



# pDT

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
TODAY

Issue: 21.2

## Professional Development Is School Improvement!

**Neil Gilbride** asks: Are Heads adult enough to do their job?

**Roisin Killick** and **Peter Matthews** explore growing top schools

**Chris Brown** and **Jane Flood** navigate the road to improvement via the network labyrinth

**Gareth Mills** places enquiry at the heart of improvement

**David Woods** shows how great schools have effective professional development at their core



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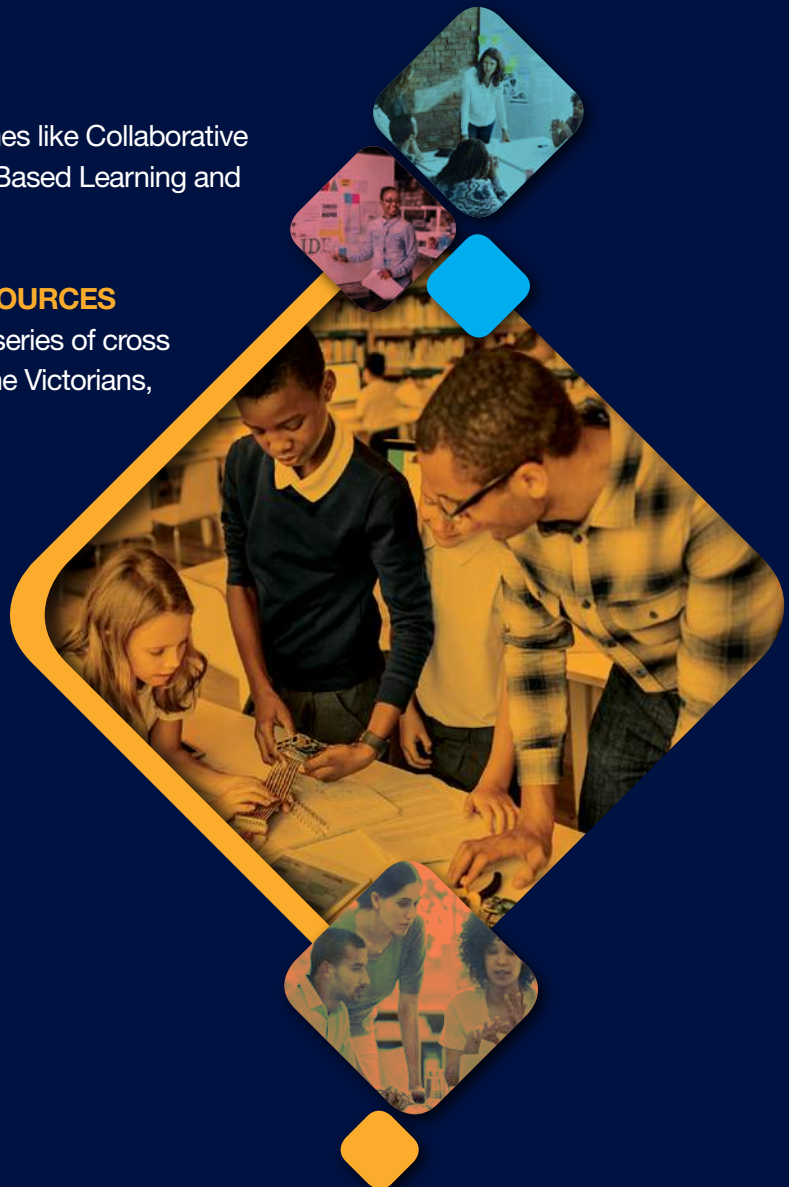
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# *pDT* Issue 21.2

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Professional Development Is School Improvement! ■■■■■■

# Professional Development Is School Improvement!

**Graham Handscomb** explores the fundamental relationship between professional development and school improvement.

## Core contribution

We rather take for granted nowadays the link that is regularly made between professional development and its contribution to school improvement. Long gone are the days when professional development was experienced as isolated external courses teachers happened to alight upon, which had little lasting effect on them ... and next to no impact on the school. Perhaps something of a turning point came at the turn of the century with the then government's Strategy for Professional Development<sup>1</sup>. Soon afterwards, with this



strategy in mind, Ofsted conducted a review into effective continuing professional development (CPD) and made what was to become a persisting fundamental link with school improvement:

*“The best results occurred where CPD was central to the schools’ improvement planning. Schools which integrated performance management, school self-review and development, and CPD into a coherent cycle of planning improved the quality of teaching and raised standards” (Ofsted, 2006).<sup>2</sup>*

Many studies followed. For instance Bubb and Earley investigated the practical steps school leaders can take to ensure that self-evaluation of school performance led, through the effective staff development, to genuine school improvement. They concluded:

*“The role of continuing development of staff was crucial in helping to address most of the priorities identified through self-evaluation to bring about improvement, enhance the quality of the learning experience, and generally make things better for pupils.”<sup>3</sup>*

### Development at the heart of improvement

In more recent times the Education Development Trust has explored amongst headteachers the key factors which contribute to school improvement. Prominent in the resulting Headteachers’ framework for rapid school improvement was: “support the teachers to develop their professional practice with the best possible professional development opportunities”<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, in a study examining the relationships among coordination, coherence, and improved achievement in New Zealand case study schools, all “mentioned the quality and focus of the schoolwide professional development”<sup>5</sup>.

This contribution of professional development to school improvement is portrayed as having breadth and depth, being key to effective leadership and self-evaluation, and to contribute to both teaching and learning. Perhaps most important is the direct link with impact on pupil achievement as claimed in a meta-analysis of high quality professional development conducted this year by Fletcher-Wood and Zuccollo:

- High-quality CPD for teachers has a significant effect on pupils’ learning outcomes.
- Evidence suggests that quality CPD has a greater effect on pupil attainment than other interventions schools may consider, such as implementing performance-related pay for teachers or lengthening the school day.<sup>6</sup>

So professional development and school improvement have become increasingly yoked together, and this dynamic is the shared focus of this issue of *Professional Development Today*.

### Collaborative improvement

Gains in pupil learning was one of the powerful outcomes of the facilitated learning community initiative described in the opening article by Roisin Killick and Peter Matthews. They evaluated how the *Growing the Top* programme grouped trios of outstanding London schools, supported by a facilitator, to work together via reciprocal visits. The shared purpose was both to showcase systematic excellence in their own school and to pose challenges for their partners' schools. In this vibrant form of lived professional learning the trios are "conceived of as *pop-up* think tanks that enable senior leaders to explore key issues together." Collaboration is clearly centre stage with inter-school development gains not just for the senior leaders involved but also for middle leaders through spontaneous learning groups generated by the initiative.

Collaboration is also the subject of the article by Chris Brown and Jane Flood. Much store has been invested in Professional Learning Communities (PLNs) but the authors argue that there is no guarantee they will lead to positive impacts either for teachers or for students. The article explores in depth what is required to "help maximise the likelihood that investing in networked approaches to school improvement will be successful," and in particular to examine the vital role of school leaders in creating a two way link between PLNs and schools.

Intriguingly, they use the story of the Minotaur as a parable to understand how best to tackle the PLN labyrinth with all the complex challenge it poses for the individual and organisation. Three key features of the school leader's role are seen as pivotal: *having a main focus on promoting better outcomes for students; leading ethically and doing the best for each child; and wanting to reach out beyond the boundaries of their schools - wishing for their teachers to engage in collaborative endeavours with others.*

The authors provide a clear orienteering guide on how to navigate the path to effective networking practice. This encompasses *formalisation* - school leaders cementing their school's and teachers' participation through ensuring PLN activity corresponds to the improvement priorities and vision for the school; *prioritization* - ensuring adequate resources exist to allow

the work of the PLN to get done; and *mobilization* - the ability of PLN participants to influence whether new practices are successfully mobilised within their school. Above all, the article indicates that successful collaborative learning involves coupling an external focus with the school's moral driver for their students.

### The Demands of Leadership

In the next article Sonia Blandford and Catherine Knowles consider school improvement and the whole issue of inclusion. They declare that the education system in England is struggling to meet the needs of at least one in five children and young people: the disadvantaged, the vulnerable, those underachieving, and those with additional needs. They signal a muddle in policy which





lacks the clarity or depth needed for practice, resulting in fundamental inconsistency in professional views and attitudes. The bulk of the article is then devoted to outlining the *Achievement for All* approach based on the four principles of Aspiration – I can; Access – I do; and Attainment – I have; Achievement – I am. The improved inclusion practice thus achieved is secured through a tenacious joint focus on high quality teaching, parental engagement, and school leadership.

Leadership is similarly the subject of Neil Gilbride's article. His contention is that we tend to take for granted the demands placed upon leaders, given the complexity of schools as organisations, and that much could be learnt from *Adult Development Theory*. Leaders are called upon to fulfil a number of significance



functions. They include fostering collaborative working to address multi-faceted challenges; employing a range of complex thinking; and handling emotions in order to promote staff well-being. The author describes how, with reference to adult development thinking, a study of twenty school leaders revealed substantive differences in how headteachers of different *Adult Ego Development* stages operated within their schools to deal with such demands. Amongst the powerful insights that emerge from this application of Adult Development Theory is the importance of considering the particular context and environment in which school leaders work and how prepared they are to operate effectively within these situations.

### Professional growth powering improvement

The research section begins with a piece by Gareth Mills which suggests that when enquiry is within the DNA of schools they have a firm foundation for improvement. The author describes the Enquiring Schools initiative which he led for the National Foundation for Educational Research. This programme sought to build a bridge between academic research and classroom-based action-research as a vehicle for professional growth and innovation.

Like other contributions in this issue of PDT, Mills sees schools as complex eco-systems and argues that enquiry empowers teachers to operate effectively within such an environment:

*“The Enquiring Schools programme is to equip teachers with systems-thinking tools so that they can develop richer pictures of the contexts in which the work and the forces that contribute to the challenges they face.”*

Again professional growth is perceived as a journey through these complexities and he charts the programme in terms of *taking your bearings* and *consulting maps* and *finding a trust-worthy guide*. He concludes with some key messages for teachers and for professional development leaders.

The importance of the individual's professional development is also the concern in Fiona Tobin's article. Indeed, she reflects that the needs of the individual can





# Can Outstanding Schools Ever Bottle Their Success?

**Roisin Killick and Peter Matthews** analyse an innovative project called **Growing The Top**, in which the senior leaders of trios of outstanding schools pooled knowledge and expertise to find solutions to systemic challenges.

## A strategy for the continued improvement of great schools: Growing the Top

It is an adage that outstanding schools don't remain outstanding by standing still. 'The key question for school improvement is what are outstanding schools doing that sets them apart, and how can we bottle it?' asked Dr Josephine Valentine<sup>1</sup>, who conceived this programme aimed at finding out...

The OECD states that 'one of the marks of any professional is the ability to reflect critically on both one's profession and one's daily work, to be continuously engaged in self-improvement that will lead to improvement in students' learning'<sup>2</sup>. But self-improvement needs to be fuelled by knowledge of best practice elsewhere, informed by research and mobilised through effective innovation. Berwick has argued that integrating these three bodies of knowledge in a structured way creates a virtuous learning community with the power to improve student outcomes<sup>3</sup>.

