

# update



Leading Learning through  
Action-led Research and Innovation

THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE LAUREL TRUST

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## Welcome to the Summer 2023 Update

As always we hope that you will find the latest UPDATE informative and interesting and perhaps stimulating your further creativity. This Spring we have again offered the opportunity to collaborations of schools in disadvantaged areas to bid for a Laurel Trust grant. The expressions of interest in our briefings has been extensive and greater than any previous response. Briefings have been conducted online via Teams and we look forward to working with new partners and their projects after the selection process has been concluded. In addition you may wish to know that we will be producing a second volume of 'Research that Gets Results' later this year in which recently completed projects will be highlighted.

**Bill Goddard, Chair of Trustees, The Laurel Trust**

*Note: this is a stock image*

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# Leadership Learning with UCL and The Laurel Trust

By **Joanne Calladine-Evans**,  
Programme Leader for the  
new National Professional  
Qualifications at the  
Centre for Educational  
Leadership at University  
College London Institute  
of Education.



**How the University College of London's Centre for Educational Leadership deploys Laurel Trust Research Enquiries to contextualise the leadership learning of teachers studying for a National Professional Qualification in Leading Behaviour and Culture.**

## About Joanne

Joanne's role has involved developing and curating content for the Specialist National Professional Qualifications and providing operational support for UCL Delivery Partners both nationally and internationally.

Her career spans 34 years in education and professional development, including secondary, FE and HE. Joanne has 11 years senior leadership experience in an outstanding secondary school including the role of the Teaching School Director, which is when she first started working with The Laurel Trust to build expertise and research networks in East Sussex.

**Evidence informed research is one of the key principles of the NPQ programmes which launched in Autumn 2021. As part of the Recruitment and Retention strategy the qualifications sit within a professional development thread that runs through a teacher's career, termed the Golden Thread by the Department of Education.**

One of my first roles at UCL was to work with the programme leader team on developing the content of the first Specialist NPQ Programmes, Leading Teaching, Leading Teacher Development and Leading Behaviour and Culture. It

was clear from the content (domain) frameworks for each programme that the teachers undertaking the new Leadership programmes would be required to learn about the evidence base from which the key learning and principles of professional development, school culture, curriculum and assessment, teaching and implementation had been drawn.

The content frameworks for each programme are thorough and every bullet point for the 'Learn that' and 'Learn how' statements had to be brought to life in practical application through real examples and case studies.



Thankfully organisations such as The Laurel Trust have been building an evidence approach to professional development from those teachers and leaders working in the field of education since 2018. The Laurel Trust has been working with professionals across the education sector particularly in disadvantaged areas, supporting teachers and leaders to interrogate the evidence available in the light of their own particular contexts employing established mechanisms of research. Our teaching and education professionals today benefit from the willingness of others to take the extra step in engaging with the research and applying it to their own context.

These context rich pieces of evidence are vital in enabling new leaders to think deeply about their own context and reflect on how they can address similar or different issues themselves. As one participant said of her learning. 'My significant learning has been in reviewing the case studies and

practical discussion and working out how I would lead and apply the methods in different scenarios in my school and context.'

Two Laurel Trust Evaluation reports in particular have been useful to demonstrate the frameworks in action 'Autism Research Into Practice' led by London South Teaching School Alliance and 'Exploring the Use of the SCERTs framework to support staff and learners in mainstream schools' produced by the 'Fir Valley Family of (primary) Schools.

Both evaluation reports exemplify the NPQ professional development framework area in the Leading Behaviour and Culture Framework specifically 'Helping Teachers improve through evidence-based professional development that is explicitly focussed on improving classroom teaching can be a cost effective way to improve pupils' academic outcomes when compared with other interventions and can narrow the disadvantage attainment gap'.

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In the Autism Research Into Practice the project 'was designed around the concept of using Research Learning Communities to inform professional practice'. This approach was implemented across 6 schools with participants being supported to work through a research cycle, a long established mechanism for professional development building on the existing knowledge, skills and understanding of the participants and drawing on a summary of the latest literature from the UCL Cognitive Neuroscience team.

The teachers were supported to design and test a change to practice in their own school that would have an impact on school

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**"Two Laurel Trust Evaluation reports in particular have been useful to demonstrate the frameworks in action..."**

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culture that would 'affect and improve the well-being motivation and behaviour of their pupils'. (2.4 LBC content framework). The outcomes in all 6 case studies were significant and you can read about them [here](#). One in particular summarises and encapsulates Bruner's spinal curriculum model of knowledge acquisition, transformation and evaluation. 'The interventions generated impressive change through embedding policy and practice in school and community ownership, together with structuring of staff learning of skills appropriate to the project: these included skills relating to SEND, such as support for pupils with autism, alongside those relating to research management, such as ways to assess change over the life of an initiative'.

