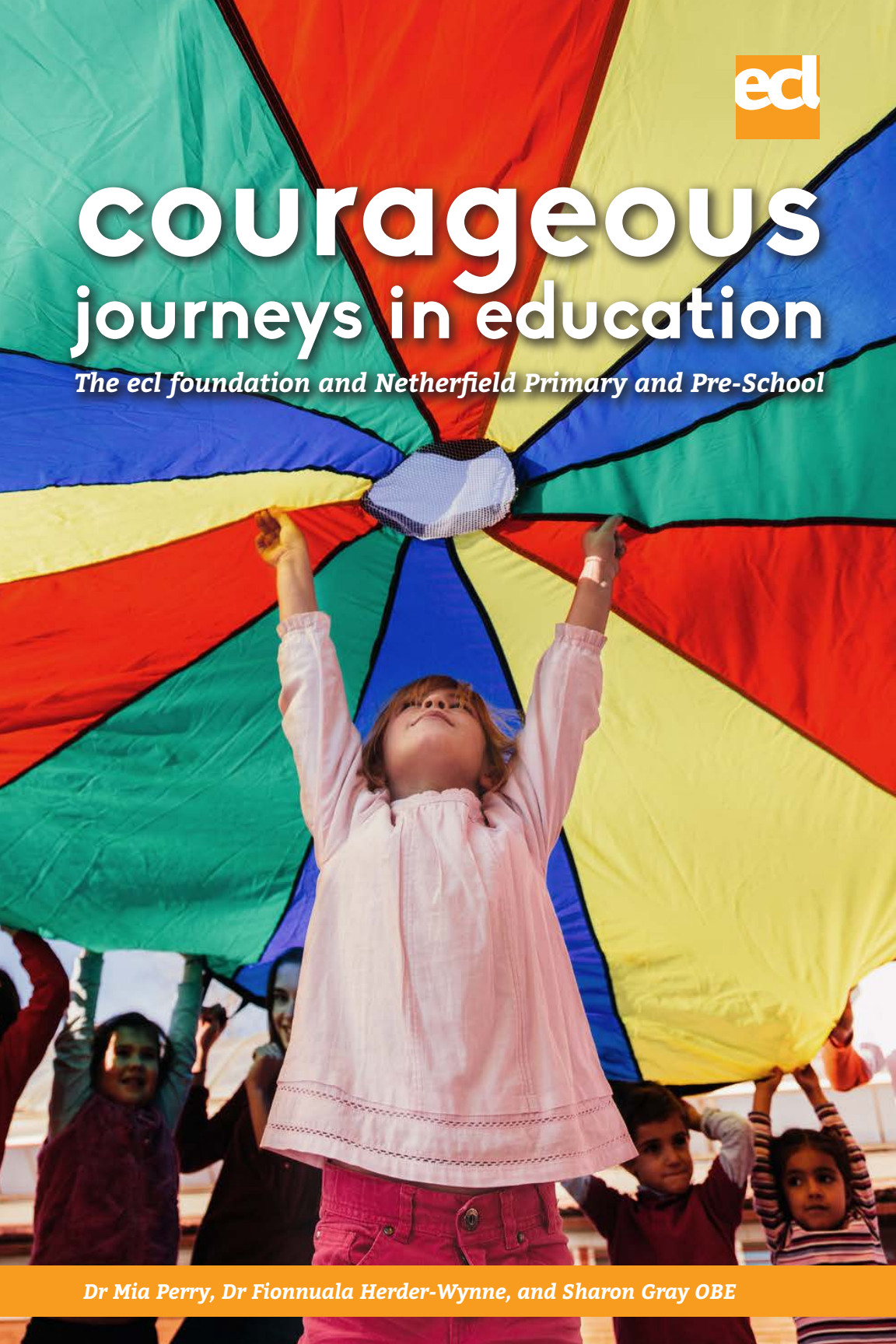




courageous journeys in education

The ecl foundation and Netherfield Primary and Pre-School



Dr Mia Perry, Dr Fionnuala Herder-Wynne, and Sharon Gray OBE

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**Courageous Journeys in Education:
The ecl foundation and Netherfield Primary and Pre-School**

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Published by:

The ecl foundation, 2015

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Terry Ingham (1954-2014), co-founder and former co-leader of the ecl foundation since its inception.

I knew Terry as a friend, collaborator, agent for change; a caring, provocative, inspiring, and courageous man. He made me feel welcome in the world and journey of ecl and made me feel empowered to take my work forward with it. He made me feel unsettled in my approach and assumptions in the best possible ways, and made me feel so hopeful in the capacity of ecl to make great work, and great change in the world. We once talked of the divide between academia and practice; we talked of the divide as an ocean, and we likened ecl to a raft on that ocean. Terry, above anyone else I know, was inseparable from his work. It was neither personal nor professional – it was just engagement with living. He will always inspire in his full, dynamic, engagement with living.

(Mia Perry)

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Dr. Fionnuala Herder-Wynne: Project Lead

Fionnuala is CEO of the ecl foundation. She holds a doctorate from Trinity College, Dublin; is a trained Facilitator of Organizational Transformation, and a trained Systemic Catalyst. Fionnuala has more than thirty years of experience in business and corporate leadership, and has led or been deeply involved with innovation and transformation processes that release inherent creativity and enable people to thrive.

Sharon Gray OBE: Project Lead

Sharon is a senior ecl Catalyst in the UK. She has been a Headteacher for 18 years, most recently, the former Headteacher at Netherfield Primary and Pre-School. Previous to this, Sharon's experience includes 12 years leading special schools including residential units for children and young people experiencing severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEMH). Sharon is an active member of the SEND London Leadership Strategy team; a co-opted member of Engage in Their Future, formerly NAES, and sits on the national committee that represents SEHM schools. Sharon has been an Ofsted team inspector for 8 years.

Contributors

Part 1, The ecl foundation: an Invitation of Purpose and Practice: Created with contributions from ecl hubs in the UK, Netherlands, South Africa, Namibia and the U.S.

Part 2, Netherfield Primary and Pre-School: An Enquiry into the ecl Approach at Work: Created with research, collaboration, and contributions from Fionnuala Herder-Wynne, Rasada Goldblatt, Chris Charles, Caroline Dixon, Sharon Gray, Karen Charles, Kat Booker, Heather Rushton, and the staff, governors, parents and students of Netherfield Primary and Pre-School.

Acknowledgments

Courageous Journeys in Education is a book that speaks of the practice and perspectives of a large and diverse community; it rests upon multiple histories and legacies; and it draws on the expertise of many. I have done my best to interweave the many people and organisations that have contributed to this book, but there are a few names that I would like to mention again here.

Judith Hemming is one of Britain's foremost practitioners and internationally regarded expert on systemic approaches. Over the course of a decade Judith Hemming and Terry Ingham developed and led the ColPi course, teaching systemic approaches and co-creating new practice. The course integrated insights from neuroscience, creativity and mindfulness forming the backbone of ecl's practice today. To Judith and the community of ColPi'ers we are deeply grateful.

Nick Udall, director of the *nowhere group*, is someone that I am yet to meet in person, yet whose name and work is positioned at a pivotal place in the work described in this book. The ecl approach can be traced back to the insight and generosity of this man who, in the early 2000's decided to establish ecl as an initiative to hold and push forward the possibilities of creative and systemic practices in education.

Jane Reed, an educational consultant, researcher, and ecl Catalyst, developed a project with me to understand more critically the foundational theories and ideas that underpin the ecl approach. This project ran concurrently to the creation of Part 1 of this book and the conversations, conceptual research, and writing that we engaged in played a major part in the content. Jane's experience and expertise both in the field of education and systemic practice has made her an invaluable support and touchstone for me and I am sincerely grateful for her generosity and care.

Robert Rowland Smith, a systemic constellator, philosopher, author, and consultant has offered unreserved willingness to contribute to this book and to support the process. His scholarship in the theory and philosophy of systemic practice is rich and hugely important to this work, and his willingness to meet for coffee and conversation whenever I pass through London always makes the trips that much more worthwhile.

The Netherfield Community are too many to name here, but to all of them, students, parents, teachers, non-teaching staff, and governors, I, and the ecl team that worked in the school, owe huge gratitude and here's just some of the reasons why: They trusted us, they confided in us, they stepped outside their comfort zones, they gave up their precious time for us, they shared their practice, they made us laugh, they made us tea, they made us feel at home in their school. Last, but not least, they inspired us.

In addition to the many people that contributed to the contents of this book, it would not have been possible without the generous financial support and encouragement of Kees Herder, Bob Mould, the Van den Broek family, the IONA foundation and the Smurfit Kappa Foundation.

Preface

I had been crisscrossing the UK from London to Bath to Nottingham, preparing our application to the Charity Commission and fund-raising when I first visited Netherfield Primary in January 2014. Like so many others, I came away deeply impressed. For days afterwards I bored anyone who would listen with stories of this living breathing example of ecl in practice. The idea for a book was born in these conversations and in the school's headteacher we found a willing conspirator. For some time Sharon Gray had been longing to write a book about the extraordinary story of the journey that the school and its community had made from special measures to outstanding: to celebrate the achievement for the whole community, to bring the practice beyond the walls of Netherfield to other schools and communities and to strengthen the voice for a more inclusive education system. All that was needed was to find someone who could lead the research and the writing, with authority. This project has been blessed with Mia Perry, the ecl foundation's research director.

Originally conceived as a 'how to' book, for many months it carried the working title of, 'The Fieldbook'. It was our intention to distill and share the theory and practice of ecl and in particular to show how it had informed the transformational journey of this school from 'special measures' to 'outstanding'. As chief executive of this young international charity I could see how this could help us codify our practice and so help reach many more teachers, social workers, children and young people.

'The real voyage of discovery lies not in seeking new landscapes but in seeing with new eyes.'

Marcel Proust

We began the research, confident that an ecl approach, based on a systemic way of looking at the world had something of value to contribute – whatever the educational context because the approach is all about creating conditions for a system that enables all of its participants to thrive. It sees the world through a systemic lens as a dynamic, relational world of networks and interconnections with each part a fractal of the whole. ecl engages with it as a whole with each child, young person, and adult in a continuous state of becoming. Interweaved with how ecl

practices phenomenology and mindfulness we were sure that access to a more creative consciousness would bring fresh insights and ideas. After all we had seen this in schools and communities around the world – in orphanages in Soweto, high schools in Johannesburg, after-school centers in Windhoek, classical primary schools and teacher training colleges in the Netherlands, schools in the UK and the U.S.

But quite early on in the research we noticed something subtle. As we tried to throw a net of words around the practice, something got lost. Something of the magic that we saw in the hands of skilled practitioners – the magic that we experienced at Netherfield - remained tantalizingly beyond our ability to articulate it. Only after admitting this to each other and pulling back from the research to see the whole picture did we find its essence – ecl is all about opening creative space. The practice comes alive in relationship to and in collaboration with the people, children, school, community, or context in which the work is going to happen. It is not a simple recipe, rather a co-creative engagement. It is by accessing the ‘in between’ that we discover our power to create magic.

We realized that we could share the practice in the only way that can hold the integrity and clarity of the work and that is through narratives of the work in context. Through stories of ecl practice in schools and communities in various parts of the world the book introduces, not only some of the tools of the practice, but also some of the vitality and universality of this approach. But we also noticed that the passing on of the approach could not happen with any depth or integrity without an awareness of the perspectives underpinning it. Finding a way to enable the reader to *experience* these underpinning perspectives has been an enormous challenge, one which the researchers took up with zeal.

In the space between theory and practice we invite you to engage with both the knowledges that underpin our work and the engagement with youth that can materialize. To share one without the other does not equip you to join us, to step into what we believe is a co-creative space, and to re-imagine what the learning and care of children and young people can be. You will journey alongside scientific perspectives that shift from mechanics to quantum mechanics, from a universe of separate things to a universe of interconnection. You will notice how science is in some ways playing ‘catch up’ with ancient philosophical and spiritual wisdoms, and in

some ways paving the way for new more powerful, compelling and above all, helpful constructions of human experience.

The resultant book takes you on a journey if you let it; a journey which is at one and the same time the journey of the authors, the researchers, teachers, Head and the children. In conversation with the design team they told us how they wanted to show the rich tapestry of human emotions that they had met in the text. So you will meet the exuberance of the children on the front cover, but you might also experience sadness, anger or curiosity. But the tone that resonates for me – the upper tone – is one of naughtiness and playfulness. It brings to mind an anecdote told me by a teacher about her first day at Netherfield. Hesitant and somewhat anxious about making a good impression she asks to see the Head and is told that Sharon is in the playground with the children. Pushing open the doors to the playground she sees a woman, jumping up and down in puddles of rainwater surrounded by children all laughing their heads off. Not at all disconcerted by the gaze of the astonished young teacher, Sharon simply invites her to take off her shoes and join them! In the book you’ll encounter this playfulness in the story of ‘Some gals who went to London for a show’. It’s this playful space that I would like to invite you to enter as you begin your journey through the book. Bring your skills, knowledge, experience and your story. Bring the whole of you. Step into the book with eyes alight with mischief. Take a look around, engage with the book, struggle with it, let yourself be moved. If something triggers your imagination or brings insight, try it out in your context and then come back and tell us what happened. We await with curiosity...

Dr. Fionnuala Herder-Wynne, CEO, the ecl foundation

Part 1:

The ecl foundation: an invitation of purpose and practice





Chapter 1

Journeys

*Pull a thread here and you'll find it's
attached to the rest of the world*

Nadeem Aslam¹

As with any story

or journey, this one has no single beginning, and no precise way to delineate the contexts or the conditions that prompted it. But as with any book, this one needs an introduction. This book describes the separate and entwined journeys of Netherfield Primary and Pre-School in the UK, and a charity for children and young people, the ecl foundation (Enhancing Children's Lives). Both organisations are focused on, and passionate about, the care, development, teaching and learning of children and young people in courageous and creative ways. One organisation, the school, is positioned within the education system, striving, and in many ways succeeding against odds, to maintain standards and status in the political and economic giant that is the institution of education. The other organisation, the ecl foundation, is positioned outside of the education system, independent, international, and interdisciplinary; working with the education system along with systems of health care, social care, business, sports, arts and culture. The partnership of these two organisations came about due to the shared belief in a systemic, 'whole child, whole system', approach to teaching, learning, and care. The partnership at the heart of this narrative, came about through the relationship of two people, Sharon Gray and Terry Ingham, who shared an instinct and a passion and co-created an approach to developing and leading a school with

children at the centre of all policy and practice; with children's well-being prioritised in the journey of academic and socio-emotional development. We will hear more about these people soon and their stories will resonate throughout this book.

Terry Ingham's leadership of the ecl foundation and Sharon Gray's leadership of Netherfield Primary and Pre-School (since 2009) provided the structure, the space, and the materials to implement a year-long research project in 2014/15. The project set out to explore and articulate the successes, the challenges, the structures, and the ethos of an ecl ('whole child') approach to education in a mainstream UK primary school. In unpacking and exploring the journeys of the ecl foundation and Netherfield Primary, we present and propose an alternative approach to the teaching, learning, and care of children within the education system. This approach is grounded in the premise that the patterns of connection between parts or people in any system is not random, that interconnecting parts function as wholes, and the behaviour of individual children and adults is affected by the structure of the whole. This approach attends to the education, development, and well-being of children and young people with the understanding that all behaviour (from child or adult) is communication that needs to be attended to; that we have multiple ways of knowing and being in the world; that our ability to succeed in any structure or system is not an individual pursuit; but intricately dependent on the contexts around us, be that family, peers, nutrition, physical comfort, and so on.

One important element of ecl's practice is the personal or internal journey often required in order to bring awareness to our own contexts or interacting systems. Self care and self-awareness is a component that we hold essential to the contributions that we can make in this world. It is from this state that we can move into places of real connection, and clear sustainable support of the people we work with. And for the vast majority of us, this self-awareness and self-care requires a journey. With the metaphor of a journey we embrace the idea that journeys do not necessarily take us in one linear direction, that they can loop back on themselves and happen at all sorts of speeds. With this energy of movement, and yet freedom of direction, we launch into the introduction of this book and invite you to journey with us for a while.

ecl's departure points

The ecl foundation was originally founded and developed within the nowhere Foundation from the inspiration and intention of Nick Udall, Judith Hemming, Terry Ingham and many other committed practitioners. In January 2002, a group of teachers, educational researchers, and systemic practitioners gathered in London, UK, to explore the possibility of a fresh approach to education, one which could create a different climate for learning in our schools and support a joy in learning and creativity in our children and young people. We were inspired by a then recently published, 'All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education' report created by a National Advisory body headed by Sir Ken Robinson². We were struck by how little practical support there was to move forward, and united by a common concern that, even after unprecedented levels of funding and the unquestionable passion and care of so many individual teachers, conventional approaches to education were not serving the needs of children. As headteachers, teachers, academics and parents ourselves, we could see vast numbers of children disengaging from learning as they moved through the education system. We recognized that our children hold the keys to a future that we could only begin to imagine and so we asked ourselves, how we, as their teachers and carers, could equip them to love learning and live their lives as a creative adventure.

Under Judith Hemming's guidance, the starting point for the exploration was to look at schools, classrooms, and families as living systems and to recognize that we needed to look beyond improving just literacy and numeracy skills and outcomes, to a fuller picture of the whole child. The exploration ignited a spark. By that summer, the nowhere Foundation had received funding from the River Rock Foundation (Maine, USA), to set up an innovation and research project in partnership with three UK primary schools and one secondary. The project was called, 'The Schools We Need'. The project was focused on finding better ways to support leaders in schools. It ran for 17 months and its impact on the levels of performance and outcomes for all of the participants, along with the depth and breadth of ideas that began to emerge from them, exceeded all expectations.

Over the next ten years, with two vital sources of funding, the UK Government Department of Education and the nowhere Foundation, individuals and groups in England continued to explore the nature of

schools and families as interrelated living systems. In addition to the initial leadership focus, we expanded our enquiry into a number of areas of school culture, developing specific aspects of the curriculum; resourcing vulnerable children; supporting emotional health and well-being; understanding behaviour change; as well as enhancing parenting skills in the home. At the core of each project was a co-creative methodology that encouraged all involved (teachers, leaders, parents, and researchers) to document and reflect on practice, to make sense of what has happened and be innovative.

As the work expanded, the ecl foundation began to receive requests to take ecl practice to other regions of the world. In South Africa and Namibia it took root when Jane James (Catalyst at nowhere) led an ecl workshop in Johannesburg: 'Every single person in this workshop was touched and inspired by the personal shifts they experienced. It touched their souls and opened the possibility for enhanced relationships with both colleagues and the children they teach'.³ The systemic perspectives we were working with in England and now in South Africa seemed to offer simple solutions to problematic issues of emotional well-being, aspects of behaviour, potential classroom disharmony and dysfunction. We developed tools and exercises based on a view of people as social beings using Bert Hellinger's notion of 'conscience' groups and 'ordering forces'⁴ as well as John Bowlby's theory of 'attachment'.⁵ By doing so, groups could develop a greater sense of belonging and bonding, which led to a mutual responsibility for each other's well-being. Participants developed qualities of respect, concentration and engagement with learning; and importantly, strengthened the partnership between home and school life. The workshops in the UK and Africa enabled teachers and social workers to experience these phenomena for themselves before taking them into their own settings and workplaces.

The ecl foundation is now an independent, registered charity in its own right, and beginning to extend its reach across the globe. We have ecl catalysts in England, South Africa, Namibia, the Netherlands and the US, co-creating a growing library of insights and resources. Knowing there is no one right answer, we are tapping into the rich diversity of people in their different contexts with their different approaches and insights. The ecl foundation is still in its infancy, we make no claims to have all of the answers – but we have an approach to working with creative and learning

processes that opens up the possibility to transform how we develop and care for the next generation. We do claim an objective to enhance children's lives (the letters of our name), in particular through our attendance to, and understanding of, three essential elements of the practice of education and care – emotional well-being, creativity and learning.

As we begin this process we would like to turn around and acknowledge the holding and encouragement of our founding company, nowhere. It is because of them that the charity began in such a spirit of generosity, with a strong foundation of theory and practice that we can freely pay forward.



Sharon Gray's departure points

Amidst the busyness of a school day, in a small meeting room in Netherfield Primary in the spring of 2015, Sharon Gray recounted some of the influential moments and memories of her journey in education. The following text includes excerpts from this conversation within a structure (subsections) that emerged through the transcribing and organising of the exchange:

Letterbox conversations

My first job in 1991, as an NQT (newly qualified teacher) was at Harry Gosling Primary School in Tower Hamlets, London. A school where no child had English as a first language, and at that time appeared to be an area that was rife with

racism, and economic deprivation. I went to visit the homes of the children in my school and spoke to their mothers through letterboxes – they were afraid to open their doors or to come out into public view. Through these conversations and the relationships built with the children, I gradually earned trust; I began to be 'let in'. With their invitation I taught them English, and helped them at times with their children beyond school hours. Slowly they dared to venture out of their homes and experience the culture of East London. They joined together with common fears and interests, and found their own support within each other; they didn't need me anymore.

At this time I also learnt to play the guitar and played for, sang, and laughed with the children who gravitated towards my classroom at playtimes. I just loved it, I'd found this beautiful profession, not a job; I'd found a way of life – real fulfilment.

I came across a family with twins, 6 years old, who had not really been taken out of their flat since birth, they were still wearing nappies, had difficulties with even the basic skills of eating, communicating. With a mum with probable emotional and mental health issues, the children were ultimately re-housed. Corin, the boy, came into my class, he exhibited incredibly challenging behaviour. I have a photograph of Corin, his eye poking up from under the desk because that's where he appeared to want/need to be – underneath the desk – a quiet, dark, safe space away from the busyness of the classroom space. I didn't totally understand this at the time, but it was the safest place he could be, and if I wanted to talk to him, interact with him that was the place I had to go.

Talking about love

I so loved working with those children who presented with such challenging behaviours; I so loved working together with them and their care providers, dissolving the barriers to develop trust, risk taking, daring to believe in possible success and achievement. I am eternally grateful for the clear feedback given when my lessons were not sufficiently engaging, matched to need, dull. Together we learned huge amounts – I from them – and I hope them from me.



I wanted to experience working in schools that were designated especially to work with vulnerable children – those experiencing social and emotional mental health difficulties. This led me to the Cedars Special School in Hounslow. At the Cedars I worked with the Headteacher, Andy Costello, who was somewhat of a maverick at the time in his work, and an inspiration to me. He loved the kids, and we spoke about love in that school, that was very new to me. I was the lead teacher of literacy there and looked at creative ways to reach children who couldn't or wouldn't read and write (and were incredibly scared to try). Again, I found that I loved it so much I felt I wanted to develop my career further in creative approaches – using an underpinning therapeutic philosophy – this took me down an incredibly exciting path.

I trained to be a drama therapist with Sue Jennings and then to be a play therapist with Ann Cattanach at Roehampton University. With an ever-deepening hunger for understanding and seeing through behaviours, I began an MSc at the British Association of Psychotherapists, North London. Whilst completing this study, I applied for leadership positions in special schools: I wanted to make a difference and 'try out' some of my thoughts and beliefs within a whole school system. In 1999 I began at Beormund Primary School, a special school for children experiencing severe social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

Taking on leadership

Ofsted inspectors had been to Beormund and then walked out again, saying it was too unsafe for them to inspect. They had registered their concerns with the Local Authority and so, unbeknownst to me, the Local Authority needed a leadership team in place to even consider closing down the school. I met the Headteacher, Dom Hendrick and knew immediately that I was meeting someone that would change my life: He did. He challenged, he believed, he was so incredibly child centred, reflective and therapeutic in his approach – he truly cared about every member of the team – children, adults, families alike, and this shone from his very core. I joined Beormund as Deputy Head and quickly moved to Acting Head and then Head, due to the illness and then retirement of the then Head, who was and continues to be an absolute inspiration in all that I do. The school wasn't closed down and there was a lot of work to do. Behaviour at the time was pretty outrageous: not just of the children, adults too. Alcoholism, anger and abuse; teachers who would throw cups of tea across the classroom in a state of temper, children absconding and heading into London, this appeared to be a normal day in the life of Beormund. Graffiti by students littered the

corridors daily, with offensive language, damaged displays. Each day had to be a new start, displays mended, an environment ready to welcome the children in, relentlessly we would have to put them back up again and again and again. Scrubbing the skirting boards with toothbrushes, removing the foul language, the negativity. We knew that to make positive change happen children could not come to school and see that. Every day was a new start, for everyone. At that time all the doors were locked, I was given a huge bunch of keys much like a prison official when I started, and my office was beyond 2 locked doors at the end of a long corridor. I recall the children calling for attention lying on their backs banging their feet on locked doors and how that sound would reverberate around the whole school in an unnerving and stressful way. So even in those moments when some children were settled, the banging feet interrupted. There was little quiet time; everyone was in a constant state of hyper arousal, ready to respond to the next crisis.

Locked doors were clearly not helpful: If someone locks a door and tells me I can't go in there, the first opportunity I get, that's what I'd try to do – many of us would. And so: quite simply we needed to open the blinkin' doors! And yes, some of the kids absconded and whilst we worked so hard to ensure their safety, we knew that chasing them and chastising them wasn't the long-term solution. We did things to make them want to stay in the first place, and they stopped running. Staff adopted very basic practices to show them we loved them, wanted to understand, wanted to help, and that we were truly with them, present in every way. At Beormund I gave my life and soul absolutely willingly and gladly. We developed the team, had fabulous people coming in; developed the links with parents. All those fundamentals meant that the school improved very quickly. In 2006, Ofsted rated us as one of the top 5% of performing schools in the country in terms of progress, and judged us as 'outstanding' shortly after that.

I did my MA practitioner NLP course and then did the ecl course, 'Enhancing Children's Learning'. Terry Ingham and Judith Hemming from ecl came in to Beormund and we got on fantastically. Together we developed the systemic approach to practice and systems at the school. It was fascinating how these children began making such accelerated progress, in terms of their well-being, academically, socially and across their wider family life.

Living through loss

I stopped in my tracks for a while. Through personal and health struggles, I became quite ill. I realised that I had become isolated in London and my school, if I wasn't careful, was compensating for too much. It was time to look for a change: A new enquiry



Beckoned

Through relocating and working with a consultancy business, Cocentra, as well as through connections built up through my work, my next big venture involved a contract with The Harbour Special School in Cambridgeshire as an Advisory Head to support the recovery and new Headship search underway at the time. It was a very similar story to that of Beormund, special schools for those most vulnerable are fragile at best – where mental health difficulties are so pronounced that the challenges can fracture teams of adults. These schools are incredibly challenging to work in whilst retaining ones own sense of well-being without incredible support and leadership. When I arrived, the level of acting out behaviours showing anger, despair, depression was quite frankly – frightening. Such a big school: all ages, all boys. In those first days and weeks, we used to have helicopters out because we'd have children having absconded, inebriated, drinking vodka on the roof of the school, it felt unsafe, chaotic and in absolute crisis. I was asked to carry out a risk assessment. We then closed the school for 10 days. We needed to stop, be still for a moment, take stock, and think seriously if we wanted to be involved in moving the school forward.

During my time at Beormund I had worked regularly with Bernard Allen who had provided whole staff training on a regular basis on the psychology of behaviour management and mood management. Bernard was also a Team Teach Tutor and provided methods in pre-emptive, preventative strategies and in practical training methods of holding children and young people safely if they couldn't hold themselves safely. I had also trained as a Team-Teach tutor. The staff and the young people needed to feel confident that they could be safe in school. So, intensive staff training: in seeing through behaviour, creative positive solution focused ways of supporting the youngster to communicate in more effective ways, safer ways. Then the basics within a school: timetabling, general

organisation, assessment, systems, structures, performance management. My two-day per week contract started to turn into 3 days and 4 days and then eventually I ended up living on site with one of the teachers, Mary Rayner. We lived and breathed school improvement.

Testing the unwritten boundaries

Through my time at these schools I observed many children that were making such incredible improvements in their emotional, academic and social abilities, achieving so much, and able for the next step of reintegration into the mainstream system (knowing/hoping it would be better for them in the long run). But Heads would refuse admission. I would hear: 'As Head of a Main stream school we cannot fit these children in... you know, square pegs into rounds holes... it just won't work...' And of course I had no experience of leading in a mainstream school. So my next enquiry question was initiated. Can mainstream schools successfully integrate these most vulnerable children and still be deemed as outstanding?

I then came across Netherfield: A larger than average mainstream school, recently amalgamated. Inspections had outlined that the school needed to improve rapidly, and that's when I took over. We had, at that time, two teams of staff coming together, in a partially refurbished, part new building labelled a 'failing school'. That label of 'failing' for the community was very heavy and really damaging. That interested and

compelled me. Again, things had to change, and quickly, because so many people at that time were so desperately unhappy and struggling which meant that the impacts on children and young people and the entire community were significant. In September 2009 I joined Netherfield as Headteacher. My first mainstream Headship, a new beginning, a new opportunity, a new challenge.



'Choose your own adventure...'

The project of this book has garnered rich insights and resources and has propelled us ever further in our journeys. Our organisations continue to change, respond, and become with every new day and every new child encountered. In this way, this book represents snapshots from our journey, or moments in time, that have been recreated from in-depth research, reflection, and attention to the frameworks and practices of the ecl foundation and Netherfield Primary and Pre-School. More than snapshots however, this book is an invitation: With this book, we invite you to engage with both the theoretical and philosophical knowledges that underpin our work and the practices that can materialize. To share one without the other (practice without theory), we believe, would be at best informative, but would not equip you to join us, to step into what we believe is a co-creative space, and to re-imagine what the learning and care of children and young people can be.

As with all our work, we intend, with the publication of this book, to open a co-creative process. We would like to invite you, the reader, to use this book in the ways that best resource you. If that means starting at the conclusion, or in the middle, please do! We encourage you to brave the journey through the difficult parts, be that the theoretical underpinnings for some, or the practical examples for others. We make plain on numerous occasions, that to engage in one without the other is to miss the opportunity for full engagement and innovation, but we don't want to tell you the order

that you should do it! The organisation of the book represents our best efforts at making sense of the materials shared, but in that organisation we are careful to re-iterate our invitation to you to add your own sense-making to the journey. This book is for you to mark up, fill in the spaces (both literally and figuratively), question and inquire, add pages of your own, and share it around – so that others might benefit. With this book goes a website (www.eclfoundation.org/courageousjourneys) where you are invited to extend this journey, to share with us and each other: current practices, and reports, stories from your practice, insights you have drawn and the theoretical or experiential well-springs that nourish and inspire you. Online you will find additional resources and stories in various media from many parts of the world. Through the structure of this book, the accompanying website, and the communities built around it, this book is positioned as a living enquiry supported by a worldwide community of educators, youth workers, and care providers.

This first chapter has introduced both the ecl foundation and Sharon Gray. These introductions are narratives of journeys, mapping departure points and meeting places, considering common purposes (in emotional well-being, creativity, and learning) and separate contexts (inside and outside the education system). Based on this background, Chapter 2 explores the ecl approach to education and care in more depth, looking to the ethos and scope of the work and exploring the critical wisdoms that underpin and inform the ecl practice. Chapter 3 adds the practical dimension to this common theoretical ground. Through project and case examples, images, and commentaries from various parts of the world, we illustrate living manifestations of the ecl approach and highlight key principles, tools, and characteristics of the practice.

The second part of this book steps into the thick of a large scale and vibrant journey in ecl centred education and care. Netherfield Primary and Pre-School, led until July 2015 by Sharon Gray, is a school with a big reputation and an even bigger community of supporters around it. It has over the past six years been awarded, rewarded, and documented as a success story of a school that moved from a failing school ('special measures' according to Ofsted, the UK Office for Standards in Education) to an 'outstanding school'. In brief, the school is evolving through a radical shift in its ethos and management; this is no easy task, not a fool proof one. In this book we explore the overarching narratives and policies of the school and the

day-to-day practices of its current situation. With your engagement and input, we position this book as a useful and thoughtful guide in innovative, powerful, and relevant educational practice and change. In particular, through looking at teaching and learning, nurture, partnerships, business management, and leadership at Netherfield Primary, we ask: what are the practices and policies of a school that contribute to a sustainable, creative, and emotionally-well place of learning, and what restricts it? Put another way: What makes this school thrive and what might enable it to continue?

This space is for you...

What questions do you have already?



Chapter 2

From where we speak

Our children and young people hold the keys to a future that we can only begin to imagine and yet we are their teachers, carers, mentors, and models. So, in an uncertain and fast changing world, how can we equip our children and young people to love learning and live their lives as a creative adventure?

Education is an ideological project that is both well-meaning and self-serving. A snapshot look at history sees schools being established since the 1st century (in Asia). Wherever in recorded history or geography we focus, we can see recurring trends of educational purpose driving the practice of school-based education. One major trend of course is religion, and the function of schools and education to teach, inculcate, and enrich the religious persuasions of young people. The second trend has been colonial (which generally implies religion along with political and economic motivations to acculturate and train colonial populations to contribute to the colonial project). The third major trend, and the one that is likely most familiar to us today, has been to provide a labour force for the market economy. What we see today, (and

arguably over the past 50 years) is a proliferation of purposes in education: Put another way, education, equipped with a global consciousness, modern philosophy, and 21st century research in technologies, sociology, economics, neurobiology, and psychology, is now accepted to have multiple functions. Arguably, the prevailing purpose will always be to ensure the continued coherence and success of a society that is led, typically, by those who succeed and flourish in the said society.

Understanding our future as our children – in this space of proliferation – we take up the possibility of literally imagining and building new pathways for the future. There are many converging movements in and around education that have brought this about. An interdisciplinary group of scholars and practitioners from fields such as quantum physics, mindfulness, creativity, business, and education inform and equip our approach and work with teachers, parents, youth workers, carers and mentors. International social and political momentum around well-being in schools and creativity in education also propel this work forward. For educators and carers the compelling theory and the ever-increasing demands on education is often exhilarating and motivating; often self-defeating, and increasingly paradoxical. The current knowledges, economical and political demands, and individual narratives that ultimately make up our schools, are hotbeds of possibility – and pressure.

The work of the ecl foundation has developed in response to and in conjunction with this contemporary educational landscape in multiple countries around the world. In addition we have grown to respond to the diverse and often disjointed systems and sectors that affect and

intersect with children and young people, for example the business sector, the health

and social care sectors, arts and culture, and sports. The work is built from the wealth of research and bodies of knowledge that feed our focus on teaching and learning, and is grounded in practice. We consider theoretical contexts, scientific knowledge, and local need and put those understandings to work.



