

LEARNING TO LEARN CASE STUDY – LEARNING THROUGH STORYTELLING AND RETROSPECTIVE REFLECTION

Program Overview

The Innovation Fund project with EastSide Early Learning Community (ELC), Belfast, aimed to ignite creativity and collaboration by offering 10 small grants to partners within the EastSide ELC. These grants provided an opportunity for partners to use the EastSide ELC Framework (figure 1) as a tool for planning and evaluation. Partners were encouraged to design projects aligned with one of the five domains in the Framework, while also connecting to secondary areas of focus. They were encouraged to foster collaboration, communicate effectively with

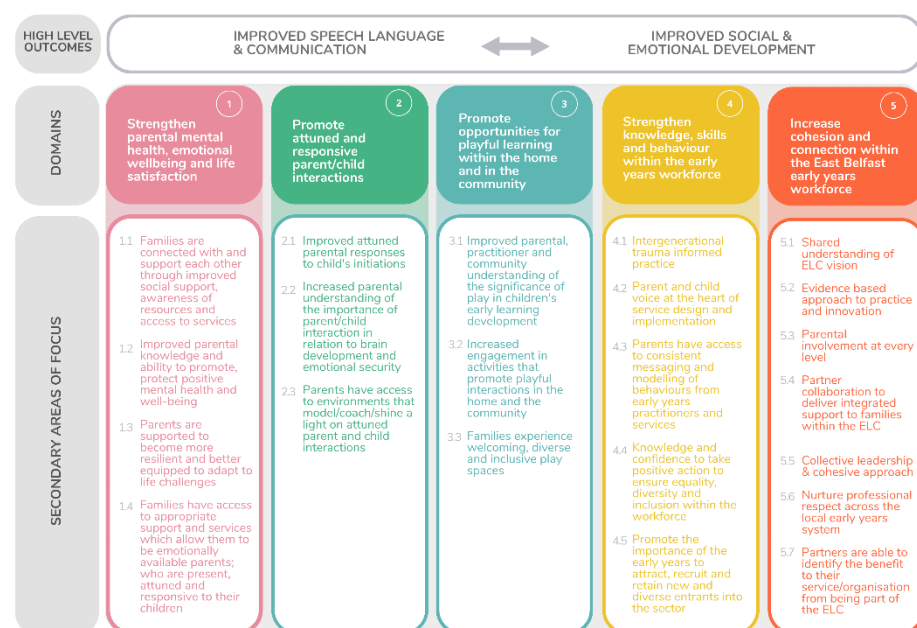


Figure 1: EastSide ELC Framework

Learning through Storytelling

A [planning guide](#) was developed to lead partners through a structured process of innovation. This guide outlined five essential steps for developing an innovation fund project: articulating the project vision, aligning with the ELC framework, defining key messages for parents and partners, learning from the project, and sharing insights with fellow partners.

To enrich the storytelling aspect, the planning group collaborated with the Media Lead from Northern Ireland, who provided invaluable support in content gathering and storytelling techniques. From the project's inception, partners were encouraged to embed storytelling into their initiatives. A dedicated training session was conducted for partners which highlighted the significance of storytelling and methods for capturing participant voices. However, limited follow-up capacity meant that some projects didn't yield as much individual content as hoped. Nevertheless, visits to select projects allowed for content collection, enhancing reflective learning. Storytelling was envisioned as a medium to narrate the journey of these projects innovatively and to help partners reflect on their successes and challenges.

Learning through Retrospective Reflection

At the project closure phase, partners were invited to reflect on their planning processes and the overall delivery of the Innovation Fund. They evaluated whether their projects aligned with initial plans laid out with the support of planning guide, assessed outcomes of the project, gauged the level of collaboration, and reviewed how the process was facilitated. This reflection was captured through:

1. Project Reflection Form

The Reflection Form prompted partners to consider their planning, execution, outcomes, challenges, and collaborative efforts. This was to be filled in individually by each partner.

