Practitioners view of the benefits of Sustained Shared Thinking

Abstract

Within this research project I will be exploring practitioners view of the benefits of using sustained Shared Thinking within settings. The research will be conducted over a 6-week period and will be undertaken with 2 settings. The rationale of why 2 settings have been chosen is to ensure I have not been biased towards either setting due to working within the one setting myself. This is to ensure that within the research project a true reflection can be seen over a wide range of practitioner's views and staff I do not personally work with. A mixed method approach has been chosen closed questionnaires and face – to – face interviews. By conducting both methods with the research a true reflection of the practitioner's feelings can be heard. Throughout the research project policies and procedures have been adhered to from both settings and ethical considerations have taking place adhering to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018). Before the research has taken place a meeting will be held with the directors and managers of both settings and when gaining their consent, a detailed information sheet will be handed out to all participants with an overview of the research project this will be to gain their consent. Once all in agreement there will be a meeting held for the researcher to go over the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (2018) stating all information will be stored safely and correctly. The closed questionnaires will be sent out first for the researcher to obtain some knowledge before the face – face interviews are undertaken. Once the research has been conducted, I will sit down with the directors and managers once again to discuss my findings and to further go over the GDPR on how the data will be stored following the University of Wales Trinity Saint David policies and procedures and reiterating that the data will be stored on a password protected file.

Literature Review

The Rationale of this research project will be to look at settings where Sustained Shared Thinking is within daily practice. Sustained Shared Thinking can happen between two or more people whether this be between an adult and child interaction or between 2 or more children. Sustained shared thinking is defined as being a higher level of thinking and learning for the children extending their knowledge and linking them to their community (Brodie 2014). This is supported by findings from Purdon (2014) who states sustained shared thinking between children and or adults working together to either solve problems & explore concepts for sustained shared thinking to happen the discussion must include input from both parties, improve understanding, and go beyond it. Within the New Curriculum for Wales (2022), SSTEW is embedded throughout engaging the children within meaningful activities and having the enabling adults fully supporting them in rich environments. Within settings it is vital each child receives a high-quality provision supporting their full development allowing them to have a lifelong love of learning and skills through rich experiences. When settings embrace SSTEW within their practice the children's emotional wellbeing is at the forefront of the care practitioners are extending the children’s knowledge within their capabilities providing meaningful activities and inviting the children into purposeful conversations where they can explore concepts, extend their knowledge and encouraging independence. This is supported by Siraj (2015) who has created a subscale where the focus is pinpointed on interactions between the child and adult that are on a higher level and the child’s emotional

wellbeing is at the forefront of the interactions. Allowing children to be the leaders of their own play. This links to Vygotsky who encouraged play with children as this supported their cognitive, social, and emotional development (Hostettler Schärer, 2017). Within settings where SSTEW takes place there needs to be a level of trust between the practitioners and children building secure relationships and practitioners have a real enthusiasm in the child's world and interests when secure relationships are formed the child's emotional wellbeing is being supported fully. Practitioners play a crucial role in sustained shared thinking they need to gain mastery in learning how to create such possibilities or recognise them when they arise naturally (Community Connections Solutions Australia INC, no date). When practitioners within settings are in tune with the children valuing their thoughts and feelings builds a child's self-confidence and esteem, this is the core of sustained shared thinking where 2 people have conversations which have meaning and where both parties fully respect each other, the practitioner being on the same level as the child and being their equal (Brodie, 2014). There has been noted that sustained shared thinking can take up too much time therefore practitioners may struggle with the intense interactions with children where the daily settings routines are still required to take place. This is where practitioners need to take every opportunity as a learning opportunity through the daily life of the setting, using each moment as a teachable moment. Throughout the day within a setting there are many routines that still need to take place snack, changing, dinner and each of these can be used to have meaningful conversations with the children. Using snack time as an opportunity to discuss the practitioner's daily lives at home, while changing the children or taking the time to sit with them while having dinner to have conversations about the day 'can you tell me about your morning? What have you enjoyed doing today?' This allows practitioners to reflect on the day and what the children would like to do next. Taking every opportunity to ensure the children emotional wellbeing is of high standard. Having natural conversations with the children about daily life further prepares them for the outside world and giving them an opportunity to talk about the community around them (Touhill 2012). Although some settings or early years provisions may find SSTEW time consuming this is supported by Purdon (2014) within her findings, practitioners expressed some of the difficulties that may come with SSTEW interactions within settings. Practitioners state that not all practitioners support SSTEW within the setting therefore harder for the ones that do. There may be limitations to time elements not having enough time to see the activity or interaction through to its full potential. Limitations with the work that is required for SSTEW interactions with time and long hours. However, the level and frequency of the adult – child interactions are vital for a child's learning within Sustained Shared Thinking (Brock, 2018).

