

Year Two Report: Build and Test

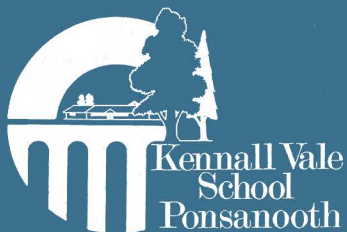
# Penryn Creativity Collaborative Action Research Report

## Research Question:

How might collaborative 'learning friends' empower children to take empowered action in their learning?

## Lead Action Research Teacher:

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## Penryn Creativity Collaborative Action Research Report

This Action Research project is part of the Penryn Creativity Collaboratives.

To cite the report please use:

**Fenton, J. (2023).** *How might collaborative 'learning friends' empower children to take empowered action in their learning?* Penryn Creativity Collaboratives. <https://penryn-college.cornwall.sch.uk/creativity-collaboratives>

### CONTEXT

Creativity Collaboratives is a national pilot programme of eight clusters of schools across England who are working together to test innovative practices in teaching for creativity, sharing learning to facilitate system-wide change. The programme, launched in October 2021, is funded by Arts Council England with generous support from the Freelands Foundation. Creativity Collaboratives: Penryn Partnership is the South-West pilot for the programme, and over the course of three years is focused on exploring one central question:

Does teaching creativity across the curriculum lead to young people who are better prepared for their future in a changing workforce?

The Penryn Creativity Collaborative is led by Penryn College with eight local primary schools and research partner, the School of Education at the University of Exeter. This report presents findings from one of thirteen action research projects which took place during Year 2 of the Penryn Creativity Collaboratives programme. Each action research project was led by a teacher with students from their own school, included a link with a partner from a local industry and the lead teacher was supported by researchers from the University of Exeter through a programme of training and mentoring.

Full findings from Year 2 can be found in the research report. To cite this report please use:

**Crickmay, U. Childs, S. Chappell, K. (2023).** *Preparing for a Creative Future: Year Two Report Build and Test* <https://penryn-college.cornwall.sch.uk/creativity-collaboratives>

### THE PROJECT

This action research project took place at Kennall Vale School (KVS) in Ponsanooth, a small rural village in Cornwall. The school is known for its proximity to the beautiful Kennall Vale nature reserve, which features a woodland and the river Kennall. KVS is situated in a moderately affluent area with good parental engagement and strong school data. The project was led by Jessica Fenton, a class teacher of a year four and five (aged 8-10) class. Over a six-week period, the sessions, led by the children themselves, took place in the school's outdoor areas and lasted for an hour each.

A total of eighteen children participated in the project, with nine children aged between five and six, and nine children aged between nine and ten. All children have been given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The children were put into mixed-age pairs (learning friends) and given five one-hour sessions to play together, outdoors. The sessions were led by the children, entirely. The year five children were asked to plan sessions that the year one children would enjoy. All the children who were invited to participate chose to take part, and their parents showed great enthusiasm and interest, following the project's progress through a dedicated ClassDojo page.

This project aims to explore the importance of creative skills in preparing children to become successful and lifelong learners. KVS already collaborates closely with Penryn College to ensure a smooth transition from early years to Key Stage Three and Four, both academically and socially. The knowledge and skills gained from this project will inform future curriculum planning at KVS, ensuring that creative skills are embedded within the curriculum rather than being treated as an add-on.

## Penryn Creativity Collaborative Action Research Report

The concept of 'learning friends' is particularly relevant to KVS due to its mixed-aged classes, where children across different key stages learn together. During initial discussions, the staff agreed that the creative skills emphasised in this project, namely Dialogue and Collaboration, Empowered Action, and Generating New Ideas that Matter, should be valued and incorporated across the school. Children were paired up, with one Y5 (aged 9-10) child paired with one year one (aged 5-6) child and the project placed a strong emphasis on being child-led. Participants were encouraged to have outdoor, enjoyable sessions that did not necessarily align with the expectations of the National Curriculum.

### DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

#### Creative Skills

The research drew on the Penryn Partnership Creative Skills Framework developed during Year 1 of the Penryn Creativity Collaboratives programme (Crickmay, Childs & Chappell, 2023). The framework defined creative skills in a five-part model, and this action research focused on three sections of this model as follows:

##### Dialogue and collaboration

Drawing in notions of dialogue, questioning, communicating and collaborating, in both verbal and embodied ways.

