

# CASE STUDY

## Implementing the ShREC Approach in Early Years Practice

Will Purcell is an Early Years Teacher at Archfield House Nursery in Bristol, he works with 1 & 2 year olds and has been at working in early years for 13 years. Here, he reflects upon implementing the ShREC approach in to his interactions in practice and role modelling this to the nursery team.

The ShREC approach provides us with a simple and memorable set of specific, evidence-informed strategies which we can embed into everyday practice. We can use these strategies with every child, every day.'

*EEF 2025*



### What was your motivation for using ShREC?

“Our motivation for implementing the ShREC approach stemmed from a shared recognition that, while our environment was rich in resources and routines were well established, the quality and consistency of adult–child interactions varied across the team. We wanted to ensure that every interaction , whether during play, routines, or group times, actively supported communication and language development.

We were particularly focused on:

- Narrowing language gaps for children
- Strengthening staff confidence in extending children’s vocabulary
- Ensuring interactions were purposeful, not incidental

The EEF’s ShREC framework (Share attention, Respond, Expand, Conversation) provided a clear, research-informed structure that was both accessible and practical for everyday use. It aligned closely with our commitment to relational practice and child-centred learning.”

## What did you learn from your research into the evidence?

“Engaging with the EEF guidance reinforced that high-quality interactions are one of the most effective ways to improve early language development.

Effective teaching begins with careful observation and shared attention. The evidence highlighted that when adults respond sensitively to cues and build on what children are already engaged in, learning becomes more meaningful and memorable.

We also learned the importance of intentional language modelling: through being aware of your choice of words in an interaction, responding to cues from the child, making conversation and building on a child’s existing vocabulary, you can teach them most effectively. This reinforced that quality, not just quantity, of talk matters. Expanding vocabulary, sustaining conversation, and carefully choosing language are central to effective practice.”

[watch this video](#)

High quality interactions  
in the Early Years

The ShREC approach

Sh



Share attention

Be at the child's level. Pay attention to what they are focused on.

R



Respond

Follow the child's lead. Respond to their non-verbal and verbal communications. You could make a brief comment on what they can see, hear or feel.

E



Expand

Repeat what the child says and build on it by adding more words to turn it into a sentence.

C



Conversation

Have extended back and forth interactions. Give children time to listen, process and reply.



***“Since focusing on the ShREC approach I have seen changes in how the adults in the room interact, really attuning to what children need and spending the time required to build relationships; positioning themselves ready to share attention, allowing thinking time and building on children’s vocabulary.”***

## **What difference has it made to children?**

“The most significant impact has been seen in children’s engagement, confidence, and language development.

Because adults are more attuned and responsive, children are sustaining back-and-forth exchanges for longer and showing greater confidence in expressing ideas and feelings

As a result of these interactions I feel I and the team are more connected to children and we better understand their interests and needs.”

## **What next?**

- Explore the Education Endowment Foundation’s [‘Improving early education through high-quality interactions’](#) website
- Attend an upcoming [Communication, Language and Literacy Network Event](#)
- Check out the [Help for Early Years Providers Communication and Language](#) website