

# update



Leading Learning through  
Action-led Research and Innovation

THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE LAUREL TRUST

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## A big thank you and a heads up...



First of all, my thanks to the dedication, professionalism and ingenuity of all our partner schools. I don't know how you have achieved

all you have done for children and their families and, in addition, either completed your research, made progress or have clear plans to finish in the coming months. In a time of such uncertainty and upheaval this is an impressive feat!

My congratulations to two of our current Lead Schools: Parkland Primary School in Leicester and John Donne Primary School in Peckham, London, both of which have completed their research 'Creative Play with a Pinch of SALT' and 'Lesson Study for Struggling Learners in Maths'

Looking to the future the Trustees are planning another round of funding to collaborations of schools in late April for a September start. Details will be on our website and in the education press from April 23, 2021.

**Maggie Roger**  
Consultant Director  
The Laurel Trust

## Recognition for Fir Vale Family of Schools in Sheffield



**Fiona Rigby, OBE, Headteacher of St Catherine' Catholic school together with Anna Westaway from the NHS have led an innovative research project using the SCERT's Framework to support children with special education needs and social communication difficulties and as an important resource for their teachers. It has been widely praised. Look out for their article in the May issue of the NASEN magazine 'Connect'.**

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# Branching out...



**Supporting families of children with additional needs:  
a Laurel Trust Action Research Project— Moving on in 2021**



**During Spring 2018, the Dales Teaching School Alliance applied for a Laurel Trust Action Research Project Grant to measure the impact of support and collaboration with parents and carers of children with additional needs; aiming to improve learning and care outcomes for children and to impact positively on the parents and carers. The application was successful and we received a grant to implement a Development Programme which we started in September 2018.**

**By Elaine O'Connor, The Dales Teaching School Alliance Coordinator.**



**We worked with Family Support Workers from five schools within the Dales Teaching School Alliance and asked them to recruit parents and carers of children with additional needs who might benefit from involvement in the Development Programme. Initially around 50 parents, carers and grandparents were involved and we launched the programme with a Parents Conference.**

**Problems shared, problems halved**  
We invited speakers from Psychological Services including a senior Psychiatrist, a Psychologist, a Speech and Language Therapist and arranged a range of workshops on strategies to help parents cope with various conditions including autism, ADHD, sensory issues and also workshops on coping with stress and building self-esteem. The conference was a huge success; in fact, it was hard to get the parents to leave at the end of the day as they had so many questions! We seemed to have opened a floodgate and many parents talked about the benefits of listening to other parents talk and realising that they weren't alone. They also thought

it was helpful to hear directly from professionals and be able to question them on things they didn't understand.

Following the initial conference, we organised a series of events for parents based on their evaluations and feedback. They wanted to know more about the various conditions and how to cope with their child at home more effectively; they also wanted a deeper understanding of medical issues including medication and what impact it would have on their child. They were keen to know more about assessment and referral systems and what decisions professionals were making about their child. They also wanted to learn more about their own



emotional intelligence, how to cope better with stress and anxiety, how to develop their own self-esteem and believe in themselves more. We hosted monthly events; sometimes these were half days but also full days. Initially we thought this might be too much for the parents but they kept coming back and demanding more.

As the year progressed the impact on the parents was evident. They had changed from being passive recipients of information to a confident, powerful body of people who wanted to learn more and be in a position to challenge services to ensure the best possible outcomes for their child. They started to take more control of the sessions, directing the content of workshops and making contributions to the delivery. Their confidence had grown significantly and they started to take greater control of meetings with professionals about their own child, demanding to be more informed about decisions and subsequent actions. Two of the group spoke at a NHS Conference for 150 professionals from Health, Psychological Services and Education. They talked about the impact that such services had on them as parents and how ineffective provision had led to further difficulties with their child. They were the stars of the show with very positive evaluations from all participants! The original

Development Programme ended with an evaluation conference in July 2019 which Laurel Trust Director, Maggie Roger and Trustee, Dame Pat Collarbone, were able to attend.

### **The development of family tree**

The Development Programme was a resounding success and it had a major impact on the parents and carers and on their children. Consequently, a small group of the parents became interested in how they could help other parents and carers at the start of their journey who had not benefitted from being involved in the Development Programme. They wanted to continue to work together to help others to better cope with the challenges they faced bringing up a child, or children, with additional needs. They took on further training including a safeguarding and confidentiality course and an ELKLAN Speech and Language Programme.

