



Project Guide

LEAP (Little Explorers And Parents & families) -
Creative Health for Early Years Wellbeing





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What is LEAP?

LEAP is an exciting addition to Northern Ballet's multi-sensory projects for Early Years (EY). LEAP enables centres across the UK to use Northern Ballet's creative methods to support EY settings and deliver storytelling, movement, music and sensory activities, inspired by the book *There is a Tribe of Kids* by Lane Smith.

In spring 2024, five EY settings based in the North East and North Cumbria area with high rankings on the Index of Multiple Deprivation took part in a pilot project. This was supported by the North East and North Cumbria Child Health and Wellbeing Network, with in-depth evaluation provided by Newcastle University.

The 'L' and 'E' in LEAP stand for '**Little Explorers**'. The project is a story-led introduction to dance; the children's curiosity leads them to explore the story through movement, music and multi-sensory resources.

The 'A' and 'P' in LEAP stand for '**And Parents**'. Families are different, and to reflect that we extended the title to '**& families**'. Since we have not worked specifically on family engagement before, we were interested in exploring how activities with a wellbeing focus that children and adults can do together would be perceived. For this, we created five take-home activity sheets, which we refer to as 'family resources'.



Essence of the project

Northern Ballet has been delivering EY work since 2010, introducing children to dance by combining movement, story-telling and sensory activities into creative sessions. Our projects are based on developmental movement play principles, with child-led learning being a big part of what we do.

While most of our EY projects are led by one of our dance artists, through LEAP we are now able to share tools and knowledge with EY practitioners nationally, to deliver the project independently in their own settings or set up their own projects.

The following are the cornerstones of the project:

- Storytelling and engaging children's curiosity as a catalyst for child-led learning
 - Exploration of multi-sensory resources to make the story more interactive and build skills
- Use of music and musical instruments
- Encouraging physical exploration of themes through movement
 - Educational outcomes and wellbeing – making links to the Early Years Foundation Stage framework (EYFS)
- Practitioner confidence and engagement
- Family engagement
- Evaluation

The project will be available to purchase for EY settings from Autumn 2024. The package includes online training, a selection of multi-sensory resources, and a resource pack with the lesson plans, along with family resources. For more information, please visit our website (northernballet.com/early-years) or email learning@northernballet.com

Alternatively, this guide will help you consider the different aspects required to set up your own creative sessions - see the 'Getting started' section.





Resources and training

The centres that took part in the LEAP pilot each received a resource pack containing a framework for structured sessions. One of the aims for the project is to raise Early Years Practitioners' confidence in delivering creative movement activities. To support with this, we provided a 2-hour online CPD session for the EY staff from each centre to:

- Learn about Northern Ballet's approach to working within Early Years settings
- Receive guidance on how to deliver sessions based on the framework, consisting of storytelling, exploration of multi-sensory activities, movement and music, all while enabling a child-led approach to learning
- Have the opportunity to try out some of the activities
- Be able to ask questions and reflect on their current practice
- Participate in the first of five sessions, to explore movement ideas and creative approaches, which can be applied to the subsequent four sessions.

The basic structure of the session is:

Beginning activities – as with any physical activity it's important to build in ways to warm up the body and get focused for what's to come.

Middle activities – everything from reading the book to exploring it through sensory activities, music and movement.

Ending activities – a cool down or relaxation to bring the heart rate and energy down again, followed by a reflective mark marking activity.

Additionally, each centre received a resource bundle to make the sessions multi-sensory. The resources provided were meant to enhance the selection of resources EY settings are likely using already or are easily sourced. The bundle contains musical instruments, light-based resources, mark making materials, fabric, feathers, shells, fake ivy, CDs with music composed specifically for this project and story, and of course the book *There is a Tribe of Kids* by Lane Smith.

The centres provided resources such as natural materials (soil/ compost, water, jelly, stones, etc); man-made materials (ribbons, streamers, paper, etc) builder's trays, extra instruments and mark making materials and batteries (for the light-based resources we provided in the resource bundle).

What resources could you use to bring to life a well-known (or new) story in your setting?



Getting started

From our learnings on the LEAP pilot, we have gathered information to share with others. Whether you are a Nursery Manager or Early Years Practitioner wanting to inject some more creativity into your setting, below are some things for you to consider when setting up a project by yourself. Alternatively, you can purchase the project package directly from Northern Ballet from Autumn 2024.

