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Arts Council of Wales and Early Years Wales

Evaluation of Creative Learning in the Early Years

Year 1 Report



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1. Overview

The Creative Learning in the Early Years project is a joint initiative between the Arts Council of Wales, Early Years Wales and the Welsh Government supported by Paul Hamlyn Foundation. The Arts Council has an established, and extensive Creative Learning programme for school-aged children which has been very successful, "Creative learning through the arts has transformed learning and teaching in Wales by placing the arts and creativity at the heart of education."¹

The Lead Creative Schools Programme, "...supports schools to develop creative learning approaches to teaching and learning, focusing on exploring new approaches to curriculum design in line with the four core purposes of the Curriculum for Wales."² The programme uses attainment and attendance to measure the impact on children engaged in the project, but it is also a broader focus on fostering a creative mindset in both teachers and pupils, "The ambition of the scheme is one of whole-school change...teachers changing their own practice, having witnessed the impact of creativity on their pupils and increasingly providing opportunities within their own schools and wider school communities for sharing"

Early Years Wales and the Arts Council recognised that to truly achieve the ambition of "placing the arts and creativity at the heart of education" in Wales, the programme must include the Early Years sector. At the core of this project is a commitment to the idea that the early years phase is a critical time in a child's life and development and this core belief is summed up by an opening statement in the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings in Wales,

"We know that high-quality early education provision is essential to children's development. The experiences, knowledge and skills needed for lifelong learning, active citizenship and future employment begin in the early years."³

¹ Kirsty Williams, [Creative Learning through the Arts Annual Report](#)

² Original Invitation to Tender – Evaluation of Creative Learning in the Early Years

³ [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](#)

2. Aims

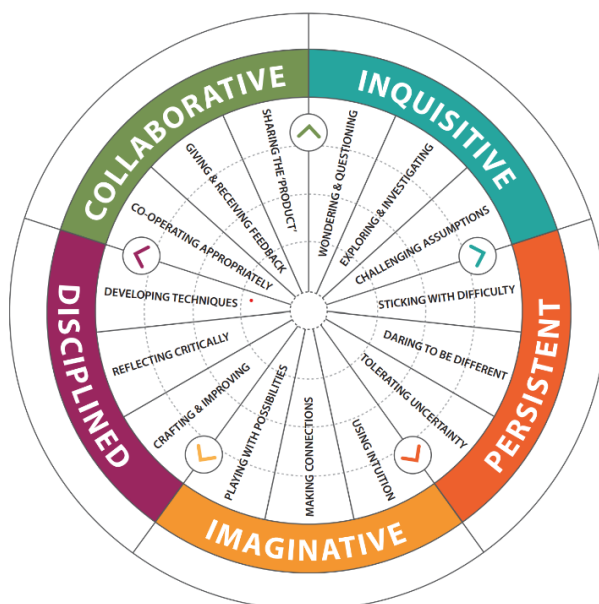
Arts Council of Wales and Early Years Wales have stated shared values of “play, wonder, exploration and a desire to overcome barriers created by inequity”⁴. The purpose of the project is to, “explore what effect bringing creative learning into Early Years settings has on the learning and development of 3 – 5 year olds.”⁵

Aims of the project:

1. To **understand** the central role of creativity and play in a child's development
2. To combine the principles of the **Curriculum for non-maintained childcare settings** with the **Creative Habits of Mind pedagogy** and learning from the **Lead Creative Schools Scheme**
3. To develop **confidence** in both early years practitioners and creative practitioners to trial new ways of working

The Creative Habits of Mind pedagogy is based on research conducted by Bill Lucas, Guy Claxton and Ellen Spencer.⁶ The issue that their research tries to address is the lack of consensus on what creativity is which means that there is therefore no defined way to assess or track progress of creativity. The research presents a “five dimensional definition of creativity”⁷ which can be used to provide support to enable teachers to develop their learners creativity and to help learners to have a broad, shared idea of what it means to be creative.

The Arts Council use the Creative Habits of Mind wheel (see below). The wheel is designed to help both learners and teachers visualise and reflect on where their abilities lie in each aspect of creativity, to develop a shared language or ways to talk about creativity and to actively seek opportunities to become more creative and develop their creative abilities.



⁴ Original Paul Hamlyn Foundation Application

⁵ Original Invitation to Tender – Evaluation of Creative Learning in the Early Years

⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/5k4dp59msdwk.pdf>

⁷ [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](http://www.gov.wales)

The Early Years Practitioners, Creative Agents and Creative Practitioners were all provided with training and support to centre their creative development through the project around the Creative Habits of Mind pedagogy. As members of Early Years Wales, each setting was also familiar with the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings in Wales which was introduced in 2022. The planning and evaluation forms were designed around these two central philosophies.

The Lead Creative School project has provided a foundation for the project, enabling the team to have a very strong sense of what will work and how to structure and organise the Creative Learning in the Early Years project, based on previous learning. Unlike in schools, it is not possible to robustly measure the attainment of three to five year olds and attendance is broadly irrelevant as attendance at settings may vary due to the working patterns or need for childcare of the parents and carers. The Creative Learning in the Early Years project's focus is on supporting Early Years Practitioners as 'enabling adults'⁸, giving them the skills and confidence to trial new ways of working and, "supporting the staff in settings in being leaders in the field of creative practice,"⁹

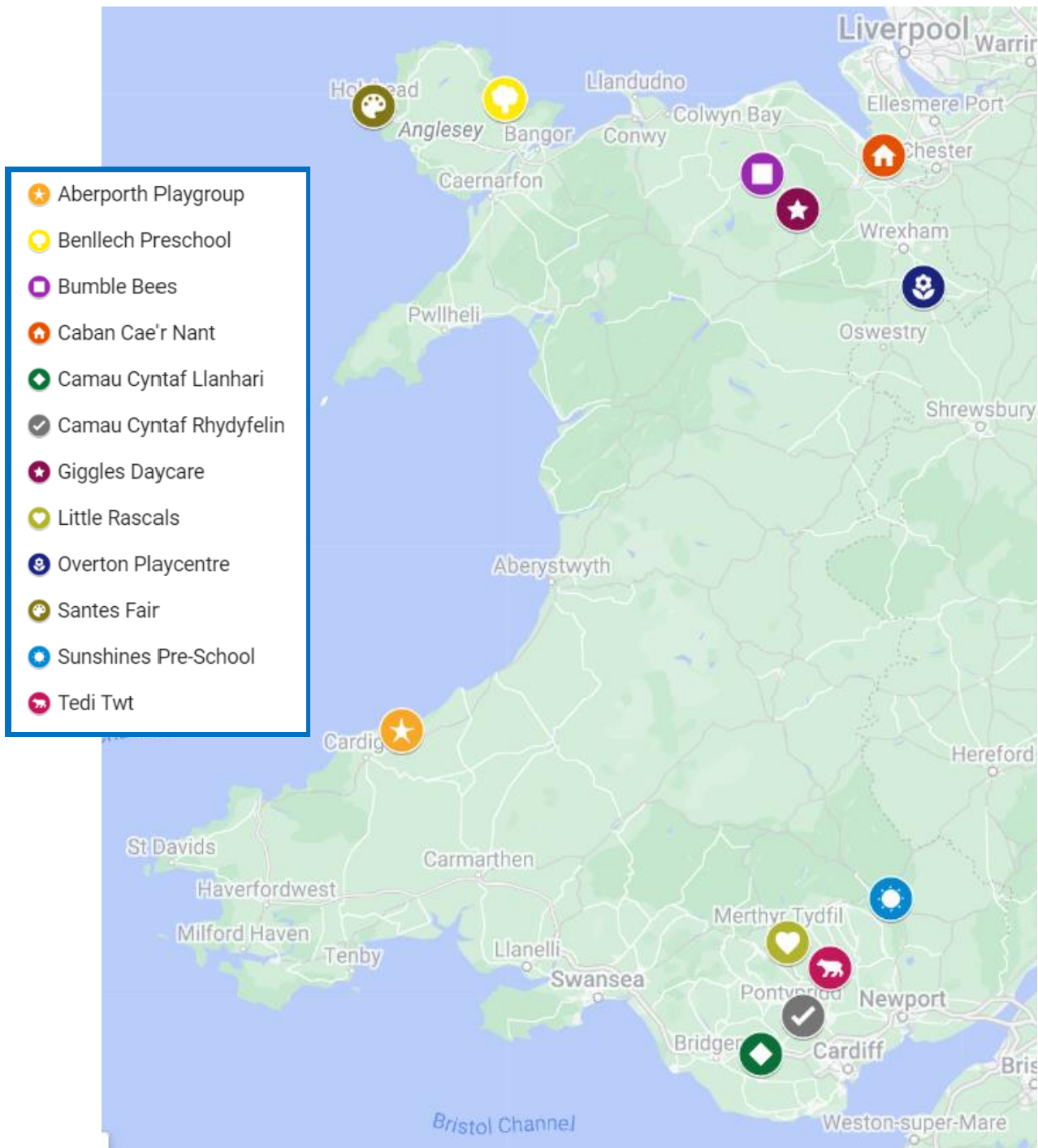
We have framed our evaluative processes around the Creative Habits of Mind pedagogy, and the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings in Wales. There are clear synergies and echoes running throughout both philosophies, which has enabled us to examine the evidence that we have gathered through the lens of these frameworks.

⁸ [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](#)

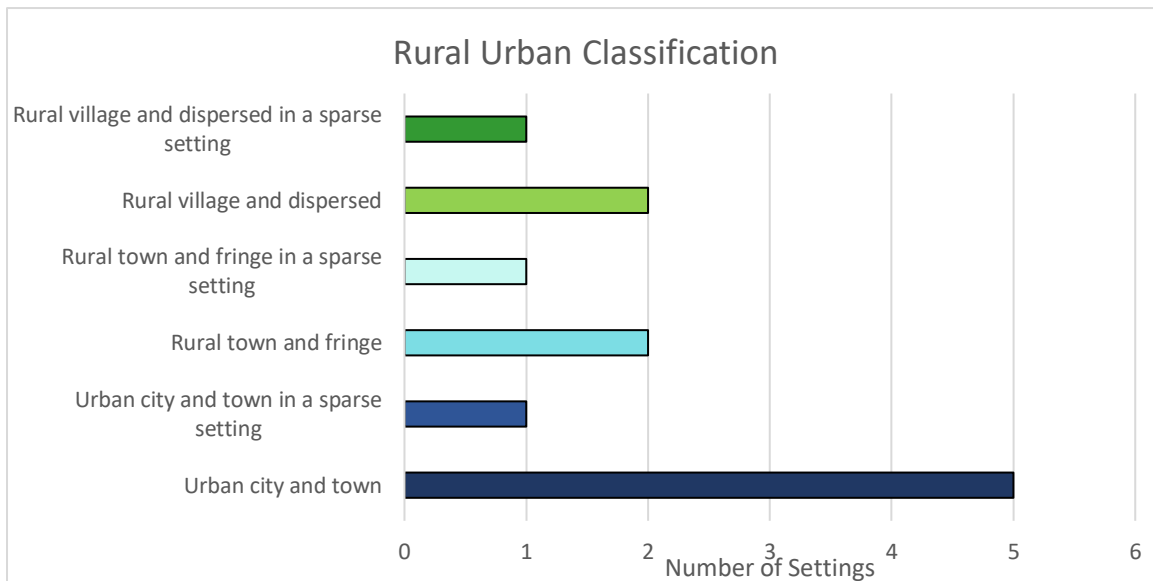
⁹ Original Paul Hamlyn Foundation Application

3. The Settings

There were 12 settings engaged in the first year of the project. They were from a wide geographical area across Wales as can be seen in the map below, or by following this [link](#).

