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## Using the principles of Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) to support and enhance the way in which young children learn Henleaze Infant School

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### Brief description

This example shows how Henleaze Infant School uses effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) to develop the independent learning skills of young children.

### Overview – the provider’s message

‘We believe passionately in children taking responsibility for their learning and becoming independent. In order for them to do this, they need first to be shown how to become independent! Much of the learning throughout the school provides opportunities for children to make choices and engage in activities that enable them to be learners in a variety of ways. Children need to understand the building blocks of learning and that is where ELLI can support them. It comes down to what the skills of being a good learner are. If you know how you learn you are more likely to carry on being a learner. Staff within the school immediately noted the potential of ELLI for our very young learners. They were creative in their introduction of the principles to the children and adapted the story to suit 4 to 7-year-olds. This foresight has meant that children have benefited from a supportive structure that enables them to visualise and practise learning skills in a safe and constructive way, but also benefit from them for their whole education and as members of the community in years to come’.



*Mandy Martin, headteacher*

## The good practice in detail

### Background to Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI)

ELLI began as a research project in 2002 at the University of Bristol, funded by the Lifelong Learning Foundation. In-depth research involving academic experts, learners and practitioners identified seven dimensions of learning:

- 'changing and learning' where individuals gained a sense of learning and changing over time
- 'critical curiosity' where individuals were eager to 'get below the surface' of what they were learning
- 'meaning making' where connections were made in learning, thus promoting an awareness that learning mattered to them
- creativity' which involved risk-taking, playfulness, imagination and intuition
- 'resilience' where learners persevered in the development of their own learning
- 'strategic awareness' where individuals were aware of their thoughts and feelings as a learner and used that to manage their learning processes
- 'learning relationships' where individuals learnt on their own and from working alongside others.

### Using ELLI principles with young children

The school recognised that the seven ELLI dimensions link closely with the key skills of communication, application of number, information technology, improving learning, problem-solving and working with others. By introducing these learning dimensions into the classroom through a meaningful story which used animals to engage the children's interest, teachers found that they could stimulate learning power and help youngsters to become better learners. The seven animals are:

- *Chameleon* who promotes changing and adapting
- *Curious Cat* who likes to ask questions
- *Spider* who makes connections
- *Unicorn* who is playful with ideas and use their imagination
- *Tortoise* who perseveres even if they are finding things tricky
- *Owl* who uses different strategies and take time to think things through
- *Busy Bee* who encourages successful teamwork.



*The senior leadership team*

These characters are initially introduced to Reception children in the summer term through story and dance sessions. Soft toys enable them to identify with the story characters and

they become familiar with the way that these animals can help them with their learning. The animals are also used as an integral part of the transition process into Year 1. For example, spiders are used to help prepare the Reception children for Year 1 by enabling them to make connections. Following a discussion about a visit to their new classes in preparation for September, Reception children explained that they were learning like spiders because they were making connections. One child pointed out that 'Class One has the same table mat as me'. Another child confidently explained that 'in this classroom, you know we're learning about symmetrical patterns and paintings, they're the same as I do at home'. Staff encourage children to consider these connections and use them positively to support their transition.

At the start of Year 1, pupils start to really think about the different styles of learning. Working with a partner, the children make bees to demonstrate working together. They also create glitter webs to demonstrate how things they know about are linked. They creatively complete their own half of a unicorn picture and mix paint on large sheets of paper outside to experiment with change. 'Plan, do and review sessions' support the work of *wise owls*, while baking bread emphasises the patience and 'stickability' of a *tortoise*. By making cat masks and asking questions on their topic, children experience the key skills involved with being curious. They are motivated and enthused by their active participation in considering how the animals support them as learners.

The animals also play an important role in settling the pupils into their new Year 2 class and are skilfully integrated throughout the year in the planning. For example, using the topic 'The Great Outdoors', the pupils learn to work like a *tortoise* when they practise their skipping. They think carefully like the *owl* when they are finding out how to record information and work together like the *bee* when they learn a maypole dance. Year 2 pupils write their own end of year reports and explain how 'I worked like an owl to make a spaceship'. One pupil wrote that they found mathematics difficult but they 'keep going like a *tortoise*'. By reflecting on their experiences children can understand more about themselves as learners and what has supported them in moving forward.

## The impact on children's learning at school

Mandy and the senior leadership team are unanimous in their praise of the way in which the seven ELLI dimensions have impacted on the children's learning. They explain how children not only talk about what skills they have learnt but also how they have developed their understanding of a key skill or concept. For example, Year 2 pupils explained that during a mathematics investigation with shapes that they 'worked like the *spider*, making connections with our previous learning'. This is a highly reflective skill and one that ensures children are able to clearly and consciously develop their abilities to be participants in their own education. Staff refer to the animals regularly to support children's connectivity to them. They then become integral to the children's learning experience.

Most impressively, children understand when they are learning both inside and outside the classroom environment. This was exemplified by a group of Year 2 pupils who noted that they 'worked like the *chameleon* and adapted our parachute game to include all of our friends'.

The children understand how different people learn and that some ways of learning are easier than others. They learn with confidence and discuss the work in a way that they understand. As Mandy explains 'they see the animal characters as "helpers" to unlock their

learning'. Pupils are confident that the animals help them with their learning. They relate enthusiastically to the story and describe their own characters confidently.

Most striking, is the way in which the children explain the qualities that they demonstrate when they are learning, talking frequently about how they persevere with developing their skills. Making reference to the animals, one pupil described how she was 'a *tortoise* when I learnt to ride my bike. I wasn't very good but then I got better and better and better'. Even after less than a term working with the ELLI principles, the Reception children refer to them during their daily activities. This was exemplified by one child who explained that 'When I went out to play and I was playing Doctor Who and I was being a pirate... I was being a *unicorn*'.

## The impact on children's learning outside school

It is evident that the children have a natural affinity toward the animal characters. They respond instinctively to a variety of situations both at school and at home and use the animals as examples of their learning. Pupils particularly enjoy taking their own class cuddly toys home and recording how they have helped them work at an activity. For example, one pupil took *Stripy Zebra* home. He explained that together 'we were *Curious Cats* when we read new things in a science book'. On a visit to home with another youngster they reported that 'me and *Stripy* built a hotel out of brick. We were *Busy Bees* and we worked in a team'.

The children successfully make links to different learning situations outside school. For instance, one pupil explained to her teacher, 'We were able to use all the animals at the weekend when we went camping'. Others talk enthusiastically about the animal characteristics when they are playing football, swimming or during ballet lessons. One pupil even used her ELLI skills on a family day out to a zoo.

Parents also learn about ELLI and it is referred to during curriculum evenings and on the school website. Hence, as Mandy explains, 'Parents learn the vocabulary with their children'. They see the animals in the classroom, displayed around the school as well as in each classroom. Additionally, ELLI is referred to in teachers' planning. Parents are keen to support the children in their connection to the animals and see it as a highlight of their children's school experience.



ELLI skills in use outside school

## Provider background

[Henleaze Infant School](#) shares a campus with Henleaze Junior School and Claremont Special School. With nine classes, three for each year group, it is larger than most infant schools. The vast majority of children are White British with below average proportions eligible for free school meals.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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