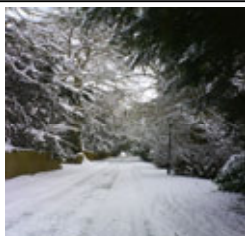




# CRITICAL SKILLS PROGRAMME Newsletter

## Welcome to Issue 4 of the CSP Newsletter



Hi Everyone

The snow here has been amazing - this is my village - however there are now sure signs of Spring! I've been looking after the birds while there was a foot of snow on the ground and watching the blue tits pecking through the foil on the milk bottles. Robins have that skill too, although you rarely see them. This is because tits are flocking birds, living together in groups and transferring their learning one to another. Robins though, are solitary birds, fiercely territorial and chase off other robins on their patch. Hence they keep their knowledge to themselves (just call me Bill Oddie!). Teachers can fall

into one of these two categories. Happily, our community consists of flocking birds so keep on spreading the word and transforming British education!

Best Wishes, Jo (Programme Manager, England)



### Quote of the Week

What a fantastic piece of professional development. There are only very few occasions when I have been thoroughly motivated and inspired by courses I have attended - this is one of those occasions.

Thank you for your fabulous skill advice and support!

Julie Wood, Hollybush Primary School, North Somerset

### ONE EXTRA PAGES OF NEWSLETTER THIS ISSUE

We have decided to make this months issue of the newsletter 3 pages instead of the usual 2 as we have 2 excellent testimonials, one from Mason Minnitt, Director of Barrow Excellence Cluster Partnership in Barrow-in-Furness and one from Rachel Smith, Deputy Head of Nunthorpe Secondary School in Middlesbrough. They have both kindly agreed to share with us their experience and knowledge of Critical Skills and how it has made a huge difference to their school and organisation.

We have also received news from Ian Humpage from Aberdare about how Critical Skills is taking off in Aberdare, the full email is featured on page 3.

### THE CRITICAL SKILLS PROGRAMME IN FURNESS, CUMBRIA

The CS programme was introduced in Barrow-in-Furness in 2002, by the Barrow Community Learning Partnership (BCLP) team. CSP focuses on the essential skills and dispositions which enable learners to learn more effectively – and teachers to teach more effectively – and was empowering for both BCLP primary and secondary schools. The flexible and adaptable nature of the programme meant that it became a highly effective and inclusive CPD model which engaged practitioners from early years through to post-16, and positively influenced area-wide curriculum and leadership development programmes. More recently CSP institutes have also included Children's Services colleagues. This move has supported development of a shared informed language about how best to nurture and sustain a community culture in which successful learners – who are also confident individuals and responsible citizens – will thrive.

A significant number of professionals in Barrow have been enthused or re-enthused by participation in CSP programmes. For example one primary head has not only transformed her school but also now works with QCA on the development of the new KS2 curriculum. She attributes her personal success and that of her school to the effective application of CSP to learning, teaching and leadership. Another example is the BCLP team member who moved on to the post of

14–19 Development Manager, and through judicious application of CSP principles and practice led the process of securing five Diploma lines in Furness for September, 2008 – one of only 10 sites nationally to achieve such success. In his new role as an educational consultant he is currently providing CPD for secondary and post-16 colleagues as they develop the Personal Learning and Thinking Skills curriculum – using a bespoke CSP institute.

Given the effectiveness of CSP as a vehicle for building a community, establishing shared and understood ground-rules, promoting an aspirational, inclusive and experiential approach to learning, teaching and leadership, I can fully appreciate its usefulness in setting the context for success in any situation where new teams come together for the first time. However it is equally successful as a vehicle for re-engaging jaded colleagues, and building symbiotic partnerships across phases and between schools, partners and the wider community.

The early investment is large – but, as we have discovered in Furness, is extremely good value for money. Furness is now very well placed to build further and sustain educational outcomes which have improved faster than Cumbrian and national averages. At the same time colleagues from across the phases of education have access to the same professional tool-kit, and share an informed language and professional culture focused on achievement and how all learners can raise it.

Mason Minnitt, Director, BECP.

## CRITICAL SKILLS AT NUNTHORPE SCHOOL NOVEMBER 2008

During the academic year of 2006-2007, our Senior Leadership Team (SLT) identified through student questionnaires, parental feedback, staff feedback and lesson observations that we had some "ethos" issues in parts of the school. In summary it was felt that mutual respect was all too often missing in many interactions and dealings within school and that this was a definite area of development for us.