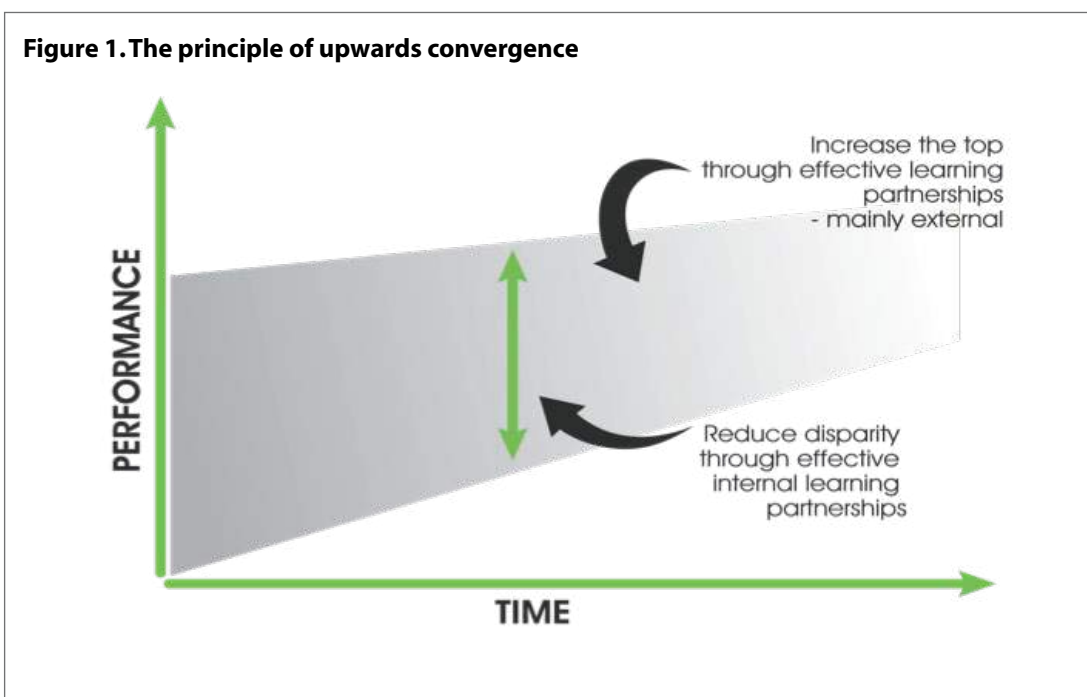
On this principle, Challenge Partners developed and orchestrated the Growing the Top (GtT) programme, which aimed to support the ongoing improvement of highly effective (or 'stand-out') partner schools by pooling their expertise to acquire new knowledge, access research and find innovative solutions to knotty challenges. Challenge Partners is a learning community and registered education charity of about 500 schools, grouped around 44 hub schools, which collaborate to improve each other and the wider education system so that all children benefit.

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### How the programme was designed and implemented

The GtT programme design was based on two core principles: upwards convergence and knowledge sharing (figure 1). Upwards convergence is the idea that the system will keep improving not only by improving the lowest performing schools and groups within schools but also through stimulating those at the top to get better.<sup>4</sup>

Knowledge-sharing is based on what is valued from research as well as the 'assumption that knowledge already resides in the lived daily experience of teachers'<sup>5</sup>. Great practice and expertise exist within our schools, but the system struggles to move this knowledge around. The idea was to create a mechanism by which stand-out schools could both share aspects of the practice that contributed to their effectiveness and work together to find solutions to an ongoing challenge in each of the schools.



The GtT programme works by grouping the cohort of participating outstanding schools in trios, engineered so that there is a spread of geographical areas and school types (selective, single-sex, faith etc) in each trio. Each school in turn hosts a visit by the headteacher and a senior leader from the other two schools in the trio, aiming to:

- i. showcase one or two aspects of systemic excellence in the school, and
- ii. present a systemic challenge, which the visiting

leaders are invited to consider and help solve.

The agenda for each school visit day ensures that both the visitors and the host can leave with tangible school improvement ideas or 'take-aways' both by gleaning great practice and by participating in high level clinical dialogue around the area of challenge, which is often common to the visiting schools.<sup>6</sup> Half the day is used to focus on one or two hallmarks of excellence, half on the area of challenge identified by the host school (figure 2).

**Figure 2. Outline structure of trio visit days**

<b>Morning elements</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitated contracting, then scene-setting by the school</li> </ul>	In which protocols are agreed and the headteacher presents the school and its strengths and challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consideration and discussion of two aspects that contribute to sustaining excellence</li> </ul>	In which visitors examine the areas of excellence through observation, presentations and discussions with key players
<b>Afternoon elements</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploration and discussion of a systemic challenge</li> </ul>	In which the challenge is described, and visitors given opportunities to explore the challenge, establish facts and suggest evidence-informed approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Round-up</li> </ul>	In which host and visitors reflect on knowledge and understanding gained and state what they will take away from the experience

Each trio visit is led by a trained facilitator, who is also an experienced and successful school leader. The facilitator is responsible for moving the day forward and keeping participants to task while enabling the host to participate fully in the day. The facilitator uses their expertise judiciously to lubricate and raise the level of professional dialogue, maintain focus and promote a climate of openness and collaboration throughout the day.

In addition to the school visit days, the whole cohort of participating schools comes together three times during the year for centrally organised day-conferences. These events are designed to facilitate knowledge sharing between trios and provide presentation inputs from research, the corporate world and the private education sector, designed to inform and challenge thinking and stimulate conversations and discussions around approaches to the continuous improvement of participants' schools.

**How effective was the programme?**

The programme was evaluated in its pilot year (2018-2019) using a mixed methodology that combined pre- and post-programme surveys of participants with case studies and testimonies from participating head teachers and senior leaders. The evaluation focused on the design and implementation of the programme and

its processes, as well as the initial impact on participating schools. Overall the evaluation was designed to test the efficacy of the GrT programme, particularly the facilitated learning trios, in terms of how well knowledge would be shared and implemented to produce positive change and improvement, reflecting the principle of upwards convergence.

The evaluation demonstrated that the Growing the Top programme is an effective vehicle for developing professional relationships, moving knowledge around and sharing expertise which all supported schools to leave the programme with tangible ideas on improving on their previous best (see figure 3.)



**Figure 3. End of visit responses**

End of visit responses (n=97): response scale 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree): rank order	Mean	Mode	Median	SD
1. I am leaving today with some tangible ideas of how my school could improve on its previous best.	9.4	10	10	0.95
2. I had sufficient opportunity to deepen professional relationships with colleagues in my trio.	9.0	10	9	1.1
3. Existing knowledge on school improvement has been shared today.	9.0	10	9	0.99
4. New knowledge on school improvement has been developed today.	8.8	9	9	0.97
5. I have increased my ability to share knowledge effectively with others.	8.3	8	8	1.3
6. I had sufficient time to reflect on learnings.	8.2	10	8	1.5

(Matthews and Killick, 2019: 22)

## A community for continuous improvement

In achieving the programme principles, the cohort of schools taking part in the GtT programme was a subset of the Challenge Partners community of schools. School trios drawn from this cohort formed time-limited and mission-focused professional learning communities (PLCs). The trios can be conceived of as pop-up think tanks that enable senior leaders to explore key issues together, following the principle of upwards convergence. These inter-school think tanks serendipitously reflected the five attributes that Vescio, Ross and Adams' in 2008<sup>7</sup>, after Newmann et al. in 1996<sup>8</sup> used to define an effective professional learning community:

- shared norms and values
- 'deprivatised' practice<sup>9</sup>
- reflective dialogue
- collaboration
- collective focus on student learning

### i. Shared norms and values

Louis et al argued that "fundamental to any community is a sense of common values and expectations of and for each other"<sup>10</sup> The Growing the Top programme used specifically trained facilitators who at the beginning of

the standardised agenda for each visit day conducted a contracting session between participants. The evaluation of the programme affirmed that these sessions reinforced a set of shared set of norms and values. Participants commented that facilitation was "well balanced and non-judgemental" and "ensured that all individuals had an adequate amount of time to share ideas"<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, almost all schools strongly agreed that: "The facilitator was trusted and effective in creating an open and honest environment" and that "The facilitator set clear and agreed boundaries and ethics in 'contracting'"<sup>12</sup>

The norms and values shared across the three schools in each of the trios were fundamental to group interaction and learning. The trios voiced joint reflections, as follows, at the end of the programme.

*"Although geographically dispersed, our schools turned out to have many principles, values, approaches and policies in common, despite very different contexts. Each school has its own individual language and approaches, but when you dig down, you find we have common fundamentals. These were reflected throughout the organisations, right down to what students and staff said and did. Very heartening. Perhaps this shows you have to have universally strong values to succeed and remain successful over time."* (Trio 3 reflection)

The facilitation of this open environment with a common understanding of expectations of challenge also supported the participants to ensure the success of attribute number two: deprivatised practice.

**ii. De-privatised (i.e. openly displayed) practice**

Schools in the Challenge Partners’ Network of Excellence are schools who by the very nature of them choosing to join a national network of schools are outward looking and open to challenge. By joining the network, they are buying into an annual peer review and inviting scrutiny of their practice. The GtT programme took this notion of opening up one’s school’s practice to examination and peer consultancy one step further than peer review. The programme provided a platform and a safe environment, importantly free of judgement, in which schools could be open about their challenges as well as their successes without feeling vulnerable. One trio expressed the virtuous learning relationship as follows: -

*“All three schools had bought into the philosophy, openness and transparency that was needed for this programme. All said how great it was when we were in the other schools. The visits were so important in terms of our journeys. They gave us so many insights and ideas to go away and try.” (Trio 1)*

The GtT programme exposes leadership practice across participating schools. By opening their schools to critical friends and fellow experienced professionals, participants “come to know each other’s strengths and can therefore more easily obtain “expert advice” from colleagues.”<sup>13</sup>

From the pilot evaluation of the programme, all respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to the propositions that: “arrangements for our focus on systemic excellence within the school provided informative evidence and insights” and “arrangements for our focus on systemic challenge, allowed us to understand, investigate and offer advice on the issue(s)”. This indicates that host schools opened themselves up to their visitors and allowed themselves to be exposed and vulnerable not only in order to share great practice, but also to enable open discussions about areas in which they were struggling. This allowed honest and effective conversations about the issues with professional colleagues, with one school explicitly commenting on noting “the importance of trust and openness, being confident to expose and explore challenges”<sup>14</sup>

**iii. Reflective Dialogue**

Establishing both deprivatised practice and shared norms and values enables reflective dialogue to take place which “leads to deepened understandings of the process of instruction and of the products created within



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the teaching and learning process.” (Louis, Marks and Kruse, 1996: 761).

Schools participating in Growing the Top proceed through two layers of reflective dialogue, firstly internally with schools’ staff and leadership teams to decide upon what areas of systemic excellence and challenge they wish to focus on during their visit day. Subsequently they engaged in open and professional dialogue with their trio and facilitator. The impact of these discussions led one participant to comment; “we have achieved a fresh perspective as well as ‘challenged our own thinking’ on current procedures and best practice moving forwards.”<sup>15</sup>.

*“We left each school buzzing with ideas. The visits had an immediate impact on us all. We felt galvanised, laying ourselves bare, having the opportunity to ask questions but also to listen. This has left us wondering how to instil the same belief in the people who are going to be driving some of the ideas going forward.” (Trio 2)*

### iv. Collaboration

The concept of collaboration is a central feature of professional learning communities.<sup>16</sup> A collaborative community working together enables “members [to] call on each other to discuss the development of skills related to the implementation of practice<sup>17</sup>

*“We liked living and breathing the ethos of other schools in different locations. We are surprised at how much we have learned from each other in such a short time. Schools very local not always so keen to share. This low-cost approach is a great way to drive school improvement.” (Trio 1.)*

Demonstrating that collaboration is really at the heart of the Growing the Top programme,, one participant noted that “it was very valuable to have the perspective of other professionals on areas of systemic challenge, bringing their experience and ideas to bear on issues similar to our own or sometimes very different”,<sup>18</sup> (). Whilst others stated that as a result of effective collaboration, they received “‘great ideas’ for tackling their own systemic challenge and finding that their issues

were not unique<sup>19</sup>



### v. Collective focus on student learning

The final qualifier, and arguably the purpose of any school-based professional learning community, is that the group must have a collective focus on student learning. Schools were not required or asked to choose areas of systemic excellence and challenge that were directly linked to student learning. However it is noteworthy that, of the 21 participating schools 15 of them chose areas of systemic challenge were directly focused on outcomes and progress for particular groups of pupils and/or subject areas rather than indirectly on outcomes via teacher CPD or wider school development<sup>20</sup> Some examples of the areas of systemic challenge were:

- progress of boys (KS3 and KS4)
- variability in post-16 outcomes
- quality first teaching in KS3 for pupils with SEND
- improving performance in subjects needing fluent academic reading and writing
- closing the gap for disadvantaged students
- demographic gaps (Black Caribbean boys and disadvantaged students).

Bearing in mind that these schools were selected to participate in the programme due to the excellent progress and outcomes for their students, it is interesting that the chosen focus often related to making further marginal gains in the learning outcomes of specific groups of students.



