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## Practitioner Inquiry Project Report

# Leadership opportunities & reflections

### Project title

The Pros and Cons of Free flow Mealtimes

### Subtitle (if applicable)

### Your name, role and setting

Kirsty Maxwell, PT Early Years Central Team, Dumfries and Galloway Council

### 1. What are the implications of this research for:

- The team/setting as a whole
- Pedagogy
- Resourcing
- Policy
- The sector / your networks / management beyond your immediate setting.

(Please aim to write between 250 minimum and 500 words maximum, using the box below. Please do not disclose the identity of any individuals in your comments, as this form will be part of your colleague's public record of their project).

There were many implications for this project that considered the benefits and consequences of having a free flow lunch experience for the children with the outcomes of the research creating opportunities to make improvements through the changes that follow. This project is using Froebel's principle of Freedom with Guidance to guide and support pedagogy. It is allowing the children to think freely and become autonomous in their decision about when, where and with whom they would like to choose to have lunch. Further to this the children are able to experience a slower pace to their lunch provision and having an unhurried meal provides them with the chance to talk with their peers and the adults supporting and extending this experience. As nurturing adults support and extend the mealtime provision there are opportunities for them to be responsive to the children's needs, developing their independence skills while they make their own choices. There is a difference for the role of the adult to be less task focussed and be more involved with the children. Similarly for the adults who are still supporting the children in the playroom the emphasis becomes less on tidying up the resources for lunch but more about enabling high quality interactions with those who are still playing or returning from having had lunch. With this new approach in mind the manager had to consider how to share practice with her senior management team who challenged why the change was necessary having fought so hard in the first place to have one sitting. A clear rationale was shared with the whole team following observations, that had led to a critical analysis of the current system. This sense of commitment to better meet the needs of the children I feel has created an approach to using criticality in their everyday workplace that has implications to make further changes. Practitioners are able to lead change and support each other to think freely about ways to do this with the children very much consulted as part of the process. I believe therefore that the project has implications for observing pedagogy, looking critically at that with the freedom to think creatively about ways in which to make changes and the children's needs at the heart of it. I also feel they have the opportunity to become a learning community to embrace change because the adults are as keen to learn from the children and they are so reflective of their practice. The relationships within this setting are strong, observations of practice are discussed as a team to have a shared understanding of the need for a change in pedagogy.

**2. What value do you place on practitioner-research – and what more can be done in your setting/locality to enable it to continue as part of routine practice going forward? (100 word approx.)**

Practitioner research has enabled this setting to be consultative and creative about the changes they desired to make. This research has involved the whole setting and community which creates a sense of unity. I feel that this setting had an opportunity and a willingness to experiment with this change and were open to the information the experience presented them with at the end. The staff were reflective of how the project had impacted on both themselves and their own practice while being objective about the outcomes for the children. Had this not been a positive change the systems would have been altered to find the best way forward for the children. Moving forward each new cohort of children will be offered the choices and freedom with guidance to ensure that they too have an unhurried lunch experience.

**3. What have you learned as a leader through supporting this research / programme? (100 words approx)**

For me I have learned that relationships are key and key to building relationships are allowing everyone to be consulted and have a voice before leading a change. Leading by supporting the adults to become reflective of their practice is essential to further professional development. Coaching and mentoring suited my leadership style in this case as it allowed the manager to have that freedom to think about and make her own decisions for her setting based on the current practice meeting the needs of this cohort of children and the subsequent observations of it. The guidance from me essentially allowed those thoughts to become actions to make the improvements for the project to be successful.

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