After extensive discussions and considerable research, we decided to implement a profound, root and branch improvement across our pastoral and CGS systems through creating a Vertical Tutoring (VT) system and a House re-structure from September 2007. As this was to be one of the single most radical changes the school had experienced in recent history, it was decided that this opportunity for wholesale change should be maximised by introducing a new philosophy for learning and relationship building. As a member of our SLT, as well as an experienced CSP co-ordinator, I suggested that CSP might provide the tools for change that we so clearly needed.

After discussions with the Critical Skills Management Team I negotiated a programme that would facilitate having all staff within the school trained over a 12 month period. The format was 3 full days in September 2007; 2 full days in January 2008; and a final day in September 2008. This model broadly followed the national training model of 3 days part A and 3 days part B. The team of trainers were briefed on the school's specific need and focus - Ethos and school culture.

By introducing CSP at the same time as VT we embraced an opportunity to radically change the culture of our school; this we have managed to do. We have fundamentally altered the way our school feels for staff and students alike.

### How has our school changed?

1. School discipline procedures are built upon a foundation of "Full Value Contracts" (FVC) within all lessons - including pastoral and CGS sessions.
2. 11-16 Student Planners have an FVC outlined in them.
3. Vertical tutor groups are based upon "Home Teams" with students from all 11-16 year groups working together on projects, challenges and quizzes - often supervised and led by Sixth Form students.
4. Challenges are used regularly to engage students within tutorial time, thus releasing the staff to undertake 1-2-1 conversations with students.
5. The use of carefully designed challenges has raised inter-house competition and House identity to a healthy level within the school. Students are proud to "Belong" to a House.
6. Our staff regularly use "Circle time" to check in with students and to monitor standards with the school in a less threatening way.
7. The use of community builders within tutor time is extensive; they have improved student and staff attitude to tutorial time and have enabled the building of positive relationships within the tutor groups.
8. There are distinctive House areas with a very real physical identity.
9. Damage to student lockers since Houses took physical ownership of areas of the school has reduced dramatically.

### How do we know things have really improved?

We currently have HMI/OFSTED inspector working with our SLT on our school wide self evaluation improvement. The same inspector first worked with us back in the Autumn of 2006 when we had a "traditional" pastoral system based upon year groups. In our first area inspection of one of our 5 houses

this term, the inspector's findings were hugely positive with the overall judgement of the House to be 'Good with Outstanding features' - those features being leadership and care and support. Specific reference was made to "Secondary staff engaging with circle time very effectively - most unusual in a secondary setting - and very high quality", "relationships within tutor lessons were very positive", "the [pastoral] curriculum is a strength" (predominantly based upon CSP challenges). "Student responsibility is a strength" - itself an area of significant weakness for us 3 years ago.

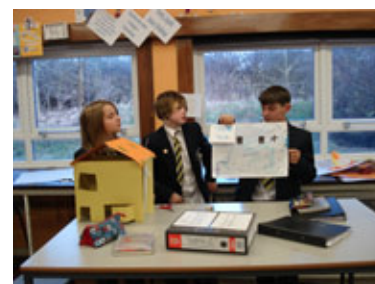
CSP is not confined to the pastoral system as all staff were trained and therefore we are seeing CSP across the school in curriculum areas.

1. All staff use "Quality Audience" to achieve focus from the students.
2. CSP challenges are used for all KS3 Science homework tasks.
3. Independent learning is developing across the school with students teaching each other after undertaking the process of a CSP Scenario Challenge.
4. AFL is improving as students become more confident in self and peer assessment.
5. Tools like the Carousel, Fox Tool, Brainstorming, Huddle/Sweep, Thumb Tool and many more are now common place within curriculum lessons.
6. Teachers are giving process feedback as well as product feedback by utilising tools like the "post-it note" feedback and checklists.

To continue our CSP journey I offer twilight sessions for further development of CSP skills to all staff at regular times through the year and all of SLT and our middle leaders undertake "Learning Walks" where we are giving specific feedback to Curriculum Directors and Pastoral Directors on the evidence for CSP as we walk and visit lessons.

I am wholly convinced that the changes we are experiencing in our school are rooted strongly within the CSP training and ethos the staff have received.

Rachel Smith, Deputy Head, Nunthorpe Secondary School, Middlesbrough





# SEMINAR

27-29 JULY 2009

The Summer seminar is being held in Leicester this year from July 27-29. The programme looks really exciting with a space challenger mission at the National Space Centre as part of our time together. We need to know final numbers by mid April. If you would like to attend then please email Sue at [suemh20@msn.com](mailto:suemh20@msn.com) to book your place.



