Assessing children's thinking and learning

Hill Mead Observing Learning Assessment 2014-2016: Summary Report

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1. Prior to the development: Context

Hill Mead Primary School is noted for its harmonious atmosphere 'in which everyone lives and breathes the school's values of aspiration, achievement and excellence' (Lambeth Report, March 2014). The social health of this school is good and pupils are calm and orderly. The report from Lambeth LEA judged the behaviour of pupils to be 'outstanding', and commented:
'Pupils enjoy school and have very positive attitudes to learning. They are enthusiastic in lessons and work well with their classmates, showing respect to each other and to adults'. But as the Deputy Head said in one meeting near the beginning of this project: 'What's the point of calm, quiet, order? It's not for the sake of it, it's for enabling learning. And it's now not fragile – it's embedded. So it's time to move on to the next phase.'

The 'next phase' was the development of a school-wide assessment of children's thinking and learning. At the time when Hill Mead Primary School embarked on this development in summer 2014, they had already taken some important steps towards it. The school leadership had focused attention on learning, on critical thinking, and on the skills and competences that would help children to be independent thinkers and learners. Considerable work had been done within the teachers on encouraging children's disposition to learn and promoting positive behaviour for learning. Teachers' medium-term planning was no longer detailed, but a record of teachers' brainstorming of ideas and approaches; over-detailed planning was seen as being often counter-productive, discouraging flexibility in teaching.

At about this time national policy shifted and schools were informed that assessment in relation to 'levels' would no longer be required. Schools were invited to develop their own systems of assessment. Hill Mead Primary School was keen to embrace this opportunity. They had already decided that the NC 'levels' were not fit for purpose and were narrowing teachers' focus. They saw assessment which consisted of ticking off achieved skills as too short-term in nature; higher level thinking skills often take two or three years to become embedded in children's learning.

Though many schools did not respond to the government's invitation to develop their own system of assessment, Hill Mead decided that they would take up the challenge. They wanted a system that would support children's learning. They wanted to create learning contexts that would foster higher-order thinking skills. They asked the question: 'How do we provide the conditions for creating lifelong learners?' The school had previously been involved in an eighteen-months-long project, the Creative Learning Assessment (CLA) project, which had trialled, in 8 schools altogether, an assessment system for Creative Learning. Becky Lawrence, the Deputy Head, had been a participant in this project and had introduced its principles and practices to Hill Mead staff. The school wanted to build on this development and approached two educational consultants, Myra Barrs and Sue Ellis, with an extensive background in observation-based assessment (the Primary Language Record and the Creative Learning Assessment). These consultants were invited to help them develop a way of assessing 'thinking and learning'.

The consultants began by identifying two main sources of research-based evidence that supported Hill Mead's approach to teaching and learning. They referred to a UNESCO booklet entitled How Children Learn, edited by Stella Vosniadou, in a series developed by the International Academy of Education. This publication lays out concisely a set of twelve educational principles, all based on a synthesis of psychological research on learning and educational practice. The twelve principles became a valuable point of reference in the development year.

The other main source was the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (1999 – 2009) carried out in Cambridge and London and directed by Andrew Pollard of the London Institute of Education and Mary James of Cambridge University. The consultants drew on TLRP's list

of 'evidence-informed pedagogic principles', an important document which synthesised the findings of the wide range of research projects carried out within the TLRP programme. These principles were another point of reference during the development of the 'Observing Learning' assessment.

2. The Observing Learning assessment framework

The assessment framework itself drew on prior work in observation-based assessment, including the work of the Assessment Reform Group, and the Creative Learning Assessment. The broad strands under which teachers' observations were grouped were the same as those used in the CLA:
- confidence and independence
- collaboration and communication
- creativity
- strategies and skills
- knowledge and understanding
- reflection and evaluation

However in the 'Observing Learning' assessment these strands were interpreted more widely and seen in the context of the whole curriculum, not just in relation to creative arts subjects. The 'prompts' under each heading were revised so as to specify the attributes that would enable children to develop as thoughtful learners across the curriculum: eg under 'strategies and skills' the skills specified included: generating questions and hypothesising; summarising arguments; drawing conclusions. This assessment, requiring close observation and description, was for the teachers a move away from assessments based on check-lists or highlighted criteria.

