



Review of Active Learning in Session 2007-2008

Schools and Pre-5 establishments involved

Schools

Achaleven Primary
 Castlehill Primary
 Easdale Primary
 Gigha Primary
 Innellan Primary
 Kirn Primary
 Rhu Primary
 Rothesay Primary

Pre 5

Campbeltown Nursery
 Easdale Pre 5
 Gigha Pre 5
 Kirn Pre 5
 Rothesay Pre 5

Introduction

Active Learning

“Curriculum for Excellence establishes clear values, purposes and principles for education from 3 to 18 in Scotland. It sets out to enable children and young people to develop their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. It provides us with an important opportunity to improve early education for all children: we have an opportunity to ensure that all children in pre-school and primary school settings experience stimulating, effective learning in ways that are appropriate to their needs.” *Building the Curriculum 2*

For the first time, the curriculum will link the pre-school sector with the early stages of primary and will be presented together as one level. The early level will comprise of a set of experiences and outcomes for children’s learning that should support active learning and encourage better continuity and progression for all children, across all settings.

It is vital that children receive the highest quality of learning and teaching at the early level to ensure the success of Curriculum for Excellence.

“Active learning in practice should include:

- *what we know about young children’s learning and how this relates to the four capacities*
- *how methodologies can change to support children’s learning as they develop*
- *the importance of continuity in children’s learning and experiences as they move into primary school*
- *practical aspects of active learning – staffing, space and resources*
- *development of staff.”* *Building the Curriculum 2*

All staff are leaders of learning and they should engage fully with the new curriculum and active learning methodologies to ensure improvements for all children.

Head teachers and managers should work with staff, children and families to establish a clear vision with associated values and aims for curriculum change. They should provide opportunities for staff to reflect on their practice and allow them to build on existing good practice.

Staff will require support to take forward their understanding of active learning through play. For many it will only require small changes to their practice to provide an environment for learning that is stimulating, flexible and conducive to the active play approach. Staff will need time to evaluate and gather appropriate resources for active learning and there are financial implications for this that will require careful management.

Head teachers and managers should plan for change systematically and ensure that the pace of change can be sustained by all staff. Changes in practice should

be given time to establish and develop through regular monitoring and evaluation of impact and outcomes for children.

“Active learning is learning which engages and challenges children’s thinking using real-life and imaginary situations. It takes full advantage of the opportunities for learning presented by:

- *spontaneous play*
- *planned, purposeful play*
- *investigating and exploring*
- *events and life experiences*
- *focused learning and teaching*

supported when necessary, through sensitive intervention and targeted observation, to support or extend learning. All areas of the curriculum can be enriched and developed through play.

Active learning and the four capacities

Active learning in the early years can support children’s development of the four capacities in many ways. For example, they can develop as:

- **successful learners** *through using their imagination and creativity, tackling new experiences and learning from them, and developing important skills including literacy and numeracy through exploring and investigating while following their own interests*
- **confident individuals** *through succeeding in their activities, having the satisfaction of a task accomplished, learning about bouncing back from setbacks, and dealing safely with risk*
- **responsible citizens** *through encountering different ways of seeing the world, learning to share and give and take, learning to respect themselves and others, and taking part in making decisions*
- **effective contributors** *through playing together in leading or supporting roles, tackling problems, extending communication skills, taking part in sustained talking and thinking, and respecting the opinions of others.”* *Building the Curriculum 2*

At the crux of the active learning methodology is the creative, flexible professional who enjoys responding to the ideas that arise from children immersed in their learning.

An important aspect of providing high quality, early level learning and experiences for young children is access to confident and skilled adults. To ensure this, early level leaders need to allow all staff the opportunity to take part in appropriate professional development.

Early Level Play Pilot

To respond to the challenges in developing an active, early level curriculum and improving continuity as children move from pre-school into primary, the local authority initiated an early level pilot involving a number of primary schools and some associated pre-school settings. It was important that the pilot schools selected reflected the diversity of educational establishments within Argyll and Bute, as the strategies implemented in one school may differ from another according to individual circumstances.

The aim of the pilot was to involve both teachers and pre-school practitioners in reviewing and trialling a range of methodologies and resources to develop high quality learning through play at the early level. To support this, participating schools were involved in a number of staff development days involving local authority staff and Lynda Keith from Strathclyde University.

During these days they were given the opportunity to take part in professional discussion about active learning; what it should look like and how it could be managed in a range of settings.

Throughout the year these schools had to implement new ideas and strategies, continually reflecting and documenting the impact of their innovations on children's development and learning.

They were asked to put together a case study for publication in order to share their thoughts and experiences with other professionals across all educational establishments.

The following pages contain all their responses and written reports. I'm sure you will find them as informative and as inspirational as we did.

Trisha Boyd and Anne Paterson

Participant Responses

What was the most effective change to your practice over the year?

"More focus on learning intentions within play. More responsibility given to the children in planning and taking learning forwards. Greater use of floor books, mindmapping etc"

"Allowing children to talk about learning. Revisit concepts using different materials. Thinking about and evaluating the use of workbooks - is there a better way?"

"More liaison with pre-5, more flexibility, less prescriptive, less reliant on old formats, taking the lead from the child"

"Change to classroom setup - involving children in decisions. Using resources in a different way e.g. playbags. Extended shared learning experiences with pre-5."

"Being freed from schemes of work, restricting planners etc and enabling children to learn actively."

"New classroom layout allowed me to see new possibilities for working. Self registration and children choosing own activities has given children ownership of class and much greater confidence to explore materials and own ideas. I have re-evaluated existing resources and found gaps which we have tried to fill."

"Learning and teaching was far more responsive to children - not confined by adults preconceptions (e.g page in the workbook). Joint planning/working with nursery very effective."

What would you do differently from the outset next session?

"Insist planning sessions to be of paramount importance and that they allow for development. Funding to be used to resource active learning"

"More flexible annual plan, greater involvement of children in medium term planning. Greater use of storylines."

"Fine Tune what works just now - extend into P3 group of children (composite class)."

"Not Panic!!! Have a better thought out annual plan".

"I tried to keep phonics too structured in terms one and two - worked better reinforcing all sounds through play. Would spend much more time on pattern through play. Have gathered many new resources I can now use straight away."

"Combine nursery outdoor play with P1/P2 - as only one pre-5 child. Focus on thinking skills and language of learning."

"I will use pictorial play planners for my groups with integral success criteria. Find an effective way of using shared outdoor time with Pre5/P1/P2."

"Collect lots of resource boxes. Allow children to investigate prior learning."

What advice would you offer to staff new to active learning approaches?

"Trust the children, try to think creatively and 'out of the box' to manage or find learning outcomes through following the children's lead."

"It works!! Be aware that support is available. No rush - build up gradually."

"Focus on one small area at a time and develop at own pace."

"Start simply - move in small steps. Enjoy the challenge"

"Look at layout and change - declutter. Look at resources and re-evaluate. Set up self registration and a choice system. Start with one area e.g maths play - build up then introduce next e.g. role play, phonics etc."

"Have confidence and an open mind - go to a Lynda Keith workshop!"

"Have confidence in your own ability as a professional. Support from management is essential"

"One step at a time - focus on one area at a time."


"Start with classroom set-up (involve children). Audit resources in place - investigate storage (shop for playbags). Start with one area of the curriculum and build up. Set up a structure with clear routines, rules etc but be prepared to go with the flow and adapt lessons."


If you were to sum up active learning in no more than 5 statements what would these be?


- Involving the children in developing their own learning.
- Giving the children responsibility for planning activities and following through to outcome.
- Availability of numerous appropriate learning resources for children to access and play with.
- Flexible, child-orientated approach to teaching and learning.
- Learning through experience, hands on approach.


- Active learning is fun.
- Active learning engages all children in the learning process.
- it allows children of varying abilities to 'work' successfully at their own pace.
- It encourages children to be responsible for their own learning.
- It allows social, emotional and personal development to blossom.


- Independent learners becoming confident teachers.
- Children learn through their strengths but will ask questions if they are not sure or still working things out (if comfortable)
- Teachers have time to interact and observe children and therefore really get to know them and their personalities.
- Don't be too rigid, allow the children to steer you.
- Recognise that something isn't working and have the courage to bin it or change direction.


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- Children learn by doing rather than sitting listening, filling in worksheets etc.
 - Learning is set in a context, which is often cross-curricular, making it more meaningful to the children. Learning becomes FUN!
 - Children are therefore motivated to learn and take more responsibility for what and how they learn.
 - There is a greater depth of understanding and learning is no longer restricted/ pre-planned, so children can take their learning as far as they want.
 - Focus is on learning and teaching and becoming more responsive to children's needs.

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- Child-centred responsive planning.
 - Contextualised play.
 - Supported self-directed play.
 - Learning without age and stage barriers.

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- Confident children.
 - Self evaluative - children more able/willing to discuss own learning and next steps.
 - Children able to access resources and have developed strategies to tackle problems.
 - Children value experiential learning and want it to continue.

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- Child-centred learning and teaching.
 - Contextualised learning and teaching
 - Learning without age and stage barriers.
 - Asking the most pertinent questions in order to facilitate children's progress.
 - Letting children lead their own learning, at their own pace.

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- Builds independence.
 - Encourages social skills / co-operation.
 - Encourages peer learning.
 - Keeps children motivated to learn.
 - Provides meaningful experiences and greater understanding.

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- Confident and enthusiastic children and teacher.
 - Children taking ownership of learning.
 - Classroom is constantly changing, reflecting the children's ideas and interests.
 - Always looking for new ideas and resources.
 - less paper, more hands on.

Final thoughts from staff

"It's been a very interesting journey for me and the children. Let's keep genuine play at the heart of active learning."

"Very happy to be involved. It has given my teaching a whole new focus - loving the job again!"

"I wish I had my own P1 class!"

HT

"It's been an inspirational year and it's been illuminating to see how capable the children have proved themselves to be, given more choice and responsibility."

"Very pleased to be included, feeling a sense of freedom to teach what I feel the children need and not what I have to do. A lot of hard work but very worthwhile."

"More please - ie Lynda Keith workshops."

"I'm happy that the link between Pre-5 and P1 has been established - long may it continue!"

"If only this had been the way 20 years ago - I can see that pupils given this start can only succeed."

"I'm so pleased to have been here and done this and regained my enthusiasm."

Case Studies

Easdale Primary

Rhu Primary

Rothesay Primary

Achaleven Primary

Campbeltown Nursery

Castlehill Primary

Innellan Primary

Gigha Primary

Kirn Primary

Early Level Play Pilot Report for Easdale Primary and Pre 5 Argyll and Bute - May 2008

Background

A Curriculum for Excellence was a priority on our school improvement plan. In order to implement CfE Easdale School staff had discussed possible changes to the teaching and planning of the Early Years Curriculum. When details of an Argyll and Bute Play Pilot were circulated to schools, it was an ideal opportunity to develop our thinking and methodology in relation to active learning and have the guidance and support of Anne Paterson and Trisha Boyd from the authority and the expertise of Lynda Keith from Strathclyde University.

Staff Members Involved:

Margaret Anderson (Head teacher)
Andreana MacDougall (Primary 1/2 teacher)
Cheryl McColl (Child Care and Education Worker)
Amanda MacLachlan (SEN Assistant) based in P1/2 classroom
Donna Campbell (classroom assistant) resources

Aims of the project

Our aim, with the support of the project, was to build on and improve existing good practice taking into account the values, purposes and principles of CfE and plan changes systematically and manage these changes at an appropriate pace.

Implementation of the project:

After the initial meeting with Lynda Keith on 20th April 2007 the first steps were to return to school and look at the practical aspects of active learning, namely space and resources in the classroom. The classroom layout was changed to incorporate a designated maths and language area, an imaginative area and a writing table. Some children's tables were removed and others repositioned to release more space in the middle of the classroom. A large teaching blackboard was removed and replaced with a wall mounted magnetic white board. A smart board was fixed to the wall in the ITC area. A workstation used by a child with autism was repositioned in the classroom releasing space in the shared "wet area".

After carrying out an audit of all Early Years resources we were able to reorganise and streamline these resources e.g. coloured storage boxes containing sorting, matching, measure, shape, time, washing lines, language activities etc. Storage units were built into the wet area to hold these shared resources for use by P1/2 and Pre 5 releasing space in the playroom. New resources were purchased for the Pre 5 playroom and P1/2 classroom.

Although new resources were lovely to have and enjoyed by the children, the series of training days were the most beneficial part of the project. Lynda Keith's expertise was

inspirational and instilled the confidence to trial new strategies and be inventive. It was really helpful to share ideas with the rest of the group and discuss how active learning was working in their schools and classes. An important factor in the implementation of the pilot were the discussions with the Headteacher after training days and her support both professionally and personally.