**External Facilitation**

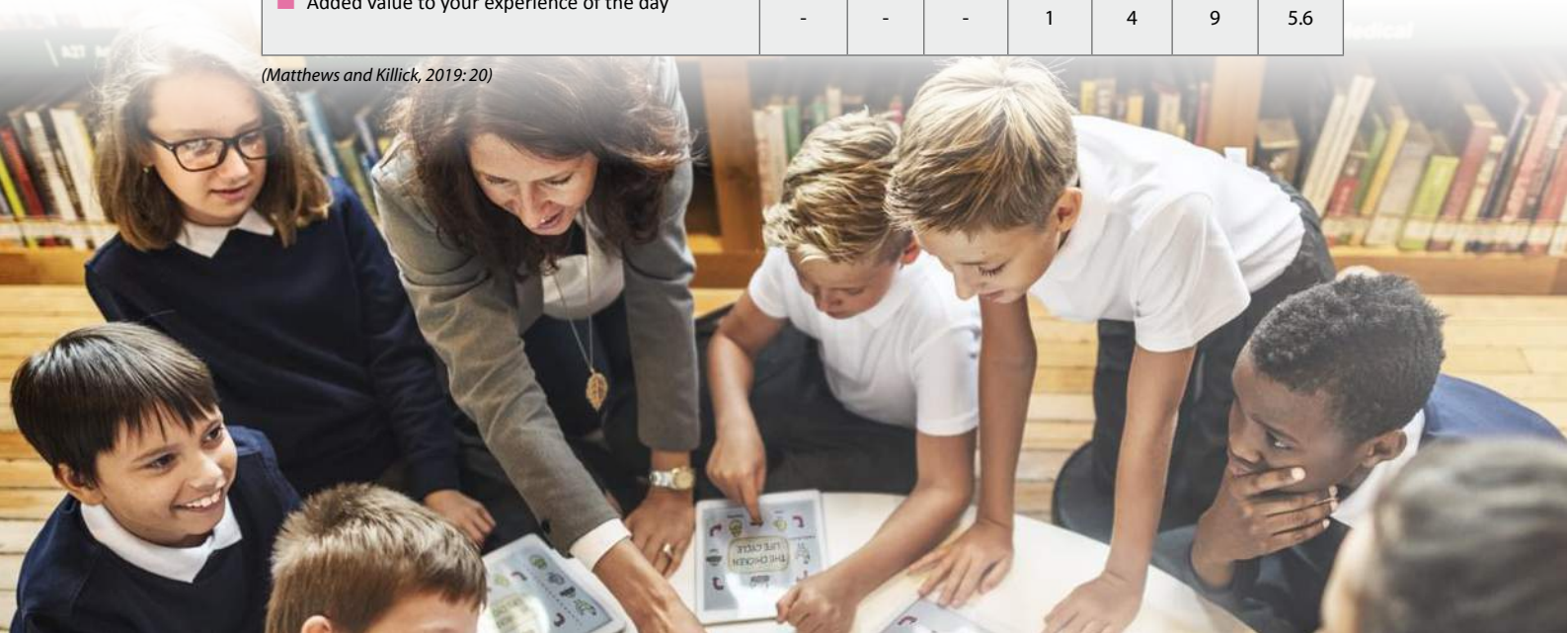
A distinguishing feature of the Growing the Top programme, and what enabled the time limited “pop-up” nature of the learning groups to still be effective, was the use of current educational practitioners trained as facilitators. Schools readily adhered to the structure of the day designed by Challenge Partners and welcomed facilitation, which they described as “well balanced

and non-judgemental”, and fundamental in “helping the host school manage the day and achieve outcomes” and noted that the facilitators themselves brought “their own ideas and experience to the table when appropriate or needed”<sup>21</sup>. The impact of this can be seen in figure 4 which clearly demonstrates the positive impact of the facilitator.

**Figure 4. Participating schools’ perceptions of facilitation (n=14)**

The facilitator	Agreement with proposition						$\bar{x}$
	SD 1	D 2	TD 3	TA 4	A 5	SA 6	
■ Set clear and agreed boundaries and ethics in ‘contracting’	-	-	-	-	1	13	5.9
■ Understood the group dynamics, involving members and making them feel good about being involved	-	-	-	-	4	10	5.7
■ Was trusted and effective in creating an open and honest environment	-	-	-	-	2	12	5.9
■ Was attuned to what was going on and intervened when appropriate	-	-	-	1	2	11	5.7
■ Was skilled in observing, listening, reading body language, understanding human behaviour and intervening sensitively	-	-	-	1	3	10	5.6
■ Was successful in maintaining the focus and momentum of discussions	-	-	-	1	2	11	5.7
■ Ensured that both the school and visitors could express what they had gained and would take away from the visit	-	-	-	-	3	11	5.8
■ Added value to your experience of the day	-	-	-	1	4	9	5.6

(Matthews and Killick, 2019: 20)



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### Outcomes

The GtT programme demonstrably reinforced the group of 21 schools as a virtuous learning community in terms of Berwick's three characteristics: research, best practice and effective innovation. The research dimension was promoted through the inputs to cohort events and by the majority of participant schools, that demonstrated how research had contributed to their strategies and practice. Research informed examples included: approaches to change management, school improvement strategies, subjects such as mathematics, middle leader development and mental health and wellbeing. Shared best practice included curriculum planning, driving up standards, intervention strategies and student and staff coaching. The schools showcased many innovative approaches including, for example: year 8 baccalaureate, personal development and iLearn, staff personal improvement plans, and maximising boys' progress.

The schools cited many ways in which they learnt from each other by discovering what worked best in other places and pooling knowledge about systemic challenges. The latter included brainstorming solutions as well as sharing knowledge and research about effective practice. Schools were predisposed to following up the most fruitful themes by creating links between other senior and middle leaders in the school trios.

The third and final cohort meeting included trio witness statements of what they had taken away for the programme and – in many cases – already begun to implement. The greatest potential of the programme lay in systemic challenges that centre on raising the relative achievement of specific groups, including boys, disadvantaged children and under-performing sixth formers. The findings showed that sharing what works through Growing the Top undoubtedly helped schools to tackle these issues.

### Conclusion

The Challenge Partners' Growing the Top programme provides an effective and efficient platform for excellent schools to share existing knowledge of great practice, co-create solutions to challenges that they share and explore their journeys to tackling issues that other schools may just be starting out on dealing with.



Although the success factors of the GtT programme align with the attributes of effective PLCs, the GtT programme's evaluation expands Stoll et al.'s concept of PLCs, limited to the school as a community with PLCs only developing and succeeding with "the active support of leadership at all levels".<sup>22</sup> The impact of learning cascades beyond the participating school leaders since the GtT model provides space and opportunities for the ongoing collaboration for various inter-school groups during and after completion of the initial programme. Essentially, the development of an effective and inter-school PLC at senior leader level also resulted in a "trickle-down effect" with inter-school pop-up learning groups forming between middle leaders, encouraged and facilitated by school leadership designed to explore issues in greater depth<sup>23</sup>. In trio 6, for example,

*"The contacts we have made and ideas and policies we have shared are providing the basis for linking people at different levels across the schools. This has started with work on English. We plan to meet again next year to review progress stemming from the programme."*

These outward looking "pop-up", inter-school learning groups were catalysed through the GtT programme and then emulated the processes which encompassed three very important conditions for success.



### 1. Enhancing the well-established social capital within Challenge Partner schools

The development of the Growing the Top programme within the existing Challenge Partners Network of Excellence means that the programme can take advantage of established social and moral capital and outward looking perspectives that are part of the makeup of the partnership. Schools who participate in the GtT programme are already used to opening their doors to visitors and welcoming external challenge through peer reviews.

### 2. External facilitation

By absolving principals of host schools from facilitation responsibilities, their focus can really be on effectively presenting aspects of the school and contributing to open dialogue and collaboration. The facilitator shoulders the practical responsibility for creating an effective and open learning environment and ensuring that the day runs smoothly and effectively

### 3. Challenge Partners as a broker

Centralised project management ensures that the

logistics of visits, identification of topics and quality of agendas were secured before visits took place and that cohort meetings added value to the programme. Additional quality assurance oversight for the programme and training of facilitators ensure that the learning experiences are effective and high quality for all participants.

This format of facilitated PLC offers a powerful option for effective and efficient inter-school development at a time when schools are feeling increasingly squeezed. With the success of the pilot year of the Growing the Top programme, Challenge Partners has been able to offer the programme more widely in academic year 2019-2020. The programme has been expanded to include primary and special schools to see whether if the impact can be replicated with different phases.

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## Can Outstanding Schools Ever Bottle Their Success? ■■■■■

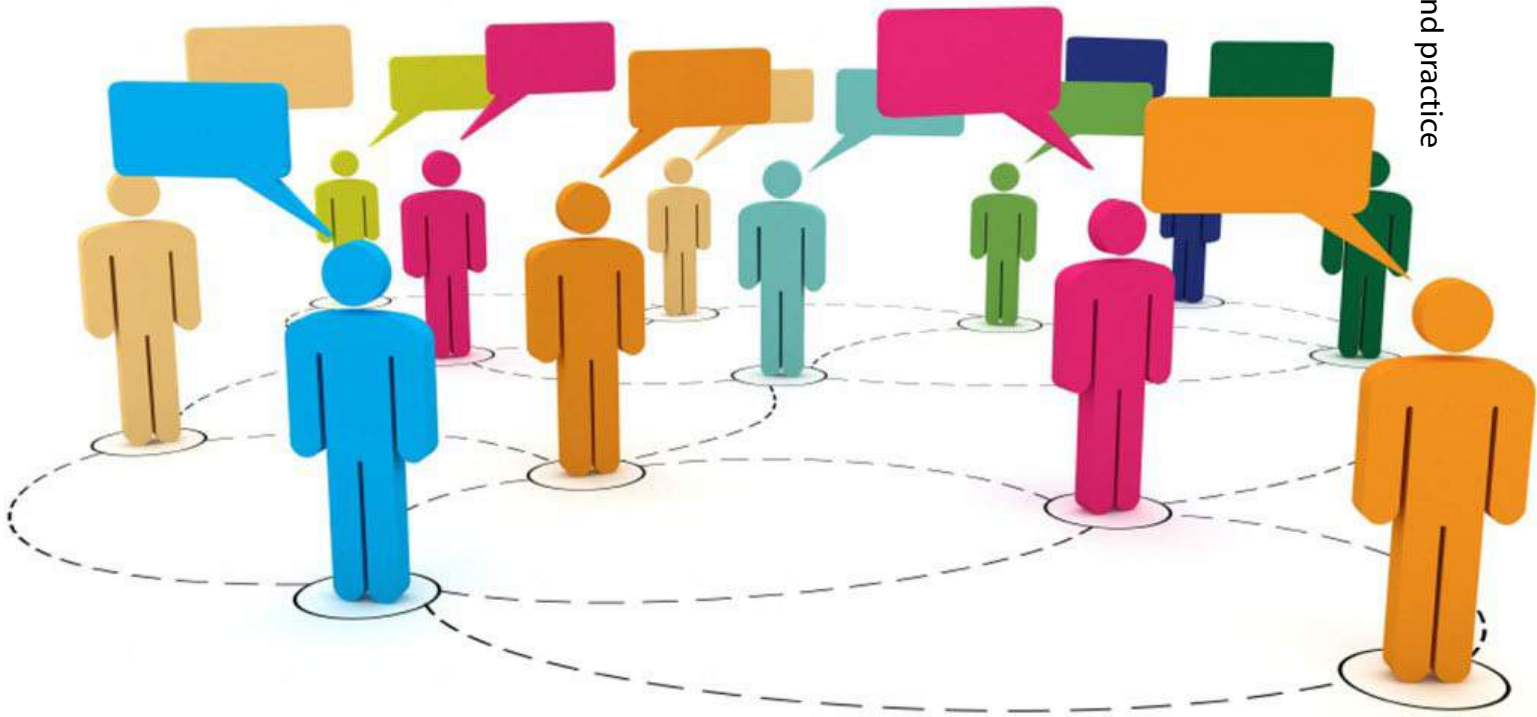
### Acknowledgements

The authors thank the 21 participating schools who allowed recordings of conversations around their areas of systemic excellence and systemic challenge to be taken, and who provided information and feedback for the evaluation.

