

# How can visual cues support EYFS children to articulate their next steps in learning?

AUTHOR

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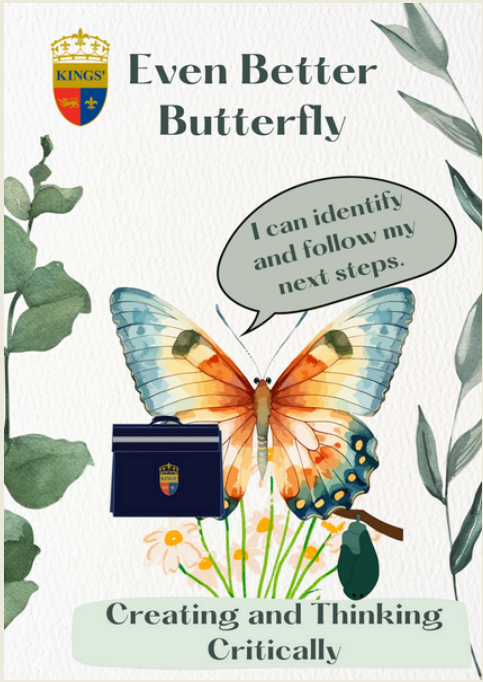
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*A small-scale, mixed methods study using semi-structured interviews to explore the role of visual cues and the implementation of a pedagogically constructed Learning Character in supporting EYFS children to articulate their next steps.*



## Introduction

### Background Literature

In a study grounded in metacognition, Hendy and Whitebread (2005, p. 56) state that "children exhibit significant potential for independent learning when provided with appropriate support and opportunities."

### School Context

Two years ago, I implemented 7 pedagogically constructed Learning Characters in our EYFS to support children to understand the Characteristics for Effective Learning, in line with the Development Matters Framework (Department for Education, 2023).

Our feedback from our KHDA inspection 2023-2024 had the following development point: **"Provide more guidance when students assess their own work and that of their classmates."** (Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), 2024).

## Research Action

This action research study was embedded in everyday classroom practice and aimed to enhance children's ability to reflect on and communicate their next steps. Through the introduction of the 'Even Better Butterfly' Learning Character, followed by visual cue prompts, the effects were monitored by a targeted intervention over a period of twelve weeks. Interviews were conducted at three key points: before, during, and after the intervention, to capture longitudinal changes in children's language, understanding, and autonomy.

Interviews were conducted on three separate occasions with a longitudinal element. The below questions were considered:

1. How many Independent Uploads does the child currently have on Seesaw?
2. What do you know about the Learning Characters?
3. Does the child currently mention any next steps in Independent Uploads?
4. Looking at three samples of anonymised children's work, how could we improve these to make them even better?

## Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods, small-scale longitudinal approach. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with three confident, motivated learners (two female, one male), selected for their diverse learning interests. Both quantitative and qualitative questions were used, with responses recorded and transcribed by the class teacher. The study is grounded in a constructivist methodology, valuing children's voice and agency in their learning journeys.

According to the research, educators should be supporting learners to reflect on their experiences as this helps them to construct their learner identities and take ownership of their educational journeys. (Carr and Lee, 2012).

## Results

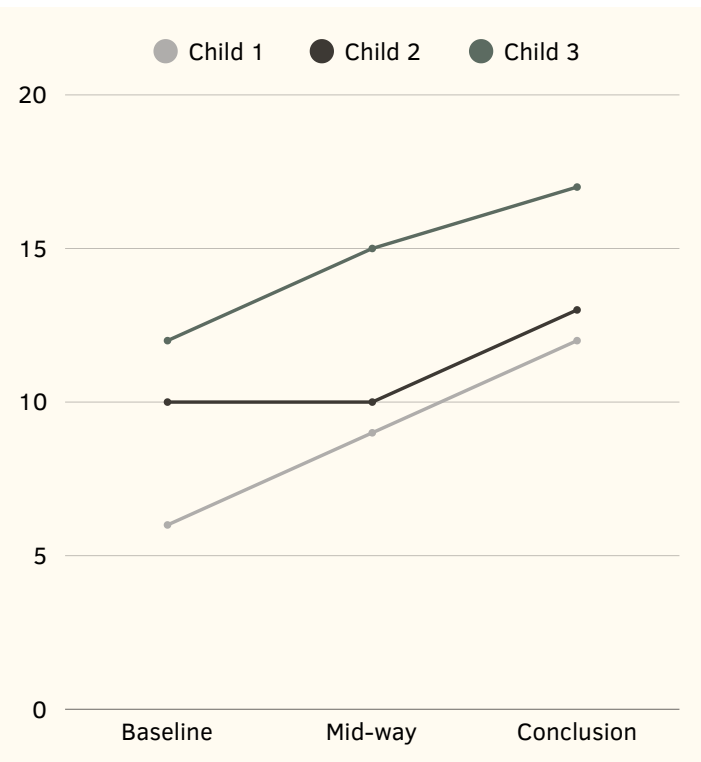
Findings suggest that visual prompts and the introduction of 'Even Better Butterfly', alongside teacher modelling and structured reflection time, enhanced children's ability to discuss their learning and progress. They were able to suggest next steps for their own learning and that of other children.

