

The Learning Catalyst Approach Review 2011-2012

Raising Aspirations and Achievement in Families

Borough Council of
**King's Lynn &
West Norfolk**



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The Learning Catalyst Approach

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Introduction

The Learning Catalyst approach aims to raise aspirations and achievement among families in King's Lynn and West Norfolk Fens that have the highest rates of educational deprivation. The approach has been operating since 2006: using a skilled team of Learning Catalysts(LCs) who are from their local community and who provide an excellent bridge between that community and school. Originally funded by the IIC (Investors in Communities), the LCs are now funded by the West Norfolk Partnership.

The LCs work within schools and the community in a variety of roles; Teaching assistants, midday supervisors, pastoral staff, one to one support staff and volunteers. They have been trained to encourage parents and families to take part in a range of activities which include; adult education classes, drop-in sessions and activities which support attaining skills for life and work. Developing communities of learners. They also offer information advice and guidance sessions on a range of topics.

The approach currently has 11 active schools, two Infant, eight Primary and one High school, with a view to engage further schools by Christmas 2012.

Three aspects are central to the approach:

1, Working with families. Families reinforce cultures, whether these cultures are of high aspirations and achievement or low aspirations and an expectation of low skilled, low-paid work or benefit dependency.

2, Working in schools. Schools are a central focus of their communities and the main organisation with the potential to deliver change in the culture of learning among families in their community over a sustained period of time.

3, Working through one to one relationships. Evidence and experience shows one-to-one relationships with support from trusted individuals are the one of the most effective ways of helping people make changes to their lives.

The Learning Catalysts work toward four objectives:

- To build confidence and self-esteem among parents and families and enable them to experience achievement

- To support Literacy and Numeracy
- To raise self-esteem and aspirations through measures to improve health and fitness
- To tackle worklessness, raise aspirations and promote progression into training, volunteering and paid or better paid work

These were developed in-line with the Local Strategic Partnerships agreed outcomes.

Summary

The Learning Catalyst Approach consists of a diverse range of schools, both rural and urban, which include infant, primary and one High School with student numbers ranging from 66 to 900+. The Approach is now wholly funded by the West Norfolk Partnership and the school agreements and paperwork have now been changed to reflect this.

The Learning Catalyst Approach continues to engage parents and families in a range of activities and courses that meet the Learning Catalyst objectives. Regular referrals to other agencies and organisations such as CAB, Adult Education and Jobcentre Plus continue.

Learning Catalyst hours per school range from 3 to 15 per week; the majority of schools have one LC, three schools have two and in these cases the hours are split between the LCs but not necessarily equally. The LC hours can be spread out over the school week or be allocated a specific time and day of the week, this is both dependant on the LC's individual capacity and the LC activities in the school. The schools claim for the hours worked at the end of each term, this payment is dependant on the receipt of activity sheets and end of term report. These reports detail the activities undertaken to meet the LC objectives including evaluation and case studies.

The LCs deliver activities based on the four LC objectives, activities can include; giving advice and guidance, referring to other agencies and to arrange and deliver breakfast clubs, craft/creative sessions, classes to boost health and fitness, self esteem and confidence and more formal classes/courses i.e. Literacy & Numeracy with a qualification outcome. The LC also engages in whole schools events such as fetes and fundraising and encourages parents and the wider community to volunteer at these events.

The Learning Catalyst Approach hosts six networks per school year, these are held once every half term. The aim is for the LCs to have the opportunity to share ideas, promote cross school working and gain information on specific subjects from invited speakers.

The Learning Catalysts are given the opportunity to access training; this has included NVQ level 3 Advice and Guidance, DSD Do Something Different and Food Hygiene. The LCs both train with the parents on any courses that are delivered and now deliver many sessions themselves.

A new addition to the Approach this year is Time Credits whereby parents and families are encouraged to volunteer in the school and community, for this volunteering they receive a time credit one credit for one hour volunteering, this credit can then be used to access a range of services which include leisure services and activities within the school.

Results 2010/11

Course / activity	Recorded participants
Literacy and numeracy	96
Computer courses	90
Health and fitness	79
DSD various adult	32
DSD teen programme	50+
Cookery clubs and activities	27
Art, crafts	112
ESOL (English for speakers of other Languages)	33
Keeping up with the children (course)	12
Reading café activity	331
Maths café activity	205
Library (membership event)	14
New parent evening	28
Recorded referrals	13
Babysitting course	18
Volunteers at events and activities	68
Mini careers event	170+
Themed events	769+

Others include:

Story sacks, parent council, friends meetings, homework club for parents, anti bullying, open days, parent workshops and parents evening.
Schools also report seeing an increase in the numbers of dads and EAL (English as an additional language) parents.

