



emotional wellbeing, creativity and learning

Releasing the creative potential of children and young people



Why now?

Our children hold the keys to a future that we can only begin to imagine and yet we are their teachers. So, in an uncertain and fast changing world, how can we equip our children and young people to love learning and live their lives as a creative adventure?

There is a genuine paradigm shift happening that is challenging many of the fundamental assumptions we hold about how we educate the next generation of children. In a radically shifting landscape of social, economic and environmental needs, simply providing 'more of the same' is no longer enough.

At the same time there is a wealth of new information from a range of disciplines about human nature and, in particular, how we learn and create. When set alongside the boundless possibilities of technology this knowledge is enabling us to raise our aspirations for what education can be about. Something new is forming.

To help make ideas a reality the **nowhere** foundation has launched an education initiative called **ecl**.



Whole child: whole system

ecl is a field-based practice underpinned by two fundamental, holistic principles: whole child, whole system.

Education is about realising human possibility so our focus is on developing the whole child. Intellectual ability is important but it needs to be set alongside the development of other essential human faculties such as intuition, emotion and embodied knowing. These aspects are often overlooked in the race for academic success, despite research showing that by including them levels of attainment are actually raised.

We also recognise that by overly focusing on the individual we often miss the important impact of the physical and social contexts in which we learn. Success is synergistic with the systems and environments that form our context. We flourish best under certain conditions. So, **ecl** attends to the quality of the learning environment – to the spaces where we learn and the resources we use – and most especially to the network of relationships that support learning. Uniquely, **ecl** has developed the use of a systemic perspective to help us understand the invisible, relational forces that enhance or inhibit engagement with learning.

Why the initials **ecl**?

Our explorations to date highlight three essential aspects of effective education – **e**motional wellbeing, **c**reativity and **l**earning.

For children to flourish each area needs to be attended to and not focused on in isolation. They are interconnected, each one relying on and fostering the other.

More than that, when these aspects are held in a supportive environment there is an ease to the task of developing children and young people. As a gardener tends to the earth, water and sunlight to grow strong, healthy plants, so an educationist needs to attend to the quality of context.

Three particular areas stand out for us:

- The relationships that support learning – which certainly include both teachers and parents but need to go far beyond these two groups in order to encourage motivation and participation
- The physical space – ideally the school as a whole and classrooms within, study areas at home, but also stimulating areas within the local community
- The quality and accessibility of learning resources. These can take the form of physical learning aides but are increasingly web enabled

All six aspects of **ecl** are captured diagrammatically below:



ecl

A community of practice

ecl is a global community of progressive educationists who want to re-think education from a more holistic perspective and develop new ways of learning, teaching and creating. These teachers, leaders, parents and change-makers are at the core of a rapidly evolving practice that is transforming how we prepare the next generation for life in a very different world.

Our purpose is to co-create innovative and systemic approaches to education that serve the needs and aspirations of our children and young people in the twenty first century.

ecl's approach respects the expertise of the people who are caring for and teaching children and young people – and resources them to be creative in opening up opportunities and finding solutions that suit their specific context.

Innovative solutions are being created constantly by people within the **ecl** community: as small as new exercises for pre-school children or as wide in scope as a fresh approach to leading whole school change. Success is whatever best suits the need.

An enabling process

ecl is an invitation to journey together to find ways of helping children to engage more fully with learning and creativity. The journey is guided by a simple yet powerful enabling process that encourages us to explore, experiment and innovate. We can see the world differently, ask challenging questions, find surprising answers, delight in sharing ideas across diverse cultures and education systems – while always in community.

For those participating, **ecl** offers an exciting personal and professional journey of thinking, sensing, imagining and realising new forms: learning new ways of being and acting. There is no dominant ideology, no right answer, but instead an openness to new, often ground-breaking theoretical perspectives emerging from science, spirituality and social science.

ecl is practical. It is, at its essence, a way of inquiring and innovating collectively using a constantly evolving stream of insights, tools and approaches that enable us to see and act from the whole.

Resources to help you be creative

Each person's journey is supported by an ever increasing bank of insights, ideas, tools and processes. These are both the results of our co-creative endeavour and our resource.

On our website there are stories to inspire, and simple tools and exercises that you can use immediately with children and young people, or if you are a leader, with your colleagues.

Some of these resources have been developed further and packaged into:

- products such as an on-line QUEST or classroom learning aids
- services such as fresh approaches to peer mentoring, mediation, coaching and Learning Circles
- events including training courses, workshops and seminars

The availability of the services and events are dependent on the level of activity in a particular country. To date they are on offer in England, Scotland, South Africa and The Netherlands but this is just a start.

Watch this space!