The Fir Vale Family of (primary) Schools in Sheffield undertook a different piece of research by using a model known as the SCERTs Model. The SCERTs Model is 'an evidence-based educational framework that addresses the core domains of social communication (SC) emotional regulation (ER) by ensuring that the environment is adapted with both interpersonal and learning supports, referred to as transactional support (TS).' (Page 1 on [scerts.com website](#)). The focus of the project has been on children who have been identified as having social communication difficulties. Such is the challenge in this region

**SC**  
Social Communication

**ER**  
Emotional Regulation

**TS**  
Transactional Support



that it was quickly realised that in order to affect real change with limited resources there had to be collaboration across community, education and health services.

The significant impact of this work means that it is now part of the Sheffield SEND Sufficiency Plan 2020-2024. This piece of research has gone beyond the NPQ framework in terms of creating a whole school approach (4. Complex behavioural needs) but its focus on bringing professionals working in schools, Speech and Language Therapy, Educational Psychology and the families of participating children demonstrates perfectly how professionals can meet the 'learn how to' (4b) part of the content framework 'Liaising with parents, carers and specialist colleagues to better understand pupils' individual circumstances and how they can be supported to meet high academic and behavioural expectations.

**"...the focus of the project has been on children who have been identified as having social communication difficulties. "**



**"The significant impact of this work means that it is now part of the Sheffield SEND Sufficiency Plan 2020-2024."**



There were many positive outcomes of this research not least of which was the quality of the staff training which has both inspired staff and changed their practice (read the detailed outcomes of the project [here](#)). This points to the high value of professional development which is designed and delivered by specialists whether internal or external.

Our current NPQ Specialist participants are a third of the way into their programme and early feedback indicates that many are at the beginning of their journey in terms of understanding the full value to be gained by pupils when there is a culture of collegial trust and staff 'buying in' to new approaches and improved practice.

Case studies such as those generously provided by The Laurel Trust and Schools in London and

Sheffield illustrate the many and varied ways that this can be achieved in real settings across a variety of contexts. For participants on the Institute of Education (IOE) UCL National Professional Qualifications the opportunity to access and draw on the research evidence provided with the professional generosity of The Laurel Trust enriches both their learning experience and knowledge, additionally the collegiality and trust displayed by The Laurel Trust

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also align with the IOEs values of openness and optimism and excellence and integrity.

**National Professional Qualifications are currently fully funded for child minders, teachers and leaders in Early Years Settings, Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and 11-19 State Funded settings in England. ●**

*Note: all images used in this article are stock images.*





# All aboard!



## Getting children's reading back on track

A project by (l-r) James Groundwater, Dr Sue Fisher and Sally Collins

**When we started this project, we had no idea of the journey we would go on. Our idea was to inspire and engage our children in reading and early career aspirations through the development of a reading and a STEM train carriage. Yes, a train!**

**We received two donated train carriages from Porterbrook, I am reliably informed these are Pacer trains that once travelled Yorkshire and the North-East. Our train now lives on the school yard on their own set of tracks. After a few problem-solving issues such as access, the ever-leaking windows and a lot of clearing and cleaning, and a bit more cleaning, we had a shell ready to make safe and refit. This sounds simple but it has been quite a journey to get the reading carriage on track, up and running for our children to use.**

The story of our build was documented through Channel 4's *George Clarke's Amazing Spaces*. If you would like to see the transformation in action it is series 11 episode 4, available on 'All 4' catch up. It was a truly strange experience being filmed. Thankfully just 3 minutes for me, but more importantly the Train and James, the member of staff who originally sent a letter to Porterbrook, were the stars of the show. The programme gave the project exposure and has helped to aid in funding the project - as you can

imagine it is expensive to convert a train. Our *Just Giving* site gained small donations from all over the country and inspired lots of people to contact us, donate books and give up their time to volunteer. This has been one of the many positives of the project.





## The Big Idea

We had four key areas we wanted to focus on:

**Innovative approaches to reading to raise levels of attainment but to also foster and encourage a love of reading**

**STEM learning opportunities to raise aspirations**

**Raising children's confidence and improve well-being**

**Parents/carers and children reading together and developing parent partnership within this**

### Raising confidence and well-being

The train project coincided with the building of the Northumberland line. This new rail line will connect Newcastle with areas of Northumberland, including Blyth, creating social mobility, careers and job opportunities. Due to this happy coupling, we have had access to a professional poet, photographer and a range of railway personnel.

