

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Liverpool Hope University		
Unit of Assessment: C23 - Education		
Title of case study: Facilitating stronger Early Years leadership		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: September 2013-May 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
1. Dr Babs Anderson	1. Senior Lecturer Early Childhood	1. Pre September 2014 to July 2021
2. Professor Tina Cook	2. Professor of Education	2. April 2015 to Dec 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: January 2015 to December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>This case study describes the impact of ongoing research-based collaborations between Liverpool Hope University and organisations in three Local Authorities (LAs) in North West England. Informed by research carried out by Anderson and Cook, the innovative action-research-based programmes have changed the conceptualisation of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for, and the approach to, Early Years leadership. It has enhanced CPD for leaders and produced original resources that have affected the quality of EY provision through identifying and building leadership knowledge and capacity and enabling leaders to implement improvements in their settings. It strengthened leaders' competency and understanding, creating improvements in the promotion of young children's physical activity, nutrition and cognitive development.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The impact on Early Years leadership is underpinned by a sustained programme of research and development that has investigated ways of facilitating change in Early Years practice using action research processes. This research shows a significant change in Early Years leaders' competence and confidence in their own abilities in leading change, particularly as this group have been traditionally marginalised.</p> <p>Anderson and Cook's collective expertise spans Early Years education, Early Years leadership approaches to research in practice (praxis), the use of creative methods in reflexive enquiry, the practice of facilitation as a non-directive change agent and the journey to impact through disrupting current ways of acting. The underpinning research is distinctive for its inter-disciplinary and collaborative approach and methodological rigour.</p> <p>Key findings from this research include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaborative reflexive research approaches that start from the recognition and articulation of locally held knowledge build leadership knowledge and confidence. • a well-educated, well-trained workforce, that can develop a strategic approach to early years practice through its own ongoing enquiry, has an impact on the quality of provision. • reflexive facilitation processes for action research that encourage knowledge exchange across boundaries are vital for creating formative learning and impact. <p>Dr Anderson's research has focused on the use of reflexivity in evaluating personal praxis,</p>		

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particularly with Early Years leaders, creating an action research model for CPD (3.1). The School Readiness action research project (3.2), focused on practice regarding children's transitions to school, enhanced participants' capacity to use collaborative enquiry to identify issues within their professional context and to take action to improve these. This research enabled a change in thinking and practice, using a safe, trusting environment, which created a space for honest shared critical reflection. Having shown that this model for CPD was successful in improving the quality of provision, the process became a model used in other projects across the North West of England, such as the Chartered Leaders project carried out with School Improvement Liverpool (SIL). This research was also used to promote conceptualisations of school readiness in The Foundation Years Trust (FYT), based in Wirral LA.

Originating in Early Years practice, Cook's research focuses on understanding methodological issues within action research that create change. Her focus is on collaborative learning as a process for disrupting common rhetoric and accepted practices (3.4; 3.5). She has developed a theoretical framework for understanding the importance of new ways of seeing within collaborative research and evaluation (3.3;3.4;3.6). Research into reflexive learning cultures and how these act as catalysts for change/pathways to impact have had a direct impact on the knowledge of those involved in projects, both in relation to the use of research approaches and the practices being undertaken, including the practice of facilitation (3.4; 3.5). Her research into the recognition of embedded and alternative forms of impact that emerge from formative research processes and the ripple effect of embedded learning within action research (3.3;3.5) has informed the way in which the EYL project has been researched, understood and evaluated.

3. References to the research

1. Anderson, B and Cook, T (2020) Developing Early Years leadership: Examining the practice of facilitation in and through action research. *Educational Action Research*, online first. DOI: [10.1080/09650792.2020.1734040](https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2020.1734040)
2. McLeod, N. and Anderson, B. (2019) Towards an understanding of 'school' readiness: Collective interpretations and priorities. *Educational Action Research*. online first. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2019.1654902>
3. Abma T, Cook T, Rämgård M, Kleba E, Harris J & Wallerstein N (2017) Social Impact of Participatory Health Research: Collaborative Non-linear processes of Knowledge Mobilisation. *Educational Action Research* Vol 25 (4) pp489-505
4. Cook, T. (2006) Collaborative action research for development and evaluation: a good fit or the road to myopia? *Evaluation* Vol 12 (4) pp418-436.
5. Cook, T. (2004) Reflecting and learning together: action research as a vital element of developing understanding and practice. *Educational Action Research* Vol 12 (1) pp77-97
6. Cook, T. (2004) Starting where we can: using action research to develop inclusive practice. *International Journal of Early Years Education* Vol 12 (1) pp3-16.

