

Evaluation of the LEAP (Little Explorers And Parents & families) Pilot Project

Five early years settings in the North of England took part in the LEAP pilot project. The aim was to offer an accessible way for pre-school children from disadvantaged areas to engage in movement, music, storytelling, and multisensory experiences. The evaluation findings highlight benefits for the children and practitioners involved, in terms of new skills gained, increased confidence, and enhanced school readiness.

The LEAP project

Since 2010, Northern Ballet has delivered early years (EY) projects to introduce young children to dance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a remote project was created for EY practitioners to use independently; this was the inspiration for the LEAP (Little Explorers And Parents & families) project.

A scheme of work was developed to be delivered weekly, with five sessions each lasting around one hour. The learning sheets and full resource package were inspired by the popular story *There is a Tribe of Kids* by Lane Smith. EY practitioners took part in a two-hour remote training session delivered by a community dance artist to equip them with the skills and confidence to deliver the LEAP activities.



The evaluation

The evaluation aimed to gather insights on the LEAP project structure and its reported impacts so that it can be scaled up to other EY settings within the UK. Flexible, qualitative approaches were used to gather the views of key people involved in the pilot.

Methods included: remote, email and WhatsApp interviews; focus groups; observations; and use of existing materials (e.g. photographs and notes taken by staff during the LEAP sessions).

The final sample involved 20 children, two parents and eight staff members from across the five EY settings. Data were analysed using a framework based on the evaluation questions.

Key recommendations

- Build on what worked well about the pilot; for example: adoption of a child-led approach; small group sessions; online training that promoted the skills and autonomy of the EY practitioners; and use of easily accessible resources within the EY settings.
- Target future delivery at settings where the LEAP approach is feasible and offers something distinctive from the usual offer.
- Ensure that contingencies are in place to deal with challenges, such as staff and child absence, settings with limited indoor space, and higher proportions of children with additional needs.
- Explore ways to engage parents/carers and families from all communities, recognising that they may not have the capacity, ability or interest to be actively involved in the way we anticipated.
- Promote the positive impacts of taking part in the project, in terms of increased school readiness and children's enjoyment of the sessions.
- Emphasise the benefits for EY practitioners not only in terms of the skills, knowledge and confidence gained to successfully deliver the LEAP sessions, but also in terms of resources and ideas that can be used to enhance their everyday practice.



Further information

This evaluation was conducted by researchers from Newcastle University and funded by the North East and North Cumbria Child Health and Wellbeing Network, which you can find out about by emailing nencicb.northernchildnetwork@nhs.net. Scan the QR code below to access the full evaluation report.



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