

## The Curriculum Story Project

# 2. A framework for thinking skills

This pack provides examples of how settings and schools have created and adapted thinking skills frameworks to enable more co-design with, rather than just for students.

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# A framework for students to design their own thinking

**Interdisciplinary Learning works best of all when planning is collaborative, and that can include planning alongside learners themselves. In turn, though, that co-design demands greater clarity around the thinking skills we want to see learners use. Those thinking skills are best taught, rather than caught.**

Learners need to keep developing new thinking skills to process information, solve problems and make decisions. Thinking skills are learnable and teachable. And that means teachers and learners, together, can organise them, and ensure the right skills for the learning we want to undertake.

A thinking skills framework gives practitioners a solid foundation for organising thinking skills alongside discipline-specific skills and knowledge.

## Crown Primary School, Inverness

**A common language of thinking skills is shaping the habits for lifelong learning.**

**Crown Primary is developing a thinking skills framework to foster independent and self-motivated learners. The framework helps the learners develop thinking skills and attributes that make real connections to employability, the world of work and new personalised learner pathways within their school.**

Crown Primary wanted to make concrete connections between the thinking skills required to improve their IDL projects and the skills development advice from Developing the Young Workforce. Therefore, the school invested in co-planning time to allow its teachers to translate the SDS Meta-Skills advice into a meaningful context for their school.

The school began its journey towards building a thinking skills curriculum from an inclusive education perspective. The school valued the variety of skills the learners had and wanted them to be able to make positive contributions within a collaborative setting. The aim was for the learners to be able to recognise other skills, use the language of skills, and to be able to apply them across different learning experiences. Therefore, a skills framework was created.

***“Not planning skills as clearly as we might plan content means that an individual teacher might be strong in one area (creativity) but not another (critical analysis), so it gets left to chance or left off the programme altogether.”***

Cat MacKay, P6/7, Crown Primary School

## Create a common language to label skills, then add some structure

The teachers have recognised that a common language is essential for thinking skills. The learners need to know how to identify and label skills before learning them and applying them. The school has looked carefully at key vocabulary, involving learners in the design process of the skills

framework to make sure children understand it. This has significantly changed the dialogue of learning and skills in the classroom setting.

The school has created a framework for the structure of thinking skills, but it is not a checklist. Flexibility and teacher autonomy is encouraged, allowing teachers and learners to adapt it in their class where necessary. The process began by creating a learner pathway for skills at one stage and then building it up bit by bit.

### Start with the language of learners themselves

Crown Primary has emphasised the importance of learners reflecting and documenting how and why they use thinking skills. For example, when doing a social studies lesson, they may identify a skill they wish to use, like creativity. The learner reflects on what they already know about that skill and their specific attributes to be creative. Learners are then empowered to research and plan tasks that help them build those skills.

The common language of thinking skills is not a stand-alone exercise in Crown Primary. They have a curriculum guide so that new staff members have everything they need to know in one place.

The skills framework connects to the school values and is embedded in the school improvement plan and profile.

***“This is part of an equality agenda. So we’ve got to ask what the purpose of learning is: we’re getting kids ready to thrive in the workplace.”***

Hannah Matheson, P6/7, Crown Primary School

### Key features of thinking skills frameworks at Crown Primary School, Inverness

- Invest in collaborative professional learning to plan and design prototypes for skills
- Use a design cycle to review the frameworks regularly with the team and learners
- Teach a common language of skills that can be applied across the school
- Break down the progression of skills across the stages and unique contexts for IDL projects in the school
- Make direct connections with the world of work and lifelong learning
- Empower learners in the process through learner reflections and documenting their achievements in their learner profiles

### Resources

Skills Development Framework: How-To Guide, Crown Primary School - [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1e\\_z4BRQJKK8\\_zmGiB6xA7pdip6ZEUxDza5rmqCoRyY/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1e_z4BRQJKK8_zmGiB6xA7pdip6ZEUxDza5rmqCoRyY/edit)

