



'I would always find some useful idea or investigation that I could take back to my classroom'

WHAT HAS THE ASE DONE FOR ME?

Lisa Newton, an ASE Primary Science Committee member, considers the benefit she has gained from joining and taking an active part in the ASE

Before 2007 I knew very little about the Association for Science Education (ASE), other than that it held a conference every year in January. Time and time again at coordinator meetings the science adviser would encourage us to become members of the ASE. 'What's the point?' were my initial thoughts, 'What will it do for me?' With a limited school budget, I was very reluctant to spend part of my science allocation on joining an association when I could be using it to buy much-needed classroom resources!

In 2007, however, all this changed as it was the year I became a primary science

Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) and won one of the AstraZeneca Science Teaching Trust (now the Primary Science Teaching Trust) Teacher of the Year Awards. The award was presented to me at the ASE conference in Liverpool and as part of my prize I received a year's free membership, so beginning my relationship with the ASE.

During that year, I slowly began to realise what the ASE had to offer me, as a primary practitioner. Every few months, a copy of *Primary Science* would drop through my letterbox and, as I flicked through the pages, I would always find some useful idea or investigation that I could take back to my classroom or share with a colleague at one of the schools I was working with. The culmination of that year saw me attending the ASE conference yet again, but this time for a full four days. During that time, I attended numerous workshops and talks, explored all of the

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suggestions and resources. In return, I was able to bring my classroom experience to the table and help identify the types of event we needed to put on to support other teachers. Even at this level, the networking and sharing of ideas had impact.

As my involvement with the ASE strengthened and I began to know more and more members, the opportunity to join the ASE Primary Science Committee arose and I leapt at the chance: if the ASE had made such a difference for me so far, how much more could it do for me if I increased my engagement? The timing coincided with the Government's decision to end the AST category and with my personal decision to move out of London and up to Cumbria – what did I have to lose?

At that time, I was worried about the future of science in the primary curriculum and how I was going to be able to ensure I was kept up to date with developments in primary science. How could I make sure the children I was working with were receiving the best possible science experiences? In schools, we were in curriculum limbo, unsure of whether or not science was still a core subject because of the apparent conflict between head teachers' ideas and what the Government was saying. Budgets had been cut and, as a result of the science standard assessment tests (SATs) being abolished and in the face of continuing pressure to improve maths and literacy results, it was fair to say that science was not a pressing concern for many head teachers. I was dismayed about the prospects for primary science and was really worried that I would no longer have access to training and resources or have any influence on how

science should be taught in the classroom.

The work of the ASE Primary Science Committee

At the Primary Science Committee meetings I was relieved that I was finally able to air my concerns to an audience that listened. More than ever, it was essential that teachers had access to high-quality training and resources and I quickly learnt that these were high priorities for the committee. For example, as I started my committee membership, several other members were just finalising the publication *It's not fair – or is it?* (Turner *et al.*, 2011), a practical and easy-to-use resource that looks closely at progression in all areas of scientific enquiry. It particularly focuses on the types of enquiry that we often forget about as science investigations. I was very encouraged by this because, not only did I have a useful resource that I could take back to school and share with my colleagues, I was also confident that there were people out there who were clearly passionate about ensuring science was taught well in schools.

The Primary Science Committee also worked hard to raise the profile of primary science at the ASE annual conference by changing the programming of the primary workshops and lectures to ensure that they had a much bigger presence and were more accessible for primary members. This was hugely successful and the primary programme has now become a much more significant part of the conference.

We were also able to have significant input into the new National Curriculum for England, as we were asked to comment on the initial draft and make suggestions. The ASE is clearly a respected body and has the power to really influence Government decisions. Not only did we make suggestions, but these were listened to! Key members of the Primary Science Committee were directly involved with the Government reviews of the science curriculum, ensuring that enquiry/working scientifically became the key focus – as it

exhibition stands and networked with like-minded teachers and professionals. I left the conference with my head crammed with ideas on how to take primary science forward, not only in my school, but within other schools in the London borough where I worked.