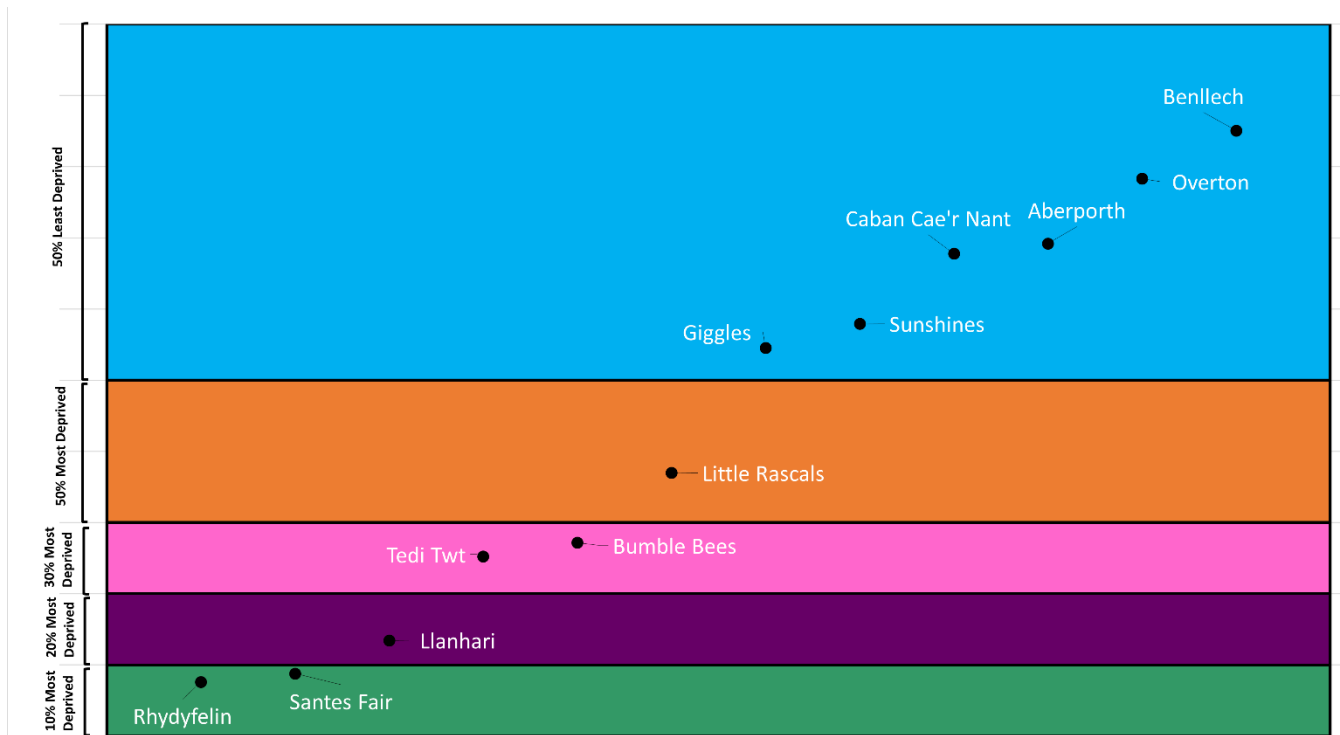


The settings are located in a mixture of rural and urban settings. The graph below categorises the settings according to the rural-urban classification system.¹⁰



Of the 12 settings taking part in the project, six were classified as being in an urban location, with the remainin six settings located in areas of varying degrees of rurality, with one setting (Aberporth) located in the least populous category.

The chart below uses the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation¹¹. The Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation Welsh Government’s official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in Wales and use eight different measures to assess each area; income, employment, health, education, access to services, housing, community safety and physical environment. Each setting is plotted against this index, based on the lower super output area in which it is based and the ranking that it has been given against the eight different deprivation indices.



¹⁰ https://datamap.gov.wales/layers/geonode:rural_urban_classification_of Isoa

¹¹ https://datamap.gov.wales/layers/inspire-wg:wimd2019_overall

Of the 12 settings, 5 are classified as bilingual. However throughout the evaluation we observed that the majority of the 12 settings encourage and support the children's use of the Welsh language .

This diversity in terms of location, language and socio-economic status is a positive for the project, particularly in terms of the stated aim to be inclusive and, "to overcome barriers created by inequity."¹² An important part of this project, as noted in the original funding application to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation was, to support a diverse range of settings;

"The programme will accelerate the Covid-recovery for young children, bringing communication, well-being, and belonging to the fore; and allow our organisations to focus on the 28% of families with children aged under 4 in income deprivation in Wales. It will enhance contributions to the Race Equality work in Wales and support bilingualism and Welsh heritage."¹³

Cwmpas spoke with or visited all of the settings engaging in the project. Each setting was very different, taking different approaches and wanting different outcomes from the project. During the evaluation we gathered an wealth of evidence unique to each of the settings. We felt it was important to devote a specific section of this report to each setting to explore both the granular evidence and to tell the individual stories that we heard when speaking with each setting. Each setting was generous with their time and their feedback, sharing their thoughts and reflections as well as the stories about the impact of the project on both the Early Years Practitioners and on the children.

¹² Original Project Funding Application to Paul Hamlyn Foundation

¹³ *ibid*

3.1 Aberporth Bilingual Playgroup

[Aberporth Bilingual Playgroup](#) is located in West Wales. The setting is bilingual and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation, but is in a Flying Start area. Described as a, 'Rural village and dispersed in a sparse setting' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting plan focused on the key areas of 'physical development and confidence in exploration' and 'engaging with nature and outdoor learning'. The plan also stated that they were focusing on the Persistent and Inquisitive Creative Habits of Mind.

Cwmpas visited the setting to observe a session with their Creative Practitioner. The setting had no outdoor space and for them, the purpose of the project was, "...to feel inspired and more confident to use our outdoors on a regular basis..."¹⁴ The setting practitioners felt that their location provided huge potential, with a beach and woodland within a few minutes' walk. However, the setting practitioners explained to us that they did not know how to make the most of the outdoor space to make it a meaningful and fun learning experience for the children.

On our visit we observed that some of the Early Years Practitioners were less enthusiastic about taking the children outside than others and some Practitioners felt that it might be physically quite demanding and difficult to manage the children effectively outdoors. It was decided that eight of the children and three setting Practitioners would go with the Creative Practitioner for a bear hunt through the local woods. The outing was themed around a favourite book of the children, "We're Going on a Bear Hunt" by Michael Rosen.

WE'RE GOING ON A BEAR HUNT



¹⁴ Aberporth Setting Planning Form

We walked down from the setting to the forest and the children followed the story, acting out the different challenges faced by the characters. The children were encouraged by the Early Years Practitioners to climb on large rocks and boulders, cross a small stream, climb a steep hill, navigate under and over tree stumps and bushes. One Early Years Practitioner explained that the children had been initially quite nervous about climbing these quite large rocks and had asked for supportive hands and for the adults to stay close by. However they observed that now, the children climbed confidently without any help, showing improved balance, an increase in their physical control and improved physical literacy. The Early Years Practitioners had supported the children to challenge themselves in terms of what they believed they were capable of, and to gauge and manage risks for themselves. We reached the forest, where the practitioner had previously built a den to hide the toy bear, which the children then discovered.

One of the Early Years Practitioners put on a puppet show for the children in the forest, using the den as a stage. The children then led the next part of the session, creating whatever they wanted out of natural objects they found in the woods. Making bear puppets from old socks and sticks, using a large discarded drainpipe to make a tunnel, using scissors to snip leaves and ferns, finding insects and bugs, and talking and collaborating with each other throughout about what they were doing. The children then decided that they wanted to make a party den. The Creative Practitioner and the Early Years Practitioners enthusiastically supported their idea. They collaborated to put together a shelter using big sticks, cloth, leaves and other decorations that they found. One made an owl birthday cake out of mud, with sticks for candles. They all sat in the den and seemed proud of their teamwork and their creativity.

The Early Years Practitioners I spoke with all said that the project had been “amazing” and really beneficial for both them as practitioners and for the children. They particularly felt that being outdoors with the children had had a positive impact on their own well-being.

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The children had the opportunity to explore the natural environment, learn about the nature and wildlife in their local area and were encouraged and supported by both the Early Years Practitioners and the Creative Practitioner to wonder and question throughout the project.

PERSISTENT

The children showed the ability to stick with difficulty, particularly the climbing, until they were able to do it independently. They showed resilience, throwing themselves enthusiastically into the unknown of their outdoor adventures with the Creative Practitioner.

COLLABORATIVE

The children worked together to create a shared idea (the party den), communicating their ideas and cooperating to bring their idea to life and enjoy it together.

IMAGINATIVE

Throughout the sessions, the children’s imaginations were encouraged, supported and validated with both the Early Years Practitioners and Creative Practitioner being led by the children’s ideas and following their interests, “discovering wildlife, the sounds, and smells of their surroundings...”¹⁵

¹⁵ Aberporth Evaluation Form

DISCIPLINED

The children became physically more confident and developed their skills in “climbing, scrambling, roaming free with confidence and minimal guidance”¹⁶, assessing risks themselves and adjusting their actions to keep themselves safe.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners challenged established ideas and assumptions that they should stay in the setting and that taking the children outside would be difficult.

PERSISTENT

They became more open to exploring new locations, using new materials to spark creativity, investigating the feasibility and workability of new ways of engaging the children, even if this might be difficult or present challenges.

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners worked closely as a team to organise the adventures, keep the children safe and engaged throughout the outdoor sessions. They were open to new ideas and ways of working presented by the Creative Practitioner.

IMAGINATIVE

One of the Early Years practitioners said that she had been amazed at all the different ways to be creative and to use a huge range of materials and that the Creative Practitioner had given them so many new ideas and the confidence to see almost anything as having the potential to be used creatively.

DISCIPLINED

The Early Years Practitioners we spoke with felt confident that the setting would continue to use the outdoors and build on all of the ideas from the project after the project ended. The project’s Creative Agent observed, “The leaders who participated will model active change to other staff who may be not confident in leading EY in the outdoors, movement, play, and place making.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

3.2 Benllech Preschool

[Benllech Preschool](#) is located on Anglesey, classified by the Rural Urban Classification as a, 'Rural town and fringe in a sparse setting'. The area is classified as in the 50% least deprived areas in Wales according to the WIMD¹⁸. The setting supports up to 19 children aged between two and four years and uses both English and Welsh.

The setting plan for the project is to focus on, 'Developing the language and many means of expression of young children' and on, 'Physical development and confidence in exploration' with an emphasis on the Collaborative and Imaginative Creative Habits of Mind. The project aimed, "...to see an increase in confidence to express themselves in speech and with their body, emotional literacy development, and Self-regulation through physicality."¹⁹

We spoke with the Early Years practitioner leading the project at Benllech on the phone. Whilst they are leading the project within their setting, the setting manager is also very supportive of the project, providing support with the administrative and financial aspects of being part of the project.

The Creative Practitioner utilised the setting's established practice of singing nursery rhymes in both Welsh and English, adding Makaton signs to the songs. The Early Years Practitioners noticed how in learning these songs the children were actually learning to communicate in three languages without being aware of it, observing that this had "... sparked some of the kids to be more lyrical".