In November 2019, the small group met again to discuss how they might take the work forward. This work was supported by a Laurel Trust Dissemination Grant. After numerous meetings and much, much discussion, the ideal of FAMILY TREE was born with a vision to 'Branch out to support families of children with additional needs'. They went on to create their own branding for Family Tree and designed a portfolio of

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documents outlining their work to share with other schools and individual parents. They designed a logo and hoodies and polo shirts were made alongside personal business cards to further enhance their professional image. They had preliminary discussions with senior staff from a number of schools about how they might be able to support parents and carers in their schools. The senior staff were very positive about the development of Family Tree in their own schools and initial plans were discussed about how this would be taken forward.

### **Moving on in 2021**

All of this development took place during the COVID crisis so the group were plagued with delays and restrictions yet they were undeterred.

**Currently, Family Tree are planning their initial conference, hoping it will take place in July 2021. They aim to invite parents and carers from local schools alongside senior staff who can hopefully grow Family Tree in their own schools. They are also liaising with engineering employers in the Port of Blyth to encourage them to create future apprenticeships and other training and employment opportunities for young people with additional needs and potentially for the parents themselves.**



**THE DALES SCHOOL**

# Creative play with a pinch of SALT



From a tentative conversation between EPIC Psychology and the Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) team in summer 2019, the **Creative Play with a Pinch of SALT** project was born. It became a reality by the generous funding of The Laurel Trust. This allowed both services to work together with schools, parents and children with the aim of uncovering what impact both a targeted and a universal creative play provision could have on the development of cognitive, social, imaginative, language and communication skills in EYFS.

By Madalaine Nicol, EPIC, Lead Assistant Psychologist

**From the project, EPIC have created a parent-child and class programme that provides quality time for classrooms, parents and children to take part in fun and creative activities designed to transport them together into a world of sensation, imagination, wonder, delight and shared laughter.**

EPIC Psychology and SALT services are housed within Discovery Schools Multi-Academy Trust. We are lucky to have a close partnership with our trust and partner schools. This structure has allowed us to work collaboratively, drawing upon

the strengths and expertise of each member of the project team. The team included: Head Teacher of the lead school, 2 EYFS teachers, Senior Educational Psychologist, Senior Speech and Language Therapist, Lead Assistant Psychologist and Psychological Services Assistants.

#### **What did we do?**

The project involved the EPIC team adding a pinch of SALT to our existing targeted creative play programme and collaborating with EYFS teachers to develop the class programme. EPIC trained teachers in the psychological and speech

and language underpinnings of the programmes. EPIC delivered the parent-child programme in 2 schools over 6 weeks and provided coaching sessions for teachers whilst they delivered the class programme.

#### **What did we find?**

Children were always very excited to engage in the creative play sessions with one child looking forward every week to 'messy play day'. We found many positive impacts on child, parent and teacher development of which we have summarised: *continues over*

## Parent-Child Programme

The targeted play-based intervention aided children experiencing difficulties to make significant developments in the EYFS curriculum, exceeding that of control groups in areas of personal social and emotional development (PSED). Although overall development did not exceed that of the control groups, impact showed the closing of a developmental gap which would probably only have grown without intervention.

## Class Programme

Impacted the development of children's positive social communication skills and literacy, with an increase in confidence for an EAL child who was going through a silent period that chose to speak during the sessions. Child attention and listening skills increased and children showed the ability to transfer listening skills with the teacher to their peers. These findings provide evidence for the recommendation that more play-based activities should be considered as a tool to facilitate EYFS curriculum learning. Changes in play were also found at school, with children asking to play session activities again in class.

## Parent-Child and Class Programme Intervention

Our project showed that the use of the parent-child and class programme in conjunction can form the basis of effective support for child development; with the parent-child programme facilitating a foundation from which children are able to learn new skills and develop relationships to then practise in a class environment with peers through the class programme. Target children showed greater shifts in development than children who did not receive the intervention, particularly in areas of language and communication, PSED and expressive arts and design.



### Teacher impact

Teachers really enjoyed delivering the sessions and said that seeing the children having fun together and making them laugh was the best part. Programme activities developed their classroom play-based repertoire. The joyful, creative play experiences shared contributed to the development of child-teacher relationships and teachers reported relationships with previously hard to reach parents grew. Teachers demonstrated positive implementation of the strategies taught through the EPIC training which in turn promoted language and communication development amongst children.

### Parent impact

Parents enjoyed the sessions and felt it gave them quality time with their children. Teachers observed they were more expressive and had more positive parent-child interactions (e.g. reduced shouting). Parents use of language and communication skills increased in some areas such as body language, turn-taking and allowing their child to take the lead. Parents reported playing with their children more at home and with a greater repertoire of creative play activities. Many parents were more open and communicative with the school and parent mood was also observed to be lifted after the sessions.