Cornerstones of our practice

Emotional well-being, creativity, and learning

There are very few people involved in the education or care of young people that would not claim to value and endeavour to contribute to their emotional well-being, creativity, and learning. These terms are broad and value-laden however, so before going any further, we very briefly make clear the way that we take up these terms, which are core tenets of our work. Later on in this chapter, these terms are looked at in relation to the ecl approach in more depth. Emotional well-being, for us, describes an ability to be fully engaged, physically and mentally, to not be afraid, to be able to understand, acknowledge, and express your feelings and be heard. It also describes a resilience (an eagerness even) towards the unknown, that is, to be able to hold and engage with the potential of the not-already-known. Creativity, for us, describes engagement and action that builds from an individual or collective connection with an outside or external purpose, mediated by a skill, technique, experimentation, or play. With this dynamic, the output will be unique or new in the context of its formation. Learning, for us, is a more expansive term than ‘education’ and is not tied to government standards, defined processes, or sanctioned knowledge. We take up learning to describe the multiple and diverse processes of enquiry and knowledge creation that people undertake in all walks of life. We understand knowledge to emerge in multiple forms, from intellect to intuition. We do not assume that learning always takes place in educational contexts, in fact we believe that learning is often stifled despite our best intentions in education due to many visible and invisible things - a lack of creativity and emotional well-being often to be found at the centre of those obstacles.

We believe in the direct relationship between the above-mentioned three aspects of experience. Emotional well-being and creativity are immensely important qualities possible in every child, and directly connected to a child’s ability to flourish in their given circumstances. We believe that put together, emotional well-being and creativity allow a student to connect their individual subjectivities and experiences with their acquired skills, knowledges, and tools, and generate change, as minute or profound as that might be. Finally we believe that change, or flourishing, will look very differently for each child.

All this contributes to a rich vision of human ability, well-being and creativity which translates into two guiding principles in our practice: 'whole child' in relation to 'whole system'. Through our practice we learn to see the whole child within his or her dynamic world of relationships: classroom, school, family, social, cultural, and historical. We look at the place (position) of the child and relationships around him or her, and learn to see the often hidden dynamics of place and relationship. We work with these dynamics to create coherence, release creativity and enable children and young people (and ourselves!) to flourish. We work with the assumption that there are many ways of knowing, and coming to know, including cognitive knowing, embodied or sensual knowing and instinctual knowing. Furthermore, we believe that an attendance to these multiple ways of knowing is essential for the education and care of young people. For example, intellectual ability is important but needs to be set alongside the nurture and development of other essential human faculties such as intuition, emotion and embodied knowing. We recognise that by overly focusing on the individual intellect we often miss the important impacts of the personal, physical and social contexts in which we learn. As well as place and position, we attend carefully to the spaces in which we work. In this way, we attend to the qualities of the learning environment; to the spaces in which learning happens, and the resources we use. Unique to our foundation, ecl has developed the use of a systemic perspective (explained herein) to help us understand and work with the often invisible, relational forces that enhance or inhibit engagement with learning.

Finally, a core element of ecl practice is the nature of engagement. The ecl foundation represents an invitation to come together to find ways of helping children engage fully with learning and creativity, and personal development. In collaboration with teachers, parents, youth workers, and leaders, from many different settings around the world, this practice will look differently in every different context that it touches. The journey encourages us to explore, experiment and innovate. We seek to see the world differently, ask challenging questions, find surprising answers, delight in sharing ideas across diverse cultures and education systems – with the support of a community. For those participating, ecl offers an exciting personal and professional journey of thinking, sensing, imagining and realising new pathways: learning new ways of being and acting. There is no dominant ideology, no right answer, but instead openness to new practice built from research, theoretical perspectives, insights, tools and approaches that enable us to see and act from a sense of the whole.

Underpinning perspectives

Behind every practice, whether we are actively aware of it or not, lies a complex scaffolding of philosophical, ideological, and theoretical ideas. Practice can only be fully understood in relation to this scaffolding or landscape, and the same can be said of theory; theory can only be understood in relation to its practical implications. ecl practice is no exception, and in order to deepen, develop, and share the practice, we have peeled away the layers of our practices, policies, and plans to consider and make clear the ideas and world views that inform us. It is our intention to share the insights and lenses which influence our work, and in doing so, invite you to put yourself in relation to them. There is a common myth in education (and elsewhere) that practice and theory pull in different directions; that teachers want 'tools' not 'theory', that someone is 'academically minded', or 'practically minded'. What is quickly evident is that that very impulse or assumption, of theory and practice being distinct projects, is a theory in itself, based on a 'theoretical' perspective and worldview. The drawback of theorists that can't do anything practical with their theory is obvious (think of any stereotype of an esteemed intellectual who can't change a light bulb). The drawback of practitioners that do not engage in the theory behind the practice is potentially dangerous: It leaves open the possibility for practitioners to practice without understanding the implications, the assumptions, the biases, or the exclusions embedded within their practice; it allows practice to repeat what has been taught, to replicate; it causes practice to be re-active and it lessens the possibility for relevant, innovative, change.

The theoretical underpinnings of a practice also gives us a language to think about and talk about the practice; an opportunity to relate individually to the practice, to break it down to analyse what it is and how it works. As we look to unpack and articulate the theories and worldviews behind our practice, we are guided by the question: What lies beneath our instincts as we work towards the opportunities for full creative engagement in learning and care? We have organised our exploration into four main areas: interconnectedness, phenomenology, poststructuralism, and embodiment. In reading this, we ask you: What resonates with you in the descriptions herein...

...and what provokes you?

Interconnectedness

The concept of interconnectedness provides a metaphorical and pragmatic lens for the ecl approach. Holism, quantum physics, complexity theory, poststructuralism, and post-materialism all contribute different bodies of knowledge to the theories of interconnectedness. We take this up and hold it integral to how we think about the relationships around the child or youth in education and care.

Holism is an idea that has roots in ancient history, notably brought into philosophical debate by Baruch Spinoza in the 17th century. Where Descartes powerfully understood and articulated human experience in three distinctive areas: the mind, the matter (body), and god – distinctions that have dominated social perspective ever since – Spinoza reduces these categories to one, and names that one, god or nature. Whether Spinoza meant singular, plural, or no religious faith, is up for debate, but what we gain from Spinoza is a philosophy that claims all things to be caused in relation to the whole. The only thing that can be seen to cause itself is the universe. So, everything is necessary; everything is determined by the interconnectedness to the whole. In this light, the idea of choice is an illusion: If we were to zoom in, with Spinoza's perspective to the comprehensive chain of events and causes and influences that contribute to a choice, it renders it not a choice, but a result of relations to the whole. This is not a fatalistic perspective, that tells us our future is predestined, rather it suggests that our future is contingent upon the many systems within which we live, affect, and are affected by.

In terms of the physical world, science has a parallel and sometimes overlapping history of theories towards explaining the nature of our known world. Influenced significantly by Descartes, Isaac Newton defined an understanding of the relationship between energy and the structure and consequent behaviour of matter (classical mechanics). We witness this phenomena in our day-to-day lives. Sogyal Rinpoche describes one example poetically:

A wave in the sea, seen in one way, seems to have a distinct identity, an end and a beginning, a birth and a death. Seen in another way, the wave itself doesn't really exist but is just the behaviour of water, 'empty' of any separate identity but 'full' of water. So when you think about the wave, you come to realize that it is something that has been made temporarily possible by wind and water, and is dependent on a set of constantly changing circumstances. You also realize that every wave is related to every other wave.¹

At the beginning of the 20th century scientists began to profoundly explore this fundamental relationship between energy and matter and through quantum mechanics recognised that all matter in the universe exists in a vast web of connection and energy. Every living or non-living thing is involved in a constant transfer of information on a molecular level with its environment. In other words, the idea of distinct matter, materials, or parts is dismantled.²

How quantum mechanics affects our work with children and young people might come as a bit of a stretch at first glance. But building on the long held understanding of the interconnectedness of humankind, as well as more recent findings from quantum science; contemporary philosophy now pushes us to take into account not only the social, socio-cultural, and socio-historical affects on the human, but also the affects of non-human, material, and immaterial (energy) forces on the human – and vice versa.³ This translates to an attention to place, to materials, to the environment, and importantly, to the parameters or partnerships integral to human agency. These ideas support the understanding that we are not independent of the whole nor are we in any metaphorical centre or power over the whole; rather we are in relation to it.

The understanding that, underneath everything, we are essentially made up of the same stuff (on a molecular level), and in relation to everything around us (on molecular, material, and immaterial levels) does not need to equate to a dismantling or eradicating of difference. In fact, we would like to stress the opposite. We each occupy a unique position (in space, in time, in relation) and based on this, we strive to understand, honour, and assume difference in all of our interactions with children and the individuals and systems surrounding. In order to be in relation to something other than yourself, the individual needs to be distinguishable. Certainly, in relation to teaching and learning, the dynamic between external realities, ideas, perspectives, and events and our own projections and identifications is essential to making meaning and assimilating knowledge. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze offers an apt summary of this approach as 'ontologically one, formally diverse'.⁴ When we realize the extent of the infinitesimal and colossal interconnections which link us to all other life, we realize that our

existence is made possible, and takes on meaning, through interaction with, and in relation to, other living and non living things. By engaging with other people, things, spaces, our ever-shifting identity and subjectivity is formed and reformed, always becoming, and in relation. In this way, we also see that our every action affects the world around us, in minute or profound ways.

In relation to children and young people in education, early careers, in health care, social care, in the arts or sports sectors, this perspective on interconnectedness provides a profound lens through which we consider all practice and engagement. We focus not on the body, the mind, the economy, the ecology, the family, the politics; rather we attend to the complexity, the messiness, the richness, and the possibility of the whole interrelated and ever changing dynamics of, and around, the individual.

Philosopher, author, systemic constellator and consultant, Robert Rowland Smith,⁵ has been a long time influence to the ecl foundation's emerging understandings of the theoretical terrain supporting the practice. In a dialogue about theories of interconnectedness he opens up an additional and provocative perspective to the discussion thus far:

The way I've been thinking about this recently is in relation to the idea of the 'self', so the notion of interconnected or the possibility that we are connected with one another at a deep level seems to me to arise when we switch of our self, so we get more connected, the less of a self we are, and that's my fundamental point.

The self function allows you, as a reasonably integrated whole person, to make sense of the world and assimilate it to the self that is you. The other part is the bit that is not restrained by the self at all -- it's an openness and for me that's quite a useful illustration of the way in which, as human beings we have two parts of ourselves. The self part, it seems to me, does lots of things for us, and among them it defends us against interconnectivity. Part of the function of the self is that we aren't connected all the time, because being connected all of the time is too much, it would destroy the self, I mean it would be very hard for us to shore

up who we are, we would lose something. So it seems to me, the self is a kind of walled entity that develops its own continuity by deciding what it will, and what it won't, take in from the outside world. That's partly why we establish identities, which are forms of continuity and repetition and sameness over time. A self that was different every day wouldn't be a self - there has to be continuity, repetition, for identity to form.

We're narrow in a sense: we have collected from the world that which will shore up our identities, our self-view of the world. We have similar thoughts that we've been having for a long time... routine, habit, repetition - a mode of self-consolidation; a necessary narrowing that helps us make sense of the world. It enables us to select what matters to us, a filtering process. If we're open to everything, it's too much; we don't know what's relevant. Meaning works because it's a reduction, it's an edit. And that edit helps us build who we are. All fine and good. But it doesn't help with connectedness. We're almost doing the opposite - the construction of the self is like we're cutting out our own borders all the time... continuing to be not unlike our current self, not other people; a refusal or a denial. If we are open to the other, to the field, we're open with a faculty that's not the self because the self is a kind of fortress, it has walls around it, and needs the walls in order to become itself, to become an identity, to persist over time as itself, as identifiable.

So, this other part of us is the not-self, it's in the not-self space that we truly become interconnected with other people. What's scary about that, and why a lot people become resistant to that, is it's harder to be sure of our own ground... I'm making quite a challenge to the more sentimental notion that: 'I'm here, it's me, myself, I'm true to myself and I belong with all the other true selves out there'...which is a very romantic notion of how we're connected. I don't think it's anything like that at all, I think it's only when we give up being 'me', that we become open, and the cost of that is that we lose the self, and the benefit of that is that we find ourselves placed within a system in which where we are becomes more important than who we are.

We move between the self and not self all the time...you walk into a group meeting of people you haven't met before and your self suddenly stiffens because it's kind of a defence, but by the end of the meeting it may soften a bit... or if you go to a football match, you go as your self, but pretty soon you are part of a whole, a many-headed animal. I don't think it's a choice, we move in and out of things... being in a crowd is a good example...it's not a question of ever making a complete transition. You are both at the same time.

For Derrida, interconnectedness isn't even really a human phenomenon, it's post-human – that's quite a challenging idea for us, especially when we're talking about interconnectedness, because there's such a romantic notion of interconnectedness: we're all interconnected, part of one family, brotherly love, or whatever... but really it's something much more strange than that altogether. Derrida wrote about it much more in terms of language and text: He says all language is quotable – and because every single word, gesture, and sign, is quotable, even when they're being used, they are functioning with an element of absence. Say I say 'hello', well the word 'hello' can be quoted infinitely, because of that, even when I say it now, it's not 100% here, because a bit of it is already absent in order for it to be available to be quotable in future. So for Derrida the idea of interconnectedness is textual. Presence has absences in it in order to allow for everything to go forward in time to be quoted, repeated, iterated. That's not a human function, but a function of all signs, for Derrida. So, there is a radical absence at the heart of all present communication, and of all presence, which allows for things to continue in time, there's a gap, a space...and that's also what's going on in systemic work - it's the fact that we're not present that is enabling these connections to take place.

Phenomenology

Deeply influential to the development of ecl practice has been the field of phenomenology. As an idea grounded in the understanding of conscious human experience, it is in many ways a natural companion to work with the lived realities of children and young people; to attending to the often complex conditions and social emotional states that they navigate. In other ways however, as indicated in the discussion above, the lived and conscious experience can only account for a part of the journeys and relationships of a life. There is much more in the past, future, molecular, and immaterial that surpasses our consciousness. Consciousness though is far from trivial – in our applied work with children and young people it a powerful and pragmatic place to start. It is very often precisely here that we do start, with mindfulness practice for example. To this end, phenomenology helps us understand the nature of consciousness.

Phenomenology was introduced by Edmund Husserl in the early 1900's. It is concerned with the conscious experience and that which is experienced (the phenomena) as understood from the subjective, or first person, point of view. Experience in itself can be understood in terms of the action of experience, ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity, and so on. The content of the experience is then the phenomena, understood as objective intentional contents. A student of Husserl, Martin Heidegger, developed the project of phenomenology to consider the 'ground' of being, and looked to modes of being more fundamental than the 'things' around us (from trees to hammers).⁶ Heidegger's work then can be seen as ontological phenomenology (concerned with being), building from Husserl who was focused on knowledge or what and how we come to know (epistemological). This is

Take a moment if you like, what makes up your experience of these few moments?

an important distinction for the work of ecl. Drawing on phenomenology as a tool is based upon an intention to allow that that manifests itself in experience to be unpacked, reviewed, and explored. This is an ontological premise. The phenomenological practice does not lend hierarchy or value to a certain aspect, for example, the consciousness, culture, or materiality, of lived experience.

In the 1940's in Paris, Maurice Merleau-Ponty developed a rich variety of phenomenology emphasizing the role of the body in human experience. Merleau-Ponty focused on the 'body image', our experience of our own body and its significance in our activities. Extending Husserl's account of the lived body (as opposed to the biological body), Merleau-Ponty resisted the traditional Cartesian separation of mind and body. For Merleau-Ponty, the body image is neither in the mental realm nor in the mechanical-physical realm. Rather, my body is myself in my engaged (interrelational) action with things I perceive, including other people. In short, consciousness is embodied (in the world), and equally body is infused with consciousness (with cognition of the world).⁷

Myriad other scholars, philosophers, and psychologists have taken up phenomenology to support various practices and purposes. Looking across this vast terrain, there are rich, diverse, and often conflicting uses of phenomenology. In psychology for example, phenomenology is often taken up interchangeably with humanism. Humanism focuses on the centrality of human values, free will, and common good. This value system and ontological stance is directly opposed to the nature and purpose of the phenomenology developed by Heidegger, and he himself was publicly opposed to humanistic values. Likewise, as Robert Rowland Smith unpacks in the previous section, poststructural philosophers such as Jacques Derrida directly opposed phenomenological views with the contention that *absence* was central to the human experience in order for experience to move and link forward in time, and thus could never be accounted for by the phenomenological perspective alone. But contentious ground is fertile for creativity and inquiry, it forces a level of interrogation and understanding that is invaluable to innovative practice, and so here we stand. What follows is a description of the way the ecl foundation take up phenomenology in our work, drawing primarily from a Heideggerian school of thought, but more accurately, influenced by Heidegger along with Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Eastern philosophy, and contemporary teachings in mindfulness.

What makes an experience conscious is a certain awareness one has of the experience while living through or performing it. Awareness-of-experience is a defining trait of conscious experience, the trait that gives experience a first-person, lived character. It is that lived character of experience that allows a first-person perspective on the object of study, namely, experience, and that perspective is characteristic of the methodology of phenomenology: 'I see, I want, I do...'

Traditionally, in the field of phenomenology, experience involves what Husserl called 'intentionality', that is, the directedness of experience toward things in the world; the property of consciousness is that it is of, or about, something. According to Husserl then, our experience is directed toward — represents or 'intends' — things only through particular concepts, thoughts, ideas, images, etc. These make up the meaning or content of a given experience, and are distinct from any notion of what the thing/event actually is. We build on this to propose that these distinctions, between the meanings or thoughts about a given experience and the given conditions themselves, are blurry at best, entirely interrelated, and that experience becomes what it is, in part, through the meanings that we (individually and collectively) add to it. That being said, the intention of discerning and developing awareness about the relationships between conceptual and imaginary meaning making and lived experience is pivotal to the approach of ecl. In very basic terms, it provides a process of 'paying attention' to the many layers that inform our interactions, from lived experience, to social, cultural, historical, and spatial factors.

Summarizing the scope of the phenomenological project, David W. Smith explains:

Phenomenology develops a complex account of temporal awareness (within the stream of consciousness); spatial awareness (notably in perception), attention (distinguishing focal and marginal or 'horizontal' awareness); awareness of one's own experience (self-consciousness, in one sense); self-awareness; the self in different roles (as thinking, acting, etc.); embodied action (including kinaesthetic awareness of one's movement); purpose or intention in action (more or less explicit); awareness of other persons (in empathy, intersubjectivity, collectivity); linguistic activity (involving meaning, communication, understanding others); social interaction (including collective action); and everyday activity in our surrounding life-world (in a particular culture).⁸

Phenomenology then, as a method, allows us to inform experience, to expand our scope of consciousness around it, and in doing so, to create the conditions of possibility for awareness and for agency.

Poststructuralism

At ecl, we consciously and carefully take up and analyse the structures and systems that contain, enable, and communicate interactions with and around children and young people. These structures might be material structures (like an outdoor playground or an indoor gym) or they might be linguistic structures (like the word 'fail' or 'right'). We believe that the structures and systems that we put in place around us, including the language that we elect to use, has profound impact on what is possible in that space. Examples of structures that contribute to the system of education are policies, business and budget models, building and room layouts, time-tables, and so on. There are many others, but taking any one of these structures and analysing its roots, purposes, and impacts, calls for a deep engagement with the practices of teaching and learning. For the purposes of this introduction, we are going to look a little more closely at language, a system that pervades and interacts with all others. Language, at all times, is taking meaning from and giving meaning to human experience. This perspective isn't new, but derives from postmodern, poststructural and deconstructivist thinking, articulated by philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler,⁹ and explored in educational contexts by scholars such as Bronwyn Davies and Maggie MacLure.¹⁰ Considering this weighty role, it seems only natural that we should assess it very carefully when using it in our care and education of children.

Most of us use language to think, and most of us use that language to form narratives to make sense of our lives, our selves, and the people around us (for example, we make sense of a certain interaction we had today with our colleague based on what we know, assume, or have heard has happened before and based on what we guess will happen as a result). Narratives, or stories, with language, weave together our lives (lives that are rarely, if ever, linear or expressible by language alone). Let us imagine then that we changed the combination or number of words at our disposal, it would follow that the story that we can tell ourselves might change. As the story we tell ourselves changes, so does the way we feel about ourselves in that story. Some people might think of this as 're-framing'. As the way we feel about ourselves changes, so does our capacity to act in that story, and so on.

If we give a child a paper and pen, and a combination of 15 words to include in a story, the story will be constructed according to the words provided. If we give the child a vocabulary to describe, assess, and make sense of his or her experience of learning, his or her sense making will depend upon the vocabulary available. For example, if we use the language 'good behaviour' and 'bad behaviour' and reward the good and punish the bad, it equips students to judge and assess the outcomes of their feelings (sometimes in their control, sometimes not) in one of two ways. This language allows students to learn what counts as good and what counts as bad, but it doesn't give them the vocabulary to analyse the cause of the behaviour (the mood, or the feeling); it doesn't give them the language to assess the appropriateness or effectiveness of their actions; and it doesn't allow them to learn about difficult behaviour, constructive behaviour, or all of the myriad other possibilities of a child's interaction with the world around them.

If we give a teacher a set of categories to understand and organise his or her teaching by, it will influence how his or her students are perceived, and therefore treated, by that teacher. For example, if we categorise students as 'more able' and 'less able' we engage in constructing parameters around and imposing certain meanings on ability. A 'dis'abled student may or may not have less ability in many aspects of school demand than another student, not disabled, but the term, used without thought, will categorise that student as less or 'un'able. That is not just language, it is action that is constitutive of perception, assumption, interrelations, and expectation.

Opening up the language around ability, exploring types of ability and their relative importance in terms of our current conception and manifestation of education is essential to ensuring that both teachers and students have the opportunity to explore, pursue, develop, and challenge abilities in whatever form they may be.

We can take up many categories of common use in education and unpack them in similar ways. 'Mind' and 'body' for example have problematic boundaries, 'emotion' and 'intellect', likewise. 'Fail' and 'succeed' are words laden with importance in schools and can serve to dictate so much of what constitutes the school experience, despite the fact that the words are ultimately value terms, dependent on context and purpose. These words can determine a student's perception of themselves, confidence, creative charge, and ability to thrive.

When conceptual boundaries that might no longer serve teaching and learning practice are challenged and categories, identities, and definitions are loosened and made more flexible and fluid, spaces are opened for creativity (and the ability for 'creativity' to mean different things for each person and context). When these more fluid positions are allowed, given a place and given light, voice, space, and creative freedom, emotional well-being is afforded (and an emotional well-being that means/is/counts as something different for each person and context). In sum: all sorts of 'creative', all sorts of 'well-being'.

ecl associate and educational consultant, Jane Reed,¹¹ has been a key collaborator and researcher in the enquiry into the theoretical underpinnings of ecl practice. In a dialogue about the manifestation of poststructural ideas in the educational settings in which she has worked, she shares the following reflections:

We do need some structures or classrooms wouldn't be effective at all, so what I am musing on is what are poststructural structures for educators? They will always be based in our intentions and ethics, what we believe classrooms are for. We need boundaries as humans; between one kind of activity and another; between one kind of institution and another; not everything flows into everything else even if there is an interrelationship between most structures. We've taken centuries to learn about difference and to manage distinction, but it's as though some forms of distinctiveness have become locked inside categories, and become the basis of bureaucracy. This has resulted in ways of seeing and being that have power and ideology invested in them that aren't helpful. So for me, it would be the ways these categories work against effective classrooms and don't serve children that I would want to unpick.

In projects I have been running with classroom teachers for several years now, 'Leading Learning Schools', I have been working with the participants on the distinction and relation between 'teacher' and 'learner' and where that is and isn't helpful. We come to see learning as something everybody does, including adults and to help the child to see the teacher's experience of having been, and of being, an on-going learner, even into the present moment in the classroom. It is an invaluable approach in terms of modelling. And the idea that the child can teach and lead learning for others including their teacher is really empowering for them. The beliefs about authority when the school system was set up meant that separation between teachers and learners was really important for maintaining control, but I don't think it is as important now, but it often continues.

And 'inside' and 'out of school' is another distinction that can work against good learning. And that ecl has taught me much about. An idea that seems to still be quite transformational is that children can continue to do their learning as much at home as they can at school. It's as though we've been protecting them [teachers] from that idea and actually devaluing and being quite disrespectful to the home, assuming that it can't provide the kind of support needed. So for example, the teachers are expected to structure

all the homework. But actually we're finding in our projects that if you give some structure and purpose and creative impulse to home learning, but not too much, the parents love it and want to be part of it and offer their skills and ideas. It's when they're expected to have very high technical skills that they haven't got that they feel devalued...

That teachers respect the primacy of the parent and enable new ways of seeing the relationship between parents and children is very important. We don't have home and school as two separate things in the work that I do; it's a continuity of lived experience for the child that can make so much difference to them. One of the things I find as a result of this home-school binary where it continues is that so many practitioners can be so disrespectful of the parent, because they didn't see the parents turning up on terms that made sense to them and they didn't see their role as being in a good relationship with the parents, but the moment that changes, something fundamental changes for children and their parents. So that's something that ecl has taught me a huge amount about.

Embodiment

The last key building block of theoretical and conceptual background to the ecl approach builds naturally from those already discussed. Here, we come, last but not least, to the question of bodies in education. Typically the first response to the idea of the body in education is with regard to its relationship to the mind, and from there the relative levels of importance a particular school system or teaching method lends to the body, as opposed to the mind. This relationship with the mind is at once essential and damaging. The more comfortable we become with talking about the body in relation to the mind, the more concrete the separation between the two becomes. Whether we like it or not, we are all bodies, seven point two billion of us, and whether we sit still all day and tax our brains, or practice yoga and athletics interchangeably, we don't dispense of our bodies, or minds for that matter, in any activity. The presence therefore of the body, is always playing its role, having affect, engaged. Having said that, each of us understands the essence of our human form in different ways. The mind, for some, encapsulates a human core, the physical body does for others, the soul for others still. No matter how we individually understand or prioritise our human essence, we are all complex co-dependent systems of mind, body, self, soul, history, future, and relations to all material and immaterial things in proximity. The body and the mind are not separable.

Taking all this into account, we maintain that the body/mind/self contains multiple ways of knowing, learning, making meaning, and representing, and taken as an interrelated whole, a student can expand modes and methods of learning by incorporating the physical body, the emotional and instinctual self, the relational self, the sensational self. By focusing on the mind, the capacity for learning and living is fractional in comparison. It is this acknowledgement and attendance to the whole body/mind/self of the student that we describe as 'embodied'.

In Western society, through language and through practice, our bodies are rarely recognised for their capacity of knowing, learning, making meaning, representing, and performing. In many cases bodies are taboo, politely and literally 'put away' under desks and in focused cognitive teaching methods. In our most familiar discourses in education, ways of understanding, communicating, and planning, mind is separate from body and mind is valued over body.¹² Put another way, the

development and outputs strived for in education are largely focused on the cognitive, or what can be translated to cognitive function.

Drawing on the previously discussed theoretical ideas and stances taken by ecl, we describe our work as embodied due to the conscious acknowledgement and engagement of the multiple (including physical) ways of learning and knowing. We recognise that bodies/minds/selves are always in a state of change (of becoming) and always in relation (to all that is impacting, i.e., other people, atmospheres, physical spaces, and so on). We recognise that a student's physical state is as relevant and important a state, and inextricable from, an emotional state and a cognitive state. In awareness of this, our approach to teaching and learning incorporates the task and the possibilities of attending to these multiple and rich aspects of our learning selves.

Building blocks of evidence

The ecl approach, supported and informed by the theoretical and philosophical common ground articulated above, draws on specific bodies of disciplinary knowledge, evidence, and established practice to inform the methods, programs, and structures of our work. Existing knowledge and evidence in educational theory is a key resource in our work, but also new knowledge and evidence coming from quantum physics, neurobiology, consciousness, creativity, and systemic theory. With this broad and rich landscape of resources available, ecl practice is brought to life by the collaboration between individual catalysts (and their diverse contexts, skills, experiences, motivations, and relations) and the context of their work (e.g., a classroom, classroom teacher, a parent, a community centre, etc.). The following section introduces core areas of scholarship that directly inform and support our work.

Educational Theory

Educational theory and research is a wide and extremely diverse field. Like education itself, it is largely divided into pre-defined subject areas (e.g., physical education, arts education, science education, technology in education, etc.), research types (e.g., statistical, qualitative, etc.), or context types (e.g., early childhood, economically marginalised, etc.). This type of compartmentalising is important for depth and innovation

in areas of educational research, but the affects obviously trickle down to the way teacher training is constructed and by extension, the way curricula and classrooms materialise for students (e.g., physical education at 9:15; science after playtime, etc.). As well as carrying out our own research, as an organisation, we collaborate with experts across a broad spectrum of areas and draw together, and put in relation, bodies of work that support, that challenge, that deepen, a systemic, whole child, approach to education. This on-going project has few boundaries, but for the purposes of this introduction, we focus on some key ideas and evidence from educational psychology, socio-emotional learning, arts in education, ecological education, and literacy studies.

Educational psychology revolves around the cognitive conditions and development of students. Evidence in this field is largely quantitative and has been a powerful voice in the development of teaching methods and measures. Generally speaking, a specific psychological model lies beneath the way teachers have engaged with their students and the curriculum assigned and assessed for at least the past century. How and when a teacher uses rewards in a classroom for example, or what criteria a teacher uses to assess a lesson, are all typically traceable to an educational psychological model carried through their own education as children and particularly as student teachers. Developmental psychology connects the human capacities for processing information, memory, and representation at different stages and conditions of development with educational expectations, methods, and content. A range of resources from this field inform our work with specific sub sets of people, for example early childhood development factors,¹³ primary to secondary school transitions¹⁴, and adolescent to adulthood transitions.¹⁵ Social constructivism is another psychology-based movement in education that has strongly influenced the ecl approach. Social constructivism understands a child or student's learning and development to be dependent not only upon teaching methods and cognitive processing skills, but also on previously held knowledge, and internalised social and cultural understandings. This model introduces the relevance of adult, family, and community structures and interactions to the learning journey. Research in social constructivism therefore supports and evidences, for example, the role of the parents and family in education,¹⁶ the impacts of peer relationships,¹⁷ and the cultural specificity of teaching and learning.¹⁸

Developing this trajectory in psychology, 'social intelligence' and our needs and capacities for human connection provide important insights into the ecl approach, which directly engages with the very dynamics of human interrelations. Psychologists such as Daniel Goleman and Matthew Lieberman draw on neuroscience to support the thesis of humans as social beings, as made up of the interactions allowed. Neuroscience, in this case, adds biological evidence to the social sciences, identifying hormone activity and immune systems for example as quantifiable shifts occurring in a person dependent on the nature and extent of their interactions with others. Neuroscience is discussed in more detail later in this chapter, but within the field of education, it is an important aspect of psychology research and it is having an ever more powerful impact in educational policy.¹⁹

Characteristic to educational psychology is an attention to the cognitive aspects of teaching and learning. Essential as this is, other areas of education theory lend focus to other ways of learning (other than the cognitive) and other types of human experience (other than that which occurs through cognition). **Socio-emotional Learning (SEL)** is a field of educational research that, as its title describes, is grounded in the social and emotional aspects of a student's engagement with learning. To break this down further, the 'social', as with social constructivism, points to the contextual nature of an individual's engagement in learning. Learning inside and outside schools is, to varying extents, a social project: we as teachers and learners in school work together, or in relation to each other, in structured groupings. That might be peer or friendship groups, age groups, ability groups, and so on. Lending focus to this aspect of education calls for attention to more than the individual student, more than the instructional method, but rather the structures and systems surrounding the individual. When we move from the cognitive ('I think') to the emotional ('I feel'), a whole different range of influences and impacts come into scope. In the context of the educational project, SEL is understood as an approach to support the acquisition of competencies related to self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and decision-making.²⁰ These competencies are cognitive, affective, and behavioural and are intended to improve academic performance and grades, along with improved conduct and less emotional distress.²¹ From this basis, a wide and ever-growing body of empirical evidence now supports the positive impact of socio-emotional learning on educational outcomes and student well-being.²² In addition, and of critical importance to ecl, is the far smaller

body of research in the social emotional learning and well-being of teachers: evidence in this area confirms the pivotal relationship that the social and emotional well-being of a teacher has with the success of their students.²³

Although SEL has prompted great strides in education towards a more rounded learning and development experience for many students, the work in this field is largely positioned as additional to regular academic curriculum, and therefore serves to support the delivery of curriculum (or the development of new knowledge) only in so far as it contributes to the right 'conditions' for academic learning (i.e. good conduct, decision making, positive goals, interpersonal abilities, etc.). Based on research in educational philosophy, neurobiology and systemic practice, ecl extends the work of SEL by allowing for and developing these essential human capacities (of feeling, sensing, intuiting, relating) as ways of learning and ways of knowing in themselves. These ways of knowing do not hinge upon the cognitive, they interact with the cognitive of course, but arguably come before cognitive or intellectual processes. Acknowledging and bringing to the fore these other ways of knowing and learning that exist in all of us, the ecl approach to teaching and learning incorporates not only SEL, but a vast scope of potential pathways to learning, knowing, and development.

One area of educational practice and research that harnesses these multiple ways of learning and knowing directly is **arts in education**. The extent to which this is transparent or nurtured will vary with every curriculum, cultural context, and teacher's individual approach, but the nature of artistic engagement invites non-cognitive responses and relations in a way that may not be apparent in other subject areas. In the performing arts, for example, the body is typically engaged and employed on a level not required in many other subject areas.

