

# Documenting EY Inquiry with Floorbooks



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In the vibrant world of early childhood education, the use of floorbooks emerges as a dynamic and collaborative platform, **capturing the essence of children's ideas, thoughts, and the magic of shared exploration.**

Rooted in the philosophy of Claire Warden, floorbooks seamlessly integrate open-ended questions, higher-order thinking, and a variety of methods to represent children's thinking in a collaborative way.

# What is a floorbook?

A floorbook is essentially a large, open-ended, and collaborative learning resource. It's typically a large book placed on the floor where children can easily gather around and access it. **Children and educators work together to co-construct learning through documenting and reflecting on interests, experiences, and observations.**



The content of a floorbook can include a variety of things:



## Children's observations

Children can contribute drawings, photos, or written descriptions of things they have seen, heard, touched, or experienced in their explorations.



## Questions and wonderings

Children can record their questions and curiosities about an idea. This encourages inquiry-based learning.



## Documentation of activities

Educators can add notes, photos, or drawings that document activities or experiences that have taken place during inquiries.



## Reflective notes

Adults can write reflective notes about what they've observed in the children's interactions with nature and how it aligns with the curriculum.

# Why use floorbooks?

Let's look at our top three reasons for adopting floorbooks as a tool for documenting learning in your setting:



**Floorbooks stand at the intersection of observation, documentation, planning, and assessment.**

Educators capture children's experiences to unfold a rich tapestry of learning, streamlining the educational process and offering a comprehensive understanding of the learning journey.



**The true magic of floorbooks lies in their ability to foster collaboration and co-construction of knowledge.**

Children gather around large pages, engage in dialogue and create a collection of learning experiences. Educators act as facilitators who guide and support the co-creation of understanding among young minds.



**Floorbooks provide a bridge between existing knowledge, curiosities, and wonders.**

Educators skillfully weave children's past experiences with new discoveries, fostering deeper understanding and inspiring curiosity-driven inquiries that drive learning forward.

# How to use floorbooks

The richness of floorbooks lies in the **diverse methods used to represent thinking**. Adults scribing capture questions and conversations, children contribute through drawings, photos freeze moments in time, and adult observations add depth to the collective learning narrative.

Let's look at a suggested flow for this form of documentation.



1. Provoke



2. Connect



3. Extend



4. Reflect



5. Plan



6. Assess

### 1 Provoke

A material or resource designed to **stimulate conversation**, such as a story, image, or artefact. Preparing images in advance and placing them in the book sets the stage for collaborative engagement.



### 2 Connect

Give children time to **make personal connections** to the provocation. This offers insight into existing knowledge and understanding of an idea.



### 3 Extend

**Foster discussion** on connections with open-ended questions, supply children with tools for documenting ideas in the book, and encourage multimodal expression of thoughts.



## Floorbooks

### 6 Assess

Connect to curriculum by adding **learning goals and characteristics**. This is an organic way to assess learning taking place, and can easily be attributed to individual children.



### 5 Plan

Pull out **recurring curiosities, wonders, and themes**. Check for misconceptions. Note these on the pages to show how the learning is being carried forward and informing planning.



### 4 Reflect

Encourage children to revisit and consider their learning. Prompt them to **share discoveries and new knowledge**. Use visible thinking routines for reflection and easy integration into the book.



# Establishing the use of floorbooks

Are you as excited about the potential of floorbooks as we are? The prospect of introducing new pedagogical tools invites you to approach this transformative journey with **thoughtfulness and intentionality**, engaging all members of your team.

Before embarking on this exciting venture, let's collectively reflect on pivotal aspects that require **careful planning and consideration**. These reflections will serve as the building blocks for establishing a foundational agreement on how floorbooks can be effectively and meaningfully integrated into our educational setting.



# Establishing the use of floorbooks

## What will the focus of the floorbook be?

Choose an area of focus to keep it manageable.



Remember maths and language can be natural integrated and documented organically!

## Where will the book be stored?

Think of how it can be stored to preserve, whilst still being accessible to children.



Think about parent access and contribution too!

## Who is responsible for managing the floorbook and related resources?

There will be prep - printing, cutting, sticking. Work with your class team share the load.



Yes! This should be sustainable. You can have a weekly time set aside to plan for this.

## How often will it be used?

Be realistic. Look for ways to naturally connect with the structure of the day.



Perhaps this could be a daily focus as you gather in the morning, to set the learning for the day....

## How can the content be inclusive?

What ways can children represent their thinking? Can other languages be used?



What tools will be needed to facilitate this?

## What strategies will be used to stimulate thinking and sharing?

Consider all the ways that exploration can be facilitated. How will this be documented in the book?



Add visible thinking routine templates to highlight shifts in thinking.