It was also important to discuss and involve changes with our SEN assistant as there was a concern as to how our autistic child would cope with significant change in the familiar environment. From the beginning we involved both this child and the other children by asking their opinions and ideas. It was essential that the social story book included pictures of changes and an informal meeting with Mum took place in June 2007 to explain the Play Pilot.

Our school induction meeting in early June 2007 included a parent workshop on CfE and the school's involvement in the Active Play Project. In early October parents were invited to an informal open morning to view the strategies in place in the classroom and Pre 5 playroom and take part in active learning with their children. This was very successful and a further open morning is planned for May as part of our induction process. The children will have responsibility for planning this open morning themselves. They will take ownership of what they want to show and tell parents. Parents of next sessions Primary 1 children will be invited along to see active learning in action and will be given the opportunity to view a slideshow, ask questions and give their views and opinions.

Time to share planning with Primary 1/2 and Pre 5 will always be problematic but the time allocated by the Headteacher was much appreciated. New planning formats were devised, trialled, adapted and continue to be adapted in some cases. In addition to new resources being purchased a significant amount of resources were made by our classroom assistant who used numerous boxes of laminating pouches! These resources continue to be extended and are stored in our shared resource area. Shared learning with Pre 5 has been extended, adapted and improved. Prior to embarking on the Play Pilot time was allocated for the Primary 1/2 teacher to have a teaching session in the playroom. Over the past 4 years Pre 5 and P1/2 have developed opportunities for shared learning experiences. These took the form of shared environmental studies topics, art topics, weekly assemblies and Christmas activities. In session 2007/08 we extended our shared learning to maths and language activities. This involved Pre5 joining P1/2 in their classroom twice a week.

Following a training session with Lynda Keith in January 2008 when we explored handwriting and pattern, we returned to school and discussed how we could improve links between Pre 5 and P1/2 that were meaningful, easy to plan and deliver and would take account of the varying needs of the children aged 4 years to 7 years. We planned a 6 week block of motor skills activities and a 6 week block of maths concentrating on pattern. The children worked in mixed age groups and activities were differentiated according to ability and outcome. These active play blocks were successful and have continued for the rest of the term and into next term.

Impact of the project:

It has been a very positive experience for all concerned. A walk around the playroom and classroom show good examples of active learning. Displays are changing and evolving and show children's work in context. The playroom and classroom have a stimulating productive ethos to it and the children are happy in their environment. Ideas and resources have been shared with other staff members who have adapted some of these ideas for their own class. Learning is more active and effective resources and strategies are in place. More account is being taken of the children's learning styles and a significant start is being made for the children to develop their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

Impact on the children:

The children appear enthusiastic about their learning. They enjoy their playroom and classroom and feel a sense of ownership. New topic displays cause excitement and the children are good at suggesting improvements and bringing in resources.

Play Bags to explore and practise learning concepts are fun and are easy to plan and assemble and have been introduced to other areas of the curriculum including science. Play Bags have encouraged the children to be more independent. However initially the collecting and making of resources for Play Bag activities were very time consuming.

Having initially trialled twice weekly sessions for maths and language activities it was apparent that we would experience time tabling issues eg withdrawing Pre 5 children from their free flow play was sometimes problematic. At other times P1/2 were involved in a specific lesson and this had to be curtailed. Finding the best day and time was not easy in a busy school environment. Our present Active Play blocks have been timetabled to address some of these issues. Bringing the children together in the P1/2 classroom first thing on a Monday and Friday morning means that issues of interrupting prior play have been addressed. Learning intentions and experiences can be revisited and consolidated throughout the week.

All the children were involved at the beginning of the learning block in choosing groups. The Pre5 children look forward to joining their groups and activities take place not only in the classroom but also in the wet area, hall and outside areas. As the weeks have progressed it is noticeable that all the children are forming good working relationships. They are working co-operatively. Plenary sessions at the end of lessons enable the children to self assess and vote for their favourite play activity and record their success in their sticker reward book. The children have produced "Big Books" showing examples of work and photographs of their shared play activity sessions.

In the afternoon Primary 3 join P1/2 for Expressive Arts and Environmental Studies. They have adapted to the classroom set up very well and enjoy the free flow play session once a week. It is interesting to note that the Primary 3 children extend the resources being used and are good at working co-operatively with the younger children. They are able to take account of prior learning and use these skills in active play. However, they requested

that free flow choices should be on offer rotationally so that every third week they get first choice.

Impact on Staff:

As the class teacher the play pilot has renewed my enthusiasm and confidence to be more creative about how and what I teach. The pilot has made me focus on what I am teaching and how I can deliver this more effectively to the children. It has been hard work but very rewarding.

Quotes from Staff:

Mrs Mac Lachlan (SEN Classroom Assistant) feels that taking part in the play pilot for CfE has been a positive experience.

“All the children seem to enjoy it and are enthusiastic during learning activities. Play bags, the writing table and imaginative areas all grab their interest and are enjoyable. The children like being given the opportunity to put forward their ideas and suggestions for these areas. They are working towards their learning outcomes but in a fun ‘hands on’ way. Children who find it a struggle to concentrate and keep on task especially with more formal work, benefit from active learning tasks. Our child with specific needs has coped well with the change to the way of learning and is being encouraged to make choices and attempt tasks independently. This boosts self esteem and confidence when successful. Active learning does demand a fair amount of a teacher’s time. Therefore the support of Classroom or SEN Assistants is highly beneficial.”

Mrs Mc Coll (Child Care and Education Worker)

“Mrs Mac Dougall and myself have worked closely together for the past 4 years sharing ideas and discussing children’s development so this Active Play Pilot has been the next steps in our development. Sorting our resources into the shared unit helped to free up our playroom and look at resources in different way. After each session with Linda Keith we returned to school inspired and ready to try out ideas and activities. We have always tried to make the transition into Primary One a good experience for the children and as we work in a semi open plan environment the children in Pre 5 have daily opportunities to see what is ‘going on’ in the classroom. The children this year need no formal induction programme as we have shared active learning all year. The Pre 5 parents will get the opportunity to discuss the Play Pilot at our Open morning. I have already been given feed back from parents that their children enjoy their time in the classroom and are reassured that the children are already happy in the classroom environment. We continue to try to make our planning manageable and meaningful.”

Mrs Anderson (Headteacher)

The Early Year teacher and Child Care and Education worker are highly committed professionals. Their practice is of a very high standard. During the course of this pilot they have been very enthusiastic about the training sessions and have implemented the

necessary changes in a systematic manner after good professional dialogue and careful reflection.

The classroom and playroom are attractive and stimulating learning environments. The activities, both shared class/playroom based are well planned, interesting and effective. They stimulate the children's enquiry, take account of their interests, allow them many opportunities to be involved in the planning and give them opportunities to give feedback on the activities. The children are very enthusiastic about their learning and know what they are learning and why. They are very happy to tell me what they are doing. The children have made very good progress in their learning and through active learning are developing the 4 capacities of CfE well. In particular active learning has made a very sound base for lifelong learners and confident individuals.

I really enjoy visiting the P1/2 classroom and playroom. It is lovely to see the children so involved and engaged in learning and to see the commitment and enthusiasm of the staff.

The staff is very committed to this way of learning and although it has required a lot of work and time they believe it has been very beneficial. They tell me teaching is more exciting now. As a result of all the benefits we have seen, the school intends to extend the planning formats and these methodologies into teaching and learning in the upper school.

Although taking part in this pilot required the school to commit a large part of the budget to planning time, cover to attend the training days, purchasing new resources and storage and allowing most of the classroom assistant time (9 hours per week) to making resources it has been well worth it.

I am very impressed with the development of weekly planners and termly curricular planners. Staff looked at existing planners and at CfE principles and saw ways to modify them. Over the session these have changed many times after good consultation. The current format has been extended to the upper school. During the course of next session we are going to gradually implement these termly planners throughout the school in all curricular areas. The weekly planners are useful to the teacher, ensure balance and allow for flexibility. The termly planners focus on what the children will learn and how they will learn.

The play pilot has been an excellent staff development opportunity not only allowing staff to distil and trial their thinking on CfE and Early Years methodology but also develop their communication and tutoring skills as they disseminated their knowledge and learning and that of their tutors to the rest of the staff. Other staff have found this very valuable.

Finally the success of this is due to the help, support and vision of the Authority and Lynda Keith, the enthusiasm and thirst for learning of our children, the interest and support of our parent/carers and especially to the hard work, commitment and professionalism of our staff.

Quotes from the children:

Charlie: "I like when I sign up. I like to choose the library because it has books you can read and you can sound them out to read them."

Malcolm: "I like the counting house. I like the big dice and the floor mats. You roll the dice and jump on the mats. I can do $5 + 1$ when I jump on and I can do take away sums when I jump back."

Holly: "I like the post office and shop because you learn about money and you can buy things."

Fergus: "I like the writing table because it changes when we do a different topic. It's been a space station and a spooky writing table."

Brodie: "I liked learning about minibeasts when we got a letter from Calum Caterpillar because he wanted us to help him write to his mini beast friends. It was fun because we got to do a lot of searching outside for minibeasts. We got all the information and we made a big book about minibeasts."

Liam: "I liked learning about Vikings. We worked together to make the big book of Vikings. I liked making the big longboat."

George: "I liked the puppet theatre because it was fun holding the puppets and counting in 2s and making songs. I liked making stories with them."

Ashley: "I like reading the books in the book corner. I liked playing with The Enormous Turnip story board."

Quotes from Parents following an informal open morning in the classroom. The children planned the morning and showed and explained their learning activities.

"Good to see the genuine enthusiasm of the children who obviously enjoy their 'work'."

"The children came across as confident and happy."

"It was lovely to hear the children talk so proudly about their work/classroom."

"It was a nice way to see the kid's outtake on school life."

Case Studies:

An individual motor skills programme was devised for a child in the first term of Primary One and this was carried out daily for 15 minutes on a 1 to 1 basis. The motor skills play activities currently planned for Pre 5 and P1/2, incorporate strategies already in place for this child. The specific motor skills needs are being met in a group situation enabling the child to benefit on a social level. The child is engaging in social language and turn taking. Consequently 1 to 1 input has been reduced to twice weekly. Self esteem and confidence have risen as new skills are acquired and opportunities given to show these skills to the younger children. Oral maths skills are good and this has been evident during planned maths play activities. Purposeful use of maths resources and play bags engage interest, help with organisational skills and have improved the child's concentration.

A child with specific needs follows a planned individual learning programme and had made very good progress in Primary 1. As this child likes a very structured environment and dislikes change we were unsure as to how they would cope with the classroom reorganisation and a more active approach to learning. To help with this transition the child was involved from the early stages in the classroom set up and a picture inserted into the social story book. An informal meeting with Mum was held to explain about the Play Pilot and reassure her that strategies and personnel already in place would continue. The child has coped very well during shared play activities with Pre 5. Noise levels and a changing classroom environment have not been an issue and the child has socialised with group members. In maths the child has enjoyed the structure of a designated number area with a 'Counting House'. Signing up for play activities has been successful as the child knows where to go to next and the class 'Play Bags' are structured to consolidate and practise skills and improve independence.

