

Report on National Network Conversation - Enabling Learning

Introduction

The National Network Conversation (NNC) focused on how the [Enabling learning guidance](#) can support practitioners in planning, designing, and implementing a pedagogically appropriate curriculum for learners that is inclusive for all. This conversation built on the previous '[Purpose, pedagogy and progression](#)' NNC held in the 2024 summer term which focused on how early experiences of Curriculum for Wales are influencing pedagogy to lead and plan for learning.

The Conversation provided a forum for practitioners in settings and schools, as well as staff within local authorities who provide direct support across primary schools and settings in Wales, to discuss the importance of child development, the role of the enabling adult and support for reading. Attendees engaged in various ways throughout the day by hearing from leaders and specialists from across the sector:

- [Opening video](#) from Professor Graham Donaldson to set the scene
- [Presentation](#) key note speaker Dr Stella Louis, a leading early years consultant on how Enabling learning and developmental pathways support and guide practice.
- Presentations on effective practice from schools, settings, a special school and Cardiff Metropolitan University
- A [Question and Answer panel](#) including representation from Welsh Government, Estyn and presenters of the effective practice
- [Closing video](#) from Georgina Haarhoff, Director of Education

Feedback from the day

a) Child development

- There are varying degrees of knowledge and understanding of child and adolescent development across the sector. Participants believed professional learning for child and adolescent development should be strengthened for all those involved in education.
- A better understanding of child development could support practitioners to recognise when behaviours may be due to developing schemas/repeated patterns of behaviour, or unmet needs and when they might be additional learning needs.
- Children have a wide variety of learning needs, experiences and traumas. Appropriate environments and pedagogies allow children opportunities to express their emotions through learner-centred practice and play-based learning.
- The importance of getting to know children, their backgrounds, and interests was recognised but not always put into practice. There can be an over emphasis on documentation and tracking rather than the process and pedagogical choices to support next steps in learning for progression.
- Suggested areas for professional learning included observation, schemas and play-based learning. Observation is at an early stage of development in schools especially amongst older year groups.
- The [curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings](#) (CfFNMNS) was praised for its impact in settings and early years classes within schools where it is being used.

b) Enabling Adults

- There was varying levels of awareness of Enabling learning and the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings.
- Practitioners who had used Enabling learning found it was effective in their settings in shaping their vision, for example with developing positive relationships and purposeful environments. The guidance instils confidence in staff as it has been written by practitioners for practitioners. It allows them time to slow down, reflect on practice, focus on the three enablers to create quality provision.

- Useful to support teaching assistants understand their role as an Enabling adult.
- Building strong relationships and connections with parents and families is important especially with hard-to-reach children. Good communication and building trust is required especially to encourage a Community Focused Schools approach to learning.

Participants shared some thoughts on common characteristics of an Enabling adult. They:

- require a good understanding of child and adolescent development to place children at the centre of their learning
- provide a sense of belonging and inclusivity for learners
- are given the freedom to notice, analyse and respond as part of their observations
- ensure provision is of a high standard
- know their children to enable them to apply what they learn through a range of opportunities
- understand the importance of using 'natural resources' and being joyful
- provide a warm welcome to support an emotionally safe environment and build strong connections with parent/carers from the start, aiding transition
- focus on what children *can* do

c) Support for reading

Approaches

- Some schools created their own approach to reading based on selections from several schemes or approaches. Other used schemes including Read, Write Inc, Tric a Chlic, Jolly Phonics, Monster phonics, Chatt, or Salley.
- Practitioners felt phonics programmes ensured all learners could work at their ability as they were organised into groups of the same level. Regardless of the approach used, a shared understanding across the school is required which must be communicated with parents. Schemes had been the go-to as there was no other training available for the teaching of reading.
- Early reading skills need to be developmentally appropriate with an emphasis on pre-reading activities and an environment to inspire children to love reading. Supporting pre-reading skills and the steps prior to picking up a book to read is integral ensuring a holistic approach to developing reading skills, not just scheduled sessions and times.

Level of support

- Some felt they were far less confident about those learners where their reading skills were out of sync with their chronological age. Although children learn in different ways a strategic and progressive approach is essential, based on the child's needs to ensure children learn to read.
- Children's assessment information may not always show their progress. Each child needs their own tailored approach to learning to read.
- Understanding developing reading skills are not standalone but developed across everything. Its beneficial to offer stage, not age, support to groups of children as well as individuals with a variety of reading opportunities- shared reading, individual reading, guided reading and using online books that can be shared at home.
- Some barriers were identified: books going home are not being returned, loss of school library service, and technology impacting on children's desire to read physical books. Some schools are dealing with parental literacy and well-being issues too for example letters home not read.

Conclusions from the day

Child development

- Strengthening child and adolescent development knowledge and understanding across the workforce and ensure it's reflected in Initial Teacher Training (ITT) courses would support practitioners.

Enabling learning

- Understanding how embedding Enabling learning supports practitioners develop a pedagogically and developmentally appropriate curriculum which is inclusive for all learners could be very useful in planning, support self-evaluation, reflection and progression.
- Using consistent terminology through Enabling learning, CfE/MNS, and [Early Childhood Play Learning and Care](#) and focusing on the three enablers supports provision for children.

Supporting reading

- A national approach to teaching reading for the workforce and a focus on early reading acquisition in ITT courses including secondary would be beneficial for practitioners.
- Resources for parents to support their child/children with reading would be useful.
- Further advice required if there is an expectation all local authorities need to follow the 'Talk with me' programme to ensure consistency. The Talk with me Campaign is not mandatory. Local Authorities will be encouraged and supported to implement Proseic Penguin; the Speech Language and Communication SLC training pathway and the Family Learning Programme.

Next steps

- The report will be shared with the relevant Welsh Government policy teams to support thinking and development of further support practitioners with child and adolescent development, professional learning, and literacy, language and communication.
- A series of Enabling Learning engagement sessions were held in the spring term. These events were to enhance knowledge and understanding for head teachers and senior leaders in all schools across Wales.