In framing these prompts the developers drew on a range of work on thinking and learning, for instance the Activating Children's Thinking Skills, the RSA's work on key competences, the work of the TLRP, and the Northern Ireland Educations Department's guidance on Thinking Skills, and the final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review.

Alongside this framework for observation it was agreed that there should be a parallel assessment for recording children's reflections on their own learning. Peer assessment and self- assessment was already becoming established in the school. A format was devised to enable children's reflections to be gathered under similar strands to those in the 'Observing Learning' assessment record. This 'Children's Learning Reflection' (CLR) framework was – like the Observing Learning Record (OLR) - to be used initially with small groups of children.

3. What happened in Term 1: Introducing the assessment

The 'principles' documents and the two assessment frameworks were approved by school leaders and a group of senior teachers, and then introduced to the whole staff in a meeting in October 2014. Staff engaged in thorough discussion of the components of the assessment. They appreciated the assessment for being grounded in clear principles and evidence-based research.
The remainder of the autumn term was an introductory phase after which any obvious snags in the assessment frameworks could be identified and revised. Teachers would use the frameworks with a sample of children. At the beginning and the end of the school year teachers would summarise their view of children's learning progress on a simple scale that required them to judge how capable children were of working and learning independently. The Head Teacher commented on the development and introductory phases that 'It was a considered approach: an introduction, a pilot and then a full trial. This was not just another assessment but a professional journey.'

Initial reactions
Initially the teachers, as they related in their video interviews in summer 2015, were 'unconfident', 'worried about which sections to write in', 'tended to concentrate on the confidence and collaboration strands', 'it was a challenge to move on to the other areas'. One teacher said 'To begin with it was hard – there was too much material and it was hard to

filter.' Another added: 'It was a bit disjointed at first – but now I have all the headings in my head'. School leaders and senior staff worked with teachers to support them in the initial stages of the implementation and project consultants visited the classrooms twice every half term to give support and observe the frameworks in use.

Reviewing the use of the OLR
Visiting classrooms gave important feedback about the use of the Observing Learning Record. It was apparent that teachers were focusing initially on those aspects of the assessment framework that they were most familiar with, especially the first three strands: confidence, collaboration and creativity. Sometimes the boxes related to strategies and skills, knowledge and understanding, and reflectiveness would be left almost blank, although there were some positive examples. One section on strategies and skills from a record of a Y6 pupil, who was constructing a bar chart to record information, noted:
 '*Analyses info in bar chart.*
Methodical. Shows working.
Promptly self-corrects when prompted to reread question.
Reponds positively to input, eg labelling chart'.
Observations like this gave a succinct and informative picture of a learner.

In filmed interviews at the end of the year teachers described how their use of the assessment developed during the year:
'During the year we began to focus more on learning strategies – it was hard to see this at first. But it led us to creating opportunities for using these strategies.'
This was a major point that emerged from the review of the use of these assessments. The Deputy Head observed that:
'Teachers began to use the assessment to inform planning. They're focusing not on content but on the context for learning. Understanding the observational framework helps them to set up contexts which will maximise learning.'
These comments underline the formative nature of the assessment.

An informal analysis of the records suggested that teachers writing records of children working in the areas of maths and science were more likely to complete these sections more fully. This was probably because teachers were more familiar with the range of skills involved in learning maths or science, and with planning practical activities that would enable these skills to be practised and demonstrated. In other curriculum subjects there had been less emphasis on the 'thinking skills' children had to use in order to develop as learners.