# An educator's voice



**Kim Peacock** is an assistant headteacher based in the EYFS, who has worked in a variety of settings in the North East of England. She has a wealth of experience to draw upon and combines this with evidence based research to inform her practice. She encourages her team to be like magpies; researching, adopting, and adapting approaches to best fit the children's needs and the school's context. She challenges her team to ask the question 'why?' on a daily basis to unpack why this, and why now?

## Kim's notebook

Hi there! I'm Kim, and I want to help you discover the joy that floorbooks can unlock as you introduce them into your setting. Are you ready to understand the magic of floorbooks? Do you want to enhance the voices of children in your setting through everything you do? Then get ready to explore!



## Floorbooks - an approach to documenting learning

Our team first heard of the concept of floorbooks at a regional Early Years event where Claire Warden was a guest speaker. The concept appealed to us as practitioners on many levels but we needed to ponder whether they would work in our school's context and for our children.

We identified that we needed to **focus on the prime areas of learning and form communities of learners**. Emphasising less time behind digital devices, we prioritised **active engagement with the children as 'co-players.'** Our focus shifted to **fostering ownership of the learning journey for the children**, ensuring their voices and ideas were heard.

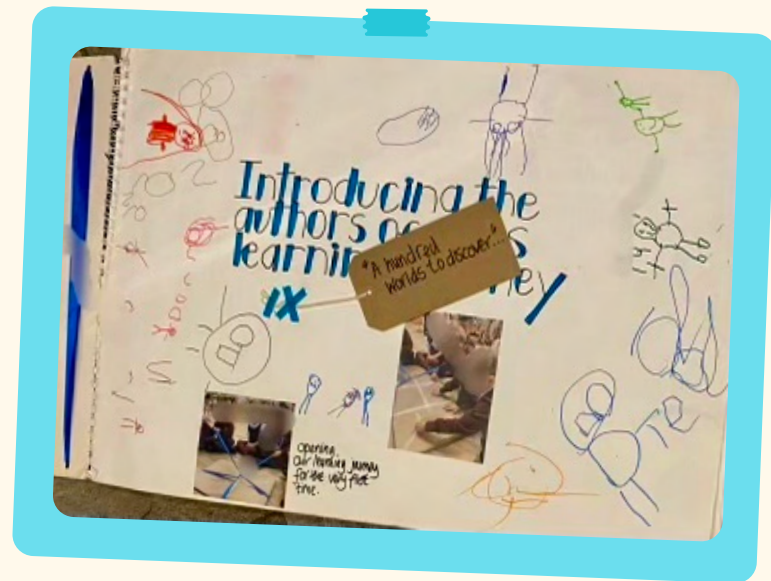
During the summer of 2021, we started to cultivate the idea of floorbooks and how we wanted to use them in our setting.

## Inviting the children as authors of documentation

Our cohort of 60 are organised into 4 key worker groups based on the relationships formed between the children and adults in our setting. We then gave each book a title (based on the group colour) and wrapped up the floor book in brown recycled paper, tied with a coloured ribbon to match the group, along with a label that had lines of **Loris Malaguzzi's '100 Languages of Children'** poem.

Next, we invited the children to unwrap it together and draw a picture of themselves on the first page; this **positions the children as the authors of the floorbook** which in itself is symbolic of the learning journey. We ensured **each child's voice and learning is represented** in the group's floorbook, so you can see their own unique journey. We decided to create and print a list of the children who are the authors of the floorbook.

Next, we asked each child to pick a coloured felt pen. This pen became their voice, and a dot in the pen colour was put next to the name of the child before being added to the front cover of the book, which acted as a key.



## Using the floorbooks

There are no fixed rules regarding how often we use our books or how many pages we use at a time, as we **follow the children's lead**.

For example, one key worker group became fascinated by Kandinsky and used several pages to explore concentric circles in a range of different contexts. This was in comparison to another group who just used two. We invariably give each key worker group the same hook. For example, a **picture stimulus, exploration of objects or something in the provision to investigate**. Our hooks are linked to our Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum which provides foundations for all future learning in our school.



What happens next is when the magic starts to happen! One can never predict what will capture the children's imagination or how they will respond to the hooks. We **document these initial ideas and then each child has the opportunity to explore provocations** linked to the hook or find the resources to create their own learning opportunities.



A fantastic example of this is when we explored the colour purple linked to seasonality and the key text 'The Gift That Grows' (Monkia Singh Gangotra). We read the story, then explored purple season fruits in the form of brambles. Many of the children had not tasted or touched them before. A range of hand tools was provided for them to squash the brambles. Recognising low fine motor skills during our initial baseline activities, opportunities were maximised to develop these skills through various activities.



One key worker group became fascinated with using the pulp in cooking/play dough, so we used the self-service playdough area to make a batch of dough. This then led to children drawing their recipe so other children in the wider EYFS community could make their dough. The children wanted their pages to be purple too, which has been embraced throughout the pages.

