



Revisiting Engagement

Professor Barry Carpenter OBE, looks at the development of the Engagement Framework for Learning.

TO appreciate the development of the Engagement Profile and Scale (EPS) we must return to its genesis.

In 2009 the Department for Education commissioned the Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Research Project, in direct response to Teachers observations that there was a changing pattern of SEND amongst children; their profile and learning patterns were often different to those previously seen, and the term 'Complex Needs' was often used, but without clarity and definition.

Research processes - finding the evidence

Evidence from this study confirmed that indeed we had a significant population of children with CLDD - 2 or more co-existing, interlocking, compounding learning difficulties/disabilities. There

was a 'new generation' of children with LDD, for reasons such as prematurity of birth, rare syndromes, road traffic accidents (RTA), societal causes such as drugs, smoking, alcohol (eg Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders). These children presented with patterns of learning that were a challenge to differentiation alone, and hence approaches that combined Personalised Learning (Hargreaves, 2008) were included to evolve a responsive, proactive pedagogy.

A prominent example would be children born prematurely, particularly, in very recent years, those who survive birth at 24-27 weeks gestation; there are some 90,000 such births in the UK every year. These children are often 'wired differently'; when they are expelled into this world their brain structure is white matter, not grey matter; the cortical

folding has not begun. Having survived in an incubator with intensive support, their brain continues to grow and develop, but the scaffolding may be different; it is an external brain, influenced and nurtured differently.

Once in the classroom the key questions for the educators have to be, 'if this child's brain is wired differently, in what ways do they learn differently? And, when I do know something about their unique pattern of learning, in what ways will I teach differently?' (Carpenter, Egerton and Cockbill 2014)

In recognising this the Project also acknowledged that the learning patterns of these children were erratic and inconsistent, often presenting as a 'spikey' profile of learning, which influenced the stability and efficacy of their learning outcomes and attainments.

How was this evidence to be

garnered from the actual classroom teachers reporting their concerns and observations? The Project rooted its' research processes in qualitative paradigms, and building upon the long history in Education of Action Research, evolved an Inquiry Framework, (Carpenter, Egerton et al, 2011, 2015) that enabled Teachers to be co-investigators throughout the project - exploring, searching, discovering. As one Headteacher said: "It is building a 'finding out culture'", which empowered teachers to critically reflect and analyse their observations. Data from each school was then taken by the small central research team, and further analysed for trends and significant outcomes. These were then fed back into every phase of the research trials over the two-and-a-half-year duration of the project.

Hence every major outcome of the CLDD Project, the EPS particularly, is the result of multiple trials, in multiple classrooms, by multiple teachers.

It is important to stress the types of schools involved.

These were carefully selected through application, by the core research team, and then approved before invitation by the DfE. At times HMI/Ofsted were consulted in this process.

12 schools acted as the original Development Schools where the materials such as the CLDD Briefing Sheets, and EPS were first compiled. These schools represented every type of designated Special School against the 4 domains of SEND, (Cognition and Learning, Communication and Interaction etc.). From here there were three further Trial phases:

- Special Schools from across England (again selected through open application, verified by external scrutiny)
- Mainstream Schools - Early Years settings, (Bromley and Wolverhampton) Primary Schools and Secondary Schools, including Academies.
- International Trial, involving Mainstream and Special schools in the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This process deepened knowledge around who were the children with CLDD, how did they learn, what teaching approaches the evidence showed were



Figure 1

most successful, and how we could design a curriculum to 'wrap around' the child?

All of this was recorded in the final report, (<http://complexd.ssatrust.org.uk>).

The model of research, (subsequently used in other studies and reported in the literature (Jones et al 2012, 2016.) can be described as a Research Spiral (Figure 1). Using schools as centres of Professional Learning, and embedding rigorous processes of Inquiry, then from daily classroom practice evidence was generated that gave us inquiry-focussed data, which enabled research analysis to confirm trends, outcomes and outputs. The Engagement Profile and Scale was one such major output - teacher developed, teacher validated in line with the children with CLDD they were directly working with, and whose learning they were shaping, systematically and deductively, by employing new generation pedagogy.

Why Engagement?

For students with disabilities, research has suggested that engaged behaviour is the single best predictor of successful learning (Iovannone, Dunlap, Huber, and Kincaid, 2003). Keen (2008, 2009) describes engagement as 'a gateway to learning and... one of the best predictors for positive student outcomes.' She also states: 'the study of engagement has the potential to assist educators and therapists to maximise learning outcomes.'

Many times throughout the CLDD

Research Project, teachers endorsed the statement of Newmann, (2006): "Engagement is difficult to define operationally, but we know it when we see it, and we know when it is missing".

The iterative process of teacher-to-teacher discovering, generating, testing and validating new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning is also validated in the literature - "student engagement represents both the time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities, and the effort institutions devote to using effective educational practices." (Kuh et al., 2008.)

A focus on engagement can underpin a process of personalised inquiry through which the educator can develop effective learning experiences. Using evidence-based knowledge of a child's successful learning pathways, strategies can be identified, high expectations set, and incremental progress recorded on their journey towards optimal engagement in learning. Their engagement will be the benchmark for assessing whether we have achieved this goal. (Carpenter, 2010.)

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Engagement is the connection between the student and their learning outcome. Students cannot create that connection for themselves; it is educators, families and other professional colleagues who must construct it with and for them. Engagement is key to this. (Carpenter et al , 2011)

The Development of the Engagement Profile and Scale

The Engagement Profile and Scale is a classroom resource which enables educators to observe and document the engagement in learning of a student with CLDD towards a personalised learning target and their progress. It allows them to focus on the child's engagement as a learner and create personalised learning pathways. It prompts student-centred reflection on how to increase engagement leading to deep learning.

Engagement is multi-dimensional, and encompasses:

- Awareness
- Curiosity
- Investigation

- Discovery
- Anticipation
- Persistence, and
- Initiation.

These seven engagement indicators form the basis of the Engagement Profile and Scale.

The Engagement Profile and Scale

As its name suggests, this resource consists of two interdependent parts – a profile and guidance which is used to record descriptions of how a student engages during a high-interest activity against each of the seven engagement indicators listed above; and a scale template which educators can use to record engagement scores and related descriptive observations against the same seven engagement indicators for an initially low-engagement activity.

By focusing on these seven indicators of engagement, educators can ask themselves questions such as: 'How can I change the learning activity to stimulate Robert's curiosity?' 'What can I change about this experience

to encourage Nina to persist?' They enable educators to focus on achievable dimensions of engagement so that each area is considered and addressed for the student.

Over time, it is possible to record the success or otherwise of interventions, the adjustments made, and the effect this has had on the student's engagement score. The outcomes can be plotted as a graph with accompanying explanatory commentary, and successful interventions generalised to other settings. The Engagement Profile and Scale encourages student-centred reflection, supporting educators to develop learning experiences and activities around students' strengths and interests. It gives the student a 'voice' as a learner in terms of their interests, strengths and how they like to learn.

It is important to recognise the contribution that the student themselves can make to the profile and scale; families also will be able to offer unique insights into what can engage their son/daughter; colleagues from other professions who are working with the student can also contribute valuable perspectives.