Conclusion:

On the whole this play pilot has been a good experience for both the children and staff. It has been hard work especially in the early stages when organising and setting up the classroom, planning active play activities and making resources. It was important to introduce changes at a realistic pace and continue to make changes as often as was required until it felt 'workable'. Planning formats changed on a weekly basis during the first term and were adapted again in term 3. They may be adapted next school session when the composite class set up changes. We are looking forward to tackling new topics, trying out new ideas and continuing to motivate the children to fulfil the four capacities set out in CfE

Active Learning

Easdale Primary School



P1/2 Classroom



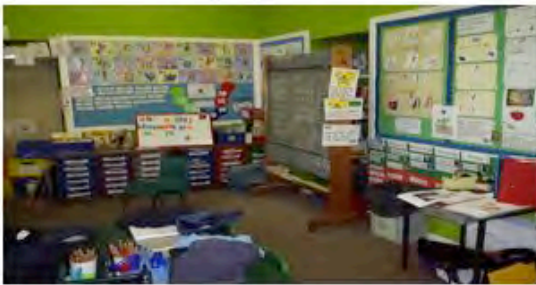
Before



Computer area



Tables and chairs in middle of room



Blackboard and storage



Shared wet area with workstation

After



Library area



Magnetic whiteboard replaces blackboard



Shared storage with Pre 5



New Smart Board



Tables moved to make a maths and language area

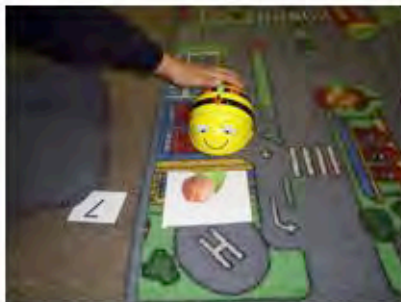


Numeracy



The counting house changes each term to match the topic being covered

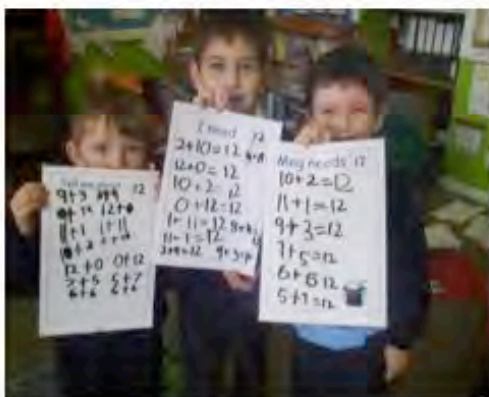
The Counting House



Playing with Bee Bot

Making sums with Charlie Chimp

Number Stories



Making and writing about 12



Counting in 2s

Meg and Mog



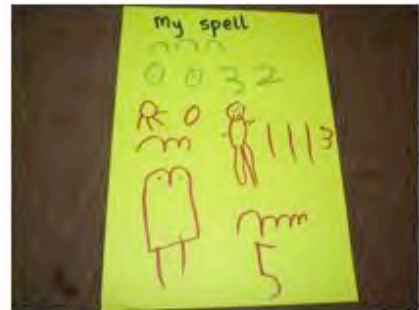
Spooky counting house



Ordering 0-10 on the washing line



Making
Spells



Meg and Mog



7 spots on Meg's hat



A wizard hat for Teddy

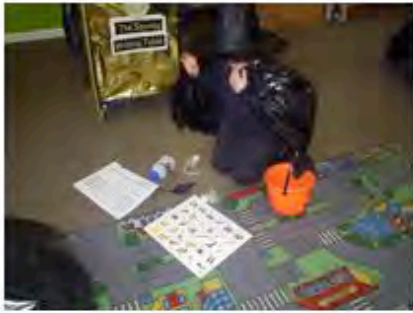


A bed for Wee Wizard



Inside Cauldron Cottage

Meg and Mog



Making a spell to turn Mum into a frog



Meeting Wizard Wonky and describing what he looks like



Meg's television

Meg's Car



Designing and making Meg's car



Mog the Cat

Writing instructions on how to make a sandwich



Visit from a beekeeper



Making honey sandwiches



Eating sandwiches before writing instructions



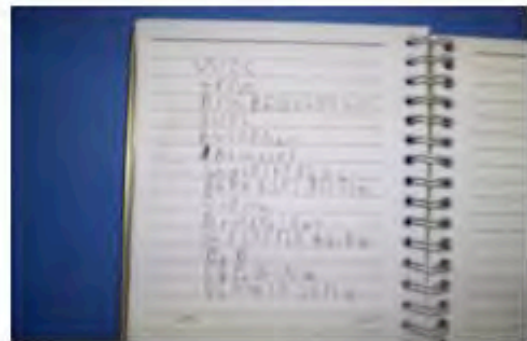
Alphabetical order on the washing line



Matching sounds with "cheeky chimps"



PC Plodd investigates an incident at The Three Bear's cottage



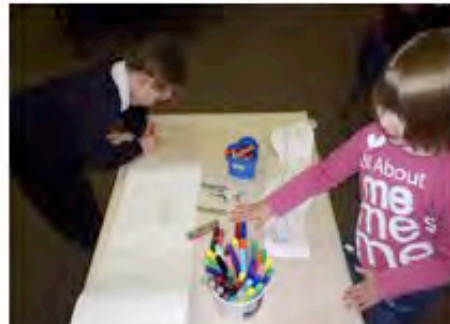
Pre 5 and Primary 1/2



Handwriting Activities



Scribble Tents and Tables



Gloop and Sand



Water Wash



using the easel and table

Letter Table



Using wipe off pens and a selection of materials



Water targets



tracing letters with water



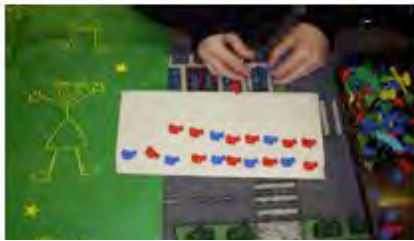
Pattern Activities



Patterns



Linking elephants and counters



Patterns



Wooden shapes



Ink stamps

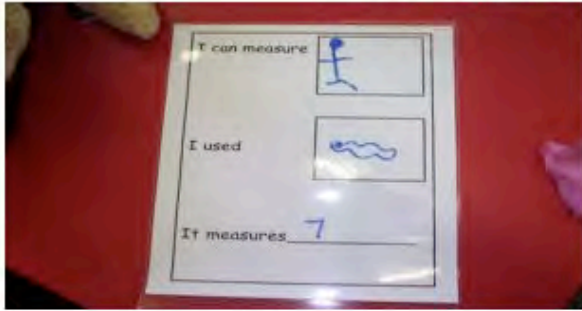


A flower for Mother's Day



Tissue shapes

Measure



Measuring with "worms" and recording the answer.



Long and short

capacity



Measuring how many cups and learning full, half full and empty



Signing up



Choosing language activity



Choosing maths activity

Targets



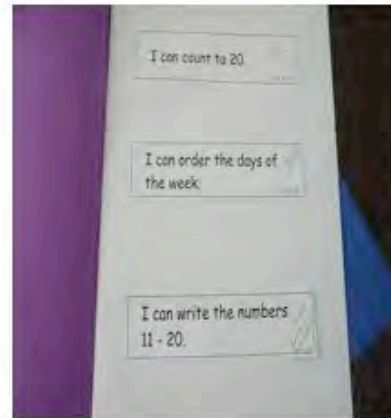
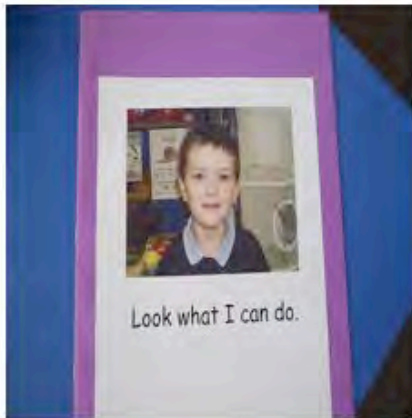
3 ticks on a target equals
1 star



3 stars equals "hand in the box"



Assessment



Targets are glued into a jotter

Learning is fun



Early Level Play Pilot Report for Rhu Primary Argyll and Bute - May 2008

Background

After many years in the infant department, I needed a fresh approach to my work with the children. The play pilot was like a gift. It felt as if, someone had after all been listening to teachers and given us permission to put into practice what we truly believed was right.

Staff Members Involved

As the Primary One teacher, I took advice from our Early Intervention member of staff who has a nursery background. The auxiliary and office staff created resources suggested at our meetings. Our head teacher provided time to organise new approaches and funds to provide new furniture, etc.

Aims of Project

The main aim was to concentrate on learning through play and provide a stimulating background in which to do this. The children needed time to explore materials and ideas in depth. They needed to take more charge of their learning and help lead the class in meaningful, new directions.

Implementation of the Project

The first implication was the layout of the classroom. Simple changes such as taking away some tables and a smaller teacher's table created more space and a rough plan of the classroom highlighted more change.

The next task was to rejuvenate existing resources, then make and buy more, using money from the pilot, the parent council, school funds and our own Enterprise scheme which made £160.

In August, I introduced new daily routines such as self-registration and planning boards. Existing topics were revamped and new story lines created.

Parents were kept informed of changes and new developments in their children's learning through presentations, workshops and a 'Shared Start' each Friday morning.

As my confidence grew in active play, I expanded the play activities to include maths, reading, phonics, handwriting and science.

In the first term, I was allowed to use some afternoons to visit other establishments, sharing good practice. i.e. Denbeath Primary in Fife, Cardross Primary, local nurseries and later Kirn Primary.

Impact of Project

Nearing the end of my first year in active play I underestimated the enormity of its impact. In comparison to previous years the children are, for the most part, much further on in basic skills. Mental ability in maths is much stronger than previous years for all abilities. All aspects of writing has noticeably improved, except pencil grip, which is just as before. Children are much more confident readers and very strong readers came to the fore more quickly. Knowledge of phonics is slightly better than before, but we are further behind due

to depth allowed. The children are independent learners with a far greater understanding of what they have actually learned. They ask more questions and are not afraid to suggest activities or take over the role of teacher in a game, displaying confidence in their ability. Children take much more responsibility for their learning and will revisit language and maths activities at free play.

The children are highly motivated and remain on task for very much longer as they make their own choices. As the year has progressed I find children are rejecting the noisier, more physical activities and opting for more seat based tasks requiring a concentrated effort. Parents have felt fully involved in their child's first year due to the 'Shared Start' and the number of activities requiring their help.

Impact on Staff

Visiting teachers have enjoyed working in our new classroom, involving themselves in new approaches and asking me endless questions. Members of staff have commented on the lovely atmosphere in our class, my strong relationship with the children and my apparent lack of stress. Although there have been times of stress when organising new activities and ideas, time spent with the children has been enjoyable and mostly stress free. As the class teacher I have a much greater knowledge and understanding of the children, their strengths, weaknesses and personalities.

Quotes from Staff and Case Studies

Asked how I would feel if I had to abandon Active Play and return to previous methods - 'Devastated'

Asked if he liked school, Joshua said, 'I love school. I want to sleep here.'

Ailsa's dad was a little put out when his daughter woke up one Saturday morning crying and said, 'I want to go to school'.

Asked if the cauldron game was a good way to learn addition, Fraser said, 'It was an incredible experience'.

Evidence

Talking to the children and parents would provide all the evidence anyone needs.

Feedback on the children's progress has been very positive. Visiting teachers have kept me on my toes, asking questions, taking photographs and asking for advice on how they can get started.

The photographs included, hopefully show the children's deep involvement and the variety of the activities they have been exposed to.

Conclusion

This has given me a whole new outlook in teaching. After 20+ years in teaching I have discovered renewed enthusiasm and energy for my profession. I can't get enough new ideas and am constantly on the look for cheap and cheerful resources. I feel it is important to continue promoting this approach and I am thankful that I was able to receive such excellent expertise and advice. It is possible that some teachers might panic and all early years teachers will need extensive inservice to implement these very worthwhile changes.

Next Steps

Next steps will be to try out new observation sheets in class. Continue to develop new planning sheets. In August we plan to set up a working party to improve the infant P.L.P. s and possibly set up a new P1 format for term 2 onwards. With a new class and different personalities, I will be monitoring and improving my methods and observing any results, using this year's class as a 'yard stick'. We aim to continue the work from Primary One into Primary Two and teachers involved will work even more closely on this.



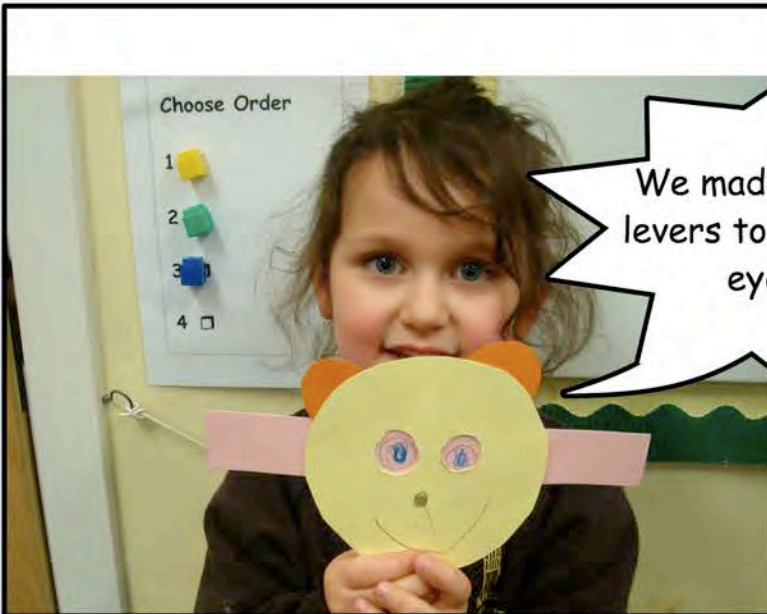
My first step towards a more active classroom was to create more space. We purchased a smaller more practical teacher's desk, which immediately opened up the front of the room. The removal of a computer trolley and 8 small desks, creating a teaching area in front of the smart board. The children now have room to work and play on the floor.