The children sang Incy Wincy Spider and then used the idea of spiders and webs to create a huge outdoor web with string. They became spiders and butterflies themselves, moving about in the web, and then crafted these creatures from various materials to put on the web and the setting's fencing. The Creative Practitioner inspired the children to explore the insect and plant life outside, sparking a fascination with mini beasts and going on bug hunts which the setting have been supporting and continuing outside of the sessions with the Creative Practitioner.

The Creative Agent reflected in an article that they wrote for the Early Years Wales magazine 'Small Talk' where they describe the benefits to children of movement, "it not only promotes their independence but supports their social development with their peers. By offering invitations for children to creatively move together we are supporting them to form relationships with peers and staff promoting opportunities for children to develop their sense of belonging and therefore enhance their well-being." Overall, the Early Years Practitioner felt that it was, ""a really joyful experience".

In their evaluation form, the setting reported that they developed in all of the Creative Habits of Mind even though they only planned to focus on two of the five habits.

Key Impacts – Children

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years practitioner explained that the children have, "grown in confidence" and she has seen the children become more independent since engaging with the Creative Practitioner. The children who were quiet and less happy to speak when in a group have become more engaged, been more confident to come forward and to be more active in the sessions.

¹⁸ https://datamap.gov.wales/layers/inspire-wg:wimd2019_overall

¹⁹ Benllech planning form

IMAGINATIVE

The evaluation form notes that the children, "...have seen a more meaningful use of Expressive Language (while singing for example) and have noticed a development in confidence while playing with others."

INQUISITIVE

The children's natural inquisitiveness was supported and encouraged by the activities, "...from role-play as butterflies to finding the way around a giant spider web, building and making safe nests, chasing bird feathers – all of them displayed evidence of early development of creative habits."

PERSISTENT

The children have been able to adapt to the sessions, regulating themselves and being a "calmer group" more able to focus on activities.

DISCIPLINED

They, "saw evidence of the connection between physical gesture and speaking/listening, and an increase in focus on tasks." And that the children, "displayed evidence of early development of creative habits, forming a foundation on which to build²⁰."

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

COLLABORATIVE

They reported that the sessions have given the Early Years Practitioners lots of new ideas and, "put a bit of fire into us." They felt that all of the setting practitioners are working together to try new things without being afraid for it not to work or go to plan.

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years Practitioner reported that they and the other Practitioners had also felt more confident and inspired by the sessions, "I'd never have thought of all the different ways to use a scarf...I'm inspired!"

INQUISITIVE

The settings use of Makaton has been a really inspirational and exciting change. The children and Early Years Practitioners have been able to learn a new language. The activities also helped one practitioner to improve their use of Welsh.

PERSISTENT

The Early Years Practitioners felt that all of the setting practitioners are now more confident to try new things without being afraid for it not to work or go to plan. They described this as a "mental shift" into a different way of thinking and doing things.

DISCIPLINED

For the Early Years Practitioners, the evaluation form stated that, "The practitioners are more readily using the children's ideas to plan in the moment..." providing evidence of the embedding of the creative habits of mind across the setting.

²⁰ Benllech evaluation form

3.3 Bumble Bees Playgroup

[Bumble Bees playgroup](#) is based in Denbigh in North Wales. It is in one of the most rural locations of the settings involved in the project and the setting primarily uses the English language. It is one of the 30% most deprived areas of Wales and the setting itself provided this description, "We are in a deprived area of Denbigh, we face many challenges with the children we care for, 'most of who are boys', many have had adverse experiences in their childhood, only a few have good communication, skills. many have poor behaviour, language and play skills."²¹

The setting wanted to focus on developing the children's access to and use of their outdoor area. Focusing on language development and supporting the children as autonomous learners. The setting wanted to focus on the Inquisitive and Collaborative Creative Habits of Mind.

We spoke with the setting via a phone call and learned about how the Creative Practitioner had focused on working with the children outside, bringing in adventures, music, singing, building, making and imagining. The Creative Practitioner inspired the setting to use natural resources in their creativity. They were now using wood, leaves soil and other found natural objects to create things from their imaginations such as wind chimes and talking sticks. They had worked with the Creative Practitioner to build dens, put up tents and found wood to make a campfire. The children experienced camping outside in tents that they worked together to erect. The outdoors became central to this project, with the children growing in confidence to explore and use their imaginations outside.



²¹ Bumble Bees Planning Form

The setting had initially felt worried about the levels of risk, and would not have attempted these activities before the project. However, the Creative Practitioner had demonstrated how to mitigate any risks and how much benefit providing children with these new and different experiences could bring. The experience had given the Early Years Practitioners a sense of freedom, a confidence to try new things, to go where the children led them to focus on the fun, rather than the finished product.

In their evaluation form, Bumble Bees identified that they had touched on all the areas of focus and every Creative Habit of Mind during the project. The Creative Practitioner, "brought in a new energy to the Early Years Practitioners and children." The Practitioners now feel an enthusiasm and a confidence and the children have become more collaborative, better at communicating and happier. The Manager described being part of the project as an, "Inspirational experience".

Key Impacts – Children

COLLABORATIVE

The children now work more collaboratively, staying focused for longer, they are more willing to take part. They worked together to put up a Bell Tent with the Creative Practitioner, communicating with each other to assign roles.

IMAGINATIVE

The children's imaginations and creativity were encouraged and supported throughout the project, with their ideas leading and sparking new creative processes and the Early Years Practitioners following their ideas and helping them bring their imaginations to life.

INQUISITIVE

The children have begun to bring resources to the Early Years Practitioners with ideas and ways they can use them creatively. The children now see creative opportunities everywhere, and have the enthusiasm to follow their imaginations.

PERSISTENT

The children were able to work together to solve problems, sticking with a difficult task such as putting up the tent, to achieve a shared goal.

DISCIPLINED

The children learned and developed new creative techniques such as pressing flowers and berries and using tools.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that they felt they worked more closely as a team as a result of the project, with an improvement in everyone's empathy and language skills.

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that the experience had given them a sense of freedom and confidence to try new things.

INQUISITIVE

"It has brought in a new energy to the staff and children, going out into the environment, exploring natural resources, and using them to create, feel, listen, and explore."²²

PERSISTENT

The experience has given the Early Years Practitioners a sense of freedom and a confidence to manage and overcome concerns such as the potential risks associated with particular activities.

DISCIPLINED

Early Years Practitioners feel more positive and excited after being involved in the project, "...it has lit a fire of enthusiasm back into us all." "everyone is more energetic, happy and playful"²³

²² Bumble Bees Evaluation Form

²³ Ibid

3.4 Caban Cae'r Nant

[Caban Cae'r Nant](#) is based in Connah's Quay in North Wales. It is in one of the 50% least deprived areas in Wales according to the WIMD, but is within a Flying Start area²⁴. It is classified as an 'urban city and town' location and the setting primarily uses the English language.

The Setting planned to focus on developing their outdoor area, which they felt that they were not using to its full potential. The setting space is shared with other community groups and as such there were constraints in terms of the need to secure any outdoor resources when not in use. The setting wanted to focus on play and playful learning, engaging with nature and outdoor learning and to support children as autonomous learners. The setting also focused on the Imaginative, Collaborative and Disciplined Creative Habits of Mind.

We spoke with the setting Manager via Teams and she described how their outdoor space had been transformed from an empty tarmac and grass area to a place with a bug house, seating area, dream catchers, willow shelter and tarpaulins as tents – all invented and crafted by the children. The outdoor space is now a place where everyone can have fun and play and use their imaginations to create new ideas and games.

Initially the Manager reflected that the sessions with the Creative Practitioner had been full of lots of free-flowing ideas, which didn't immediately work for the setting. They needed time to work with the Practitioner to develop an approach, a flow and rhythm that worked for their setting. They kept things simple, limiting the amount of resources available at any one time, and keeping the sessions to half-days, to ensure that everyone could focus and engage. As the project progressed, the children became more inventive, became better at interacting with each other, developed their language skills, collaborated more effectively and became more adept at practical skills. The Early Years Practitioners felt more confidence in using different materials and thinking more creatively, being less structured and intent on outputs or the finished product of the creativity.

The impacts for the Early Years Practitioners were primarily an increase in their confidence and seeing themselves as creative people. They are now thinking of new ideas, new activities and ways that they can engage the children in the setting. The Manager reflected that they had relaxed into the project and are now taking the children outside as much as possible, enjoying the benefits that this has on their own well-being.

The setting achieved developments in the areas of focus that they intended, with the project helping the children develop play and playful learning, engaging with outdoors and nature and supporting them as autonomous learners. They also supported development in the Imaginative, Collaborative and Disciplined Creative Habits of Mind, with evidence of additional progress in all of the five Habits for the children involved in the project.

Key Impacts – Children

COLLABORATIVE

The children worked together to build dens, co-operating to achieve a shared goal, enjoying creating something they can use together.

²⁴ https://datamap.gov.wales/layers/inspire-wg:wimd2019_overall

IMAGINATIVE

The children were able to explore the possibilities of being outdoors and playing with nature and natural objects, using their imaginations to foster their creativity.

DISCIPLINED

The evaluation form states, "The children were happy to get things wrong and keep trying, such as den building and pegging."

PERSISTENT

This Creative Habit was not directly identified as being developed during the project by the setting, but the evaluation form states that "They [the children] didn't just give up."

INQUISITIVE

Although they do not mention this as a Creative Habit that was developed during the project, in the evaluation form the setting notes that, "The children were more creative in their learning and more inquisitive."

Key Impacts – Early Years Practitioners

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners are working together to continue the creative developments that they have started during the project, and to continue to build on the creative skills that they have gained.

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that they are more open minded and accepting of change and creative possibilities.

DISCIPLINED

The Early Years Practitioners reported feeling concerned about risk at the start of the project. However, through working with the Creative Practitioner they have developed both confidence and creative knowledge and techniques which they will continue to employ as a team.

3.5 Camau Cyntaf Rhydyfelin

[Camau Cyntaf Rhydyfelin](#) is based in Rhondda Cynon Taf in South Wales, and classified as one of the 10% most deprived areas of Wales²⁵. It is considered an 'Urban city and town' according to the Rural Urban Classification and the setting primarily uses the English language.

The setting planned to focus on 'Play and playful learning', 'Physical development and confidence in exploration', 'Engaging with nature and outdoor learning' and 'Noticing and supporting children as autonomous learners.' The setting wanted to focus on all of the creative habits of mind, and, "...to see an increased confidence in the staff and a greater willingness to take calculated and considered risks in outdoor working."²⁶ The setting also wanted to instil this confidence in the children, "to see our children growing in confidence in their relationship with the outdoors and embracing the natural world in all its wonder and potential, fuelling their curiosity and imaginations."

The setting supports a number of children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), as identified in their ESTYN report from May 2023, "Many [of the children] come from disadvantaged homes and during initial assessments a high percentage of pupils display a variety of learning needs."²⁷ The setting were particularly interested to find out the, "Impact of physical learning approaches and engaging with the outdoors on children with ALN."

Cwmpas spoke with one of the Early Years Practitioners who has been leading the project with colleagues. They told us that the project had been "fantastic". The setting had a Creative Practitioner who was enabling them to use their outdoor space more effectively, focusing each session on different natural objects such as pinecones or bugs. The setting has access to a huge outdoor space, as well as real tools and workbenches. These advantages however, also pose their own challenges in terms of keeping children in ratio and safe. These challenges had meant that the Practitioners did not feel confident to use the space and resources as much as, and in the way that they would like.

The Creative Practitioner had demonstrated a variety of new ways to use natural resources as creative tools, painting with sticks and leaves, making necklaces from found objects, using natural objects to count or sort colours and supporting the children's own creative ideas. The Creative Practitioner brought some volunteers to the sessions, some of whom the Creative Practitioner described as being "neurodivergent" which gave them "superpowers". Feedback at the Sharing Event suggested that these volunteers had been able to interact really positively with the children with additional needs, which had been a real advantage for the setting.

