

Engagement profile and scale as a tool

Karam Bhogal, teacher at Westminster Special School in Sandwell, writes about applying the Engagement Profile and Scale as a tool for baseline assessment and continuing assessment within the early years for children with complex learning difficulties and disabilities.



PUPILS with Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (CLDD) are often hard to engage in learning being "a unique group of learners with a distinctive profile of learning need" (2011, p. 131). When a pupil shows minimal engagement in a learning activity and ceases to learn, it can be difficult for educators to know how to move forward. The Engagement Profile and Scale (EPS) (Carpenter et al., 2011, 2015) is a systematic tool which can be used to assess, measure and progress engagement in learning for pupils with Special Educational Needs and disability (SEND). This article considers the ways in which the EPS is an appropriate tool for baseline and continuing assessment for Early Years pupils with CLDD in terms of:

- Supporting the development of personalised pedagogies

- Providing a valid framework for teacher inquiry with established indicators of learning
- Creating a clear evidence base as a foundation for future teaching and goal-setting.

The Engagement Profile and Scale

The EPS was developed by the CLDD Research Project in 2011 (<http://complexld.ssatrust.org.uk>). It is a tool which can be used to assess, measure and progress pupils' levels of engagement in an educational setting. It was a pioneering piece of work and as such the debate surrounding the tool is limited. Further to the original research, there have been a number of publications. The use of the EPS has been championed by Imray and Hinchcliffe (2014) in *Curricula for Teaching Children and Young People with Severe or Profound and Multiple*

Learning Difficulties. Practical case studies carried out in Surrey schools were published in *Developing a 'Finding Out' Culture* (Carpenter et al., 2014). Additionally, members of the CLDD research team have recently published *Engaging Learners with Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities* (Carpenter et al., 2015) detailing its creation and use in educational settings.

How the tool works

The EPS has two complementary parts: the Engagement Profile (EP) and the Engagement Scale (ES). In both the EP and ES, engagement is split into seven indicators: awareness/responsiveness, initiation, curiosity, investigation, discovery, perseverance, and anticipation.

The Engagement Profile (EP) is used by all members of staff working with a child and their family to develop a record

of how the child behaves when they are engaged (Carpenter et al., 2015, p. 34). It forms a record of children's most engaged behaviours observed while they are taking part in preferred activities. One way of gathering this information is to attach an enlarged blank Profile to the wall of the classroom which allows all staff working with the child as well as parents to contribute. At the time the child's most engaged behaviours are observed by adults, they can be written on individual Post-It notes and stuck to the Profile. This is an effective and quick method which is more suited to primary and special schools; however a more portable and discreet version would be more appropriate in a secondary setting where children move from class to class for their lessons.

The Engagement Scale (ES) is a tool for observers to record and measure the changes in a pupil's engagement. It is used to monitor the impact of personalised adaptations made to an activity in order to further engage the pupil in learning. Initially, two or three baseline assessments are carried out without any change being made to the activity. These form a point of comparison so later assessments can monitor progress following the introduction of new adaptations and strategies to engage a child (Carpenter et al., 2015, p. 40).

The educator makes these changes based on their and others' knowledge about the pupil and the way they learn best. The ES template gives space for educators to describe the learning environment, the actions taken forward from the previous scale (unless a baseline), how the child has responded to those changes, and what 'next actions' will form the next intervention. Over a period of time (e.g. half a term), the educator therefore completes a series of ES which evidence the changes they made to the original activity, the rationale for the educational choices they made, and the impact of each change on the child's engagement for learning. The ES series creates the pathway through which a pupil's levels of engagement for learning are increased.

It is also possible to plot the pupil's engagement progress as a graph based on engagement scores. Each time an ES is completed, the seven engagement indicators are scored from zero to four: four when the child is completely engaged (represented by the behaviours



described on their EP) and zero when the child does not show any engagement in the target activity. The scores for all seven indicators are totalled and the pupil is given a score out of 28 (Carpenter et al., 2015, p. 43). The scores for each week can then be plotted against time.