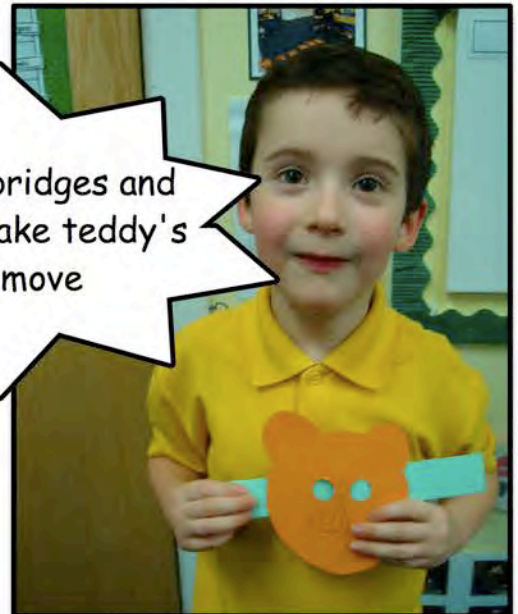
Technology is Fun



We cut zig-zags and wavy lines to make our crowns.



We made bridges and levers to make teddy's eyes move



I made a catching game with plastic, sticky tape, string and paper.



My dolphin balances on my finger.

Construction is Fun



We built a giant city. We are hiding from the little people.



We made animals for the jungle



We used Bau Play to make cars and trains. we discovered gears.



This is Lengthy World

Technology is Fun



We are learning to operate remote control buggies.



We use the computer to write and play games.



We built a bridge for Beebot. We had to measure him to make sure he fitted,



We play games and listen to stories at the listening post

Growing Things



We are growing potatoes, tomatoes and carrots.



We must remember to water them. We will eat them in Primary Two.





Grandparents' Day



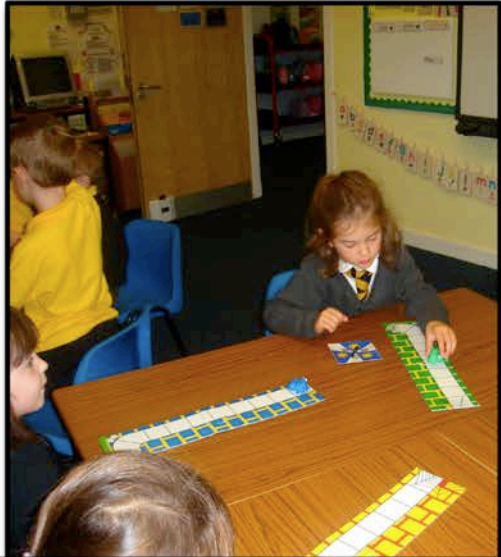
Music



Show and Tell

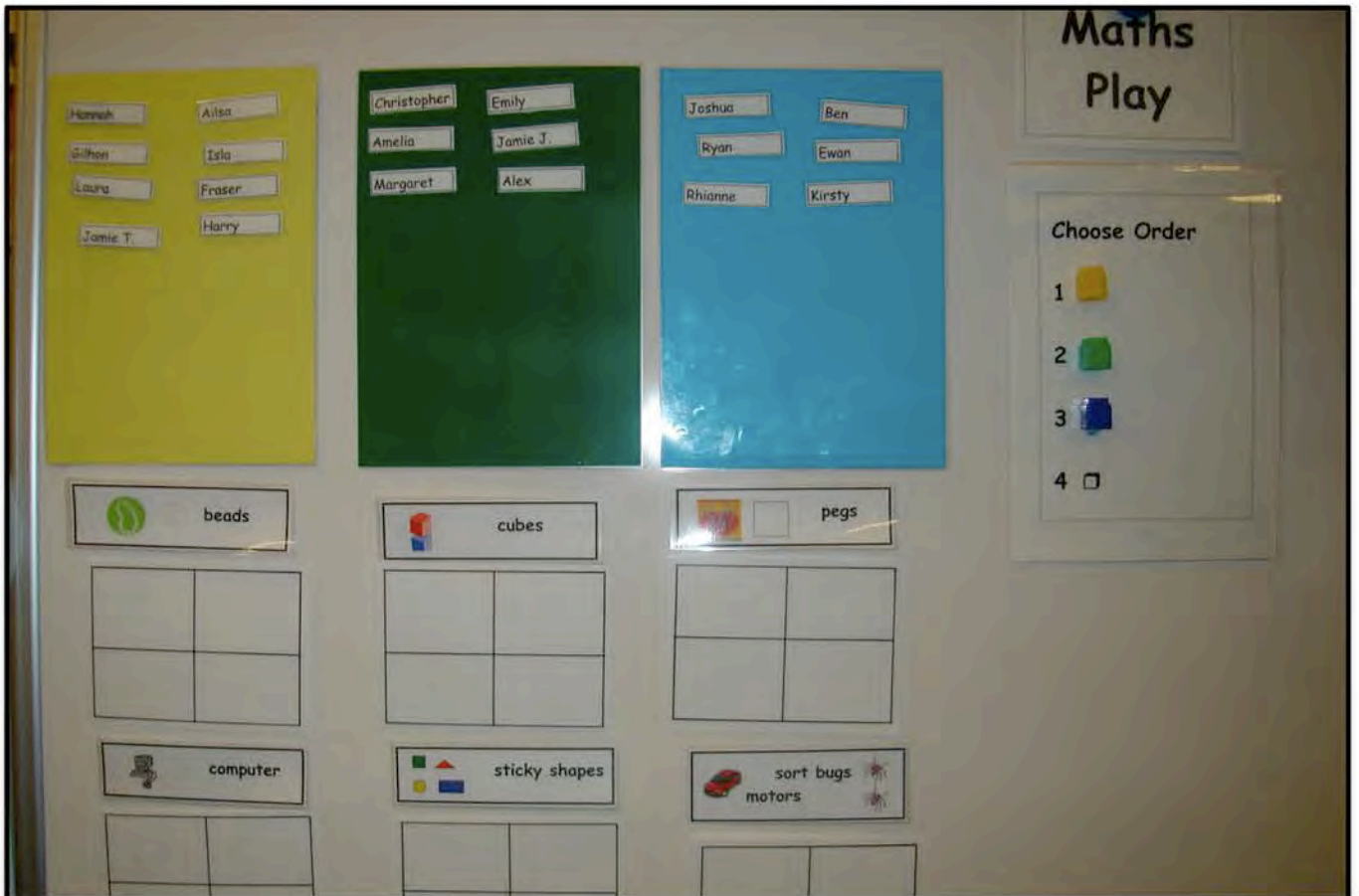


Our Games Morning



Some brave parents played board games with the children to practise their number line and dice skills.





Children enjoy the choice and variety on offer, remaining interested and motivated for much longer. They understand very quickly, the idea of choose order and waiting your turn.



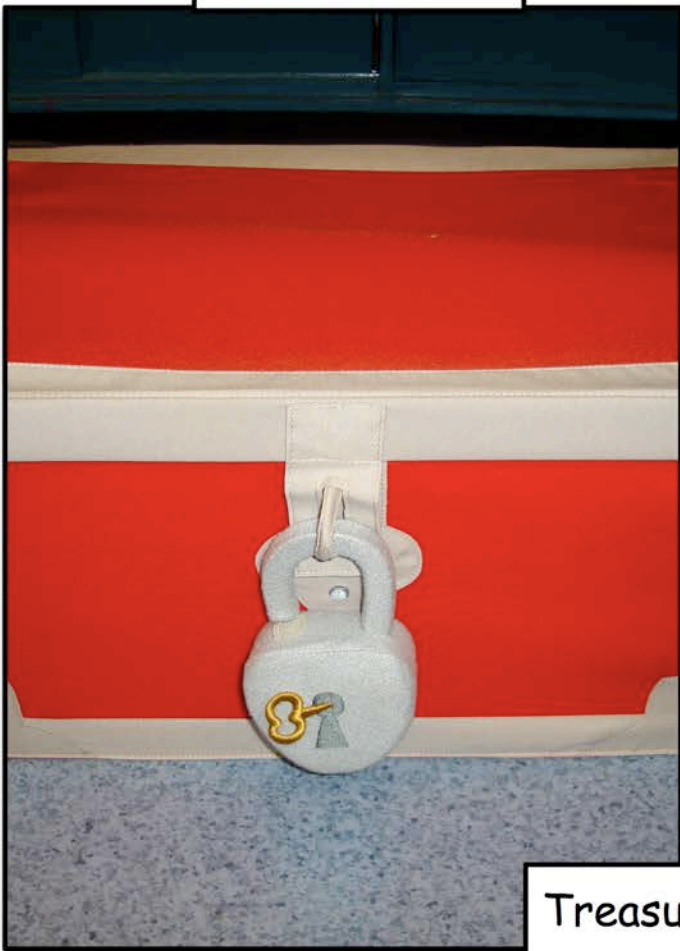
Writing Areas



Sparkle Space



Writing Tower



Treasure Box



Our Story Line 'Baby Red Riding Hood'



Designing a nursery



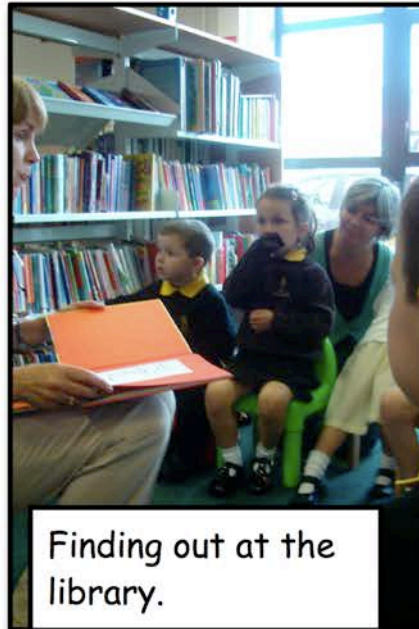
Phoning the doctor



Midwife



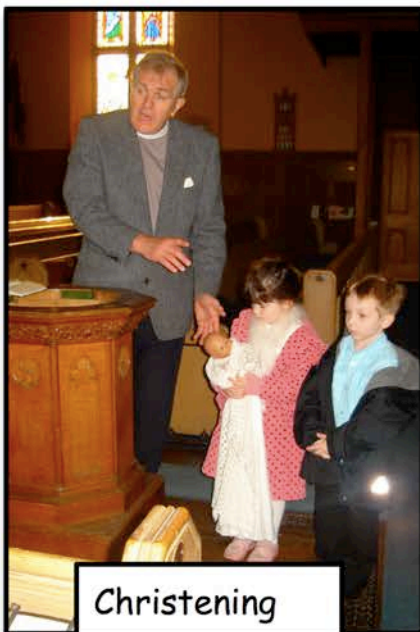
Nanny application



Finding out at the library.