The setting Practitioners had observed the children becoming more collaborative and able to work together to achieve a goal, such as building a den with large branches. The children were also communicating more clearly with the Early Years Practitioners and with each other. The Early Years Practitioners reflected that they have seen an "unbelievable" positive change in the children.

One incredible story the Early Years Practitioners told at the Sharing Event was about one girl who they said had, "selective mutism" and who never spoke when in the setting. The girl was outside, watching the birds during a session and without prompting asked, "Where's all the birdies gone?" This child will now speak when she is outside, which the Early Years Practitioners felt was because

²⁵ https://datamap.gov.wales/layers/inspire-wg:wimd2019_overall

²⁶ Rhydyfelin Planning Form

²⁷ https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2023-07/Inspection%20report%20Camau%20Cyntaf%20-%20First%20Steps%20Cylch%20Meithrin%20Rhydyfelin%202023_0.pdf

she felt more relaxed and happy. This story shows the incredible, positive impact that the project has had for this child. Being able to communicate is described in the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings in Wales as, "key to learning"²⁸ and is one of the 5 developmental pathways which are, "fundamental to the learning and development of all young children"²⁹ It is difficult to imagine a more important or moving example of the project's impact.

Camau Cyntaf Rhydyfelin had not been able to submit their evaluation form at the time of writing this report, because the sessions were still taking place. We are not able to use the reflections from their evaluation form to explore the impact of the project on the Early Years Practitioners or the children in this setting. However, we have used the information that we have from our interview with them and information that they provided during the Sharing Event to explore the development of the Creative Habits of Mind for this setting.

Key Impacts – Children

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years Practitioner observed that the children are more collaborative, and work together better. They now, "stick together and hold hands".

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners have developed the confidence to let the children lead with their ideas, let them decide what to do next and what resources should be used. This supports the children's ideas and validates their choices and has helped the children to feel more confident and happy.

INQUISITIVE

The children love to explore and ask questions in their new outdoor space, which is now called 'the nest'.

PERSISTENT

The children had worked together to build a den with large branches, which required more than once child to move them. They worked together, helping one another to achieve their creative goal.

DISCIPLINED

The children have become really excited by using natural objects as creative tools, painting with twigs and leaves. Through the project they have developed focus and will spend long periods repeating creative processes, improving their techniques. The Early Years Practitioners observed that previously the children had not been able to focus on tasks for such long periods.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners work together to take the children outside as much as possible, where they feel happy and relaxed and where they can have so many creative experiences. As a team they have recognised the value and benefit of this creativity both for them and for the children.

²⁸ <https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/b1801d78-38c3-4320-9818-d9996c21aef8/220914-a-curriculum-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings.pdf>

²⁹ Ibid.

IMAGINATIVE

The project has helped the Early Years Practitioners feel more confident to use new resources, ideas and techniques to help the children explore their creativity.

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners have made the project inclusive of all the children in their setting. They have actively engaged the children in the setting with additional learning needs in the creative activities and have shown that creativity is for all children and that it can have an incredibly positive impact.

PERSISTENT

The nature of the outdoor space in the setting is such that it posed challenges in terms of keeping children in ratio and safe during creative sessions outdoors. The Early Years Practitioners worked as a team with the Creative Practitioner to make the sessions work and to keep everyone engaged.

DISCIPLINED

The Early Years Practitioners have developed the freedom and confidence to use found natural objects in their creativity and felt inspired by how much could be done creatively with inexpensive or free resources.

3.6 Camau Cyntaf Llanhari

[Camau Cyntaf Llanhari](#) is based in Rhondda Cynon Taf in South Wales and is a bilingual setting. The setting has a purpose built cabin in the grounds of a Welsh Medium Secondary School. Many of the children that attend the setting come through the Flying Start programme, and the area surrounding the setting is classified as one of the 20% most deprived areas of Wales.³⁰

The planning form states that the setting wanted to develop their woodworking activities, engaging a Creative Practitioner who could help the Early Years Practitioners and children build confidence using tools and crafting items from wood to benefit the setting. The activities were planned to support the development of the children's 'language and many means of expression', physical confidence, engagement with the outdoors and supporting them as autonomous learners. The setting planned to focus on three of the five Creative Habits of Mind – Collaborative, Persistent and Disciplined. The setting manager was really keen to develop woodwork after being inspired by attending a woodworking course by [Pete Moorhouse](#), a leading authority on Woodwork in Early Years Education.

The setting has adopted what the Manager described as a "curiosity approach" to learning. The setting utilises many items that might normally be considered too unsafe for small children (glass, ceramic tea sets, small nuts and bolts, real tools) to enable the children to learn how to interact differently with different materials.

We visited the setting to observe one of the final sessions with the Creative Practitioner who was working one-to-one with a small number of children to make a wooden birdbox. The children were all aged three and were being supported to use professional drills and power tools to create their own birdbox which they could take home. The Creative Practitioner was helping them to drill pilot holes in the wood, and then use the drill to put large screws into the body of the birdbox. The children had used the drills before during sessions and were very proud to show us their skills.

We observed the children focusing their attention and being helped to hold the (heavy) drills safely. The children were able to control the speed of the drill by pushing the trigger harder or softer and were able to articulate this using descriptive words. The Creative Practitioner asked the children at each step of the process whether they remembered what came next and why. The children showed a real grasp of the mechanical reasoning behind the pilot holes, order of construction and need for care at each stage.

The children also competently used wood glue, coping saws, hammers, screwdrivers and rulers during the session. Their pride at being able to use these big, noisy powerful tools was evident and they were joyfully showing the adults present and their friends how they were able to make these incredible birdboxes.

³⁰ https://datamap.gov.wales/layers/inspire-wg:wimd2019_overall



The children were very clearly developing their gross and fine motor skills and able to name tools and processes involved in woodworking. They used rulers both to measure and to draw straight lines and understood the importance of accuracy to the finished product. They demonstrated persistence, remaining engaged and trying again when things didn't go to plan. They were able to show remarkable concentration given that the session was taking place in the middle of the busy setting with children coming and going, crying, singing and shouting all around them.

The Creative Practitioner was immensely patient and supportive with the children, gently reminding them if they lost focus, offering guidance and encouragement throughout the session. The Early Years Practitioners at the setting also seemed really proud of the children's achievements showing us a large bird table the children made along with planters, a bug hotel and larger birdbox. The children have loved the sessions, looking forward to coming in to the setting, looking forward to seeing what insects have been using the bug hotel. They have had very positive feedback from parents and carers, as the children have been proudly taking home the things they have made to show them their skills.

The children have developed their digital creativity skills, filming and photographing each other making things, The manager reflected that the project had given them confidence to do so much more with the children, being aware of how to manage the risks and make the sessions enjoyable for the children. The children's fine and gross motor skills had been significantly improved by their ability to manage screws, screwdrivers and drills, which is of huge benefit to their ability to use pens, pencils and other mark making tools.

The Manager told us about one three-year old girl who had taken part in the sessions. The girl and her Dad had decided to donate some of her old toys to the setting, but noticed a screw was coming out of one of her toy cars and her and her Dad agreed that they couldn't donate that as it might hurt a child – they had been talking about health and safety in the Creative sessions. The little girl decided that she could fix it, and told her Dad to get her a screwdriver. The little girl fixed the toy, made it safe and donated it so that other children could enjoy it. The Manager told us that the children were now routinely choosing to take things to bits, or to fix things in the setting because they had the skills and the confidence to do so. The manager explained how much of an impact the project had had on the setting, the Early Years Practitioners and the children, "It has outdone my expectations...it has blown us away".

Key Impacts – Children

COLLABORATIVE

Children worked together to make planters, birdboxes and bird tables. They shared the final product in the setting, excited to see the visiting birds. They listened to instructions and helped their friends.

IMAGINATIVE

The children researched which birds and insects might visit the new wooden homes they had made for them. They experimented with different tools and materials, understanding the logical steps in building a structure and the need to employ different forces when using different tools. They can mend things using their skills and confidence and have an understanding of how things are put together.

INQUISITIVE

The children were fascinated by what birds and insects might visit the bug hotel and bird boxes they had made, researching and exploring how to encourage and support nature in the setting. They have taken the skills they learned and are applying them to new objects, using tools in new ways to explore and investigate.

PERSISTENT

The children showed remarkable persistence, handling heavy, powerful tools and trying again when things didn't go to plan.

DISCIPLINED

The children developed a range of techniques, processes, skills, abilities and competencies. They were encouraged to reflect at all stages of the process, examining how different inputs resulted in different outcomes.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners worked together to facilitate a potentially difficult to manage session that took place in the middle of the setting.

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners supported new ideas, following the children's creativity and allowing it to grow and flourish.

INQUISITIVE

The setting showed a willingness to explore possibilities with the children, challenging ideas of what they were capable of and what they should be allowed to create or do.

PERSISTENT

The setting undertook an ambitious activity which had it's own challenges. The Early Years Practitioners were able to manage uncertainties around risk and whether the project would work in the way they wanted.

DISCIPLINED

The setting reflected critically on the activities, developing ways in which the setting could continue to enable the children to have these creative experiences.

3.7 Cylch Meithrin Santes Fair

[Cylch Meirthin Santes Fair](#) is located in Holyhead, Anglesey and is a bilingual setting. It is in a more urban location and is classified as one of the 10% most deprived areas of Wales³¹.

The setting planned work with a Creative Practitioner to develop movement and dance as well as digital and artist creativity, with a focus to develop the use of the Welsh language within the setting. The planning form outlined that they wanted to focus on developing language and means of expression, engaging with nature and outdoor learning, physical development and confidence, creative and symbolic representation and supporting children as autonomous learners. They wanted to focus on the Inquisitive and Imaginative Creative Habits of Mind during the project.

We spoke with the Setting Leader via a phone call and they reflected that the project had brought new creative ideas to the setting. Each session was led by the imaginations of the children, allowing them to follow their interests and to learn whilst having fun. The setting lead explained that the project had been a true collaboration between the Early Years Practitioners, Creative Practitioner and the children, bring together their creative ideas to form something that genuinely enhanced the setting.

The children had learned new Welsh songs and words, had been free to take digital photos of themselves and each other, do yoga and move freely outside, use feathers and chiffon to move, dance and express themselves. The Setting Lead reflected that these activities had brought a change in the Early Years Practitioners who seemed to have become more comfortable to get involved, move themselves and had grown in confidence. Whilst the Early Years Practitioners were all professional, creative and imaginative people, the Creative Practitioner seemed to bring fresh ideas, enhancing what they were already doing and adding a new dimension to their existing practice. They felt that their Creative Practitioner had been “amazing” and that they were particularly impressed with how music and singing could play a role in creativity. The parents had reported that their children had come home singing.

In their evaluation form, the setting felt that they had explored every area of focus, adding ‘Play and playful learning’ to complete their list. They also felt that they had been able to develop the Collaborative, Inquisitive and Imaginative Creative Habits of Mind during the project.

Key Impacts – Children

COLLABORATIVE

Although the evaluation form does not make specific reference to the development of this creative habit, there is evidence that the Early Years Practitioners felt that this creative ability was developed during the project, “Being collaborative with others has also been developed through the project especially through the language of dance and movement.”³²

IMAGINATIVE

The children had become more imaginative through “... creative movements and dance allowing expression of feelings and emotions.”³³

³¹ https://datamap.gov.wales/layers/inspire-wg:wimd2019_overall

³² Santes Fair Evaluation Form

³³ Ibid.

