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Listening to Practitioners: The key to High Quality Inclusive Sustainable Practice in ECE



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Outline of Project

- Funded project led by Teamworks (teaching schools and LA), to improve levels of development in boys underachievement in handwriting
- 10-week programme – dough gym
- 10 PVI settings, 2 practitioners per settings, selected from area of disadvantage
- Pre-determined sample of children aged 36 – 48 months



Significant Features of the Project

- Initial launch event and conferences / meeting with Alistair Bryce-Clegg
- Training for the intervention, including assessment of children at the start and end of the intervention
- Moderation events
- Employed third party researchers
- Teamworks aimed to work in partnership **'with'** rather than **'to'** practitioners / participants



Researchers Aims:

- Establish if the project was designed and carried out **'with'** or **'to'** the practitioners
- Sustainability
- Long-term benefits for the practitioners / settings
- Continuation of the intervention on completion of the project



Theoretical Framework

- Power viewed through Bourdieu's (1977, 1992) theories of capital; social and cultural capital
- Exploitation (Taggart 2011)



Methodology

- Focus group – collaborative approach
- Six months post project semi-structured interviews with practitioner and QIT (LA)
- Two researchers adopted an approach to ‘investigator triangulation’ (Archibald 2016)
- Ethics - Authentic voices of participants, safe space to talk
- Mutually respectful relationship between researchers and participants



Analysis

- We used the following critical periods throughout the intervention for the analysis of 'power'

Critical Periods

Bid and initial design of the intervention

Training and allocation of resources

Assessment and implementation of the intervention

Moderation

Completion of intervention



Findings

Training and Allocation of Resources

- Conference...
- Resources: *'As a charity we don't have spare pennies so it was really good to say I'm going to spend this on fine motor skills for my children'*
- Lack of resources in the PVI sector therefore can be exploited by Teamworks to buy cooperation, leads to 'powerlessness' (Osgood 2005)
- Powerlessness evident elsewhere in data (network / sharing contacts)



Findings cont...

Assessment and Implementation of the Intervention

- Initial assessment tool needed specialist training and could only be used by two teachers from Teamworks = **unsuccessful**
- Modified assessment handed over to practitioners, which they could adapt to the children's needs

'Break it up into 2 or 3 sections... you could let them go' (children)... described herself as 'empowered'

- Data suggests a temporary shift in the power imbalance towards the participants



Findings cont...

Moderation

- Participants reported high levels of enjoyment and staff were approachable during the moderation meetings
 - Nevertheless they would wait for the focus group to ask us (the researchers) questions about the intervention
- Teamworks set the agenda and reclaimed power from the participants



Findings cont...

Completion of Intervention

- Sustainability
- The participants were very positive in their response to the intervention, recognising the positive benefits to the children, other staff and themselves
- Nevertheless they did not continue with the intervention it in its current form
- Social and cultural capital – led to an increase but limited and did not include all participants and settings



Participant Quotes

‘Most of the settings have continued to offer dough gym activities a few times a year, though none of them are baselining or tracking using the specific criteria from the project’ (QIT)

‘We haven’t continued doing dough gym as an actual session that we do daily... but I think we use quite a lot of the techniques from dough gym and put that into our provision, so we have playdough all the time whereas we might have had it twice a week’



Summary

Critical Periods	Power
Bid and initial design of the intervention	Teamworks
Training and allocation of resources	Teamworks
Assessment and implementation of the intervention	Participants (assessment) Implementation shared
Moderation	Teamworks
Completion of intervention	Participants..?



Conclusion

Was the intervention done **'to'** or **'with'** the participants?

Participants experienced high levels of satisfaction and gained in confidence when there was a shift in the power imbalance to the participants during the day to day implementation of the intervention. For some there was a limited increase in social and cultural capital in that they are now more engaged with the LA and sharing good practice. However, longer term only a modified and reduced version of the intervention has become an established part of continuous provision in the settings and the participants still look to Teamworks to identify future interventions, this suggests there has been little change in the power imbalance and emphasises the lack of status of practitioners in the PVI workforce.



Significance of the Findings

- Longer term improvements to practice in the PVI sector are jeopardised by this power imbalance and opportunities to use the knowledge and expertise of the practitioners is lost
- Whilst mutual acceptance of the status quo regarding holding of power continues, it is unlikely that the status of the workforce in the PVI sector will improve
- Education will continue to dominate early childhood, education and care



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