Registering the birth



Christening

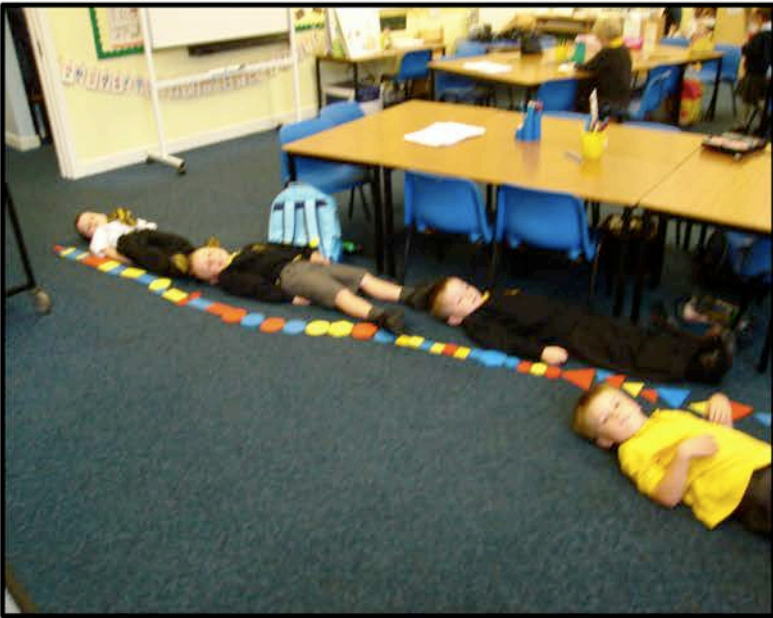
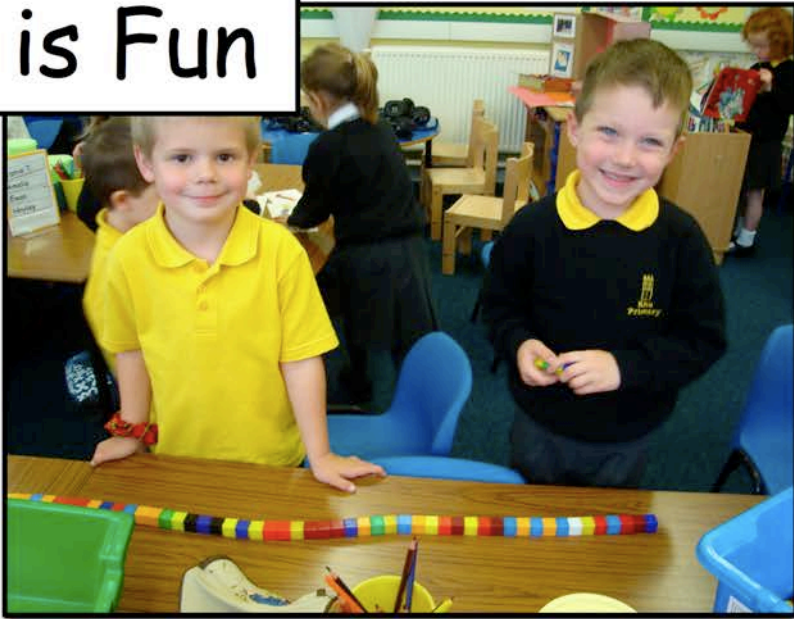


Christening cake



Thank-you letters

Maths is Fun



Early Level Play Pilot Report for Rothesay Primary and Pre 5 Unit Argyll and Bute - June 2008

Background:

Rothesay Primary joined the pilot for active learning just before we moved to our new joint campus last summer. We share the campus with Rothesay Academy and Argyll College. The staff involved in the pilot were myself, Linda Connor, currently a P1 teacher, and Allison Hassan, senior pre-5 officer.

I have been an Infant teacher since qualifying at Jordanhill in 1973, and having been trained in Froebel methods, feel that this pilot is taking us right back to methods that are familiar to me and which allow children to explore, investigate and experience as they learn and grow. I have been at Rothesay Primary since 1998, and have been a P1 teacher here since 2001.

Aims of the project:

The aim of this pilot was to promote a more active approach to learning through play across Argyll and Bute. Our aim at RPS was to introduce more active learning into P1, while at the same time smoothing the transition from pre-5.

Implementation:

Allison and I attended various training days at Inveraray, where Linda Keith organized workshops. These days gave us many practical ideas, which covered everything from the arrangement of furniture in the classroom to the teaching of maths. We were sent back inspired and raring to go!

My immediate priority was to organize the new classroom. I knew which areas I wanted to create, but organizing the space took a lot of thought and there were many changes between the first layout and the way I have my room now.

Looking back at last year's daily diary, I saw changes that could be made immediately. I started off in a very simple way by reducing the amount of sedentary colouring activities and increasing the amount of active play.

Linda had introduced me to a play chart system which allows the children to 'sign in' for their chosen activities. I had doubts about this at first, thinking that it could be very time consuming, but am happy to admit that I was wrong. The children very quickly learned the routine, and the benefits of this system were immediately obvious. Each child made his own decision about what to do, and settled into his chosen activity more quickly than if it had been imposed on him. Special friends were given the opportunity to work/play together. Groups rarely comprised the same children two days in a row.

I established a writing table and incorporated it into our topic corner, so the children had tasks that varied with each different topic. The writing table was stocked with pencils, pens, stencils, whiteboards, staplers, hole punchers, paper clips, ink pads and stampers, topic related pictures, boxes containing laminated words and of course a variety of coloured card and paper.

Below is an example of how I used the writing table as a play activity.

One morning in October the children arrived at school to find a letter from Meg the witch. The letter told them that she had lost her broomstick. Could the children help her find it? We agreed that we'd try. The broomstick was found some time later in the Autumn corner. The excitement was tremendous! A big discussion followed. What should we do now? How could we let Meg know that we'd found her broomstick? The children decided themselves that they should write to Meg. There was great excitement as they took their turns at the writing table. Their letters consisted of random words, symbols and pictures. One little boy was concerned that he needed to spell words correctly, but I explained that as Meg was magic, she would know what he was thinking as soon as she looked at his letter. The following day the children received another letter. Meg thanked them for finding her broomstick and left them a 'real' witches' hat. More written responses followed from the children, and over the next few weeks they enjoyed sending and receiving letters. They were learning about the purpose of writing.



Above are the children in our Autumn corner.

The pictures below show the writing table being used during our Winter and Spring topics.





After the writing table, the next area to be established was our 'Counting Castle'. This took several weeks to construct. The castle is occupied by the frog prince. The frog prince is always on hand to help the children with any problems they might encounter as they learn about numbers, but the children were also able to help him. For example, the frog prince has a very unreliable milkman who can't count. He continually got the milk order wrong. If the frog prince was to ask for 7 bottles of milk to be left at the castle door, the milkman might only leave 2. The children had to work out how many more bottles were needed. The activities within this area changed as the children progressed in their understanding of number. They included various counting, matching and sorting activities, as well as measure and time. We also progressed to addition and subtraction games, using the 'teddy train', which brought visitors to the castle.



The white boards on display had been put there by the children. They like the frog prince to see how well they can record sums! Below are some further pictures of children engaged in number activities from the Counting Castle.





To help us get started, we had been given some money to spend on resources. My purchases included:

Magnetic picture cards for sequencing familiar fairy stories.

Picture cards of characters, places and situations to inspire story telling.

A fabric train with pockets in the carriages for teddy passengers. (I used this to introduce addition and then again to introduce subtraction.)

Linking elephants for pattern, sorting and counting activities.

A programmable 'Bee-Bot' toy.

Magnifying glasses.

A 'bug scooper' with magnified compartment.

A 'Tuff Spot' (large moulded plastic play mat with many uses)

Impact of the project:

Working with a more active approach has certainly brought fun back into learning. It involves the children in developing their learning as they access appropriate resources and learn through experience.

These resources, however, don't just appear. It takes a lot of time and effort to collect, produce and organize quality resources for each area. In fact, my best decision of the year was to buy my own laminator!

The other obvious impact of the project is on planning. Planning has to be a priority and it takes a lot of time as individual needs are considered and matched with appropriate activities.

Impact on the children:

The children have all really grown in confidence this year. In a class with several different levels of ability, each child has been able to work at his own pace. They are all enthusiastic about their work and see everything as fun. Many of them have told parents how much they love maths!

Impact on staff:

Working this way has also given me confidence. I have become much more critical of schemes of work, and am now ready to completely abandon Heinemann. I looked at each page in the workbooks and was able to see how I could improve on the way each concept was delivered. The children can learn these concepts through play activities and have no need to complete page after page of their workbooks. As a result, able children can progress much more quickly and less able can spend as much time as is required at each stage.

Case study:

Our biggest success story this year has to be that of a little girl who spent her first few days at school in tears. She was very immature and was identified for Early Intervention. We immediately began to plan play activities, which would fulfill her needs. She gradually and steadily grew in confidence. She is now brimming with enthusiasm and has a real desire to succeed. Having been unable to retain the names of ORT story characters or count beyond 3, she is now confidently reading Stage 3 books and can count and add with numbers to 10. She is currently learning about subtraction through play activities.

Evidence:

The best evidence I can give is to include further photographs, which show the types of play activities made available to the children.









Here at RPS we are taking active learning forward. We feel we made a good start this year, and have seen the benefits in happy, confident children who have achieved their targets. Next session we are going further. We are opening up our two P1 classrooms to create one large area. Eilidh MacKay and I will teach our two classes together, and in such a way that we can cater for all levels of ability. We feel confident enough to teach maths without a published scheme, and will organize our groups to include many play activities. Language/literacy will be taught in a similar way.

Conclusion:

Active learning is a more natural way for children to learn. It engages the children in their learning, because it allows them to learn from experience. What they are learning makes more sense. It is also easy to cater for all levels of ability. We plan to stay with it!

Early Level Play Pilot Report for Achaleven Primary Argyll and Bute - June 2008

Aims of the project

To provide early years pupils with a more active approach to learning and to explore different methods to approach cross curricular projects.

Implementation of the Project

Attended courses throughout the year to discuss and analyse early levels in maths and literacy with Linda Keith, Anne Paterson and Tricia Boyd. As a result of these sessions implemented a more active approach to learning, in maths initially, and gradually throughout term 1 Jan – October. The success of the initial approaches gave me confidence to develop further ideas and extend active learning into many more areas of the curriculum and include Primary 2 and 3 in many of the activities.

Impact of the Project

The impact has been extremely beneficial to all pupils. The most notable impact has been on the confidence and resilience of the Primary 1 group. They are more willing to talk about how they will tackle an activity and to share what they have learned with others. They are very enthusiastic about their learning and are always looking forward to the next step. I have taught the early stages for many years and I have implemented many new strategies and methods over the years. I feel that this has been the most rewarding and beneficial strategy yet. Teaching Active Learning makes me think more carefully about the impact of not only the teaching but the activity and the resources used. I have discovered that not a great deal of money needs to be spent to create the most useful resources, but it can take quite a bit of teacher time and creativity! The pace of learning has certainly increased, but also has the depth of understanding as we do not have to pay lip service to textbook pages we are free to tackle the same concept in a variety of ways, this approach benefits all learning styles. Another noticeable outcome was on the motivation of the boys in the group. In general, boys of this age tend to be easily distracted and find it difficult to remain on task for any length of time, when active learning approach is used it has been very interesting to note that the boys appear to be well motivated and fully engaged in the task. This has also has a very noticeable impact on behaviour which can only be beneficial for future learning.

Impact on the children

As stated above the children all appear to be very happy and fully engaged in all their tasks. They have not this year mentioned the words 'I'm bored' or 'What do I do now?' Once relevant resources are put out the children quickly find ways to use the resources, often not the use which was expected and are very willing to make up new activities to challenge each other. Their problem solving skills have improved greatly as has their confidence to tackle new tasks, including writing.

Impact on Staff

Love it, once the planning challenge has been tackled, the less time that is used on marking piles of books, the more time I have to create resources and talk to the children.

It is easier to involve them in the planning for next steps as there is more time to listen and observe.

Conclusion

I would be very reluctant to return to the 'old ways'. Each day is faced with enthusiasm as there are new challenges. It can be very time consuming thinking about different approaches and sometimes a worksheet has been used to check learning and the children feel they are doing 'grown – up' work. But on the whole it has been a great experience.

Primary 2 and 3 were very keen to participate and there has been less workbook and textbook tasks completed in these age groups also. There has been much more discussion and exploration of numbers and although the older children were more reluctant to share their ideas 'he/she is copying me!' they soon got used to the idea that they could learn from each other and that everybody had an idea or a solution that could be shared.

I have thought more carefully about the 'how' and the 'so what' factors in teaching and it has had quite an impact on my teaching. I do feel quite strongly that this has been facilitated by the sessions with Linda and the rest of our group. The support and ideas have been very welcome and encouraging. And my imagination and creativity have been challenged and stretched. It has been a huge learning experience for both myself, other early years staff and the children.

Next Steps

Active learning will be extended into Primary 2 and some methods will be shared and adopted throughout the school with relevant staff being encouraged to further their own learning through attending courses and sharing ideas at staff meetings. Resources will continually be reviewed to ensure that they encourage active learning and fewer workbooks will be purchased. Plans will be developed to ensure that the learning needs of all children are addressed. Active learning will continue to feature in the school's improvement plan.

How do you know when there is Active Learning?

An Active Learning class is



Talking



Challenging



sharing

helping



proud

busy



learning



Achaleven Primary - The Owl Who was afraid of the Dark



Plop was afraid because his world was changing. We explained to Plop what was happening to his world and showed him the signs of Autumn in the garden.

We designed a new home for Plop using solid shapes. We learned about the properties of solid shapes and thought about the best shapes to build Plop a safe home.