## PHOTO OPPORTUNITY AND FEEDBACK

We would love you to send us any stories or photos (with permissions) you have of Critical Skills in action at your school, so that we could use them for future newsletters or the website. Please send stories and photos to [marie@criticalskills.co.uk](mailto:marie@criticalskills.co.uk)

## STOP PRESS!

### CRITICAL SKILLS OPEN TRAINING EVENTS FOR 2009

If you would like further information or booking forms for the following institutes, please contact:  
**Marie Matty (England and Wales) on 01455 840066 or email [marie@criticalskills.co.uk](mailto:marie@criticalskills.co.uk)**  
**Maria Hybszer (Scotland) on 07854 414512 or email [maria@criticalskills.co.uk](mailto:maria@criticalskills.co.uk)**

#### LEVEL 1 TRAINING

Level 1A - 09-14A	18-20 May 2009
Level 1B - 09-14B	5-7 October 2009 Kings Manor, Edinburgh
Level 1A - 09-15A	30 March - 1 April 2009
Level 1B - 09-15B	1-3 June 2009 BVSC Conference Centre Birmingham
Level 1A - 09-16A	8-10 July 2009
Level 1B - 09-16B	7-9 October 2009 Manchester Cathedral Visitor Centre

#### LEVEL 2 TRAINING

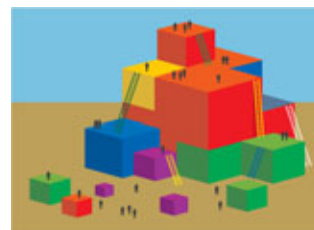
Level 2 - 09-L2.6	25-27 March 2009 The Malmaison Hotel Birmingham
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**IF YOU WOULD LIKE ANY INFORMATION ON CLOSED INSTITUTES, INSET DAYS, TASTER DAYS OR ANY OTHER TRAINING WHICH YOU FEEL WOULD BE BENEFICIAL TO YOUR SCHOOL OR ORGANISATION, PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO CONTACT US.**

## COMMUNITY BUILDER

### RAIN/RAINFOREST GAME (10 MINUTES)



#### Why Play it?

- To demonstrate the combined power of the whole team, whilst requiring everyone's commitment for success.
- To develop concentration skills and full value contract.

#### How to Play

- Everyone sits in a circle.
- The facilitator makes a rhythm pattern.
- The person to the facilitator's right starts the same pattern, and so on round the circle.
- When everyone is performing the pattern, the leader changes the pattern and the pattern then changes one individual at a time.
- Make sure the players copy the exact volume and tempo to build up a real thundering rainstorm by starting quiet and increasing the volume, tempo and intensity of the sound.

#### Possible Debrief

- What did you have to know, do, be like to succeed at that?
- Would that have worked the same with a smaller team?
- How did you rely on other people in that game?
- What modifications can you think of for this game?

#### Why not...

- Take children into an imaginary rainforest by making the noises of things they would see and hear, which they copy around the circle, e.g. rustle of leaves, bird sounds - build up to a rainstorm.

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE COMMUNITY BUILDERS, WE NOW HAVE A FANTASTIC NEW COMMUNITY BUILDER PACK AVAILABLE TO PURCHASE AT A SPECIAL PRICE OF £10.00 (UNTIL 31.3.09). ATTACHED TO THE NEWSLETTER IS A LEAFLET WITH DETAILS ON ALL OUR BOOKS AND POSTERS FOR SALE AND INFORMATION ON HOW TO PURCHASE THEM.**

#### Email sent in by Ian Humpage from Aberdare

Just to let you know that the Aberdare Cluster are delivering a two day insight as to how Critical Skills have been introduced into our schools and the benefits it has brought to our LEA in February. I have a whole school teaching and learning inset day in February at which 5 staff are delivering various topics to other staff including community builders, check ins, rubrics, chevalier grids. We have more staff starting their Critical Skills journey next month. The sceptics are starting to become a very, very small minority.

#### CSP PROGRAMME MANAGERS - CONTACT INFORMATION

Pippa Leslie (England & Channel Islands) - [pippa@criticalskills.co.uk](mailto:pippa@criticalskills.co.uk)  
Andrew Pearce (Wales) - [andrew@criticalskills.co.uk](mailto:andrew@criticalskills.co.uk)

Jo Morrison (England) - [jo@criticalskills.co.uk](mailto:jo@criticalskills.co.uk)  
Maggie Clark (Scotland) - [maggie@criticalskills.co.uk](mailto:maggie@criticalskills.co.uk)

**DON'T FORGET TO CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE: [www.criticalskills.co.uk](http://www.criticalskills.co.uk)**