Teachers were deliberately starting topics with discussions of children's prior learning. They were spending time on discovering what children already knew and providing extended time for them to record their existing knowledge in mind-maps. Children were also recording their questions at the beginning of each topic. The topic work that followed made links between children's prior learning and their new learning. Encouraging children to generate questions was very positive and led to a discussion of various approaches to teaching thinking skills.

4. What happened in Term 2

Teachers were invited to offer suggestions for amendments to the Observing Learning record, but they were satisfied with its shape and content. During this term the school decided to consciously focus on science as a context for observation. This proved to be a very good way of concentrating attention on 'skills' and 'knowledge' aspects of the Observing Learning record. In addition the school proposed to develop broader approaches to planning by encouraging teachers to use 'mind-maps' as a way of generating ideas and structuring their projects.

Planning learning opportunities
Teachers felt that it was in this spring term that they had begun to work more systematically with the record. One said:
'It has changed our planning. We had to go through a trial and error phase. Initially we were doing observations in our normal classroom contexts, but we couldn't see enough in those

contexts. We weren't allowing enough opportunities to see what the children could do in all the learning strands. So in the Spring term we incorporated it into our planning.

With more experience of using the OLR, teachers found that it became an integral part of their practice and their way of looking:

'You have to really think about your pedagogic knowledge. The more I've used it, the more it's been helpful.'

'Initially it was about the focus children. Now it's a part of us – we're observing them all, all the time'

In interviews the Head Teacher and Deputy Head commented on what they saw as the most positive outcomes of the use of the OLR. The Head teacher said:

'They've been planning in open-ended learning as they see why they need to do it. We had been working towards a curriculum that teachers plan themselves, incorporating higher order skills'.

The Deputy Head agreed:

'The teachers are now concentrating on learning in terms of the skills and understanding involved. Through this project they have a scaffold or a framework for taking this on.'

The Child Learning Reflection

The other area where practice developed rapidly in this second term was the Child Learning Reflection. Gradually this opportunity for children's self-assessment came to be seen as an important and integral part of the record. Teachers in the video interviews said:

'The child learning reflection is really really useful – without this you'd never get this much from a child. There was no place for them to really reflect. It makes them more engaged – it's had a really good impact.'

'Children are a lot better at explaining how they've worked and are more thoughtful. It needs more time to be embedded. It's a more important part of the assessment than I thought originally. It helps children to understand what we are looking for and it creates a dialogue.'

Older children's reflections sometimes revealed a sophisticated capacity to step back from their own learning and to describe what was going on. One boy said:

(How I worked) 'I was trying things out – we were using our knowledge of forces'

(What I learned) 'It taught us about forces, gravity, air resistance and balance (if it was uneven it wouldn't spin). I didn't learn any new words.

(What I think about my work) 'I like science – finding things out, trial and error, making predictions.'

The school leaders felt that the Child learning reflection was having 'a positive impact on children's understanding of their own learning':

'The other approaches we have in place are content driven and are closed – linked to success criteria. In the Child Reflection there is an open framework – it gives them an opportunity to tell us what they think in their own terms, not what they think we want.'

However there was a technical difficulty in that the record was intended to be completed at the end of the lesson or soon after, and it was sometimes difficult to find the time for this. Although some older children were completing their own CLRs without discussion with the teacher, the records that were based on a conversation with the teacher were richer and more informative. In Year 2 of the development it was agreed that the CLR should be replaced by a Child Learning Conference.

'Tools for thought'

As the dialogue within the staff group about learning and thinking continued throughout the year, there were shifts in planning, and suggestions for ways of structuring planning. The two consultants provided a staff conference on a 'thinking toolkit' which would provide teachers with a 'toolbox' of ways of representing and organising thinking. This meeting looked at mind-mapping in some depth and at the many ways in which ideas can be represented graphically so as to make them more accessible to learners. Learners can take over some of these means of symbolising meanings and organising information themselves and use them to organise their understandings. We considered such 'tools' as:

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- annotation (eg labelled diagrams
- representing events (eg story maps)
- representing processes (eg cycle diagrams)
- grids and charts (eg comparison charts)
- graphs (eg Venn diagrams)

Examples of several of these ways of organising information were presented, and teachers were invited to engage with them and use them.

