

How High Quality Interactions form part of Evidence-Informed Pedagogy:

WHY IT MATTERS IN THE EARLY YEARS



In early childhood education, we talk a lot about being “child-centred” or “reflective,” but there’s a growing recognition that we must also be evidence-informed. This isn’t just another buzzword—it’s a way of thinking, practicing, and evolving as professionals.

What Is Evidence-Informed Practice?

At its core, evidence-informed research combines three essential elements:

1. The best available research, including findings from longitudinal studies, neuroscience, and developmental psychology.
2. Professional expertise, built through training, observation, and reflective practice.
3. Contextual knowledge, including children’s individual needs, families, communities, and the setting itself.

This approach avoids relying solely on academic research (which can be limited or disconnected from real-life practice) and instead values a more grounded and dynamic form of enquiry.

High-Quality Interactions as Evidence in Action

One of the most compelling areas where evidence-informed practice makes a difference is in high-quality interactions. These aren’t just warm or friendly exchanges—they are powerful moments where thinking is extended, emotions are acknowledged, and language is meaningfully developed.

Research such as the EPPE and EPPSE studies, the SHREC framework, and tools like the SSTEW and Leuven scales have consistently shown that intentional, responsive interactions are a key driver of children’s learning and wellbeing. But it’s not just what the studies say—it’s how we apply this knowledge in our own environments that matters most.

How High Quality Interactions form part of Evidence-Informed Pedagogy:

PRACTITIONERS AS RESEARCHERS



“If you're working in the early years and want your practice to be responsive, robust, and deeply respectful of children, start with this mindset: embrace action research and develop an evidence-informed approach. Because when our interactions are grounded in research, reflection, and real-life relevance, everyone benefits—most of all, the children and their families.”

Action Research can facilitate evidence-informed pedagogy, invites practitioners to see themselves as action researchers, thoughtful observers, experimenters, and reflectors. When we record interactions, discuss them with colleagues, and look critically at our own behaviours, we are engaging in practitioner research.

Settings like Pen Green have modelled how this can be done collaboratively—with practitioners and parents co-analysing footage of everyday routines to uncover what truly supports learning. This kind of research enquiry leads to strategies that are deeply personal, highly effective, and grounded in lived experience.

It's Not About Being Right—It's About Being Reflective

There's no single blueprint for quality in the early years. What works in one setting may not fit another. Evidence-informed practice gives us a framework to test ideas, question assumptions, and adapt our strategies thoughtfully.

It encourages us to ask:

- What does the research say?
- What am I noticing in this child, right now?
- How might my own values or beliefs be shaping what I do?
- What interactions facilitate and support the learning and development of our children in our setting?

Moving Forward with Intention

Embedding action research doesn't require grand projects or academic reports. It starts with small actions: noticing a moment of interaction, reflecting with a colleague, questioning a long-held practice, or trying something new and observing its impact.

It's about creating a culture of curiosity and reflection—where decisions are made not by habit or convenience, but by thoughtful, informed intention.

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