Skills Development Framework, Crown Primary School - [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zXxRYXXALQh7y\\_H-oyZ8tpLtdZx0s7MghWybZxdJb-g/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zXxRYXXALQh7y_H-oyZ8tpLtdZx0s7MghWybZxdJb-g/edit)

Developing the Young Workforce  
<https://www.dyw.scot/>

## Wyndford Nursery, Glasgow

**A challenge to diversify learning environments provoked powerful thinking skills between educators and learners.**

**IDL looks and feels distinctive in an early years environment. It starts with the child and is centred around contexts and provocations for learning. Wyndford Nursery created new contexts for IDL by co-designing an outdoor learning curriculum.**

Outdoor learning was the catalyst for encouraging staff dialogue and challenging perceptions of learning. The impact of this change allowed all staff to see themselves as ‘educators’ and authentically include learners in the curriculum planning and evolution of the nursery learning environments. In addition, powerful thinking from the learners became evident in the influence and traces they left on the co-design of these new learning environments.

### An approach to educators out of their comfort zone

Wyndford Nursery used thinking skills to provoke enquiry-led dialogue and questions between educators and young children. Developing an IDL context for outdoor learning challenged educators and learners to reimagine the nursery’s existing learning environments. A ‘nature nursery’ was envisaged as a creative way to include more children in deeper learning. The nursery leadership used the idea to gently nudge educators out of their comfort zone towards co-construction of learning alongside children. For example, children and educators would go to the nursery’s woods and create fantastic provocations for learning from very little - the outdoor context fuelled discussion and observations of the world around the children.

But when the educators came back to the building, they reverted to default positions, where educators and children were drawn to use the array of ‘stuff’ (materials and resources) in the nursery rather than starting with the child’s interests.

So an effort was made to develop a more collaborative approach to professional learning, that filters their focus entirely through the child’s experience. The nursery staff made decisions and ideas moulded together and built around a shared image of the child and constructs of childhood.



## The nursery with no resources: a provocation to fuel learner thinking

The core elements of Wyndford Nursery's thinking skills framework are **provocations for learning**, **enquiry**, and **storytelling**. And these three elements came together to move learners themselves out of their comfort zone, and move away from the educator-led approaches we'd seen before.

When, one night, the fairies came and packed away all the 'stuff' from the nursery, the reaction from the learners was terrific. Some learners were annoyed; they wanted to have the key to get their resources back. Others felt intrigued and excited about what was to come and everything in between.

As a result, a culture of story-making emerged with educators and learners shaping and mapping the pathway together. Educators and learners primarily used their imaginations. In turn, this led to powerful enquiry-led thinking and questions.

**Where is this going? What are the opportunities? What are we observing? What connections can be made?**

## What works for learner thinking is essential for educator thinking, too

The provocation and critical thinking focused educators and learners on using thinking skills to reimagine the learning environments inside and outside the nursery. The emphasis on using shared learning walls shifted from celebrating the finished learning product to the messy learning process. So, the setting wanted to focus on thinking about thinking and a visual method of metacognition for learners.