One teacher said, of this meeting:

'It was really nice having the meeting Tools for Thought. It was a really useful open-ended way of developing skills.'

Frameworks like this have so many potential uses and tap into children's graphic imaginations. Information is presented not in a linear form but in diagrams which show connections. For teachers these 'tools for thought' also provide a means of structuring their own planning.

5. What happened in Term 3

During term 3 staff continued to work with the assessments in the classroom. Teachers became more familiar with the OLR and with the six strands around which it was structured, and these became more embedded in their planning. The work on 'Tools for Thought' in the previous term had helped teachers to plan learning contexts, and to provide pupils with ways of organising their thinking. Pupils were also noticed to be making more links between new learning and prior learning. The use of the 'Tell Me' grid across the curriculum had supported them in making links and connections of this kind.

Interviews with teachers and children; Ofsted inspection

In May 2015 we interviewed groups of teachers and several individual teachers about the use and impact of the Observing Learning assessment. Later in the term, in July 2015, we also interviewed children from a wide age range about their learning. These interviews were part of the ongoing evaluation of the Observing Learning project, to be discussed at a staff conference in early July. They were intended to be part of the presentation of the work to the audience at a conference planned for September 2015. In the event, because of an Ofsted inspection which took place in July 2015 the staff conference could not take place and was postponed until September 2016. After discussion, the wider conference was also postponed, until summer 2016. In the Ofsted inspection the school was judged to be 'outstanding in all areas'.

Reporting to parents

Hill Mead School made a further use of the OLR when they used it as a means of structuring their report to parents in summer 2015. They felt that the strands in the OLR record gave a better overall picture of the child as a learner as well as providing a structure for reporting progress with regard to the curriculum. Parents' feedback on this new form of report was positive; there were several spontaneous comments about the change, and parents appreciated the range of information in the new reports. The school is making some changes to the wording of the strands to make the language of the report more accessible – eg replacing 'collaboration' by 'working together'. This has been a further positive outcome from the Observing Learning project. The same report form has also been used very effectively, under the title of a 'case study,' as a way of summarising teachers' assessments and for the purpose of moderation.

Governors' responses to the use of the OL assessment

During the summer term the Observing Learning Record was presented to the school governors. Governors were very interested in the development and asked a range of very pertinent questions about the OLR and its use. They strongly backed the school's aim of ensuring high quality learning and saw the relevance of the OLR to this key objective. They were naturally concerned that this form of recording should meet national requirements and after discussion were satisfied that it would. One governor with particular expertise in high-level international testing responded very positively to the use of the OLR.

6. What happened in Year 2 (terms 4 – 6)

In this year of the project some revisions were made to the Observing Learning Record system, resulting in the development of a Child Learning Conference, and a model of progression in 'thinking and learning' was developed.

The Child Learning Conference
The children's 'reflection' component of the OLR had originally been recorded on a form (CLR) mirroring the OLR, which was intended to be completed after a lesson. This produced problems of management so at the beginning of year 2 the CLR was restructured as a Child Learning Conference – a conference about learning between the teacher and the child, to be undertaken two or three times a year.

This has proved a much more realistic undertaking and all teachers have now used the Child Learning Conference (CLC). Teachers feel that the CLC is a doable record and that it is better from this point of view than the CLR. They feel that it makes for a helpful basis for a conversation with the child about their learning, creating a space when they can sit down with one child and have an in-depth talk.

The Conference gives room for children to reflect on their learning and to assess their own progress. It has provided invaluable information about how children see themselves as learners and what support they need to further their learning. Within moderation meetings it supplied illuminating evidence of children's reflecting on their own learning. Prior to the development and use of the CLC, the amount of evidence being collected about children's ability to reflect on their own learning was limited but the use of the CLC has changed this situation.