In music, as another example, sense as well as feeling is called upon as substantive to the practice. Also present in arts education is an attention to creativity, something that is key to the ecl approach to teaching and learning and often absent in the teaching of social or scientific subjects. Creativity and the arts don't necessarily go hand in hand in education (think of the 'same old' rendition of Oklahoma the musical, or the 30 identical Mothers' Day cards lined up to take home), and a further discussion on creativity comes a little later in this chapter, but the common assumption of creativity living in arts practice in education has led to important conceptual research on the role of creativity, culture, and craft in arts education that informs ecl's approach to culturally specific and creative practice. Literature and research in arts education supports not only our ability to adapt and develop creative and aesthetic strategies in education (from visual art education, drama and dance education, and creative technologies) but also incorporates many aspects of teaching and learning that ecl lays much importance on. This includes the importance and impact of the body in education,²⁴ imagination and play in education,²⁵ and performance and presentation in education.²⁶

Ecological education, sometimes known as environmental education, is a field of practice built out of the ethical and scientific call for the need to base our education on the fundamental and ever more threatened relationship between humans and the natural and material world. This approach to education not only draws on environmental sciences and ecological paradigms of living, but also overlaps with sophisticated theories of interrelationality, seeing the body as integrally connected with, and affected by, the objects and environments around us. Ecological educationalists propose that if we begin to understand that our lives are directly impacted by that which is not human, we will be able to make decisions in awareness of the actual impacts of our behaviour.²⁷ This extends to a critical knowledge of, for example, the connection between a portion of cheap french fries that we can buy on our local high street, to the provision of health and education of the children and young people in a developing Asian country.²⁸ Ecological education also attends to the importance and the potential of teaching and learning outdoors, in environments where the superficial boundaries between the natural world and us are further removed and our curriculum engagement becomes in relation to the natural world, rather than in spite of it.

Literacy studies is a long standing and broad field in educational research that has established, and continues to inform, the purposes and methods for teaching reading and writing to students of all ages, from birth to adulthood. The use of the term literacy has been stretched and reconfigured over the past two decades to account for the ways in which we 'read' and 'write' the word and the world. Today literacy studies incorporates the study and pedagogies of media literacies, visual and aural literacies, physical and emotional literacies, civic and cultural literacies, among others. In short, literacies can describe the ways in which we receive and communicate ideas. In schools however, especially in the primary years, the literacy focus is on text literacy. Regionally the ages at which text literacy is introduced and the methods by which it is taught vary, but the common agreement that reading and writing text is a key part of every child's education is one of the few, shared goals across time, culture, and epistemological paradigm.

Literacy then, be it text literacy or literacy more broadly construed, is central to the project of teaching and learning. Conceptually and empirically, research has shown that literacy is a social practice.²⁹ In other words, we develop our literacy skills through a variety of ways (listening, observing, responding, repeating, experimenting, etc.) and we do this in relation to, and in response to, social and cultural environments. Considering this in relation to education policy and curriculum can be complicated, as of course the idea of policy and curriculum is that it takes effect regardless of the many and diverse sociocultural contexts of students' lives. Literacy policy therefore in the UK is predominantly focused on distinct skill sets identifiable and common across literacy development. The advances of literacy scholars over the past few decades have resulted in an in-depth and evidenced understanding of the potential

and impact of literacy practices that fall far from measurable skill sets such as phonics. Some of the key literacy areas that inform ecl's practice are: Family and Community Literacy³⁰ and New Literacies.³¹ Family and Community Literacies describe the rich and diverse set of meaning making and communication skills acquired through engagement at the level of family and community. These literacies that can vary from vernacular language to culinary skills, from nursing the elderly to car mechanics, are not only valuable skills for intellectual, emotional, and vocational learning, but also essential for the cohesion and sustainability of a community or family unit. A lack of attention to these literacies in education can result in a devaluing of them in a child, family, or society's estimation, but can also waste rich opportunities for student engagement and development of expertise. New Literacies broadly refer to literacies that have been made possible by contemporary advancements in digital technology, this might include digital literacy, but also visual and media literacies, global and transcultural literacies. It is no surprise that both educational theorists and policy makers alike are attempting to engage in the changing face of literacy education in the digital age. ecl is particularly attentive to this area to the extent that, like Family and Community Literacies, New Literacies represent a lived reality of a child or young person's always emerging engagement with the world around them; it is a condition of their lives.

Natural Science

Science often works by metaphor, likening complex phenomena with visible and known things or attributes: for example the 'selfish gene' 'the genome

blueprint'. These metaphors are powerful and can hold sway in a social mind-set long after the metaphor is discovered to be inaccurate (as with the two examples above). The metaphor of the age of Newton was the 'majestic clockwork' motion of the planets: a simple regular predictable Newtonian machine with the earth placed at its centre.³⁷³² This became the model for the next 250 years. And it wasn't until the beginning of the 20th century



that scientists began to profoundly explore the relationship between energy and the structure of matter. In doing so, the physical Newtonian material universe that had been at the heart of science, and at the heart of how we humans perceive the world, was shaken. Scientists began to realize that everything in the universe is made of energy. As Nikola Tesla stated, 'If you want to know the secrets of the universe, think in terms of energy, frequency and vibration.'³⁸³³ As discussed earlier in this chapter, quantum physicists now recognize that the universe cannot be understood as a collection of separate things, but rather a web of interconnectedness, with all living things (at their most elemental) constantly involved in exchanges of information with their environment.³⁹³⁴ The 17th century metaphor however, of the majestic clockwork, still holds much influence over the organisation of our societies today and how we think about human engagement.

When physics (i.e., the make up and behaviour of the universe, of nature, energy, and matter) is defined through metaphor, through theory, and through the narratives shared to understand the world that we live in, that understanding informs the way we think about other aspects of our lives and experience. Physicist and philosopher, David Bohm, states, 'If [one] thinks of the totality as constituted of independent fragments, then that is how his mind will tend to operate.'⁴⁰³⁵ A socio-cultural mindset is not an easy thing to shift, it becomes embedded in profound and trivial ways in our social, cultural, and psychological systems. In fragments, for example, a General Medical Practitioner (GP) can treat discrete symptoms of sickness; in fragments we can plan a recipe for a meal and the contents of a meeting agenda; in fragments we can put together the subjects and content of a student's day. These fragmentary approaches are perfectly familiar and often successful if considered and assessed in terms of

the fragments according to that which they are designed. What we can learn through physics however, is that the natural world, including the biological, ecological, and cosmological, doesn't actually exist in this way at all. Rather, it exists in an intricate interdependence. The fragmentation therefore does not coincide with a natural state. This is not necessarily a good or bad thing, and this incongruence has been identified for many years in many fields. In ecl's work however, we have found that drawing on the models and wisdoms of scientific knowledge of the natural world and aligning that with our collective knowledge in the social sciences and humanities has strengthened the foundations and the relevance of our practice. We have found that working in a different rhythm, or against, biological, physical, and ecological processes does not support, but rather challenges, the well-being and learning of children and young people.

The shift in scientific perspective from mechanics to quantum mechanics, from a universe of separate things to a universe of interconnection, emerged from various developments in physics, ecology and biology; in some ways catching up with philosophical and spiritual wisdoms from hundreds of years previously, and in some ways paving the way for new theoretical and sociological constructions of the human experience. Amidst this profound perspective on nature is both the complex, unpredictable, and interdependent emergence of all things, set alongside the simplicity of rules by which we may be able to understand and even replicate a natural system. At the Sante Fe Institute in New Mexico in the 1980's an eclectic group of economists, biologists and physical scientists came together, across disciplines, languages, and contexts to

explore these ideas in the contexts of their own professions. They proposed that although natural systems may operate 'at the edge of chaos', they are in fact self-organized; that very simple ordering rules can lead to incredibly beautiful complexity.³⁶



Neurobiology, Consciousness, Mindfulness

Historically, Western science and Eastern philosophy have appeared to have virtually nothing in common. What relevance could the values of sitting in a Himalayan cave have for a physician in urban Britain? However, as more and more people in the West have begun to study and practise the techniques of meditation (as a technique without any particular religious affiliation), so curiosity has grown, and a dialogue between the two worlds have developed – with some fascinating results. One of the most interesting areas of research relates to how we learn; particularly how we learn to behave or act differently. And advances in neuroscience and psychology are beginning to endorse what the spiritual teachings informing mindfulness are based upon. Our minds are not one fixed entity, but constantly changing and conditioned by habitual patterns of thought and behaviour. But with practise, they are also readily susceptible to new learning, which can bring about very real changes in everyday experience.

Neurobiology tells us that the human brain includes three distinct layers. The first layer of the brain is known as the brain stem (or reptilian brain), responsible for involuntary functions such as breathing, metabolism and heart rate. The second layer is known as the limbic region. It surrounds the brain stem like a helmet and includes a series of neuronal connections that stimulate the impulse to nurture. This area provides much more sophisticated information about the intentions and behaviour of others, and allows for the interpretation of various social, emotional and behavioural signals. The limbic region is the seat of emotional bonds. Among humans and other highly-evolved mammals is a third layer of brain: the neocortex. This is the area of the brain responsible for analysis, reasoning, imagination and all the processes associated with the intellect and thinking. It's through this layer of the brain that we manipulate symbols, learn language, control impulses, learn from past mistakes, empathise with others, and so on.

Brain activity, of any kind, is due to the activity of neurons. These 'social' cells are constantly communicating along neural pathways, delivering their messages at vast speeds throughout all three layers of the brain in the form of chemical molecules. What is of particular interest is that when neurons connect, they form a bond. They get into the habit of passing the same sorts of messages back and forth. In very simple terms, this means

that we are able to learn, but as we rely on certain bonds, we determine the use or possibility of other bonds. For example: suppose I'd been frightened by a dog as a child, a set of neuronal connections would have been formed corresponding to the physical sensations of fear on the one hand and the concept that dogs are scary on the other. The next time I saw a dog, the same set of neurons would be activated, reinforcing the association of fear with dogs and the belief that dogs are scary. It wouldn't be long before just the thought of a dog would be enough to generate symptoms of fear. Only if other, more positive, experiences occurred to interrupt this repeat pattern, or if the capacity to reason and challenge assumptions had developed, would this association and the corresponding fear it provoked be avoidable. From this example, we see how cognitive learning takes place, and how programmed the brain is to develop patterns of thinking and behaviour. These patterns have a strong influence on our everyday experience and play a major role in our subjective experience of happiness as well as in our ordinary capacities to live and work in society.

Eastern philosophical perspectives bring a different body of knowledge to the understanding of how we learn. Here it is understood that the brain is the physical support for the mind – but not the mind itself. The mind per se cannot be touched, seen, or even defined by words, and it can be understood in two parts, as the ordinary mind (thoughts, sensations, feelings, etc.) and the natural mind. The natural mind, or the mind's true nature, is impossible to describe (because all our attempts to do so use the ordinary mind, which is limited). However it is through awareness of this natural mind that we come to experience the peace, happiness and aliveness that we so long for. According to the long tradition of Eastern philosophy,³⁶ the problem is that we fail to realise what is 'behind' all of this. Our natural mind is so familiar to us, we don't recognise it, and instead are caught in a whirlwind of ever-changing thoughts and emotions that can never lead to lasting peace or wellbeing. We learn to believe in the content of our ordinary mind (thinking, feeling, reacting, remembering, predicting), but we can also learn to detach from this whirlwind activity and rest the mind in its natural state, and from there begin to observe what the ordinary mind is up to. In doing so, we have the opportunity to gain greater control over our mind, thinking processes, and behaviour. We can become responsive rather than reactive, creative rather than prescriptive. This process of detachment is commonly known as mindfulness or meditation.

Bringing these philosophical perspectives together with Neurobiology, we can see the implications of mindfulness practices on our brain behaviour in scientific terms. The effect of an ability to be detached from the day to day and constant interactions of the ordinary mind is that we calm the incessant neuronal activity in the brain, reduce the strength of the connections between neurons, and allow for new, more currently appropriate, connections to be made. In short, we can change the way we habitually think and therefore engage with the world. We can unlearn out-dated habits and open our mind to new ways of perceiving, new ways of behaving.

Mindfulness facilitates an awareness of our habitual thoughts, perceptions and sensations, and rather than being swept away by them, their influence over us begins to fade. The practice of mindfulness is often taught through the metaphor of the sky: our natural mind being like the sky – open, clear, limitless, and unchanging, and our ordinary mind being like the clouds. Whether dark and stormy or light and feathery, they change and they are temporary. There are now a huge array of strategies and resources to support mindfulness practice, along with a growing field of scholarship around the implications of mindfulness in education, the arts, healthcare, business, and sport.³⁷

Creativity

The concept of creativity is a heavily conceptualised and researched one, particularly over the past decade when its influence has spread far beyond the cultural sector and into corporate and social sectors, including significantly, into education. What 'creativity' means, of course in these various and far reaching contexts is now slippery, stretchy, and multiple. In the first instance,

it is directly connected to a value system and as such, it is a term that means different things for different people depending on their values, positions, and intentions. Unsurprisingly then, there are myriad definitions of creativity, emphasising everything from beauty to value to individuality to surprise.

ecl practice is based on the belief that there is an inherent creativity in every child. That characteristic will look differently with every context and value system. We believe that within creative practice we are required to be open to that which we don't already know, to engage with tools, ideas, other people, and other materials; and to attend carefully and reflectively to that which we do know. With our purpose of inviting teachers, for example, into collaborative spaces to seek fresh new solutions or pathways to the well-being and learning of children and young people, comes a call for creativity. That is, a call for the type or nature of creativity required and accessible to that specific group at that specific time. In this way, creativity and innovation (understood as the applied actions resulting from creative work)³⁸ underpin our work and allow us to go beyond the boundaries of what we already know, requiring us to let go of our certainties. We believe strongly in the potential for positive change that this practice holds, and thus use the term 'co-creative' to describe the primary characteristic of our working methods.

Innovation is not the result of the genius of one solitary inventor. It requires a collective in which the efforts of the individual, becomes something more. Truly innovative groups are consistently able to harness each other's creativity into a single work of collective good. Everything that the ecl foundation does is set within the context of an invitation - to teachers, leaders, parents, carers - to step together into a co-creative space.

One common characteristic of creative practice is that it requires toleration, or even active seeking out, of ambivalence and ambiguity. Psychologist Szilvia Péter-Szarka proposes that through this toleration of ambiguity, the practice can also be seen to stimulate the acceptance of others' viewpoints, and in turn, understanding and cooperation. He states, 'In addition to more effective problem-solving and collaboration, creativity influences the quality of life in a positive way: creative people are more optimistic and persistent in problem-solving, the manifestation of everyday creativity contributes to the subjective well-being of the person and his/her environment'.³⁹

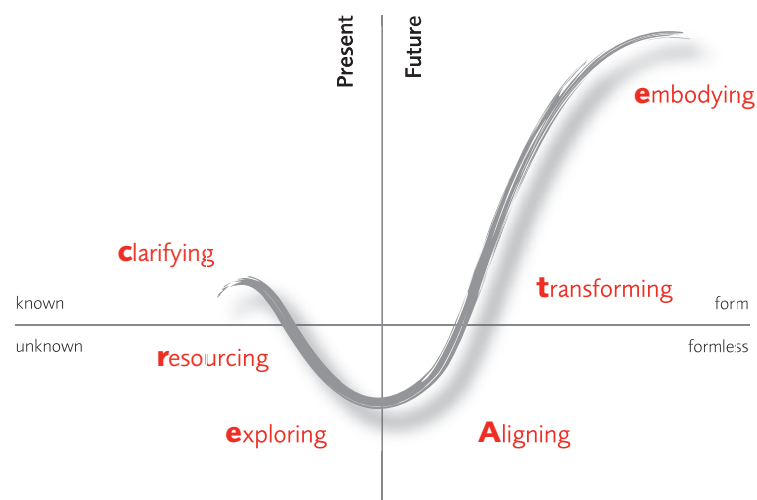
In the field of education, creativity has been considered extensively in terms of its internal determinants⁴⁰ and more recently in terms of the social and environmental factors on creativity.⁴¹ Beth Hennessey, in a 2004 study on the role of motivation and climate in the developing creativity in students,⁴² articulates five constraints that have consistently proven to be sure-fire killers of intrinsic motivation and creativity: expected reward, expected evaluation, competition, time limits and surveillance. She also notes that this list could be labelled as a recipe for a typical American classroom, and most of the time the educational environment is structured in such a way that intrinsic motivation and creativity are bound to suffer, or be completely destroyed. Going back to the idea of creativity requiring an engagement with that which we don't already know, we can see the clear link with the provocative argument of Ken Robinson, based on the premise that today's education is preparing children for a future that we do not know.⁴³ According to Robinson, our purpose should be 'to develop a new paradigm of human capacity to meet a new era of human existence.' And to do this, 'we need to evolve a new appreciation of the importance of nurturing human talent along with an understanding of how talent expresses itself differently in every individual. We need to create environments in our schools... where every person is inspired to grow creatively'.⁴⁴

Nick Udall, a writer, organizational consultant, and co-founder of ecl's initial incarnation as a foundation, beautifully describes a perspective on creativity that we have found extremely useful:

Creativity is the dance between what we know and what we don't know, and it is through the dance that we make meaning of the world around us, making the unknown knowable, the unconscious conscious and the invisible, visible. Moreover there is an art to actively bringing the new to our mind, for our everyday ego-consciousness hates to be out of control, preferring to keep us within the comfort zone of what we already know. The challenge is to awaken states of being and qualities of mind that help our creativity to flourish'.⁴⁵

ecl challenges the boundaries that constrain creativity and offers a practice to support it. Drawing on many of the disciplines discussed in this chapter, the ecl foundation has developed a creative process, CreAte (see page 70), that begins with a question and takes people on a journey to an inspiring insight or fresh solution.

The process combines enquiry, creativity, skills and rigorous practice. It uses all our faculties: cognition, emotion and intuition. But what it also does is to invite the skills and experience of those taking part. For each it is of crucial importance to respect the expertise available within the collective such that we resource them to be creative, to find solutions which work in their context.



Systemic Thought

Systemic or systems theory is an interdisciplinary field about the nature and relations of systems or units across nature, society, or science. Within this umbrella field, each is grounded heavily in a systemic perspective deriving from therapeutic practice, specifically systemic constellations work in personal and family therapy and organisational development. For many people then, the first contact with a systemic perspective is through the experience of a family constellation. Although a powerful methodology – making visible information about the hidden dynamics in a system – this aspect of systemic work is insufficient to convey the underlying principles of the work and the consequent possibilities of it in social, educational, and care contexts. It is not the method that works, but the underlying grasp of the systemic perspective and the principles operating in humans systems.⁴⁶

The starting place in understanding a systemic approach is to understand the nature of wholes, and how parts and wholes inter-relate. Conventional thinking encourages us to focus on the parts, often in the form of people,

concepts and events, as individual components; discrete entities separate in the world. At best we are encouraged to see ‘context’ as a collection of those parts – rather like the assembly of parts in a car engine or clockwork. Indeed the prominence of a machine metaphor in the worldview of western organisational culture, including our education systems, is testimony to this.⁴⁷ Such a mind-set encourages us to take a view of behaviour and performance as residing more in the individual than in the relationships between individuals, or in the *place* of the individuals.

For Robert Rowland Smith, it is this focus on place that is the radical meaning of systemic. He says, ‘place becomes much more important than identity; *where* you are, is the key factor for health, flow, society, love... It matters a lot more than *who* you are, or being true to yourself. You are looking for what’s good for the system rather than the individuals in it. Of course the individuals benefit, but it’s not self-based, it’s because they are in the right place.’⁴⁸ A systemic lens enables us to see a dynamic, relational world of networks and interconnections with each part a fractal of the whole, rather than as separate elements able to act independently from one another. Peter Senge described this type of holistic phenomena succinctly: ‘The whole exists through continually manifesting in the parts, and the parts exist as embodiments of the whole.’⁴⁹

The systemic approach to working with this understanding is grounded in the work of the German philosopher and therapist Bert Hellinger.⁵⁰ At the core of the approach is the notion that systems are governed by hidden laws of relationship. We can experience and understand the natural laws of gravity or centrifugal force acting on a physical system, but find it more difficult to appreciate the invisible dynamics acting in human systems. In complexity theory the term used to describe this phenomenon is ‘strange attractor’, an attractor is like a gravitational field. A strange attractor is an energy field that pulls otherwise chaotic behaviour into complex and beautiful patterns. We cannot see it, but we can feel it. It ‘tugs’ our behaviour into its pattern; we become aligned to a certain way of being. We experience the impact of these laws every day but cannot readily see them.

In a systemic context conscience has little to do with moral principles or ideals; instead the word is used to describe an inner compass or guiding force (similar to the ‘strange attractors’ of complexity theory) that guides our fundamental belonging to groups; from our family of origin,

through school and into the organisations in which we work. Conscience points to that tacit monitoring system we all have that is exquisitely sensitive to our survival needs. Think of your conscience as a kind of sense organ to maintain equilibrium. One that is repeatedly asking four important questions:

- Do I **belong**? (do I feel included, welcomed, secure?)
- Am I in the right **place** in this system? (in relation to others around me. And is this a place where my skills and passion meet? Do I feel poised and in balance?)
- How fair is the **exchange**? (Am I receiving as well as giving? Am I resourced? Acknowledged? Rewarded?)
- Am I standing in the flow of **time**? (Honouring past heritage, standing in the present, leaning into the future?)

We respond to this inner enquiry in the form of 'a felt sense' of ease or discomfort, innocence or guilt. Personal conscience works as a sense organ of equilibrium that we are aware of if we pause to reflect on what is happening. It binds us consciously to our group: our family, our region of birth, our organisation, our professional body, our religion, our culture, our language and our country. It supplies loyalty to our family, work, friends and colleagues, and the organisations we belong to. Indeed it enables those organisations to form and endure. It is always in our consciousness and guides us by providing us with feelings that can be understood as guilt and innocence.

In addition to the personal conscience (of which we are usually aware) there is also a systemic conscience of which we are frequently not aware. The hidden, collective conscience works across the system and through time. Wrong doings, injustices, exclusions that may have been 'perpetrated' by one member of the system remain held as a collective memory. This sucks out the energy of a system reducing the flow of creativity. But it can also play out through the most vulnerable members of a system – often the children. Work done to release this memory: disentangling stuck relationships or healing that which has been torn – frees up huge reservoirs of well-being and creativity.

The third conscience termed 'spiritual conscience', responds to the energy that moves everything creatively, outside of our direct control. It goes beyond all other boundaries and can be understood as that which keeps us

connected to the greater whole. If we find harmony with this movement it can carry us, bring us calm, and support clarity. It provides us with a willingness to surrender, to love and be at one with things exactly as they are. Following this third conscience requires great effort, perhaps even a spiritual effort, because it tears us away from obedience to the dictates of our family, religion, culture, and constructions of personal identity. This conscience is ineffable and mysterious and it does not follow the laws of personal and systemic conscience, which we know more intimately.

In education this approach has invited the study of the orders (time, place, exchange, and belonging) in a school and classroom and through systemic work to examine and realign them. This has been particularly developed in the work of Marianne Franke-Gricksch.⁵¹ With Marianne, we are reminded that the systemic orders, particularly belonging, have unique implications in a school; school is for a particular time, not a lifetime. Systemic approaches in education remind us to attend to the whole child (the relationship between their mind, body, heart and spirit) as well as the systems within which they connect. So, 'whole child, whole system' is a useful maxim commonly used to summarize the ecl approach.

In the following pages of this book, you will see various applications and manifestations of the disciplines of knowledge discussed in this chapter. The practices are grounded in the philosophical ideas introduced from the outset, and brought to life when brought into co-creation with the teachers, carers, children, and young people that are engaged with. ecl practice is shared through images, practitioner reflection, commentary, and finally through a research study in the second half of this book.



Chapter 3

The ecl approach in practice

“And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music.”

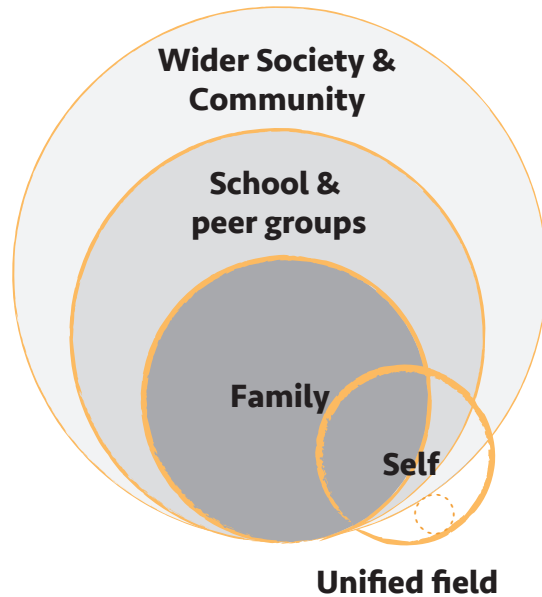
F. Nietzsche

ecl practice, practitioners, and programs are rooted in the perspectives and knowledges that have been described in the previous chapter. The practice and programs however, only come into being in relation to, and in collaboration with, the people, children, school, community, or context in which the work is going to happen. ecl practice is not simply constituted of instructional methods; rather, it is a method of co-creative engagement: whether you are a teacher, a mentor, an employee, or a carer. ecl practice does not prescribe methods, but rather it facilitates the conditions (state of mind/body/self, level of engagement, atmosphere, etc.) whereby teaching, training, caring is more productive, responsive, accessible, and sustainable. On account of this, there is no neat template or program description that can capture the ecl approach; the practice, essentially, only exists in the specific time, place, and relations of its use. Necessarily, it adapts, evolves, and transforms with each new group of participants and systems.

What can be recounted and represented are guiding principles that inform the practice across all settings, and selected tools that have been developed to support the work. In this chapter we begin by briefly introducing the guiding principles and give some example of common tools and strategies. More substantially, we share the ecl practice in the only way that can hold the integrity and clarity of the work, and that is through narratives of the work in context. Through stories of ecl practice in schools and communities in various parts of the world, we will introduce, not only some of the tools of the practice, but also some of the vitality and universality of this approach.

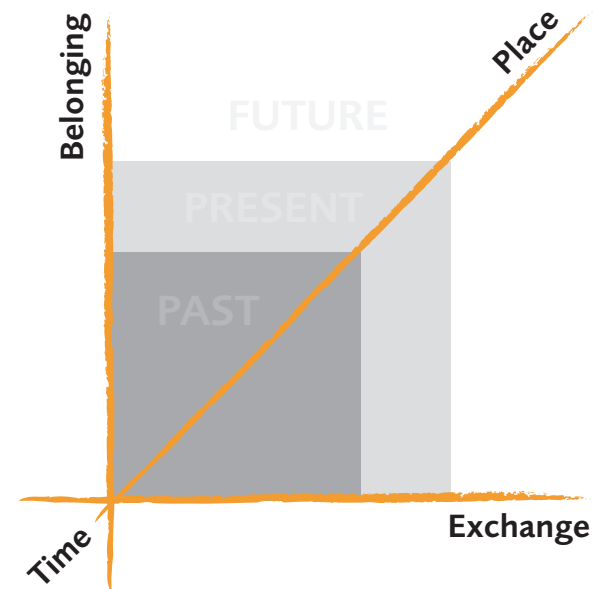
Guiding principles

The work of the foundation is always guided by the question: how can we as adults create conditions for a system in which children and young people can flourish? The approach takes up the world through a systemic lens as a dynamic, relational world of networks and interconnections with each part a fractal of the whole. The systemic approach allows us to see the whole child or teacher within his or her dynamic world of relationships: classroom, school, family, social, cultural, and historical.



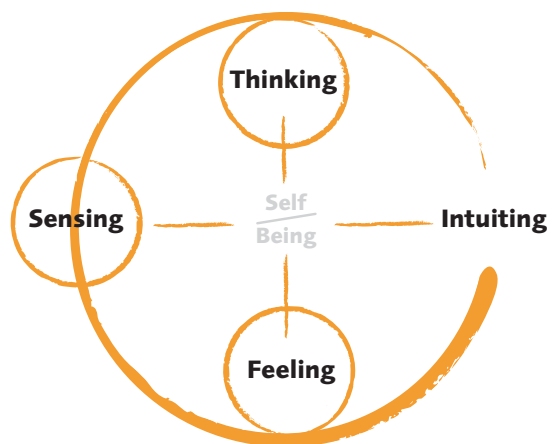
The starting place in understanding a systemic approach is to understand the nature of wholes, and how parts and wholes inter-relate. Conventional thinking encourages us to focus on the parts, often in the form of people, concepts and events, as individual components; discrete entities separate in the world. At best we are encouraged to see 'context' as a collection of those parts – rather like the assembly of parts in a car engine or clockwork. Indeed the prominence of a machine metaphor in the worldview of western organisational culture, including our education systems, is testimony to this. Such a mind-set encourages us to take a view of behaviour and performance as residing more in the individual than in the relationships between individuals, in the in between.

The systemic approach to working with this understanding is grounded in the work of the German philosopher and therapist Bert Hellinger. At the core of the approach is the notion that systems are governed by hidden laws of relationship. We can experience and understand the natural laws of gravity or centrifugal force acting on a physical system, but find it more difficult to appreciate the invisible dynamics acting in human systems. We learn to see the hidden laws of relationship and how to work with them to create coherence. He summarized them as the 4 orders: Belonging (how am I included, welcomed in the system?); Place (Where am I in relation? Am I in right place?); Exchange (How are people acknowledged and rewarded?); Time (How are the past, present and future honoured?) Knowledge of the rules allows us to understand that there is an underlying structure and harmony in every system. It may not be visible to the eye but we can learn to be aware of it phenomenologically. ecl has developed practice and tools that skill teachers and carers to align the orders and in so doing restore balance and coherence and increase our flow of energy and creativity.



Music as a metaphor can help us understand these hidden laws of relationship. When we consider the difference between music and noise, we notice that the qualitative difference lies not in the sounds themselves (the frequencies of each note/sound), but in the relationship between the notes. The relationship between the notes and silence, and how these are held within a structure of harmonic and rhythmic rules, cause the recognition of music. There are for example conventions in most musical traditions for regular and hierarchical accentuation of beats to reinforce a given meter. Hearing a 1-2-3, 1-2-3 rhythm might conjure visions of debutant balls; the 1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4 rhythm might conjure images of marching soldiers. Composers can be creative with the rules, creating new genres such as jazz whose syncopated rhythms contradict the conventions by accenting unexpected parts of the beat. Knowledge of the rules allows us to understand that there is an underlying structure and harmony in every system. The ecl foundation has developed a series of tools to support the alignment of these four orders, but beyond the tools, an awareness of importance of belonging, time, place, and exchange informs all ecl practice and engagements.

Another guiding principle of ecl practice is an awareness of the multiple ways in which we communicate, make-meaning, and come to know. We work with the concept of '4 ways of knowing'. By attending to the development of all ways of knowing that go beyond the cognitive – by including emotion, sensation and intuition – we open up new possibilities for learning and creating.



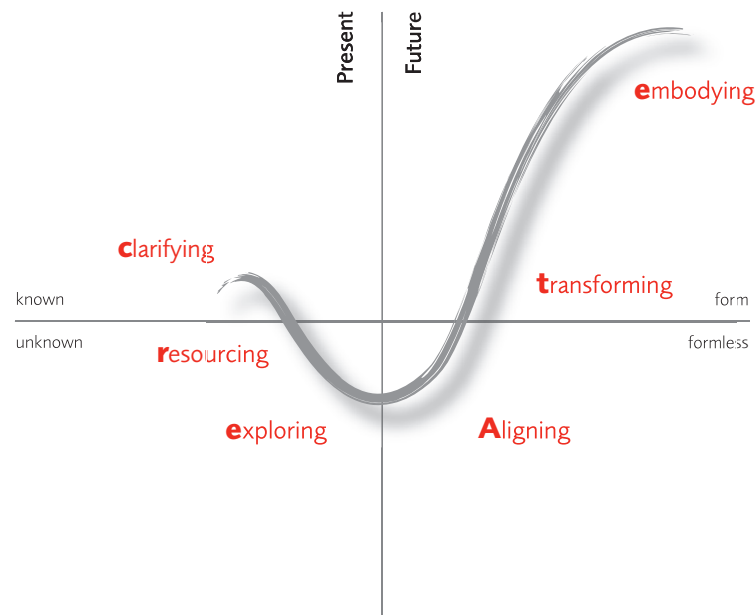
Carl Gustav Jung first proposed these four fundamental ways of perceiving and interpreting reality: Thinking, feeling, intuition, and sensation. According to Jung, these were two diametrically opposed pairs (thinking and feeling; intuiting and sensing), and by extension, if someone has a developed thinking function they will have a correspondingly underdeveloped feeling function. Unlike Jung, however, ecl does not place these four approaches in a fixed structure or relationship to each other, furthermore, there is no hierarchy implied. The ways of knowing are intended as a reminder rather than a prescription, and understood as intricately interconnected processes. Indeed, the pursuit of drawing lines between them as processes is progressively futile, like separating the yeast from the flour once the bread has been baked. What the terms signify, however, are points in time plucked from an ever-moving process of experience and interaction. The naming and understanding of these ways of knowing is pragmatic: it allows us as teachers, as researchers, as learners, to design, reflect upon, and represent experience.

As interconnected and engaged human beings, we all live our lives in accordance with thought, feeling, intuition, and sensation – what we have found in education however, and indeed many walks of life, is that these aspects of our engagement with the world are not given equal space or lent equal importance or articulation. They are not engaged as ways of knowing. Put another way, feelings, intuition and sensations are typically considered only in relation to how they affect thought and can be articulated through speech. The ecl approach sets out to acknowledge, value, and develop all ways of knowing, assuming richer, more accessible, and more creative inquiries are therefore afforded.

ecl challenges the boundaries that constrain creativity and offers a practice to support it. Drawing on many of the disciplines discussed in this chapter, the ecl Foundation has developed a creative process, CreAte, that begins with a question and takes people on a journey to an inspiring insight or fresh solution. The process combines enquiry, creativity, skills and rigorous practice. It uses all our faculties: cognition, emotion and intuition.

This space is for you...

CreAte, a guiding process for a creative journey



- c – clarifying: finding focus
- r – resourcing: preparing ourselves for the journey
- e – exploring: systemic exploration to understand the hidden dynamics
- a – aligning: restore coherence, resolve issues, generate new insights
- t – transforming: creating new possibilities based on the felt shifts
- e – embodying: stepping into the new

Co-creativity can happen when two or more participants contribute, engage, and build from a common starting point or goal. What results is something that goes beyond the scope of any one individual; and in both process and product, expands the possibilities of inquiry, learning, and representation. In order to co-create with others, all participants need to be known (to the extent that they can be), able to contribute, and with agency to make decisions in the process. Co-creativity is at the heart of the teaching and learning within the ecl foundation.

It invites the skills and experience of those taking part. To give this substantial role to the children/young people/teachers/youth and careworkers takes trust and courage. Trust in themselves and in the knowledge that their contributions will be respected and valued for what they are. The courage to try something new, engage in potentially unfamiliar territory, and to think independently. For ecl it is of crucial importance to respect the expertise available within the collective such that we resource participants to be creative and to find solutions which work in their context. In this way co-creativity becomes a shared practice.

