children's centres to help parents learn about their children's learning

Key messages:

1. Holding classes in children's centres raised parents' awareness of other opportunities available there;
2. Working closely with creche managers enabled data collection on children using the creche;
3. For many learners, the concepts at the heart of the EYFS structure were new to them;
4. Parents learned how playing with their children promotes learning.

"I didn't realise that playing with play dough helped my child to write."

The courses were mainly delivered in children's centres in the heart of the deprived areas of urban Oldham. Some of these centres were in white working class estates, where it had been traditionally very hard to engage with learners who were disaffected. Other centres were in areas of high percentage ethnic minority families, mainly Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities.

Holding classes in children's centres proved very successful. Whilst coming to class, learners became aware of other groups using the centre, or gathered information on other services. One learner joined the midwife classes and was also seeking help with breast-feeding. The quality of resources and physical environment of the centres was high. Learners appreciated the venues and this helped greatly in delivering a quality service. The use of interactive whiteboards meant learners could experience 'new technology' and be more familiar with how their children were learning in schools.

The Family Learning team also worked closely with the services' own crèche managers and as a result developed systems to collect data on children using the crèche. These children also benefited from their parents attending a family learning programme as they received quality play and interaction during their time in crèche.

During each joint session, the teacher observed the children interacting with their parents and noted any developmental progress. She also catalogued any progress during nursery sessions, which she believed to be as a direct response to involvement in family learning.

One parent, who had limited English skills, attended sessions with her child. The child was fluent in English but did not choose to talk either in class or in nursery. After attending a few family learning joint sessions, this child, with gentle encouragement and close contact with her mother, started to talk. The child subsequently stated that she had “decided to start talking to her teachers now.”

Learning about the Early Years Foundation Stage structure and how it contributed to their child’s learning was an eye-opener for many of the learners. Many did not know or understand basic foundation concepts such as ‘self esteem’ or ‘unique’. Most were not familiar with the curriculum and did not understand how the emphasis on play related to learning. Many were amazed at the breadth of learning that occurred during the joint session activity.

“I’m amazed at my child, she is talking more. I ask her questions about books now not just read them to her.”

Oldham Family Learning