Methodological considerations

Within this research project qualitative data will be carried out within two settings, this will be over a six-week period to establish a more reliable result (Anderson 2010). I have picked two settings where the SSTEW approach has been taken on and used within their daily practice. A total number of 18 staff members have agreed to participate within the research project and all have the required qualifications within the childcare field and acquired training on SSTEW. Both settings have been part of SSTEW assessments by their Flying Start co coordinators and both settings achieved a substantial score, ranking as the 2 highest settings within RCT. Both settings are the managed by the same company in 2 different areas and both settings have Flying Start children as well as private children. The only difference

between either setting is the one has children from the age of 6 months, so SSTEW practice is used within the baby room and the sister setting has education children. Within the research the triangulation method will be carried out where there will be more than one method to collect the data required. Triangulation is the process of using various methods or data sources in qualitative research to create a thorough understanding of a subject (Carter 2014). Within the research for both settings, I will be first sending out questionnaires to all staff before undertaking face to face interviews. The evidence attained from the mixed method approach will be to see whether using SSTEW within settings is beneficial for the children and the staff. Interviews I will conduct will be the method where I will ask the questions to the staff separately this will be so I can get a clear understanding of their views on SSTEW. The questionnaires I will send out to the staff will be a list of questions this will be to gain some knowledge before I proceed with the interviews (Mukherji, 2018). The questionnaires will be to gain some knowledge on the practitioner's view and attitude towards SSTEW. The questionnaires will be closed questions with tick box options for the staff to select the answer they feel suits them, by doing this type of questionnaire before face-to-face interviews can give the interviewer some background knowledge on how the practitioner is feeling towards the chosen subject (Mukherji, 2018). Blaxter 2010 states within questionnaires there are 7 options a researcher can choose from, within these options for the questionnaires I have opted for in this research project will be multiple choice. Multiple choice questionnaires are based on the practitioner ticking the box they feel is relevant, throughout the questions there will be some options where the practitioner can choose more than one. Within the research there is evident that the way the questionnaires have been conducted there are negatives to this way as well as positives. Some negatives could be that not enough information can be obtained from closed questions as the practitioner will be selecting the options given to them therefore no option to provide a detailed answer within their own words another negative towards closed questionnaires are that they are not on a personal level (Hyman 2016) this considered within the one setting where the research will be undertaken it will be with a team where a more personal feel is approached due to the nature of them being my staff however the other setting although is the same company is not my team therefore I may get more of an in personal feel to the questionnaire due to not having the relationship with them. This considered would be the reason within the research 2 methods have been chosen so a more personal level will be seen with the face-to-face interviews. However, Gorgens-Abino (2009) disagrees by stating that closed questionnaires can be beneficial to the researcher as well as the practitioner stating that they can be relevant for the researchers needs to get quick responses enabling the data to be calculated easier rather than open ended questionnaires and that the researcher is able to ask for one piece of information at a time. Willims (no date) supports the use of closed questionnaires within research stating they can be beneficial if you are using them for further research as using the questionnaires as a base of knowledge on the persons feelings towards the subject. Within the research the questions that will be asked will be ‘Do you feel SSTEW is beneficial within settings’ ‘Do you feel children are able to contribute towards SSTEW interactions’ ‘Do you feel you have enough time to undertake observations within your SSTEW practice?’ The questionnaires will be sent out via email. Once the questionnaires have been filled out and sent back face to face interviews will be undertaken over a 2-week period. The interview process will be conducted face to face with the practitioners and managers within the setting. Face to face interviews is a favoured way of collecting data within a research project and have been in place for many years. Researchers

can collect a substantial amount of information from using this method (Dialsingh 2008). Opdenakker (2006) states when conducting face to face interviews the researcher can gain a lot more from the questions by the body language and social ques this can add to the verbal answer from the practitioner. This is supported by Hague (2004) who states that when face to face are conducted more information can be gathered from the questions due to the practitioner being able to elaborate more on their answer and even extending the answer. However, Oakley (1981) criticised face to face to interviews with saying they are formal, and that the researcher can sometimes design interviews to operate in the way they want them to be putting the practitioner in a position where they can feel some manipulation. Within the SSTEW research the face-to-face interviews will be conducted in a respectful manner towards the practitioner (Hucker 2001). The questions that will be asked will be to get the practitioners knowledge and feelings on SSTEW. The benefits of conducting this research will be looking at the SSTEW subscale with the practitioners within the interview and considering the pros and cons of using SSTEW within daily practice. The subscale has been written and used within settings to score the use of SSTEW and give overall feedback to the setting. Within RCT Flying Start settings are assessed on SSTEW practice using the SSTEW scale by Siraj (2015) which looks at the children's emotional wellbeing and how practitioners support this while at the setting. Within the scale the child is at the heart of the practice encouraging child led play, supporting their higher level of thinking, exploring concepts, and enhancing learning all while being in enabling environments with enabling adults. Furthermore, the scale links to The New Curriculum for funded non maintained nursery settings (2022) where the focus is on the child's wellbeing. The new curriculum has been written by practitioners for practitioners putting an emphasis on how this research project puts a focus on how they feel using SSTEW is beneficial within the settings. The focus of the face-to-face interviews will be conducting asking the practitioners 'how they feel the SSTEW scale fits in within their practice' 'Would they change anything within the use of SSTEW in the settings' 'Do they have enough time to fulfil the requirements they need to meet.' While considering the methods used within this research project and exploring different options there were some methods that were considered but felt were not beneficial for this project. Looking at telephone interviews with the staff particularly as there are 2 settings and looking at the time element to ensure each staff member had a chance to voice their opinions. While research telephone interviews there were some pros and cons to this method Communications for research (2021) states that telephone interviews can be convenient if there is a big distance between the interviewer and interviewee, they are also more cost effective. However, Wrenn (2007) states that although telephone interviews are more convenient, they are not as personal as face – to face interviews.