Phenomenology and mindfulness are for ecl, both approach and practice. We slow down, deepen the quality of relationship, open ourselves to a place of inner stillness, opening to the whole and wait for a new understanding to emerge. It has the quality of ‘beholding’ (Goethe) – a direct perception of reality. Scharmer directs us to, ‘the emerging future that we can sense, feel and actualize by shifting the inner place from which we operate’. From this place, this state of being we access a profound creativity. Whatever the skills and capacities of ecl catalysts, the practice only comes alive in relation to, and in collaboration with, the people, children, school, community, or context in which the work is going to happen. ecl practice is not simply constituted of instructional methods; rather, it is a method of co-creative engagement: whether you are a teacher, a mentor, an employee, or a carer, ecl practice does not prescribe methods, but rather it facilitates the conditions (state of mind/body/self, level of engagement, atmosphere, etc.) whereby teaching, training, caring is more productive, responsive, accessible, and sustainable. On account of this, there is no neat template or program description that can capture the ecl approach; the practice, essentially, only exists in the specific time, place, and relations of its use. It adapts, evolves, and transforms with each new group of participants and systems, becoming a living breathing creative practice.

Glimpses of ecl in practice

What follows are stories of ecl in practice in schools and communities taking place in three of ecl's Hubs around the world: South Africa, The Netherlands and Namibia. There are as many practical applications as there are diverse educational and care contexts. We describe the context, the practice, and some glimpses of the impact of the work.

ecl in South Africa Rena le Lona

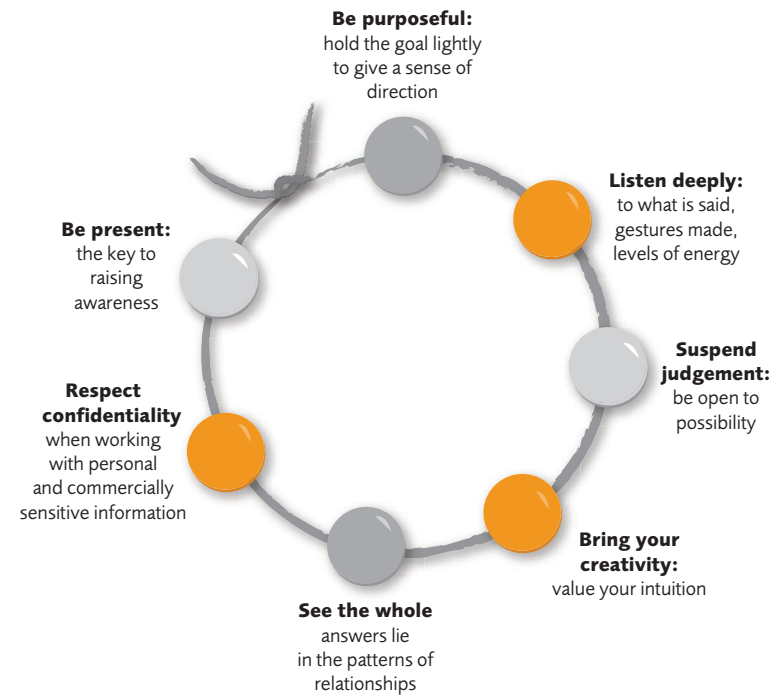
60% of South Africa's children live below the poverty line, many (1.5 million) are orphans and/or living in child-headed households (90,000). Violence is rife in all levels of society, weakening family structures and placing immense strain on everyone involved with the education and care of children: teachers, youth and care workers.

In Diepkloof, in the township of Soweto there is a centre for orphans and vulnerable children called Rena le Lona. It supports children in the age range from 5 to 18 and serves 16 schools. The centre aims to provide all the support that these children need: emotional, intellectual, spiritual and nutritional. In the words of the director, "the pressure that our teachers and coaches face every day, is tremendous". With the understanding that it is often the adults who need support and skills in order to be able to work well with very vulnerable children, the leadership of Rena le Lona approached the ecl foundation to find out how to utilize the methodology within their NGO. Together they co-created a 2-day intensive to introduce systemic principles to all staff in order to create a solid foundation for children to engage in learning.



Janet Goldblatt (Hub Director SA) and Rasada Goldblatt (catalyst) vividly recall walking into a room filled with teachers and coaches from very different backgrounds: Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Ndebele and Afrikaner, each holding the question: How can we inspire the children in our care to do their best and be their best? After a round of introductions, the catalysts began by 'building the container' - paying attention to creating conditions conducive for the group to work safely and creatively.

The Seven Beads



They introduced the 7 beads as a way of engaging with each other throughout the 2 days. Particular attention was paid to coming to presence using a stilling exercise (a guided breathing and concentration exercise) allowing each person to come to become aware of themselves and each other in the room. From here the ecl catalysts facilitated an enquiry into the question held by the group as this would become the focus of the work throughout the workshop. It quickly became clear that the question with the most emotional charge was about themselves: How can we as a team be inspired, how can we be our best?

ecl catalyst reflection (Rasada G.)

“It is not unique to Johannesburg but due to the history of migrant labour and apartheid, these things have contributed to extremely high rates of crime, violence, alcoholism, divorce, multiple partners and the highest Aids related death and illness rates in the world. All these factors combined have left a community where fathers and the relationship with fathers have been severely impacted. Fathers are often absent, missing, unknown, longed for, despised, idealised, mistrusted and sometimes against all the odds have been fathers that hold, support, encourage, teach and nurture.

I remember a young man in one workshop who shared with the group with tears of rage how angry he was with his father. It was the end of the second day and the entire group supported him to find a place of peace and forgiveness with his dad. At the end of the process I can see him beaming with pride, he had realised the kind of dad he is to his own kids and also found some elements of his own father that he could draw strength from.

The work of including our fathers, with the wounds and the blessings that come with that and realising when we work with other adults and children how their relationship with dad might need a little support has opened my eyes in many ways including how I look at my own father.”

Catalysts introduced teaching around the systemic 4 orders and led exercises exploring the order of Belonging through groupings around religion or culture. Teachers and coaches began to see the importance of honouring their own system. How do I belong in my own system? How does it feel to be the only member of my system, in this room? What does it mean to belong? What does it mean for the children in my class? Taking their place within their own culture, standing on the ground of being Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Ndebele or Afrikaner, paradoxically allowed them to look at the ‘other’ with fresh eyes. In the words of one of the participants, “this exercise was quite mind-blowing. It enabled us to cross over and break down some of the barriers that still exist in this country”.

The order of Exchange led into an exploration of resourcing: how am I resourced (internally and externally)? In the reflections of a catalyst, “What became apparent to me was the relief that was felt when these teachers became aware of their own resources and how to draw on them. As one participant pointed out to me, commenting on the suicide rate, he noted that people employed in the service industry, (nurses, policeman, teachers) are always giving of themselves but who is there for them, who do they have to lean on as a resource? He discussed how often these feelings are bottled up as it would not be “proper “to show emotion or express how they feel. He had felt a great sense of relief when during his own constellation I had placed a resource behind him for support.

Or in the words of another teacher, “My cup feels full and I encourage all of you to keep seeing and hearing each other. Be there for each other, as teachers we are always giving to the children but remember to replenish yourself as well. Amongst us today are real men of the 21st century and I thank you for what you are giving to our children in terms of being male role models of distinction.”

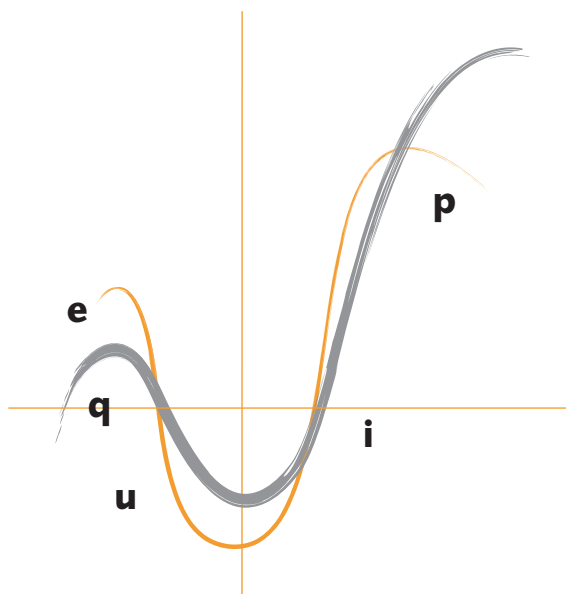
“Every single person in this workshop was touched and inspired by the personal shifts they experienced, a powerful workshop that far exceeded any of their expectations as it touched their souls and opened the possibility for enhanced relationships with both colleagues and the children they teach thus enriching their personal growth and the growth of all involved (Director).”

ecl in South Africa: Jeppe High Schools

At the other end of the scale the South African team partnered with the Ruth First Trust to develop Peer Mentoring programmes that could support the transition of teenage students from townships to Jeppe High School in Johannesburg. The actual design of the programme was a co-creation with school leaders, teachers, teenagers and key people within the Ruth First Trust. Guided by a breakthrough question: how can we design a pilot peer mentoring and learning program so that students and alumni can support those younger than themselves? The intention was to provide a resource that enhanced existing academic and pastoral support by leveraging the skills, knowledge and personal qualities of older students and Ruth First Trust alumni so that they can work alongside the younger students of Jeppe Girls School.

Emerging from this partnership was a design for a pilot running from Feb to Nov 2014 beginning with the training of a core group of 60 mentors (adults and teenagers). The 2-day training was facilitated jointly by the foundation's mentoring expert, Chris Charles and ecl South Africa Hub Director Janet Goldblatt. The programme objectives were to: raise the standards of achievement and attainment of 30 students; stimulate their levels of motivation and aspiration and reduce the barriers they experience to learning by: enhancing self-awareness and esteem; fostering relationships that will support learning; nurturing a stronger sense of community and encouraging creativity.

Equip – a guiding process for Peer Mentoring



- e – engage: tending to the quality of contact at the outset of the session
- q – question: finding a focus and phrasing it as a question that evokes curiosity
- u – understand: uncovering information and learning about how things are
- i – imagine: using new insights to develop ideas for ways forward
- p – plan: deciding where next and grounding ideas in plans for action

What has evolved is an ongoing program that is run by the school itself of which the Jeppe Trust Annual Review 2015 says, 'The program would not have been possible without the input and facilitation of ecl. The model has been very effective.'

ecl in The Netherlands

Picture this: 't Kompas, a typical village school in Noordhorn in the Dutch province of Groningen. It's the end of the school year.

Children between the ages of 9 and 12 stream into the classroom where they are met at the door by a young woman, their teacher, Alina Dijkshoorn. She greets them reminding some children to pay attention to placing their peg on the feelings thermometer. On each child's chair a card has been placed and they are looked at with curiosity. The class settles. Children take their known and trusted place - from eldest to youngest in the circle. There is time to notice and say something about the positioning of their pegs on the feelings thermometer; time to say something about what is written on their card and the sense they make of it. Children listen respectfully to each other. Alina helps where needed with the articulation of feelings, at times placing it within the wider context of what is going on at home or in the community, asking what they need of others in the class. One student says, 'I feel under pressure and sad today'. Alina replies, 'What do you need?' The student replies, 'Quiet time', and Alina directs, 'Ask this of the class'.

Still in a circle, Alina leads the class in a 1-minute stilling, 'Just become aware of your breathing, count your breaths'. The curriculum for the day is introduced and work begins. There is calm, awareness and presence – as if there is all the time in the world to meet the learning challenges together.

Alina, has been building her practice over the past ten years based on personal and professional development work with the ecl Foundation as well as numerous other practices. She has written a book describing her journey and practice (currently only available in Dutch), Barefoot Back to Basics. The following text is made up of excerpts translated from the book:

It's fantastic what this time at the beginning of the day does for the children; space to become aware of their feelings, to make contact with their body. As well as stillings or meditations we frequently work with guided visualizations to which language tasks are connected. At the end I notice that we have completed twice as many 'educational goals' - but with pleasure and engagement.

Having the confidence to work in this way began with my own personal journey. As a child I had always tried to stay within the safe paths given by my teachers - to do things the way that was required of me. Whilst inside there was so much more! As a beginning teacher I noticed the same pattern - children with so much potential, my job as teacher not to release this but to somehow fill them up with curriculum. The tension this caused in me I saw reflected in my students. It triggered a search for a different way which brought me along very many paths including NLP and ecl. Along the way I fell in love with life again.

I bring this systemic (ecl) awareness into my teaching practice. By being myself, I create the space for the children to be themselves. The atmosphere of calm, trust and safety creates the space for me as teacher to teach and practice in a different way - for me to explore, create and learn as teacher and to be able to create the space for the children to do the same.

But it's not all calm and quiet, Adult: How strange, aren't the children supposed to be sitting quietly? What high spirits, what energy! Alina: Yes! What energy - isn't that exactly what happens when we allow children to discover their own path, talents and passion?

And yes, it requires that I schedule in time for all this - extra stuff. But I would like to challenge you to look at it from another perspective. What if you don't? The time spent in creating the conditions for learning pays off in the results - academically (CITO scores) and socially-emotionally.

The practice is spilling out to other teachers and classrooms. It benefits the relationships with parents and community. Explicitly, there is a school mobile with a hoop for the staff, one for the children and one for the parents. As Alina explains, 'It has made visible for everyone the need to work together if we are to create a safe and good learning environment in which children can develop'.

And in this classroom there is a rhythm. At times complete stillness as children visualize or count breaths. At times quiet motion as massage is combined with learning language. At times high energy, as dance combines with learning times-tables. Each child is busy exploring: how do I best learn? What are my learning goals? In Alina's words, 'this makes a world of difference - they want to learn'. There have been many occasions where Alina has met students diagnosed with socio-emotional conditions, ADHD in particular, and yet very often, after working with her in the approach glimpsed in the text above, the symptoms of these conditions no longer present, and the collective and individual learning is no longer disrupted.



Mobiles offer a direct visual representation of the whole system and the impact that one part may have on the whole system - being in or out of balance. Children and adults can use the mobile to represent their experience of life, to explore imbalance and also to test out various ways in which balance can be restored. The mobile allows them to see in a dramatic way the impact they have on each other. In the words of one parent, "it's such a simple idea. It allowed my son to suddenly 'see' that he was one of many in the classroom and to sense his connection to each and every other child. An incredibly simple shift in perspective meant

that the children themselves began to take collective ownership for the atmosphere that learning requires; and so the behaviour of each child becomes the responsibility of the whole system.”

ecl in Namibia

Since independence in 1990, Namibia has created a country in which the majority of its people are assured of their rights and protections, yet still the gap between rich and poor has widened to one of the highest gini coefficients in the world. A century of colonialism, and ever-present racism (between the more than 11 ethnic groups) has led to suppressed anger boiling beneath the surface manifesting in violence, often towards the most vulnerable – children and young people. A 2013 Ministry of Health survey (in collaboration with WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNAIDS) showed that 65% of male students between the ages of 13-17, report to have been seriously injured through some form of violence with 46% having experienced bullying.

The Ministry of Education has acknowledged the “multiple barriers to learning in Namibia: systemic, organizational, pedagogical, curriculum-related, environmental, financial, societal, cultural and attitudinal barriers”. They emphasize the government’s commitment to restructure education policies and practices for the benefit of all of Namibia’s children - especially the educationally marginalised children.

Against this background the ecl Namibia team began working with the children and teachers of the BNC (Bernhard Nordkamp Centre) in Windhoek. The centre serves some 200 of the capital’s most vulnerable children. Many come from “broken homes” where at least one if not both parents/care givers are unemployed and where there is a high consumption of alcohol or smoking of dagga (marijuana). The BNC provides supplementary classes for learners in grades 1 to 7. Children attend public schools in the morning and come to the centre for additional academic support.

The ecl team has been working with the children for some years, yet it is only in the last weeks that the Hub Director, Rowena Mould, came to truly understand what this level of violence means in the daily lives of the children. The generosity of a well-wisher had delivered 2 tons of carrots to the BNC. Arriving that afternoon, a member of staff was threatened

at knife point by inebriated parents, cursing and swearing, demanding carrots and reimbursement of their taxi fare. Bedlam and hysteria amongst children and staff is not alleviated when a police van stops, not to help, but to help themselves to 15 bags of carrots, before driving off.

‘I was frightened. This is what the children and young people deal with all the time’.

In shrill contrast, the children call, ‘Miss, miss, MISS ROWENA – who is going to the ecl class TODAY?’ Rowena, ‘It is their vibrancy and desire to learn, to be stretched and challenged that inspires me to give whatever I can. The children want to improve. They want to find a way out of the negative behavioural patterns of their parents. It has become the breakthrough question of the staff at the BNC: How can we (teachers) support the children in their desire to uplift themselves?’

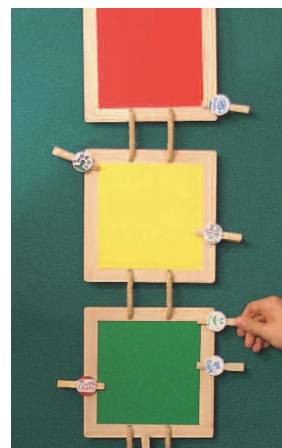
ecl staff work directly with children in the classrooms four afternoons per week. The children are encouraged to wash their hands and take off their shoes before entering the ecl room where they can choose to sit or lie on the cushions, or to remain standing. With one hand on their heart and the other resting on their belly they listen to relaxing music such as Schubert’s Serenade.



“The hand on the tummy is to connect with the breath. The hand on the heart is to calm the body and is based on scientific evidence that the heart sends more messages to the body, than does the brain. During stilling practice, it is definitely the heart which is in charge. With practice a child becomes able to assertively face a bully, to remain calm and in relationship. Children in the playground are able to turn to face someone who has physically hurt them and say (hand on heart) - I don’t deserve this. I would prefer that we discuss this. I’ve seen them then go on to creatively figure out together how to resolve a situation fairly. I see them learning that there are many ways to express anger, other than through violence!

When first introduced the children were reluctant to close their eyes. Stilling was new and awkward. But now, some have become masters and are able to go into deep relaxation. One of the remedial teachers joined us for a time. She came back at the end of the day simply to share that she had never seen so many of the children engage, let alone with such obvious enjoyment. Or a grade 5 learner who shared that in preparation for an English test he entered the classroom, put his head on the desk and imagined hearing the stilling music. Calm and focused he took the test and achieved full marks. Or the story of Maggy, the youngest teacher at the BNC, who has discovered that when she centers herself before entering the class, that she gains the children’s attention with ease. She is leading by example and the children simply follow her.

After the stilling comes a check-in: space and time to share how we are each feeling. Children place pegs on a drawing which they have made (feelings thermometer). A yellow sun indicates positive emotions; clouds, rain and lightning, represent the less positive emotions. The pegs are placed alongside the spot, which best represents how they feel. In the beginning the children tended to use the same words, I feel happy, bad, sad or glad. So now we work with a sheet which lists more comprehensive emotions and the children are gaining access to a richer emotional vocabulary: Miss, what does this word mean? OK, I feel disappointed. Being able to articulate how they feel opens a whole new world for them. It also enables the group to role play issues that are arising. For example, relating to incidences of theft where a child expressed how he was feeling accused. The ensuing role play (based on the 4 orders) allowed the class to explore questions such as: do we feel safe when we behave in this way? How can we make it safe for everyone, so that everyone feels that they belong? And what is now needed?



Feelings thermometer



We work a lot with ecl tools such as the Hula hoop. The children place stones within the circle of the Hula hoop to represent how they feel in relationship to others in the class. What place am I taking? Am I together with others, or alone? And how does that feel? Am I facing inwards or away from? Do I belong? The children become observant of the invisible patterns in the classroom and start to take responsibility for each other. One new boy who had been feeling left out heard the other children say, ‘that person looks lonely’. Some days later he came to me to say, Miss I’m not lonely anymore, they are playing with me!



Hula hoop: Incorrect use



Hula hoop: Correct use

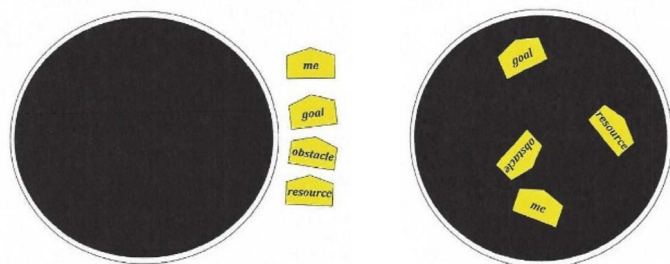
This space is for you...

In the staffroom too an exploration of the systemic order of Belonging is crucial. There are 11 different ethnic groupings (and more than 11 languages) in Namibia. In the BNC staff room we have Ovambo, Afrikaans, American, English, Herero, Nama-Damara and Lozi speaking teachers. During the Parenting Conference, exploring groupings based on ethnicity one participant said, 'I have only ever seen myself as a member of my tribe. This exercise was the first time that I felt myself to be Namibian'.

With the more senior children (and with teachers), those who have built up experience of the ecl approach we can work with the Systemic Pizza. In the words of an observer researcher, "A tool called 'Systemic Pizza' was used where children place different coloured stickers on a circular board, to represent themselves and significant people in their lives, usually a mother and a father. The 'Pizza' is a tool used in ecl, that gives a starting point for the child to talk about what is happening at home, and how it affects him or her. I was amazed by how calm and present the children were when either one of them was sharing with the rest of the group, and at how the ecl catalyst was able to prioritise which child to listen to at a time, without making the rest of the group feel left out. For instance, one child was sharing his 'Pizza' with the group when another child grew impatient and kept raising her hand to get the attention from the facilitator. The catalyst checked in with the impatient girl by kindly asking her, 'is it something urgent or can it wait until he is done sharing his story?' The girl then paused for a short while and said: 'It can wait'. This seemed to be the way of doing things. The catalyst checks in with the group to 'agree' how to proceed with the session such as asking if the group is willing to listen to one more child's Pizza before going for a break. The more usual Namibian way is to think, 'they are children, you just tell them what to do and they obey!' I left thinking otherwise.

In the words of the centre's director, 'in collaboration with the ecl foundation, we aim to restore a joy in learning and bring balance and emotional well-being to every child in the programme. The (academic) results have been outstanding. 7 out of 10 of our learners in grade 10 passed the national exam and every other child in our programme improved drastically in their academics. The ecl programme has been the most wonderful transformation for the older children. It works magic with the children, it brings out the best in everyone and it has had a huge impact on our centre.'

Systemic Pizza



Part 2:

Netherfield Primary and Pre-school: an enquiry into the ecl approach at work





Chapter 4

An Introduction to Netherfield, the journey, and the research that dipped in

At Netherfield Primary and Pre-School on the outskirts of Nottingham, England, a courageous journey has been underway over the past six years to explore what is possible in a larger than average mainstream school when an ecl approach to education and care guides the ethos and leadership. What is possible when each and every child is considered with regards to his or her whole and interconnected systems, and when each and every child's individual needs and emotional and social development are prioritised? The second part of this book explores this journey through the outcomes of a year long collaborative research project with Netherfield Primary and the ecl foundation.

The second part of this book does not record the hundreds of stories of lives changed, children settled, parents who have learnt to read, teachers who have found love for their students and passion for their jobs. But this is in an important and compelling backdrop. It is not a report of validation for the department of education whose standards, values, and regulations determine the schools public status and level of success. But that value system and related evaluation and documentation is an inevitable and pragmatic backdrop. Instead, we invite you to engage in our exploration of a journey in education that has successes and failures, that sees flourishing and also struggling, that embraces, supports, and accounts for children and teachers

in all the diverse and complex and delightful and difficult worlds that they bring with them to school. In this research we ask welcome questions that seek to share the best practices and innovative approaches in education; animating the ecl approach in mainstream schooling. But we also ask difficult questions that seek to articulate, and prompt change in, places of imbalance or unsustainability. It is with deep respect and full support of the work at Netherfield Primary that we engage in this research, and we hope that the honest and messy and 'in-flight' spaces that you encounter herein inspire you to question, to reflect, to relate, or to look further into your own engagement with the children and young people in your life.

Part 1 of this book has provided a detailed discussion of the perspectives and ideas that inform the research that makes up the remainder of this book. In this chapter we introduce Netherfield Primary in terms of its demographic and public records at key moments in its journey. We briefly outline the research questions that we brought into our collaboration with the school, and introduce the main researchers involved in the project. Finally, we share a story from an early and pivotal stage in the school's journey, a story of 'some gals who went to London for a show'. This light-hearted but profound story sets the stage for the remainder of the book that weaves through focus areas of teaching and learning methods, Nurture provision, school partnerships, school business management, and leadership.

Netherfield Primary and Pre-School 'on paper'

Netherfield is a larger than average primary and pre-school offering a provision for 2 year olds, Foundation Stage 1, through to year 6 (10/11 yrs) to a total of 489 enrolled in 2014/2015. The school serves Gedling, a small town on the outskirts of Nottingham in central England. The large majority of the local population is of White British ethnicity and the area has high unemployment rates, with above 30% of the working-age population receiving benefit or welfare support of some type.¹ Family deprivation, along with complex physical, mental, and social needs are common in this population and in Netherfield Primary. A quick indicator of the extent of disadvantaged children, as defined by government and economic standards, within the student body at Netherfield Primary can be understood through the number of students designated with 'Pupil Premium' status by the department

of education. This status equates to additional funding and is granted to students who have either left local-authority care or who are eligible for free school meals (a means tested category supporting low income families). In the 2014/2015 school year, 48.8% of all students at Netherfield Primary received Pupil Premium status. In addition to this, in the same year, 24% of students were being supported for additional physical, mental, learning, or social-emotional needs.

In 2007, due to a number of converging factors (including a recent school amalgamation), the school was in put into a 'special measures' category by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). This meant that the school was deemed to be providing inadequate care and education of its students and required immediate and significant improvement in order for it to remain open. With local authority support, shifts in governance and new leadership, the conditions and evaluations of the school by the government's inspectorate body gradually improved from that year on, and in 2013 the school rated as 'outstanding' on all fronts – the highest rating possible. The report accompanying this rating in 2013 described the school as 'a new benchmark in education'.² Netherfield Primary is now recognised as exemplary of best practice in England and Wales on many fronts and is the lead school in a 'Teaching School Alliance',³ providing professional leadership and training in various ways within and outside of Netherfield. After their most recent visit (at the time of writing), in July 2015, HMI have used the school as a "Best Practice Guide". Behind these mandated checks and measures, a new headteacher, Sharon Gray, was hired in 2009. In that same year, a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), Kat Booker, also joined the school.

Over the past 6 years a quantitative overview of student attendance and attainment paint a very clear, if two-dimensional, picture of development:

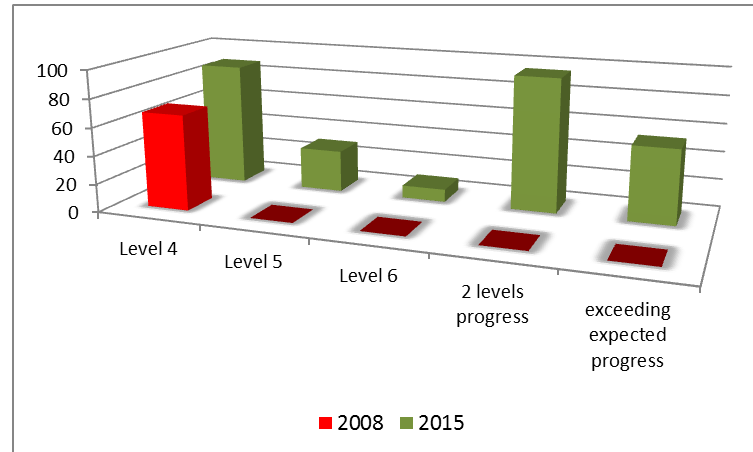


Table 4.1: Comparing children's attainment in the reference years 2008 and 2015 for Maths L4+

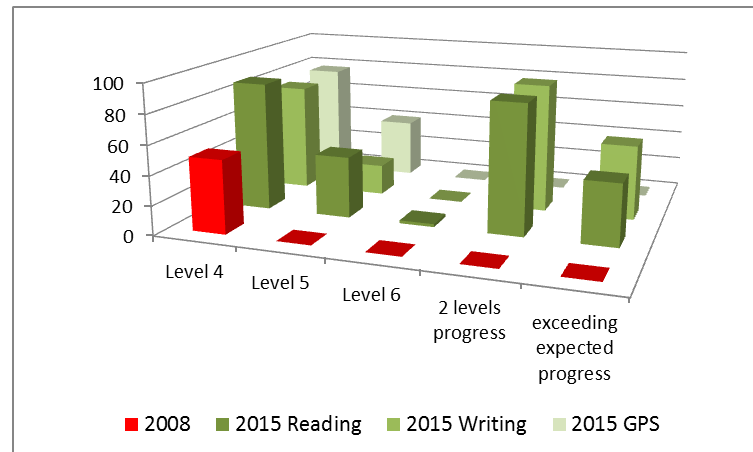


Table 4.2: Comparing children's attainment in the reference years 2008 and 2015 for English L4+

This pragmatic survey of facts and figures paints a compelling picture of a school that has worked against economic, social, and historical odds to create a school of excellence in academic attainment, social-emotional well-being, and community cohesion. Glancing at this picture, we can admire, we can be inspired, and we could, I suppose, all move to Netherfield (I've thought about it!). Beyond that, the reports, even along with pictures and anecdotes, are limited in how they can support the care and education of children and young people in other contexts, in other schools and, other communities. There are two big reasons for this: Firstly, the ethos, practice, and progress of Netherfield Primary is based on the specific (and therefore always changing) needs and conditions of those children in that school at that time. The school does its utmost to adapt, invent, and adjust any external support, demand, or idea to their specific needs and conditions. Already then, we see that 'Netherfield approaches' or programs wouldn't or shouldn't work in the same way at any other school. The second big reason is that the value systems, criteria of success and goalposts that such a survey of facts and figures is based on, is not fixed and is itself based on cultural and political circumstances that change over time and across geographical context.

So, is Netherfield Primary unusual? Yes, in the same way that every school in every place is unique and particular, according to the children, teachers, staff, families, and community connected to it. With this acknowledgement, we engaged in research with Netherfield to explore the useful, practical, and transferable knowledge that has been developed there over the past six years. We aim to tell a story that is not always inspirational, and not always 'successful' according to government standards, but that is always focused on the needs, the wellbeing, and the learning of the children.

Looking Deeper...

Sharon, being an affiliate and then a trustee of the ecl foundation invited a team of ecl Catalysts and researchers to develop some formal research around the teaching and learning at Netherfield Primary in 2014. The senior leadership of the school as well as members of the broader community, including parents, governors and students, shared the desire for a forum to spread the work of Netherfield beyond the walls of the school. Equally, the leadership and teaching staff craved a clearer articulation

and understanding of the ethos and educational approach of the school, something that had, for the majority of the staff, been an intuitive process of adjustment and development rather than an intellectual one. The ecl foundation were interested to deeply experience and understand the practical manifestation of the ecl approach in a mainstream English school and to collaborate with the staff to deepen their understanding of the work. Most of all, the ecl foundation were keen to co-create with the Netherfield Primary staff and to continue to support the work in the ways that were now being called for.

With this in mind, we developed a research project that looked at the conditions and wisdoms that made an ecl approach at Netherfield Primary possible. We documented and analysed the practices and policies. In collaborative processes, we explored ideas and practices of teaching, learning, business management, and leadership in the school. Finally, we asked what contributes to a sustainable, creative, and emotionally-well place of learning, and what restricts it.

...through these eyes

In line with the philosophical and theoretical background discussed in the first part of this book, we understand this research to be hugely influenced by the perspectives and expertise that we bring to the project. In the same way, we understand that your reading of this work will equally be influenced by your own perspectives and expertise. So, it is only right, before going any further, to introduce ourselves:

My name is Mia Perry, I am the Research Director of the ecl foundation and have led this research project and the writing of this book. I come from a background in theatre and then in arts education, educational research, and teacher training. My journey through theatre practice, to academia, and now to work in this foundation has taken me to various cultural contexts, from rural England to rural Ireland, from Dublin to Moscow, from Canada to Scotland. My work in the arts world has helped me love and appreciate the creative, the playful, the surprising, and the beautiful. My work in academia has helped me love and appreciate the critical, difficult, and important work of scholarship and theory. If you have read this far, I say all this to preface a 'thank you' to those who have read through text that is unfamiliar in either its difficulty or its simplicity, or for persevering

through both at different times in the book depending on who are you and where you are reading.

Fionnuala Herder-Wynne is the CEO of the ecl foundation. Along with managing and funding this project, she has led the business model enquiry with Netherfield Primary and been a key sounding board for each step of the process from proposal to writing. Fionnuala has a background in science and a long career in research and innovation in business, as well as training in organisational development and systemic practice. Fionnuala is based in the Netherlands, and her work in educational research and professional development there provides an important backdrop and skillset to the process of inquiry. Her strategic leadership has made this book possible.

Chris Charles is the co-founder of ecl's UK Hub and a lead Catalyst working both nationally and globally in ecl practice. Chris has an extensive background in education working as a specialist in behaviour and inclusion in both the Primary and Secondary sectors. Chris led the nurture provision inquiry for this project, and from the outset has valued image as much as word to share perspectives and positions in relation to this work (we learn to dance between).

Caroline Dixon is an ecl catalyst in the UK hub and a primary school teacher. Caroline has led the teaching and learning focused inquiry for this project. In sharing her perspectives and position in relation to this research, Caroline shares this text:

The teacher...looking for the colour, the essence, where the magic is...seeing all of the child, within that group/class. The teacher... facilitator to layers, connections, relationships, overlaps, conflicts and harmony-colour of life-encouraging children to own 'it' and rejoice in it... The teacher...creative learning journeys - shaping the curriculum; The teacher...encouraging the goal - each child aware of their place and how they 'fit' in the class system, making the 'whole' complete, practising for future group experiences...

Sharon Gray, OBE, is the UK Hub director of the ecl foundation and former Headteacher of Netherfield Primary and Pre-School (2009 - 2015). Sharon is also an Ofsted Inspector, a National Leader of education, and a Co-opted member of 'Engage in their Futures'. Sharon has provided the

permission for this project and facilitated the ecl foundation's on-going collaboration with the school. You will learn much more about Sharon's work in education through the remaining chapters of this book, but it has been her knowledge and trust in her staff and school, and her drive to make a difference that has provided the access and energy required to create this book.

