



CASE STUDY REPORT

Seamless transitions: Supporting continuity in young children's learning

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This study was originally published in 2009 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.

Abstract

Background: The purpose of the study was to explore ways to implement a more continuous curriculum and create confident creative learners with a personal vision and developing appreciation of life, through whole-school involvement and belief in the project, CPD sessions, and access to key resources.

Aims: The main aim is to develop a whole-school approach to create confident and creative learners through dialogue, evaluation, and CPD sessions.

Methods: The participants in this project were the whole school community, including teachers, administrators, and students, who worked together to create a creative and confident learning environment. The project used whole-school involvement, dialogue, evaluation, CPD, and observations to develop a joint vision of Creative Confident Learners. Time was essential to think, discuss, and challenge.

Findings: The main findings are that whole-school involvement and belief in the project, along with time and CPD sessions, are essential for successful implementation of creative and confident learning. CPD should focus on adult engagement and practitioner observations.

Implications: The findings suggest that a continuous curriculum, with high levels of involvement and self-esteem, can have a positive impact on pupil learning, teaching, transition, inclusion, performance management, community cohesion, equality and diversity, special educational needs, G&T, and school organization and leadership. Whole-school involvement and belief in the project, as well as access to key resources and CPD sessions, are essential for successful implementation.

This abstract was generated by Camtree using a large language model (LLM) and added to the original report in 2023.

Keywords: Primary education; Behaviour and attendance; Creativity; Transfer and transition; Citizenship; PSHE

Introduction

What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

As practitioners we were questioning the perceived compartmentalisation of learning and imposed initiatives which we felt were having a negative effect on the children learning to be learners, whereas in the Foundation Stage, principles and practices were supporting child development. The Early Years Unit had successfully completed the Effective Early Learning Project which gave the school a broader basis for understanding the meaning of involvement and autonomy and the impact this has on children's attitudes to learning.

Who might find this case study useful?

- Support staff
- Headteacher
- Middle leader
- National Strategies consultant
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- SIP (School Improvement Partner)
- Subject leader
- Teacher

Description

What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- Behaviour and attendance
- Creativity
- Transfer and transition
- Citizenship
- PSHE

How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

At Linthwaite Clough Junior Infant and Early Years School we believe that a child's journey through each phase, and from each phase to the next, should be a continuous and seamless progression. The transitions need to be planned and reviewed, as do other aspects of school life, if they are to be successful.

We believe that high levels of involvement and self-esteem are important for all learners and that the continuous curriculum is the ideal vehicle to deliver this. It should provide opportunities for questioning, exploration and thinking – learning! Therefore the continuous curriculum is a vital part of learning in the early years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

We believe that there are perceived barriers between key stages that, if we are not careful, dictate the way we teach and the way we expect children to learn. We believe that as children move through school there needs to be a shifting balance between the continuous curriculum, led by the children, and the taught curriculum, led by adults – both still need to be addressed but the emphasis given to each will be dependent on the child's stage of development.

Our school vision is held and owned by the whole school community. As creative thinkers and responsive listeners our vision has led to the development of sessions in which the compartmentalisation of the curriculum is challenged and the nurturing of life-long learning skills becomes a key feature. It extends the principles and effective practice outlined in the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage into Key Stages 1 and 2. These

sessions have been named 'Confident creative learning' sessions.

As practitioners we were questioning the perceived compartmentalisation of learning and imposed initiatives which we felt were having a negative effect on the children learning to be learners, whereas in the Foundation Stage, principles and practices were supporting child development.

The Early Years Unit had successfully completed the EEL (Effective Early Learning) Project which gave the school a broader basis for understanding the meaning of involvement and autonomy and the impact this has on children's attitudes to learning. It showed us that children were most deeply involved in their learning when they were:

- encouraged to take responsibility for themselves
- able to make their own choices and decisions
- supported by interested and sensitive adults, who valued and were able to extend their thinking.

What were your success criteria?

That children would become confident creative learners.

What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupil consultation data
- Pupils' work

Describe the CPD approaches you used

The Effective Early Learning Project involved the collection of data to provide information for future development which would underpin children's success. This aspect of our research was discussed by the whole school in a staff meeting which initiated further thinking about the school's Vision Statement "to create confident learners with a personal vision and a developing appreciation of life".

During these discussions concerns were expressed not only about the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 but also the degree to which children experience continuity from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 2.