They also wish to thank Liz Smissen who co-delivered the programme, Dame Sue John, programme Executive Sponsor and Dr Josie Valentine OBE, CEO at the Danes Educational Trust and programme Lead Practitioner who developed the Growing the Top programme and provided invaluable feedback on the evaluation. This article draws from research commissioned by Challenge Partners and described in Matthews and Killick (reference below).

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# Are Learning Networks Worth The Effort?

**Chris Brown and Jane Flood**

**explore what is required from the networked school leader to conquer the Professional Learning Network labyrinth?**

**The quest to maximize impact**

Increasingly, policy makers, school and school system leaders are turning to Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) as a means to achieve bottom-up educational improvement at scale. Networks of teachers, and others, collaborating to improve aspects of teaching and learning, before mobilising new practices and ideas amongst their colleagues, seems an intuitively promising approach. However, are they worth the effort? Does the time invested in networking pay dividends? In fact, there is no guarantee PLNs will lead to positive impacts either for teachers or for students. Further insight is therefore required to help maximise the likelihood that investing in networked approaches to school improvement will be successful. In this article we examine one key factor thought vital to the success of PLNs: the role of school leaders in creating a two way link between PLNs and schools.

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### Networks, capacity and agency

PLNs are defined by the first author (Chris) and his University of Twente colleague Cindy Poortman as “any group who engage in collaborative learning with others outside of their everyday community of practice, in order to improve teaching and learning in their school(s) and/or the school system more widely”.<sup>1</sup> This definition illustrates that PLNs are focused on driving improvements to teaching and learning. PLNs will achieve this through building capacity, which is understood as “the power to engage in and sustain learning of all people at all levels of the educational system.”<sup>2</sup>

Capacity is built first by helping PLN participants to create and share knowledge about specific educational problems as well as innovate (i.e. develop novel responses to these problem). Capacity is also built as PLN participants broker new knowledge and/or innovations to colleagues within their home schools.<sup>3</sup> Such capacity building should not be considered sustainable however until it results in lasting school wide changes in school policy and practice<sup>4</sup>; with these changes resulting in measurably positive outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, all educators with links to a network should also display “agency”. This means that teachers in schools engaged in PLN activity do more than just make lasting changes in their behaviour; they should actively try to innovate their practices in an ongoing

way.<sup>6</sup> To ensure PLNs are effective, i.e. result in sustained and positive changes in teaching, learning and student outcomes, a number of conditions relating to their nature and functioning need to be met. One of these, the one we believe is the most important: effective leadership, is explored in more detail below.

### The PLN Labyrinth

To help conceive the nature of the problems faced by school leaders our preferred visual prop, is that of the labyrinth. The Argentinean writer, Jorge Borges employs the metaphor of the labyrinth extensively in his writing.<sup>7</sup> Often Borges uses the concept to represent a struggle to be overcome, or as an analogy for those who have lost their way. Sometimes the writing is from the perspective of the Minotaur itself (e.g. The House of Asterion): here Borges’ parables serve to present something potentially problematic from a new angle, thereby enhancing our understanding of how to tackle the specific difficulties we might face.

What is useful about Borges’ parables is that they serve to shift our perspectives, enabling us to understand labyrinths not just as things comprised of high walls, dead ends and potentially a lurking Minotaur, but also as providing a metaphor for any complex challenge that an individual or organization might face. Using this metaphor also reveals that the best approach for negotiating any complex challenge will be a function



of the various elements that comprise that problem and so contribute to its complex nature. When labyrinths consist solely of opaque walls, then a map and a good sense of direction is all that is needed. But if the labyrinthine problem is made up of procedural obstacles or relational elements, or formed from more hard to attain requirements, such as the means through which to facilitate and mobilize change, then different sets of knowledge, tools and strategies will be required. What's more if the nature of these problems alter as a result of contextual or organizational factors, then what is needed to tackle them will necessarily alter as well.

On first glance the nature of the PLN Labyrinth is deceptively simple: if networked learning amongst small numbers of teachers is to benefit teaching and learning in schools more generally, then what is required is a two-way link between the work of the PLN and the general day to day teaching practice that occurs. But when examining what a meaningful two-way link might entail it can be seen that it will necessarily be comprised of two key elements:

- To maximise the benefits of being part of a learning network, PLN participants will need to engage effectively in networked learning activity;
- Teachers (and other relevant staff) within the wider community of practice involved will need to know about, engage with, apply, and continue to improve the products and outputs of the PLN, ultimately with the aim of improving student outcomes.

So who is best placed to tackle this labyrinth?

### The role of leadership in relation to PLNs

While it is most likely teachers that engage in networked learning activity, it is school leaders that need to support them in doing so. Thus the actions of school leaders are key to the impact of PLNs being maximized. School leaders have a substantive role in improving outcomes for children and young people (e.g. Robinson et al., 2009). In fact, in terms of within-school factors, their impact is second only to teachers.<sup>8</sup> School leaders are able to make a difference to teaching and learning though what are known as first and second order effects.

To begin with, school leaders can target first order

variables. For instance, instructional leadership can be used to improve the quality of teaching and the nature of the curriculum that is delivered to students in the classroom.<sup>9</sup> School leaders are also able to generate second order effects. Transformational leadership, for example, can be used to increase the commitment of others in the school in relation to specific first-order effects on learning. This means school leaders are thus best placed to instigate and coordinate the actions required to conquer the PLN labyrinth outlined above because they can aim specific first and second order effects towards making meaningful two-way links between network and school.



### Linking external focus with a desire to do the best for every student

To get the most from engaging with PLNs, school leaders must first understand their role as instructional leaders and the impact this role can have. It is worth recalling the work of Robinson and colleagues where it is demonstrated that it is instructional leadership approaches which result in the most substantial benefits for student outcomes.<sup>10</sup> In particular Robinson et al., (2009) suggest that the act of school leadership with the biggest single impact is “promoting and participating in teacher learning and development”, which they indicate has an effect size of 0.84. This is double the effect size of the next highest impactful action: ‘planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum’ (ES 0.42).. This link between student

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achievement and the active participation of school leaders in the professional learning and development of their staff leads Robinson et al. to conclude that: “[the] more leaders focus their relationships, their work and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning the greater their influence on student outcomes”.<sup>11</sup>

This means, therefore, that a school leader’s main focus and responsibility should be promoting better outcomes for students, emphasising the importance of teaching and learning and enhancing teacher quality.<sup>12</sup> Transformational aspects of leadership: e.g. establishing goals and expectations); or, providing the necessary resource and structures, e.g. time and space to support a given way of working, should thus be employed in pursuit of specific instructional goals or the introduction of new ones. The other more managerial aspects of running a school are not, therefore, what makes the difference, and school leaders should spend less time and effort should on these!

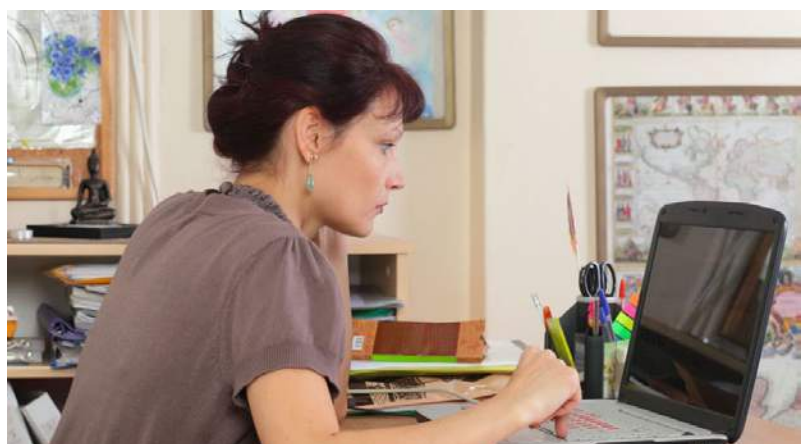
### Leading ethically

As well as having an instructional focus, school leaders must also lead ethically, with a commitment to social justice and doing the best for each child. As Day and Sammons note, if leaders are to be considered successful, they should be promoting both academic and social outcomes for all students.<sup>13</sup> Here they suggest social outcomes should be considered as including integrity, compassion and fairness, students possessing a love of lifelong learning and schools fostering citizenship as well as personal, economic and social capabilities. An underpinning assumption for the work presented here, therefore, is that both teachers and school leaders have, as their driving purpose, a desire to support all children and young people to be the best they can be; with the notion of ‘being the best’ considered to have a wide and socially just basis.

### Reaching out beyond the boundaries

But an ethical instructional approach is just one prerequisite for schools to engage effectively with PLNs. Before thinking about how to tackle the labyrinth we have to recognise that school leaders must want to enter

it in the first place. In other words, school leaders must want to reach out beyond the boundaries of their schools and wish for their teachers to engage in collaborative endeavours with others.<sup>14</sup> As Azorín notes “the schools we want today are not institutions that sit behind their railings, but rather organisations that are prepared to boldly open up and work in collaborative networks with their neighbours and other allies”.<sup>15</sup>



This is not always an easy task, when schools are facing demands of ever higher levels of achievement coupled with an intolerance of failure;<sup>16</sup> which often means the natural inclination of school leaders is to focus onwards and to “put one’s own house in order” first. Indeed effective engagement with PLNs requires school leaders to adopt an external focus and to couple their desire to do the best for their students. So their understanding of their role as instructional leaders needs to be fundamentally linked with a recognition that instructional ethical leadership can often best be served through collaborative work. Coupling an external focus with their moral driver for their students, results in school leaders needing to:

- **Sign up to the common purposes of the network** and the focus area of networked activity.<sup>17</sup> As Hubers and Poortman note, a shared sense of purpose among the individual PLN members in relation to the specific goals of the PLN is key.<sup>18</sup> Although members do not have to have homogenous goals for participating in the PLN (as goals can vary due to individual learning goals, vision on education, and



so forth), the more these goals are aligned and PLN members agree on the reasons why they are working in this group, the easier it will be to meet everyone's expectations.

- **Understanding that change through networks requires time to come to fruition.** Time is a scarce commodity in the liquid modern world and scarcer still in education systems now dominated by short term rather than long term success. As Bauman<sup>19</sup> notes, these days practitioners are more often than not looking at the next few moves ahead rather than progress to a long-term attainable goal; especially if they perceive they will not be in post in the longer term.<sup>20</sup>
- **Recognize that common resources might need to be established** to ensure the successful ongoing operation of the network (e.g. new resource generated or existing resourced transferred) and that this resource will need to be maintained over the mid to long term (Gilbert, 2017; Hubers and Poortman, 2018). At the same time, any transfer of committed resource must not impact negatively on the internal functioning of the schools involved.
- **Acknowledge a moral obligation towards, and an acceptance of collective responsibility for the outcomes of all children in all schools** within the network (Boylan, 2018; Gilbert, 2017). In

other words, schools engage in networks to gain in terms of their teachers' learning but should also be supporting teachers in other schools with their own learning requirements. PLN activity can also, of course, represent an extension of a school leaders' moral purpose, enabling them to carry their values and vision beyond the school gates (Boylan, 2018).

- Finally, **there needs to be a new kind of collaborative non-hierarchical leadership.** It is argued by Di'az-Gibson et al., (2017: 1044) that "networked leadership is considered to be a different type of nonhierarchical leadership, where information and expertise substitutes for an authority structure through a self-organizing process, held together by mutual obligation that develops over time by reaching consensus-based decisions". Since network leaders and participants will not necessarily also be formal leaders, school leaders are required to recognize that distributed leadership needs to be supported to flourish (Azorin et al., 2019; Dimmock, 2019). This means that PLN participants are supported to engage in networked activity and to lead change within their own school (this is described in more detail below). This represents a stark contrast to many schools where the impetus for change and the introduction of new ideas often from the school leader themselves (Finnigan, et al., 2013).



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Being prepared to engage in networked forms of learning requires new dispositions. To ensure that this leads to positive impacts for their schools, school leaders must then engage in specific instructional and transformational approaches designed to negotiate the key aspects that make up the PLN labyrinth as it currently stands. This raises two key questions and we examine them now by exploring in detail both what constitutes the labyrinth school leaders need to negotiate, and the approaches school leaders have at their disposal to do so.