What roles, positions, experience, and ideas do you bring to your engagement with this book?

...and with these methods

The research is primarily qualitative (with quantitative elements provided through standard educational evaluation and accounting processes), systemic, and ethnographic. Until July 2015, Sharon was the Headteacher of the school and in this way engaged as a full participant of the research. The other researchers visited the school for varying lengths of time every month between November 2014 and June 2015. During the time in school, we conducted extensive interviews and focus groups with children, teachers, staff, governors, and parents. We led systemic workshops with teachers and children as well as spending time observing, listening, photographing, and in conversation with external stakeholders and provision providers connected to the school. In between visits, we sourced school data records, policy manuals, and government reports. We also explored the relationship between official reporting and lived experience

of the school community. With our research based primarily on the views and experiences of the staff, children, parents, governors and community members, the proximity of our findings to that of official scoring and reporting (local and national) is variable. This incongruence is not unique to Netherfield, and Ofsted itself is currently in development to address these issues and ensure effective reporting. Throughout this journey we worked together in weekly research forums, discussing reflections, questions and ideas that were emerging through the work.

Alongside this fieldwork with Netherfield, we gathered research and theoretical scholarship that addressed, in different contexts, the areas of our inquiry. This review of related literature provided us with a broader context for the knowledge that we were developing and a deeper understanding of the dynamics, practices, and challenges that we found. In the chapters that follow we will reference this broader landscape of research and invite you to follow the trail of references and links wherever they may further support your particular interest.

'some gals who went to London for a show'

September, 2009, Netherfield Primary, Sharon Gray, new Headteacher:

Right guys, who would like to come and form the Nurture Group? Absolutely nobody. Who would like to be a home-school liaison worker? Nobody.

I asked who might be interested to work with our most vulnerable children? Children that, let's just say, might be blamed for the school going into special measures because the behaviours were so outrageous and disruptive of the entire school. I wanted a couple of staff to teach all of them in one group – a Nurture group. The response was: NO way – fear was clear!

But then I watched; I looked for who might have the attributes; the empathy, the nurturing care, and I approached a few colleagues and had another conversation. I explained to them: you don't have to do it, but maybe just come and watch a Team Teach training – see what some of the possibilities are for meeting the needs of these children. Team Teach is a program that introduces a pre-emptive, preventative, see-through approach to behaviour and conflict management in schools - and I was leading some Team Teach in London at the time. I asked, just come down

watch me do it, take part, share thoughts, have a bit of a laugh... and I persuaded them. I think that sense of fun implied throughout all helped and a trip to London, the possibility of that... And I said that we would also go and see the lecture that follows up the training program and unpacks some of the reasons behind children's behaviour.

So two teaching assistants and one teacher came down; watched me leading two days of Team Teach training in London. We got to know each other, we laughed lots. I explained on the Thursday night, that we would attend a lecture that will teach them everything they need to know about understanding and seeing-through behaviour – they were still very lacking in confidence in their abilities to work with children with social emotional and mental health difficulties. I told them we needed to dress up, that it was a well-respected lecturer, and there would be a good turn-out of people attending – and that we would have dinner first with a glass of wine (or two!). We had to take notebooks and everything, to be prepared to sit and listen, that it wouldn't be necessarily interactive, and so on...and so, they were all a bit nervous. You can imagine, a new Headteacher; their new 'boss' who they didn't really know yet; and very unusual circumstances. We went into the city, I hadn't planned to really attend a lecture – we had a meal and a glass of wine and then went to see *Wicked*, the musical. The story, quite simply outlines why the Green Witch in the *Wizard of Oz* is 'bad'. And it made an impact, it moved them, that evening, shift happened. My colleagues came out saying 'I can't believe I've been treating our children and seeing our children the way that I have' and 'when can we start?' 'I want to work with these children'... and so they then became my core starters of the Nurture program and are now leaders in that area.

It's ways of infecting people with interest, with fun, through bespoke and therefore at times slightly unusual ways. Colleagues questioned, because these staff members came forward and were whisked off to London for a couple of days, and had a great time. I made big photos of this 'behaviour tour', of them having fun and doing all sorts of mischievous things in London, daring to give something new and unknown a go. Then they came back and told the story of *Wicked*. After this, I wrote to the stage director of the musical at the time and told him of the significant shift that his musical has made happen in this school in 'special measures'. I told him how exciting this shift was, and that what we'd like to do for him, at no cost to them, is to write an educational program that will sit along side the musical – to help

others to see how the musical could be used to support understanding and attitudes around the need to see through behaviours. If you go online to the *Wicked* website, I'm sure it's still there, you'll see Netherfield Primary has helped write the educational programs. In return, I asked for tickets for all of our year 5 and 6 children to go and see it. I can't remember how we funded the coaches, but we secured external funding. We then did an incredibly exciting project around the musical including video conferencing with some of the actors, so suddenly the whole school was hooked into this musical, and the ideas around seeing through behaviours and understanding why the Green Witch was behaving in what was perceived as nasty and unkind, and suddenly we got it. As a taster, yes, and it was exciting. Exciting, because not only were we doing all this great exploration, but we were doing these beautiful things too like going down to London! Many of the children had never been to London – a lot of the children had never been out of Netherfield! Let alone gone to see a West End show, let alone gone to see something with such poignancy. So I think that sort of creative way of trying to get people to see things from a completely different viewpoint, a different perspective, was a crucial starting point. And beginning to see that the only person you can ever truly control is yourself. The only behaviour you can ever truly control is that of yourself; however by changing your own behaviour, you can gain a different response from others. So doing something differently will get a different response; this was the tipping point to truly moving forwards at Netherfield.



Chapter 5

Teaching, learning, and creating with curricula

The teachers and their teaching methods are as diverse in Netherfield Primary as they are in any other mainstream primary school in the UK. The teachers come from the same series of teacher education pathways, they come from the same educational systems, and they deal with the same pay scales and time management issues as all other primary teachers in England. The core elements of the statutory curriculum, along with the related targets and standards, come from the Department of Education as for all other schools; the teaching staff have to find ways to animate, and then personalise, the curriculum and enable their students to meet assigned external standards. And although this depiction may sound commonplace, it has actually been one of the most challenging realisations of our research: that when it comes to how teachers teach, Netherfield teachers are using the same methods as those available and practiced across English schools.

Yet, the teaching that happens at Netherfield Primary is inclusive of all children's individual needs (including a large percentage of vulnerable and high level needs children); the content is always changing (and directed by student interest); and social emotional well-being is at the forefront of all policy and practice. Being in Netherfield Primary anytime between 7:45am and 6pm during term time (and very often during school holidays too) is to be in a buzzing hive of activity, of positive energy, and smiling children. If anyone is suspicious yet, you're not alone! Some of us

were too, at first. School attendance is very high, parent and community volunteers are copious, and overall an enthusiasm for learning is visible in every corner of the building. In this chapter, we explore the tangible aspects of teaching and learning that afford this space and style of education.

In one word, the overwhelming characteristic present in all aspects of teaching and learning at Netherfield is relationship. Relationships between teacher and student, teacher and family, student and student, class and space are central to all practices and decisions made. The systemic lens, in particular in terms of place and belonging, as introduced earlier in the book, provides a rich backdrop to this aspect of education. With this in mind, we summarise three specific aspects of the teaching and learning project that can be seen to bring to life the ethos of the school and instil inclusive and engaging education. These simple, yet hugely impactful, things transform the school from one of uniformity and struggle to one of colour, diversity, and playfulness. In brief, these aspects are: the space and time carefully allowed for each individual student to be themselves, at their own pace; the careful use of language and modes of communication; and the fundamental understanding of partnership between student and teacher, between school and family, between curriculum and classroom practice. This chapter will explore and illustrate these aspects of teaching and learning at Netherfield Primary in more depth and look at how they connect with existing educational research and policy, as well as what they imply and demand for teachers and schools.

Allowing the right space and time for each child

When we use the word space in this book, we mean it to serve both literally and figuratively. Literally, space describes the place in which something happens (in time), and with a child in school this denotes their desk and classroom areas, their playground, and everything in between. Figuratively, we use the term space to suggest the extent to which an individual can have autonomy or agency over their thoughts, feelings, instincts and actions. As you can see, space implies time: in order for one to have autonomy over their thoughts and feelings, they require the appropriate time to do so; in order for the desk or playground to have any relevance at all, it similarly requires appropriate time for it to be taken up or made use of. Without delving too far into the intricacies of language use, it is important to pause for a moment with this term, as it is profoundly important in understanding the nature of teaching and learning as it happens in Netherfield.

Physical space

The literal, physical space of the school is used carefully. A school that was once immaculate in eggshell matt finish walls – corridor and class – proud of its renovations and committed to its maintenance, is now positively bursting with visual representations of its ethos, practice, and community. Project displays, carefully chosen statements of motivation, attendance scores of classes, and more, cover every available wall. From the ceiling in the main hall of the school bikes are hung, new donated bikes from the community to be awarded to students who have merited recognition for their efforts, integrity, kindness and progress. In the classrooms, each class has designed their own retreat area, which in some rooms is a tent-like structure; in one class it is a large wicker pod. In all cases, these are quiet spaces, often dark, softly furnished, and calm. In the playground the area is divided between a large, colourful play structure, an open play space, and a green space that is also home to a small farm. The foundation (early years) unit has a ‘free flow’ design to allow the foundation classes to move in and outside as they choose.



This careful and creative use of the school space makes for great tours for visitors and great material for media coverage. There is a story, a conversation, and a potential teaching moment no matter where you stop to take stock on the school grounds – whether you are in the lunchroom or the reception area of the school. But the purpose and the impact of this use of space is much more significant than general atmosphere, first impressions, or public relations. Space plays a huge role in allowing, triggering, controlling, or impeding both teaching and learning.

This space is for you...



Theorists in a number of fields, including modern philosophy, contemporary education, and human geography (a field of study concerned with the relations of people and culture across place and space) have investigated and evidenced at length the relationship between people's experiences and the spaces they inhabit and encounter.¹ The assumption of the direct relationship is commonplace, with particular assertion in terms of the social relations that are established in relation to space. Specific studies as to what sort of spaces create positive or creative learning environments in schools are less commonplace, and multiple factors including economic, behavioural management, and culture, typically determine the spaces children spend their school days in. There are some important exceptions to this in innovative school architecture and in outdoor education (based on the belief in the impact and advantages of natural outdoor environments for children's learning).

In Netherfield Primary, the staff have made very careful and purposeful use of both the indoor and outdoor spaces. Design choices with regard to space are made in response to the students who use them. In each classroom for example there is a designated space for 'retreat', a quiet, comfortable and relatively private space for use by any student as and when they may require some time out of a particular situation or activity. But each class is able to design the retreat space in their classroom to suit their needs and wants. The large foundation unit is designed as a free flowing space

consisting of an open-plan central area with smaller rooms radiating from it, each closable with movable dividers. The central area includes multiple 'Learning Labs' where activities are permanently located and the resources are laid out and labelled with shadow stickers for easy replacement. The unit opens out onto an outdoor playground that is a designated space next to, but separated from, the main school playground. Caroline reflects in fieldnotes on the impacts of the space in the foundation unit:

Feels like the heart of the hive in here, where the buzzing starts and resonates from. Purposeful pace, community and connection in the corridor lead into the reception and nursery classrooms (Foundation Unit). Wow what a space! Creative use of different zones – the buzz in here is incredible! Little ones notice us with lots of smiles and chattering towards us, but they are far too busy to pause for long. Looking for adults as they are mingling in again! Adults in purposeful places again, directing learning when needed. You can see independent and collaborative learning going on. Adults moving physically towards and away from the children: a genuine dance – towards and together with child for purposeful direct learning; slowly stepping away for free, personal learning. Environment speaks (bending down to level of kids) – this is where learning begins – this is where my understanding of co-creative learning begins: I heard what my adult said; I know where my adult is; I know what I can do; I know what I want to do; I want to explore this; this is exciting... I am going to share it! This is my room, this is our room, full of possibilities...

Longer pauses for Foundation 2, focused learning with teacher. Teaching room doors pulled closed, but the nursery hive doesn't stop buzzing. When the doors are pulled open children re-enter the buzz and become part of the larger team with their new special knowledge.

Figurative space

Each child brings a unique set of circumstances, needs, strengths, and inclinations. The students of Netherfield Primary are, in this regard, no different from the student body of any school, the world over. At Netherfield however those myriad individual traits and contexts are acknowledged, learnt about (to the extent that they can be), and given the time and space to be included into each child's learning journey. In practice this equates to an open invitation to each child to bring his or her whole self (personal, physical, contextual, etc.) into the engagement with curriculum. This invitation denotes the value placed on each individual child: We value you, who you are, and therefore we want to know how you feel about this, how this relates to you, and what you need in order to engage with this. This invitation requires time, much more time than a standard unanimous delivery of a curriculum area.

'Kids are busy being themselves'

As mentioned earlier, at the heart of the teaching and learning that happens at Netherfield Primary is relationship, that is, the relationship between teacher and child, and the relationship between peers. With this relationship, which is of primary importance to teachers, comes knowledge of the individual student (as well as his or her family and friends). In order to build and maintain this relationship, the school day needs to allow for the time and space for these individual children to express themselves, explore their opinions, strengths, and questions. This time and space happens in the fabric and the rhythm of the day. There is no fixed or assigned time, there is no need for it. It is as simple as allowing a moment to ask how a student is feeling, or asking what a student is thinking, or how he or she is doing with an activity. It is as profound as letting students propose and vote on the topic they would most like to engage in (are most interested in) during the term to incorporate their curriculum requirements. In this way, space is provided for a meaningful attendance to the present (moment) of each child, and in valuing and building from this information a phenomenological approach to teaching and learning is invited.

Allowing space for the children to relate individually (and the varying pace that is therefore required) is characteristic of classroom practice at Netherfield Primary. The observations below are taken from a case study of a year 6 (11 year old) student, Michael.²

Michael is frustrated. The objective of this part of the lesson is to discuss facts for 'Should under 13's be allowed to use Facebook?' Michael is to argue 'for' facts and he is really struggling to keep his bias out of it! However, the teacher allows room for him to express himself in a small group. He does this openly but without disturbing other groups and he quite quickly refers back to the task without bias. I cannot help observing this 'allowance' by the teacher of the 'freedom to be yourself' to be happening around the classroom with other children. There is a 'climate' of being able to 'express', not loudly, but just enough to be able to explore thoughts and an allowance of room to play with them. This can be seconds or a couple of minutes, and then Michael and the other children were back on task. Michael quite naturally investigated in a personal way then formed part of the rhythm of the lesson again. I took a step back to see other children stepping out, then coming back to the collective again. I could feel the draw to come back to the whole. The pace of the lesson allowed for pauses from the regime of keeping completely on task, which gave room for each child to be themselves within the learning. From the body language exchanged between the teacher and Michael and the other children, I could see an honesty. Michael was being himself, remaining an individual, within his small group, his class system.

Space and time for teachers

Attending to the multiple impacts and influences on teaching and learning in the school requires that we look equally at the space and time afforded for teachers and staff to engage in their practice. As we know too well, allowing space and time for one thing inevitably means that we move or remove space and time for something else. In the case of Netherfield Primary, a difficult issue that emerged in the research was the lack of sufficient space and time for teachers. From an ecological perspective the dynamic that was uncovered by this research was in relation to exchange. In other words, the qualitative exchange of what is given and what is received was largely out of balance, with teachers giving substantially more than the system of the school was able to return. This is not a like-for-like equation or a quantitative issue of time or remuneration (although time plays a key role), rather it is a social emotional issue of being adequately resourced in order to give to the extent that is required.

In order to create the conditions described above, of space and pace for each child, the demand on the teaching staff is high. Physical hours are long (a typical work day for teachers and TA's is 8am – 6pm), and professional demand within these hours is high. In short, there is little space for the teacher in the day-to-day life of the school. As we witnessed the beauty of the children being themselves, expressing and playing with ideas, we were alerted to the absence of time to pause, reflect, or rest for the teacher. Through our direct engagement with teachers we found this absence to be reiterated in many ways. For many, our research collaboration was the first time they had stopped to think deeply about the practice since being students themselves. Without exception, we found that work significantly impacted on the home life of staff through the sheer extent of physical hours demanded through school days, after school clubs, school trips, school holiday camps, and professional development trainings.

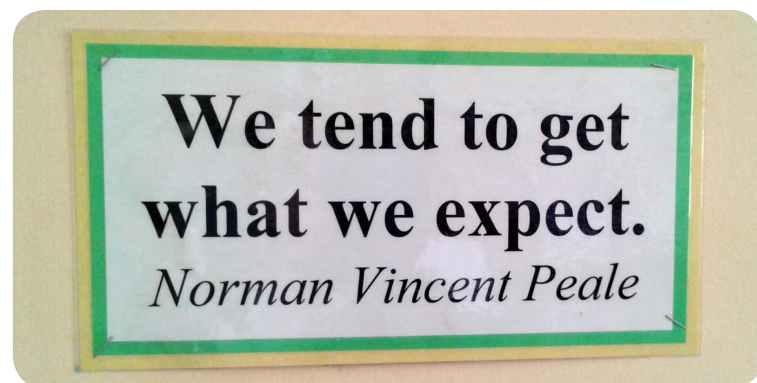
In addition to these demands, the relationship based practice of teaching also requires an emotional resource, and one that will be called upon to greater or lesser degrees depending on the needs and personalities of each individual student. In this regard the exchange becomes more balanced. At the core of Netherfield Primary's ethos is an understanding of the impact of your own presence and behaviour. In adopting this, and indeed, in modelling this for children, every teacher is invited to acknowledge the impact of their role, their actions, and their feelings. This acknowledgement comes

with a value, and as teachers' impacts are valued, they can gain a sense of their agency in their work. This is a powerful, if often pressurised, space. It is particularly poignant in a time in the education systems of England and Wales whereby centralised government control, standardised testing, and extensive monitoring are gradually removing agency and teachers' individual discretion from the profession of teaching.

Outside of Netherfield, there is an interdisciplinary body of research that considers the relationship between physical space and the corresponding mental spaces and learning spaces that are afforded. Studies in architecture, design, human geography, and education explore various aspects of this dynamic. The long-standing journal, *Environment and Behaviour* exists as a rich record of a broad range of research in this area. Thinking across these fields, we are reminded that this dynamic is not a simple quantitative one; that is, a certain type of space does not equate to a certain type of learning or teaching practice. Rather, teaching and learning is determined by a much more complex system of influences.³ What we can postulate from our research in Netherfield, and corroborate with research in other UK, African and US schools is that an awareness of the role of space, an engagement with the use of space, and a collaboration with children in the design of space, acts as catalyst to improving teaching and learning outcomes.⁴

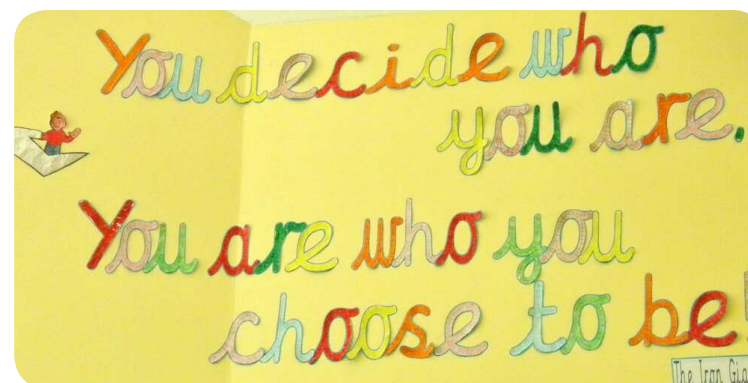
Communication

The second aspect of practice that is a key characteristic of the teaching and learning that happens in Netherfield Primary is the way that language is used. In terms of communication in school, much of modern pedagogy is based on social constructivist views that learning is a collaborative and social process (i.e., dependent on relationships, environment, nature



of engagement). Unsurprisingly, when looking to change or improve education, educational theorists have been prompted to ask: if social interactions shape our learning, and our children are disengaged from learning, what shapes our social interactions? Well, to a huge extent, language does. Poststructural research in particular has provided a rich body of work that confirms and explores the power of language to create and shift social relations, learning spaces, and individual identities.⁵

On a theoretical level as well as a practical one then, teaching and learning depend on communication abilities (broadly defined) and children develop these at different stages depending in part on the opportunities they have had in their early years (0 – 5yrs). Communication skills support emotional and social capacities which in turn supports each child's capacity to function and flourish in the collaborative setting of the classroom. Many of Netherfield's students come to school with very limited communication skills due to social-emotional or mental health problems. Allowing for, and acknowledging this at Netherfield Primary has meant that general, emotional, and subject specific, communication skill development is of primary concern to the staff. Every opportunity possible is taken up to develop and instil communication skills: from the playground to the lunchroom, from the corridors to the classrooms. Communication is addressed in a realistic and day-to-day manner: for example at lunch time, students are required to sit around shared tables, to share platters of food (and therefore pass to and serve one another); they are required to uphold basic table manners and work together to manage their lunch. In the open shared spaces of the school, children greet and are greeted by any adult passing with polite and positive courtesy, but in addition the opportunity



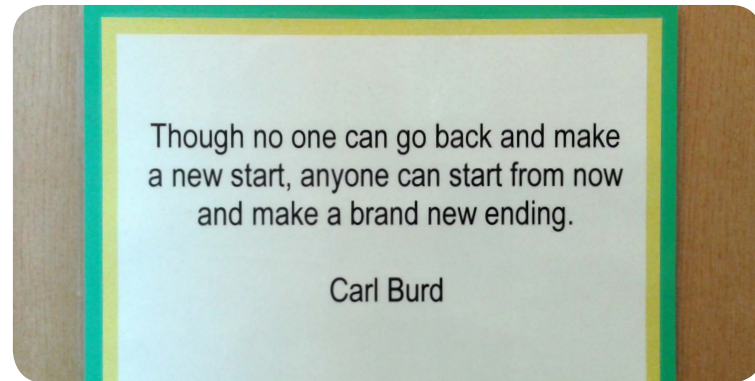
(of happenstance meetings with a child in the corridor) is taken to thank the child for his or her kindness (in, for example, holding open a door). Every encounter with a child (or indeed, a child's family) is seen as a teaching/learning opportunity.

A manner of speaking

Communication happens through language. Language (as we use the term) describes both spoken and printed text, as well as body and visual language. The languages we use to communicate create, to a huge extent, our reality; put another way, we construct and make sense of our realities through language. As we speak of things in certain ways, using certain terms, expressions or physical gestures, we 'frame' them, we add value and meaning to them; change those terms or gestures, and we 're-frame' and renegotiate the understanding.

'Where there are words, there's a way' is the expression used by Sharon in speaking about her leadership of the school. As the staff reflect back on the journey that the school has gone through over the past six years, colleagues have told Sharon that, with a shift in ethos, came a shift in language. Everyone at that time in and around the school spoke about Netherfield Primary being in 'special measures', and designated to the status of 'requiring improvement'. These were labels, they were states, and at the same time, the more they were spoken, the more they became the fate of the school. Sharon entered her headship talking about the school as being an 'outstanding school'. In her mind, and in her words, this was where the school was going, and that's where the school will be –

This space is for you...



'and why would we be anywhere else?' This language and accompanying attitude of confidence was infectious, and at different paces the school community began to talk about the school in those ways too. Ultimately, of course, those outside the school (Ofsted, HMI, media and politicians, other schools) would talk about the school in this way too.

Based on the lived understanding of the power of language, the attention and selection of language used and promoted by Netherfield Primary is an important characteristic of the school and an important teaching tool required by all who work there. We identify three main characteristics of the use of language: the first is honesty; the second, positivity; and the third is a careful attention to the verbal and written language around behaviour, ability and inclusivity.

Honest language

There is an honesty demanded and 'matter-of-factness' about the communication style that requires adults and children alike to put simple, direct words to expectations, behaviour, moods, emotions and interpersonal causes and effects. This style of honest communication is not confrontational, but upfront, and it exists between staff members, between staff and children, and between staff and parents and carers. This style means that everyone (the child and those around the child) clearly knows what is expected of them and nothing, in relation to the child, that is known or knowable, is hidden. Be that a celebrated achievement at school, or a concern about neglect at home. Being able to put words to feelings and

emotions is a critical step in being able to manage them. School is a social space, and the communication relating to the child is required to be clear, honest, and meaningful to child, staff member, and parent/carer.

Clear communications in the lunch hall: 'You are sitting calmly and quietly, indeed this is what we expect, but thank you, certainly I will make sure you go out after lunch first.'

Teachers put specific language to the progress and engagement of the students in report cards (including social and emotional aspects of their learning and engagement) as well as day-to-day interactions with children and their carers. One classroom teacher however cannot hold this level of communication with all the families of their year on an on-going basis, so the school is structured to include multiple TA's working in every year group, and 2 designated (part-time) home-school liaison officers who actively maintain communication with all families, seeking out those who may need support and welcoming all those who seek it. Constant open channels of communication between the school and the families, translates to a depth of understanding of child and family circumstances, as well as an intention to comprehensively support the child's learning at home as well as school. For example, if a student is not completing a certain aspect of homework, or showing up late on a certain day of the week, the teacher, TA, or home-school liaison will chat about this with the child's family, identifying the possible causes and circumstances of this and creating a solution together. In this way, the school does not become a separate entity from home, but rather a partner with home, in the support of the child. If a child has been uncharacteristically aggressive at school, a

direct honest conversation will be had with that child's carer; if a child is seen with unexplained bruises or wounds, a direct non-confrontational, but upfront conversation will be had. In this way, over time an accountability is made explicit (of the school and of the families); in this way a respect is nurtured (of the school and of the families), and most importantly, in this way, a level of trust is generated (between home and school) which would be impossible without the attention, energy, resources, and openness of home-child-staff-school communication.

This level of honesty requires staff to model honest responses to children's behaviour, in both positive and negative circumstances. In this environment, a teacher or TA can take the time to pause and absorb and describe the feelings of joy or poignancy for example in seeing a particular student accomplish something, or behave in a certain way. Likewise, a teacher or TA is required to identify feelings of anger, upset, frustration, or fear in the face of their students and deal appropriately with this emotion. This aspect of honest communication leads us into the next characteristic of positivity. Experiences at Netherfield Primary are not always positive, so how does that honestly translate into the positive resilient ethos?

Positive Language

One fundamental shift in the journey of Netherfield Primary under the leadership of Sharon was, in her words 'the relentless modelling of positivity, optimism, the stoicism'. This characteristic manifests in part through the language used, displayed, and promoted in the school. There is comprehensive documentation of this in school policy.

Excerpts from 'Engagement and Mood Management Policy'

We model clear communication and positive interactions between each other and between adults and children.

If the ethos of the classroom and the school is positive, there will be an atmosphere of mutual respect and enhancement of self-esteem in which pupils are behaving in an actively positive manner, and teaching and learning is leading to achievement.

We believe that:

When we feel happy and enjoy, we learn far better.

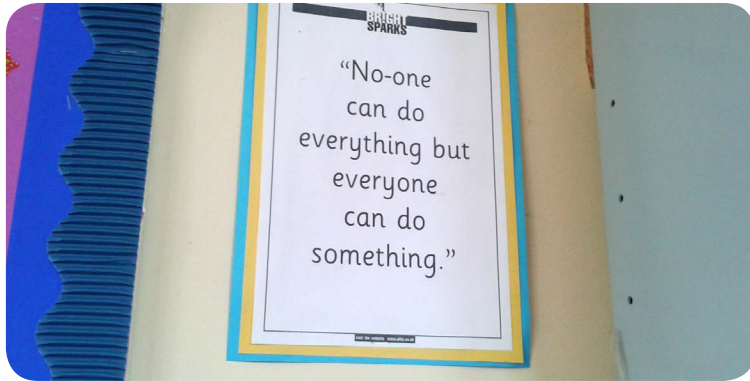
We aim:

To facilitate an environment of infectious positivity and happiness.

Keeping Positive

'There is neither good nor bad but thinking makes it so' (Shakespeare)

In some schools and care settings the ratio of directive or negative comments to positive ones can be unbalanced, sometimes with four directive comments to every positive one – this is not the case at Netherfield. It takes a deliberate effort to reverse this damaging ratio, but the effects can be marked. Giving accurate feedback is important but there is no evidence that upsetting people has any beneficial effects. Honest feedback can be structured to keep the mood positive. The 'PIN' acronym stands for Positive, Interesting and Negative. It suggests the order in which feedback should be delivered. When providing feedback at Netherfield we begin by talking



about several things young people like, moving on to interesting features, before finally referring to any negative aspect and suggesting how it can be improved. At Netherfield we always praise before prompting.

Keep Smiling

Smiling may be a good habitual behaviour to develop. Smiling triggers an automatic response in other people, causing them to smile in return. It also makes other people feel subconsciously better disposed towards the person who is smiling. It communicates confidence and openness and also stimulates the production of natural opiates and boosts the immune system. At Netherfield we truly understand the importance and impact of smiling.

In addition, the school staff practice with the common understanding that every day is a clean start. That is, no matter how difficult the previous day had been for a particular student, or group of students, no matter what may have happened in the playground or classroom that caused distress, upset or frustration; every morning, every student is allowed a fresh start, accompanied by a smile and a positive expectation for the new day.

Finally, there is a shared understanding amongst staff that their state/mood/demeanour affects the atmosphere, comfort, and possibility of the school space. Again quoting the Engagement and Mood Management Policy: 'I am the decisive element in the classroom, it is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather'.⁶ This perspective is central to the professional practice. With this

in mind, it is expected of staff to deal sensibly with their emotions and state of mind in private, in order that they can be present in school for the children in a positive and able way. In this way, a performance, or conscious practice, of positivity is required of the staff and structure of the school. This performance is asked of the children to a point, but it is accompanied by significant time, space, and resources to support any difficult and complex problems that might be causing negativity. The Nurture provision and classroom retreat areas are two obvious examples that are in place. In contrast, the support for the staff is less structured, although attended to. Primarily, staff support comprises of a tight community of informal peer support, a network of family-like familiarity and affection. In addition, the play and holistic therapist employed to work with particular children on the site of the school also offers therapy services to school staff that are taken up regularly. School leadership don't hesitate to recommend and accommodate personal therapy courses for those whose practice would benefit from it. As with the children of the school, there is a shared belief that how we are affects how we can teach or learn.

Inclusive Language

As introduced above, there is no policy around behaviour management at Netherfield Primary, there is, instead an in depth policy on 'Engagement and Mood Management'. This policy covers much of the same terrain as a behaviour management policy would, except that through language it is made clear that behaviour is a form of communication and a result of emotional responses or moods. With this distinction immediately teased out, the attitude to behaviour shifts. In brief, the focus moves from the consequences of that particular behaviour (e.g. running around in class results in a 'strike' or shortened playtime for example) to the mood and circumstances that caused that behaviour, and how to best acknowledge and deal with that. But this is just one example of myriad other opportunities that have been taken up by the school to shift perceptions and therefore experiences with the language used to predict, facilitate, or reflect on school. 'Integrity' is used rather than 'behaviour', 'manners', 'morals' or 'etiquette', to describe the nature of engagement that the school seeks and rewards inside the school, but as well in the broader community. Netherfield 'University' is used rather than 'club', 'extra-curricular', or 'after-school' to describe the program of activities, courses, and projects offered to the children outside of school hours (afternoon/evenings or weekends).

The Netherfield University has offered some 60 plus programs annually to the students of the school since its inception in 2010. The idea of a University being a self-selected, after-school, and mastery engagement gives both school children and their families an affiliation and language with spaces of self-improvement, and higher levels of education and social standing, that are often otherwise foreign, unspoken, or intimidating. If University is a regular, accepted, and comfortable idea in their educational lives, then perhaps thinking forward to third-level education in university will become more of an available opportunity.

Co-Creativity

Co-creativity can happen when two or more participants contribute, engage, and build from a common starting point or goal. What results is something that is beyond the scope of any one individual; and in both process and product, expands the possibilities of inquiry, learning, and representation. In order to co-create with others, all participants need to be known (to the extent that they can be), able to contribute, and with agency to make decisions in the process. Co-creativity is at the heart of the teaching and learning endeavour at Netherfield Primary. In particular this is visible in two ways: Firstly in relation to the external programs, services, and projects that the school invites and commissions in; secondly, in relation to the delivery of curriculum.

All practices – whether it is a guest artist working with the school on a project, or an external program such as FAST (Families and Schools Together) – are carefully and consistently made relevant and appropriate to Netherfield in particular. This means, that Netherfield Primary's principles and practices are upheld within the externally delivered practice. In itself, this transforms the practice, sometimes in subtle small ways, sometimes in significant shifts. In order for this to happen, the teachers, TAs, and leadership need to actively and carefully mediate and collaborate with educational providers, ensuring that the students are heard and catered to. In many cases, it is the students themselves who influence the decisions on who and what external opportunities will be available in any particular term. In every case, the practice becomes suitable and nourishing to the particular children of the school at the particular time of the delivery.

'I was in another school until the end of year 5 but I learn more here and I just want to learn here. The teachers ask you things, like, your opinion, what do you want to learn and how do you want to learn it. It's normally a compromise because we can't get exactly what we want! The teachers listen to us. It's good teamwork; we are all part of the team. I really like feeling part of a team'.

Sarah (Yr 6, 11yrs)

If we think of curriculum as a set of subject matters (with learning objectives), a standard delivery would select the most effective and efficient materials and processes to teach the subject matter at hand to a variety of children in the same year group. The subject would be introduced, taught, hopefully questioned, enquired into, and then ultimately, grasp of the subject matter would be tested and students would fall into position on a bell curve of attainment, i.e., those that were able to understand and reproduce the knowledge well and those that weren't. In this way, the curriculum could be taught with the same materials and processes year after year as the students of the school move through that particular year group. In this model, curriculum sits away from the students, amongst teachers and policy makers, and the teacher becomes a conduit for the curriculum, conducting it to the minds of children. At Netherfield Primary, the curriculum is positioned very differently, which implicates both teacher and student. The curriculum at Netherfield is taken up as a meeting point: At this meeting point, the teacher (and school leadership) meets the child, and the child brings to that meeting point their needs, abilities, and contexts. From that meeting point, a journey begins and it has not been predetermined, most of the destinations along the way are yet to be fully known. Students are often asked what topics, interests, or activities they would like to use to explore curriculum, teachers work in teams to create cross-curricular topics that would suit their students; leadership build school-wide events to engage students in their own self-led (with teacher support) curriculum learning. Expectations and policies are in put place, clearly and consistently, but around the needs of each individual child.⁷

To give students a say in the details, and indeed the substance of, their own education takes trust and bravery by both the students and the teaching



staff. Trust in themselves and in the knowledge that their contributions will be respected and valued for what they are. The courage to try something new, engage in potentially unfamiliar territory, and to think independently. When this is modelled by the teaching staff and taken up by the students, then education becomes a joint endeavour, when it is a joint endeavour, student (and indeed teacher) engagement becomes a given. In this way, curriculum becomes a meeting point, or a shared goal, and co-creativity can become the practice.