2. Collective Learning Review

The three-hour session was conducted in person with six out of the ten participating partners in Belfast. The session was divided into framing introduction to learning objectives, small group discussions, individual reflections and a whole group discussion. The purpose of the session was not only to critically assess the project outcomes but also to understand the support provided by the Save the Children team in incubating these innovation projects. The collective learning review consisted of three sections employing dynamic reflection tools for each pillar of reflection. The facilitators from EastSide ELC Planning Group began the session by presenting a synthesis of project achievements and challenges, creating a foundation for deep reflection.

a. Reflection on Project Outcomes

'What? So what? Now what?' – This reflective exercise started individually, allowing partners to contemplate their projects and its outcomes, followed by engaging small group discussions that delved into the "So what?" - which is the potential impact delivered and "Now what?" - which details the way forward.

b. Reflection on Collaboration

Using [Tamarack Institute's Collaboration Spectrum](#), the group evaluated the extent of collaboration across the 10 projects, providing a nuanced understanding of their collective efforts.

c. Reflection on EastSide ELC's Approach

Partners reflected on the entire process, from the Expression of Interest stage to project completion and collective learning, using the tool – *'I like, I wish, I wonder'* to express their experiences and aspirations.

Making Learning Intentional

- ELC Innovation Fund Planning Guide
- Proactive approach by ELC Project Planning Group in planning learning activities
- Storytelling Training Sessions for content gathering and active reflection

Driving Continuous Learning

- Project site visits to capture learning content and impact stories
- Retrospective reflection
 - Individual partner reflection form
 - Collective Learning Review
- Use of design tools and frameworks for active participation and engagement

Creating an Inclusive & Equitable Learning Environment

- Multiple modes of feedback collection - written and verbal
- Impact stories captured through multiple methods - videos, pictures, and voice notes
- Collective reflection space offered multiple means of engagement - post-it exercises, individual reflections, small group discussions, and wider group discussions

Best practices for conducting a successful collective learning review with partners

- **Creating a Conducive Environment:**
It was essential to ensure that the collective learning session encouraged constructive participation from partners. Facilitators set the tone by underscoring the value of self-critical reflection, introducing relevant tools and models, and demonstrating openness to critique by evaluating their own roles in the process.
- **Building Relationships:**
Partners had shared time with each other several times throughout the year, which was crucial for creating a supportive learning environment. This connectivity enabled partners to reflect more deeply on challenges and consider future improvements with greater insight. The learning spaces also helped in strengthening these relationships creating a cycle of trust.
- **Introducing Tools for Learning and Reflection**
Various tools and frameworks were used in the learning review to increase active participation and engagement. Moreover, it provided a structured method for partners and ELC team to reflect deeply on challenges and why it might be important to tackle them in the future.
- **Role of Facilitators**
Facilitators play a pivotal role in shaping the learning environment. Tasked with setting the stage, introducing tools and frameworks, encouraging engagement, maintaining focus, and providing support, skilled facilitators are instrumental in creating a reflective, collaborative, and growth-oriented environment.
- **Inclusive and Equitable Feedback**
Different methods of providing feedback were offered to cater to various preferences, such as written feedback or verbal discussions. During in-person meetings, multiple approaches like post it exercises, individual reflections, small group discussions, and wider group discussions were used. Various methods for capturing stories, including videos, pictures, and voice notes, were also offered.

One of the key challenges was coordinating everyone's availability. At the collective reflection session, six out of the ten projects were represented. The partners involved in the Innovation Fund program had diverse backgrounds and faced varying challenges in allocating time for additional sessions due to their schedules.

Key Outcomes of the Learning Approach

- Partners were able to meaningfully examine how their planning and delivery went.
- The ELC Project Planning Group continued to highlight the connection to the Framework, which was the main aim of the Innovation Fund.
- The ELC Project Planning Group modelled a learning practice, including a range of tools that could facilitate this.
- Joint planning, storytelling, and learning sessions supported relationship-building, fostering a culture of learning that is expected to grow further.

[Check out this 3-minute video](#) to hear from partners their experience from collective learning session.

Learn more about the outcomes of the innovation project [here](#). For more information about this work, contact Marcela Vielman (m.vielman-ruiz@savethechildren.org.uk)