We learned to count and add to 5 with pictures of Plop

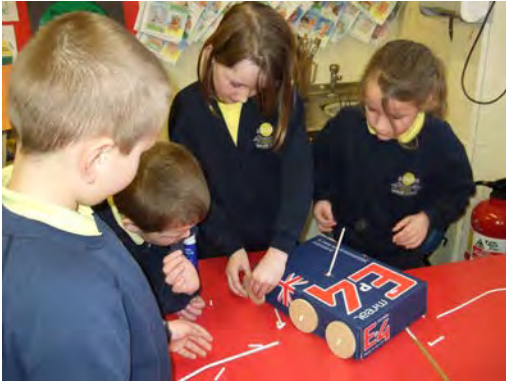


We found out what friends Plop would have in his woods and we met some of them. We made up stories about Plop and his friends and we told them to each other.



Transport Topic – Challenge: to design and make a buggy which moves

The children were fully motivated by this activity and some of the ideas they came up with were very surprising. On the day of the 'race' the teams made posters to cheer on their buggy and there was great cheering from everyone when the buggies crossed the finished line. The children learned about forces, technology and also about supporting each other and listening and responding to others ideas through this activity. They also learned to respect each others strengths.



This was the best topic ever!



I learned that some people have good ideas!

I learned that if something doesn't work you try something else

I really liked working With my friends

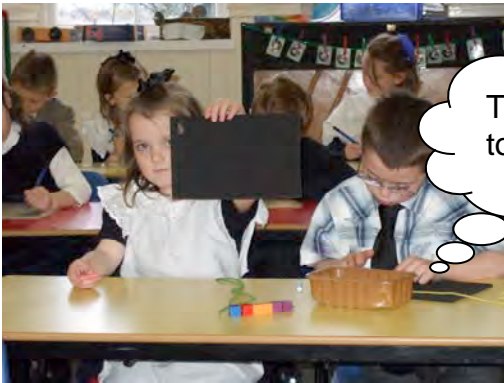


Our School Topic – We found out that our school is very old – over 100 years old. Primary 3 researched what children would wear to school, what lessons would look like and what games children would have played 100 years ago. They told us all about it and we decided to have a Victorian school day to find out what school was like 100 years ago.



Good Morning Mrs Burt.
She looks very scary
today!

It's hard work
keeping quiet.
How did my
Grandad



This work is
too easy!



Playtime is good fun.
There were lots of games
we could play.



Early Level Play Pilot Report for Campbeltown Nursery - Viv Campbell Argyll and Bute - June 2008

I became involved in the early level play pilot initially because Castlehill were involved and we work closely with the school as the majority of our children go there. I was also very aware from my own evaluation of our service and from attending training that we needed to work at improving the learning focus within our planning and our interactions with the children. We had been involving the children in planning their activities through plan, do, review, but I knew we could go much further than that in involving the children in planning for their own learning. We were trying to incorporate 'assessment is for learning' strategies into our work with the children and I considered that this pilot would give me lots of ideas to make our practice much more dynamic and stimulating. It certainly did that!

The implementation of the project involved all the staff, and I was fortunate that the staff were behind me and keen to try out new ideas. We also had an HMI inspection this year and the good report - 'staff interactions with children were goodthey made effective use of questioning and dialogue to extend children's thinking and learning' -that we received was a lot to do with our participation in the early level pilot.

We didn't drastically change our practice. We still kept the same format for the sessions, because they involved 'plan, do review' and focussed on following the child's lead and developing the child's learning through effective interactions. We just worked hard to improve our interactions and to ensure that our medium term planning focussed clearly on our learning intentions and was flexible enough to allow the children scope to develop the theme.

The first topic that we chose was "big and little". We decided to take the children around Campbeltown and take photos of things that were big and little. The children really enjoyed this and seeing the photos being put onto a computer and printed out. In groups the children discussed the pictures and started to make a floorbook.



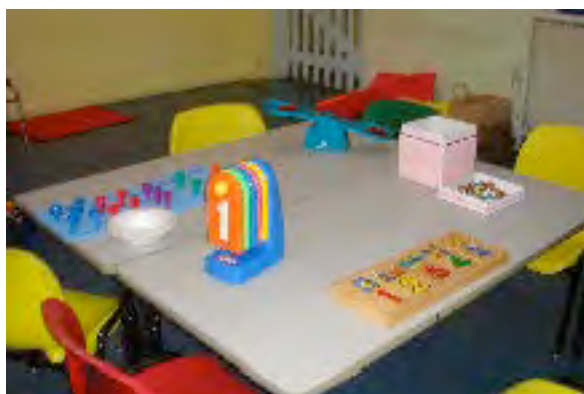
They all drew pictures of their favourite big/little photo, and told us about their pictures for the floorbook. Then they decided that they would make models of the buildings. They brought junk in from home and worked together making models.





The children became so involved in this topic, it was amazing. One boy who is a very quiet child took over the making of the model buildings and was organising the other children, really effectively. We were very impressed!

Lynda Keith also inspired me to develop our maths provision and we introduce a number of the activities that she suggested. We developed a Maths table



and set up a washing line and a number line.

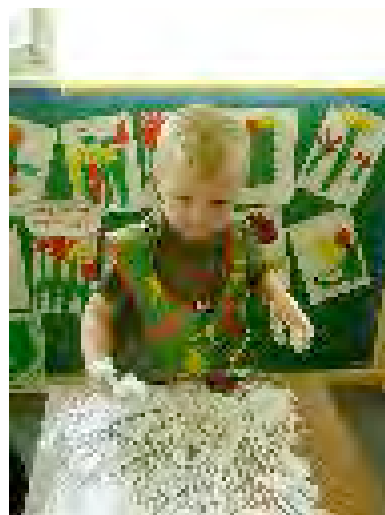
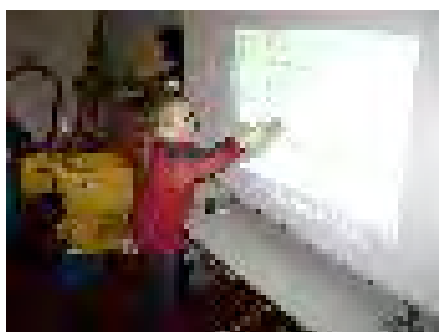
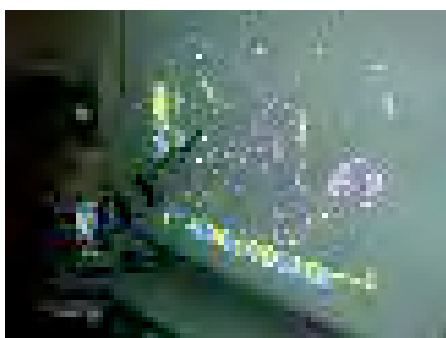


These activities are varied and differentiated and are always part of the daily choice for the children. We feel that the children's development in number has improved considerably.



Similarly with language, we have improved our provision and hence the children's learning by being part of the play pilot. The use of floorbooks has given the children a focus to develop their pre writing skills, as well as their ability to discuss ideas and feelings. Allowing them to take the lead in developing our topics has resulted in a greatly improved ability to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings. We have used different media to allow the children to practice 'writing'.

The Activ board has proved very popular with all the children and has made 'writing' activities great fun!



I have used cooperative learning strategies and one which proved very successful involved getting the children in pairs to tell each other their favourite colour. They then told the rest of the group their partner's favourite colour and working together to get the necessary materials, made flags of their favourite colours.



The children have amazed me by how capable they have proved themselves having been given more responsibility, and how much more involved they have become in their own learning. Dionne took over decorating Santa's grotto.

Three 3-year old boys enjoyed a book together.



Early Level Play Pilot Report for Castlehill Primary Argyll and Bute - June 2008

Background

Transition from pre-school

The majority of children who start P1 in Castlehill have attended Campbeltown Nursery during their pre-school years. Whilst Campbeltown Nursery lies adjacent to Castlehill School it is a separate entity with its own Head of Centre, Mrs Viv Campbell.



Traditionally, children entering P1 in Castlehill were given the opportunity to visit the school and work with P1 teachers on four occasions during the month of May prior to their entry to school.

Over the past few years we have expanded this provision and now small groups of children, accompanied by a Nursery staff member, make visits from February onwards. They play in the open area during break times and get to know staff and the layout of the school in an informal, relaxed situation.

During last session, pre-school children came into the P1 classroom after break and joined in with songs, rhymes or listened to a story. This proved to be very successful!. They then had their four longer visits in May with their class teachers.

In April 2007, we held our usual Parents' Evening for parents of children due to start school in August. Parents were introduced to the idea of "Active Learning" as well as being given all the usual information about starting school. There was a positive response from several parents who had been worried about their children's ability to sit still!



When we were invited to take part in the pilot, we were delighted because we have felt for a long time that the type of teaching and learning happening at P1 is totally unsuitable for the majority of four or five year olds.

Our situation

Claire Reid and I (Ida Brown) share responsibility for P1. Claire teaches them on Mondays Tuesdays and Wednesday mornings and I have them for the remainder of the week. This is not an ideal situation especially for a P1 class and brings with it problems of communication and continuity for which we just have to find solutions!

We are very lucky to have an excellent Pupil Support Assistant, Katrina Cameron, who is with P1 every morning and this helps greatly with continuity.

Normally, numbers are such that a P1 and a P1/2 class is required. This year however, the intake was unusually small - 21, and therefore ideal for the Early Level Pilot!

Aims of the project

Our aims were twofold - firstly, to improve transition from pre-school to school, and, secondly, to provide a wealth of enjoyable, meaningful active learning experiences for P1 children thus enabling them to develop in the four capacities of A curriculum for Excellence.

Problems outwith our control !

When we agreed to be part of the Pilot, we hadn't bargained for the devastation which enveloped the Infant Department during the summer holidays!! New windows were being put in and new floor coverings in some areas.

The chaos was unbelievable since the entire contents of one class had been put in the open area to allow a new carpet to be laid. Furthermore, Claire and I had also moved the P1 class to a larger teaching area in order to allow us to set up active learning areas within that space. There was a thick layer of dust everywhere, numerous boxes to be unpacked and total panic!!!!

Painters were still working in our classroom on Wednesday 15th August, the day before the children started!

By 9am on Thursday, we had a classroom with active learning areas set up, albeit these were somewhat bare!

New classroom layout



Writing Area



Maths Area



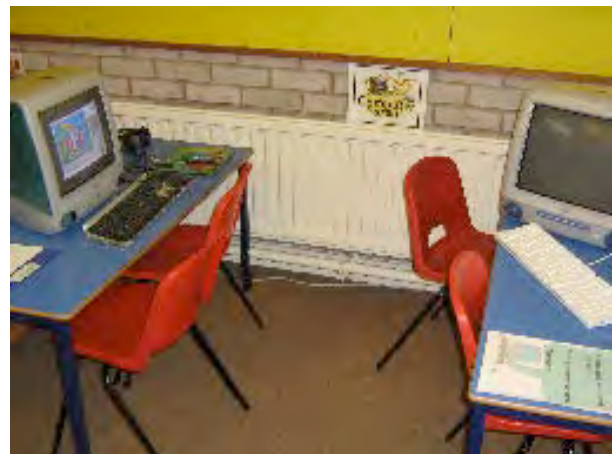
Reading Area



Role Play Area



Water, sand, art/craft
area just outside class



Computers - only one of
which is working!

Transition Topic

After discussion with Viv, we decided to have a topic which ran from Nursery into the beginning of P1. Our topic is Bears of the teddy variety!. Viv bought a bear and introduced him to the Nursery children as a bear who had just recently moved to Campbeltown. This bear was going to start school with them in August. The Nursery children brought the bear to school on several of their pre-school visits.

When August the 16th arrived, so did the bear, complete with his school sweatshirt!

The bear is always doing something different each morning when the children arrive in the class - on the computer, reading a book etc. They always look for him and give him a hug!

The first day!



Day One - 9.45 am!





The children just came in and "got on with it"!

The first few days

I soon realised that the traumatic feeling of sheer panic I felt when the bell rang at 9am on Day One was unnecessary! The children simply came in and took to active learning like ducks to water! After all, they were entering an environment not dissimilar to the one they had left at Nursery in June. They all seemed happy and almost all were engaged in what they were doing.

It was I who wasn't too sure what I was doing and I, who was decidedly removed from my comfort zone!

I felt somewhat out of control and realised that we would need to put more organisational strategies in place as quickly as possible.



We decided to split the class into six small groups so that there were never more than four children at each area.

This board shows activities for the Plan, Do, Review session which runs from about 9.40 to 10.15am. Groups have first choice on a rota basis and two or three of the activities change each day. (Names stick on with Velcro).

Self Registration

Children register themselves in the morning before coming into the class.



Whole class handwriting lesson



The children enjoy using the white boards and cope very well sitting on the floor with the boards on their knees.

They concentrate very well and don't seem to be bothered by the close proximity of their classmates!

