



## **Child Initiated Learning**

A Joint Development Project:  
Lancashire County Council &  
Qualifications and Curriculum  
Development Agency

## Acknowledgements

This document was drawn together at the end of an action research project undertaken by some Early Years schools and settings in Lancashire. It reflects the journeys of dedicated, enthusiastic and committed practitioners as their research developed. We hope that you will find it inspiring and useful.

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## What is a co-development network?

A network is made up of settings/schools that work in partnership with each other and with the QCDA to make a difference to children by developing and improving their curriculum.

The QCDA (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority) has worked with local authorities to establish a number of Co-development networks across the country, linking groups of practitioners from settings/schools that want to reflect and push their thinking a bit further, sharing ideas for curriculum innovation.

This particular network was jointly facilitated by the QCDA and Lancashire LA, with the aim of exploring and providing 'on the ground' evidence of curriculum innovation and the impact of initiatives. The network focused on the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage), drawing together a number of practitioners from a range of settings, to reflect on, explore and develop an area of challenge to further extend good practice and to share more widely with others.

## Objectives of the network

- To establish a co-development network that focuses on curriculum innovations specifically within the EYFS;
- To establish an effective and open relationship with a range of EYFS settings in order to provide dynamic first hand evidence of the implementation of the EYFS;
- To enable QCDA to explore and support innovative approaches to issues and challenges that have been identified within the EYFS;
- To generate a set of appropriate case studies of how specific issues have been identified and addressed.

## The project in Lancashire

In Lancashire a small number of settings/schools were invited to participate in the project. The settings/schools represented the diversity of EYFS provision: a sessional group, a childminder, a Children's Centre, maintained and independent nurseries, maintained and independent reception classes.

An initial launch day explained the project in more detail and planned the way forward. This was led jointly by Jan Dubiel of QCDA and advisers/consultants from Lancashire LA. Further support was given by a QCDA Consultant who spent three days in Lancashire working with small groups within the project, including visiting some of the settings, and from Lancashire Consultants working directly with settings.

## Considerations

Three questions were posed at the start of the project:

- **WHAT** are you trying to achieve for your learners through the curriculum?
- **HOW** can you best organise learning to enable you to achieve your aims for your learners?
- **HOW** will you know when you have achieved your aims?

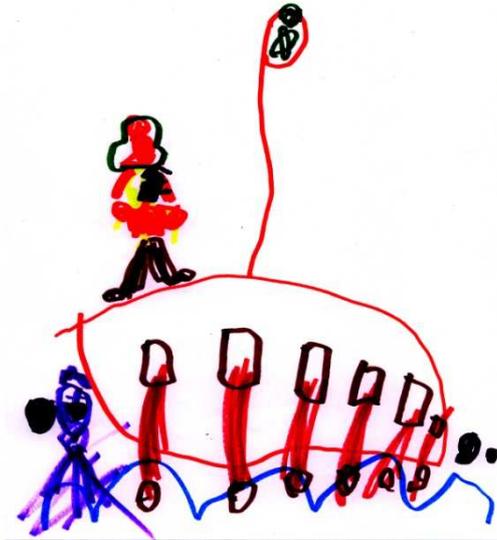


## Child Initiated Learning

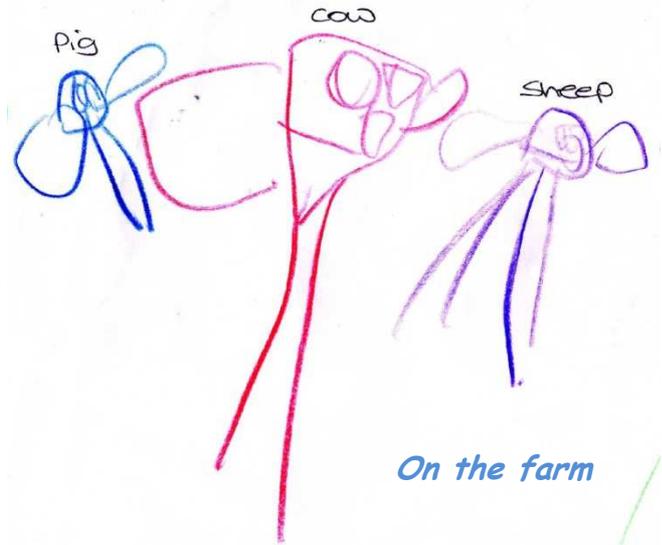
In Lancashire the group decided that in trying to answer these questions the network would focus on child-initiated learning and how this was developed in each school/ setting through their chosen focus.

In order to do this effectively the group felt that they needed their own definition of child initiated learning.