The development of the Thinking and Learning Scale
One issue which arose at the beginning of year 2 was whether the school needed to develop a way of documenting children's 'stages of learning'. The development had begun as an assessment and this was a natural further step to take, in order to provide a guide to progression and a means of ensuring common understandings across the school.

The school leaders took the view that it would be advantageous to develop a way of assessing progress as long as it did not come to dominate the OLR but supported it. The school had no desire to arrive at a numerical assessment or invent a system of levels to replace what had been discontinued. From their point of view, and with the Deputy Head's experience of the Creative Learning Assessment, the assessment of 'stages of learning' would help teachers' ability to arrive at professional judgements. It would provide them with a common language for discussing progression in thinking and learning, and it would underline the need for evidence in arriving at decisions about children's progress. It would be a true system of formative assessment and would not be used for summative purposes.

The consultants undertook the initial development of the 'Stages of Learning', drawing on the five strands on the one hand, and on other hand on other models of assessing learning in broad terms, especially the Activating Children's Thinking Skills project, Northern Ireland Thinking Skills framework, and the RSA Opening Minds competences framework. After discussion of alternative approaches a six point model was arrived at, which was based on the five strands and was intended to be used across the whole age range. Areas such as confidence and independence, and creative thinking were given equal weight with knowledge and understanding and thinking and learning strategies. Reflection had a special place in this, being central to children's development as thinkers and learners. This model was discussed extensively with the school leadership and with three groups of teachers from right across the school before being finalised.

A model of assessment which rests on teachers' informed judgements is essential for the assessment of higher level skills and competences, such as hypothesising, thinking analytically, identifying key ideas and perceiving patterns in evidence. Any other system, which attempts to be objective and to exclude teacher judgement, is not likely to be able to assess such complex skills, or a student's ability to orchestrate them in a competent

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performance. Assessment systems have come up against this problem repeatedly. The NC level-based assessment system tried to break down complex skills into sub-skills and detailed objectives so as to make assessment more 'objective'. The eventual result was an unwieldy fragmented system, driven by the need to 'show progress' in a short period, which meant that levels were divided into sublevels, and commercial schemes thrived.

Much more is gained from a model of assessment which works towards developing teacher judgement through training, discussion and peer moderation. The use of the Stages of Learning would enable teachers to compare their judgements and arrive at a shared and grounded model of progress in thinking and learning. Peer moderation was seen as a very effective way of developing shared standards. It would contribute significantly to the school's quality assurance processes

In such a system teachers learn from each other and from each others' records, and see how they might improve their own observational records and their planning. The need for basing judgements on evidence of learning is highlighted. This is true formative assessment, designed to inform teaching and shape planning. The aim of this moderation process was not to provide numerical data for external audiences. As with the OLR the use of the Stages of Learning was confined to a sample of pupils in each class.

Moderation
The experience of moderation towards the end of the second year of the project has, by general agreement, been positive. The final whole school moderation was carefully prepared for:

1. An initial *'core group' moderation* gave this group of teachers first hand experience of moderation and prepared them to give training and support to colleagues. The records they moderated became exemplar records for the whole staff training moderation. Each child's moderation folder included examples of work in books and folders; examples of OLRs and Child Learning Conferences; and 'Case studies'. The format of these case studies proved to be ideal as a way of bringing together and summarising teachers' observations of pupils' progress in thinking and learning. The children's books and folders were 'tabbed' to identify particular pieces of work referred to in teachers' records.

2. At the beginning of the summer term there was a *training moderation* session with the whole staff, with core group teachers supporting the moderation. This moderation gave very positive results. The moderations were conducted by pairs/groups of teachers from all year groups, with two moderation pairs/ groups assessing each record. Teachers appreciated this opportunity to work with colleagues in other year groups and to gain a view of teachers' records and children's learning at all ages.