### Characteristics of the labyrinth

The elements currently comprising the labyrinth can be thought of in terms of issues relating to the formalization, prioritization and mobilisation of PLN activity. The labyrinth involves these three aspects because the interplay between network and school is an exemplar of what Kotter describes as the dual system. As Kotter observes, “in truly, reliable, efficient, agile and fast enterprises, the network meshes with the more traditional structure... it is not a super task force that reports to some levels in the hierarchy... it is seamlessly connected and coordinated with the hierarchy...”<sup>21</sup> A seamless meshing will also require a shared leadership approach, since PLN participants will require autonomy and freedom to innovate and scale-up the use of innovations.<sup>22</sup> As such, PLN activity must be something that is both recognised and treated as important within the school. Furthermore, the learning and practice development emerging from networked learning activity must be mobilised effectively so that staff within the school benefit.

Formalization involves overtly recognising how the PLN priorities resonate and integrate with the school's. Teachers and schools face a myriad of competing priorities. Often these priorities can also appear to be in tension; for instance, schools need to meet both the needs of parents and local stakeholders, whilst also meeting centrally prescribed targets and requirements. Likewise, schools need to close attainment gaps, while at the same time pushing the brightest and the best.<sup>23</sup> (Greany and Earley, 2018). In the face of these often competing demands, it is school leaders who

are responsible for direction setting: deciding on the activities that should be focused on and signaling these to ensure common understanding (Day and Sammons, 2013).

Similarly, school leaders need to make best use of available resources to ensure the goals they decide upon are achieved.<sup>24</sup> (Dimmock, 2019). In this light, the notion of formalisation relates to the need for school leaders to cement their school's and teachers' participation in the PLN by ensuring that:

- the activity of the PLN corresponds to the improvement priorities and vision for the school; and
- PLN participation remains a key focus of the school, and that its importance is recognized by all.<sup>25</sup>

*Prioritization* of engagement in PLNs is about ensuring adequate resources exist to allow the work of the PLN to get done. For such engagement to be beneficial school leaders must be prepared to provide opportunities for



such engagement., including making time available amongst the hectic range of commitments each school has. There are a number of possible approaches to the prioritising of time. These include freeing up time to engage in PLN activity by reallocating what had already been set aside for standard meetings, training and/or planning and preparation.

Schools may also be required to provide financial support to ensure the ongoing operation of the network. Funding matters: without funding PLNs are left to run simply on the good will of their participants.

Finally, school leaders can prioritise by ensuring that both capacity (e.g. skills, knowledge, experiences) and the capital (e.g. social capital) of individuals and groups is utilized and built if lacking.<sup>26</sup> The aim of the former is to not only build the knowledge and skills that teachers need in order to accomplish specific goals in relation to PLN activity, but also the dispositions (commitment, capacity and resilience) to persist in applying these knowledge and skills.<sup>27</sup>



*Mobilisation* or effective PLN activity rests on making distributed leadership a reality - particularly related to teaching and learning. Viewed in this way, distributed instructional leadership practice can be seen to represent a form of collective responsibility, intelligence and sense making. Thus, leadership for school improvement emerges as an interactive process of influence designed to achieve organisational ends. It helps to facilitate the expertise they need in order to engage in and mobilise PLN activity.

The ability of PLN participants to influence whether new practices successfully mobilised within their school will be dependent in part on their position within their school's social capital networks.<sup>29</sup> It will also require PLN participants to be knowledgeable and skilled in the process of change management.

### Conquering the PLN labyrinth

Taking down the minotaur is complex, but in this article we have begun to outline some of the core areas school leaders need to consider if they are to successfully negotiate it. There are also important lessons educationalists should heed to maximise the impact of PLNs for the schools involved. So we conclude by briefly outlining what could be seen as a call to action within each of the three priority dimensions.

- **Formalisation:** It is vital that networked activity is formally linked to the policies and process of the school. Doing so signals the importance of the work. Also that engaging in networks is not “just another initiative”, but something that is key to a school's culture and way of working. Approaches to formalising PLNs need to encompass the inclusion of network-related activity in school improvement plans and teachers' performance management targets. Such approaches also need to ensure that PLN engagement is on the radar of the school's governing body. At the same time, such signals need to be meaningful. There is no point adding further tasks to a school improvement plan if there are already so many that the notion of something being a 'key' or 'vital' no longer has currency.

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■ **Prioritisation:** Ask any teacher around the world how they could best be supported to engage with a new initiative and, invariably, time will feature in their response. Teachers are overburdened and if we want them to do more of something, we need to ensure they can do less of something else. This seems to be especially true for schools in challenging circumstances where teachers can struggle simply to stay afloat. School leaders do have the freedom to change structures within their school to free up time. For example, by ‘shaving’ time from lessons to create a free half-day once a week; by reallocating meeting or preparation, planning and assessment time; or through smart approaches to timetabling. Affording time to teachers will go a long way to helping them engage in PLNs effectively, but time also needs to be allocated to help teachers engage with their colleagues to ensure the mobilisation of activities can occur. This also means that processes within the school need should be used to facilitate

PLN-related collaboration. For instance, timetables should reflect that the need for collaboration between particular groups of teachers.

■ **Mobilisation:** Mobilisation is complex and there is much room here for improvement in many schools. In particular, forms of mobilisation that have impact require school leaders to ensure school staff: 1) actually engage with innovations; 2) collaboratively test out how new practices can be used to improve teaching and learning, and; 3) continue to use and refine new practices in an ongoing way. Doing so will ensure that the use of PLN-related innovations is both refined and sustained over time, allowing students to benefit from their ongoing improvement. In addition, who is doing the mobilising matters, and school leaders should take care in selecting as PLN participants those teachers situated at the centre of their school networks; meaning they have the power, the access and the ability to influence whether and how innovations are adopted by others.



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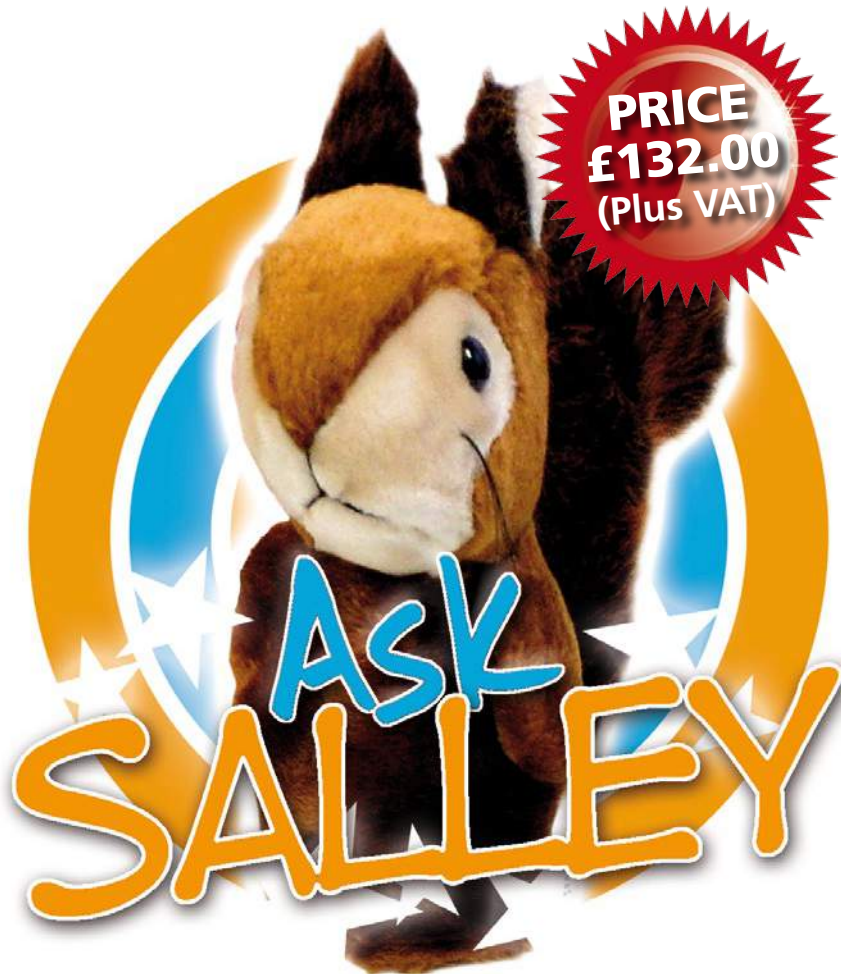
Great  
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Reviews

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# Beyond Poor Inclusive Thinking And Worse Practice

**Sonia Blandford and Catherine Knowles challenge poor inclusion thinking and practice; then call for radical development to support achievement for all.**

## **Lack of clarity and depth in Government policy**

Schools locally and globally are wonderful places where most children learn and are academically and socially successful. However, evidence demonstrates that the education system in England is struggling to meet the needs of at least one in five children and young people: the disadvantaged, the vulnerable, those underachieving, and those with additional needs.<sup>1</sup> This translates as 20% of all children and young people who are unprepared for their lives post 16, whether in education, training or employment

Current government policy across the four home nations of the UK is benignly aimed at helping educators and other stakeholders to focus on inclusion for vulnerable people, often defined at those identified with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), and disadvantaged children and young people. However, these policies often lack the clarity or depth needed for practice; this leads to confusion as to how support for the vulnerable and disadvantaged should be developed in schools.<sup>2</sup> This is further adversely impacted by inconsistencies in terminology across the home nations in their definitions of SEND and disadvantage - and its assessment - leaving too much sadly open to interpretation at a local and school level.

We would argue that these interpretations of inclusion explain the relatively large differences in the proportion of pupils identified with SEND and disadvantage across the home nations.

### Professional inconsistency

This results in what we and other researchers, identify as an inconsistency in our sector's professional views and attitudes towards the meaning of inclusion; this may explain in part the championing and nurturing of what some researchers and practitioners consider to be non-inclusive practices.<sup>3</sup> Recognising effective links between policy and practice for the implementation of inclusion has strong implications for practice. As educators, we need to look more deeply at the meaning of policy; and reflect on what inclusion means in practice. For example, in the classroom and across the school, inclusive practice looks towards the participation and engagement of every child in all the opportunities on offer. And, as we are aware, for some children and young people, this will involve enabling them to access learning and the wider opportunities.

### Achievement for All

Achievement for All has taken a partnership approach to address and contribute to the exciting, vital, but challenging emergent global movement towards inclusive education. This global movement focused on inclusion is to be found in the fundamental philosophy and key practice of the United Nations International



Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization.<sup>4</sup>

UK government policy has - to a greater or lesser degree - promoted inclusive education since the Warnock Report<sup>5</sup> and reflects the Salamanca Agreement (UNESCO, 1994),<sup>6</sup> which broadly defines inclusive education as the education of children with special educational needs (SEN) in a regular school instead of a special school.

However, despite the increasing profile of inclusive education on the global agenda, Pujil<sup>7</sup> is critical of the continued prominence of segregated education in some countries. He contrasts the significant place of special schools and classes in the Netherlands with the reduced number of pupils in special education in Norway in recent years.

Overcoming this segregation is a key focus of Achievement for All and our work is with all education settings, including early years, schools, further education, and higher education (including those that educate and train the next generation of Early Years practitioners, teachers, and further education educators).

The Lamb Inquiry (Lamb, 2009) and the national delivery of the Achievement for All programme (DfE, 2011) in England marked a turning point for SEND policy and practice: placing it firmly within the domain of school leadership and bringing a real focus to inclusive education.

Founded on the principle of removing barriers to learning and participation,<sup>8</sup> inclusive education is most appropriately delineated when it occurs within a



framework for practice, as the theoretical boundaries of definition tend to preclude a precise and easy definition.<sup>9</sup>

This may, in part, explain the vagueness of the way inclusive education has been promoted and articulated in successive government policies.