The quality of this work is indicated by:***Invited collaborations:***

In May 2020, Anderson was invited to join an international research project into Early Years leadership in Sweden, Greece and England, led by Dr Palaiologou and Dr Male.

Invited key notes:

Cook's methodological research has international reach. Since 2000 she has been invited to present 27 keynote addresses to national and international conferences (audiences of both academic and community partners) on the subject of participation, action research and impact and

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evaluation.

Widely cited publications:

Since 2000 Cook has published 22 widely cited methodological papers (participatory research, impact and evaluation) in international refereed journals. She was part of a team of renowned international participatory researchers that published the Position Papers on Participatory Health Research and led the team that published the Position Paper on Impact (<http://www.icphr.org/position-papers--discussion-papers>).

ESRC Festival of Social Science

The ESRC gave a grant of £900 to fund a dissemination event 'Early Years settings: Who would be a leader?' in November 2018.

Project Funding:

1. September 2013-June 2014

Knowsley Children's centre systems leadership £8,000 for Phase 2 and 3 of the School Readiness research project. Grant Holder: Dr N. McLeod.

2. October 2015-Feb 2016

2a. School Improvement Liverpool and Liverpool Learning Partnership £8, 675 for Phase 1 Liverpool Chartered Leader programme (CPD and research element)

March 2016-July 2016

2b. School Improvement Liverpool and Liverpool Learning Partnership £8, 375 for Phase 2 Liverpool Chartered Leader programme (CPD and research element)

October 2016-Feb 2017

2c. School Improvement Liverpool and Liverpool Learning Partnership £8, 375 for Phase 3 Liverpool Chartered Leader programme (CPD and research element)

March 2017-July 2017

2d. School Improvement Liverpool and Liverpool Learning Partnership £8, 375 for Phase 4 Liverpool Chartered Leader programme (CPD and research element)

October 2017-Feb 2018

2e. School Improvement Liverpool and Liverpool Learning Partnership £8, 375 for Phase 5 Liverpool Chartered Leader programme (CPD and research element)

Total £42, 175 (£12, 653 Research; £29, 522 CPD) Grant holder: Dr B. Anderson

October 2019 – May 2020

3. School Improvement Liverpool £3,600 for Keep Moving, keep healthy, keep learning (Physical activity and nutrition coordinator -'PANCo') research project

Grant holder: Dr. B. Anderson.

4. Details of the impact

This sustained programme of collaborative research projects was carried out on three levels, the first at individual Early Years leader (EYL) level, the second involving EYLs and stakeholders in a holistic approach that involved entire settings and the third, a tertiary level of voluntary sector and educational service providers (organisations supporting early years education and care provision). Each project at all three of these levels engaged with individuals or organisations in evaluating and embedding new ways of working in CPD in the North West of England.

1. **Individual EYL level:** This first project, commissioned by Knowsley's Children Centre System Leadership Fund was used across 14 early years settings and had the following impacts:

- It was found that an action research approach to CPD was effective in improving practice for

individual Early Years leaders.

- A barrier to communication between birth–3 and 3–5 provision was identified.
- Recognition of school readiness as being beyond a purely psychological concept where a set of skills had been achieved, moving towards recognition of the whole child and family history as having an impact (5.6).
- Parents' perspectives were elevated as an important element in supporting a child's success in education.
- Recognition of the need for, and confidence, in acting more inclusively in their Leadership role was enhanced.