Engagement and learning

Carpenter et al. (2015, p. 20) claim that without engagement, no deep, meaningful learning can take place. It is the link between engagement and learning that justifies expending time and resources on measuring engagement. Carpenter et al. (2015, p. 21) note that, in the past, definitions of engagement in education tended to focus only on time spent on task but that more recent definitions focus on sustained interaction with a productive learning environment. The CLDD project, from which the EPS was spawned, roots engagement in the link between the learner and the learning environment (Carpenter et al.,

2011, p. 68); the interaction between the learner and their learning environment 'including people, ideas, materials and concepts' (ibid., p. 68) has to be observed and manipulated to achieve optimal engagement and the most meaningful learning possible. The central method of measurement in the EPS rests on measuring levels of engagement via the seven indicators, and shifts the focus from 'time on task' to quality engagement (Carpenter et al., 2015, p. 21).

Assessment

Assessment is considered vital to build a sound evidence base for pupil progress (Imray and Hinchcliffe, p. 44), and the National Foundation of Educational Research (NFER) - summarised by Lewis (2001, p. 231) - states that effective assessment must be "sufficiently accurate... to inform future teaching and enable the setting of goals". The EPS fulfils these roles, meeting this NFER criterion through the inclusion of 'next



actions' noted above (Carpenter, 2015, p. 38).

By definition, baseline assessment takes place as early in pupils' formal education as possible; for most, this will be the Early Years Foundation Stage. The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Handbook (Testing and Standards Agency, 2014) is therefore a guide to what we might look for in our learners. The relevance of the EPS's conceptual base - engagement and the seven engagement indicators - to early years educators is emphasised by their appearance in this Handbook. The chapter, 'Completing commentaries for the characteristics of effective learning - example lines of inquiry', not only has a specific 'engagement' section heading but also refers to learning characteristics linked to six of the seven engagement indicators of the mainstream EPS - 'responsiveness', 'curiosity', exploration (corresponding to 'investigation'), 'discovery', 'initiation' and 'persistence'. ('Anticipation' - the seventh EPS indicator - is not mentioned.) For example, the Handbook tells the reader, when working with their pupils, to identify curiosity by asking, "Does the child respond to first-hand experiences in an exploratory way?" (ibid., p. 37). More explicitly, it instructs the reader to look for actions which result from an "innate curiosity" (ibid.). It is important to note that while

the Handbook concerns mainly young children in a mainstream setting, it is applicable to all children of the correct age (Standards and Testing Agency, 2014, p. 6) - including those with CLDD.

Practitioner inquiry

The idea of practitioners researching in their own environment to attain the most effective pedagogies through improving their own practice (Broadhead, 2004, p. 53) has become increasingly well-established in schools (Jones et al., 2012; DfE, 2014) particularly using an action research approach. A crucial element of the EPS is the fact that it incorporates this observe-plan-do-reflect cycle of teacher inquiry in carrying out the baseline assessment and the intervention assessments. In so doing, the child is placed at the centre of assessment (Carpenter et al., 2015, p. 28). Educator research is particularly effective when practitioner researchers are able to request support from research specialists, either from within their own school (Carpenter and Egerton, 2007) or externally (Carpenter et al., 2011).

Personalisation and the EPS

Lewis writes that personalisation is the way to alter "classroom experiences to foster learning" (2001, p. 233). Carpenter et al. (2011) state that it is the "process of personalisation that envelops the child

as an engaged learner", while Imray and Hinchcliffe suggest that:

"...children with the most complex needs should have richly intense levels of personalisation in order to find out their learning pathways and engage them" (2014, p. 46).

Personalisation is a key principle of the EPS, and is central to how practitioners use it to support pupils' maximum engagement for learning. The EPS seeks to offer a clear route to personalisation through the identification of the pupil's learning strengths and interests using the EP, the selection of 'next actions' to further adapt the pupil's learning environment, and the evaluation of their effectiveness in relation to the pupil's subsequent levels of engagement for learning (Curreli, 2014 p. 69).

- Please look out for the March edition of SEND Magazine where we will look at a recent case study to support engagement for learning.

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