Ethical considerations

Wiles (2013) States that when conducting research ethical considerations need to be put into place for all parties involved, in research moral decisions must be made by individuals. Before conducting this research there was many permissions that was needed before hand, the directors of the company, managers/leaders, and the participants of the research this was outlined in the beginning as all policies and procedures needed to be adhered to for the safety of the setting and the staff (Haider 2021). According to Marusic (2023) for a successful research project to be conducted all parties must be in collaboration with one another and agree with all parts of the research project before it goes ahead. Before conducting the

research, meetings will be held with the directors and managers of both settings this will be one meeting to discuss both settings. As stated in Bera (2018) all participants will be asked for permission to participate within the research project and will be made aware they can withdraw from the research project at any given time. This is supported by The University of Wales Trinity Saint David (2022) who states to comply with ethical criteria, researchers are required to get participants' consent before starting studies. Although no children will partake within this research project Harcourt (2011) suggests that if children are included within the research project the parents/carers permission must be agreed as well as the children's. National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (2023) specifies when conducting research with children it needs to be clear to the participants what is happening and what research means this is seen if the participants are old enough to understand, if this is not the case with a younger child then the researcher will assess the situation at the time and if the participant is willing to partake in the activity this will be seen as 'assent' and if this is the case then the parent/carer must give permission for their child to partake in the research project. All participants within the research project will be made aware that they are able to withdraw from the research at any moment and that this will not affect them in anyway (General Medical Council 2013). This is supported by Mukherji (2018) who states that when a research project is carried out all participants whether an adult or child need to be made aware of the full details in what is happening and that they can withdraw from the research project at any time. University of Oxford (2021) stipulates when gaining consent from participants within the research there are 2 stages – the first stage is providing the participants with information on what will be required from them and the details of the research project there is no time frame on when they need to respond on whether they will take part or not. The second stage is where the researcher provides the participants with a detailed form like bullet points to which they need to agree to once this has been done verbally the research project can take place. Throughout the research the confidentiality of the participants will be protected fully this will be made aware to the participants before the research is carried out. The research will make the participant aware that their confidentiality is of paramount to them and that if the research needs to be spoken about the researcher will ask for consent to speak this can also be done anonymously (UWTSD 2022). Curtis (2013) affirms that when participants partake within research the anonymity is vital. When taking part in research within a childcare environment there are some ways where anonymity can be used where the name of the setting/school is changed, or the practitioners/teacher's names can be changed. This would be the case on the sensitivity of the research being carried out. However, UWTSD (2022) argues that when research is carried out within in a childcare environment, although maintaining confidentiality and upholding anonymity are important, they are not requirements. This would be where the researcher would have a duty of care towards to the children if something had been revealed or spoken about within the research project then it is the researcher's responsibility to disclose this information following the correct procedures. It would be the researcher's responsibility to speak to the University's data protection officer who will advise on the correct responsibilities upfolded by the University and any legal obligations. When conducting research within a childcare environment before the research takes place the researcher will go over the policies and procedures of the setting one of these policies would be the safeguarding policy which will state the correct route to follow if a safeguarding concern had been disclosed within the research this is supported by Imperial College London (2023). When conducting the research, the researcher will have to uphold

respect and present themselves within a respectful manner following the UWTSD (2018) guidelines this would be that the researcher is representing the University and would therefore also follow their policies and procedures. The aim of this research project supported by UWTSD is to foster a research environment that is built on a culture of honesty, good governance, and best practices. The Data Protection Act and GDPR (2018) Suggests when partaking within a research project it is vital data protection is followed for all participants within the project when managing or sharing data. The data collected within this research project will be stored digitally and participants of the research project will be made aware of this from the start this is supported by BERA (2018) stating that when any research project takes place participants have the rights to know where their data is being held and whom it is being shown to. In this research project UWTSD data guidelines will also be followed for them to follow the GDPR (2018) act. The data will be held within a safe method as suggested by the UWTSD Research Data Management Policy (2016) the data will be password protected in a password protected file and will not be published. As supported by UWTSD (2021) only those who have been given permission to use the data can access it because it is confidential to the participants of the research project. When conducting this research project, the aim is to gather enough information on both settings to see how SSTEW works within a setting and the practitioners view on using it within their daily practice. SSTEW is new to some childcare settings and schools and looking through the subscale some settings may not partake within Sustained Shared Thinking. The benefits of SSTEW for a child/children can be phenomenal in many aspects of their development especially for their emotional wellbeing. The change within both settings have been groundbreaking for the children and the enabling adults supporting them. Allowing child led play within a setting fully supports the child as an individual and allows us into their world. The New Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings (2022) supports SSTEW and this curriculum aims to instil in children and young people a love of learning that, if fostered, will last a lifetime.

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