3. The final *whole staff moderation* took place in late June. The level of agreement was lower than with the training moderation, and in subsequent moderations moderating pairs will not be expected to moderate as many records. Sitting in on the moderations was illuminating. The evidence presented showed, over and over again, teachers commenting in a very detailed and sensitive way on children's work, and children responding thoughtfully to teachers' comments. The 'case study' forms summarising teachers' assessments showed their in-depth knowledge of children and their very careful attention to learning and thinking. The efficiency and expertise of the teachers carrying out the moderations was noteworthy.

The evidence used in the moderation tended to be skewed towards learning in maths and English and there was an obvious need to look beyond core subjects in assessing thinking and learning. Some of the evidence from work in science was particularly helpful for what it showed about children's ability to hypothesise, look for patterns in evidence, and draw conclusions.

For the school this is work in progress, but the first attempt to compare judgements on children's learning across a range of subjects was encouraging overall. It has also been an effective form or professional development. A report from Queensland Education Department remarks that: *'In fact, having teachers focus on their judgments of the standards*

demonstrated by student performance, that is, real examples from their classrooms, is the most powerful form of professional development available'.

Teachers' responses to the Child Learning Conference, the 'Stages of Learning' and the moderations

Three teachers were interviewed in early July about their responses to using the Child Learning Conference, the 'Stages of Learning' and moderation.

Child Learning Reflection

One said: 'My favourite part is the Child Reflection Conference. It opened up some lovely conversations and has really given me opportunities. One child talked about her favourite lesson of the year. She analysed her collaboration with her partner and their enjoyment at arriving at decisions together. This is really concrete evidence of children's learning and it can highlight clearly where a child is in relation to the 'Stages of Learning'.'

One teacher had conducted reflective conversations with small groups of children and found them increasingly aware of their own learning strategies. She believed that it ought to be possible to develop 'reflective conversations' as regular features of classroom life, involving groups of pupils or the whole class.

In the opinion of a teacher of KS1 children the regular reference to reflection had made children more award of their own processes:
'They're eager to tell you how they've been working, what methods they've used. They are aware that you value what they think.'

Stages of Learning

Teachers were unanimous in their appreciation of the 'Stages of Learning' and saw it as a valuable addition to the OLR: 'It affects planning and preparation. We've always got the record or the Stages of Learning next to us so that we can be sure we are giving enough opportunities for different aspects of learning – it results in a more rounded curriculum'

'It gives you a direction….it helps you to understand in a broad sense how to enable progress to take place.. Everybody now is more aware of children's learning as opposed to 'this is a lovely activity'. We are more focused now on what we want learning to look like. We're more self-aware'.

'It has added to my observations, it adds clarity to what learning in that area looks like. I use it a lot in terms of target setting. It's particularly useful for more able children.'

'It explains each strand better and makes it more objective, as does the moderation. It has provided a common framework; the language of the strands has become common among the staff. The Stages of Learning supports the whole structure (of the OLR).'

Moderation

Teachers had appreciated the professional opportunity presented by moderations:
'It's been good to see other children's work and records. And it's valuable to be working with teachers from other year groups, we have different perspectives.'

'It helps you – you can see the same traits in different year groups and understand progression through the school. Working in year groups you can be biased, but working with teachers across the year groups makes the discussion more objective. It's invaluable for improving your judgement.'

'As a whole school staff it's really important – if you don't tie the record all together through the moderation you would lose that sense of sharing practice and sharing judgements. I think it will change how I organise in my year group, we shall be looking for evidence of learning.'

One teacher observed that 'you learn a lot about the children and they're aware of that – and it helps your relationship with them'.

The school leadership's view of impact of the Observing Learning assessment project

Interviews with the head teacher and deputy head teacher suggested that the OL project had had a positive impact on practice in the school. The head teacher described this by saying that:
'An interesting space has been opened up, which gives room for thinking'.
The growth of reflection among the staff, and the opportunity to reflect as a group, had been a 'breakthrough'. It had impacted on teachers' planning and their practice.