Clubs: Summer club, breakfast club, breakfast trolley, gardening clubs, games club, creative club, mother and toddler and craft club.

Fundraising activities: Bingo, pamper evenings, fetes and discos, car boot, Bags 2 School, selling items made at craft and creative clubs.

Themed days: Careers day, Diamond Jubilee, Olympics, Christmas, Easter, Pancake Day, family days etc.

Volunteers:

We have seen an increase in volunteering in schools; some of this can be attributed to the Time Credits programme having six schools now part of the scheme; however we have also seen an increase in volunteers in general. This could be down to more volunteering opportunities this year due to the Diamond Jubilee and other themed events and has been a very welcome contribution to the Learning Catalyst Approach.

The Schools

Kings Lynn Academy	Amanda Holland
Highgate Infant School	Vicky Rogers & Karen Mason
Howard Infant School	Heather Armstrong
Howard Junior School	Tracy Sayers & Trudi Arundell,
Fairstead Primary School	Adele Jenkinson
Whitefriars School	Elaine Pottle
Terrington St John Primary School	Kathy Curruthers & Sharon Cooper
West Walton Community Primary School	Susan Titmarsh
St Michaels Primary School	Susan Pollard
Southery Primary School	Sue Vainu
Eastgate Primary School (new)	Carole Walker

A selection of School activities in more detail

CAB Helping with your finances course: Howard Infant School, Heather Armstrong

I asked CAB's (Citizen's Advice Bureaux) Mandy Stratton to come to the school to deliver this course. This was to help parents to gain a further insight into money management.

Looking at ways to save money on weekly shop, how to budget, how to save for the future. Realising what is a need and what is a want when shopping. Also to encourage parents to be part of the school community, building their self confidence and to make people more self aware about money.

The content of this course was very good, everybody enjoyed it and it made everybody think about their shopping habits, how they could maybe save money and how they could put a bit by for the future.

UK Online courses and community room: Whitefriars Primary School, Elaine Pottle

The aim of the activities is to offer parents a range of opportunities to access new skills i.e. computer skills, maths, literacy, this helps to improve their personal skills and boost their self esteem.

The UK-Online computer courses have worked really well and we have 45+ parents, carers and the wider community involved in attending and gaining new skills.

I also liaise with outside agencies to support activities running in the school. We have DSD and mother and toddler as well as a range of different classes being delivered in the community room. I have now completed my CTILs (Certificate to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector) and am currently working towards becoming an associate teacher.

We are also Time Credit school so this helps in engaging volunteers. I am using the Time Credits for summer club prep and have three people signed up for this. We have also been able to sign up parents to hear the children read and also other members of the extended families and the local community. The Time Credits have also been used to reward the children and we currently have 16 children receiving them. We have both parents and some of our year six students volunteering both in the school, as readers and at our events.

Breakfast trolley: Eastgate Primary: Carole Walker

As a school we often find that children are arriving in the mornings having had no breakfast or sometimes having had nothing to eat at all from the previous evening. We therefore felt that it would be very beneficial if we could give our parents the opportunity to purchase breakfast for their children here before they go into classes for the day.

We have found that children who have had breakfast are much better equipped to concentrate in class than a child who is hungry and has not eaten.

By offering a breakfast trolley we hoped that this will encourage parents to purchase items and ensure that their child/children have had a healthy start to their school day. Items available on the trolley include toast, biscuits, cheese and biscuit packs, cornflakes and milk along with milk and juice to drink. Charges were kept minimal, being only 10p – 15p for most items. We trialled the trolley on the morning of Tuesday 27th March to ascertain what kind of response we would receive; The trial session was such a success that it was decided we would run the breakfast trolley every morning for the foreseeable future. A member of our kitchen staff now comes in earlier each day and runs this every morning. There is always a queue of eager parents & children every morning and we are finding that the parents are purchasing items for themselves as well as items for their children. We are very pleased that this has been successful and the parents have said that they enjoy sharing breakfast with their children and their children's friends/parents each morning.

Reading and maths cafés continue and we join the Time Credits School in Sep.

Activity...Sound discovery lessons for EAL parents:

Highgate Infant School, Victoria Rogers and Karen Mason

The aim of this activity was to help the EAL children's learning within school by teaching the parents to read and write English in the same way their children are taught in school. We also wanted to promote adult learning, raise confidence of these parents and get them more involved in the school.