Comments from teachers included:

- "I don't feel that children are as excited about learning now that the curriculum is more compartmentalised and imposed, even though we have tried to keep our child centred approach alive!!!! (Key Stage 1 practitioner)
- "Spontaneity has lessened, teaching and learning is becoming blander. Education has always included "missed opportunities" but this could become more the case". (Key Stage 1 practitioner)
- "My feelings are that we need to consider the Key Stage 2 learning opportunities, and continuity throughout the Foundation stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, not just Foundation stage to Key Stage 1" (Key Stage 2 practitioner)

We then explored the extent to which important skills developed in the Foundation Stage (e.g. independence, responsibility, creative thinking) were valued and promoted as the children moved into Key Stage 1/2. As a school we decided that we wanted to address this issue and began to explore ways of implementing a more "continuous curriculum". The result was to focus on "confident creative learning" (CCL) sessions throughout the

school which have been introduced to give children opportunities to develop their own ideas, and follow extended cross-curricular learning pathways.

The initial observations of confident creative learning (CCL) sessions in Key Stage 1 (see Appendix A, Observations 1,2 and 3) indicated a significant decrease in childrens involvement levels compared to those evidenced throughout the Foundation Stage. (The Child Involvement Scale is a child-focused observation method which attempts to measure the process of learning, rather than concentrating on outcomes.) This raised questions about how children learn most effectively in Key Stage 1 and led us to review our current practice, including our approaches to planning and assessment. Ways of encouraging children to be more involved in the learning process became a particular focus for reflection.

What CPD materials, research or expertise have you drawn on?

Dr Andrew Lockett (Kirklees School Improvement Officer, Early Years) was involved in the initial stages of the development of this work, encouraging, challenging and supporting, and has continued to be a critical friend. This has supported high quality continued development.

Who provided you with support?

- Middle leader
- Senior management
- Subject leader

How were you supported?

Support was set in the context of a wider agenda introduced through educational consultancy expertise, the governing body and senior management expertise and experiences when working within the LA. This was specifically a school initiated and school led project supported by all practitioners and governors. A culture of support and development was established through in depth discussion, reflective practice and constant evaluation. On going support also came from children's positive responses and contributions to this development.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

The impact over a short period of time was clear with regard to how involved the children were in the opportunities offered through CCL sessions. We are currently looking at the impact of the Creative Orientation to Learning Project on all learning sessions, not just in CCL.

Involvement Levels when observations were completed in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 literacy, numeracy and PHSCEE sessions indicated similar involvement levels as in CCL with a range of 4-5. (See Appendix B, Observations 4, 5 and 6). This will require further evidence but we feel that this creative approach is impacting positively on the learning opportunities across the whole curriculum.

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

CCL promotes positive attitudes and respect between individuals. CCL also develops the individual through awareness and understanding of themselves and others, as it provides opportunities to discuss and explore in both independent and co-operative learning. It is therefore an integral part of Inclusion and the Every Child Matters Agenda.

Through CCL children develop a responsible and independent attitude towards work and towards their roles in society. We feel this is vital to the creation of a fully inclusive society where all members have aspirations and

see themselves as valued for the contribution they make. Although it is difficult to quantify we hope that the long term impact on learning outcomes will be significant for our children and community.

The 'family voice', through child interviews and parent carer conferences, suggests that CCL sessions impact on achievement and support inclusion, as they clearly indicate an enthusiasm for learning and a commitment to learning how to learn.

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

"The fact that children have ownership of their learning increases their involvement." (KS2 Practitioner)

"In CCL we get opportunities to make choices. Its always fun, we can negotiate to work on different things and work to our own timetables." (Jordan KS2 Yr5)

"CCL is interesting because we get given the responsibility with what we do, where we do it, who with, but we have to show we can be responsible pupils. There's a lot more to CCL than you might think!!" (Conor KS2 Yr4)

"In CCL we have opportunities to do a variety of activities. I've only just come to this school and at first I was amazed because we didn't have anything at all like it at my old school and now its just ace!" (Joshua KS2 Yr5)

"In CCL we can work in different areas of the school. We make the choice but the teachers trust us to be responsible and sensible. Sometimes I choose all easier options but sometimes I challenge myself. Its good." (Liam KS2 Yr5)

"Children understand expectations in CCL sessions. They display confidence and enjoyment in making their own decisions, taking responsibility for their learning." "The importance of quality adult interaction/intervention to support effective/stimulating learning was observed." "The children are able to talk about what they are learning and the reasons why." (AST Practitioners)

"CCL is also one of his favourite sessions, we know this as he talks about it at home quite a lot. He also gets very excited on the days you are doing CCL, and talks about it none stop in the car on the way to school." (Parent)

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Periodic teacher assessment

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Pupils' work

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

Observations indicate sustained improvement in measured Involvement Levels suggesting quality effective interactions and learning.

Gender differences in all curriculum areas was significantly lower than national picture KS1 and KS2(see below).