### Defining Inclusive education

In practice, inclusive education encompasses such areas as school cultures, policies and practices, child and parental voice, and achieving potential.<sup>10</sup> The Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education<sup>11</sup> outlines what this means for practice in any educational setting:

- Putting inclusive values into action.
- Viewing every life and every death as of equal worth.
- Supporting everyone to feel that they belong.
- Increasing participation for children and adults in learning and teaching activities, relationships and communities of local schools.
- Reducing exclusion, discrimination, barriers to learning and participation.
- Restructuring cultures, policies and practices to respond to diversity in ways that value everyone equally.
- Linking education to local and global realities.
- Learning from the reduction of barriers for some children to benefit children more widely.
- Viewing differences between children and between adults as resources for learning.

- Acknowledging the right of children to an education of high quality in their locality.
- Improving schools for staff and parents/carers as well as children.
- Emphasising the development of school communities and values, as well as achievements.
- Fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and surrounding communities.
- Recognising that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society.

### Whole school approach

However, to date, Inclusive education initiatives have tended to focus on specific aspects of inclusion rather than a whole-school approach or addressing change at a system-level.<sup>12</sup> Effective inclusive education in schools calls for change in practices, attitudes and whole-school approaches and commitment.

Whole-school commitment to inclusion has been fundamental to the development of the work of Achievement for All and its place in the pan-European Raising Achievement for all Learners research.<sup>13</sup> The work of RA4AL drives a shared vision, commitment, collaboration, communication, and partnership work for unprecedented change to the lives of children and young people identified with special needs and disabilities, and the disadvantaged. And certainly, the central theme of everything that is Achievement for All can be summarised as:

*If we were to shine a light on every pupil, how many would not be able to make progress?*

The answer is, of course, none. All pupils have the potential to make progress in school. This is the basis of all Achievement for All programmes, which in turn are founded and based upon the key principles of:

**Aspiration I CAN:** Aspiration relates to having high expectations about what learners can achieve. It reflects a can do mentality displayed when a pupil decides to meet challenges and gain access to learning, thus believing that they can succeed. Pupils identified with SEND and others vulnerable to underachievement

## Beyond Poor Inclusive Thinking And Worse Practice ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

may reduce their aspirations and consequently become demotivated. Pupils with low aspirations do not always hold their future in high regard and may not have a vision for further education or extracurricular activities. Achievement for All works with schools to raise aspirations, focusing on attitudes, parental aspiration, motivation and school and teacher aspiration.

Parental engagement has a very distinct and wide-reaching effect on pupil aspirations. Parents with low aspirations often unintentionally pass their beliefs and feelings on to their children. Furthermore, parents who do not understand the education system may struggle to communicate aspirations to their children. Without good modelling of an aspirational outlook, it can be difficult for children to have their own aspirations. It is important that pupils with SEND and others vulnerable to underachievement feel motivated, not only to overcome potential barriers but so that they continue to aspire about what they are able to achieve. For pupils to become aspirational in the school environment or to continue to raise their aspirations, it is crucial for staff to be aspirational for them. Without a whole-school culture, which models aspirational values and holds a strong belief in the pupils' abilities to access and achieve, children and young people will not realise their full potential and the choices open to them.

**Access I DO:** The Achievement for All framework enables schools to break down barriers which can prevent children and young people with SEND, and others vulnerable to underachievement, from accessing all the opportunities schools has to offer. Many schools have found that the Achievement for All programme has allowed them to improve the access these pupils have to the curriculum, leading to increased enjoyment of learning, greater aspirations and higher levels of achievement. Just as importantly, it has enabled pupils to access extracurricular activities through which they develop positive relationships and enjoy increased participation in school life.

**Attainment I HAVE:** There is a tendency for adults and policy makers to focus on attainment, and neglect the value of experience of success, progress and recognition. This is detrimental to effective practice and positive improvements. Solutions would include setting goals that are a foundation for raising achievement that are both within reach and achievable whilst not lowering expectations.

**Achievement I AM:** Understanding how to learn is rooted in self efficacy and knowing. Self-efficacy is a belief in an individual's ability to achieve goals; knowing is an awareness of information and experience, together there is a sense of achievement and a greater understanding of self.



The four As are integral and equal in value; one cannot exist meaningfully without the others. An effective teacher increases Access and raises Aspirations as a means to improving Attainment and Achievement. An inspirational educator, working in partnership with parents improves Achievement in a way that changes

a child's aspirations, and in doing so improves their future life chances by securing Access to continued Achievement and self-fulfilment. This is a good point to reflect on your own practice in relation to the four As. For each of the following, reflect on your current practice and consider how you could do it better.

**Aspiration: In the classroom raising aspiration means...**

- Having high expectations about what learners can achieve.
- Enabling pupils to have confidence in their competencies
- Enabling pupils to meet challenges and gain access to learning, thus believing that they can succeed.
- Focussing on attitudes, confidence, parental aspiration, motivation and school and teacher aspiration.

**Access: In practice, access means enabling all pupils to participate and engage by focusing on...**

- Behaviour
- Participation in wider school life
- Parent or carer engagement
- Developing positive relationships with others
- Attendance

**Attainment and Achievement : these lie within and extends beyond exams: social, artistic, musical, sporting and leadership endeavours all count towards the achievement for all.**

- Monitor pupil progress against targets
- Put interventions in place only when needed
- Have pupil progress meetings
- Encourage pupils to take responsibility for their progress
- Outline next steps in learning for pupils
- Develop attendance initiatives
- Organise workshops for parents to develop their role in supporting children's reading and maths at home
- Use pupil data to measure progress and inform planning
- Work effectively with teaching assistants to improve pupil attainment and achievement

*(Source: adapted from Blandford and Knowles, 2018)*



### Implementation

Evidence shows the high proportion of pupils with SEN amongst those excluded from school every year. Many of these children and young people have behavioural issues impacted by social and emotional needs; the majority are boys, many of whom are from low income families. This issue needs to be addressed urgently, most appropriately through a uniform approach across schools. The Achievement for All framework across the key areas of inclusive leadership, teaching and learning, parent and carer engagement and wider opportunities and outcomes provides an approach for all schools.

### Demand

Education professionals are having to spend too much time developing and writing Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans, with less time available for pupils identified as SEN Support.

Mainstream schools should be given additional, ring fenced funding, for pupils identified as SEN Support and should be accountable for their outcomes. This would ensure that children with SEND can access high quality support to ensure they achieve their full potential and that their parents maintain confidence in the system; this in turn will help reduce the increasing trend towards the rising number of EHC Plans where these might otherwise not have been needed. Further extending the Pupil Premium principle more explicitly into SEND may support the implementation and development of this.

This also requires more transparent accountability around how children with SEN are being supported within the school's system and schools which have a poor SEND offer should be better supported by the Local Authority or MAT to improve.

### Capacity

There needs to be a culture change within schools, LAs, MATs and health and social services; otherwise additional funding will make little difference.

Since the Childrens and Families Act 2014 and during the period of implementation of the SEND reform programme, Achievement for All has developed further. We offer good solutions for schools, which



struggle to get to grips with elements of the reform, particularly timely and accurate identification of need, responding practically to the needs of those on SEN support, providing inclusive approaches, fewer exclusions for pupils with SEN and better relationships across the school. In addition, we provide on-line support to schools, early years settings and post 16 providers, through The Bubble, an on-line system with over 2,000 evidence informed tools, information, analysis and evaluation tools for use by schools, clusters, early years' settings and post 16 providers.

### Parents

The reforms of 2014 were meant to give parents a greater say in what they wanted for their child with SEN (D); but they still have to fight through an inefficient administration process for their voice to be heard. This could be better supported through increased engagement of parents in their child's education. Evidence shows that the structured conversation model, developed by Achievement for All and used by schools working with Achievement for All, is a very effective way of giving parents and carers and their child a 'voice' in the issues affecting them. We believe this way of working should be further developed across LAs.

*'I can know how (her) work is progressing, that we can take action – how we could help her, how we could help her engagement. It's important.'*

(Parent of Year 11 child)

*“I feel listened to and really valued in the structured conversations”*

(Year 5 parent)

*“My son is now more confident, he interacts better, he is learning more and he feels better about himself.....”*

(Year 1 parent)

*‘... as the weeks progressed we became more involved, more of a family’*

(Parent of Year 9 child)

### Local performance

Regional variation in the quality of support needs to be minimised. With an inclusive, whole school approach, permanent and fixed period exclusions are reduced.<sup>14</sup> Achievement for All has worked collaboratively with over 4,000 education providers -schools, PRUs, post 16 providers and early years’ settings to improve outcomes in English and maths and wider outcomes including confidence and well-being for the lowest achieving 20% of learners. Progress of targeted children and young people with SEND and those who are economically disadvantaged is up to 50% above expected progress in English and maths; there is a reduction in exclusions and an increase in attendance.

The Achievement for All schools programme (Achieving Schools) acknowledges the important role of school leaders and teachers in its implementation and delivery; they are involved from the outset.

### Impact

In the first five years of the Achieving Schools programme, evidence consistently demonstrated improvement in:

- the progress of the lowest achieving 20% of pupils
- whole-staff capability and practice,
- effective use of Pupil Premium.<sup>15</sup>

Evidence for pupil progress (2015-2016) shows:

- Yearly Average PS from target group pupils from 2015-2016 (PwC, 2016, p.6), reading +5.4 (1.8

above expected outcomes); writing +5.4 (1.8 above expected outcomes); maths +4.1 (0.5 above expected outcomes)

- Impact on schools remaining with the programme beyond 2 years (PwC, 2016, p.18) over 50% improvement in reading + 8.33; writing +7.74, maths +7.40
- Schools interviewed by PwC experienced a reduction in children and young person absenteeism.
- School Champions reported that their rating of pupil participation and attendance had increased by 30%
- The combined figures for 11 case study schools demonstrated a reduction in exclusions over a year of 48%
- Engagement, confidence and self-esteem of children and young people, 75% of children and young people surveyed reported increased confidence in their own ability to achieve; 75% pupils agreed that they liked learning and enjoy lessons more



Achievement for All is also referenced in the importance of AfA in Raising the Achievement of all Learners in Inclusive Education Country Report: United Kingdom (England).<sup>16</sup>

Achievement for All has demonstrated that it is possible, through adhering to key principles of the reforms to improve progression and attainment for children with SEND along with better attendance, improved behaviour and greater parental satisfaction through a focus on high quality teaching, parental engagement, school leadership and a focus on wider outcomes. However, over the last five years we have

experienced that schools are finding it more difficult to be able to commission our support due to general pressure on schools budgets and in some cases an unwillingness to prioritise and fund the needs of children with SEND.

In summary, mainstream schools should be more inclusive, providing opportunity for all pupils irrespective of their challenges, background or need. Leading SEND across the school involves a clear whole school approach to aspirations and access leading to increased achievement. This is reflected in the

Achievement for All approach, which underpins the schools approach set out in the Code of Practice for all schools (DfE/ DoH, 2015); if this approach was in place in all schools, there would be increased quality of support and less variability across the country.

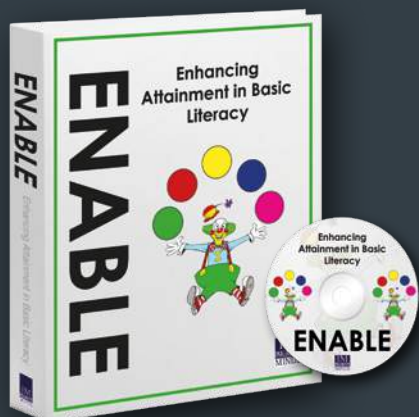
**Professor Sonia Blandford is CEO and founder of Achievement for All**

**Dr Catherine Knowles is a researcher at Achievement for All**

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Are Heads Adult Enough To Do Their Jobs? ■■■■■

# Are Heads Adult Enough To Do Their Jobs?

Research shows that headteachers do not have the emotional maturity to be effective in their roles. **Neil Gilbride** investigates how Adult Development thinking can be used to better equip school leaders.





### Facing up to the demands of leadership

Do we take for granted the size of the challenge facing school leaders? Is there a sufficient appreciation for the range of leadership functions that they face each day? Are the professional development needs of leaders as adult learners really understood and addressed? This article, will introduce the concept of Adult Ego Development and its relevance for how we conceptualise leadership and leadership development. First, it outlines



why leadership in schools is particularly challenging. Following a brief introduction to adult developmental psychology, I will demonstrate how many of the features recognised to be important in school leadership occur in a small subset of individuals. Finally there will be a reflection upon how challenging school leadership is, what we need to consider in developing leaders and what we need to have in our working environments to get the best out of leaders in our organisation.