From the teaching staff's perspective, Sharon describes a recent literacy intervention: 'After a drop in our literacy levels, and an emerging issue of disengagement with writing, we knew that what those children needed was something that was personal to them. We needed to observe and hear and talk to them and their families to find out what the barriers potentially were as to why a child wasn't reading, or so disengaged with writing that they wouldn't dare put pen to paper. And then we built very personalised programs that we could group children together around. So groups of children were coming together from all over which way, across age groups and ability groups. It wasn't as simplistic as, right these children aren't achieving in reading, so we're going to do reading with them, and they're alright at maths so we can do reading in maths time. It's about what makes those individuals tick.'

From a student perspective, one of many opportunities to share ideas and aspirations about their learning comes at the beginning of every year in the facilitated PATH session (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope).⁸ Representatives from all aspects of the school community come together for the annual PATH session to plan the upcoming year.

Sharon describes the impact of one student's bravery and engagement with their learning: 'It's like little Stuart saying, in the PATH, "I want to do my learning on the moon". Ok, then, put it down, and we'll go with that and then we'll see. And we managed to organise a flight around the British Isles for over 320 children and their families; he did his learning out there in the skies. We have got a plan to take the children to NASA, which I hope comes through to fruition. But that will be because of Stuart and when he was 9 years old and what he was able to do at Netherfield in front of 120 people. He dared to share and articulate his dream and no one laughed at him. It was taken seriously. How do we plan to achieve that? It's the no-limits thinking that's so important. Otherwise we put glass ceilings on things if we're not careful.'

Looking up, looking on

Clear qualitative evidence is presented in this chapter as to the atmosphere, engagement, and processes of teaching and learning at Netherfield Primary. We don't need to rely solely on the evidence within Netherfield to show the effect of language, space, and co-creativity in learning however; in this chapter we have also pointed you to corroborations and expansions of these ideas across disciplines and spaces of research. We have touched on the impacts of the approach on teacher and staff well-being, and this will be revisited throughout the remaining chapters of the book. Ethos, external pressures of attainment, and a natural allowance for the energies of children, combine to create an environment that can be best described as buzzing: energetic, fast paced, and constantly changing. In that buzz the focus is on the children, the content is created with children, and the spaces and pace of delivery are constructed and carried out with children in mind. There are clear parameters on what can be achieved directly determined by the Department of Education. The pros or cons of those parameters are dependent on individual views, and indeed the changing politics that define them. The other clear parameters of this system lie with the teachers and staff of the school. In order for the system to be balanced, fully understood, and sustainable, a focus in terms of resources and structure needs to be available for teachers and staff. Without the time or energy to reflect and recharge, the teacher aspect of the child-teacher relationship becomes vulnerable and susceptible to the loudest voice in leadership, student body, or personal position. To support strong, autonomous, emotionally well, and independently thinking children, we need to support teachers to the same end.



Chapter 6

Nurturing education

Nurture describes a program in the education system focused on the emotional well-being and social competencies of school aged children. Developed initially in the late 1960's by educational psychologist, Marjorie Boxall, Nurture groups can now be found in over 1500 schools in the UK. Books, networks, and tools have been developed to support the on-going evolution of this program.¹ The underlying premise of the practice is that the source of many social and emotional difficulties that children face in school can be rooted to a lack of adequate nurture in early childhood. These difficulties have obvious impacts on student attainment along with many other aspects of school life. Boxall proposed that a lack of strong and nurturing bonds with a significant adult in early home life caused children to be inadequately prepared for the social and intellectual demands of school.² The Nurture group was therefore designed specifically to support the development of emotional well-being and social competence in a way that is very hard to do within the context of the main stream classroom.

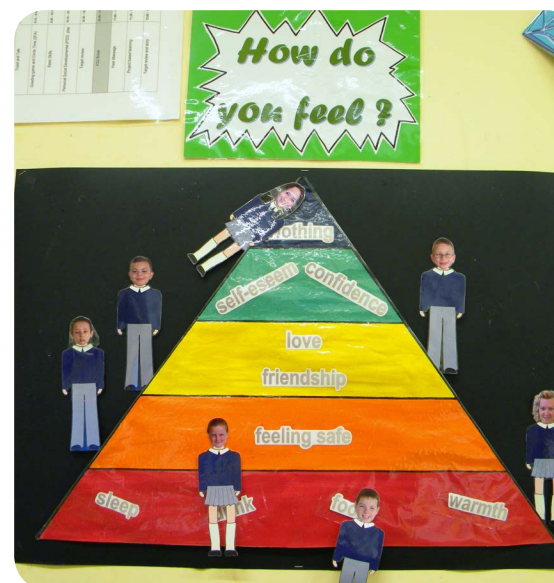
Nurture provisions in school involve providing a time and place for students to receive additional adult support and individualised learning in curriculum areas, in conjunction with educational experiences focused on emotional well-being and social competence. From this premise, the Nurture provision is taken up in vastly different ways in different schools. Commonly, Nurture rooms include home-like areas, eating or kitchen areas, free play areas, and quiet work areas. At the same time, other schools can be found that fulfil a Nurture provision in a space that resembles a broom cupboard. The ethos, leadership, and resources of the school, play major roles in the potential and scope of a Nurture provision.

In 2009, when the newly appointed Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), Kat Booker, began working at Netherfield Primary she, along with her colleagues and community, experienced student truancy, aggression, and unruly behaviour as commonplace. Approximately 25% of students had identified additional behavioural, physical, or psychological needs; student attendance was at approximately 84%; and the school was struggling to achieve basic literacy and numeracy targets. Urgent measures were required to establish the school as a safe space for students and staff. So, Kat began the Nurture provision in the first instance to provide a service for the highest need children: those who were running out of the school during the day and into the local streets and parks; those who were being excluded or excluding themselves from classes; those who were visibly distressed or distressing others.

Over the proceeding terms and years, the Nurture provision at Netherfield Primary supported the most vulnerable children to become more able and willing to learn and collaborate in the mainstream classrooms. As levels of truancy and misconduct decreased overall, the Nurture team were able to work with a wider variety of students who struggled with various needs from the often less visible concerns of fear or anxiety or low self-esteem, to the more visible such as aggression and bullying. The Nurture provision at Netherfield has become a highly successful model of practice, and the staff team involved are frequently called upon to support other schools in training and establishing similar provisions. The school now has three Nurture spaces including a purpose built 'Netherfield Nurture Centre' next to the school which offers the provision to children from neighbouring schools. The following section includes descriptions, images, and document excerpts that offer some glimpses into how the Nurture program at Netherfield Primary translates into practice.

The Nurture Policy document at Netherfield states:

- Our two nurture groups provide a modified curriculum in an environment based on the principles advocated by Marion Bennathan and Marjorie Boxall.
- The groups are an intervention for those who are having difficulty accessing learning successfully in their mainstream classroom. This may be due to fragmented or deprived early childhood experiences, learning difficulties or disorders on the autistic spectrum.
- Our groups meet for five mornings each week, with the children spending the first fifteen minutes as well as afternoons in their own classes. This ensures their sense of belonging both in their own class and within the whole school community.
- We have two groups in our school; the Gems and the Diamonds.
- A minimum of two experienced members of staff run each group and in the absence of one of these team members, a known member of staff to the children takes their place.



Nurture expanded

The Nurture program at Netherfield Primary shares many of the same guiding principles as its founder, Marjorie Boxall: An awareness of the role and effects of family and home dynamics on the capacities of a child; an attention to the emotional and social well-being of a child; a belief in the relationship between well-being and academic potential. To many of you reading this, these premises likely seem valid and even commonplace. It will also be easy to see though that the need for the distinct Nurture provision arose because there is rarely the time or space to act according to these premises or principles in the mainstream school or classroom: the predominant focus is elsewhere (for example, curriculum, behaviour management, assessment and evaluation). At Netherfield, two significant characteristics distinguish the Nurture provision, making it an enormously important example of practice. 1. Nurture is embedded into the ethos of the whole school and 2. Nurture is taken up, expanded and revised on an on-going basis to respond directly to the specific and always changing needs and contexts of the school community. Below, we look into these two characteristics of the Nurture provision in more depth.

A Nurture Ethos

Nurture represents a core characteristic of the ethos at Netherfield Primary and one outcome of this is that each staff member is trained in, and embodies, core Nurture ideas. For example, each teacher loves his or her students: this common basis of love for each child builds or supports an emotional, as well as a learning, bond of attachment for each child. Each teacher knows their students' parents well and an explicit relationship between the school and parents and families of the children supports, and in many cases develops, the network of attachment around each child (this aspect of the school practice is explored in more depth in the next chapter). Each teacher sees behaviour as communication and responds appropriately to the causes as well as the outcomes of student behaviour to ensure that behaviour is not 'managed' but dealt with in a way that both supports the child's needs but also develops the child's self-awareness and social competency.

This Nurture ethos informs all aspects of the running of the school. You will see evidence and discussion of this throughout the chapters of this book, in particular, in leadership and business management you will see Nurture

informing budget allocations, recruitment, roles, policy development, and career professional development; in teaching and learning you can see Nurture principles applied to classroom management, assessment and teaching methods, and extra curricular opportunities (including play times, lunch times, before and after school clubs). Nurture can be felt, seen, heard, and sensed in a myriad different ways in all corners and aspects of the school.

Nurture always changing along with changing needs

As mentioned above, from the outset the Nurture program attended to the needs of the most visibly needy, those who were most apparently struggling and causing distress to those around them. As the Nurture program and ethos saw effects and improvements in the overall student engagement and levels of social emotional well-being, the program was able to look more broadly at the school population to work directly with students that may have not been obviously distressed or causing major disruptions to learning, but who may be carrying internal barriers to their own learning and development. In this way, the program was able to include children who struggled with social anxiety, forms of depression, or debilitating insecurities.

As success was visibly seen and felt in the school, the program began to look more directly at the family role in the children's progress. To this end, not only are families involved in the Nurture program at every opportunity (they are invited into the playground, to join lunchtimes, to volunteer, to avail of services such as literacy support, and so on), but also the school actively engages families in Nurture related development programs, such as FAST (Families and Schools working Together).³

The success of Netherfield's Nurture provision is one reason that the school is frequently asked to accept students who have been excluded from other nearby schools due to behavioural issues. In response to this situation, and as a final example of the constantly adaptive nature of the provision, the past year at Netherfield has seen the development of an entirely new building on site in order to provide the Nurture provision to students from other schools in the locality. This provision will support students from the area to remain in their own schools through the careful additional support and social emotional development provided at Netherfield Primary.

Nurture supported

With an overarching goal to support the social, emotional, and intellectual development of children in a school context, the Nurture program resonates deeply with the ethos and stated vision of the school. What this amounts to, is not only a wholehearted support of the Nurture groups and careful and thorough communications between Nurture leaders and classroom teachers, but more importantly, an extension of the Nurture provision to the whole school. Although, as discussed above, the Nurture provision at Netherfield is specific to the needs and contexts of the school, it is supported by a number of established, nationally available professional development resources for schools, themselves prompted or supported by governmental policy allowances or mandates. In particular, programs that have had an important impact on the school's capacities to practice Nurture include the SEAL program (Social and emotional aspects of learning), Team Teach, See Through Behaviour and Mood Management.

External supports

In line with growing empirical research, the UK government administration from approximately 2003, showed an awareness of 'social and emotional aspects of learning' (SEAL) and began policy shifts towards a more holistic view of the child. A pilot project, named SEAL, was introduced into select Primary Schools in 2003. The emotional needs of learners had long been acknowledged in educational research and scholarship, and in the 'Every Child Matters' policies introduced in 2004, a holistic emphasis on children in school was clearly visible. In 2005, the department of education gave official backing for SEAL and its approach to explicitly teach a range of social and emotional skills within the school curriculum. SEAL was given prominence in the Primary National Strategy and core professional development materials and described as 'a comprehensive approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and well-being of all who learn and work in schools'.⁴ Although the emphasis was initially placed on Key Stage 1 and 2 (the main assessment stages of primary school), the approach quickly spread into secondary education.

SEAL provided a structured whole curriculum framework for developing children's social, emotional behavioural skills; skills considered fundamental to school improvement. The materials were focused around

five skill areas: self-awareness; self-regulation (managing feelings); motivation; empathy and social skills. The SEAL resources include a set of suggested learning opportunities and lesson plans for developing the above mentioned skills through given themes, at different learning levels. In addition, they offer a series of differentiated learning opportunities intended for small-group work with children who need additional help in developing skills. The resources include staff development activities and school assembly topics. Recognising that social and emotional aspects of learning need also to involve parents and other family members in 'behaviour problem solving', the SEAL resources also incorporate activities for families to do together at home.

Between 2009-2010 the National Strategies in SEAL priorities were:

- Building a school ethos that provides a climate and conditions to promote social and emotional skills
- All children are provided with planned opportunities to develop and enhance social and emotional skills
- Adults are provided with opportunities to enhance their own social and emotional skills
- Staff recognise the significance of social and emotional skills to effective learning and to the well-being of pupils
- Pupils who would benefit from additional support have access to small group work
- There is a strong commitment to involving pupils in all aspects of school life
- There is a strong commitment to working positively with parents and carers
- The school engages well with other schools, the local community, wider services and local agencies

The success of these strategies has since been validated by research and the continued commitment by the Department of Education. SEAL resources were initially made freely available to local authorities by the DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families; now the Department of Education). Presumably to override the transient nature of political agendas, in 2012 Jean Gross and Julie Casey established the SEAL Community as a Community Interest Company, providing a home and continuity to the resources and network of schools and practitioners engaged in the work.⁵

In addition to SEAL, Netherfield Primary staff engage in an annual training program led by Bernard Allen which includes Team-Teach, See Through Behaviour and Mood Management.⁶

These programs, amongst others are not unique, in fact, well known across much of UK education; what is unique about Netherfield Primary, and essential to an ecl approach to education and care, is that these programs don't remain allotted to a compartment of time, space, funding, or age group: Nurture does not just happen 5 mornings a week in the designated rooms; and SEAL does not just happen in the assigned curricula designation proscribed. A 'whole child, whole system' approach requires the school to ensure that these external programs and resources are made relevant to them. The Nurture principles of these programs are integrated throughout the design of the day and the space of the school, and the staff ensure that the principles stay current and consistent through their living practice. Below, we share a number of specific examples of this integration in the school.

Internal applications

External programs like the two highlighted above, along with the skill sets, passions and motivations of individual staff and community members, contribute to a rich palette from which to construct a school grounded in emotional well-being, creativity, and learning.

Netherfield Primary has appointed a 'Lead SEAL Innovator', a teacher whose job it is to oversee the application, adaption, and integration of the SEAL program in the school. A specific staff member being appointed this title (which is not an inherent requirement of the program) both conveys the value given to this work in the school, but also the need for the program to be directed by an internal employee in order to ensure that it is made relevant, helpful, and aligned with the overall ethos of this school. Support from the school leadership in this way has allowed the Lead SEAL Innovator, Jo Mulligan, to make SEAL visible and high profile for staff and families alike. At Netherfield, SEAL (as a category of learning and development) is the second box on every report card sent home to families.

Within the Nurture program, a common element is a 'retreat' area where children can go to take time and space away from situations that are too

difficult for them to handle well. They use the space to calm down and manage emotion. At Netherfield Primary, the staff recognised that this space would be beneficial for all students, not just those in the Nurture program, as a result, every classroom in the school has a retreat area. As introduced in the previous chapter, in each classroom it is different, depending on the teacher and students' design and discretion. The space is used freely and openly by a whole range of students, often at their own discretion, at times by teacher prompt.

A Nurture approach to students requires adults to consider behaviour as a form of communication, it requires a specific attention to the social and emotional awareness of students, and it requires teaching that supports the development of those skills. Inevitably, this practice calls for an attention to, and a revision of, the types of language we use to talk to, about, and with, children. The language of discipline and punishment does not support an approach that seeks to understand the causes of behaviour; the language of naughty and good does not support an approach that seeks to raise self-awareness of students. A huge part of the development of the social and emotional skills of children involves providing them with language in order to process, analyse, describe, and share feelings and emotions. For all of these reasons, language has been considered carefully at Netherfield, and walking through the corridors and classrooms, the language that can be heard and seen is distinctly geared towards supporting a healthy interpersonal, empathetic, and positive environment.



This use of language hasn't arisen completely organically (although, as with any working environment, there is a certain amount of language that is carried within the ethos and therefore soon taken up by new staff at the school). The school leadership has developed a large series of policies (34 at the time of writing), at least 5 of which include direction on the nature and use of language (body language and spoken language). We share excerpts below at length in order to highlight the extensive amount of written and mandated guidance for the school staff and community, but also to illustrate the clarity and emphasis of the language used.⁷

Excerpt from Touch Policy:

Our policy on touch has been developed with due consideration of neurobiological research and studies based on and around the positive impact of touch. Our key aim is to facilitate a safe and happy school where children and staff alike enjoy coming to school. Positive relationships are fundamental to our positive ethos and this policy fully supports this.

The essentialness of appropriate touch

We define the appropriate use of touch as in situations in which abstinence would actually be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neurobiologically damaging. Indeed, studies have shown that young babies who have been deprived of early touch stimuli, build a resistance to touch and nurturing (despite the desperate need for positive touch) and the ability by the brain to handle and assimilate touch actually becomes impaired. In extreme cases, this lack of touch causes listlessness and depression. In translating these findings to a home or school setting, examples of appropriate touch would include the natural and beneficial use of touch in the comforting of a child who is in an acute state of distress. We have a clear understanding that to not to reach out to the child in such circumstances could be re-traumatising and neurobiologically damaging.

Supporting a distressed child

Failing to physically soothe a child when in the face of intense grief and/or upset can lead to a state of hyper-arousal in which toxic levels of stress chemicals are released in the body and brain. (The severely damaging long-term effects of this have been well researched world-wide and are well documented.) In such states of distress, touch can often be the only means of maintaining a connection with the child when he or she can no longer hear or make use of words or soothing tone/eye contact and therefore is in danger of dissociating, with all the detrimental effects that this can bring.

Touch as part of our daily routines

The staff at Netherfield Primary School initiate and respond warmly to appropriate touch from all children and indeed each other. Each morning the children are both greeted into the school and then again into their individual classrooms, this could be with a hug or a hand on the shoulder. Interactions

in the corridor or at the above times will often include a physical interaction, again a hug or a hand on the shoulder. This creates the nurturing, warm, caring environment that is so enabling for our children at Netherfield School.

The staff are also acutely aware of the current atmosphere where, due to fears of abuse, touch as a natural and vital form of human connection has been almost vetoed in some schools. We also know that it is unfeasible, unethical, impractical and unsafe to impose a 'No Touch Policy'. We know that as part of our loco parentis obligations that there are times where touch will be necessary for the wellbeing of the children in our care. We understand that carefully judged contingent and/or containing touch can be therapeutic. Equally, we understand that when a child is in deep distress that with sufficient connection, psychological holding can be established without touching.

Teaching our children about appropriate touch

Our policy adheres to the belief that every individual needs to appreciate the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch.

By 'Appropriate Touch' we mean touch that is not invasive, humiliating or could possibly be considered as eroticising / flirtatious. We agree that 'appropriate' places to touch are 'shoulders, arms and back. Staff will invite children to sit closely and occasionally on their lap (upper thighs). Where possible staff will aim to turn to the side when holding a child therefore avoiding full frontal touch, this will ensure that these holds are not misinterpreted.

Excerpt from Peer Massage Policy:

Aims

- To promote the well-being of children in the knowledge that nurturing touch is a basic need and a powerful tool to help children develop into healthy, well balanced human beings.
- To give children the chance to experience nurturing touch at school, in a safe and creative way.
- To promote an ethos of respect of self and others, as children request permission before they begin, and say thank you to each other when they finish the routine.

- To give the children a voice - those who do not wish to receive/give a massage can say no and sit and relax / observe, or do an air massage.
- To develop positive communication - children are encouraged, while practicing the massage routine, to express their preferences regarding the strokes. They can say what they like or dislike, and how much pressure and at what pace the massage should be done for them.
- To encourage a sense of unity throughout the school, children will share in a full massage at least once a week.

Objectives

- To improve concentration
- To improve co-operation
- To increase a stronger sense of self and higher self-esteem/confidence
- To reduce aggressive behaviour
- To encourage a calmer classroom environment
- To encourage empathy and respect for their peers
- To enable the children to recognize difference between good and bad touch
- To encourage a more relaxed and focused feeling in the school
- To discover differences between people
- To encourage and develop the imagination
- To improve communication

Rationale

Touch and Development

Did you know....?

- biologically, touch is the first sense to develop and the last to leave us. By the 7th week of pregnancy, the baby reacts to touch.
- feel good chemicals are released in the brain through caring interactions.
- the body and brain will stop growing if there is a lack of touch- some animals even die!
- families and cultures that express warm physical affection have fewer issues with anger and aggression.
- many children often learn best through touch and movement.

What is Peer Massage?

Relaxation is a skill that can be learnt and the great news is, it gets easier with

practice! Relaxation can take many forms and there are plenty of approaches to choose from, the most important thing is to find what works for you. By learning to recognise your own states of tension and relaxation you can begin to control them at will.

We believe that every child attending school should experience positive and nurturing touch every day... everywhere in the world. This belief shapes our whole school approach to promoting the physical, social, spiritual, mental and emotional wellbeing of all pupils and staff.

Massage in Schools is a programme of positive touch and clothed peer massage, introduced to the UK in 2000 by its founders Mia Elmsater and Sylvie Hetu. The clothed massage is for children 4-12 yrs old. The children learn a simple massage sequence which is given by the children to each other, working in pairs. They wear their normal school clothes and give massage to each other on the back, shoulders, head and arms.

Children have the right to choose whether or not to take part in a session. It takes 10-15 minutes. (A child not wanting a massage is asked to sit and watch, do an air massage or massage a teddy or cushion if appropriate) The child should always be able to see the other children during the massage.

Excerpts from Positive Handling Policy

Positive Behaviour Management

All physical interventions at this school are conducted within a framework of positive behaviour and mood management. The school Engagement and Mood Management policy is intended to reward effort and application, and encourage pupils to take responsibility for improving their own behaviour, effective self-management and emotional health and well-being. Part of our preventative approach to risk reduction involves looking for early warning signs, learning and communicating any factors which may influence inappropriate behaviour and taking steps to divert behaviours leading towards foreseeable risk. Pupils are encouraged to participate in the development of their own Positive Handling Plans by focusing on positive alternatives and choices. Parents

are also encouraged to contribute. However, if problems arise, staff have an additional responsibility to support all pupils when they are under pressure and safely manage crises if, and when, they occur.

Alternatives to Physical Controls

A member of staff who chooses not to make a physical intervention can still take effective action to reduce risk. They can:

- Show care and concern by acknowledging unacceptable behaviour and requesting alternatives using negotiation and reason.
- Give clear directions for pupils to stop.
- Remind them about rules and likely outcomes.
- Remove an audience or take vulnerable pupils to a safer place.
- Make the environment safer by moving furniture and removing objects which could be used as weapons.
- Use positive touch to guide or escort pupils to somewhere less pressured.
- Ensure that colleagues know what is happening and get help.

Modifications to Environment

Staff will not wait until a crisis is underway before conducting a risk assessment of the environment. We know that some pupils at this school may exhibit extreme and possibly dangerous behaviour. In general it is a good rule to keep the environment clutter free. This may mean giving consideration to secure storage for a range of everyday objects when they are not being used.

Help Protocols

The expectation at this school is that all staff should support one another. This means that staff always offer help and always accept it. Help does not always mean taking over. It may mean just staying around in case you are needed, getting somebody else or looking after somebody else's group. Supporting a colleague does not only mean agreeing with their suggestions and offering sympathy when things go wrong. Real support sometimes means acting as a critical friend to help colleagues become aware of possible alternative strategies. Good communication is necessary so that colleagues avoid confusion when help is offered and accepted. They need to agree scripts so that all parties understand what sort of assistance is required and what is available.

At Netherfield our script includes:

- “How can I help?” when looking to support a member of staff or child.
- “More help available” when a staff member has offered help, been told that help is not needed but feels the staff member requires further support.
- “I am holding you safely until you can hold yourself safely” when holding a child to ensure their safety and that of others around.
- “I care too much to let you hurt.....yourself....other people.....let yourself do something you would later feel bad about....” When a child is being held due to others being at risk, or they are at risk of hurting themselves, others, destroying property etc.

Well Chosen Words

A well chosen word can sometimes avert an escalating crisis. When pupils are becoming angry there is no point in getting into an argument. Telling people to calm down can actually wind them up. Pointing out what they have done wrong can make things worse. The only purpose in communicating with an angry person is to prevent further escalation. It is better to say nothing and take time to choose your words carefully than to say the wrong thing and provoke a further escalation.

The Last Resort Principal

At this school we only use physical restraint when there is no realistic alternative. This does not mean that we always expect people to methodically work their way through a series of failing strategies, before attempting an intervention in which they have some confidence. Nor does it mean always waiting until the danger is imminent, by which time the prospect of safely managing it may be significantly reduced.

Support evidence

As we introduced in the first part of this book, there is a wide and ever-growing body of empirical evidence to support the positive impact of socio-emotional learning on educational outcomes and student well-being. This evidence spans governmental bodies, independent scholarship, and school based practitioner research. A 2014 report by the Department of Public Health evidences: ‘Effective social and emotional competencies are associated with greater health and wellbeing, and better achievement’.⁸ Even in the past 3 years, quantitative and qualitative studies in locations as far reaching as Australia, Chile, Finland, and South Africa have found direct correlations between the delivery of social and emotional skills curriculum and student achievement.⁹ There is also a body of research and advocacy around the longer-term effects of social and emotional skills, both in terms of quality of life and employment prospects. For example a 2015 report commissioned by The Early Intervention Foundation concluded, from a longitudinal study of adults born in the 1970’s, the instrumental positive long-term effects of social emotional skills on adult life.¹⁰

Internal and external impacts and implications

Netherfield Primary, as supportive, safe and welcoming a school as it has become, is not a bubble; it does not function in a vacuum, and the work that is carried out in Nurture is a result of a multitude of influences, both supporting and constraining the practice. We have described some of the supports drawn upon, but what has enabled and required those supports (programs, policies) to come in, is a leadership, a local authority, and a community.

Sharon brought with her a background in leading special needs schools; in child psychotherapy; play and drama therapy; in ecl training; and in NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming). Sharon also brought her connection with Kat Booker, from working together in a previous school. Inviting Kat to join the Netherfield staff meant that there was not only an experienced, qualified, and creative leader to direct and design the Nurture provision for the school, but that person also brought with them an existing strong and trusting working relationship with the Headteacher. Having this immediate and high status level of support of her work, allowed Kat to develop the Nurture provision with confidence, autonomy, and school backing.

This space is for you...

This strength and clarity of direction emerges in relation to the positions and conditions of the staff and families of the school. Needless to say, the family surrounding each child directly impacts that child's attitude towards school. Each family enters the school with an established set of dynamics between them, and pre-existing assumptions about, and relationships with, school. Very often, these dynamics and assumptions are challenged by the ethos and practices of Netherfield Primary. Whether the dynamics are related to a power struggle between parent and child, or to levels of respect, love, or security, the Nurture approach at Netherfield endeavours to engage with any negative cause or outcome of these dynamics and instil positive relationship development. In this community, pre-existing assumptions of school are typically negative, and generally involve a conception of school being separate from home life, with the rules, expectations, activities, and outcomes unrelated with other aspects of a family's life. On the contrary, at Netherfield, the school-family relationship is paramount, the learning journey of a student is expected to reach and draw from all aspects of his or her life. But regardless of the specifics of the assumptions and conditions of families coming into Netherfield Primary, a family's treatment, attitude, and relationship with their school-going child affects the child directly (and the way in which the child can engage in school) and therefore indirectly affects the teachers. Just as we pass on a fear of spiders, we can pass on a fear of school, or a disrespect of, and so on. If a type of challenging behaviour is unacceptable at school, and yet accepted or required at home, this creates a barrier to a student's possibility of thriving at school.

Just as each student's family plays a part in the actual day-to-day practice and outcome of the Nurture approach, so does each staff member. Each staff member also comes from a family system and range of contexts. Staff members carry these contexts with them and they texture, inform, and enable their practice. At Netherfield Primary, every member of the Nurture team carries something in particular related to the Nurture context that drew them to the program, for example being mother to a child with special needs, being daughter to an existing Nurture teacher. Inevitably there will be times when a child 'hits a nerve' with a teacher, or provokes something in a teacher that will have significant impact on their ability to teach. The Nurture approach of the school allows, to an extent, the space for staff to be affected, to be shaken, to be upset, or to be overjoyed by an interaction with a student, but importantly, the approach requires that the students' needs be prioritized at all times. Therefore, there is a space

and time for staff to process feelings and emotions and impacts related to their work, but it is separate from the space of teaching and care of the children. In short: staff are required to, at all times: 'be the adult'.

An awareness of the impacts of a teacher's emotional state is strongly communicated through the leadership of Sharon along with Team-Teach and Mood Management training. Beyond this however is a much broader field of inquiry and personal development that supports the Nurture approach. Only with an understanding of their own personal narratives and perspectives can teachers fully grasp the impacts and specific effects of their practice. The wealth of knowledge, research, and perspectives within developmental psychology, consciousness and mindfulness studies provides a sturdy framework of on-going support upon which staff could build and expand their practice. This deeper foundation (personal work and disciplinary knowledge) is largely absent from any standard training required for teaching assistants or teachers. Furthermore, this type of professional development is extremely rare in the working life of a Nurture teacher or teaching assistant. The teacher with this depth of background knowledge therefore becomes the exception, rather than the expectation. A Nurture program that truly attends to the whole child and whole system (a system which would include the teachers) is therefore an exception. Even in Netherfield, with its model program, and outstanding level of educational provision, the gaps in knowledge (either knowledge of self, or knowledge of discipline) challenge the overall balance and sustainability of the program.

"you teach from where you are..."

Looking at ourselves, or the education and well-being of teachers, carers and youth workers, is an aspect of the education system that often falls under the radar. An ecl approach challenges us to acknowledge not only our role in the education or care of a child, but the profound impact of our knowledge, mood, behaviour, personality, perspectives and attitudes on the children we work with. This approach asks us to acknowledge and take control of the space that we stand in and the power that it yields. A maxim within ecl practice, that extends to many fields of practice and theory in education, is 'you teach from where you are at', put another way, you teach who and how you are. Whether you are a full time teacher with 20 years experience, or a generous adult who has volunteered once for a youth sports camp, you will likely recognise that if you bring frustration (from, let's say, the morning family feud) with you to your teaching practice with children, your group of children will respond to that in conjunction with what you are overtly asking of them. Being children, they will likely not work to diffuse your frustration, but will reflect it back to you. If you bring giddy happiness (from, let's say, the lottery ticket that you just won), then your class will go very differently.

The work involved in the creating of this book provided an opportunity for staff at Netherfield to take pause, to reflect on their work, their relationship with their work, their motivations, their hesitations, and their desires in relation to their work. This pause – this time and space – is rarely found in the day-to-day work of education. With few exceptions, the staff that worked with us in the project of this book were stopping to think deeply and reflectively about aspects of their work in ways that they hadn't previously done. This process was not only essential to the writing of this book, it was an important step in the journey of Netherfield Primary towards becoming a strong and sustainable school.

Research on the social emotional learning and well-being of teachers is much scarcer than that of children and young people. However, the research that does exist, including within the ecl foundation, supports strongly the view that the emotional well-being and self awareness of teachers has profound and direct and tangible impacts on their capacities for teaching and caring for children and young people.¹¹

Looking up, looking on

The Nurture program at Netherfield Primary is taken up as a model, and its teachers are invited to support other schools, but the fact remains that that the practices of Netherfield work in the way that do because of the particular needs and people involved. The theory, research, and tools that constitute the Nurture approach have been taken up by the school and transformed as per necessity to meet the specific needs and the affordances of the school and community. This is its strength, but if sought after as an 'export', it quickly becomes its weakness. If only it were so easy as to transplant the policies, space design, and teaching methods to another school as is! Instead the model of Nurture that

Netherfield provides is one of carefully matching resources and people with needs and circumstances, and what emerges is a program that makes sense, that responds appropriately, consistently and thoroughly, and that can evolve alongside the needs of the school community.





Chapter 7

Expanding education through partnerships

'When visitors come, you know it's not going to be an ordinary sort of day'

Ellie (Year 4, 9 yrs)

Across primary and secondary education there is a curious continuum of the level and nature of relationships between teachers and schools on the one side and parents, carers, community, and culture outside the school walls on the other. On the one end of this continuum, there is the very recognisable and common model of the school with high walls and locked doors. In this type of school, notes are sometimes sent home to parents and carers in backpacks, meetings are scheduled in 10 minute blocks twice a year between teacher and parent or carer, but apart from that, school time is school time, the bell ringing in the morning indicates the final goodbye to the outside world until the end of day bell rings again and the children once again appear to their waiting parents and carers. Typically the waiting adults will ask how the day went, 'how was school?' only to hear a one or two word response or a general reluctance to recount any details of the day. The curiosity of the adult quickly waning as the rest of the afternoon and evening demands take focus. On the other end of the continuum is a school that behaves in many respects like a community centre. The doors are always open, the washrooms, lunchroom, common rooms, even classrooms, welcoming to visiting adults. This school reaches out to any community member who would like to come and be involved – to volunteer time to share an expertise, to listen to children reading, or to support a project. This school commissions and hosts programs specifically designed to include parents and carers, this school runs the local Gala annually, this school asks community members to take an active role in the care and assessment of the students. And as we consider these portrayals as two ends of a continuum, we acknowledge the possibilities of everything in between.