INQUISITIVE

"The children have been inquisitive and willing to learn within each session"³⁴

PERSISTENT

The evaluation form reflects that the children had become more willing to get involved in activities, particularly ones that they were not familiar with, showing evidence of the development of this creative habit.

DISCIPLINED

The movement and dance elements of the project have enabled the children to better express their feelings and emotions, building confidence to share their thoughts, ideas, preferences and wishes. The children have developed creative techniques, crafting and improving their creative skills.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

COLLABORATIVE

The project was described as a, true collaboration between the staff, Creative Practitioner and the children.

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners felt that they learned about new resources and ways to use them, opening up new possibilities for creativity in the setting.

INQUISITIVE

The setting had been particularly impressed with the role that song/music could play in creativity, joining activities together or reflecting on activities. The Early Years Practitioners were looking forward to continuing to explore these creative possibilities.

DISCIPLINED

"I've learnt to allow children enough time to explore and take part in creative sessions."³⁵

³⁴ Santes Fair Evaluation Form

³⁵ Ibid.

3.8 Cylch Meithrin Tedi Twt

[Cylch Meithrin Tedi Twt](#) is based in Bargoed in the South Wales Valleys. The setting is in an urban environment, in an areas classified as 30% most deprived areas of Wales and is bilingual.

The setting wanted to focus on supporting the children to develop their Welsh language skills and to use these skills to express their creativity. They wanted to develop play and playful learning, engaging in nature and the outdoors, creativity and symbolic representation and supporting the children as autonomous learners. The setting also wanted to develop all of the five Creative Habits of Mind during the project.

We visited the setting and spoke with the lead Early Years Practitioner and other setting Practitioners who explained that they were already a creative, free-flowing, natural and open setting which encouraged child-led imagination and freedom of expression. They initially wanted to explore woodworking as they have a woodworking shed and tools on site. However, it proved difficult to recruit the right Creative Practitioner to enable them to pursue this, so they decided to work with two Welsh-speaking creatives who specialised in textiles and materials.

The sessions involved taking small groups of children to a separate area to explore different ways of being creative. They made and painted with natural dyes made from beetroot, coffee and turmeric. They decorated fabric by hammering leaves and other natural things into it with hammers. They made beautiful mosaics out of broken tiles and created versions of themselves and their friends using the textiles they had made.



The children found the creativity really engaging and it clearly connected with them on a very deep and personal level. One little girl remarked to the Early Years Practitioner, "dwi yn mynd yn nol i 'fy ffrindiau." (I'm going back to my friends) when she wanted to go back to making her fabric people.

The children were encouraged throughout to shape and lead the sessions, with their interests and imaginations taking the sessions in new directions. For example, the children made birds but felt they belonged in the trees with the other birds, so the team made sure that their art now has a home in the trees. The Early Years Practitioners took the children out on a walk in the green space around the setting, and the children took great delight in rolling down the hills, getting covered in grass and exploring the nature all around them. Throughout each session, the Creative Practitioners spoke in Welsh to the children, helping them to learn new words and concepts and to develop their abilities to express their own thoughts and ideas in Welsh.

One of the Creative Practitioners reflected that, "Mae gweld y byd trwy lygaid plant bach wedi bod yn hwyl fawr ac yn ysbrydoliaeth i fod yn onest - maen nhw'n hyderus i arbrofi heb boeni am gydymffurfio neu blesio eraill.³⁶" (Seeing the world through the eyes of small children has been great fun and an inspiration to be honest - they are confident to experiment without worrying about conforming or pleasing others.)

Key Impacts – Children

COLLABORATIVE

The children had all improved their ability to work together and share their ideas with each other.

IMAGINATIVE

The children had explored the ideas of who we are and what makes us different/the same. They used their creativity to make representations of themselves and their friends.

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that as the project progressed, the children showed more and more curiosity about the natural world and about the creative processes they were involved in.

PERSISTENT

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that many of the children who found it difficult to concentrate and focus their attention were now more able to focus.

DISCIPLINED

The evaluation form reflects that, "Roedd diddordeb enfawr gan y plant, roedden nhw wrth ei bodd yn datgan barn a'i am y gwaith at ei gilydd i'r ymarferwyr creadigol a blynyddoedd cynnar." (There was a huge interest from the children, they loved expressing their opinions and about the work together for the Creative and Early Years Practitioners.)

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that, "...rydyn ni'n well yn trafod syniadau gyda'n gilydd. Yn gydweithredol."³⁷ (We are better at discussing ideas together. Collaboratively.)

³⁶ Tedi Twt Evaluation Form

³⁷ Tedi Twt Evaluation Form

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners identified that the creative process and skills that they had learned were suitable for all their children, even the younger ones and are planning to develop these ideas across the setting.

INQUISITIVE

The Creative Agent reflected that the setting created, “awyrgylch agored yn llawn arbrofi a mentrwch.” (an open atmosphere full of experimentation and daring) and this was due to the mindset of the Early Years practitioners within the setting.

PERSISTENT

The setting initially struggled to recruit a Creative Practitioner to help them with woodworking activities, but the Early Years Practitioners were open to adapting their plan and working with different creatives to make the project a success.

DISCIPLINED

The Early Years Practitioners had improved their creative vocabulary and their ability to express their ideas in Welsh, “Dwi wedi dysgu technegau a geirfa newydd Cymraeg. Mae’r staff wedi ymelwa wrth glywed y ddau ymarferydd yn defnyddio’r Gymraeg yn naturiol yn y cylch...”³⁸ (I’ve learned new Welsh techniques and vocabulary. The staff have benefited from hearing the two practitioners use Welsh naturally in the cylch...)

³⁸ Ibid

3.9 Giggles Daycare

[Giggles Daycare](#) is located in Ruthin in North Wales, and is classified as a 'rural town and fringe' area by the Rural Urban Classification system. The setting is within an area which is amongst the 50% least deprived in Wales, and the setting primarily uses the English language.

The setting planned to focus on developing play and playful learning, engaging with nature and outdoor learning, physical development and confidence in exploration and supporting the children as autonomous learners. They wanted to focus on the Inquisitive, Imaginative and Collaborative Creative Habits of Mind with a particular focus on developing the children's freedom to lead activities, and improve their communication skills, their self-awareness and self-confidence.

We visited the setting and met with the Setting Lead who was able to reflect on the project. They told us that the project has enabled the setting Practitioners to explore and develop their creative ideas, and enable the children to have the freedom to fully explore their creativity. The Creative Practitioner had transformed the setting's outside area, making a space in which everyone wanted to be creative. They used the idea of hiding treasure (which were simple items such as tinfoil and tape) each session to excite and inspire the children, encouraging them to use their imaginations to create things using these treasures. The Creative Practitioner used song to bring the children together at the end of each session, helping them to reflect on and talk about their creative achievements and think about the next session.



Parents had been very complimentary about the impact of the project on the children, giving lots of feedback about how happy their children had been. The children were also observed to be communicating more positively with each other, working together to achieve shared goals. They were sharing toys and resources more readily. The children had also shown much more confidence in their interactions with Early Years Practitioners. One story they told us was of a child who they described as 'non-verbal', who had become really involved in weaving ribbons into the mesh fence outside. The child had been able to copy the actions of the Creative Practitioner and returned to this activity regularly.

The Early Years Practitioner explained that the project felt like just the start of what they and children are capable of in terms of creativity. For them, the project has been "transformative", a great way for Early Years Practitioners to begin to explore and spread creative ideas. Early Years Practitioners felt more free to allow activities to go where the children led them, rather than feeling that they should be tightly planned and controlled. The Setting Lead reflected that previously the team had struggled with "creativity" and they usually defaulted to providing painting activities for the children. However, they now realised that children could work out the creativity themselves and the nursery team just had to provide the materials. The setting team were now more confident and worked together to explore the creative possibilities with the children and to "to think outside the box". The reflected in their evaluation form that, "We feel that this is just the beginning."

The setting found that they had developed all of the areas of focus and each of the Creative Habits of Mind during the project.

Key Impacts - Children

COLLABORATIVE

Children are talking and interacting differently with each other during the activities. The children had got to know each other better, making friends and working together.

IMAGINATIVE

The children made so many different things from simple objects such as tape or foil, using their incredible imaginations to create ideas and tell stories.

INQUISITIVE

The evaluation form reflects that, "We have learnt that from focusing on one item many unexpected things can happen." The children have been supported to explore where their creativity can take them.

PERSISTENT

The evaluation reflected that "The children showed persistence to evolve what they were doing from asking for help and using various resources purposefully."³⁹

DISCIPLINED

The children developed and improved throughout the project, using resources more and more confidently as they progressed.

³⁹ Giggles Evaluation Form

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

COLLABORATIVE

The setting is working collaboratively to share ideas and enable all the children within the setting to feel as excited about their creative outdoor space.

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners came up with imaginative ways to repurpose and reuse resources throughout the project, creatively reimagining the potential uses for each resource.

INQUISITIVE

They reflected that this was only the start for their setting in terms of where they could take the ideas and creativity that they have developed during the project.

PERSISTENT

Early Years Practitioners had felt able to relax and let creative activities go where the children led them, rather than being planned and controlled.

DISCIPLINED

Early Years Practitioners have reflected that they are learning to expand the creative opportunities available for the children, coming up with new resources that they can use and new ways to support the children's creativity.

3.10 Little Rascals Preschool

[Little Rascals Preschool](#) is located in Pentrebach, (classified as an urban area), close to Merthyr Tydfil in South Wales. The setting is in an area which is amongst the 50% most deprived in Wales and is a Flying Start area. The setting primarily uses the English language.

The setting planned to focus on developing language and expression, play and playful learning, engaging with nature and outdoor learning and supporting children as autonomous learners. They also wanted to focus on the Imaginative and Collaborative Creative Habits of Mind. The setting wanted to explore creative movement as a way of helping the children develop their self-expression, confidence and communication skills. The setting has a number of children with additional needs who "require enhanced support for their social communication skills."⁴⁰

We spoke with the setting Manager via Teams. The Creative Practitioner used different themes each session to engage the children, exploring dinosaurs, Diwali, Spring Time, enchanted gardens and fairies. The Creative Practitioner developed 'stretchy stories' with the children, which involved lots of movement and imaginative play.



⁴⁰ Little Rascals Planning Form

The setting had found it difficult to recruit a Creative Practitioner as they found it hard to find the right person for the setting. They had wanted a strong focus on music and movement and to engage the whole setting in the project which would include the 'Cwtch' area for the children with additional needs. The Creative Practitioner initially tried to engage the whole setting which they found challenging, due to the range of different needs and the number of children involved. The sessions were quite structured at first, with a different theme each week, and were not as centred around music and which the Early Years Practitioner reflected, was not what they had originally wanted to explore through the project. The Early Years Practitioners and Creative Practitioner worked collaboratively to refine the approach, deciding to focus on a smaller group of six or seven children within the main setting, to focus on one overarching theme and to incorporate more music and movement into the sessions. Both the Early Years Practitioner and the Creative Practitioner felt that this led to the sessions working much better and resulting in better outcomes for everyone.

The Early Years Practitioner reflected that the children led the sessions, with the Creative practitioner following the children's ideas. At one point, the children found a knothole in a tree and decided that this is where the fairies lived. Some of the children decided to listen to see whether they could hear the fairies, and they could hear them cooking breakfast! The Early Years Practitioner felt that the project had had a positive impact on the children in particular. They have seen quieter children, ones who tend to stick with a particular practitioner, become more confident and communicative, "bringing them out of their shell". They reported generally that the children were using more words, speaking more often, relaxing more, seeming happier and more engaged.