The demands of school leadership can be best understood by considering the problems that school leaders typically face. Schools are complex organisations<sup>1</sup> where wicked problems are common.<sup>2</sup> Such problems, according to Rittel and Weber are multi-faceted, require a bespoke solution, and can have ramifications for the organisation beyond the original incident.<sup>3</sup> In addition, schools and school leadership have large affective elements which will influence the course and interaction with the problem.<sup>4</sup>

So the argument is that, to handle such complex and wicked problems in school leadership, leaders will need to:

- Recognise and appreciate the underpinning complex, wicked of the problem.<sup>5</sup>
- Respond by working in mutual, collaborative manner with their teams.<sup>6</sup> (Woods and Roberts 2018; Hargreaves and O'Connor 2018)
- Handle and support the feelings of individuals that can run those these incidents.<sup>7</sup>

However, in my research exploring the applications of adult development psychology to school leadership, I argue that the three examples I have cited (complex thinking; collaboration; and handling emotion) are, for most adults, far more challenging than we currently give credit for. When considered alongside the day to day nature of these demands, we can come to see that the work day is full of challenges that we might not even register as 'challenging'. By showing the relevance of an adult's development to these tasks, we open a whole array of questions around what we mean by professional development and the need to reconsider how we can embed some of this learning within our organisations.

### A Note on Adult Development.

How adults come to make sense of the world around them is an attribute that can develop and grow throughout the life span. Adult developmental psychologists Jane Loevinger and Robert Kegan<sup>8</sup> propose that there is a psychological construct called the Ego. The role of the Ego is simple – to make sense of the problems we face, which in turn shapes how we act.

Both Loevinger and Kegan state that the ways by which individuals construct their understanding of the world moves through discrete stages of development. The most common stages within adulthood are:

**Self-Aware Stage:** Those in the self-aware stage typically seek to understand the world through rules and structures. Situations are generally seen for how a discrete cause might determine a given outcome. Whilst they seek to be helpful to others, they focus more on their own actions and their own response to situations.

**Conscientious Stage:** Individuals in this stage experience the world through their own values and ideals, and focus less on the societal rules, structures or expectations. Other people play an increasingly greater role in their lives and in how they come to comprehend situations. Situations are more complex than might have been perceived previously – in particular, those in the Conscientious stage recognise patterns within incidents.

**Individualist:** In this stage of development, adults try to balance the rules and external expectations/structures with their own internal values. They perceive those around them as their equal, regardless of role or status. Situations are recognised as even more complex; for example, they recognise the difference between the process and the outcome.

It is suggested that individuals have been shown to move through these stages.<sup>9 4)</sup> This development usually occurs in response to disorientating experiences – experiences that challenge our world view as insufficient or incomplete. Such moments are often challenging and deeply uncomfortable and they can induce anxiety and fear. So, a safe environment is vital to help promote positive growth to a new developmental stage. Without this security, we risk individuals ‘doubling down’ on our entrenched position, losing the momentum of development. Current practices become further

entrenched and more resistant to change in the future.

After this brief consideration of the literature on Adult Development, the next section will explore how this is concept is relevant for the day to day tasks of leaders within school.

### The Relevance of Adult Development to workplace expectations

The demands of our day-to-day working lives are associated with behaviours and ways of working found within later stages of adult development. For the first time, myself, Chris James and Sam Carr myself conducted an analysis of School Leaders and their stage of Adult Ego Development (AED) and their response to wicked institutional problems. After assessment of their AED stage, we determined how each participant would typically respond to a wicked problem. Leaders were interviewed about a problem they had recently faced. They also had to complete a vignette task, where they write about how would anticipate handling a hypothetical wicked problem. To corroborate these themes, we also asked two people who worked with the headteacher who had to complete the same tasks based on their understanding of the headteachers typical way of handling these problems. The data was then organised into

This comprehensive study of 20 leaders in the three main adult stages demonstrated that there are substantive differences in how headteachers of different AED stages operated within their schools. Table 1 summarises our findings, and greater detail can be found our recently published article.<sup>10</sup>



**Table 1: Stages of Adult Ego development**

Data theme	Stage of adult ego development		
	Self-Aware	Conscientious	Individualist
<b>The sense-making process</b>	<p>An emphasis on collecting 'hard evidence' about the incident.</p> <p>An emphasis on individual sense-making.</p> <p>An immediate and rapid response.</p> <p>A desire to respond according to the relevant policy.</p>	<p>The collection of hard evidence and explanations.</p> <p>Predominantly individual sense making using a limited range of possible explanations.</p> <p>Close attention to detail in responding to the incident.</p> <p>A desire to provide support to those involved in the incident.</p> <p>Low dependency on policy.</p>	<p>Seeking hard evidence, reasons, and insights and intuitive judgements of others.</p> <p>Allowing understanding to emerge.</p> <p>Co-construction of understanding with others.</p> <p>Involvement of a range of others.</p> <p>Understanding the perspective of others.</p> <p>Reflecting and taking time to reflect.</p> <p>Seeking connections beyond the critical incident.</p> <p>The provision of support and feedback.</p> <p>Seeking to promote staff development through the incident.</p> <p>Seeking to ensure widespread understanding.</p> <p>Reliance on policy not a data theme</p>
<b>Feelings and the sense-making process</b>	Not a theme in the data	<p>A need to minimise feelings and their expression as emotions.</p> <p>A need to know the affective state of others involved in the critical incident.</p>	<p>Feelings are a central aspect of the critical incident.</p> <p>An empathetic approach.</p> <p>Provision of opportunities for those involved to express their feelings about the incident.</p> <p>Seeking to ensure the affective well-being of those involved.</p>
<b>The involvement of others in the sense-making process</b>	Others were: providers of information; an audience for the expression of feelings.	Others were: trusted advisers; an audience for off-loading feelings; a source of validation.	Others were: co-constructors of a shared understanding; providers of guidance on who to involve; sounding boards; expected to be involved.
<b>How others experience the principals</b>	As solution/outcome focussed; as a significant source of influence	As having particular qualities or traits; as taking a logical, rational approach in responding to a critical incident; as highly emotive choosing the appropriate moment to express their feelings.	As having a deep and significant effect on those they worked with; able to identify the issues that others cannot see.

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What was of particular interest was how so many of the expected ways of working were found in the later individualist stage of Adult Development. For example:

- How individuals conceptualise incidents are fundamentally different. The world moves from being straightforward ‘black and white’ and relatively linear to increasingly ambiguous, grey with multiple routes for causality.
- How individuals engage individuals around them within school tasks. Moving from delegation (I will tell you what to do) in the earlier stages of adult development, individuals are increasingly brought in to provide insight. It is in the individualist stage where leaders are more likely to work with others in a genuine mutually driven collaboration between leaders and those around them.
- The extent to which emotion is recognised. It was only leaders in the later individualist stage that proactively recognised the role of emotion in how others made decisions.
- Seeing the inter-dependence within an organisation. There was a greater recognition of how individuals are -dependent upon each other and how outcomes from one task will impact upon what will happen next in often unpredictable ways.
- Acknowledge that the history of the incident would be important in determining what will happen next.

This indicates that the key features within the role of the school leader- recognising complexity, engaging in genuine collaboration with those around them and the recognition of emotion are more associated with the later stage of Adult Development.

Furthermore, not only do these behaviours tend to occur at a substantively later stage of adult development, this stage of development is rare within the adult population (Cook-Grueter 2004; Lanning et al 2018). Thus, the tasks we expect leaders to undertake, day to day, week in and week out, are linked to a stage of development which untypical of the general population. Associating ways of working with the later and rarer stages of adult development, has several implications:

### **i. Appreciating just how challenging these Ways of working actually are.**

As outlined above, the inherent organisational structure and typical problems school leaders face places an implicit expectations on school leaders to handle emotion, recognise complexity and work in a genuinely collaborative way. This analysis has shown that this way of working will be very hard for adults to do consistently. We are demanding a high level of development within school leaders.

Our findings begin to encourage us to reconsider what we mean by the common statement of school leadership being a tough job. Usually a range of reasons

will be cited – external pressures, high work load and huge responsibility on the shoulders of one person. However, what this research is starting to show is that school leadership is challenging, not just because of these larger demands of the role, but because the day-to-day tasks are so demanding: they require school leaders to work in an exceptionally sophisticated way that is linked to a rare stage of development.

The implications of this is that we are at risk of asking leaders to take on roles that are highly taxing for reasons that we might not have considered previously

This then leads to posing two further questions – Are we developing leaders to support them within this endeavour and how important is the context in which they work?

**ii. We need to reconsider the concept of development.**

By linking to their stage of adult development, the traditional model of content delivery to leaders might need some revision. Many of the factors we expect from leaders on a day to day basis are facilitated by their stage of Adult Development. This is significant because it would suggest that a leader needs a broad, balanced curriculum of powerful knowledge and experiences in order to support their growth. This is where the work of Drago-Severson,<sup>11</sup> Kegan<sup>12</sup> and other adult developmentalists can be critical. In their work, they regularly point to the importance of the following features:

*Developmental Coaching* – Being aware of an individual’s stage of development can facilitate more appropriate learning goals, experiences and conversations that individuals can make sense of. For example, asking someone to attempt a genuine, mutual collaboration in the Self-aware stage might be a challenge too far: it is two stages above their current sense-making capacity. Could it be that their starting point is to learn to incorporate other perspectives into their own, or to increase the number of people they consult with, as a conduit to achieving this bigger collaborative goal? Augmenting coaching with Adult Development Theory could transform an already common place practice to facilitate adult development.

*Disruptive Experiences* – putting individuals into situations that is unfamiliar to them can facilitate growth. Such circumstances need to force individuals to reconsider how they are making sense of the situation. Critically, this needs to be done with their stage of development in mind, by using the right framing through developmental coaching and with intent and awareness.

In addition to these points, I argue that we need to think about what knowledge can be particularly powerful in the development of leadership. At the moment, we risk underplaying the role of knowledge within the promotion of an adult’s wider development. By knowledge, I refer to the overall approach and content that can be incorporated into a programme of professional learning – be it a qualification or a set of professional standards. In other places, including my blog, I have argued for the importance of Knowledge. Knowledge is, indeed, power. What we need to do is reconceptualise how we view knowledge – for me, it is knowledge that, once understood, provides a template or scaffold that can facilitate leaders in seeing the world through a different lens. This, I believe, can be transformative to how individuals come to understand their world view and thus their stage of development.

Others in the field of educational leadership, such as Bryan VanGronigen at the University of Delaware, are thinking hard about how we can embed approaches to adult development to school leadership programmes.



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Seeing such work develop further will be fascinating at the field moves forward.

It is important to note that none of these techniques or strategies are particularly new – however, what we need to think about is the intent behind them. By thinking about the adult to be development, armed with the information of stages and how they enact in their environment, we can enhance our current approaches to school leadership development into approaches that achieve both their traditional aims whilst also working on the wider adult developmental needs.

### iii. To restart the conversation on well-being – A performance driven narrative.

It is very tempting with psychological constructs to focus entirely on leadership as an innate trait that is divorced from its environment – after-all, an individual's AED is exactly that: their ego, their development. So there is often the implicit assumption that such behaviours will simply be transferred across different organisations, regardless of contextual demand.

However, exposing the relevance of an individual's stage of AED to how they practice school leadership demonstrates that quite the reverse is the case: that individuals sensemaking and behaviour will be critically impacted by the context in which they reside. Our Ego, and therefore our capacity for sense-making, is sensitive to the environment. Should an individual be placed under consider stress or pressure, we engage in defence mechanisms<sup>18 19</sup>. One of these defence mechanisms is regression: temporarily operating at earlier stages of development in order to protect ourselves. For example, the adult within the individualist stage, called upon to bring a wider range of people into a genuine collaboration can, and will, revert to earlier patterns as (private sense-making; focusing on their own action) should they placed under duress.

Thus, discovering the relevance of adult development to school leadership practice emphasises the critical importance of the environments we provide and work within. In summary, if we want leaders to recognise the complexity of their environments, work collaboratively



with those around them, provide developmental support and to recognise the emotions within an institution, the workplace needs to provide a safe holding environment for adults. Such environments promote psychological safety, emotional containment, empathy and support for individuals to comprehend the situation<sup>19</sup>. Through these conditions, adults can express themselves at their fullest potential and, thus, those within this stage are facilitated to operate within it.