In the many possibilities of this continuum of in-school-out-of-school relationship, teachers are often wary of parents, of children's popular culture, and indeed of the surveillance of local authority and government. Parents are often wary of teachers, teachers who might frown on incomplete homework, or teachers who seem to be intimidating their child. School children often hold their school life completely separate from their home life: their behaviour, their levels of comfort and courage, so different, that to hear descriptions of the same child at school and at home can seem like hearing about two different children. School children often associate school with work and home with play, no matter how hard a teacher might work to incorporate play into the learning, and no matter how hard a parent might work to get the child to do homework or indeed domestic work.

The remainder of this chapter revolves largely around the fact, the nature, and the impact of the relationships between Netherfield Primary and their various out-of-school interrelated partners.

Netherfield Primary exists within a web of partnerships, some of which are familiar to any school, others which come from an active attempt to broaden the horizons and possibilities for the school beyond the standard models. What is crucial to emphasise in this chapter is that all of these partnerships are taken on with purpose, care, and a strong awareness of the interdependent relationship therein. For example, the school-parents partnership is not simply considered as an unavoidable reality, but it is a valued and carefully developed relationship that aims to see both partners (school and parents) resourced, and engaged. The partnership between



the school and the Rotary Club is organised and tended to, to the benefit of the school, but importantly to the whole community of the area.

The following breakdown outlines some of the core partners of Netherfield Primary at the time of the writing of this book. We break them up into three categories: Individual partners; public sector partners, and private organisations. These relationships are all unique, with different models of exchange.

Individual partners

Building from the previous chapters, let's look briefly at the central relationship between teacher and student. At Netherfield the staff endeavour to know the child, to know his or her contexts, strengths, and needs; with this knowledge, the teacher builds a partnership that enables the learning to take place. Both parties know the expectations and the goals of this partnership; both parties know their place and their role in it. This partnership is also one that is grounded in love. Love is a word used with caution in schools, but not so in Netherfield Primary. The teachers love their students and they show their love in direct gestures of affection and care, in explicit celebration of their successes, and consistent support in times of difficulty. This aspect of the student-teacher relationship inevitably provides an element of emotional stability in the context of the learning as well as a modelling of positive interrelational communication.

‘Students know that they are valuable because we tell them that they are’

The nature of the partnership between teacher and parent is a pivotal one. For decades educational research has shown us that literacy, student engagement, interpersonal skills, and school grade levels are significantly dependent upon immediate family.¹ For teachers to take an active role in this determinant, a partnership with the families of students is imperative. At Netherfield Primary this partnership is taken very seriously. It manifests in a number of ways. The teachers and TA's are present at the beginning and end of every day, available to greet parents with their children, take stock of any particular needs or circumstances, attend to any concerns or questions, and communicate any relevant feedback on a child's day or work. The relationship in these settings is informal and direct, teachers work hard to position themselves as a support to the parent who is considered the primary expert on the child; teachers are open and transparent about feedback on the child, either positive or not, and keen for the children to witness this communication and relationship between them and their parents.

Mr Willis, Yr 6 (11/12 yrs) teacher:

Eve is one of the strongest maths students in my class, but I noticed that some days she would excel and power through her work quickly, clearly, and confidently, and then other days or for days at a time, seem to fail to be interested in, or grasp new concepts altogether. It was only when I started chatting to her mum in the mornings that I learned she had trouble with insomnia. There are nights when she only sleeps for a couple of hours altogether. Now, I check in with Eve or her mum most mornings, and therefore know if she is having a difficult period of insomnia that I can simply give her more time, space, or even the opportunity to nap, as opposed to added pressure by me, or a shift in task or teaching approach. She is more than capable to jump back into the work and catch up, and my awareness of her situation gives me enough insight to be able to reassure her of her math ability, which in turns builds her competency.

The relationship between teacher and parent isn't always an easy one, especially in a community where a large number of parents have negative associations with school from their own childhoods. As Sharon points out: 'The fact that we've got a label as a teacher already makes it difficult for us to meet on a common ground, so we've got to do something about that by showing that, yes, I am a teacher, but we're actually two human beings, one with greater expertise in their own children and another that has studied a pedagogy, and with that information we could work together to create something that really meets the needs of that child and family. And it's only through that togetherness, that we're going to truly know what each child needs'.

As well as this fundamental, and perhaps cultural obstacle, to overcome, there is also the tangible obstacle of time. For every teacher there are approximately 28 families that require active relationships. Even with the support of TA's, checking in, and keeping up, with 28 parents or carers every morning or afternoon is impossible, it is just not built into the capacities of a school. To attend, then, to this central and yet demanding need, Netherfield's staff includes 2 Home-School Liaison Officers whose mandate is to build and maintain the relationships between home and school, as well as manage and mediate where necessary the relationships between child, family, and health and social care. Mandy Roper and Lesley Balfour have both been staff at Netherfield for over 16 years, as TA's they have worked in various capacities at the school and through Sharon's leadership have moved into roles that suit their skills, personalities, and natures. Mandy and Lesley know every family that attends the school; indeed, they have known some of the parents since they attended the school as children. For new families to the school, Mandy or Lesley greet them in their first introduction: 'From the moment new families walk in the door, we meet them, welcome them show them around the school and share the approach'. In addition, they visit new families to the school at their homes, establishing from the outset the essential relationship between home and school and the school's commitment to supporting that. Once in the school, Mandy and Lesley work along side the classroom teachers and leadership to build the relationship. Day to day interactions at the beginning and end of the school day are accompanied by communication books in every classroom in which teachers or TA's can record any questions, concerns, or information relating to their students that may impact their or their peers' learning. Mandy and Lesley

use these books to identify and track any investigation, intervention or support that may be required. They have in depth, lived knowledge and understanding of a large number of the families, and above all, they are trusted by them. In the vast majority of cases, their interventions can be simple and yet have significant impacts on a child's engagement, well-being, and attainment at school, and there are hundreds of examples.

It was noted that Mark was arriving late for school every Wednesday with no explanation; he was missing the morning session and part of his PE class, and his teacher noted it as a problem. I quickly went to chat with Mark's parents and found out that Mark was uncomfortable changing clothes in the classroom before PE and avoided going to school on the mornings that he knew that was going to happen. With a short discussion we arranged for Mark to come to school on Wednesdays wearing his sports gear – problem solved and Mark's attendance went up.

In Mandy and Lesley's office you can close the door, have a cup of tea, discuss an issue, a family concern, seek advice, or simply vent. In support of the Netherfield students, Mandy and Lesley liaise with the social work and health care support systems, including school nurses, local doctors, counselling services, and holistic therapists.

Establishing these relationships as part of the project of teaching and learning has had a wide and powerful influence on the achievement of Netherfield's students. A home-school liaison officer will be present at every progress review meeting, if issues are identified with the progress of a student, the intervention will be in cooperation with the liaison officer to ensure that it is researched in conjunction with home circumstances. Mandy and Lesley also manage attendance records, and again will liaise with the teaching staff on any issues concerning attendance. They begin an inquiry into attendance of a child if it drops below 94%, based on the school's assertion that anything less than a 94% attendance rate has a knock-on affect on curricular learning. In broad terms, this active relationship helps develop a common attitude to school within the family system that is positive and engaged; it helps create a cohesive support and structure around a child's learning goals. Transparent expectations are communicated across home and school and where needed, additional school resources are created for use at home.

Private and community partners

Looking beyond the family and into the community opens up another level of possibility for the school to expand the web of support and pathways of opportunity around each child. This support comes in many ways, both infusing additional funding (through sponsorship or social responsibility funding) into the school to enable enhanced provision such as new materials, trips, and special events, as well as contributing expertise through the direct involvement of members of a certain sectors or industry. Direct and hands-on collaborations, if only for an assembly visit, adds a connection with, and a perspective on, the external sector and professionals working with knowledge that the children are encountering in their classrooms. It makes learning immediately relevant.

An outcome of this community interaction is the sense of the school being a hub of activity, indeed, it is often said that 'The school is like a community centre' (Mandy, home-school liaison officer). One of the community governors, Peter Esswood corroborates that, 'the school has become the focal point of this community'. At Netherfield Primary, some of the community partners at the time of this writing include restaurants, garages, and banks. Frankie and Benny's support with pizza making sessions for the children – children learn how to make them, and of course then get to eat them afterwards. Frankie and Benny's is also used as a reward trip event for reading or integrity rewards. Toby Carvery is another restaurant that has a similar relationship with the school, groups of children go to take a cooking lesson and eat a meal. The restaurants also donate prizes for school raffles, treasure hunts, and other special events. The Paul Smith Garage give the school favourable rates for servicing their mini bus; Lloyds Bank send in staff to read with the children; the Rotary Club likewise have been visiting the school regularly to read with children for the past 5 years. Finally, the two local care homes in the area, Bailey Court and Stoke Lane Nursing Home are important community partnerships that the school maintains. Karen Charles, the school business manager adds, 'the children go in to sing at Christmas time and we invite the residents in to school for afternoon teas during the year. The children benefit so much from the interaction with these older people; many of them don't have grandparents living close by'.

In the community, partnerships exist with local shops and cafes. In particular, shops and café staff are invited to take note of positive, empathetic, generous, or thoughtful attitudes or actions shown by Netherfield Primary students in their presence and award those students with 'Integrity Merits'. These small laminated cards are submitted by the students to the school and every year a group of students achieve 'Integrity Awards', the prize of which is a trip to an annually decided location. These are not merely day trips to a local attraction, these are international trips to places children have never been to before, for many, these trips are the first time students have left the region. Previous Integrity Award trips have included scuba diving in Egypt, climbing the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Skiing in Italy, and racing a car around the Silverstone Racetrack. Local businesses, grants, and a certain amount of discretionary budget are used to fund this annual commitment to the students.

Public sector partners

Netherfield Primary is in active partnership with the multiple government sectors that work along side one another in the interest of children and learning. The Department of Education not only mandates curriculum, and requirements for attainment; it is responsible for the inspection and surveillance of all schools under their jurisdiction. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) is a governmental body that decides the acceptability and quality of the education provision of schools through school visits and school document analysis. Netherfield's leadership endeavour to maintain a strong and positive relationship with the Department of Education, through detailed and on going reporting of all activities, progress, and evaluation of students, through active correspondence with Ofsted officials, and a willingness to share and seek support from them, rather than a more common tendency to hide from or fear inspection. The local authority, as you will see in the following chapter, is responsible for the overall financial accounting and management of the school. In addition the local authority facilitates and oversees school-to-school support and resource distribution in the area including student placement to, and exclusion from, local schools.

Health and Social care are essential partners of the school and there are many families in Netherfield that draw on the support of multiple health and social care agencies. Due to the high need of the school population

and the integrated approach to the care and education of children that drives Netherfield Primary's practice, a large part of the home school liaison officers' role is in managing the multiple sources of care required by some children. In many cases, Mandy or Lesley will submit a request for assessment for support (Early help assessment forms, or EHAF) to bring agencies together. In all cases, Mandy or Lesley will attend 'Team around the child' meetings along with the child's teacher or TA.

A final essential partnership that must be mentioned is the school's partnership with third level education, teacher education, and in this case, Nottingham Trent University in particular. In order for the work of Netherfield Primary to be sustainable, the school has taken an active role in supporting both initial teacher training (ITT) and career professional development (CPD) in the area. This work has evolved from receiving student teachers for practicums in their classrooms, to becoming established in the past year as a Teaching School. This status carries with it additional government funding in order to develop training modules, host and manage the training of new teachers, carry out research of practice, and contribute to the growing role of schools in teacher education. At the time of the writing of this book, Netherfield Primary is the lead school of the Netherfield ecl Teaching School Alliance. This brings us to the partnership at the heart of this narrative, between the school and the ecl foundation. Our relationship with Netherfield, like many others, has enriched the foundation's practices, opportunities for research, and network of influence. ecl in the school has provided professional development work, consulting and professional support, funding, and finally the production of this book.

The common denominator among all of the partnerships described above is that they exist with the primary objective of supporting the children. In this way, the school resembles a community centre in as far as communities specifically serve



children. Surveying the various implications on the teaching and learning in the school, teachers, TA's, non-teaching staff, parents and governors agreed that the active and wide ranging engagement with partnerships around the school provides the students with more relevant and consistent learning opportunities (in working with home, social, and health care); opportunities to do things that expand their horizons (in working with community partners); enrich curriculum; and even engage in things that are extraordinary. Working with research and trainee teachers in third level education supports the sustainability of this educational model.

Looking up, looking on

Family literacies, school and family relations, and the impacts of parental education and involvement have received significant attention in empirical educational research, and conclusively the correlation between parental engagement and student learning is evidenced. From pregnancy through to a student's secondary education, research has shown that parental education, health, well-being, and engagement with their children's school is indicative of student attainment.² Less research however has been done to look at community engagements and partnerships in relation to student well-being and attainment. In this regard we lean on systemic principles of interconnectivity and a perspective on the whole child in relation to the multiple systems that affect, and are affected by, a child's life.

A core part of the ecl foundation's vision is to acknowledge and account for the multiple sectors that contribute to, and depend upon, the care and education of children and young people. The education system too often works separately from the many other systems that share some common goals: social care, health care, sporting and recreation, arts, media and culture, business and industry. With vulnerable communities, or children who have little access to services beyond public health and education, the school space is an important opportunity for intersectoral cohesion; for diverse sectors of society to come together under the safe guarding and pedagogical guidance of the school structure, and connect, contribute, learn from, and support the children and young people that will ultimately serve or be served by these sectors. Netherfield Primary's model, integrating social and health services (coordinated by home-school liaison officers), corporate, community, and family partners in the interest of the child, is a living example of a 'whole system approach' to education.



Chapter 8

Understanding the business of school

The business and financial management of schools is perhaps the least common area of knowledge, discussion, training, and scholarship in education. We observed from the outset of our research however that the innovation and ethos of this school inevitably required at least the buy-in, if not leadership, of the school's business manager in order to make possible the environment, the adult-to-child ratio, the calendar of events, and so on, that were clearly evident in the school. With this early interest, we included an enquiry into the business management of the school as a key component of our research. The power and insight afforded by this enquiry has been substantial, especially to those of us who had been preoccupied with the energy of classroom practice, the necessity of the Nurture rooms, and with the colour of community engagement. We are reminded that none of that is possible without a business model, and what's more, this process of enquiry has allowed us to understand it!

We begin this chapter with an overview of educational funding across the EU. And from here, zoom into Netherfield Primary and Pre-School. A business model brings together several broad areas of school activity: school funding, the management of human resources, teaching and learning which themselves cover the essential areas of curriculum, assessment and teaching methods. This chapter is an exploration into these various areas of school activity in terms of finance and business management, which are then integrated into a business model that makes explicit the relationships between school ethos, practice, and finance.

Education Funding across the EU

Across the EU-27¹ some 5% of GDP is invested in education. Spending by public educational institutions falls into two main categories – current expenditure and capital expenditure. Current expenditure includes wages and costs relating to staff, maintenance of buildings, purchasing of educational materials and operational resources (daily costs). Capital expenditure relates to expenditure on assets that last longer than one year, for example construction, renovation, and on new or replacement equipment. Current expenditure represents more than 84% of total expenditure by public institutions in all countries. Within this, spending on staff overshadows all the other categories of expenditure representing some 70 % of annual education expenditure across the EU- 27.

There is great variety across Europe with respect to funding systems (how the money is allocated). These systems have developed over many decades to meet the changing priorities of education systems, the needs of individuals, wider society and the economy. In more than a third of countries, the central/top level ministries transfer resources for teaching staff directly to schools (Ireland, Spain, Croatia, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Portugal and Slovenia), or pay teachers' salaries directly (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Malta and Liechtenstein). In the remaining countries, the top level ministries share the responsibility for transferring funds and/or paying staff with intermediate authorities.² For example in the UK, the top level (government) transfers a lump sum to the intermediate level (local authority), which is intended to fund a range of public services, not only education. In addition, in most countries, intermediate authorities also contribute to school financing from their own resources.

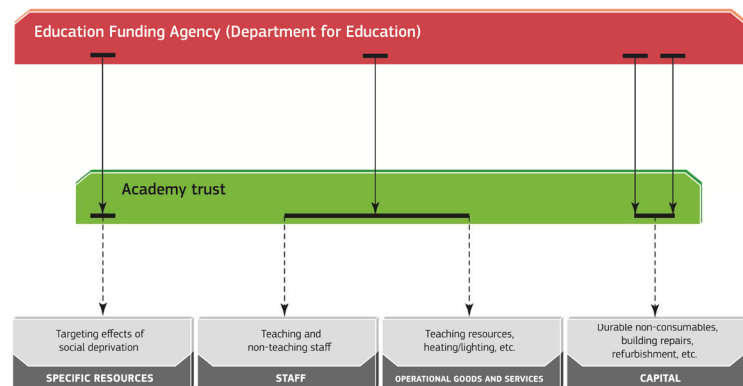
In the UK, and therefore the context for Netherfield Primary, there is no single budget for education. Broadly speaking, the funding for early years and school provision comes from the Department for Education, while the public funding for higher and further education comes from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). The average spend per primary school student is and €5,316 and per secondary school student €6,129 (average across the EU). At the local level, local authorities are free to add to funds received from local taxation to their schools and early childhood education budgets. Schools are also free to raise their own funds.

As with the majority of European countries, in the UK, the level of resources for teaching staff is established by way of a funding formula. In England, each local authority chooses from a centrally established list of factors to develop its own formula for allocating revenue funding (covering staff and operational resources) to schools. Two factors are mandatory – a basic per pupil entitlement and a deprivation factor. To address equity issues in the current funding system, a new national funding formula that all local authorities will have to use will be introduced in 2015. At the time of the writing of this book, 'Pupil Premium' payments provide schools with extra funds for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In the 2013-2014 financial year, the Pupil Premium payment was GBP 900 per child. The Premium is paid for each child who is or has been eligible for free school meals in the last six years, and 'looked after' children (children in the care of the local authority).

Business Management at Netherfield Primary and Pre-School

In the UK, the fiscal responsibility for schools is country (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) and school status dependent. In England there are 2 models. Academies receive their funding directly from the Department for Education (see fig. 8.1 below) and enjoy freedoms related to organisation and the curriculum. Academies include free schools, university technical colleges, and studio schools. Maintained schools are funded via the local authority (fig. 8.2) and include community schools, foundation schools, trust schools, voluntary controlled and aided schools. Only the pupil premium funding (intended for the alleviation of social deprivation) is transferred directly to schools or via the Local Authority (LA) who must pass it on in its entirety to the school.

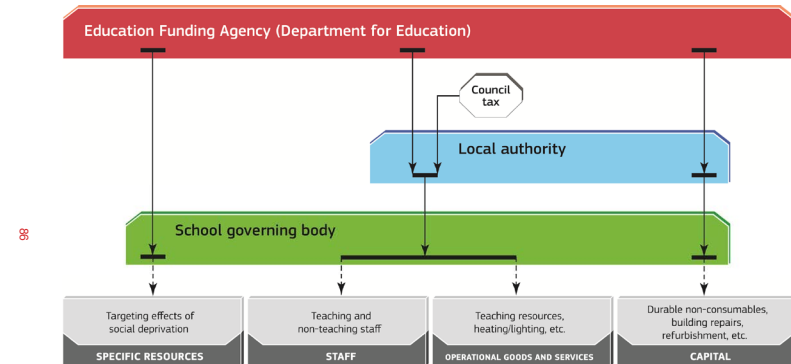
UNITED KINGDOM – ENGLAND Academies (primary and general secondary education)



Academies are publicly-funded independent schools which have individual funding arrangements directly with the Secretary of State and enjoy freedoms relating to organisation and the curriculum. Academies include free schools, university technical colleges and studio schools. The flows in this figure represent the mechanisms for funding pre-16 education (General Annual Grant, Pupil Premium, Devolved Capital Funding and the Academies Capital Maintenance Fund) and post-16 education (the 16-19 funding formula, the project development fund, college capital investment fund and targeted capital allocations). Academies are responsible for managing their own recurrent funds (General Annual Grant – GAG). There are no set amounts which have to be spent on the base categories. The subcategories indicated represent the kinds of goods and services schools may choose to spend this funding on but it is not exhaustive. Regarding capital expenditure, the diagram focuses on on-going funding allocations (devolved capital funding – DCF) and the Academies Capital Maintenance Fund (ACMF). Academies may also access other funding to fulfil the capital requirement for providing new pupil places in new or expanded schools.

Place holder: Figure 8.1: Academy School Funding Model³

UNITED KINGDOM – ENGLAND Maintained schools (primary and general secondary education)



Maintained schools are those that are funded via the local authority and include different legal categories, such as community schools, foundation schools, trust schools, voluntary controlled and voluntary aided schools. The flows in this figure represent the mechanisms for funding pre-16 education (the Dedicated Schools Grant, Pupil Premium, Devolved Capital Funding, and, depending on the category of school, either Local Authority Capital Maintenance or Local Authority Coordinated Voluntary Aided Programmes) and post-16 education (the 16-19 funding formula, Devolved Capital Funding, and, depending on the category of school, either Local Authority Capital Maintenance or Local Authority Coordinated Voluntary Aided Programmes). Maintained schools are responsible for managing their own recurrent funds (individual school budget share of the Dedicated Schools Grant). There are no set amounts which have to be spent on the base categories. The subcategories indicated represent the kinds of goods and services schools may choose to spend this funding on but are not exhaustive. Pupil Premium funds (which should be used to target the effects of social deprivation) are shown as directly transferred by the Education Funding Agency to schools. However, they are in fact distributed to schools via the local authority who must pass it on in its entirety. Regarding capital expenditure, the diagram focuses on on-going funding allocation (devolved capital funding and maintenance funding). In addition, the Education Funding Agency (EFA) may transfer a Basic Need Allocation to LAs to support the capital requirement for providing new pupil places in new or expanded maintained schools.

Place holder: Figure 8.2: Maintained School Funding Model⁴

Netherfield Primary belongs to the category of maintained schools with fiscal responsibility lying with the local authority, although the school has autonomy over how the money is spent. The school's business manager works with the headteacher and senior leadership team (using a budget planning tool provided by the LA) to develop the school budget. At the start of the budgeting process, staff bid on behalf of their department/curriculum – for a budget that falls into 3 areas:

- Essential costs - including such things as compasses for teaching Mathematics
- SIPD/Strategic - specific funding for work aligned to the school's strategic improvement plan, for example costs associated with investment in software to improve the link between IT and mathematics
- 'Weird & Wacky' - requests that go above and beyond direct department or curriculum requirements. Here is where requests have been made (and funds raised) for school-wide projects such as 'Look Deeper' or 'Whole New World'⁵

The staff have negotiating power over section b: how the strategy of the school translates into their particular subject areas, how they propose to

meet those needs and the funding needs associated. The staff are also encouraged to come up with, and request funding for, ideas that go beyond their basic curriculum. Here is where seeds have been planted for projects such as, 'Whole new world', 'Look even deeper' and 'Challenge to Achieve'.

Once everything has been inputted, the business manager and headteacher work out a fair allocation. A robust budget is then sent to the Finance & General Purpose (F&GP) Committee of the Governors. Governors are updated each term during the F&GP committee meetings during which the business manager presents and leads the discussion. Quarterly report summaries are also sent to parents. The accounts are reconciled with the LA on a monthly basis and at the end of year. The budgeting process is described by the business manager as, 'fluid and flexible' with possibilities throughout the year for staff to come forward with ideas to which the response is usually, 'yes and how?'

Income generation and in particular, its allocation, closely reflect the ethos of the school. Its total income is dependent not only on the number of children on roll but the number entitled to free school meals and the number requiring additional SEN (Social emotional needs) support. The LA provides additional funding for HLN (higher level needs) and AFN (additional family needs), reflecting the school's commitment to be authentically inclusive and to nurture the potential of all.

Funding

The Department of Education (via the LA) use a funding formula dependent on number of pupils on role and Pupil Premium (% of pupils eligible for free school meals). In addition Netherfield raises funds by 'exporting' its expertise to other schools in the form of professional development provisions. For example, the 'Nurture' package has been developed into an intensive training and toolkit; the 'Assessment' package is offered as a half-day training; there is a Reading Recovery package. The school bids for Lottery or Randstad awards to fund its 'weird & wacky' projects. Income comes in through SERCO (as the Head carries out Ofsted inspections as a team Inspector) and private donations. The school's budget is further extended through a huge pool of volunteers, as discussed in the previous chapter: parents, grandparents, former teachers, local business people. Children too

are encouraged to raise money for school projects and local charity. In the 2014/15 school year, additional fundraising amounted to 7% of the school budget. This reflects Netherfield Primary's intention to involve the whole community, to create rich learning environments for the students, and to stimulate agency and belief in the children to reach beyond the school walls.

Netherfield's ethos is most obviously reflected in the design of its allocation of funds, and this is highlighted by the trend in fund allocation since Sharon's leadership began. Table 8.3 below shows an excerpt of these trends. The outstanding nurture provision is supported by the increase in teaching assistants; the outstanding teaching practice is underpinned by additional funding allocated to CPD and in the reduction in 'supply' and agency teachers. Fund allocation, business management, as well as a level of staff engagement and skill allows Netherfield Primary, to a large extent, to provide its own supply staff when required. There is a sufficiently large pool of teachers and TA's to be able to cover for each other. This has obvious benefits for the children: teachers know the children, the curriculum, and the school. The enhanced curriculum and nurture provision is funded through allocation to learning resources and external professional providers (in areas such as Music, Drama, Film, Dance, sports, and reward trips).

Fund allocation main changes	2009	2015
Pupil: Teaching Assistant ratio	27.2	17.1
CPD as % of budget	0.8%	1.7% (peaking at 2.4% in 2011/12)
Bought in professional services	1.5%	4.3%
Learning Resources	1.5%	4.3%
Supply teachers % of budget	2.6%	0.8%
Agency Supply teachers % of budget	3.5%	1.8%

Table 8.3: Budget allocation then (2009), and now (2015): how the allocation of funding makes the school ethos possible

A school Governor, when asked about the high number of TA's, responded, 'they are there for the children. The teaching staff are great at teaching, but often need another adult to help clarify the message. The high % of TA's at Netherfield reflects the high % of SEMH (Social emotional and mental health needs) children. The extra support enables these children to stay in mainstream. Otherwise they would be disruptive, to themselves and other children. Netherfield turns this on its head – children have much to offer, they can be supportive of each other, BUT need to have the environment in place in order to be able to do this – for this the TA's are pivotal The % allocated to TA's reflects the ethos of the school – being able to surround the child with care, having another adult supporting the child'.

Business leadership

The headteacher works closely with the Business Manager to ensure adequate funding for priority areas. The ethos of the school and its approach to teaching and learning inform these decisions, from the high ratio of adults to children to the 'weird & wacky' fund. Equally important is the space and belief given by the headteacher to others, in this case, the current business manager, Karen Charles. In discussing her role in the school, Karen recounted: 'Dreaming and believing is not something I did until Sharon became head of Netherfield. From the very beginning she encouraged me (us) to "Think-Believe-Dream-Dare" The shift from thinking of myself as office manager, dealing with routine office tasks, to someone who could bring in her thoughts and ideas was breath-taking. It was liberating and at times scary – "she trusts me with the budget!" It was a huge difference to how we worked in the past where for the most part I heard, "you can't do that"'.

Business instinct

The budget at Netherfield Primary is as flexible as the leadership can manage. Decisions made in September may not hold relevance in January, depending on the needs and circumstances of the children. An opportunity might present itself in March that was inconceivable in October. In the words of the business manager: 'We budget flexibly, reacting to the needs of the children. Budget has to be flexible; it has to be responsive to the needs, whilst ensuring long-term stability. For example Sharon can say

that there are children struggling and that we need additional support – together we look at how we can shift the money around in order to enable this or look for funding from external sources, i.e., bid-writing'.

Business expertise

Carrying the business model and its manifestation in the school requires more than a headteacher. Karen, the Business Manager is highly professional with extensive experience including 15 years in Netherfield Primary. In her position at Netherfield, she is able to incorporate all of her financial skills and experience, but also build on them with the on going professional development of working in a school in which every adult is required to understand and emulate an ethos of love, support, positivity, and growth. This ethos is unavoidably carried into the day-to-day deskwork of business management. Furthermore, through the ethos and culture of the school, Karen knows well the community of children and adults that the school serves, most of them by name, she interacts with them on a day to day basis and it makes up part of her expertise. As a result, the financial figures represent tangible obstacles or opportunities with implications that can be clearly felt.

Key Governors including an F&GP committee contribute to the body of expertise carrying the business management of the school. One committee member speaks of the clarity and transparency of the business manager and school leadership team: 'I've been a teacher and a head. Karen is excellent at communicating; it's one of the strengths of this team. They know where they are going, know what they need to invest in, and if there are changes, they communicate to us. There is trust based on transparency'.

'Karen welcomes us to the meetings. She allows us to settle inviting questions and contributions. This welcome begins at the front door, 'Hello Kay!' The only things that I miss are the biscuits. Next time I will bring some'.

The challenge of innovating with the business model

As we said at the outset of this chapter, the financial and business lens is a lens that the vast majority of people in education don't have. So communicating with and engaging the school community is a challenge that the Business Manager often faces. Investing three days in the preparation of the financial data for board meetings results in a board of governors with great trust in her work. But, she states, 'I would love more enquiry and questions'. Of course, this would require a level of understanding and engagement not commonly found even on the governing levels of education. A governor relates: 'I understand that school budgets are hard – they are often met by a glazed look. There are few of us who do understand'. And even those who do understand the educational streams of the budget, often don't know their way around the more entrepreneurial fund raising streams: 'I don't know much about this. I know that key staff have expertise and this is brought to other schools. And I can see how this stimulates entrepreneurial spirit. But my knowledge and understanding is of the educational streams of the budget, where the money is coming from and where it is being spent'. Being a financial and business manager in an education (or, let's face it, in many public or not-for-profit organisations) is to be working with colleagues whose eyes glaze over at the sight of your budget sheets. This position in an organization or school is privileged, valued, but often isolated.

Collaborating with us on this research, Karen, in her role as Business Manager, was given cause to pause, to reflect, to articulate, and to analyse her work in a way that had otherwise been entirely absent from her professional life. For a teacher, on the other hand, these practices can happen on a day-to-day basis (albeit, to very varying degrees). The impact of this depth of engagement with her work was powerful. Through our work together, we explored and realized the broad scope of the practice of business management at the school. Additionally, we gained a perspective on the relationship between the financial structures of the school and its ethos. We discuss these findings in more detail below. In the context of the broader research project within the school, attending to the financial and business aspects of the school was hugely insightful, not only in terms of our research questions, but also for the resulting positive recognition that resulted. Karen shares (with tears in her eyes), 'To see this recognized. It makes me feel proud to see the huge impact that the business model has on facilitating how our school is'.

Looking deeper, co-creating with ecl

In order to fully understand the process and development of the business model and management of Netherfield Primary, we had to analyse not only current budgets, but previous ones. Looking at isolated years over the past decade caused more questions than answers and so a more thorough historical analysis was called for. An historical analysis of school budgets, as you can imagine, is largely at odds with the on-going and heavy load of day-to-day demands on the school Business Manager. Karen confesses: 'there is little space in my head to do some real thinking, little time to reflect. We (Netherfield) do and then move on to the next thing. Taking part in the research for this book was a challenge, a good one. It was the starting point. It made me think about the business model thoroughly and properly'. Through an extensive process of looking back, analysing, and reflecting, we investigated the parameters of Netherfield's business model; the key changes between 2009 and 2014/15 (the period in which the school moved from 'special measures' to 'outstanding'); the visibility and accessibility of the model to the various stakeholders; and the features that are unique to this school.

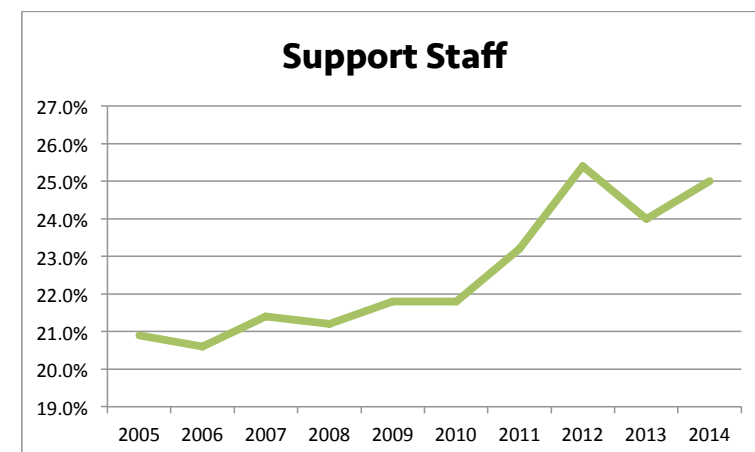


Figure 8.4: Netherfield Primary and Pre-School Budget, Expenditure on Support Staff as a Percentage of Revenue Income over time period 2005-2015

The business canvas model

The business canvas model⁶ enables you to see at a glance what a business is about: how it creates value (value proposition); the key activities, partners and resources needed to create this; the customer segments (for whom?); the relationships and channels (how do you reach these people?) and ultimately: what does this cost and how does one make money?

It may seem a little odd applying this in an education setting and indeed, to our knowledge, it is not commonly seen within the education system. But we found it enormously helpful to enquire into the ways in which the ethos of the school informed the actions taken, including the allocation of funding (see figures 8.5 – 8.7 below).

Figure 8.5: Generic business canvas model

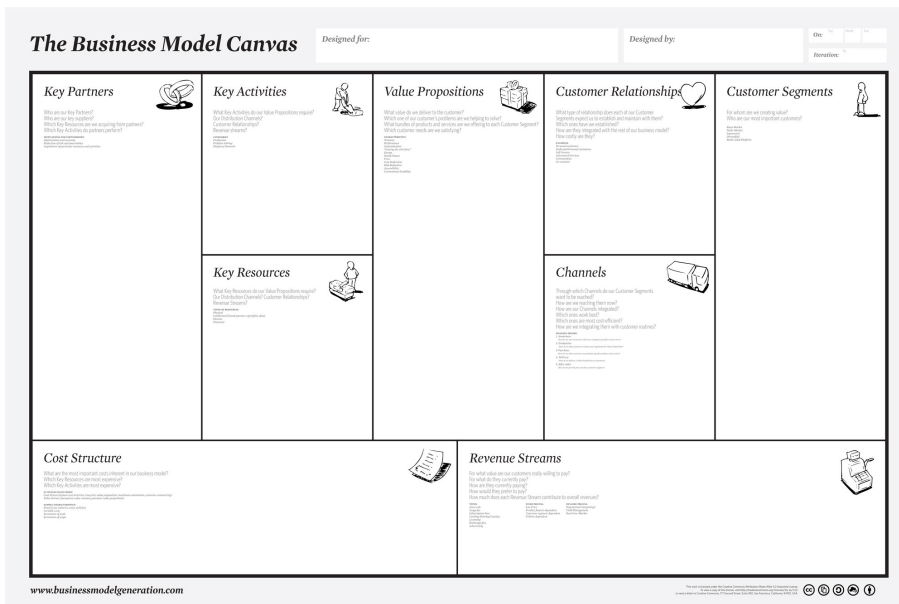


Figure 8.6: The School's Business Canvas Model: mapping the relationship between ethos; key activities, partnerships and resources; the for whom (customer relationships and segments) and how (channels); against the cost structure, revenue streams and allocation of funding to support school ethos.

NETHERFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL BUSINESS MODEL - 2014

Key Partners <i>Who do we need on board so that we can focus on Key Activities?</i>	Key Activities <i>Uniquely strategic things we do</i>	Value Propositions <i>What's compelling about our school? Why do children/parents want to come to Netherfield?</i>	Customer Relationships <i>How do we interact with our customer through their 'journey'?</i>	Customer Segments <i>Who are our customers?</i>
<p>Whole Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff Volunteers – reading/after school clubs IMT – Instrumental Music Tuition School Swimming; Forest Football Club; Notts County, Gillespie Dance, Nottingham Ice Stadium Lesley Beal – Holistic Therapist Central College – TA Students/Apprentices ecf foundation Nottingham Trent University – ITT Local Authority Enhanced Provision DSO – Catering Quality Mark <p>Whole System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents Governors Community e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Business community (e.g. Bikes donation) Retired Netherfield staff volunteers Local Authority – provision of legal, payroll, Health & Safety, HR expertise Gedling Family of Schools Kathy Hooper, School Improvement Partner We R Here ecf foundation Gedling Borough Councillors Adult Education Providers Media – Nottingham Post, Radio Nottingham/Trent Save the Children – FAST project DSO – Cleaning Dept Atom IT – IT services 	<p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thorough knowledge and mastery of subjects is expected of the staff. CPD 'is core to the ethos of the school' (Quality Mark walk around). Recruitment..... Students and inexperienced staff receive rigorous in-house training. (Reduces the need for supply teachers – from 2.6% of budget in 2009 to 0.8% in 2014. Reduces the need of Agency Supply teachers – from 3.5% of budget in 2009 to 1.6% in 2014) Teaching School status facilitates training for staff who need support <p>Whole Child Teaching Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative Learning Journey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equipping students to become confident co-creators of their future Engage the 'whole child' Each classroom has a 'Learning Lab' Each classroom has a retreat area where children can go if they need a quiet space to manage emotions Ensure safe container for creative journey (safeguarding policy) SEAL elements are integrated into curriculum with specific learning skills attended to in 6 ½ term blocks of work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding others; Work hard & concentrate; Push yourself to improve; Try new things; Don't give up; Imagine your Future Well-designed curriculum. School ethos is that, 'In a class of 25 children there are 25 Individuals who each have a preferred way of learning!' (Quality Mark report) Enriched holistic, whole school extras such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look Deeper Egstravaganza Whole New World Flight of Dreams Video Authentic teaching and learning experiences cross boundaries to be used in different settings by the children e.g. 'thinking outside of the box', a SEAL skill is applied by a child struggling with maths, 'I'm thinking outside the box – I've got to change the way I'm doing this' (SEAL report) Team teach Learning community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-created lesson plans Frequent observation & monitoring, Learning walks, both internal & external (Quality mark) and Book Scrutiny Deep forensic Assessment of effectiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key staff are Ofsted trained inspectors Every child given ambitious targets to achieve between 4 and 6 APS Close monitoring of pupil progress: based on personal, social, emotional and academic goals Data on pupil progress and attainment is analysed every 6 weeks. Intervention programmes if problems such as: Reading recovery; 1st Class Maths; i Can Maths Holistic approach to learning, looking after the emotional wellbeing of the child first and foremost Enhanced Nurture Provision (Groups) Integrity Awards Structure – 	<p>Ethos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethos is at the heart of Netherfield. Everything that the school does is informed or catalysed by its ethos Every child can flourish and live their dreams – regardless of race, gender or income. Nurturing the potential of All, striving to be the best we can Every child deserves an 'outstanding' education (including those who have been previously excluded) We are an Ofsted outstanding school We are a Learning community, where everyone (child, teacher, parent) is encouraged and committed to learn, improve and succeed Everyone is a Leader Outstanding practice surrounds each child with firm love Thrilled when a child achieves a personal- social- emotional or academic goal. We are here to help children develop a lifelong love of learning <p>Non-negotiables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outstanding teaching practice & teachers who reach for the stars and expect the best Whole system – Parents & carers fully included Whole child – Rich holistic, experiential curriculum that goes beyond cognitive Holistic approach to learning, looking after the emotional wellbeing of the child first and foremost Outstanding SEN/SEMH Authentically inclusive school (actively accepts children previously excluded) Safeguarding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome and Immediate support available from Reception staff 'Open door' policy – Headteacher and teachers Home- liaison staff roles enable a tight link between staff, parents and children. Relationships of trust and mutual respect with parents, carers and children – earned over time Hand over time teacher to parent (10 minutes available with key staff each day) Parents as reading partners FAST project PATH shared vision creation Caring for the child, family – advice, therapists, We R Here counselling Attention to Safeguarding ensures safety of Children and parents Learning journals taken home on a ½ term basis allowing family to share learning journey of their children Displays outside each classroom make visible the conditions for learning and the learning going on inside – (equipping parents with information to enable them to engage with staff) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance Chart of academic levels and age-related expectations Advise on how to 'praise' Children's photos Inspirational Quotes – ethos is visible everywhere in the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and parents of Netherfield, Carlton and Colwick. Currently 482 pupils on roll aged from 2-11 System (family/community) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ward of Netherfield and Colwick lies within the 2nd most deprived quintile in the East Midlands. The deprivation indicator of 0.80 is almost four times the national average and significantly above the LA average at 0.30. A significant number of the population of Netherfield are aged between 25 and 45 years, with a high number of children under the age of 4 years, indicating a large number of young families and young people. Synthetic estates show high levels of binge drinking, smoking and domestic violence and poor diet. Predominant ethnic group is White British and we have relatively small numbers of ethnic minority pupils (15.6%) Children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School is larger than average and has a higher than average proportion of pupils known to be entitled to free school meals (Currently 35%), Pupil Premium is 47.7% (Ever 6 FSM). Of our 481 pupils currently on roll, 104 are on the SEND register – 22%. Our data shows that the vast majority of children entering school at age 5- 4 are below Age Related Expectation (ARE) in all areas; a large proportion are entering the setting either significantly or exceptionally below. This means that they are already working a year or more below expectations, ie functioning at around the level of a two year old Many of those joining the school at times other than the main intake periods are managed moves. Last year there were 7 managed moves and these relate to children who were at risk of permanent exclusion due to their SEMH.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly, termly, annual awards Free Breakfast Club Comprehensive after school club offer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Netherfield University; Music, Choir, Cheerleading, Strictly dancing Safeguarding (policy) <p>Whole System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome and immediate support available from Reception staff Welcoming environment – bright, warm, stimulating, clean, positive, happy energy PATH Shared Vision 'Reach for the Stars' at the beginning of each school year includes all school stakeholders Challenge to Achieve - outreach work Parent and family education and engagement e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Save the Children – FAST project School farm (including Dads) Employment and training advice service Training of parents to become 'Teachers of Reading' Parents (private) access to reading help Home-liaison staff roles enable a tight link between staff, parents and children. Difficulties are signalled quickly and dealt with tactfully (with decades of experience Lesley & Mandy know the families well and have relationships of trust and mutual respect) SEAL interventions are recorded, reflected on and learned from Governors spend time in their focus area during 'Link Week' each ½ term – present their findings at next board meeting <p>Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assesses opportunity and if it enhances the lives of the children and families in Netherfield it is integrated into the school provision. Leadership actively seeks fresh sources of funding Models 'can do' <p>Key Resources</p> <p>What unique strategic assets must we have to compete?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outstanding Principal Strong leadership team (leadership distributed) Excellent, committed teachers Excellent, committed TAs Parent volunteers Community volunteers Site management team/catering Good standard of accommodation Excellent admin support Strong finance planning and management Clear business model 	
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<p>Channels</p> <p>How are the propositions promoted, sold and delivered?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reputation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal (teacher of the year etc.) Ofsted outstanding Community school in heart of locality Local Authority recommendation Family of schools, SEMH needs Proud Staff, Proud Parents needs Proud children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I am proud to be a pupil of Netherfield' Children actively interviewing the older members of the community (having been told that they had a negative perception of the children) within SEAL programme block 'understanding others' Website Communications, letters, phone calls Nottingham Post Awards - Pride of Britain, Randstad Award, Nurture Gold Award, Reading Recovery, Business Awards, etc. Challenge to Achieve: trainings; presentations. Staff have created and delivered bespoke learning packages that over 40 schools have experienced in the last 12 months (TSCH application) (Future) Teaching Alliance with ed: activities Website 	
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Cost Structure Key drivers and changes period 2009 – 2015	2009	2015	Revenue Streams How does the school earn revenue
Pupils on Role or which % Ism	384 31.1%	479 33.4%	DFE Block funding formula (main school budget, pupil premium)
of which % sen/SEMH	21.9%	21.7%	Local Authority: SEN funding; HLN (higher level needs); AFN (additional family need, through Cedling Family of Schools budget)
Teachers FTEs	19	20.7	DFE/LA
Pupil: Teacher ratio	20.2	23.1	Main budget; Pupil premium
Teachers as % of budget	46.5%	39.9%	
Teaching Assistants FTEs	14.1	28	DFE/LA
Enhanced nurture provision			Main budget; pupil premium ; CZA
Pupil:TA ratio	27.2	17.1	
Support staff % of budget	21.3%	25%	
Supply teachers % of budget	2.6%	0.8%	
Agency supply teachers % of budget	3.5%	1.8%	
CPD as % of budget	0.8%	1.7%	DFE/LA
Expensive teachers & teaching practice curriculum & Nurture	2.4%	4.2%	DFE/LA
Extra-curricular activities	?	80	Challenge to Achieve (7% of income in 2014/15, includes Robin Hood)
Enhanced curriculum			PATH facilitation; Team Teach training; Nurture Training; Assessment Training; Early Years Training; Literacy/Reading Recovery Training; Conference speaking
Projects			SERCO – S Gray inspection income
Enhanced curriculum			Fundraising through bid writing and awards; school events; Photograph commission; Recycling income; Donations councillors, companies, individuals
			Purchasing expertise
			Best value; negotiation; careful purchasing; wise use of funds

This space is for you...

Through the process of our research together, the model was populated, enquired into and shared with the governors. We considered the business model canvas as a way to more deeply enquire into interventions that underpin the school's ethos. For example the model could link ethos ('Value Proposition') and educational purpose ('Customer segments') with financial data such as revenue streams and cost structures, and with the practices of it ('Key Activities', 'Key Partners'). The model allowed us to place the ethos of the school at its centre and to see that the ecl approach of working with the whole child and the family and community systems around each child, truly did sit at the heart of the 'business of this school'. It made visible the integral nature of the Nurture program and approach. It made visible the words of the SEAL report, 'Netherfield have personalised SEAL making it entirely relevant to them and making sure it stays current and consistent through their living approach of it'.

Sharing the model with school leadership and governors further clarified the impact of the approach. The model connected and made visible the thing that is so primary in each person's mind: the child, and the subject to which they need, essentially, to engage with: the budget. One governor, a former Headteacher shared: 'speaking from my own experience, I would have loved to have this 'model' available to me. I want this to be shared. The most crucial thing is 'love', something which is not spoken about in education, it is a crucial part of why this [school] is so successful. Love and touch – you can't quantify that. But it's there! I would like to see this continue and spread, share the model. If it could spread to other places and especially into government; to look at the whole child, within its whole system – not just our current limited view on attainment. This model could really help open up this dialogue'.

Looking up, looking on

Bigger picture thinking about the school business model – including the conceptual and empirical knowledge about business and finance – opens a fresh way of seeing things, a new perspective. A shared language, understanding and ownership around this can facilitate engagement with all stakeholders (even those without a financial background); and generate ownership and further belonging and release entrepreneurial creative energy. A pictorial representation of the business of school – the business model canvas – supports this. Feeling included in the business of school

contributes to a key characteristic of the systemic work of ecl – belonging. For business managers to be able to take their place of leadership in this work, rather than be seen simply as number crunching or holding purse strings, is empowering and important.

Just as this process and outcome worked in Netherfield Primary, so it could work, not only in other schools, but also at the level of local authorities and government. Mapping out the relationships between budgets and the child in terms of education, family support, care (social, health), and community investment, for example, can reveal a multi-system, child-centred perspective on the impacts of the myriad budgetary decisions effecting the education, care, and prospects of our children. It enables, even the most discriminating task that is money management, to align with a whole-child and ecl approach.



Chapter 9

Leadership: the dance and the quality of holding

This image represents one of the corner stones of the ethos of Netherfield Primary and Pre-School. Everyone in this system matters. Not only do they matter; they have an important impact on what happens and what is possible in this school. Whether you are the deputy head, the literacy lead, a parent volunteer, a janitor, or a student, you are considered, and expected to be a leader in your work and your engagement with the learning of the school. Within our time and research with this school, we have found this to be true, in that every member of the school lives the ethos and the objectives of the school. Every member of the school speaks a similar language of positive, straightforward, and inclusive care and education with the needs and benefit of the children always at the very heart. Every member of the school seems to understand their role in that project and carry it out with a sense of purpose and joy that is captivating.

Before drawing you into a sense of some sort of utopia, or losing you to disbelief, I will promptly now add that despite this shared leadership and ownership of the project of education at Netherfield Primary, this chapter on leadership is presented through the words of Sharon, the headteacher until 2015. This needed to be so. Although the ethos that Sharon introduced and led in Netherfield

is embraced and carried by everyone there to the best of their abilities, it is Sharon who is best able to unpack the underlying principles, beliefs, and structures that make this reality possible, and it was Sharon who introduced, guided, and implemented them. An ethos, coherent across a large institution like a primary school, does not happen by chance, and whether people stop to analyse it or not, to unpick the workings of it or not, there are both fundamental world-views and tangible structures that allow an ethos to manifest in practice.

“It’s like a dance, and always trying to be on your toes, but at the same time maintain [a centre of gravity] so that you can move around and respond to the kind of dance that might be shared with you at [any particular] time...”

Sharon, July 9th, 2015

This comment, shared by Sharon regarding her leadership of Netherfield Primary, describes so much about her connection not just with her staff and students, the community and families around the school, the local authorities and the Department of Education – but also with the ecl foundation. The journey of the ecl foundation with Netherfield has, in many ways, been a dance, of coming and going, of giving and taking, of learning and laughing. The remainder of this chapter is made up of conversations that we have had, over the past year, about the many aspects, moments, principles, and prospects of leadership in Sharon’s experience. These excerpts are framed and positioned by the research to illustrate three core issues that have arisen as most relevant. Firstly, this chapter explores the personal and professional requirements and conditions that have led to and supported Sharon’s leadership. Secondly, we look at how this leadership manifests in practice in Netherfield Primary with key overarching principles. Finally, we consider the cost and implications of this style of leadership, and look at a very recent point in the journey of Sharon’s leadership and her decision to leave the headship of the school.

Building blocks of leadership

Mia: What are the key experiences, trainings, or beliefs that enable you to do the work you do today?

Sharon: My first teaching job was at Harry Gosling Primary School in the Tower Hamlets in London. And I just I loved, I’d found, this beautiful profession, more than a job, I’d found just a way of life. And so at lunch times, I used to practice playing Cat Stevens, and so I would just sit - awful - I can’t sing at all, and do ‘Father and Son’ – that was a favourite. And the children would come and just ask to sit quietly... it was an unusual kind of thing in that context, I know that, and but it was just ... I loved it.... I so loved working with those children, and what I found at playtimes is that those more challenging kids would just come in to my classroom, and in actual fact the Head and the staff at the time would let it happen because it meant that the playground was a lot easier. And we just had lots of fun, lots of laughter, you know the gifts they gave were just fab – real enjoyment. But then I found out, loving the work with those children, that there were special schools where staff were employed to work specifically with children with high social and emotional needs and I wanted to see what that was all about.

At the Cedars in Hounslow, I worked with Headteacher, Andy Costello, who was somewhat of a maverick in his work, so child-centred. It was all about overcoming barriers, dissolving barriers, and loving the kids. He loved the kids and we spoke about love there which was very new to me. I led Literacy there and looked at creative ways to get to a lot of those children who couldn’t read and write, exploring lots of strategies which was just great fun; and again bringing parents in. I loved it so much that I felt I wanted to develop my career in that way. So at that stage I trained initially to be a drama therapist (cert in drama therapy) and my tutor was Sue Jennings who is brilliant. Then I decided to do my diploma in play therapy and worked with an incredibly inspirational woman, Ann Cattanach.

And at that time I started a Masters (MSC) at the British Association of Psychotherapists so BAP in London. My work was in the psychoanalysis of human development, within a Freudian strand. One of the most significant parts of that training happened in the 1st year when we had to identify a pregnant mum who was going to be giving birth within about 6 weeks. For one hour every week we went and observed mum - before she had the

baby and then as soon as possible after she gave birth and then every week throughout the 1st year.

During the observations of this mum and child, along side my studies and my own personal journeys, I learnt how to be aware of my own impact and yet be able to sit to one side of it and try to make a sense of the whole situation. I learned not be afraid to ask the questions needed to gain the perception of others. Perceptions can be so very different to what's actually going on within those tiny moments. I realised that what I was seeing was only my reality and therefore I was able to gain an awareness of the reality of everyone else's perception, or the perception of everybody else's reality. At all times drawing together as much information about a single situation. Not necessarily asking about those opinions, although that's important, but knowing that the mum's emotional connection to the baby was very different to that of me observing. Now when I go into a classroom I think about that emotional experience of teaching and learning, that each individual will come from their own background, and understanding, and experience: it's far more complex than superficial and that has delighted me. There is complexity in every tiny situation and just to deal with it from my perspective and my experience isn't going to work for everyone else to come to some kind of combined solution.

I did an MA practitioner NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) course during my first headship at Beormund, and fully engaged in the interconnected journey of my personal and professional life, I met ecl and did my first ecl practice course.

So, working in this context is about hearing people, and being as authentically present for them as possible. But also needed is a sense of the urgency to get things moving, a dynamic sense, is really important and maintaining the focus of why we're there: the children. Watching people, knowing the staff really well, hearing them talk about their interests. When I first met one of my colleagues at Netherfield, it was so blimin' obvious to me that she was brilliant, but equally obvious was her self-doubt. So before thrusting her into something that I don't think she believed that she could possibly achieve because her self-doubt was debilitating in many ways, I was able to just look at what she needed. And it wasn't a leadership course, in actual fact it was therapeutic sessions. So that's what we organised right from the outset. Privately, through this

work, she developed an awareness of and strategies to manage her own emotions and through this gained a greater insight into the emotional state of all.

As well as listening, it's about being able to speak with confidence. If I speak with a confidence, people tend to believe. From the very beginning of my work at Netherfield, I have said that Netherfield will be outstanding, and you know, from the moment I walked in there, I knew that would happen. But I speak with confidence to my colleagues and my children about both the difficult things such as performance and personal struggles, and the wonderful things such as achievements and progress: in all cases I believe that it is the confidence in my words that carries an energy to help things move or keep moving. Its about enabling something and if I can articulate it – where there are words there's a way – if I can articulate how it is, or work as part of a team to find a way of articulation, then it takes us further on our journey to achieving whatever it is.

And undoubtedly, it takes relentless positivity and optimism. And determination, resilience. With that, is presence, and I think as head of the school it's the art of containment – you are the ultimate container and therefore, this way and that way, you're containing what's spilling. And that's a big part of it: staff and parents, children, families don't need to know everything that weighs in; parts of it, yes. Sometimes it's over protective, but I don't want them to be bombarded and baffled by things they don't need to be. This containment is a toleration – and an element of maternal holding through times of difficulty, as you would, I would imagine, for children growing up, and supporting and nurturing, enabling for independence. To tolerate it all.

So you have to juggle, or spin plates, or both at the same time! You have to do the right thing by the children, and then you need to shape what you're doing to fit what the external pressures are in terms of curriculum standards and government policy because otherwise you wouldn't be able to do what is right for the children.

In practice

Mia: What does this style and substance of leadership look like in Netherfield?

Sharon: I've recently been asked to speak about headship at a conference and I have been thinking about using the plate spinning, circus game, to portray the dynamics. To do this, in a conference, I would, have to look out for who would step up to help me make it work, actually spinning plates. As you do in a classroom, have to look out for the folk who can really help you right from the outset. There will be people that I will engage with that will help me straight away to come and spin this plate, while I get this one going and then from there, I can choose someone else who might not be so confident but the first is already spinning over there, I can spend more time with this one. I can identify folk who are willing participants in moving forward. With us, at Netherfield, right from PATH⁹⁷¹ on the first morning of every year, I can see who the willing participants are, and who needs to watch from the sides a little bit more. It's organising and structuring all that: who is able to keep it spinning, who needs a revisit.

Going with the metaphor of plates, the work requires constant attention. If I'm by myself it's a nightmare, but not if I have a team around each plate, with trusted folk, so that the leader can pop over to another team to see what's going on there, to be motivated and bring back, and so on. So it's also an assertive approach: keeping it going. The necessity is to have the strategic overview. Every school needs to have that strategic person within it, and that takes time.

Positivity

There are some fundamental characteristics and practices that are required to lead in the way that has been so transformative for Netherfield Primary; characteristics that are recognisable in so many leadership roles. From the outset, Sharon emphasises above all the importance of the relentless modelling of positivity, optimism, stoicism, and determination. In addition is rigorous monitoring of quality first class teaching and improving outcomes. 'And underneath that is the sheer hard work of putting displays back up, scrubbing.' What this means is that, no matter what sort of behaviour or challenges may have been faced one day, by the next morning in school, there needs to be a fresh start.

Sharon: I have been in schools where I had to scrub graffiti off the walls every day. You know, scrubbing the skirting boards with toothbrushes. And I had to say to the staff: children cannot come to school and see that. Every day it's anew, it's refresh. And they will come back and we will stop the destruction, and when we can't, we'll start again and try again. I remember the former Head of Beormund giving me his bunch of keys and all the doors were locked. My office was beyond 2 locked doors. And the children would just lie on their backs banging their feet on these doors and it would reverberate around the whole school, and so those moments when some children were settled, you would hear this. And I know if someone locks a door and tells me you can't go in there, the 1st opportunity I get, that's what I want to do - and we'd all be the same. And so: open the blinkin' doors! And yes, some of the children ran and we didn't really chase them - that made them run faster, longer; we did things to make sure that they wanted to come back to, and then they stopped running. And then, all of the very basic things, about showing them we loved them. And developing the team - fabulous people coming in; developing the links with parents.... all those fundamentals.

Structure

The second is structural, putting clear systems of: what are the expectations, what is my role, my responsibility, my accountability, how am I going to be held accountable. What is it that you want me to do specifically to do in terms of achievement, how can I evidence that, lets have a shared understanding of that, how are you going to monitor that. And then underneath that, what systems are in place to ensure that I can succeed. So if it's quality teaching and learning: ensuring that we have a really clearly understood approach to our planning, to the subject

This space is for you...

knowledge, to ensuring the pedagogy. Staff, through initial performance review meetings, need to look at those targets, roles and responsibilities. In all of the schools I have led, including this one, the first thing that I did was have one to one conversations with all of the staff, looking at areas of strength, development, aspirations, being clear about that. And then, sharing, in a way that folk, through prescribed training and more general guidance, are able to developing the structures and systems themselves needed to maintain the system. They develop them themselves, so that they own them. And importantly, is the PATH process. It's old and it works. I've done it in all the schools I've been in, so that we've got a very clear shared vision of the future that's involved, shared with representatives from all which way.

You are the weather

The third is the sharing of the understanding that YOU WILL impact. And so if you see something happening around you, the first port of call to look at is yourself to see what it is that you are doing that makes that happen, and quite frequently there will be a really clear link. And so instead of labelling and blaming, look at what you can do to have a slightly different impact that then triggers a slightly different behaviour. And that is embedded within looking at emotional health and well-being of everybody, through Team Teach, and that sort of pre-emptive preventative approach to seeing through behaviour and understanding that behaviour is communication and that we have a responsibility and accountability as adults of our behaviour and so we need to consider that. And that quote about, "I am the weather," you know it's in every place that I've been, I've made sure that that's up and very central and then shared that with children as well. And creating a holding environment and I think as part of that as a Head, is to be the ultimate container, in terms of the holding environment emotionally in terms of well-being but, where needed, in terms of safe guarding, at times physically. And that's really really important for children, and sometimes adults, where feelings become so overwhelming that we feel we can't hold them, we can model that holding of that.

Leading with conflicting priorities

'If I'm not careful I collude with a system that doesn't work'

Sharon

Without delving too much into a political overview or analysis of educational policy in the UK at the time of the writing of this book, it is fair to say that the centralised and standardised education system that governs education in England is driven by test scores that are measured against each other and then measured against global standards. This method of evaluation is used for children, but also as a way to view teacher performance. The goal posts set by the department of education are done so according to prescribed educational goals, broadly, in relation to the contemporary drivers of the global economy. These are well meaning goals, and not set without thought, debate, and conviction. The problems with this picture are almost needless to say (if you've read this far into this book), but to name a few: measuring success according to an academic test is to limit learning to a narrow and insufficient category of knowledge acquisition and production; measuring one child against another, one school against another, and one country against another, is a dehumanised and inaccurate way to organise process, progress, or achievement; to standardise targets and assessment criteria forces education into a process of teaching for common consensus and diminishes possibilities for creative, independent thinkers who develop the deeper learning that will actually support them to thrive in their lives.

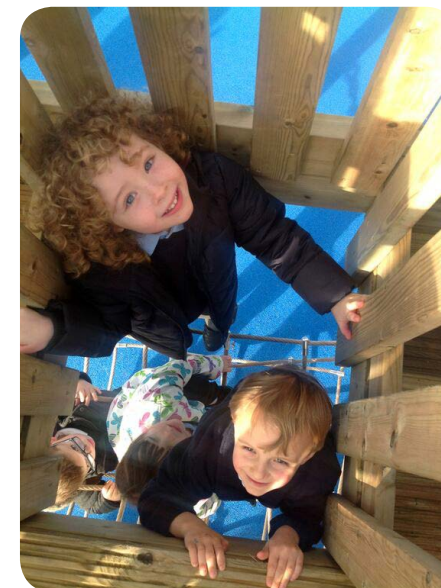
Aside from the pressures on time, energy, resources, and emotional wellbeing that these policies cause in schools today, the fundamental reliance on testing standards conflicts with a fundamental approach within

ecl and Netherfield Primary to meet and respect and value every individual child for who they are, for what they bring, and for what they need, according to no single standard, norm, or expectation. Based upon these things, we are able to build together, to co-create learning, and to support each child to lead a life in which they can thrive. But based on these things, learning looks differently for each child, and in order for deep learning to take place, we can't know the outcomes, let alone design an exam in advance to measure them. It is in this contested space of the child's needs, and the requirements of centralised government, that an educational leader such as Sharon sits.

Sharon: Because people know that I have a background in special education, colleagues from other schools tease and say what we've created at Netherfield is the 'biggest special school in the country'. But, what does one need to do in a special school? And what does one need to do in any school? They need to personalise the learning for every child. Because all groups of children have a complexity of different needs – being physical needs, and the large numbers of children with complex social emotional mental health issues, that is not specific to Netherfield or special schools. In the face of government targets we have still managed to achieve. We're over the moon that this year, in our data, we've got almost 40% of our children achieving level 5's; that is, a whole level (12 months) enhanced of expected standards leaving primary school. With the new curriculum just being developed, it is likely that targets will rise even higher, with every child expected to achieve the equivalent of a level 5 next year. If you don't meet 'floor' (minimum required results), the consequences are incredibly damaging, including schools being transformed into academies and staff losing their jobs. The initial data headlines reporting on a school outline attainment not achievement, and so the initial message shared about schools if they're not attaining is that they're under performing. This creates such pressure for the system. So hang on: our school that has been judged as outstanding because these children have come in with such complex levels of needs and have achieved so much, but at the same time, we know now new expectations will bring the need for even greater creative approaches to ensure our children continue to achieve for next year.

Looking up, looking on

Not unlike many of the staff and community at Netherfield Primary, this process of enquiry provided a rare and important opportunity for Sharon, along with some of her leadership team, to pause, reflect and take stock of her practice, in relation to personal and professional goals. Inevitably, in the midst of a busy and pressurised job, this process caused shifts in the existing conditions. Since the completion of this research, the leadership of the school has changed. Sharon came to the difficult conclusion that her continuing leadership of Netherfield did not enable her to adequately question and contribute to the socio-cultural priorities and governing policies of the education system, nationally, and indeed globally. With this decision came the process of moving into a supportive role of the new interim leadership and thus a new and very exciting stage of Netherfield's journey begins.





Chapter 10

Taking stock, looking forward

It is with a huge forward momentum that we complete this research and book creation project, and it is our deep hope that you also can pick up momentum from the journeys, ideas, and challenges that we have shared. In this final chapter we summarise some key outcomes and reflections of the research with Netherfield and carry them forward into provocations for our on-going work in the education and care of children and young people.

Taking stock

The project of the ecl foundation is to enhance children's lives; our belief is that this is possible through a basic shift in perspective from seeing children as individual agents of action and behaviour to members of a complex and interconnected system. ecl works with adults who are responsible for the environments where children learn and interact, across all sectors, enabling them to best support the most vulnerable children and those around them. Netherfield Primary has bravely and sensitively encountered and embraced this approach to education and care. Introduced to it through Sharon Gray's brave and rigorous leadership, the staff and community of Netherfield have changed the perceptions, the realities, and the future possibilities of a vast number of people through education.

The approach unpacked throughout this book is not new, and it is not difficult. Part 1 of the book explored the wisdoms and bodies of research and theory that have contributed to what is a worldview as well as approach to practice. Part 2 explored how this worldview

and approach can affect and cause change in the trajectory of a school. The research at Netherfield reveals that with core commitments to positivity, self-awareness, and structures of accountability along with healthy doses of fun, this work can happen anywhere. Let's not be mistaken, these core commitments are not light work, but they are accessible to all of us, whether we work with one family, one class, one school, or more. At Netherfield, there was no grand budget, no swooping task force, no defiant boycotting of the institution, but there was a passion for the care and well-being of children, and where that passion wasn't there, it was re-ignited by others.

'For the first time in a long time I knew my kids, as opposed to their levels or their writing ability...it brought me back to what I got into teaching for in the first place: supporting children to have the experience that I didn't have...'

Nadeem, former staff member at Netherfield Primary

Seeing the school as a complex interconnected system, as well as the children in it, required us to think broadly and creatively about this research. Knowing that the school is accountable to governmental evaluation and yet standing separately from governmental criteria for success required us to be courageous in our choice of research questions and data generation. We chose not to focus on attainment or progress records, not to rely on standard yardsticks for 'successful education' and not to align our language with current prevailing discourses in educational policy. These decisions enabled us to attend to the spaces of creativity, emotional well-being, and learning that were evaluated only in relation to the person or people engaged. In the privileged positions of visiting researchers, we were able to observe the dynamics, question the decisions, and reflect in the pauses. From this position we chose to focus on areas that told us the most about the ways in which the ecl approach was being brought to life, and hence we looked deeply into teaching and learning processes, the Nurture provision, the partnership model, the business model, and the leadership.

Across all areas we found that the conscious style of language use was instrumental in the approach. The need to instil communication skills and positivity (both required for effective learning) drives this focus. In all areas we found Nurture (and social emotional learning), and a comprehensive

prioritising of social and emotional well-being. Finally, in all aspects of the school system we found that relationships were of utmost importance: The teacher-student relationship, the teacher-teacher, the teacher-parent, and so on. Each relationship pivotal to the potential of the practice associated.

It is no surprise that relationships continue to surface as critical to the practice of Netherfield Primary and the practical manifestation of the ecl approach. Taking a step back from the day to day practice, the approach is based on the engagement of the whole system (or all of the systems) around the child. In order to engage the multiple systems around a child, a teacher, parent, carer or youth worker needs relationship. Firstly, relationship with the child to begin trust and access to the systems around him or her; secondly relationships with the systems (of family, of peers, of community, of culture, of health care, and so on) in order to coordinate support; and finally and not least, we need relationships to support and resource our own work with the children and communities of our practice.

With relationship, it becomes possible to engage in the whole system around a child no matter what their background is, and with that, the potential to have more positive collaboration or even co-creation, and so ensuring together a better resourced package and more positive outcomes.

Looking forward

It is poignant that as we complete the project of this research and book creation, we are simultaneously launching the new Netherfield ecl Teaching Alliance. It will be a physical and virtual resource to support an international network of teacher training, professional development and research. And as in any journey there are intersections and turning points and that have certainly arisen for many members of Netherfield's staff as well as ecl, not as a coincidence, but largely prompted by the journey of this work.

Looking forward, we hope that this book will support your journey, prompt a change in direction or propel you onwards with more confidence. We sincerely invite you to connect with our ever-growing community of practice wherever in the world you are. Through this community, we look forward to asking new questions, creating new practices, and supporting one another as we endeavour to enhance the lives of our children.

www.eclfoundation.org/courageousjourneys

Notes

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² As above

Chapter 9

¹ The European Union member states.

² European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2014). *Financing Schools in Europe: Mechanisms, Methods and Criteria in Public Funding*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

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³ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2014). *Financing Schools in Europe: Mechanisms, Methods and Criteria in Public Funding*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. 87

⁴ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2014). *Financing Schools in Europe: Mechanisms, Methods and Criteria in Public Funding*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. 86

⁵ Look Deeper: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5bilstXjs>
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UClIRuJoemM_jYhxbOzhX2qg/videos

⁶ The business canvas model can be found at <http://www.businessmodelgeneration.com/canvas/bmc> (accessed 19, Sept, 2015).

Chapter 10

¹ "PATH is a creative planning tool which starts in the future and works backwards to an outcome of first (beginning) steps that are possible and positive. It is excellent for team building. It has been used to mediate conflicts." From: <http://www.inclusion.com/path.html> (accessed 19, Sept, 2015).

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