The journey so far

In January 2002 a group of people gathered in London to explore more innovative ways of educating our children. We held a concern that in so many ways, even after unprecedented levels of funding, conventional approaches to education weren't serving the needs of our children. As parents, head teachers, teachers, academics and consultants, we could see many children increasingly disengaging from learning as they moved through the education system. We wondered if the strong emphasis on an academic education was effectively preparing them for life – and work – in the twenty first century.

Something crucial had to change. So began a quest we call **ecl**.

As a starting point, we built on work we had done in the **nowhere** foundation that explored families as living systems. We conjectured that a similar 'systemic' perspective if applied to schools could support significantly the quality of leadership, the effectiveness of teaching and most importantly children's levels of enjoyment of learning.

In the summer of 2002, we received funding from the River Rock Foundation in Maine USA, to set up a small innovation and research project in partnership with three primary schools, a secondary school and the University of London's Institute of Education. The project was called 'The Schools We Need'. Its focus was on finding better ways to support leaders in schools. It ran for over a year and its impact on the levels of performance of the participants, and the depth and breadth of ideas that began to emerge for them exceeded all expectations.

Over the next five years, with two vital sources of funding, the UK Government's Department of Education and the **nowhere** group, individuals and groups in England have continued to explore the nature of schools and families as inter-related living systems. In addition to the initial leadership focus, we have expanded our inquiry into a number of other areas such as whole school culture, developing specific aspects of the curriculum, resourcing vulnerable children, supporting behaviour change, and enhancing parenting skills.

At the core of each innovation and research project lies a simple action inquiry methodology that encourages participants to be creative with the actions they take, collect data, and make sense of what has happened.

The result has been a better understanding of all the areas of inquiry – and more. Each project has produced something new: from a simple management tool to a whole school peer mentoring process; from a classroom learning aid to an on-line curriculum in systemic practice; from a method of formulating breakthrough questions to a process that supports vulnerable children.

Eight years on, there is an ever-increasing number of people, in England, Scotland, South Africa and The Netherlands, co-creating a growing library of resources. All are designed to enhance the practice of parents, teachers, leaders and policy makers as they strive to find answers to the questions that challenge them about supporting the futures of our children.



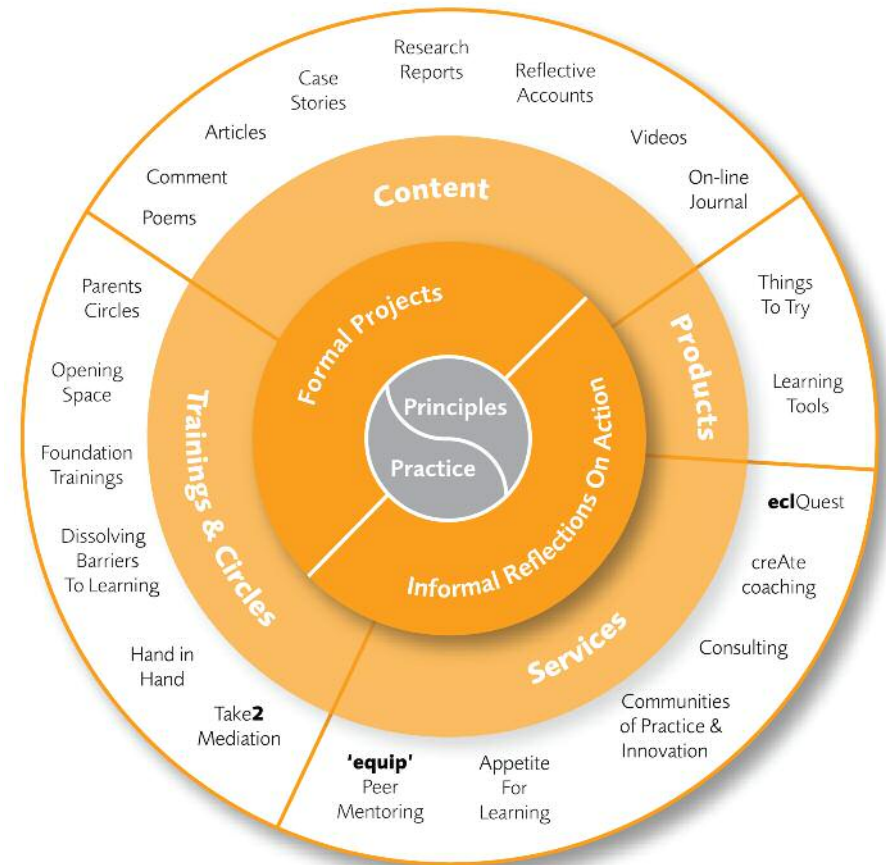
Innovation and Research

ecl is about making a real difference to the levels of achievement and creativity of children and young people. But our quest is not simply to improve what is already being done but also to help create a new practice – next practice. At the heart of **ecl** are a number of 'Innovation and Research' projects designed to stimulate exploration, experimentation and fresh thinking.