Mistakes can be easily erased and there is no record of failure!

Successful work can be photocopied and displayed.

We like to MOVE!



Daily physical activity is really enjoyed and children seem to settle better to tasks afterwards. We use a variety of resources including Movement Matters, Sticky Kids and Brain Gym activities.

Children also have the choice of physical play during several play sessions per week.



Whole class teaching

On reflection, we have decided that we have done more whole class teaching this year, especially at the beginning of the session.

Our only problem with phonics was finding somewhere for every child to sit since we had done away with a table and chair for each child!



Synthetic Phonics



Reading

“Washing line reading” was a great success and really helped the children begin to

Maths is fun!

The children seem to have a greater depth of understanding because they are having so much “hands on” experience.....



We have never had so much fun teaching Maths and I think the children have enjoyed it too!!

More Maths



Practical Maths has become the norm.



There is plenty of time for it since children are not filling in worksheets or workbooks!

Numeracy



We have been amazed at how easily the children have been able to learn and encouraged by the progress they have all made, even the least able!

All children in the class have had the same learning opportunities made available to them and have then taken their own learning forward at their own pace!

There are no barriers/limits to learning which means that children are free to explore numbers beyond what one would expect in a traditional primary one setting.

Understanding seems to have a greater depth and children are confident to experiment and explore numbers.



Active counting

Where have all the workbooks gone?

Long time passing!!



Addition of 3 numbers



Addition Robot



Maths Area



Exploring number bonds

Where have all the workbooks gone?

Far, far away!!!

Learning in context

Because learning is taking place actively and within a topic or theme, it has become fun and more meaningful to children. We have found that children are more motivated and are learning to work successfully together in groups.



“Happy Healthy Me” topic



The Storyline Approach

The alien arrives!



One of our most successful topics was "A Visitor from Space" which we did using the Storyline approach.

The children write to her.



The writing area



The take off!



The role play area



Our main focus was literacy and we hoped to inspire the children to write! Our Alien wrote back to the children in upside down Wingdings script! A problem to solve!!

Children were excited and keen to solve problems to help our visitor and her babies return home safely! So, we built a rocket!

Conclusions

Although we feel that the pilot has been a great success, there are some problems, concerns etc for which we haven't as yet found solutions or answers! Here are just a few!

* Record Keeping/Evidence etc - Having been tied to so much paper for so long, it is difficult to get one's head round the concept that, "The children are your evidence." Because the children are doing little in the way of workbooks and worksheets etc, we don't have a huge amount of written evidence of their progress. We are continuing to complete reading records and phonic checklists for each child and are currently working on a Maths record. Creative Writing folders will be passed on to the next teacher.

* Planning - We tried out all different kinds of planning formats this session and are finding it difficult to decide on the most useful one. To a large extent, it depends on the type of work being undertaken and, therefore, we may end up using several different kinds e.g. interdisciplinary, storyline etc.

* Time management - Lack of time and opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved and to plan next steps is a continuing problem! We also find it difficult to free up enough time for observations and to hear reading. We feel sure that the children's reading skills are at least as well developed, if not better, than in previous years, but think it is still very important to spend quality time with each child.

The successes far outweigh any lingering "teething troubles"!!

- * Children are happy and motivated to learn.
- * Children communicate with each other about what they are doing/learning. Most of the time, they co-operate and help each other!
- * They are much more in control of their own learning, how they learn and at what pace.
- * They seem to have learnt just as much, if not more, and have a better, fuller understanding of what they have learnt.
- * Each child has had the opportunity to extend his or her learning to its full potential instead of being restricted to the P1 curriculum.
- * School has become a fun and exciting place to be again!
- * Staff, *although exhausted*, feel they are providing appropriate and worthwhile learning and teaching for all children.....at long last!

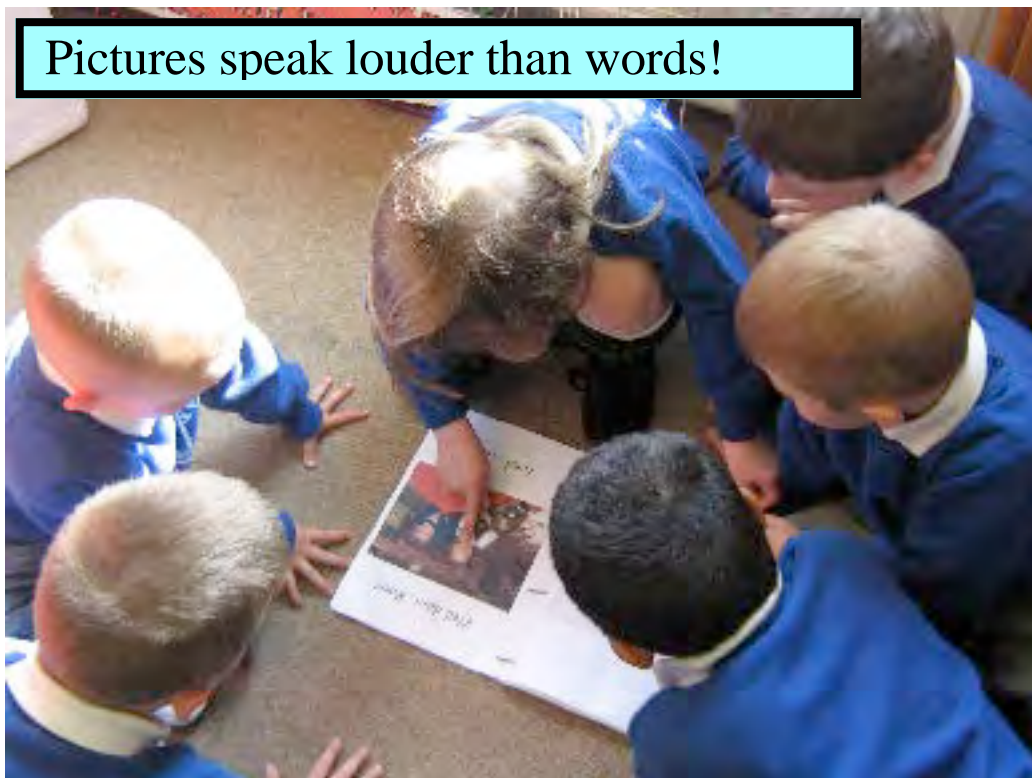
* Teaching staff have had the benefit of attending several inspiring training days delivered by Lynda Keith!

* Parents are happy that their children are enjoying school and many are amazed by what their children can now do!

I think our main, and constant worry throughout the session has been "Are we doing it right?"

It is so far removed from anything we have done before that we have lived with a feeling of insecurity!

Pictures speak louder than words!



An able reader reading a home-made book to her captivated audience, during a free flow play session!

However. . . we should have had more faith in the children and their ability to learn, and in ourselves and our ability to provide a successful learning environment!

"I wish Primary One had been like this when I was at school," said one parent to me on Parents' Evening.

There is no doubt that this has been one of the most difficult, most exhausting and yet most rewarding years of our teaching careers!

(Next session won't be so difficult AND Sparkle Box is FREE!!)

"Bye Mrs Brown. School's the best!" said one wee girl on her way out of the classroom.

NEXT STEPS??? Look out Primary 2! HERE WE COME!

Early Level Play Pilot Report for Innellan Primary Argyll and Bute - June 2008

Background

Innellan Primary School was invited to join the Early level Play Pilot, with a view to increasing the opportunities for active learning in the Primary 1 to 4 class. A recent reduction in the school roll provided the opportunity to reorganise the open plan structure of the school and make four teaching areas into three. There was now scope to develop areas within the school that provided space and resources for active play. Funding was provided to buy new resources and a clear out of redundant furniture provided new space for active learning.

Innellan Primary is fortunate in having extensive grounds which include a hard-court, grassy banks, trees, shrubs and a football pitch. All of these areas are easily accessible and can be used by the children as an outdoor classroom.

Aims

The aims of the project were principally:

1. To ease the transition between pre-school and Primary one by continuing the active learning experience of pre-school.
2. To ensure challenge and enjoyment, and personalised learning, which is at the heart of A Curriculum for Excellence.

Implementation

We decided to take our first Active Learning approach in Environmental Studies. Our topic was the Vikings.

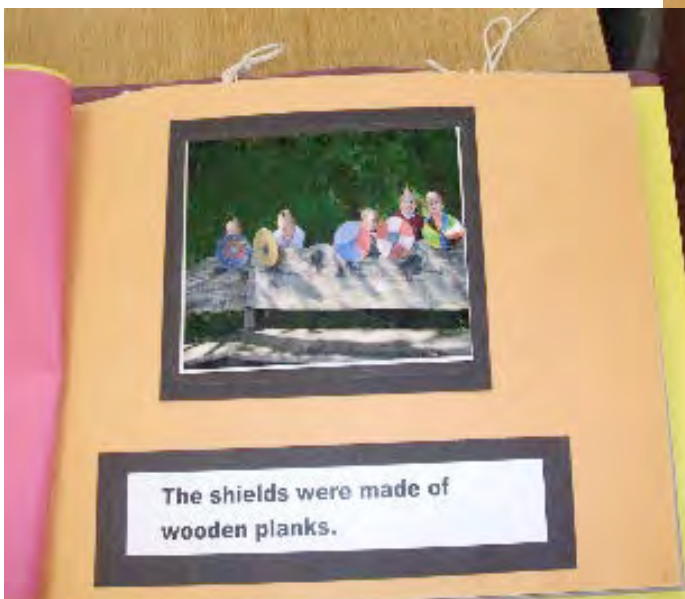
The children brought in clothes to dress up and take the part of Vikings and much use was made of outdoors.

They acted out all aspects of Viking life and without a single worksheet acquired a tremendous amount of knowledge and enjoyed the whole experience immensely.

The many photos taken along the way were then presented in a book at the end of the topic along with some super writing inspired by their experiences.



The children recreated life on a longboat



The Vikings arrive!

One nice sunny day we were all working hard in our village, minding our own business. We were chopping trees, cleaning, knitting, making dinner, sewing clothes, gardening and planting. Our children were playing and having good fun.

All of a sudden, we heard loud noises. It was a growling and roaring racket!! There was shouting and screaming! We were scared and petrified! A big group of people with weapons came running towards us. They had swords, knives, axes and shields! We didn't know who they were. They began to fight us.

The whole village was frightened. We screamed and screamed. Some people ran away to hide, but some brave people tried to fight bare-handed! We thought we were going to die.

A long time after this terrifying day, we found out that they were Vikings trying to take our land from us.

Lewis Macd., Lewis C, Lewis McC, Craig, Jay, Katie and Caitlin. P.2.

After their adventures in the playground the children were inspired to write exciting stories.

We planned and then constructed a Viking Longhouse in the classroom. The children were then able to use the completed house for role play .



After the success of our Viking topic we decided to introduce active learning to different areas of the curriculum.

In maths the younger children used 3D shapes to make exciting and imaginative constructions.



The older children used different shapes to create junk models. So enthusiastic were the older children about the robots that they made with junk modelling materials that they had to continue and design and make vehicles for the robots to travel in.



P1 children used a Teddy Bear's Picnic as a stimulus for counting, matching, sorting and ordering and derived huge enjoyment from the process.



King Fred the hungry frog enabled P2 children to reach a sound understanding of addition and subtraction within 20 - and beyond!



The Christmas Shop offered opportunities for Active Learning in all areas of the curriculum. The children decided what was to be sold, the price structure and the layout of the shop. They set up a decoration factory to produce the goods for the shop. They held customer surveys to find out which items would be best sellers. The customers got their bargains and the shopkeepers ensured that they made a profit! When the shop opened for business the shoppers were responsible for buying the decorations to decorate the house corner. Each group had their own ideas about how to spend their money and what the decorated house should look like. The January sale was a fun conclusion.



Careful measuring ensured a good fit.



Impact

Initially the project required a lot of hard work in terms of planning and preparing resources. The experience however has been very rewarding both for the children and staff. The children became much more independent and inquisitive and were able to remain absorbed in tasks for much longer periods.

Our next steps will be to continue to develop this teaching and learning approach to include P4 pupils. We see this method as being particularly valuable in our development of the Curriculum for Excellence.

Early Level Play Pilot Report for Gigha Primary Argyll and Bute - June 2008

Background to the Pilot

Gigha Primary School and pre-5 Unit serve the Island of Gigha. Following the community buy out of the island in 2002 and the provision of new socially rented housing for the island, the school roll increased dramatically from 6 children to 23 with 5 in the pre 5 Unit. This increase in the school roll had led to nursery and p1/2 staff sharing space and working together more closely. In addition the school improvement plan highlighted the need for more scope for play in p1/2.