### Child initiated learning experiences



*Captain of the pirate ship*



*On the farm*

***“Child initiated learning is instigated by the child’s own innate curiosity, motivation and drive. It is sparked by an experience, observation or interest which gives children ownership of their learning” (Lancashire)***



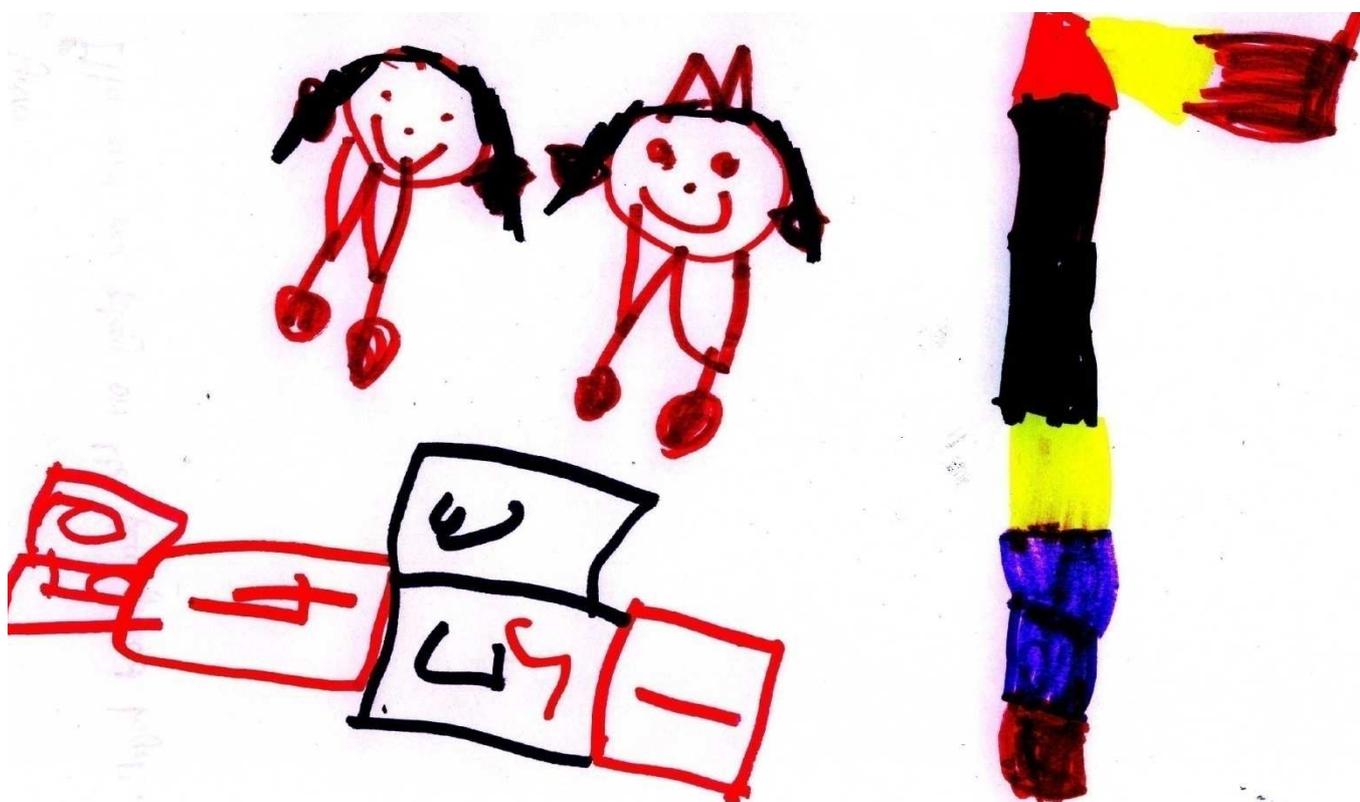
*In the doll's house with other people*



*Exploring Water*

## Child initiated learning is embedded in play which:

- is led or chosen by the child;
- can involve adults and other children or be very personal play;
- is unique to every child – values individuality and respects their interests;
- is safe for a child – can't be wrong - no set outcomes;
- starts from what children are interested in;
- allows children to choose their own resources, using and adapting according to their interests;
- gives children ownership allowing them to develop learning both indoors and out;
- enriches their knowledge and experiences;
- motivates the learner;
- gives the opportunity to explore and develop creativity and curiosity;
- may begin with a teacher initiated activity which children then follow through in their own way;
- meets the needs of all the children (e.g. child that lives in small flat needs/wants to play outside more);
- the ideas/concepts stem from the children;
- involves the children in planning and designing the learning process;
- encourages communication in the setting.



## Adults facilitate the learning by:

- having a shared ethos with the team on child initiated play;
- acknowledging and valuing child initiated play;
- providing easy access to resources for a stimulating environment (equipment, time, space to encourage exploration indoors and out);
- creating situations and activities which inspire children's play based on knowledge of children's current interests;
- using sensitively informed intervention. Adult playing on the child's terms – participation if and when invited;
- working in the role of a model, sensitively 'scaffolding' the play, showing fun, excitement, curiosity;
- providing a setting that is 'safe' to experiment in by creating a place where children are secure enough to take risks;
- using observations and reflections derived from each day's experiences to inform planning;
- including the 'voice' of the child in planning learning experiences;
- being aware of schemas and children's current interests;
- extending ideas – open-ended questioning, suggesting but not taking over, supporting the learner and building their confidence;
- recognising and responding to the needs of an individual and interests of the individual;
- talking about what children are doing and listening to suggestions;
- using a 'sow seeds' approach for children to build on during play.



**Taking part in the discussion**

## What we wanted to achieve

Through discussion we decided what we wanted to achieve from participation in this project. As we were such a diverse group we welcomed the opportunity to work together to establish some common objectives in our research. These were:

- to develop a greater understanding of child initiated learning;
- to improve the quality of child initiated learning in our settings;
- to participate fully in the action research;
- to value the opportunity for professional development;
- to reflect, question and develop our current practice;
- to work with others from a variety of settings towards a common goal.



Some of the group in discussion

