

# What makes an effective pre-school?



# Key issues addressed by the study

- ◆ This study explored:
  - the teaching and learning models and practices used in the most effective pre-school settings
  - links between effective settings and parent participation



# The key characteristics of the most effective pre-school centres

- ◆ High quality pre-school centres provided:
  - a balance between teacher-led and freely chosen activities
  - differentiation which enabled children to build on their own starting points
  - opportunities to challenge children's thinking



# The benefits of high-quality pre-school for children

- ◆ Improved thinking skills
- ◆ Good quality adult–child interactions
- ◆ Enhanced behaviour and social skills development
- ◆ Positive responses from adults to children’s emotional and learning needs



# Practices seen in effective centres

## ◆ Adults:

- balanced group work with freely chosen activities
- differentiated activities to challenge children
- provided support so children could reach beyond what they could do already
- asked open ended questions
- displayed non-critical attitudes
- encouraged children to try new experiences
- modelled activities



# Parents/carers can help

- ◆ There were further positive effects on the children's development of thinking and understanding where parents or carers :
  - were aware of the learning activities taking place within school
  - built upon these experiences in the cultural context of the home



# Kinds of interactions that were effective

- ◆ Where adults involved themselves in the children's play and extended their thinking through questioning

*Child:* We found a coconut!

*Teacher :* Well done! Oh it's an acorn, if we planted it what do you think would grow?

*Child:* A flower

*Teacher :* Not quite, if it came off that tree what would grow?

*Child:* Don't know!

*Teacher :* OK, let's get a pot, some stones and plant it to see...What do you think it will grow into?

*Child:* A tree



# What helped to develop children's thinking skills

- ◆ Adults modelling appropriate language, behaviour, skills and attitudes
- ◆ Both the teacher and the child contributing to the learning process
- ◆ The opportunity for children to be active and take the initiative to learn
- ◆ Sustained shared thinking and scaffolding



# What scaffolding and sustained shared thinking involves

- ◆ Scaffolding is when an adult provides the support needed for a child to achieve a task and then gradually reduces the support to allow the child to become independent at it
- ◆ Sustained shared thinking involves:
  - the adult responding to the child's understanding / capability
  - the child's awareness of what is to be learned
  - the active co-construction of an idea of skill



# Who were the children in the study?

- ◆ The main study followed the progress of 3000 children, aged 3 plus, in 141 pre-school settings in six English Local Authorities
- ◆ This study involved 10 boys and 10 girls from each of a sub-set of 14 pre-school settings
- ◆ Pupils were identified by practitioners to provide a range of ability and age



# How was the information gathered?

- ◆ Data collected at each of the 14 case study pre-school settings included:
  - written analysis of the setting
  - transcripts of interviews conducted with staff members and managers
  - observations of two practitioners followed in each setting and selected vignettes and ‘critical incidents’ observed
  - parental interviews
  - floor plans showing the inside and outdoor learning and play environment

# How can teachers use the evidence in this study?

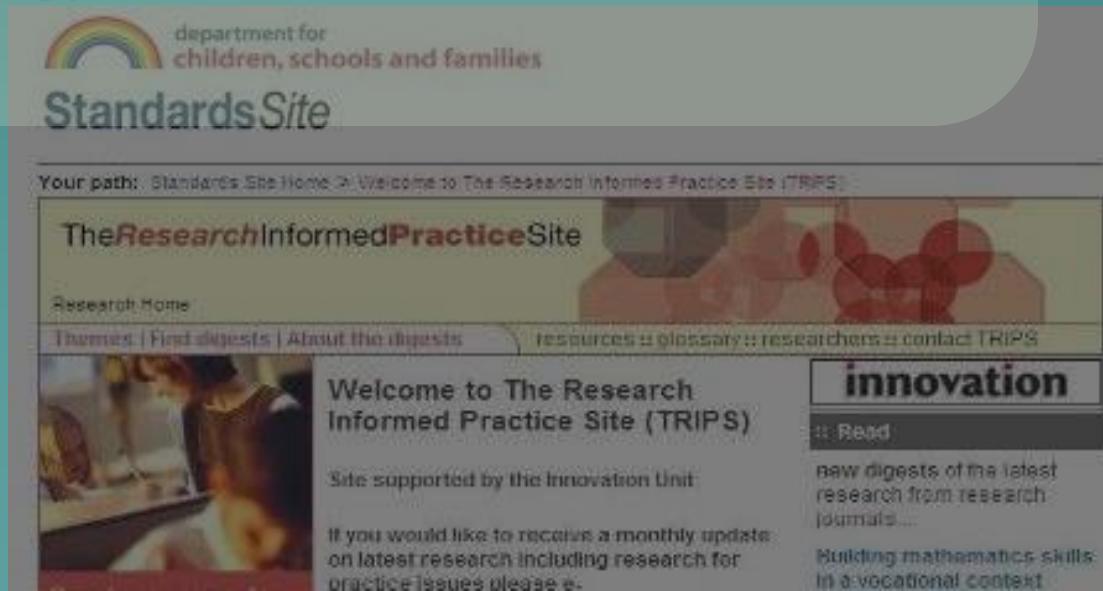
- ◆ The study identified ways in which adults could stimulate children's thinking.
- ◆ *How could you increase:*
  - *the scope for freely chosen activities?*
  - *respond more proactively to opportunities for engaging in shared thinking?*
  - *increase open-ended tasks for which children will need to work together to find solutions?*
  - *encourage parents and carers to build on learning activities experienced in school in the home environment e.g. through using a home school book to record briefly these activities and offer suggestions for parents and carers to follow up?*

# How can leaders use the evidence in this study?

- ◆ High quality pre-school learning environments shared a number of characteristics including adults asking open questions and differentiating activities to challenge children
- ◆ *Could you encourage staff to share effective approaches through observation of each other's practice either as a whole staff or as part of an action research cycle? For example, would it be useful to monitor the number of open and closed questions used within a particular session?*

# Follow-up reading

- ◆ Study reference: Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Sylva, K.(2004) Researching pedagogy in English pre-schools *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(5), pp.713-730
- ◆ Summary available at:  
[www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research/themes/early\\_years/Researchingpedagogy/](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research/themes/early_years/Researchingpedagogy/)



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Research Informed Practice Site (TRIPS). At the top, there's a logo for the Department for Children, Schools and Families featuring a rainbow and the text "department for children, schools and families". Below the logo, the word "Standards Site" is displayed. A navigation bar includes links for "Research Home", "Themes", "Find digests", "About the digests", "Resources", "Glossary", "Researchers", and "Contact TRIPS". The main content area features a banner with the text "The Research Informed Practice Site" and a small image of children. Below the banner, a large image shows two children playing with colorful blocks. To the right of the image, the word "innovation" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the page, there's a section titled "Welcome to The Research Informed Practice Site (TRIPS)" with a sub-section about the Innovation Unit.

# Feedback

- ◆ Did you find this useful?
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