### Impact on leaders

**This project emphasised the scope of opportunities available to us as combined services and the potential to provide significant impact to both adult and child mental health, wellbeing and development. The team saw first-hand the power of play and its ability to make learning and relationship building accessible for parent-child, peer-peer but also adult-adult. As this project came to completion during the first lockdown, the connected, joyful nature of the programmes certainly highlighted its flexibility to support adults and children at home. We feel this has enhanced our professional practise when working with staff and families, but also our personal lives with many of us making time for more moments of playful connection.**

**We have been delighted to launch all training and programme resources, please access using the link:**

**<https://epicleics.com/epic/resource-packs/creative-play-with-a-pinch-of-salt>**

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank The Laurel Trust, Discovery Schools Trust, project class teachers and support staff, the parents, the children, Kyra and everyone in the team for such a cohesive, joyful project. We hope you find the programmes useful.



## SPOTLIGHT ON THE TRUSTEES

# An African Adventure



In 2008 my school, a three-form infant school, decided to apply for the International Schools Award. One of the criteria was that we established a partnership with a school abroad that would benefit the children in both schools.

By Becky Greenhaigh, formerly Headteacher of Horndean Infants School/Laurel Trust Trustee

### How it all started

Thanks to a contact in the village where I live we were put in contact with Melon Mission in Nakuru, Kenya. Melons was set up to support the slum children and offers a feeding programme alongside free education. Many of the children are orphans and are cared for by guardians who are supported by Melons.

### Learning by our mistakes

Initially, the children exchanged letters and pictures and we raised funds and sent out books. In 2011, I and one of my classroom assistants went out to teach for a week during October half-term and stayed with members of the family who set up Melons. Before we arrived, we planned carefully and took out all the resources we would need for the activities. We based our activities on the 3 Little Pigs as we felt the repetitiveness would support the children. When we got to the school, we knew immediately that some of our activities wouldn't work.

Chalk drawings on the playground! The children in Kenya speak their own dialect and Swahili but they are all taught in English. The children in the class we were teaching had very limited English and would not understand the story and in actual fact it had no relevance to them even though we had put the Swahili words in to help! Fortunately, we had planned many creative activities but these again brought their own problems. The children and their teacher had not used scissors before, the children had never had coloured pencils and by the time we had given each table a set they had



disappeared from the front of the class! However, once they realised, they would be getting them at the end of the week they all reappeared.

The children all enjoyed the different creative activities and were so eager to learn and they had fun too. Their crowded conditions and broken tables did not deter their enjoyment.

#### Lessons learnt

What this first visit showed me was that the Kenyan teachers were doing a great job, very different from the UK but it works. So, my next visit and subsequent visits would focus on creative activities and games. Overall though, I came to the conclusion that what this school needed was builders to improve the children's learning environment. I came home and we raised money to buy new tables and chairs and when we returned in 2012 there were 12 of us six builders and six teachers. We planned activities that the children could relate to for example Handa's Surprise and have continued to

**“The children all enjoyed the different creative activities and were so eager to learn and they had fun too.”**

do so every year since. We have replaced every table and senior pupils have their own desk.

#### Bigger, brighter, better

Over the years, many people have come out to build or teach and supported us by raising money. There has been a consistent group of builders, plumbers and electricians who have worked tirelessly with their Kenyan counterparts and as a result in 2019 the children moved into a purpose-built school and I got to teach in a classroom that was light, roomy and waterproof!

**For more information on this project, please visit:  
[www.melonmission.org](http://www.melonmission.org)**



## Philosophy corner

**DR MARCELO STARICOFF**  
Trustee | The Laurel Trust

**The Philosophy Corner is a regular column in our Newsletters designed to promote a love of creative, critical and philosophical thinking at school and at home.**

Each Newsletter will feature a set of themed philosophical questions to inspire children and adults with an enthusiasm for wonder and for becoming experts in the art of dialogue, discussion and debate.

**The theme in this issue is the recent budget in which the Chancellor of the Exchequer had to make certain decisions about how to spend the Government Piggy Bank.**

- If you were in charge of the Government Piggy Bank what would be your priorities for example: education, health, the environment, helping those poor areas, defence, overseas aid?
- What percentage of the Budget would you give to each of the things you have chosen?
- What decisions would make the children engage in philosophical discussions? For example discussions around: whether it is right to spend so much money on space exploration and the Mars robot when so much of the world lacks basic needs – food, clean water, medicine etc.