Analysis of Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) completed Jan 08 indicates

- a very positive picture regarding the behaviour of learners - self regard, feelings about school, perceived learning capability and attitudes to teachers throughout KS2 - well above average
- that throughout KS2 children significantly enjoy their learning and recognise the importance of

attending school - well above average. School maintains good levels of attendance - attendance is above National average indicating enjoyment and enthusiasm for learning.

- that children recognise the importance of school for their future economic well-being, general work ethic, attendance attitudes and self regard - well above average
- that throughout KS2 learners perceived learning capability, self regard, work ethic, learner confidence and response to the curriculum is well above average.
- that children are positive and enthusiastic about learning and find the school environment stimulating. Children are confident, articulate and well aware of new initiatives within school.

Although improving boys' achievement was not a specific aim of the project, evidence from analysis of test results has shown that CCL has had a positive impact on boys' learning.

What has been the impact on teaching?

The positive impact on teaching is that practitioners are given a level of autonomy that enables them to work with an enhanced level of expectation, enjoyment and enthusiasm.

In CCL teaching styles are adopted to suit the purpose and can be adapted according to group size and ability.

We emphasize the fact that focused teaching and self-evaluation of teaching strategies are important.

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

"CCL gives opportunities for practitioners to spend quality periods of time with individual children. Also I value the opportunity to be able to observe children working independently in groups, interacting with each other." (KS 2 Practitioner)

"Quality - sensitivity, stimulation, autonomy - of adult interaction increased children's motivation, concentration, persistence and successful completion of a task. Observations of children's learning can support on-going teacher assessments, tracking children's progress and development in all areas of the curriculum, whilst providing for the learning needs of individual children as appropriate." (AST Practitioner)

Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Evidence from planning
- Teacher perceptions

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

Planning includes cross curricular learning intentions and references the hierarchy of learning skills.

Observation and monitoring indicates high levels of practitioner engagement. Enhanced opportunities for differentiated group teaching, different teaching styles and methods of assessment are clearly evident. Practitioner perceptions of the impact of CCL on teaching are positive, and clearly indicate an appreciation of their professional levels of autonomy within a secure framework.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

CCL has permeated all aspects of school organisation.

It was initiated by senior management but was developed by the whole school; all practitioners have ownership and have developed understanding, confidence and practice in response to this.

This has allowed school leadership has taken a more oligarchic role.

CCL policy is inextricably linked to all other policies, in particular Learning and Teaching, Transition, Inclusion, Performance Management, Community Cohesion, Equality and Diversity, Special Educational Needs, G & T.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

As a school we have been invited to work with colleagues locally and nationally to support and develop similar projects. This has impacted positively on our own development and has challenged some aspects of school organisation and leadership strategies but to a large extent has reaffirmed the importance and excitement of thinking outside the box - children first not systems for practitioners!

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

Whole-school involvement and belief in the project and the project constantly evolving through constant dialogue through continual dialogue and evaluation.

What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

The development of this project relied very much on whole school belief in children becoming Creative Confident Learners.

More than any thing the project required time! That is time to think, discuss and challenge both before making any significant changes and during the process of development.

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

It needs to be a whole school approach.

Within the Early Years unit the team had completed The Effective Early learning Programme directed by Christine Pascal which set out a frame work for quality and promoted an inclusive approach to evaluation and incremental change. The data from this clearly indicated that children work at high levels of involvement when they have initiated their own learning in some way. CPD looked at what constituted self initiated learning and the idea of involvement. We approached involvement through the EEL project as this provided a measure for quality learning observable at all ages. When considering continuity and progression from FS to KS1 and beyond it was necessary to have a joint understanding of this as it was fundamental to what we were trying to achieve.

Foundation Stage Curriculum, EYFS as it is now, provided the basis.

If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

This creative approach to the curriculum by definition needs to respond to the unique and distinctive characteristics of individual settings. It has to be a whole school approach and as such it is essential to start with establishing a secure, joint understanding and philosophy that gives the whole school community the confidence to make, what could be quite radical, changes to working practices and move forward.

After challenging discussions the practitioners at Linthwaite Clough came easily to a joint vision that supported the development of Confident Creative Learner sessions but, although motivated, focused leadership proved to be essential to the complete realization of this vision.

We have had lots of visitors from schools in the LA and other authorities and in discussion we are keen to point out that CCL is Linthwaite Clough's and that any development of this kind needs to be generated from within the setting.

What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?

CPD - Further develop understanding of the concept of adult engagement, looking at levels of stimulation, sensitivity and autonomy, this to be included into practitioner observations - further developing confidence and professional self image.

Supplementary Materials

This report is accompanied in the library by the following supplementary material:

- Photographs of Confident Creative Learning
- Appendix B Observations 4, 5, 6
- Summary of achievement (gender)

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This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. They were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use.

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