The first few sessions we focused on finding out what the parents already knew. It soon became apparent that these parents knew most sounds and that they needed to learn long vowel sounds e.g. "ai", "ea", "igh" and "ow". We then taught each of these sounds a session and started to introduce grammar. I found lots of resources to teach grammar on the skills workshop website. I start each session with a speaking exercise. The parents really enjoy this now but didn't like this much to start, as they said their English speaking was poor. They really just needed a confidence boost.

During one of these sessions the parents said they would like to do an accredited course. We then had an impromptu IAG session. The parents want to get a qualification in English, as they expressed they would like to get a good job and not just "work the land". Through doing these workshops I have seen their confidence grow, two parents even came along to the Love food Hate Waste workshop and asked questions. We then found a free course that is starting on 17th April and they have signed up to this.

We are a Time Credits school and we have parents that help out at events etc.

Creative Club: Terrington St John, Kathy Carruthers & Sharon Cooper

The aim of this activity is to give parents a sense of achievement. This also helps in building a school community and a sense of belonging. We use it as an opportunity for sharing information and skills i.e. local jobs, politics and family issues and encouraging volunteering.

DSD VIP Parents: Terrington St John, Kathy Carruthers & Sharon Cooper

The aim of this activity was engaging people in the DSD (Do Something Different) habit breaking programme. This programme offers ideas to break habits and discover a happier life. Those who came to all or most of the classes said how well it worked and that they enjoyed the “Do’s”. It really made them think about their habits and how they impacted on their lives.

Golden Time afternoon (Maths): Fairstead, Adele Jenkinson

We had decided that we should now begin to give the Golden Times afternoons more direction and decided that we should incorporate maths into it. The sessions would still be teacher lead to begin with and the children could then play games that were maths based.

As the parents arrived I decided to open the hall to those parents that had more than one child so they could work together as a family group rather than go to each individual class. This worked really well and the parents were very pleased that they were able to do this so we will continue with this for the next Golden Time. I have decided that the halls will be much more structured and we will hold mini workshops to include examples of using a number line, phonics, extending sentences etc.

We also got parents to complete a survey where we asked them what they thought of the golden time afternoons, the activities and if they were interested in an Adult education class in Literacy or Maths. The results were very interesting in that half said they were interested in classes, they enjoyed the afternoons and those with siblings wanted the halls to be opened to them so they could work with all their children. They also wanted more times when they could come into school and do these kinds of activities.

DSD VIP Parents: Southery Primary School and Playgroup, Sue Vainu

The aim of the programme was to work with the parents on a habit breaking programme. All of them thought the course in general was very good.

Comments included “It helped me quit smoking, which I wouldn’t have without the course”, “I thought it was all good - just to change to my habits”, “Most of the tasks and projects were useful”, “having to wear something different each week was good as we all wore different clothes”, “The eating the Elephant task and setting a date for things to be done helped me tackle the big task in the house by doing tasks in small sections”. One parent has returned to learning and is now training to be a teaching assistant.

We are a Time Credits school; this has helped us to encourage volunteers to help in the school and to help others learn new tasks such as sewing.

Adult Craft class: West Walton, Sue Titmarsh

The aim of the activity was to raise aspirations and self esteem by trying a range of crafts and fostering a 'can do' attitude. They are learning new skills alongside as well as literacy and numeracy; we also share information and range of topics.

The adult craft sessions are always well received and if there are any skills the group want to learn we try and include them in the next set of classes.

Last term we held a class on felting as part of adult learning week. They would like to try felt beading so I will aim to do another class on that.

The school is now a Time Credits school which has enabled me to engage people to volunteer in both the school and the summer activities.

Community Library/drop in session: St Michael's School, Sue Pollard

The community library/drop in session has now got a regular attendance with a few mums and toddlers included. Magazines have been brought in by one mum and some unwanted children's books by another. The shared reading has continued between the mums and toddlers, individual quiet reading is also taking place and several books have been borrowed and returned.

We have had success with our numeracy courses and parents have completed their tests. One lady passed at level three and now wants to go on further so I am getting her some information on adult courses in the area. The numeracy cafés in the school are getting as popular as the reading cafés and I have been going around the school to encourage interest from parents.

DSD teen programme and Baby sitting course: Kings Lynn Academy, Amanda Holland

I now run the teen DSD as a rolling programme, I had one student who wouldn't speak or make eye contact however through DSD she is a new person. Her confidence has grown so much that she had decided to attend the prom; this is something that she would not have done before.

