

Stop! Look!
Listen! Sharing
observations
with parents

The idea

‘Stop, Look and Listen’ is an exciting approach to developing children’s learning with parents. **London Borough of Camden’s Foundation Stage Advisory Teacher Team** has introduced the approach to a range of early years settings, to enable practitioners and parents to share their observations and to plan the next steps for the children together.

The title suggests a way of working with young children, to be shared with parents, that encourages them to sometimes stop everything, look at their child as they play and *listen* to what they have to say.

The inspiration for the project stems from a combination of recent training on ***Listening to Young Children**** and the work of Margaret Carr in New Zealand on assessing children’s learning through recording ***Learning Stories*****

Listening to Young Children suggests recording children’s ideas as a vehicle for sharing experiences. Cameras, for example, can be used for a variety of purposes such as recording children’s likes and dislikes; planning changes in the setting; and recording observations on walks. These are ideal activities for parental involvement, encouraging both parents and practitioners to give more time and space to children’s own voices.

By using the format of *Learning Stories*, parents in New Zealand’s early childhood centres are encouraged to regularly observe their children, share their own children’s interests and contribute to records.

Parents and practitioners write an account of what children do and say when absorbed in play. These are then discussed and plans made to encourage positive learning dispositions, which are defined as: taking an interest; being deeply involved; showing persistence; expressing feelings and views; and taking responsibility.

Practitioners have developed their own ideas for ‘Stop! Look! Listen!’ as a result of training delivered by the advisory teacher. At Ready, Steady, Go Nursery, the children designed and made a chair, which is designated as a special Listening Chair.



Whoever sits in it is encouraged to share their views, offer ideas for activities and must be listened to.

Introducing the idea to parents

Parents from a range of settings in Camden attended evening sessions where both approaches were explained by the advisory teacher. At the workshop, an example of a learning story was read out and it was explained that it could be very short – simply recording what the child did and said. Both practitioner and parent use the same recording format.

Some parents agreed to make observations of their child at regular intervals. Some managed each week, others every half term. The child’s key worker also makes an observation and these are shared. Parents do express anxieties about involvement at first, feeling uncertain of what to say or write. Parents are encouraged to think about what interests their child, what gets them involved and to observe this.

(A Learning Story assessment format is included on the CD-Rom in your pack.)

“I didn't realise he could do so much for himself. I've stopped doing everything for him now, the way I used to.”

Problems overcome

The parents' observations can be written down, taped, videoed or, for those who feel uncomfortable about writing, simply recounted verbally. Disposable and digital cameras have also been given or lent to families to help record observations and have proved very popular.

Benefits achieved

Through this process, parents learn new things about their children. They notice what really interests them, spot repeated behaviour patterns, realise that children can do far more than they thought and even begin to consider that perhaps they had been pressuring them to do things they didn't like. Through relating observations to Margaret Carr's learning stories, parents were supported in appreciating the prime importance of personal, social and emotional development in learning. They also learned just how much children learn through play and how important it is to give children time to explore and lead, instead of adults dictating the pace.

When regular parental observation and dialogue is established practice, practitioners learn more about what children do at home.

It can also be easier to discuss concerns about a child's development. One parent, who had worries about her child, was very pleased to have the regular, shared conversations and felt it had really helped to identify needs.

Laura is an only child who had missed some time in nursery due to poor health. Her key worker was concerned that she found playing and sharing with other children very difficult. Her parents, however, were surprised to hear this. They began to share observations with the key worker, who then suggested that some of Laura's friends from nursery be invited home to play. Laura's parents were then able to see, at first hand, the behaviour expressed towards other children.

Through working at home and in the nursery together on strategies – talking, sharing stories and working with puppets to discuss feelings – Laura gradually began to cooperate more and made a firm friend at nursery. She was able to work cooperatively to make a jewellery shop, even passing on her new-found skills to other children. She was heard to firmly announce that 'It's all about sharing, you know.'

“When we realised how much he loved wrapping things up and decorating them at home, it made us think, should we provide more of this at nursery? We moved the paper and boxes so that he could get them himself.”



*Lancaster, YP and Broadbent, V (2003) *Listening to Young Children*. Oxford University Press
www.coram.org.uk

**Carr, M (2001) 'Assessment in Early Childhood Settings: Learning Stories', *Assessing Children's Learning*. New Zealand Council for Education Research (NZER) (training pack).
www.communityinsight.co.uk