##### Empowered action

Foregrounding pupils' own agency in creative action, as a skill this includes the ability to take risks and question accepted ideas, the capacity to be immersed, and the ability to act on creative ideas.

##### Generating new ideas that matter

This includes the ability to combine innovation with critical attention to the consequences of ideas, considering the ethical impact of creative actions, and understanding diverse values.

#### Creative Pedagogies

The research drew on the Penryn Partnership Creative Pedagogies Framework developed during Year 1 of the Penryn Creativity Collaboratives programme (Crickmay, Childs & Chappell, 2023). This framework used two prior reviews of creative pedagogies: Cremin & Chappell's (2019) systematic literature review of 30 years of empirical research on this topic, which identified a series of seven features characteristic of creative pedagogies, and Chappell et al.'s (2016) review which identified a series of eight features of creative transdisciplinary science and arts teaching. This project utilised the following aspects of the Creative Pedagogies Framework:

- Generating and exploring ideas: There is a climate of openness – a high degree of acceptance of children's ideas. Tensions between openness and structure – a need to balance openness with structure to support learning. A sense of both stepping back and stepping in, to balance control and freedom
- Empowerment, autonomy and agency: Learners and teachers both have a sense of agency and are allowed to express themselves. Students are empowered to act independently and with agency (exerting power), developing and trying out their own ideas
- Risk, immersion and play: Teaching/ facilitation creates space for these three processes to occur. A trusting space is developed in which mistakes are possible and failure can be accepted.
- Individual, collaborative and communal activities for change: Co-constructing teaching and learning in relationship. Group work and collaborating (recognised as real life skill). Dialogue – between people, disciplines, creativity and identity, and ideas; acknowledging embodiment and difference and allowing for conflict and irreconcilable difference

## Penryn Creativity Collaborative Action Research Report

### ClassDojo

An online platform that connects primary school teachers, students and families through communication features, such as a feed for photos and videos from the school day, and messaging. It can be translated into more than 35 languages.

### Collaborative learning friends

The pairing of a year one (aged 5-6) and a year five (aged 9-10) child.

### Key Stage

The different stages of the National Curriculum in England. At primary school, these include: Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, at primary school including ages 4-5), Key Stage One (KS1, ages 5-7) and Key Stage Two (KS2 ages 7-11).

Y1: Year one children, Y5: Year five children

## AIMS OF RESEARCH

- To explore if and how collaborative learning friends can empower children to take risks
- To explore if and how collaborative learning friends can empower children to take action in their creative ideas
- To explore if and how the collaborative learning friends model can be used by other classes
- To explore how collaborative learning friends empower children to take empowered action in their learning

## METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

### Research design

Qualitative data was collected in this project to examine the dialogue of individual children and between children working collaboratively. The methods included photographs, observations and transcription of year-five children's vlogs. For the observations, the 'Preparing for a Creative Future' wheel was used - a data collection tool that was designed for the Penryn Creativity Collaboratives project. Around the edge, it includes the five-part definition of creative skills developed during year 1 of the project, with each skill broken down into three detailed sections. Inside the wheel, teachers or students can mark whether they noticed each of the skills being used a little, some, or lots. These methods aimed to capture rich discussion and reflection while observing the children without distracting them. The researcher focused more on four selected children, providing additional time and referencing their data more frequently.

### Participants

A total of eighteen children participated, nine aged between five and six years old, and nine aged between nine and ten. All parents provided consent for their children to be part of the project. The Year 1 children comprised of three girls and six boys, with five boys preferring hands-on learning. Among the nine Year 5 children, there were five girls and four boys, with boys showing a preference for outdoor and practical learning while girls had no specific preference.

# Penryn Creativity Collaborative Action Research Report

## Data analysis

Data analysis involved immersion in all data, followed by transcription of selected audio and film-based data. Photographs were coded using the See, Think, Wonder technique from Harvard Project Zero. All data was then systematically coded using low level through to high level coding which led to a thematic analysis. This is written up below in this report. Transcriptions of vlogs and analysis of photographs focused on creative skills related to dialogue, collaboration, empowered action, and generating new ideas. The See, Think, Wonder technique was applied to analyse photographs and identify common themes and progress over the sessions. Creative wheels and observation notes were also analysed, with findings inferred from the notes. Triangulation of data against the research aims was carried out to explore how collaborative learning friends empowered children in their creative ideas.