In terms of the impact on the Early Years Practitioners in the setting, the setting Manager reflected that many of the Practitioners seemed much more confident, had taken new ideas from the sessions and had enjoyed the freedom that the sessions brought. The setting identified the value and importance of being outside to the well-being and creativity of the children, "Practitioners noticed how the children immediately became more relaxed when being in a natural environment and engaged in the tasks at hand."⁴¹ The setting also saw positive changes to the children's communication skills, their self-esteem, their ability to collaborate effectively and their confidence in creativity.

Whilst the setting didn't focus on the Persistent or Disciplined Creative Habits of Mind, the project provided evidence of significant development in the three other Creative Habits of Mind.

Key Impacts – Children

COLLABORATIVE

The children collaborated with each other, "The more confident children helped to guide our more reserved children, making them feel at ease in a surrounding that was different to their usual routine."⁴²

IMAGINATIVE

The Creative Practitioner reflected that, "...many of the children have developed their language skills as a result of this project, whilst also feeling comfortable in exploring the possibilities of their imaginations."⁴³

⁴¹ Little Rascals Evaluation Form

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid

INQUISITIVE

In their evaluation form the setting highlighted that, "This experience has demonstrated how the use of props and instruments can act as a catalyst for further creative exploration..."

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

COLLABORATIVE

The planning form and evaluation identify that the Early Years Practitioners in this setting did not feel confidence with creativity as they were not from 'an arts-based background', however as the project progressed, the Early Years Practitioners became more confident to deliver creative sessions, particularly around music and movement.

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners found that having a prop or an item to work with helps them to become more imaginative and confident in their own creativity.

PERSISTENT

They faced a few challenges along our project process, which required persistence to ensure it stayed on track. "...we feel persistence in particular was a huge creative habit developed from this project..."⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Ibid

3.11 Overton Playcentre

[Overton Playcentre](#) is based in a rural area, south of Wrexham in North Wales. The setting is in an area which is amongst the 50% least deprived in Wales and the setting primarily uses the English language.

The setting planned to focus on developing language and means of expression, engaging with outdoor learning, physical development and confidence, creativity and symbolic representation and supporting children as autonomous learners. The wanted to focus on the Inquisitive, Imaginative and Disciplined Creative Habits of Mind through woodworking and "...to explore how to become more imaginative and confident with the setting up of our 'invitations to play'⁴⁵ with an emphasis on 'Cynefin'.⁴⁶

We visited the setting and met with the lead Early Years Practitioner who is also an artist, and had an understanding of the importance of child-centred learning and creativity. The setting had two Creative Practitioners - one who focused more woodwork and one who focused more on developing the 'invitations to play'. The setting focused on all activities being child-led, with the children choosing whether or not to engage with the artists and resources.

The children were able to develop skills in using tools such as wooden mallets, nails, screws and augers. They were supported to develop an awareness of safety and the processes to reduce risk such as wearing goggles and gloves. Whilst we were at the setting, one four-year old girl showed us how to use the mallet and saw. She helped us put on the safety gloves and goggles and showed us how to hit the wooden dowl with the mallet. The Early Years Practitioners reflected that they saw 'pure joy' in the children undertaking the activities. The evaluation form also talks about one child with 'global development delay' who is now able to use a saw on their own. The Early Years Practitioners also reflected that the children had developed concentration and focus The evaluation form notes that, "One of the children took a great interest in hammering, they hammered for nearly two hours in one session! EY Practitioners commented that he was 'a different child'.⁴⁷

The impact of the project on the Early Years Practitioners has been equally as significant. During our visit we learned how Early Years Practitioners were really enjoying the sessions and had begun to see creativity differently. Their confidence had grown and they now felt able to use their new learning and skills to make sessions engaging and creative for the children. The Early Years Practitioners had felt, "empowered to share more of their own ideas and passions"⁴⁸ as a result of the project, bringing a sense of ownership of the activities for the Practitioners. They were less concerned about mess, and more open to letting the children express themselves and try new things. One of the setting Practitioners had said that they felt 'proud' of what they had learned during the project.

Key Impacts – Children

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners were enthusiastic about a 'jig' that one of the Creative Practitioners had made to enable the children to saw more safely. They had ideas about how to develop this idea further, demonstrating that they felt real ownership and engagement with the activities.

⁴⁵ <https://www.invitationstoplay.org/>

⁴⁶ [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](#)

⁴⁷ Overton Planning Form

⁴⁸ Ibid.

IMAGINATIVE

The Creative Agent reflected that, during the 'invitations to play' children found, "...new and unexpected ways to use materials that I would never have thought of"⁴⁹

INQUISITIVE

The children are becoming adept at using a range of woodworking tools safely. They are challenging assumptions about what children their age are capable of.

PERSISTENT

The woodworking activities were initially challenging for the Early Years Practitioners in terms of worries about risk and keeping the children safe. However, the children have stuck with the difficulty and have become adept at different woodworking skills.

DISCIPLINED

The children are taking a leading role in the direction of creative sessions in the setting, and continuing to develop their creative skills and techniques.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners are working together to share ideas and support the transfer of creative skills within the team.

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners are exploring the potential usefulness of these creative skills in supporting the children's transition to Primary School. They see them as 'transition skills' and feel that embracing them in an early years setting will provide these children with an invaluable foundation for the future.

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners found that they began to value mess, rather than seeing it as a problem. They could see the benefits and learning potential in the activity that created the mess, and began to welcome it as a positive.

PERSISTENT

The woodworking activities were initially challenging for the Early Years Practitioners in terms of worries about risk and keeping the children safe. However, the benefits created by the activity and enjoyment it created meant that they felt more comfortable with, "...allowing some risk within the woodworking area."⁵⁰

DISCIPLINED

The Early Years setting team are reflecting critically about how they can repurpose and reuse their existing resources in future, to support their creative ambitions for the setting.

⁴⁹ Creative Agent Feedback – Overton Evaluation Form

⁵⁰ Overton Evaluation Form

3.12 Sunshines Pre-School

[Sunshines Pre-School](#) is based in Llanfoist near Abergavenny which is classified as an urban area. The setting is in an area which is amongst the 50% least deprived in Wales and the setting primarily uses the English language.

The setting planned to focus on all of the six key principles, and to focus on developing the Inquisitive, Imaginative, and Collaborative Creative Habits of Mind. The setting wanted to focus on developing creative experiences in their outdoor area, particularly to develop the children's social, emotional, cognitive and language skills.

We visited the setting to observe a session with the Creative Practitioner, who was putting the finishing touches to a den that the children had worked with them to build over the course of the project. The shelter was made of recycled wood and pallets that were in the setting unused and the children had worked with the Creative Practitioner to saw, screw, drill and construct the frame for the den over the past few weeks. The children had then also used their feet to paint on huge sheets of fabric which they then used as the walls and ceiling of the den.



The children were extremely proud of their den, and of the painting that they had done with their feet (something which the Early Years Practitioners told me that they had absolutely loved, making mess and feeling the paint between their toes). The children wanted to show us the den, how they had made it, how they could now use it to sit in. The Creative Practitioner calmly carried on, engaging the children when they showed interest, and leaving them free to go off and do other things. The Creative Practitioner showed the children how to use a long drill bit to turn a screw eye into the wood frame, and they explored how it was easier to use the drill bit than their fingers. They were fascinated by the very long, tape measure which was on a reel, and they were enjoying using it to play at fishing, reeling each other in.

The children had also worked with the Early Years Practitioners and Creative Practitioner to build a bean tunnel on the steep banks at the side of the setting. The Early Years Practitioner lead explained that they had not felt able to do much with this bank as it was full of rubble from the construction of the building. The Creative Practitioner and children had planted beans and added string to make a tunnel which the children loved to run up and down. The Creative Practitioner also worked with the children during story time and P.E. sessions. The children were given the first line of a story and then were asked to take turns in making up the next part themselves, which led to a cow called Milkshake getting into big trouble but who was rescued by a fairy. The Creative Practitioner also led movement and dance sessions, surprising the Early Years Practitioners with the number and complexity of the instructions that they gave to the children, and how well they were able to follow the instructions.

The setting reported that for the children, "the impact was tremendous". They developed their knowledge of nature, improved their communication skills and their ability to share their ideas, they collaborated and worked together and learned how to solve problems. The setting had a sharing day, where carers and parents were invited to see what the children had built and grown. The children were proud to show their creative achievements and the feedback was very positive, with carers being "impressed with how much they have done."

The Early Years Practitioners felt that the project "brings a different energy" to the setting. They felt that sometimes working in a setting every day can get a bit "flat", so having fresh ideas, new ways of thinking and doing had re-energised them. In their evaluation form, the Early Years Practitioners reflected that they had developed in all six areas of focus and in each of the Creative Habits of Mind. They felt that the project had improved their confidence and reflective practice.

Key Impacts – Children

COLLABORATIVE

The children collaborated throughout the project. During the movement sessions they played 'follow the leader' and 'image work' which helped them to express their emotions and ideas effectively, working in teams.

IMAGINATIVE

In the evaluation form, they reflected that during the den building, the children transformed the den into a stage, a castle and the space encouraged their creativity and storytelling abilities.

INQUISITIVE

The children were encouraged to ask questions and explore throughout the project. Their storytelling creativity encouraged their natural questioning, exploratory nature and helped them to feel ownership over the story.

PERSISTENT

The children demonstrated persistence when they built the bean tunnel, watering and watching the plants grow and understanding their responsibility to nurture the growing plants.

DISCIPLINED

When the children painted the fabric sheet with their feet, they had to take turns as well as being careful and precise in their movements and steps on the fabric. The evaluation form reflected that this activity developed their discipline by, "contributing to their fine motor development and spatial awareness."⁵¹

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years team have felt inspired by the Creative Practitioner and the ideas and techniques that they have brought to the setting, particularly in terms of seeing the potential in the space.

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years team have seen the project as an opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills.

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners have been inspired by the Creative Practitioner to think of new ways to use the space and inspire creativity in the children.

PERSISTENT

There have been challenges in terms of the Early Years Practitioner time and keeping in ratio with the children. They also had an Estyn inspection in the middle of the project, making the timings challenging. However, the Early Years team worked with the Creative Practitioner to make the project a success.

DISCIPLINED

The evaluation form reflects that for the Early Years Practitioners the project has "...instilled in us a newfound confidence to try new approaches in our practice."⁵²

⁵¹ Sunshines Evaluation Form

⁵² ibid

4. Summary of Key Points

4.1 Development of the Creative Habits of Mind

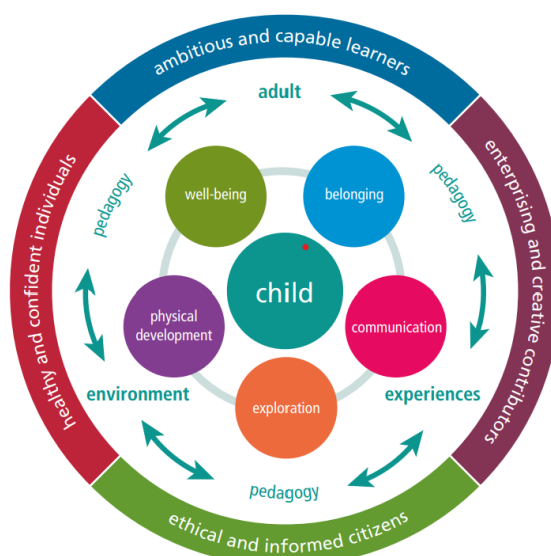
Our interviews and the evaluation forms provide evidence that the settings exceeded their own expectations in terms of the development of the Creative Habits of Mind. The settings all saw progress in developing the Creative Habits of Mind that they originally planned to focus on in their planning forms and seven of the settings (and possibly more if we examine the narrative and interviews that we conducted during the project) recognised that they in fact developed additional Creative Habits that they had not expected to focus on. The positive impact of the project is evident and clear from the stories, impressions and reflections of the people involved in the project.