Parents now phone me to say thank you for the change in their child, they go from being very angry children to calmer more rounded individuals with a focus on life.

The babysitting course encourages young people both girls and boys to be responsible when looking after children and it has also shown young people just what it means to have and look after a baby, the course had computer babies that the students looked after for a weekend. By doing this they discovered not only that it was hard work but also took their time.

We have recently joined the Time Credits scheme. We have completed a couple of activities and expect to do more in September.

E-Qas training services IT club: Howard Junior, Tracy Sayers & Trudi Arundell

The aim of the course was to reach parents via an IT club to access learning and to build a partnership between school and parents.

I have been running a successful IT Club for over 12 weeks, I have had between three and eight parents attend every week, some being grandparents and some fathers of children in school, since starting the course. Richard Blatch the course co coordinator has visited us on a regular basis to make sure that everything has been running smoothly and to find out how the parents are doing on the course.

I can successfully say that all parents have since completed and now have an OCR in basic computer skills. Some are looking to doing the next OCR level 1 and some are looking to doing either literacy or numeracy.

Trudi and I have now completed our IAG and have received our certificates

This is just a selection of one or two activities from each of schools in the Learning Catalyst Approach. Each school is willing to share their contacts and how they set up their activities. If you would like more information on the activities listed or would like to know more about the other activities that schools are delivering please contact me.

Please see below comments from ofsted and a Head Teacher whose school joined the Learning Catalyst Approach in 2011.

“The international week was organised in partnership with the schools Learning Catalyst, who is playing a valuable role in promoting the profile of the school in the community” Primary School Ofsted inspection report 2012

“The excellent work of the parent support adviser and learning catalyst is greatly appreciated by parents and carers for the ways in which it enables them to help their children to learn successfully. The school's promotion of community cohesion is a shining example of outstanding practice”. Ofsted inspection report 2011

‘I am delighted to have been involved with the learning catalyst approach. It has had a very positive impact on our school and it is pleasing to see so many parents actively involved in the life of the school’ Head teacher, Southery

Training

NVQ level three Advice and Guidance

Trudi Arundell, Tracy Sayers and Heather Armstrong passed IAG level three.

DSD Do Something Different

DSD has now become an integral part of the Learning Catalyst Approach both referring to and by delivering programmes. Most of the Catalysts have received training to deliver Do Something Different.

Basic food Hygiene (online)

The majority of the Learning Catalysts have taken up the offer to gain their Basic Food Hygiene Certificate and this offer is still open for Learning Catalysts who wish to gain this qualification.

First Aid six hour course

In the new academic year there will be an opportunity for Learning Catalysts and some the parents to attend this certificated one day programme.

Conclusion

The schools have had a good year in meeting the Learning Catalyst objectives; engaging parents and encouraging progression to try both learning and family engagement activities. This has resulted in an increase in the range of opportunities for both parents and families. This increase has been assisted by DSD (Do Something Different) and Time credits.

The majority of LC's are trained to deliver DSD and also refer to community programmes. DSD is a behaviour change programme that has assisted parents and teenagers to break habits and helped improve their confidence and general wellbeing. Some of the parents who attended a DSD programme have returned to learning and work.

The teen DSD is now a rolling programme in Kings Lynn Academy, this programme is seeing results with those children who present challenging behaviour both in the classroom and at home. The parents are in full support of the programme and have thanked the school for the assistance in changing their child's behaviour.

A new programme a family 'Healthy weight Happy life' is currently being written, this will be available for LCs to deliver in the new term.

The Time Credits scheme started with six schools and will be rolled out to the remainder of the LC Schools during the next academic year. Time credits encourages volunteering in the school and community by rewarding the individual with a time credit for each hour they volunteer. This has boosted volunteering and the confidence of parents. They can use the credits to access a range of organisations which include both sports and leisure which they would have not been able to access previously i.e. The Old Gaol house, Leziate Park Sailing Club and Bread baking courses at Denver Mill.

The LCs continue to develop a range of innovative engagement activities and I will be assisting them to develop some more ideas as the academic year progresses. We do have some rolling programmes with the same groups of parents. I will be asking the LCs to think of ways to boost these activities bringing in new ideas and to engage new parents. I have asked all LCs to engage at least 10 new parents in the new term and to develop further their parent engagement activities. The type of activity they will be able to deliver themselves. To assist with this I will be supplying them with range of different activity ideas to develop, i.e. Family/Village/Town History scrap book, Poetry/Story writing workshops and reading, literacy style activities.

Thank you for continued support for the Learning Catalyst Approach and I look forward to working with you in the new academic year.