Whether formally commissioned or informal reflections on practice, professionals and parents are asking breakthrough questions, developing ideas, taking innovative action and inquiring into better ways of teaching, learning and leading. The past eight years, in many ways, has been a meandering road. We have gone where the need is most pressing and where people's energy for action is high. But each inquiry has built off the next, pushing at the edge of conventional practices to create a platform that is **ecl**.

The innovative results of these projects are of particular importance. They are producing an ever-expanding range of co-created resources in the form of stories, research accounts, things to try, articles, learning tools and new methods. All are fostering further creative activity to move the educational and caring practices on in ways that meet real and emergent needs.

Most found the approach invigorating, both personally and professionally – and the results have almost always exceeded expectations.



Eight Services

Consulting – Whether it is a curriculum, strategy or performance issue, we work with you to create solutions that suit your specific needs and aspirations. Examples include developing a peer mentoring scheme, designing new staffing structures and facilitating whole school planning processes.

Coaching – using the creAte systemic methodology, leaders focus on issues of performance, innovation or strategic change either in one to one or team settings. The need might stem from a desire to support a new person in post, design a school-based mediation process or enable a head teacher to test ideas for a change strategy.

Training & Circles – for leaders, teachers, parents and students focusing on improving their practice through learning and taking action. The focus of these circles is on learning using a mix of face to face contact alongside an innovative approach to on-line peer support.

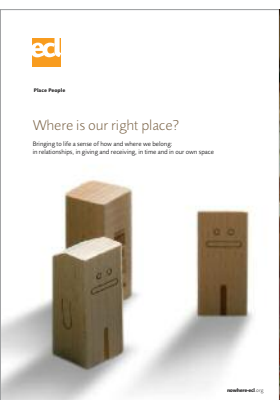
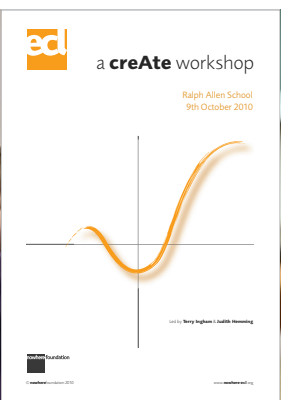
Dissolving Barriers to Learning – a carefully managed process to support teachers and parents who want to explore and resolve 'what is really at issue' for vulnerable children experiencing difficulty. Schools can create a systemic (whole picture) map of critical behavioural, attainment and attendance issues and gain fresh insight.

eclQuest – an on-line curriculum of 40 exercises that enable individuals to learn the fundamentals of systems thinking, embodied knowing and collective creativity and to explore systemic principles with their class groups, families and teams.

Learning Tools – these are practical learning resources that demonstrate the dynamism of the classroom as a living system. Made from high quality wood, card and cloth, they are designed to foster a sense of mutual responsibility amongst pupils and their teachers.

Innovation and Research – all our work encourages innovation on which we ask participants to reflect and share their thoughts. We also undertake long term, commissioned innovation and research projects to develop and test ideas in the school and home.

Community of Practice and Innovation – A growing network of educationists who want to deepen their ability to work creatively and systemically in collaboration with others in countries around the world – and use their work to enhance the ecl initiative. Practitioners come from a wide range of backgrounds including teachers, academics, parents, child welfare professionals, psychotherapists, coaches and consultants.





Where next?

The field of education has reached an inflection point. At the same time, a deeper more holistic and systemic approach to the practice of leading, teaching and learning is emerging. Many thought leaders and writers inside education but also, importantly, in other related disciplines, are reaching similar conclusions.

So we are asking, how can we help these new ways of thinking, creating and working together move forward to the benefit of educating the next generation? What and where next?

Our vision is to build an even stronger community of individuals and organisations that help each other to connect to deeper sources of inspiration. Together they can work creatively, intentionally and collectively as they inquire and innovate 'next practice' in all aspects of education – and in all areas of the world.

We aspire to create a global network of hubs and communities whose function is to act as holding spaces to support an infrastructure for an emerging movement that integrates science, consciousness, and profound educational change. These communities of people will be supported by web technologies as well as by face-to-face events and services, as they explore new approaches to enhancing the wellbeing, development and creativity of their children and young people.

This is **ecl**.

To learn more about **ecl**, email us at jane.james@nowhere-ecl.org

To learn more about **ecl**'s work with students, teachers, parents, and schools, visit www.nowhere-ecl.org

To learn more about the non-profit work of the **nowhere** foundation, visit www.nowherefoundation.org

To learn more about **nowhere** visit www.now-here.com