2. Early Years Setting level: The aim of the 'The Early Years Chartered Leader' programme was to enhance outcomes for children, particularly in areas of low socio-economic status (SES). The project involved over 60 EYs from all sectors of early years provision in Liverpool Local Authority and each of the EYs influenced a wider range of stakeholders with their improvements, including their staff, parents and children (5.1). This project used and built upon the knowledge gleaned within the first project to create a series of nested action research interventions whereby they identified issues and created solutions (5.2 /5.3). This had an effect on

- communication: more effective communication strategies were developed, including communication with parents;
- enhancing the staff subject and pedagogic knowledge base: the way in which planning for individual children's needs via observations was influenced by their engagement in the project;
- strategies for effective staff peer observations and supervision, together with more evidence-based self-evaluation activities, were developed.
- each leader, could in partnership with their stakeholders, now identify an issue, evaluate their interventions and take into account success indicators for their change management.

This was new to early years leaders. The impact of this project was demonstrated through renewed funding, which occurred after robust evaluation of each phase of this project and judgments by OFSTED, who rated 94% of early years provision in the LA of Liverpool as good or outstanding, an increase in previous rates (5.4). An ESRC Festival of Social Science event presented their learning journey to the participants to recognise their evolution as leaders (5.5) and embed their role in the process of change.

The funders, School Improvement Liverpool (SIL), an educational service provider, held the project in high regard and wanted to continue with the project. Unfortunately, their next bid for funding from the Education Endowment Foundation was not successful.

3. Tertiary level: The research findings from project one were recognised as valuable by the Foundation Years Trust (FYT), Birkenhead, set up by Frank Field MP as part of the strategy for improving education in areas of identified low SES. They subsequently used them to examine and improve their practice in their work with parents, both directly in groups operated by the FYT and indirectly in their work with other practitioner and parent groups. The research findings were also used by the FYT to articulate a team response to consultation on school readiness by Wirral LA, thus challenging conventional wisdom and stimulating debate as to interpretations of the concept of school readiness beyond the FYT itself (5.6).

The successful outcomes of the Chartered Leader Project led to Anderson being commissioned by SIL to enhance delivery of CPD for early years settings in the Keep Moving, Keep Healthy, Keep Learning –the role of a Physical Development and Nutrition Co-ordinator (PANCo). The outcomes

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of the research were shared with SIL Officers and used to inform and extend the delivery of high quality CPD (5.7/ 5.9). The interim report at the end of the first phase of the PANCo recommended:

1. Continue with the practical sessions and the knowledge sharing group work, due to their positive impact on staff and settings (5.8).
2. Continue with specific input on knowledge regarding physical activity and healthy eating due to its effect in broadening staff knowledge on relevant guidance and confidence and ability to apply it.
3. Using Anderson's collaborative approach to raising awareness within staff of the holistic nature of their role as the key person in supporting the child's learning and development, including wellbeing and healthy lifestyles.
4. The importance of strengthening EYs' partnerships with parents, including encouraging reciprocal feedback between settings and parents/ carers.

These were implemented to ensure the delivery of effective training for the second phase of PANCo leaders and enable them to embed this work effectively in each of their settings. A final report May 2020 (5.10) demonstrated how this new form of training has impacted on high quality provision in terms of health and wellbeing.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Educate magazine article on Early Years Chartered Leader programme (July 2016).
2. Exemplar poster to illustrate impact in one setting (Dissemination event Jan 2018) (Poster).
3. Personal reflections on the process of taking part in CPD action research (Dissemination event Jan 2018).
4. Report from funder, SIL, on their perspectives of the impact of Liverpool Early Years Chartered Leader programme (Feb 2018) (email).
5. Excerpt from evaluations from ESRC event 'Who would be a leader?' (Nov 2018).
6. Communication from the Regional Director of the Foundation Years Trust on the use of School Readiness paper (March 2020).
7. Report from SIL on progress during phase 1 of PANCo CPD (email) (July 2019).
8. Ofsted report on nursery engaging in PANCo project (April 2019).
9. Email from SIL on how the PANCo scheme has impacted on their provision (July 2019).
10. Excerpt from final evaluative report on the PANCo CPD for SIL (May 2020).