We discussed the Creative Habits of Mind pedagogy with the Early Years Practitioners and whilst some had a strong grasp of the pedagogy, some did not feel confident using the Creative Habits of Mind as a tool to understand and support creativity. However, many of the settings we spoke with had a 'lightbulb' moment during the project with the realisation that creativity is more than setting aside time for painting or producing a creative product. There was a clear grasp amongst the Early Years Practitioners of the core philosophy behind the Creative Habits of Mind; that creativity can be found in almost anything, that creativity is a mindset or a way of seeing the world and that everyone can be creative. Many spoke of this in terms of "freedom" and "confidence" and found this idea liberating and exciting. However some were less confident to use the Creative Habits of Mind as a tool to expand and explore the creative potential of themselves, their setting and the children. This may be resolved by changing the focus of the training around the Creative Habits of Mind, possibly introducing it slightly later in the process.

There did seem to be some confusion around whether the Creative Habits of Mind were to be developed for the children, the Early Years Practitioners or both. We have captured evidence throughout the evaluation for both, but in future years it could be beneficial to be clearer in both the training and the evaluation forms as to which group is the central focus and more specific instructions around what evidence the project would like to gather around impact.

4.2 Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings in Wales

There are many synergies between the Creative Habits of Mind and the five developmental pathways within the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings in Wales. The diagram below shows the pathways (belonging, communication, exploration, physical development and well-being).⁵³



⁵³ [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales)

The diagram above illustrates how these five pathways relate to the four purposes of the broader Curriculum for Wales (ambitious capable learners, enterprising and creative contributors, ethical and informed citizens and healthy and confident individuals).

We examined each developmental pathway's 'I am learning to...' statements, which are expressed from the child's viewpoint "to ensure that provision focuses on the needs, interests and curiosity of three- and four-year-olds"⁵⁴. These statements describe skills and dispositions that support a child's learning and growth through each developmental pathway. Interestingly, each pathway contains skills which reflect each of the five Creative Habits of Mind, which provides further evidence that creativity is fundamental to all areas of a child's development.

Reflecting on the information gathered during the evaluation, we have seen clear evidence that the project is contributing to and supporting children to progress in each developmental pathway;

Exploration - Many of the settings reflected that their children used mark making tools, solved problems, became more focused and showed resilience and perseverance.

Communication – There were a number of very moving and impactful reflections about children who had difficulties communicating being supported to communicate as a result of the creative activities.

Belonging – There were numerous examples of children being actively engaged in recognising and managing risk for themselves. The majority of the settings engaged children in outdoor activities, and we saw evidence of children learning to love, respect and care for the natural environment.

Physical Development – The outdoor activities have had a significant impact on the children's physical confidence and co-ordination. We saw many examples of children developing co-ordination, balance and both gross and fine motor skills.

Well-being – The Early Years Practitioners often observed the children becoming calmer, happier, more relaxed, more communicative during sessions. Children were inspired to regulate and to express their feelings during the creative activities.

4.3 Confidence

In every setting, the Early Years Practitioners told us that they planned to continue to use the creative techniques, skills and ideas that they had developed as a result of the project. Every setting reflected that their Early Years Practitioners felt more confident in their creativity, and their ability to provide the children with creative opportunities. "Confidence" was a word that came up time and time again, in every setting for every Early Years Practitioner. This is a vital outcome, given that it is one of the three key aims of the project, "To develop confidence in both early years practitioners and creative practitioners to trial new ways of working."⁵⁵

Similarly, many of the Creative Practitioners developed their confidence in working with young children and developed their own practice in terms of how to engage children of this age. Creative Practitioners often reflected to us that they were amazed or inspired by the children's imaginations and creative abilities. Many of the settings reflected that they felt energised or lifted by the Creative Practitioners approaches and enthusiasm for their practice. Some Early Years Practitioners reflected that this project reminded them how important and special their jobs are.

⁵⁴ [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales)

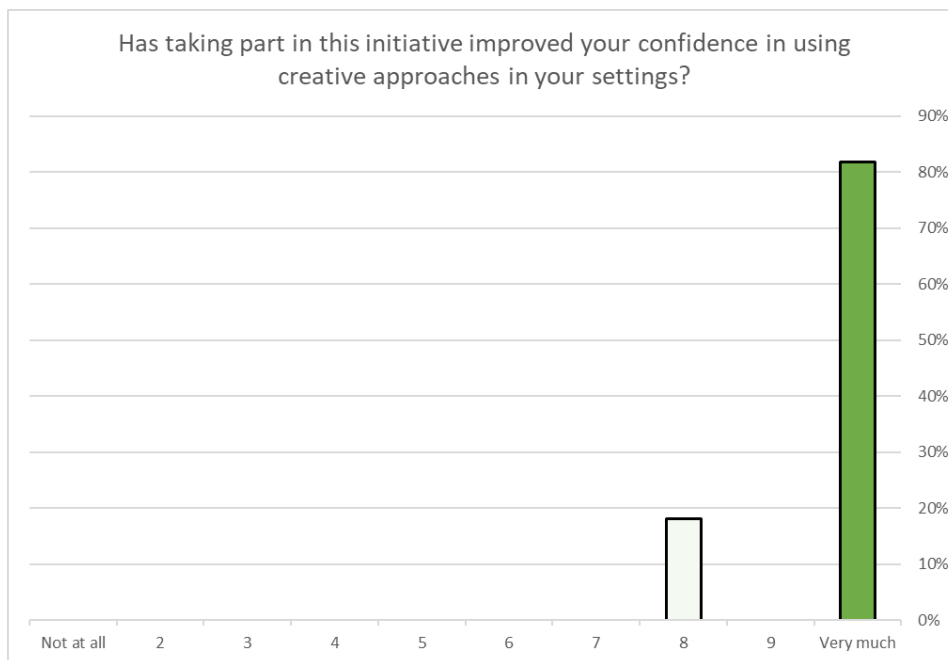
⁵⁵ Original Invitation to Tender, Arts Council of Wales

5. Overall and Additional Impact

The evaluation forms for the settings included two scaled questions, asking the settings to gauge their confidence using creative approaches and the impact of the project on the children. The results were extremely positive.

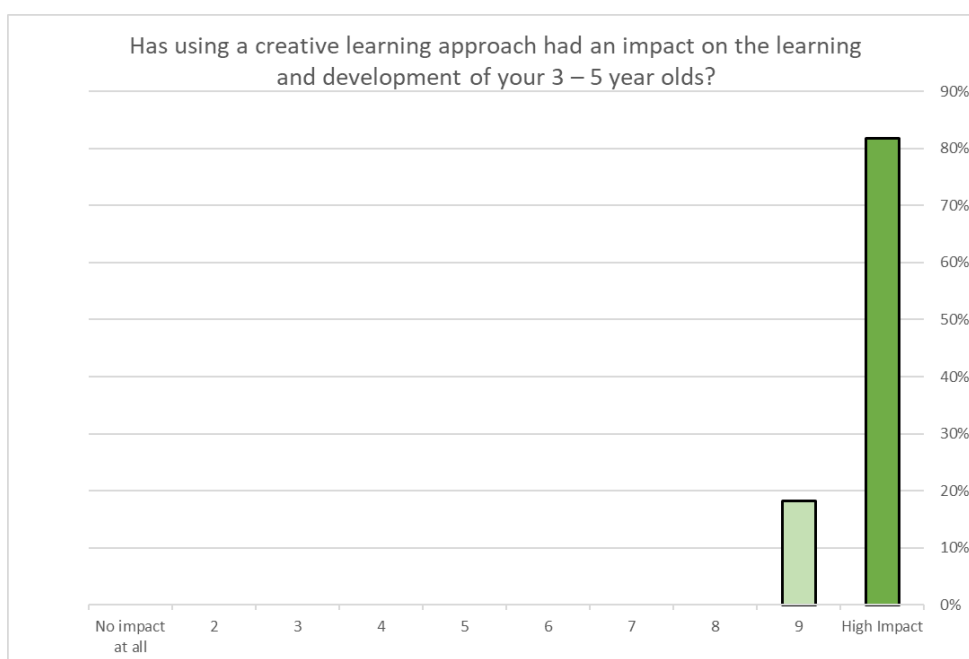
The scores for the question, "Has taking part in this initiative improved your confidence in using creative approaches in your settings?" can be seen in the graph below. The question was scaled between one and 10, with one being 'Not at all' and 10 being 'Very much'.

Nine of the settings, (82%) scored 10 which equated to "very much" and two (18%) scored eight.



The scores for the question, "Has using a creative learning approach had an impact on the learning and development of your 3 – 5 year olds?" were even more positive. The question was again scaled between one and 10, with 1 being 'No impact at all' and 10 being 'High impact'.

Nine (82%) of the settings scored the impact as a 10 (high impact) and two scored the impact at nine.



The evaluation forms also provided evidence of the numbers of children involved in the project, and provides evidence of the wide range of engagement and involvement in the project across Wales. Unfortunately we were not able to review the evidence from one evaluation form, so we have excluded this setting when calculating the numbers of children involved in the project. The original planning forms estimated that the project would engage 258 children and the evaluation forms show that the project has engaged 240 children across Wales so far (with the likelihood that this will rise to around 270 children once all of the data is returned).

The majority of these children were three-year olds (45%) with another 33% of the children aged four. Given the wide geographical and socio-economic diversity of the settings engaged in the project, and the incredibly positive outcomes that have been identified it is clear that the project has had a significant impact across the breadth of the country.

6. Delivery and Management

Across the project delivery team and project partners there is a strong sense of the passion for and commitment to the field of Early Years education. The project team have all been open, honest, willing to share information and listen to feedback. Communication between the project team, partners and evaluation team has been very positive and productive.

The project team has shown a great deal of respect for the creative professionals involved in the project, and values their input into the design and organisation of the project, seeking their feedback and acting on their advice. There is also a very clear and evident respect for Early Years Practitioners, from both the project delivery team and the creative professionals.

6.1 Recruitment of Creative Practitioners

Many of the settings reported finding recruitment of Creative Practitioners difficult. Some of the difficulties stemmed from the specific skill-set that they were looking for, the timing of the sessions or training, or the or the location of the setting. Other difficulties were around the newness of the project and the ages of the children and the inevitable lack of experience amongst potential creative practitioners in working with this age group.

Many of the setting reported that the database of Creative Practitioners was vital in supporting them to recruit and most said that their Creative Agent had been instrumental in supporting the recruitment and selection process. The number of Creative Practitioners and their relative levels of experience will of course expand as the project progresses, and hopefully the joyful, inspiring experiences that the Creative Practitioners have had throughout the first year of the project will act as a driver to bring more Creative Practitioners onboard.

6.2 Timings

The timeframe for the project was condensed due to unavoidable delays, and this was one of the few negative aspects reflected by all of the settings. Some settings reflected that the process felt rushed, others were under pressure to recruit or schedule creative sessions, which presented challenges for the already very busy Early Years Practitioners. Some settings would have liked to spread the sessions over a longer period, others found the condensed timeframe worked well for them and that the added intensity actually helped engage the children more effectively. The issue around timings should be resolved in future years, as the project has a longer delivery timeframe in years two and three.