Becoming an active ASE member

My AST line manager, Des Dunne (an active member of the ASE), encouraged me to attend some of the events put on by my local ASE section in north-east London and, before I knew it, I was nominated and elected as the committee secretary!

For three years I attended regional meetings, fed back information to my local section and helped to organise a number of different local events. These were well attended and provided good-quality professional development to other teachers.

In turn, this began to influence my own science practice back in the classroom: I was able to see the 'bigger picture' and, through attending the meetings and networking closely with other ASE professionals, I found that I was more knowledgeable about my subject and how best it should be led in school. At my fingertips, I had a group of people who I could turn to for ideas,

should. Similarly, in the time I have been on the committee, we have also put forward a response, in partnership with other bodies, to the initial consultation on assessment, which we know is a key concern for primary teachers in England. This was informed by the Nuffield Project on assessment in primary school science, led by Professor Wynne Harlen, with Jane Turner (curriculum adviser to the Standards and Testing Agency for KS2 science) representing the ASE.

Committee members represent all parts of the UK and have also engaged with recent consultations about curriculum change and implementation in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The Primary Science Quality Mark (www.psqm.org.uk) is another initiative supported by the committee. This award scheme was designed to develop and celebrate the quality of science teaching and learning in primary schools and has been very successful in doing so. Since its inception in 2008, 830 UK schools have achieved the award and another 470 schools are currently working towards it. Although I have not yet had the opportunity to apply for a PSQM award, this is something that is definitely on my to-do list. It is yet another example of the way in which the committee works hard to raise the profile and improve the practice of primary science, both in schools and nationally.

My involvement

In no way can I take much credit for any of this work. Far more qualified practitioners than me on the committee, such as Brenda Keogh (sadly missed now) and ex-chair Anne Goldsworthy, have worked tirelessly on behalf of the ASE members. As a result of their hard work we now have a much-improved primary science curriculum. What I have been able to do, however, is to put forward my views and experiences as a current practising classroom teacher. As a busy year 6 (ages 10–11) teacher trying to ensure that every one of my pupils will make at least two levels progress

in maths and literacy, in the face of higher demands from Ofsted, science can sometimes be the last thing on my mind. I have therefore been able to emphasise that changes that are put in place need to be purposeful, effective and teacher friendly. They need to be changes that schools can access and work with easily and that will have a positive impact on the children's learning. Without this, they will not work. The committee has listened to these points and made sure that the ideas put forward by the ASE are the views of teachers and not just people sat in offices.

So what has the ASE done for me?

On a personal level, it has provided me with support: access to resources and training that I would otherwise never have had. Through networking, reading *Primary Science*, having access to discounted resources and being on the Primary Science Committee, I have had the privilege to learn from highly influential and experienced practitioners who have inspired and educated me, impacting positively upon my practice in the classroom.

On a professional level, the ASE has given me the assurance that what I am doing in my school and what I am advising my colleagues and even my own head teacher to do, is the 'right thing'. We are not just making decisions because we are frightened of what Ofsted may think; we are making our decisions based on the collective experience and advice of a body of science education professionals.

Sometimes, as classroom teachers, we get so snowed under by the everyday things we need to do, such as marking, planning, organising trips, teaching engaging lessons, attending meetings and so on, that we forget about the world outside the classroom and can feel quite isolated. Time and again, we



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hear in the news about changes that the Government proposes to make to the teaching profession and it is easy to become quite cynical. In this professional climate, it is good to know that there are organisations actively working towards improving education by supporting change based on the experience and knowledge of those who know best – teachers. Organisations such as the ASE are really fighting behind the scenes to help ensure that children have the best learning experiences possible and to shape our education system for the better. They are leading the changes that we are asking for and need. For these reasons, I am proud to be a member of the ASE and am actively encouraging the other science coordinators and teachers I work with to become members too.

Reference

Turner, J., Keogh, B., Naylor, S. and Lawrence, L. (2011) *It's not fair – or is it?* Sandbach: Millgate House.

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