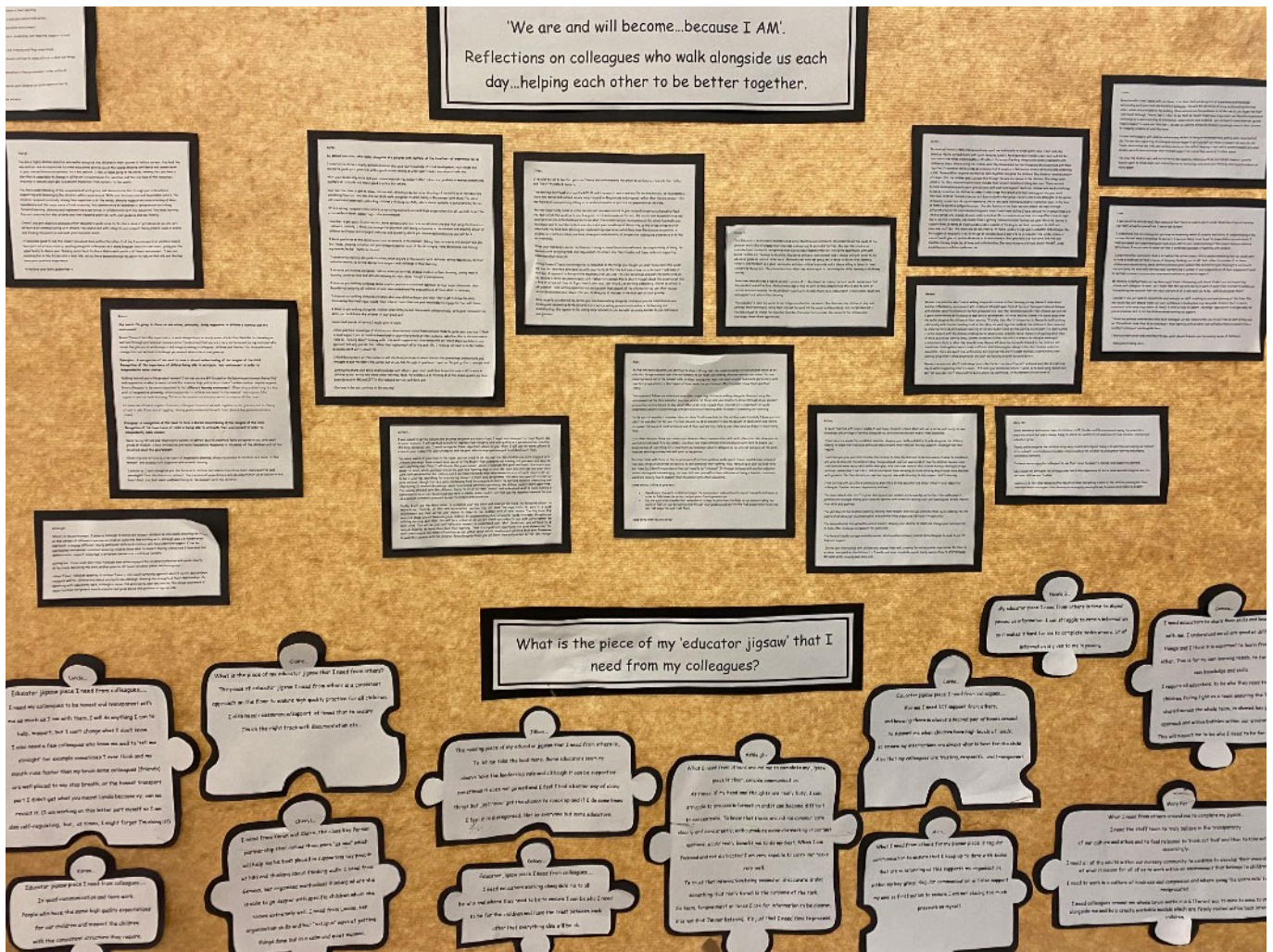
Thinking skills helped redefine Wyndford Nursery's shared image of the educator. By investing time in collaborative professional learning, they could ask fundamental questions:

What did they need from each other?  
Who are we?  
What is our job?

There was a shift in professional values expressed like this: 'Here is what I can do and how I connect with others in the team.' They changed the common language from 'key workers' to 'educators'. Those who took ownership of that title grew into it. The team had been framing their work around the six principles of nurture groups, that is:

- Children's learning is understood developmentally.
- The classroom offers a safe base.
- Nurture is important for the development of self-esteem.
- Language is understood as a vital means of communication.
- All behaviour is communication.
- Transitions are significant in the lives of children.





What they came to realise was that the six principles of nurture could be understood as being just as relevant frame for adults' thinking as they are for children.

***“We wrote stories to each other to give an idea of how peers help each other do more together than they can do alone. We notice what each other is doing and what we bring to the table. We’d hit on peer mentoring - this is who I understand you to be and what you need other people to bring to what you have.”***  
 Mary Pat Mac Connell, Head of Centre.