### Key Findings

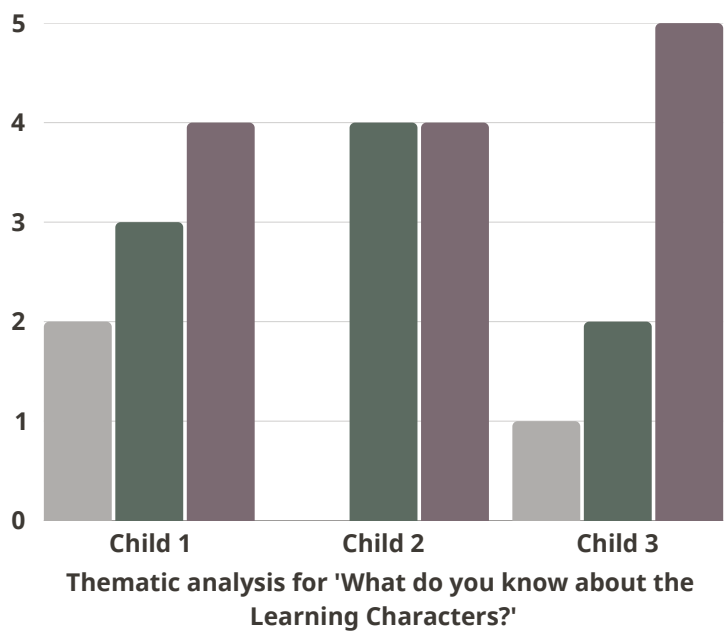
- **Increased Learner Autonomy:** By the conclusion stage, all children could independently mention next steps in their Seesaw uploads. However, Child 2 plateaued between Baseline and Mid-way, suggesting some children may need longer exposure to such strategies before showing progress (Carr & Lee, 2012).
- **Role of Pedagogy:** 'Even Better Butterfly' was widely used in children's discussions, reinforcing the value of narrative-based learning tools in fostering engagement and self-assessment (Carr, 2001). However, it was unclear whether children relied more on visual prompts or teacher-led scaffolding to articulate their next steps.
- **Enhanced Communication and Language Development:** Children's vocabulary and ability to discuss learning-related concepts improved over time, supporting research that structured dialogue aids language acquisition (Fitzhenry & Murphy, 2019; Ewing et al., 2016).



## Analysis



*How many Independent Uploads does the child currently have on Seesaw?*



This thematic analysis refers to the number of times the following themes and codes were referenced during this interview question:

- "learn" or "learning"
- "explain" or "show"
- "even better" or "butterfly"
- "add"
- "purple pen"
- "fix"
- "try again"
- "improve"

## Research Questions

What is the impact of introducing a new Learning Character, 'Even Better Butterfly'?

Do visual and narrative supports enhance children's ability to reflect on their progress and communicate their learning goals more effectively?

How can we further improve self and peer-assessment in the EYFS?

## References

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## Conclusion

### Discussion

All three children mentioned the Learning Character, 'Even Better Butterfly' and themes relating to this, an increased number of times when sharing their learning. By the conclusion stage, all were able to provide more specific feedback to a friend.

### Implications for Teachers, Students, and Schools

- Students benefit from having structured tools that help them reflect on their learning.
- Schools should consider embedding visual cues and self-assessment strategies into their assessment approaches to build early metacognitive skills.

### Limitations and Future Research

- Small sample size and a focus on confident, highly-motivated learners limit generalisability.
- Future studies could compare visual cues vs. teacher modelling to identify the most effective strategy.
- Future studies could investigate the long-term effects in a year, to investigate whether early exposure leads to sustained independent learning habits.

### Reflections

The Learning Character, 'Even Better Butterfly' has since been rolled-out across all six FS2 classes. Next academic year, the children in Year 1 will use this alongside the other characters to support their learning conversations. Partaking in action research has encouraged me to be more specific and concise when implementing a new initiative, in order to measure the impact effectively.