## Trustworthiness and credibility

The research project was carefully planned to ensure safe and trustworthy methods for children's participation, including observations, photographs, and pupil voice from the vlogs. The inclusion of the Creative Skills Wheel as an additional data collection method enhanced credibility. Systematic analysis was conducted during the coding process to ensure rigour. The researcher engaged in discussions with colleagues, including an external partner and Bill Lucas (Professor of Learning, leads the peer-network between the either Creativity Collaboratives), to ensure ongoing trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical research practice was ensured by following the ethical guidelines of the University of Exeter ethics committee which are grounded in the British Educational Research Association (2018) guidelines. Protocols involved seeking informed consent for all research activity from all participants alongside careful data protection practices.

## MAIN FINDINGS:

The data showed that during the project, the following creative pedagogies were being utilised to develop creative skills.

### Generating and exploring ideas

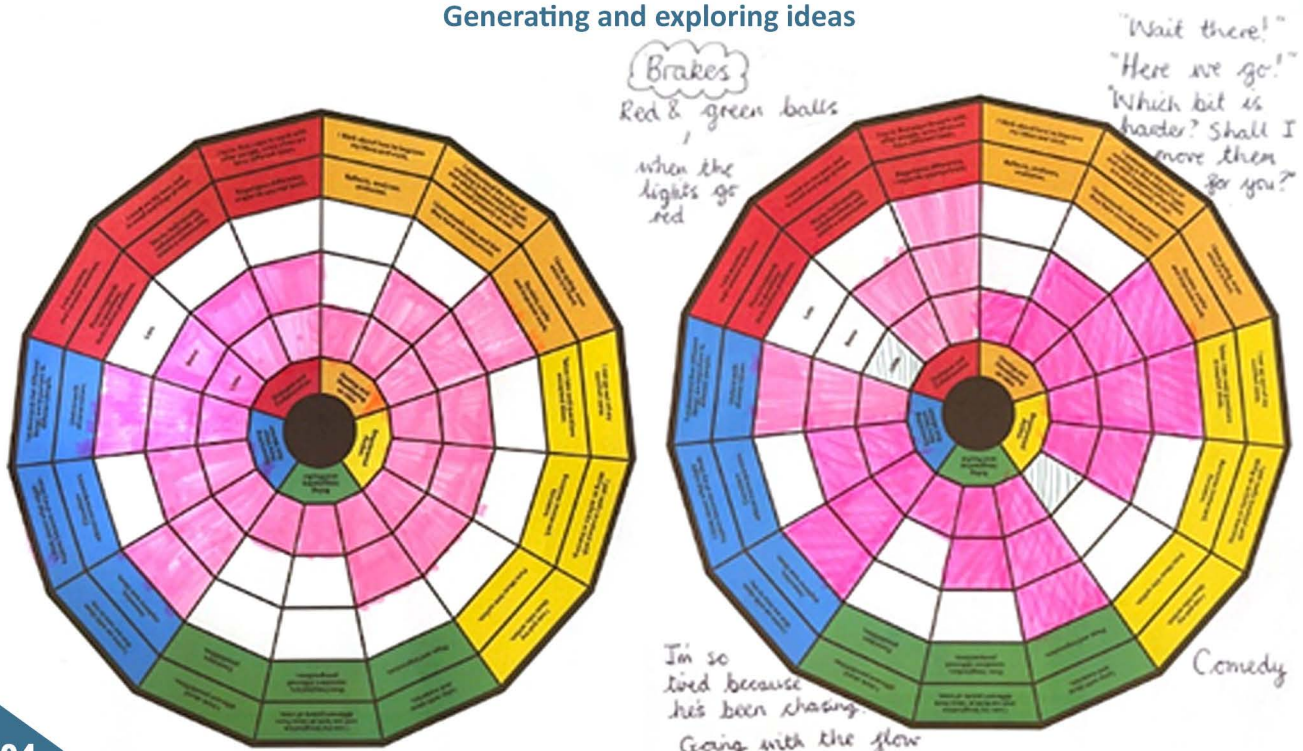


Figure 1: Penryn Creative Skills Data Wheel

## Penryn Creativity Collaborative Action Research Report

Qualitative data from the creative wheels provided insights into two children's perceptions. Initial discussions and reflections with the children were challenging, as they struggled to grasp the concept of the wheel. The researcher had to model the process multiple times before the children could use the creative wheels independently. It is possible that the project's unstructured nature, without a clear learning objective, made it difficult for the children to base their reflections on. Findings from the creative wheels indicated that the children lacked self-belief in statements such as "I can put my ideas into action," despite consistently implementing their ideas.