Staff were looking for ways to ease pre-5 to p1 transition.

On top of this the entire school building was undergoing refurbishment and an extension was under construction, which was originally planned to be used as the new pre 5 classroom. At the beginning of the 2007-8 session we had to start by unpacking all our boxes! This did however give us the chance to set up a new classroom from scratch.

Staff Members Involved

Veronica Blair, Childcare Worker in pre 5 Unit

Ruth Reid, P1/2 Class Teacher

Lorna MacAlister, Head Teacher.

We relied on support staff in the school, especially Ann MacSporran who did so much of our laminating! Our Probationer Lynne MacDougall was also able to observe our practice, which we hope has been valuable as professional development.

Aims of the Pilot

To smooth transition between pre5 and p1 through collaborative working

To teach Maths in the Early Level and p2 using Active Learning.

As we had been working closely for a year and had made a start to using Storyline and sharing topics, we decided to focus on Maths.

Implementation of the Project

Classroom Layout

Our first task was to set up the classroom in order to facilitate

Active Learning. Banking and dividers were used to create curricular areas- maths, writing/ mark making, book corner, creative, messy, role play, construction, music, Smartboard, computer, sand/water (flexible according to plan).

Two tables were placed to allow for puzzles, games, snack and written work.

The Importance of Planning

The greatest single change to our practice was in the joint planning which informed every aspect of the Active Play Pilot.

Planning was done in an allocated time- Thursday afternoons. Once we had decided on a format (we still haven't !) we worked together to map out our long term plans for the year. From our backdrop themes weekly provision was determined in response to varying factors which we had observed- children's learning needs, their interest in activities, natural next steps. We provided structured activities to reflect planned shared learning intentions at different levels.

The Storyline approach fitted well with some of our backdrop themes and dovetailed with Active Learning. We observed increased motivation and engagement, particularly for some of the boys in the group.

Parental Support

Initially a parents' meeting was held to explain the aims and methods of the Pilot and the impact we envisaged for the children's learning. We hoped to be able to address any concerns that parents might raise with regard to pre5 and p1 but especially p2 working together.

However parents were generally supportive and feedback from parents' evenings and open mornings has also been very positive. (See appendix)

Timetabling

Pre 5, p1 and p2 were together on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday from 9.00 to 10.30 and for a 10 minute plenary session at 11.50 before the pre 5 children went home. On Thursdays PE meant the nursery children had the room to themselves and on Friday there was no nursery.

	Nursery	P1/2
9.00	Registration, Plan do Review Free flow play	Registration, daily plan, Interactive maths
9.30	Planned adult led activity- P1/2 joined in as available	Active learning with Teacher & follow up
10.00	-----TIDY UP TIME-----	
10.10	Shared story time/ topic discussion	
10.30	Snack	Fruit time and break
11.00	Outdoor play	Language time
11.50	Shared plenary and song/rhyme	
12.00	Home time	Active phonics
12.15		Lunch

Active Learning in pre 5, p1 and p2 Case Study

We had observed the children's interest in relative sizes and had decided to extend this through the story of the Three Bears. We identified a possible Learning Outcome - children will be able to put items in order according to size.

This led to a variety of Active Learning opportunities within the Maths Area. Children were invited to arrange the Three Bears' socks on the washing line and put them into order. Beds, chairs and tables in three sizes, small, medium and big were provided for the bears and we observed matching and ordering as part of free flow play. Eventually we put the children in order from tallest to smallest which provoked a good deal of discussion- why was the oldest not the tallest?

Primary 2 were able to discuss metres and spent time matching unit cubes to metre sticks and 10 sticks to find how many it would take.

We decided to ask the children to sequence the Three Bears story and used laminated pictures to do this. They were also able to use the Smartboard to sequence the story independently.

Volume and capacity were introduced when the nursery children decided to feed sand "porridge" to the bears. Real porridge oats were introduced to the messy area in an enormous mixing bowl and eventually put in to the water tray with a variety of containers and spoons. There was a lot of language development- "What kind of consistency is it?" "It's gooey" "Runny, runny porridge".

Finally we formalised our porridge making with a whole group session of porridge making and tasting, when we discovered the "real" recipe for porridge and added some of our own flavours- lemon, salt, sugar, honey, cinnamon, apple and Nutella.

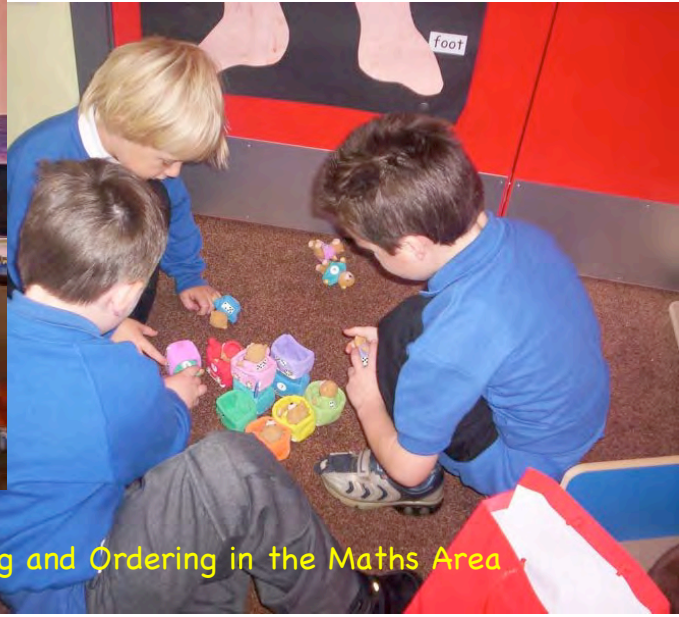
(Nutella was very popular!)

This led to a book of porridge recipes for the Three Bears to use.

On reflection, we felt that children had achieved our Learning Outcome, but also so many more of their own ideas and interests had been developed. They had been engaged to extend their own mathematical learning and take ownership of the classroom.



Story Sequencing



Counting and Ordering in the Maths Area



Confident, collaborative mark making



Sharing Resources



Exploring Possibilities

Impact on the Children- Successful, Confident, Effective and Responsible!

The pilot has had a wide ranging effect on the children and this encompassed all four capacities of a Curriculum for Excellence.

We felt that the nursery children's learning had a far greater depth and that they were able to relate themes more closely to their own personal experiences. This was particularly noticeable where we used a Storyline approach. The benefit of child centred, responsive and flexible teaching and learning was obvious. Primary 1 and 2 modelled learning skills and behaviours for the nursery and as a result talking and listening during story/ group times was more effective. The nursery are all familiar and comfortable with their primary 1 teacher which should ease transition considerably.

Primary 1 developed concepts of addition and subtraction at a far earlier stage in the year than would previously have been expected and are more secure in their number bonds than we would have predicted.

Primary 2 have been able to consolidate and extend prior knowledge through active learning opportunities in the classroom. Both groups have been able to explore aspects of maths and numeracy that would have previously have been left untouched at this stage- they were "not in the planner"!

In general the children are confident in tackling new concepts in a playful manner and transferring their learning into a written format has been less stressful for them as a result.

Impact on Staff

The most significant impact on staff was the amount of time and commitment required for joint planning. This involved allowing a weekly two hour slot for planning the week's learning opportunities and relied on the goodwill of the childcare worker in particular. We felt that without this time to liaise the pilot would have been a failure.

The pilot workshops were felt to be extremely valuable and gave staff an opportunity to reflect upon their own practice and review it in the light of new learning- which could be challenging at times! It has left us both thinking of new ways to take things forward in the coming sessions.

Impact of the Project

The pilot has led to more effective use of space, resources and staff time within the Early Level classroom. Resources have come out of cupboards and been used creatively and effectively by staff and children!

Pre 5 to primary 1 transition has been made smoother and teaching and learning have been a lot more engaging and fun for all concerned.

Impact on the School- Headteacher's Viewpoint

This pilot has proven to be very successful. Feedback from staff, parents and most importantly, the pupils, has been very positive.

The children have worked very well in their shared space. They have thoroughly enjoyed all of the themes this session, often leading the direction of the topic commensurate with their own interests.

Staff have worked very hard to ensure a differentiated experience for all the children, as well as the provision of a gateway of opportunity to allow the younger children to benefit from the experiences of the older pupils.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The pilot has been an enjoyable and valuable experience for all concerned and we are full of enthusiasm for next year, when we look forward to building on our strengths and improving our weaknesses!

This will bring new challenges as there will initially be only one pre 5 child and eight p1/2s. We would particularly like to focus on

developing shared outdoor learning at the Early Level
building Plan do and review into p1
developing Active Learning in Literacy

- and that's just for starters!

In closing, Veronica and I would like to say a big thank you to all involved for giving us the opportunity to take part in the Pilot.

Ruth Reid.



Early Level Play Pilot Report for Kirn Primary Argyll and Bute - June 2008

Background

In accordance with A Curriculum for Excellence, it was felt that the new approach was appropriate to achieve success for all. Continuity between stages creating appropriate experiences and challenge was missing and needed to be addressed.

Several schools in Argyll and Bute including Kirn Primary, were selected to take part in the 'Early Level' Pilot, led by Lynda Keith, University of Strathclyde in partnership with the Early Years Team.

The methodologies needed in the Pilot were already in practice in Kirn's Pre5 unit where all children were experiencing structured play activities. This style of learning stopped, however, when pupils went into Primary 1. The children were placed in a fixed environment where there was little room for flexibility and they were taught in the conventional way.

Aims of the Project

The Pilot was to develop play and active learning in the early years, a methodology which would allow all children to learn successfully at their own pace.

It followed that there had to be effective liaison between Pre 5 and Primary 1. The Primary 1 teacher had to have a better understanding of what had gone before in the Pre 5 Unit. It was necessary for the children from Pre 5 to continue their learning in a similar way when moving into Primary 1. In this way, pupils would continue learning at their own pace and in a way that encouraged success.

It was also felt that the static set up normally associated with the classroom needed changing so that the room itself was more like the Pre 5 Unit classroom. The Primary 1 room was to be organised into curricular areas leaving space for activity and movement.

Implementation of the Project

Initially time was spent thinking about how to rearrange the Primary 1 classroom to meet the needs of the Pilot with curricular areas, assembling area, and practical areas.

Resourcing was the next worry.

We were given a budget to help us resource appropriate materials for the task. Initially there was very little available in the school that was going to be useful in the development of play materials. Fortunately Primary 1 was able to share Pre 5 materials to begin with.

A problem for the Primary 1 teacher was in appreciating that play on its own was worthwhile and accepted as a process that does not necessarily have any outcomes.

With careful planning, many games and activities were prepared so that the intended learning might take place without the child realising that they were in fact 'working'. This preparation took time and a great deal of thought. It demanded the teacher's full understanding of curricular needs. It depended on the teacher being able to promote specific skills, plan for progression and take into account children with special needs.

Through trial and error and due to attending the course, it was clear that the role of the adult in the activity was paramount - when to intervene in an activity and when to hold back.

Impact of the Project

For the Pre 5 Teacher

It was good to have the relationship with Primary 1 and to see progression actually taking place. In future this will allow for smooth transition from Pre 5 to P1 and through the school. Because we are working together and sharing planning and topics it means there will be no repetition and all areas of the curriculum will be covered.

For the Primary 1 Teacher

Embarking on the Pilot was not as daunting as imagined, mainly due to the fact that the Pre 5 teacher shared her knowledge and gave support constantly throughout. The logic of the early learning process became clearer as time passed and it was obvious that the methodology was working.

Impact on the Children

- * Children felt comfortable because the environment was similar to the one they had in the Pre 5 Unit.
- * The children were able to continue with skills already developed.
- * Continuing with the same methodologies helped the children to succeed.
- * Each day, the children came to school happily because learning is fun.
- * As time passed, children became gradually more confident.
- * Play allowed children to develop their social skills and become effective contributors.
- * With play comes responsibility in caring for materials and this worked brilliantly with the children.

Conclusion

- * Learning through play works
- * Parents recognise the positive results in their children's learning and are particularly pleased with the raised confidence their children now show.

- * The link between stages is absolutely fundamental to the success of early learning.
- * The methodology should be continued into all stages.
- * Primary 1 teachers were sceptical about the pilot, but have since totally changed their minds and see this as the way forward.

Next Steps

- * Continue developing materials to support tasks for early level learning.
- * Encourage the powers that be to support schools in developing the methodology throughout the school.
- * Other members of staff need to be introduced to early level learning in a softly softly approach so that they too will see that change is good.



The Witch's Den



The Enchanted Forest



The Magic Shop