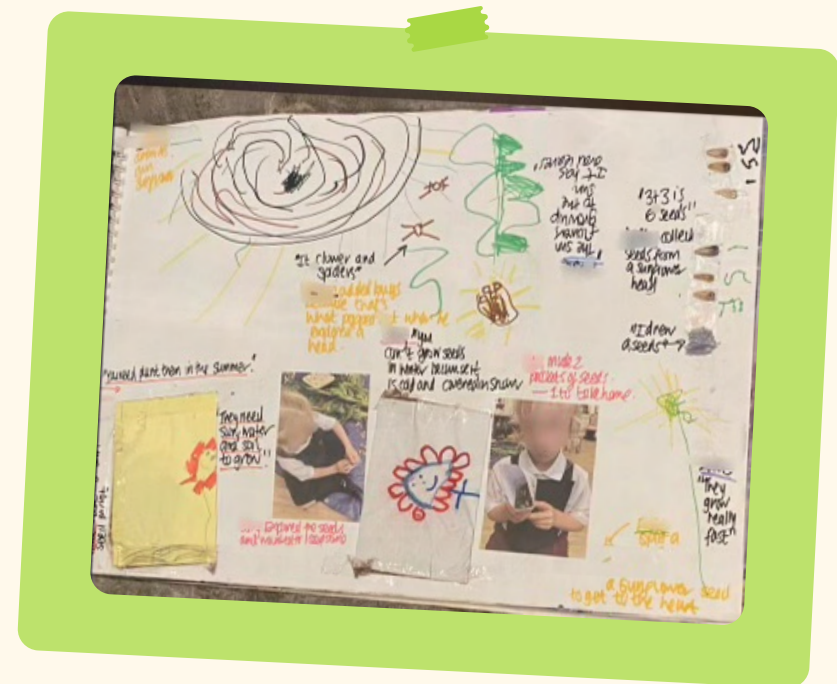
Another group became fascinated with painting with the juice. The dye from the blackberries was used to paint on fabrics **in response to this interest.**



This documentation highlights one group's exploration in response to a provocation using sunflowers.



# #Exploration...



#Exploration..



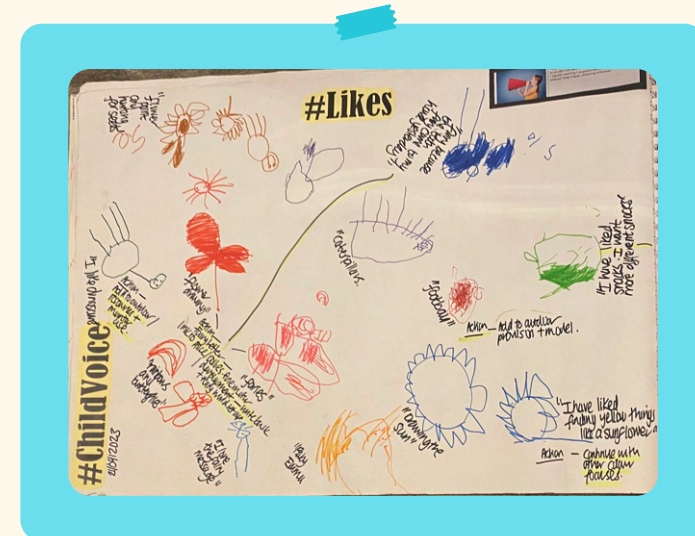
Children revisited the Van Gogh images, some choosing to paint their own sunflower representations, others investigating the seeds further. Each thought was documented in a multi-modal way - children's marks, scribed narrations, and photos.



## Evolving our use of floorbooks

As a school we have decided to build upon this practice. **Initially started in EYFS, we are now using floor books in Year 1 for certain areas of the curriculum.** This is still in its infancy but the children have loved using them this year in Year 1. We have also included a session as a way for exploring the children's likes and dislikes, which also links to Religious Education (RE) curriculum goals.

The children draw a response which is then used to make adaptations to our planning. We highlight these adaptations in yellow on the floorbook so they are easy to identify. These are completed alongside observations.



# Tips for getting started



## Know your why!

Explore the reasons for choosing floorbooks as a tool for documenting learning in your setting and **develop shared understandings as a team**. Check out [Claire Warden's website](#) for professional development opportunities.



## Process over product

Don't worry about your floorbook looking beautiful! **Each of our floorbooks look different** - they contain different lines of inquiry, different adults have scribed children's ideas and the children produce different pieces to include. That's what makes them unique!



## Invest in quality floorbooks

Those that are made from cartridge paper with spiral binding makes pages easier to turn. However, you can get cheaper pads which are thinner and are good for a one- off explorations.



## Get organised

During our team planning sessions, we **plan hooks (provocations) to ensure curriculum coverage** and that they are meeting the children's needs. We print these out in advance along with other images/materials we need.



## Continually reflect

It's ok to adapt how you use your floorbooks. Recently we decided that at the end of each term we will get the children to pick out their favourite learning experience across the term. This will allow us to find out what lies behind their choices and will **inform future practice**.



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