### Empowerment, autonomy, and agency

The children produced vlogs during the project, following sentence starters to guide their ideas and ensure alignment with the Creative Skills Wheel (color-coded to match skills). The vlogs revealed that the Year 5 (aged 9-10) children felt pushed out of their comfort zones, believing they were responsible for generating new ideas and taking risks to support their Year 1 (aged 5-6) partners. Over time, they realised that the Year 1 children could also contribute and that the experience should be more collaborative. The Year 1 children began making suggestions and taking risks themselves.

During Eva's vlog, she shared, 'It was making some things different than other things that I've done. I tried a new idea today'. Her statement highlights her ability to take agency and feel empowered.

Rohan was observed to need reassurance from an adult because her confidence was knocked (when her flower stem investigation failed). As soon as she was given positive feedback, she continued to feel empowered and take agency to support.

J.J needed additional support to stay on task and Rohan was autonomous in how she could manage his behaviour.

Figure 2 shows how the Y1 child is engaged in a writing task under the guidance of a Y5 child. This interaction shows the idea of empowered action within the primary school setting, where the older child assumes a role similar to that of a teacher, demonstrating agency and the ability to guide their younger peer through the activity. This highlights how peer mentorship and collaborative learning fosters a sense of agency and autonomy among students.



Figure 2: Writing task, Y1 child under the guidance of a Y5 child

## Penryn Creativity Collaborative Action Research Report

### Individual, collaborative, and communal activities for change

Observations highlighted instances where children were motivated to explore new ideas, take risks and engage in problem-solving, even when lacking confidence. For example, when Winnie (Year 5, aged 9) expressed uncertainty and frustration, her learning friend enthusiastically praised her efforts. The teamwork and constant verbal discussion among the children were evident. Initially, it was expected that the Year 5 children would take on nurturing roles as problem solvers, but the Year 1 children surprised with their spontaneous kindness and support, boosting the self-esteem of their older peers.

Photographs captured the collaborative nature of the learning friends project, showcasing dialogue, teamwork, and emotional expression. This aligned with the observation and creative wheel data, affirming that children were empowered to participate and take risks due to the supportive environment created by their peers. The photographs also showcased the wide range of activities, demonstrating the children's ownership of their learning. Initially seeking reassurance from the researcher, by the fourth and fifth sessions, the children confidently initiated their sessions without adult intervention.

The Y5 and Y1 who were working on bike skills used dialogue to exchange knowledge and offer feedback to each other. The eldest child reassured the Y1 that he was doing well but also corrected his bike riding skills (verbally) to promote development. Their teamwork shows shared responsibility; they are equally as important in this interaction. They could express their emotions verbally but non-verbally too with facial expressions and gestures.

