

Contexts for Dialogue

Some of the contexts for dialogue that came to be developed over the life of the project were as follows.

The **University of Aberdeen**, School of Education has undertaken a major reform of the structure and content of the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) for primary and secondary teachers, funded by the Scottish government, to ensure that social and educational inclusion was addressed within the core learning and teaching programme rather than being an elective selected by only a few student teachers. *Learning Without Limits* is a key text. In addition, a course on *Learning Without Limits* was included in the programme of elective Further Professional Studies modules for teachers following the Post Graduate Diploma in Education. Students used the key concepts and principles outlined in the book as a framework for reflecting on their own and one another's experiences during school placement. Through this sharing and analysis of personal stories, they were encouraged to develop a more nuanced understanding of how the decisions teachers make affect children's achievement, and which choices they can make to ensure they act in the best interests of all children. The course included an assessed, co-operative group task, culminating in group presentations where students explained to their peers what they had learnt through relating their work with children to LWL core ideas and principles.

At the **University of Cambridge**, an elective module on *Learning Without Limits* was included in the Masters' programme. Sixteen teachers opted to join the course, led by Mandy Swann and Alison Peacock. Course themes included: identifying the effects of fixed ability thinking on teachers, children and curriculum; exploring alternative ways of conceptualising teaching, learning and school improvement; constructing a principled pedagogical approach to increasing the learning capacity of all learners; teachers determining their own thinking and acting; teachers and children working as co-agents in learning; pupil consultation and power sharing; tensions and dilemmas. Students prepared for and followed up course discussions by carrying out activities in their classrooms, and some chose to carry out research for their Med thesis connected to the ideas discussed.

At the **University of Hertfordshire**, staff in the Education Department used *Learning Without Limits* as a core text to support their collective work to clarify the principles that inform and underpin their work with teachers following courses of initial training. The principles, published in a booklet for students, partner schools and college staff, are closely linked to the core idea of transformability and principles 'Everybody', 'Trust' and 'Co-agency'. Work was also undertaken to revise the wording of tasks to be undertaken by students on school placement. The language of differential 'ability' was replaced by 'planning for personalisation'.

At **Bishop Grosseteste University College, Lincoln**, a doctoral research study drew on three in-depth case studies to explore adults' experience of learning in the context of a Foundation Degree course for teaching assistants. The research led to the development of new understanding of factors contributing to successful learning in HE, including the role of work place experience, the learner's self theories and motivation, tutor beliefs regarding ability and the tutor's role.

At the **University of Oxford** Department of Education Studies, a research study funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation set out to document what happened when three schools decided to change the ways that they were teaching mathematics in Year 7, in order to ensure that all students, including previously lower attaining students, were offered opportunities to engage in challenging mathematical thinking. The study was particularly focused on exploring how support structures put in place at department level helped to encourage and enable the development of individual teachers' practice in the classroom.

Two **Advanced Skills teachers**, one working in the secondary and one in the primary phase, described how they set about working with and alongside colleagues to support their learning. The Secondary teacher described how she involved colleagues and pupils in the organisation of exciting 'cross-curricular days', and how these created opportunities for young people to be perceived by staff and to perceive themselves in a different light. The Primary teacher used visits to each others' classrooms and co-teaching to create contexts for exploring ideas and trying out new possibilities.

At **Bradford College**, staff worked with students over the four year Primary Education with QTS degree course. Staff were keen to build on the instinctive empathy that many mature student teachers have with young people's experiences as learners, resulting from their own school experiences. Because of this students are able to scaffold young people's development effectively. It means they are often also predisposed to embracing a LWL ethos. Staff at the college aimed to strengthen this instinctive position by modelling key features of a LWL classroom in college teaching sessions.

A **group of experienced primary and early years consultants** were concerned about the documented rarity, in Year R, of sustained complex play, sustained purposeful dialogue and relevant, meaningful first-hand experiences, and the consequent limits on children's learning opportunities in the early years. Their ideas for how teachers might best be supported in enriching provision for young children have been published in two books, *First hand experience: what matters to children* (2005) and *Learning: What matters to children* (2008).

Another **group of experienced primary teachers and specialist teachers**, linked to a LA support service, came together to explore what might be done to enable children with previously very low levels of recorded attainment compared with their peers to be more fully included in shared activities. While dialogue was concerned with factors contributing to inclusion, rather than explicitly with the LWL key ideas and concepts, implicitly discussions were all concerned with the kinds of practices that allow commitment to the 'ethic of everybody' to become a classroom reality.