Almost all settings reflected that they would have very much liked to have more sessions, and for the project to continue for another year. Some settings have made private arrangements with their Creative Practitioners to continue their creative journeys after the project ends. There is often a balance between widening access or intensifying impact with finite funding resources. Our evidence strongly suggests that this project has had significant and demonstrable impacts for both the Early Years Practitioners and the children, even with a shorter timeframe. As with any project wanting to make a national impact, engaging the widest number of settings would seem to be the most effective way forward.

6.3 Application Process

Many of the settings made reference to the initial application process, which some found 'confusing' or 'complicated'. We understand that there are a number of steps to the application, requiring different weblinks and that some of this process is defined by the Arts Council's policies. There will often be unavoidable administrative processes involved in accessing a project and any support or guidance that could be provided to the settings to help them through this process would be welcomed in future years.

6.4 Finances

Some of the settings we spoke with expressed confusion about the funding and what could and could not be bought with the money provided as part of the project. Some wanted to purchase items which seemed to them to fit perfectly with their creative journeys, but their requests were not able to be approved due to constraints on the funding. To avoid future confusion, it would be useful to provide clear written guidance to settings about the funding and how it can be used.

A few of the settings reflected that the Creative Practitioners wanted to take the children out of the setting on adventures, but this was difficult or impossible as they needed to keep within ratio and to ensure there was enough staff available to be responsible for the numbers of children. There were suggestions in the evaluation forms to consider providing project funds for additional Early Years Practitioners to enable these adventures to take place.

We have not at this stage been asked to evaluate the project budget or the current expenditure.

6.5 Creative Agents

A key success factor that we identified was the positive relationships between the Creative Agents and the Early Years Practitioners. There was a great deal of positive feedback about how the settings had found the Creative Agents to be supportive, helpful and experienced. Settings found that the Creative Agents' support with the administration (forms, feedback, finances) was invaluable given how busy the Early Years Practitioners were. The Creative Agents also played a critical role in recruiting the Creative Practitioners and in supporting and managing the relationship between the setting and the Creative Practitioner. This was particularly useful where the Creative Practitioner and the setting had different ideas of where they wanted to go with the project, and the Creative Agent was able to help manage the relationship, support the communication process and provide ideas for ways forward.

6.6 Sharing Event

The Arts Council for Wales arranged two Sharing Events towards the end of the project, to bring the Early Years Practitioners, Creative Agents and Creative Practitioners together to share learning from the project. There were two events held simultaneously, one in North Wales, and one in South Wales, with brief points in the schedule where the two sessions linked via Teams. The event was very useful from an evaluative perspective, with the attendees provided with guided activities to support reflection on all aspects of the project and its impact.

The connection between the two events unfortunately did not seem to work particularly well, as it was difficult to hear the voices of the participants through the online connection. Project staff reflected that it might have been more useful to hold the two events at different times, to enable project delivery staff to be able to attend both sessions. However, it is important to connect all of the participants and to foster a sense that they are part of a unified project. The attendees that were face-to-face in the events reflected that they learned a great deal from listening to the experiences of the other people involved in the project.

7. The Future

One observation from the evaluation is that there isn't a clear mechanism by which to either continue to support these settings on their creative journeys, or to capture the ongoing impact of the project. As evaluators, we would be interested in exploring with the project partners, ways to continue to engage these settings throughout the next two years of the project.

We feel that connecting Early Years Practitioners together in some way would be hugely beneficial for the continued creative development of the settings. This could be done in a number of ways - via social media (perhaps a closed Facebook group given that most of the settings already use Facebook) or through a community of practice that could meet online.

Facilitating this ongoing connection between settings may help prevent the possibility that once the sessions with the Creative Practitioner end, the excitement and energy of the creativity and new ideas may dissipate. It would also start to build a community of early years practitioners and settings who want to explore and expand their creativity. This community could grow with the project and become self-sustaining.

There was also a suggestion in the evaluation forms to support opportunities for connecting the settings and Creatives whilst are actively engaged project. The project provides a number of opportunities for the settings to come together throughout the project, but enabling settings to connect more informally and communicate with each other could help with practical issues such as managing risk or to try creative ideas that have worked for one setting.

Another way of widening engagement with the project might be to develop '[recipes](#)' (case studies) from some of the settings involved in Year one. This may help to build an accessible, practical resource to support settings across Wales – even those not directly involved in the project. The recipes should be presented through the perspectives of the setting, and could provide other Early Years settings with insights into what it means to develop creativity in an early years setting and what this might look like in practice. The recipes could be presented in a visually engaging written form, or as short videos.

The recipes could include:

- **About us** – where, how many children, relevant facts
- **What we wanted** – our plan, why we needed it
- **What we did** – overview of activities
- **How it helped us** – key facts about any impacts on Early Years Practitioners and on children
- **Top tips** – what made it work (or not) in the setting, any issues they overcame, potential pitfalls, best advice.

We can also see value in making available other useful resources such as template or example risk assessments, particularly for activities such as woodwork, that could help settings overcome concerns about managing risks.

8. Conclusions

8.1 Learning

The experience and learning from the Lead Creative Schools project was clearly invaluable in shaping the design of this project. Working with smaller groups and spending time getting to know the setting before launching in to any creative activities seemed to be important factors in the initial success of projects. Many settings reflected that it was a really important first step for the Creative Practitioner to visit the setting just to get to know the Early Years Practitioners and the children, see how the setting worked, get a sense of the space and the routines. It may also be useful for settings and Creative Practitioners to have conversations around expectations and boundaries. Children of this age may want to hug and touch visitors and it is important to establish people's level of comfort and setting expectations around this very natural behaviour.

Many of the settings talked about how the short attention spans of the children meant that it was really important not to bring too much structure or expectation of engagement to a session. Shorter sessions worked much better in most cases – most settings had sessions of a few hours or half a day.

Creative Agents provided some useful feedback in terms of the Early Years Practitioners feeling able to bring their own passions and interests into the project. There were some reflections on how much more engaged and excited Early Years Practitioners were when they were able to connect more personally with the creative experiences.

Another observation is that the role of the lead Early Years Practitioner has an impact on the project. The settings where the key contact for this project was the setting manager (or someone with a senior role in the setting) seemed to find it more straightforward to have a broader setting-wide impact, and this impact seemed to happen faster than in settings where the key contact was not in a senior position. It is not always easy to 'lead from behind' and there were settings where there was frustration about how colleagues were not receptive to the creative ideas and different ways of working that the Early Years Practitioners wanted to introduce. Another Early Years Practitioner observed that the training was geared more to setting managers, and that they felt it would have been better for their manager to have attended with them.

If at all possible, individuals with a senior role in the setting should be involved and included in the project and particularly in the training, to support each setting to full embed the learning and to help effect a setting-wide adoption of the creative mindset.

8.2 Well-Being of Future Generations

Throughout this evaluation it has become clear how much of the impact of this project has a direct link to the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the work of the Future Generations Commissioner. The project is actively creating impact that can be aligned to the Seven Well-being Goals of the Future Generations Act:

A Prosperous Wales – The project is supporting children to fulfil their potential as individuals, supporting this goal of "...a society... which develops a skilled and well-educated population"

A Resilient Wales – The project's strong focus on developing the children's love for and understanding of the outdoors, living creatures and nature supports "A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment..."

A More Equal Wales – The project has engaged a wide range of settings with a diversity of socio-economic backgrounds and children with a range of needs, supporting, “A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic circumstances)”

A Healthier Wales – The settings have found ways to support the children to feel joy in movement, to develop their physical creativity and to regulate and manage their emotions. All of these impacts support the well-being aim of developing, “A society in which people’s physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood”

A Wales of Cohesive Communities – The project is fostering collaboration and a strong sense of the importance of working together. This supports the goal of creating communities that support each other work together to create positive change.

A Wales of Vibrant Culture & Thriving Welsh Language – The Welsh language has been a vital to this project, with settings supporting children to use and to value the Welsh language. Children have also been supported to become creative individuals in their own right, recognising and exploring their own creativity. These impacts are in line with the aims of creating, “A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language.”

A Globally Responsible Wales – The project has been careful to explore the careful use of natural resources and, wherever possible, the repurposing of existing resources. The children are beginning to see their role in protecting the earth’s resources and to become citizens who see that they can, “make a positive contribution to global well-being”⁵⁶

The Creative Learning in the Early Years project could play an integral role in enabling Wales to achieve the ambitious Future Generations Well-being Goals, by providing our future citizens with the skills that will help them reach their potential. We feel it is important not only to continue to track the project’s impacts through the lens of the Act but also to highlight the project’s success directly with the Welsh Government, Children’s Commissioner and the Future Generations Commissioner.

8.3 Unintended Impacts

A (perhaps) unexpected impact for the Early Years Practitioners was their reflections on the improvement in their own well-being. Many of the settings, particularly those that were focused on outdoor activities, reported that the Early Years Practitioners had felt benefits to their own feelings of enjoyment being outdoors; being refreshed and energised; lifted; improved staff morale and feelings of renewed satisfaction in their work.

The settings that engaged in activities such as woodwork and outdoor exploration have expressed a change in their attitudes towards risk. Some settings have much more comfortable with allowing the children to engage in activities that may present some risks and reflected that they saw the risks being outweighed by the benefits of the creative activities for the children. It might be useful to support settings who identify risk as a barrier to engaging with certain activities, by providing information, support or templates for risk assessments. Settings that have already engaged positively with activities such as woodwork may be willing to offer advice or provide a case study explaining how they practically set up the activities, any useful equipment, and how they assessed and managed risk.

⁵⁶ <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/>

8.4 The Strengths of the Participants

One of the most striking reflections from this evaluation is that so much of what we allow young children to experience is governed by our own perceptions of what they are capable of or what we deem safe or appropriate. This project has shown that these three and four year olds are capable of incredible things. They are capable of learning and developing in ways that we, as adults, can sometimes assume are beyond their abilities.

The Early Years Practitioners we spoke with during the evaluation embody the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings in Wales's framing of 'enabling adults'. They are skilled professionals who provide emotionally safe environments for the children, supporting children to learn and thrive. The project supports the Early Years Practitioners to "model a joyful approach to learning, and encourage and support children's natural curiosity..."⁵⁷

The Early Years sector is an undervalued profession, with Early Years Practitioners citing high turnover of staff and difficulty recruiting. Some of the reflections that the Early Years Practitioners shared were around feeling devalued and demoralised, particularly after the COVID pandemic and the pressures caused by the cost of living crisis, but they also embodied a huge amount of pride and love for their vital work. This project is as much about celebrating and singing the praises of these professionals who have such an important role in our society. Valuing them and investing in them will enable them to do the job that they want to do, which is to give these children the best possible care and to help them to have the best possible start in life.

The project's key success is in helping the Early Years Practitioners feel the **freedom** to try new things, to give things a go, to be bold and adventurous in what they do with the children and to have the **confidence** in their own skills, in the capacity and capabilities of the children and in the creative process.

⁵⁷ [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales)

9. Recommendations

1. Establish a mechanism to continue to engage the settings involved in year one of the project, either through periodic check-ins or through creating a Community of Practice.
2. Build the learning from year one into the guidance and planning for year two, particularly around training, organisation, set-up and timings.
3. Continue to track the project's impacts through the lens of the Well-Being of Future Generations Well-being Goals and highlight the project's success directly with the Future Generations Commissioner, Welsh Government and the Children's Commissioner.
4. Develop 'recipes' or case studies from year one to provide examples of the impact of the project through the voices of the settings that took part. This should help showcase the impact of the project and encourage other settings to get involved.

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