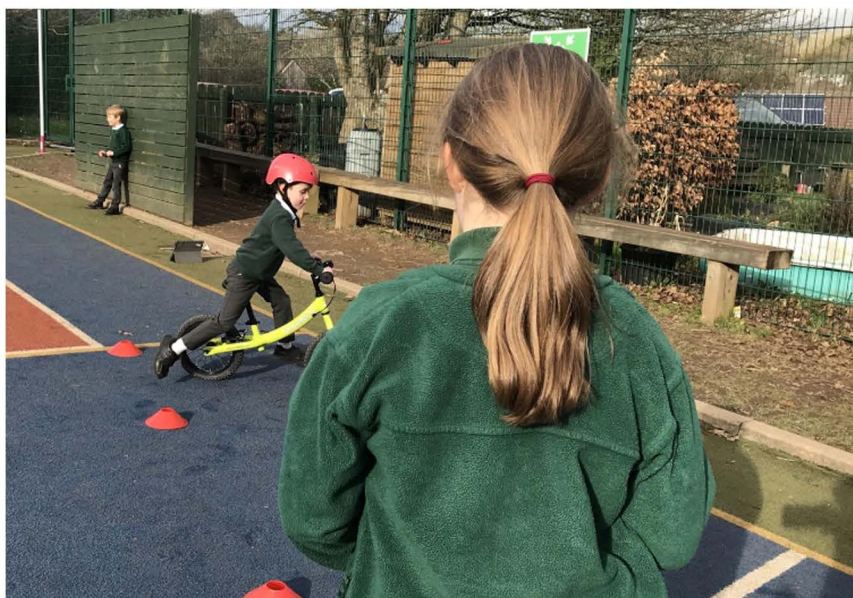


Figure 3: Y1 and Y5 working on bike skills

When observed, Winnie showed how she was firm with her instructions and kept repeating steps until she deemed that W had mastered them. Sometimes, W lacked confidence and was overheard saying that she had no idea what she was doing, it was all going wrong. W quoted, "IT'S AMAZING!" and this resulted in a huge smile from Winnie.

### Risk, immersion and play

The sessions fostered a trusting environment where children were encouraged to take risks. Notably, Rohan conducted a science investigation using coke and Mentos with Jason, showcasing her impressive risk-taking attitude. Despite her lack of personal interest in science, she aimed to provide enjoyable experiences for her Year 1 partner, even bringing resources from home. Her commitment exemplified the immersive and playful nature of the project, as children actively sought to provide interactive and exciting sessions for their peers.

## Penryn Creativity Collaborative Action Research Report

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROJECT AND FINDINGS

#### Impact on the Children

The children's ownership of this project allowed them to feel empowered and gave them time and space to express themselves. The element of play was pivotal – children were testing, exploring and taking risks through play, in every session. The children could not believe that they were allowed to do 'whatever' they liked during the sessions. At first, they were overwhelmed by choices and could not choose where to begin but after a few sessions, it was clear to see the positive effect. There was no pressure to meet a particular objective or record their work on paper – the children could play together and enjoy the session without adults' intervention. It appeared that they found it liberating.

#### Impact for the Future

A typical lesson at primary school is part of a sequence of learning that has been meticulously planned out to meet curriculum coverage and progression expectations. The small steps of learning are focused on an end point or composite piece so consequently there is not much time for child-led learning in KS1 or KS2. The National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2013) does not mention play as a means for learning so this project is innovative in this respect. The learning friends project is more reflective of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework and its overarching principles (Department for Education, 2014, p. 6). As a school, we hope to embed learning friendships as a strategy to create a safe and empowering learning environment across the school, going forward. The sense of togetherness and community suits our village school's ethos perfectly. As a teacher, I could lead the way to show staff the value of the five creative skills (dialogue and collaboration, honing and developing ideas, taking empowered action, being imaginative and playful and generating ideas that matter), for wellbeing, enjoyment and to prepare them to succeed in the wider community and in later life.

#### Highlights of the Project

Relationships between pairs developed over time to build a sense of safety and trust – the learning friends could share ideas without worry of judgment. Since the project, the learning friends still believe themselves to be 'buddies'. They have repeatedly asked the researcher for the next 'learning friend session' – this is a glorious review of the positive impact that the project has had so far.

#### Challenges of the Project

The researcher found the biggest challenge has been justifying to the children that these sessions have been filled with worthwhile, important learning! The children view the sessions as 'too fun' and they have doubted how the project is reflective of a typical day at school.

#### Final Thoughts

Overall, the findings show good evidence that collaboration has influence on children's ability to take risks and engage in empowered action. It took time to feel confident but the supportive, encouraging environment they created allowed them to cooperate, communicate, self-regulate and decision make, regardless of their age. The importance of these findings has been inspirational to staff and the project is just the start of the learning friend concept.

### REFERENCES

Crickmay, U. Childs, S. Chappell, K. (2023). *Preparing for a Creative Future: year one Report Question, Challenge and Explore*. <https://penryn-college.cornwall.sch.uk/creativity-collaboratives>



# Creative Skills

PENRYN PARTNERSHIP

“Does teaching creativity across the curriculum lead to young people who are better prepared for their future in a changing workforce?”