In the moderations the 'case study' summaries had demonstrated both teachers' subject knowledge and their knowledge of individual children:
'All teachers have been becoming early years teachers – knowing more about individual children. The real difference to pedagogy is in the knowledge of the individual learners.'

The moderation meeting had also shown the efficiency and expertise of the moderation groups in carrying out a professional exercise of this kind. Teachers' way of talking during the moderations had demonstrated their enhanced awareness of learning. They had been robustly testing the evidence, but in a collaborative fashion.
'There was a peer-to-peer spirit in their discussions, all teachers were involved in this as a form of self-evaluation as well as an evaluation of children's progress. It fits with the school self-evaluation process.'
The head teacher felt that the project had led to unexpected benefits and sparked off development in other areas. It would affect tracking, the development of learning targets, and assessment as a whole across the school.

The 'slowing down' of learning was something that the deputy head teacher identified as a major outcome of the project.
'Teachers are no longer thinking of learning as coverage of compartmentalised subjects at breakneck speed. There's more understanding that you can take longer, repeat topics, return to previous learning. It gives a picture of what deeper learning might look like.'

The different strands in the continuum had enabled teachers to identify different aspects of learning and to 'think more about learning than about teaching.' There was increased awareness of the importance of creating favourable contexts for learning. The Stages of Learning model of progression had provided an opportunity to put all the parts of the record together and a framework for looking at a class as a whole. It had also provided a common understanding of learning across the school:
'Using it across the age range is challenging but beneficial. It helps you to understand what you might have to put in place to help particular children or groups – for instance older children with learning difficulties.'

The effect of these developments seemed evident in children's learning behaviour.
'I feel learning is more purposeful. Children are more engaged in the process of learning. They are more articulate about what they think and why, more reflective and thoughtful.'
In general the whole initiative had had the effect of:
'...making us think about our own learning. We want to develop into a learning community.'

At the end of the Activating Children's Thinking Skills Project (one of the projects that formed part of the Teaching and Learning Research Project) the director, Carol McGuiness, wrote:
'It became increasingly clear that developing children's thinking goes far beyond an understanding of how children learn. Issues to do with curriculum design, availability of curriculum materials, the nature of pedagogy, teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching as well as their professional development came to the fore. Perhaps it was not surprising that the emphasis in the ACTS project shifted from thinking-as-a-skill to concepts such as the thinking curriculum, thinking classrooms and schools for thought.'

Throughout the Hill Mead teachers' interviews and the interviews with the leadership it was apparent that there was a strong sense of ownership of this initiative right across the school,

and a general consensus that it had impacted on teachers' practice, children's learning, and the learning culture of the school. As Hill Mead Primary School continues to work with the Observing Learning framework and the Stages of Learning this continuing focus may affect more areas of the school's practice.

Key findings

1. The Observing Learning project had resulted in teachers no longer thinking of learning as the coverage of compartmentalised subjects. There was an enhanced awareness of learning; a move towards slowing down and deepening learning; and an interest in recursive learning.

2. The school's close focus on learning, and the increased attention given to children's reflections on their own learning, was seen by the school leadership as having an impact on children's learning. Children were becoming more engaged and reflective, and more articulate about their learning.

3. The Observing Learning project had had a marked effect on teachers' planning. It had led them to consciously create contexts that gave greater opportunities for observing all aspects of children's learning.

4. The Observing Learning Record and the 'Stages of Learning' had helped to establish a shared view of progress in learning, and a common language to describe progress, both within year groups and across the whole school.

5. The Observing Learning project had added to teachers' pedagogic knowledge, developed their judgement and contributed to their professional development. It had created 'room for thinking' and promoted a habit of reflection among the staff which impacted on their practice.

6. There had been additional benefits from the Observing Learning project in other areas of the school: it had influenced the school's way of reporting to parents and had affected target-setting, tracking, and teachers' self-evaluation.

7. The moderations and interviews showed that teachers had developed a strong sense of ownership of the Observing Learning initiative, and were integrating it into their practice. It had become part of the culture of the school.

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