What are your aims for the project?

We know that being active is good for physical and mental health, and adding creativity and storytelling to the mix has the potential to impact all areas of the EYFS. Are there any particular areas that you want your setting to focus on through this project – to benefit the children, and perhaps also the staff?

Choose a suitable length and duration for your project

Perhaps you want to run the project across half a term, so six weeks for an hour each week. Or maybe a themed week or day is a better starting point for you.

Choose a story to focus on

Split this into sections to reflect the number of sessions you have decided to run the project within. If the project runs over multiple days, be sure to recap earlier parts of the story for any children who may have missed a session. For themed days, split the story into sections to enable the children to have focused exploration time depending on the themes in the book.

Choose a space where the project will be delivered

Consider the layout. Will you need to move furniture to give children more space to move or can any sessions, or parts of sessions, be delivered outside? (Weather permitting!)

Consider the group you are going to be working with

How many? We suggest 8 – 12 at a time, depending on the number of adults present. What ages? What needs?

Who will deliver the project?

Is there a staff member in your setting who is eager to take on the challenge and confident in delivering movement-based activities? If not, is it time to consider bringing in a suitable dance artist to deliver the project?

Here's what you might want to discuss with a dance artist (or a member of staff):

- The parameters for the project
- Number and length of sessions
- The story and themes to be explored
- Aims – what do you want the children (and also staff) to get from the sessions?
- What resources could be used in the session and who will provide these? They may include messy play resources such as soil, water, jelly, 'clean mud', flour, musical instruments plus other materials such as fabrics, lights and mark making resources. Do you provide the music and the speaker, or do they come prepared with this?
- Completing a Risk Assessment together to ensure that you have thought about the space and the resources used in the sessions
- The children they will be working with and their needs. How many in the session and how many members of staff will be present to support?
- That they have a valid DBS, insurance, background in dance/movement and have worked with young children before
- Lastly, payment to reflect their expertise, planning, delivery, cost of resources and travel

Get resources together prior to the start of the project

What will you need to make the story more interactive and inspire the children's curiosity?



Find music for each of the sessions

This includes music for warm up and cool down/relaxation, as well as music to reflect the environment or part of the story you are exploring in each session.

How will music be played in the sessions?

If the artist is sourcing the music, do you have a speaker/CD player for them to play the music on? If you are sourcing the music, share this with the artist as early as possible so that they can prepare. Have you got a PPL PRS TheMusicLicence in place to play music?

Family resources

We created take-home activity sheets to extend the learning from the project within the EY setting to home. Our aim was to see to what extent parents and families would engage with the child's learning at home using the resources we provided, and these focused loosely on the '5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing' ([nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing)) to benefit the children and families.

The activities involved moving like some of the animals from the story, with the option to follow short video clips through QR codes, collecting and creating with natural outdoor materials, as well as encouraging conversations between children and their adults. The family resources were sent to EY centres together with the resource pack and bundle.

Children received a take-home activity sheet after each of the five sessions, and these related to the themes from the LEAP session delivered by the EY staff at the centre. One side of the activity sheet guided the activity, with some of the pages incorporating QR codes linking to short videos with movement examples. The other side had a short guide for parents/adults. It incorporated URLs and QR codes which led to the Healthier Together website ([nenc-healthiertogether.nhs.uk](https://www.healthiertogether.nhs.uk)) and its various pages to provide help and advice about common concerns.

Through the project, the evaluators found that family engagement is difficult to monitor and make accessible to everyone. The use of writing and language barriers should be considered, as well as the time and space required. The evaluators have recommended producing resources in other languages and digital versions to overcome some of these barriers.

Further information

The North East and North Cumbria Child Health and Wellbeing Network is part of the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board. To find out more about the network please contact them via nencicb.northernchildnetwork@nhs.net and you can access their work into arts and creativity at nenc-healthiertogether.nhs.uk/resources/child-health-and-wellbeing-network-chwn-shared-resources/arts-and-creativity

Northern Ballet: northernballet.com/early-years

Healthier Together: nenc-healthiertogether.nhs.uk

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[The full evaluation report on LEAP, and a two-page executive summary, can be accessed here](#)