## Make thinking visible from the very start

Wyndford Nursery points to the significant impact of thinking skills on learners. The skill of thinking about thinking, and a child-centred focus, encourages learners at all levels to think 'out loud' together. Learners now see educators as a resource for learning where they didn't before. Also, educators now understand their role in supporting children to become experts in their own learning and how to use different learning environments as a key resource for provoking learning.

***“Learners know that the nursery is theirs. They visualise their plan for the morning, are active participants in the environment and have the power to change the environment day to day. They leave their traces of powerful thinking, where before they were hidden.”***

Mary Pat Mac Connell, Head of Centre.

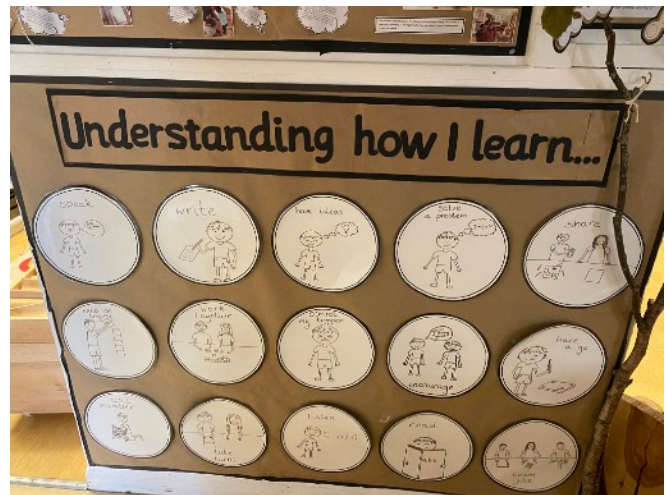
Many learners have individual needs that benefit from the newly decluttered learning environment and the added opportunities from outdoor learning. However, those inclusive conditions work well for all learners. It enables all those learners, creating time and space for all learners to consistently meet challenges in learning as their potential is exposed.

***“It's not effortless to get to this point, but it looks and feels effortless when you're working with young people.”***

Mary Pat Mac Connell, Head of Centre.

## Key features of thinking skills at Wyndford Nursery:

- Open-ended environments such as outdoor learning are vital contexts for realising IDL in nursery settings
- Investment of time and space for staff collaborative learning
- Learning provocations prompted thinking skills and subsequent questions and dialogue
- Thinking skills are enquiry-led and collaborative
- Thinking skills focus on inclusive practice and the child at the centre of the learning process
- Thinking skills amplify 'thinking about thinking' and share the messy process of learning
- Visual wall displays can chart the thinking skills process
- Thinking skills are at the centre of strong collaborative professional learning





# Discussion Prompts

You may wish to use these discussion prompts with your team or create an interdisciplinary learning session with colleagues from across your setting. Set aside three sessions to tackle each question in turn - use the time between sessions to research, experiment and probe further.

## Session 1: How are thinking skills developed in your context?

For example, do you have a skills progression framework like Crown Primary or an enquiry-led pedagogy like Wyndford Nursery?

## Session 2: How can you develop thinking skills in your setting by using existing core resources like the Four Capacities and Skills Development Scotland's Meta-Skills?

For example, what are the pros and cons of using a common framework across the same setting? How do you plan for flexibility and sustainability?

## Session 3: What impact would the development of thinking skills have on the learners in your setting?

For example, can you think of specific learners or year groups that would benefit from this approach and why?

# Next Steps

## Tell us how it went:

On social media, using the hashtag #curriculumstories  
By email [curriculuminnovation@educationscotland.gov.scot](mailto:curriculuminnovation@educationscotland.gov.scot)

**Education Scotland**

Denholm House  
Almondvale Business Park  
Almondvale Way  
Livingston EH54 6GA

**T** +44 (0)131 244 4330

**E** [enquiries@education.scotland.gov.scot](mailto:enquiries@education.scotland.gov.scot)

[www.education.gov.scot](http://www.education.gov.scot)