This has inspired our children to write poetry with the intention of the poems being displayed at the stations along the way. Our children feel that they can do rather than having a fixed mindset of can't do. The confidence the children have shown listening and speaking with railway personnel, news reporters, members of the council and creating poetry is palpable when speaking with the children. We will need to capture this in a more qualitative way in order to demonstrate the progress in well-being and confidence, we have seen in school.

Self-regulation is integral in our work, and we use the 'Zones of Regulation' curriculum. We use the colours red/blue/yellow/green to give a visual representation of key emotions, alongside words and symbols of the emotions being felt. Each colour has strategies developed with our Occupational Therapists to help regain focus,

**"Our children feel that they can do rather than having a fixed mindset of can't do."**

calm down or alert, to support in self-regulation.

### Reading

Many of our pupils are pre-readers or reluctant readers. The majority of whom come to our school with a fear of reading. Many of their peers in mainstream schools have surpassed them and can read and understand the text with increasing accuracy and fluency. This can become a deep-rooted fear of learning and a belief that they can't succeed.

Using the train as inspiration, a quiet and non-threatening environment, is a completely different place to learn. We use a wide range of resources, dressing the train environment to reflect and promote the current school topic. Keeping

**The Dales is specialist primary school in Blyth which has a train, its own station and ticket office. Children, parents and teachers are now working on a station café and garden which will provide food for the café. It has been a privilege to support such an exciting venture.**



the environment practical, relevant and fun means that it is interactive, engaging and fresh.

Staff share stories, use pictures and props when storytelling to support both written and spoken language. It is crucial we use varied methods to support reading as many of our children find phonics so abstract and difficult. We are using a whole word approach alongside Rocket Phonics to scaffold learning for success. We already teach each child according to their individual needs and the children do not feel singled out or different when they are at varying reading levels within the class as it is usual for everyone to be working at their own level.

Initial quantitative research has been around parental involvement in reading and we have had limited response to our questionnaires. We made the decision to switch to a more qualitative method to engage with parents practically in order to collect responses to reading at home.

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**“Staff share stories, use pictures and props when storytelling to support both written and spoken language.”**

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The children have filled in questionnaires pre-the train library in class and many responses highlighted the extent of the problem. In response to these questionnaires, we put in place a lending library and added a book vending machine to our train. The vending machine is hugely popular and, so far, our reluctant readers have responded well. One of our children came up with the idea on how to make it fair to all children across school, using the number of pages read rather than books read to gain a token and choose a book to take home.

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**“The vending machine is hugely popular and, so far, our reluctant readers have responded well.”**

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### Data and Evidence

We are in the enviable position of being data rich. Having completed pre-reading train, aspirations surveys and using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale, when linked with the post data this will give us a large amount of quantitative data. In order to yield a richer source, we intend to hold parent focus groups and individual conversational interviews in order to capture parental views. We are in the process of preparing two to three individual case studies to enrich and bring to life the impact of the project.

### Going Forward

As the renovation of the STEM carriage finishes in May 2023, we look forward to teaching and learning about rail safety and STEM based careers from Network Rail. Not that a lack of completion has stopped us from travelling by train, thank you to Aln Valley Railway and Northern Rail for providing these free experiences.



Role play is, and will be, integral in developing language and appropriate social skills. We are working with speech and language therapists to develop the cab for our pre-verbal children. Cause and effect switches will be key in this development. Children already use the wireless phone that we put in to make calls between the cabs and the ticket office.

**Dame Pat Collarbone even had the experience of driving the train using the driving simulator cab. Our aim with the STEM carriage is to further drive forward, enrich and develop our curriculum offer. ●**

*Footnote: How many train puns did you find?*



*Dame Pat at the controls*





# WHAT'S COOKING?

## Maggie's Fresh Asparagus Soup: a seasonal special



### Ingredients

500g of fresh asparagus

1 large onion

1 clove of garlic (optional)

2 pints chicken stock (I use two Knorr chicken stockpot cubes)

1 tablespoon butter

2 tablespoons plain flour

Salt and ground black pepper

Crème fraîche garnish (optional)

1. Finely chop the onion and garlic.
2. Remove the woody end of the asparagus. Chop into one inch pieces and reserve a few tips for garnish.
3. In a saucepan gently sweat the onion and garlic for two/three minutes in the melted butter and then add the asparagus and cook for a further two mins.
4. Stir while sprinkling flour, salt, and pepper into the mix. Do not let flour brown.
5. Add the chicken stock and simmer for 10 mins or until asparagus is tender.
6. Blanch the asparagus tips until tender.
7. Use a hand blender to purée the mixture until smooth.
8. Ladle into bowls and garnish with the reserved asparagus tips.
9. Add a teaspoonful of crème fraîche if desired.