### Conclusion - the value of the Adult Development perspective

This article has sought to demonstrate the relevance for adult development in school leadership development. How an individual makes sense of their environment is critical to how they lead and manage within school settings. This is governed by their stage of Adult Ego

Development – a psychological construct that does the work of sense-making and can develop across the life span. Across the main stages of adult development, it would appear there are substantive differences in how leaders work with complexity, handle those around them and manage emotion. Critically, those in the rarer individualist stage of development appear to have some distinct advantages. This raises three points – the day to day job of leadership is far harder than we give credit for; that we should be prepared to consider the process of adult development within wider professional development and the need for a supportive holding environment in which adults can thrive.

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# Teachers Must Experiment And Test Like Scientists To Be More Effective





**Gareth Mills outlines the Enquiring Schools approach and explores some of the forces that influence teacher professional growth**

### Enquiry within the DNA of schools

In 2010 I was involved in designing the Enquiring Schools programme for National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). The Enquiring Schools programme builds a bridge between academic research and classroom-based action-research as a vehicle for professional growth and innovation.

Importantly, the Enquiring Schools programme grew out of a curriculum-based project called Enquiring Minds, developed by an organisation called Futurelab, a research and innovation incubator based in Bristol. Enquiring Minds set out to enhance the traditional curriculum by giving students a say in some of the content and issues that they would wish to explore as part of their school experience.

The Enquiring Schools project takes this spirit forward by offering teachers a way to engage in disciplined enquiry on themes that matter to them and their students. I believe this is important. Enquiring Schools is not a top-down initiative but one that begins with the real lives and issues teachers wish to explore as part of their professional growth. It is about choice and agency. A recent report from NFER noted that having some autonomy over professional development goals has the greatest potential to increase job satisfaction and retention.<sup>1</sup>

Since the launch of Enquiring Schools our small team has worked with some 52 schools either directly, or as part of a cluster of schools collaborating to find solutions to problems or looking to innovate. Several school groups are on their fourth annual cycle and have embedded teacher enquiry into the DNA of their organisations. The Enquiring Schools team now operates as an independent organisation and continues to work and learn alongside teachers from both state and independent sectors, including secondary, primary and special schools in the UK and beyond.

This article will outline some of the principles that underpin our work, as well as some of the practical strategies we use to create what I believe to be a human-centric approach to professional growth.



### No significant difference

Earlier in the year I attended a conference titled '100 years of education trials: no significant difference'. It was organised by the Royal Statistical Society and National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to mark the centenary of the first randomised control trial (RCT) in education. Leading figures in the field of educational research came together to address the key challenges faced by researchers in education.

One powerful message I took from the debate was the need to do more to build a meaningful and two-way collaboration between the research community and practitioners. As someone who has spent most of their professional life as a teacher, or working alongside teachers, I did feel, however, that it would have been possible to leave the event with the impression that if only researchers could design more robust RCTs and disseminate their findings more effectively, the teaching profession would be transformed. My experience suggests that this would not be the case. My proposition is that it is not the lack of compelling evidence that is the issue, it is our partial understanding about the complexity of how change happens, or doesn't happen, in classrooms.

### How change happens or doesn't happen

Teachers work within a complex eco-system with many competing factors influencing their thinking and decision making, only one of which is research. Teachers and school leaders are subject to changing, competing, and sometimes contradictory, pressures that shape what goes on in classrooms. For example, changes to inspection criteria, exams, curriculum or the metrics used in high-stakes accountability systems are as likely to initiate activity as are the findings of any well-designed controlled trial.

A recent report from the EEF noted that academic research has a relatively small impact on teachers' decision-making.<sup>2</sup> It found that teachers were much more likely to draw ideas from their own experiences or the experiences of other teachers/schools when deciding on strategies to support learning. CPD, often non-research based, such as that associated with changes to inspection criteria or qualifications, was also cited as an important influence.

One only has to look at the effect that the introduction of the EBacc in England has had on examination entries to illustrate the influence that political decisions have on front-line practice. Entries for subjects like for drama,

music and design technology are declining rapidly, down 18%, 20% and 51% respectively since 2015, while numbers following geography and history are increasing.<sup>1</sup> Policy advisors are very aware of the levers available to them. Practitioners quickly realise that curriculum freedoms given with one hand are often taken away by assessment requirements on the other.



### The implications of a new era of communication

An important part of the education eco-system are the channels of communication, both formal and informal, that influence policy and practice. Over the past decade, this has changed considerably. Alongside the demise of national agencies and local authorities, and the growth of multi-academy trusts and private service providers, we have witnessed the rise of more informal channels of communication with a wider range of commercial, philanthropic and ideological agendas.

Some argue that this change can be welcomed as a democratisation of communication, giving voice to alternative perspectives beyond traditional elites and orthodoxies. Others are concerned that the idea of a shared body of professional knowledge, accumulated through rigorously-analysed research studies, is giving way to a market-place of competing ideas. Whatever your perspective, there is undoubtedly an increased interest in research and evidence-based education.

Followers of ‘Edu-twitter’ and other social media channels will be aware of the lively debate taking

place about the way evidence is being used to promote particular agendas. There are many thoughtful contributors and very generous professionals who share resources, personal insights and provide links to research papers and so on. Much can be gained from participation. However, there are also serious concerns about the influence these new channels are having on the nature, tone and quality of professional discourse.

Earlier this year, Kevan Collins, the former chief executive of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) said the education community needed to stop debating in an “awful, polarized, adversarial way.”<sup>3</sup> He finds the tone of much of the online dialogue as “deeply unattractive and alien to my experience of being an educator.” Brian Lightman, the former CEO of ASCL, commenting on a twitter thread says “this is a depressing trail but it unfortunately reflects a big problem which is preventing a respectful and professional informed discourse from taking place” (Lightman, 2018)

As educators, hopefully open-minded and respectful of evidence, we might be concerned that the rather than opening-up thought, some of the tone of online debate could be seen to contribute to the closing down of thoughtful dialogue. Alison Peacock, the Chief Executive of the Chartered College of Teaching, warned of the avoiding the “false certainty” of research claims often seen on social media.<sup>4</sup> One regular contributor to the online debate expresses the concerns of many when he writes “Edu-twitter can be absolutely brilliant but it can also be toxic in its cynicism, bullying, shaming and intolerance imposing relentless certainty on others while sneering at those who disagree”. Knowledge can be used to subjugate as well as liberate.

Clearly ideas about education have always been debated and disputed, but there are concerns that teachers are being offered simple definitive solutions. The claims made for evidence-informed education are now more complex and contested. So how might we move forward more productively?

### Finding a way forward

Duncan Green, Senior Strategic Advisor at Oxfam and Professor at the London School of Economics, says that “a defining property of human systems is complexity:

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because of the sheer numbers of relationship and feedback loops among the many elements, they cannot be reduced to simple chains of cause and effect.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus Green encourages people to do more Systems Thinking invites us to look at the whole and the way the parts within it interrelate in a dynamic way. It commends us to consider the forces that influence individuals toward one thing rather than another. It encourages us to explore a variety of perspectives to critically examine the assumptions we make. Systems thinking reveals that many actions can have unintended, as well as intended consequences.

In complex systems like education, change comes from the interplay of many factors. An important aim of the Enquiring Schools programme is to equip teachers with systems-thinking tools so that they can develop richer pictures of the contexts in which the work and the forces that contribute to the challenges they face. We use dialogic approaches and coaching to encourage thoughtful reflection and respectful debate. We support teachers to apply ‘evidence-based best-bets’ sensitively through classroom investigations.

We can think about systems in a macro or micro way. At the macro level, we might think about the forces at play within the whole education system – the political priorities, inspection criteria, accountability frameworks, funding, staffing, curriculum and qualifications requirements. There are, of course systems within systems, so on a micro level we might think of the school as a system. At this level the leadership priorities, staffing, timetables, resources, access to CPD, class groupings as well as curriculum, assessment and pedagogy all interact in a dynamic way (for further exploration of the concept of the schools as an ecosystem see: Godfrey and Handscomb, 2019)<sup>6</sup>.

It is worth reflecting on some of the forces that influence teacher professional growth. We noted earlier that academic research has a relatively small impact on teachers’ decision-making. In a chart presented in the NFER blog describing this finding, “research undertaken by me” was identified as being twice as influential as “research presented by a research organisation.”<sup>6</sup> This could be interpreted as being hugely problematic for research organisations. Alternatively,

for those working alongside teachers, it could be seen as a key to help unlock the way to teachers can engage more effectively with evidence as a way of bringing about positive change. It certainly reinforced my belief that engaging teachers as partners in enquiry is one of the most effective ways to promote positive change.

### Learning journeys

An Enquiring Schools project seeks to recognise complexity, and use a variety of systems tools and approaches to support thoughtful analyses and professional growth. We use the metaphor of a journey to help explain the purpose of each stage. We begin by establishing basecamp.



### Taking your bearings

Before beginning any journey, it is very useful to know your starting point. Involving teachers in actively exploring and mapping the factors that influence decision making is a good starting point in recognising the real-life contexts in which they work.

Spending some time uncovering the dynamics of what is happening, by, for example, looking at an issue through different perspectives, often radically changes perceptions of what might need to happen next. In the Enquiring Schools programme, we encourage participants to spend some time building up a picture of current practice before setting out on a course of action. It might be useful to have a broad destination in mind



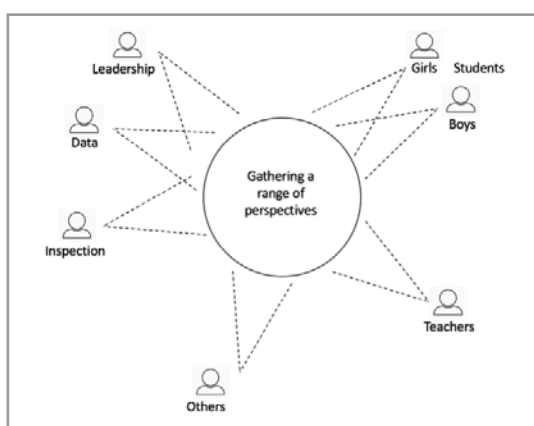
but it is also invaluable to spend some time exploring the current situation before embarking on a new initiative.

**Illustration:** In one Enquiring School a teacher was given the remit to identify and introduce a new house-point system to the organisation. It was felt that more needed to be done to better incentivise students. As part of building up a picture of current practice it became apparent that the underlying issue was less about the shortcomings of the existing house-point system and more about how the system was being implemented. Underlying the implementation there were deeper issues about engagement, motivation and fairness.

For example, it emerged that students felt the awards system was unfair as some teachers could give house-points for turning up with the right kit while others required students to produce an extensive piece of scholarly research before making an award. Some teachers gave house-points frequently while, for others, it was a rare occurrence. Students understood that gaining recognition through house-points had as much to do with the teachers scheduled on their timetable as it was to the quality of effort or work. It became apparent that the implementation of the house-point system had the unintended consequence of de-motivating rather than motivating students. This finding led to a much richer debate about student motivation and consistency of expectation across the school than was anticipated at the start. In another school, a similar finding led to staff and students developing a set of 8 desirable learning behaviours associated with effective learning. It was agreed that these learning behaviours would inform the house-point system. In both schools, discussion about learning proved valuable, the language of learning became more visible in classrooms and subsequent activity built upon the academic-evidence base around meta-cognition and self-regulation, both of which are associated with effectiveness.

Systems-thinking encourages us to gain a deeper insight into reality by investigating the perspectives of others. It means involving and listening to people to get a range of viewpoints on the issue being explored. It can be especially effective when students, as well as teachers and senior leaders help to build up the picture of practice.

**Figure 1: Building up a picture of practice**



The illustration in Figure 1 shows a simple systems-thinking tool. Gathering intelligence from a variety of viewpoints can significantly inform our understanding of issues and influence the decisions that follow. The dynamics of a situation are more clearly identified and, consequently, more effective strategies for improvement are identified.

**Consulting maps and finding a trust-worthy guide**

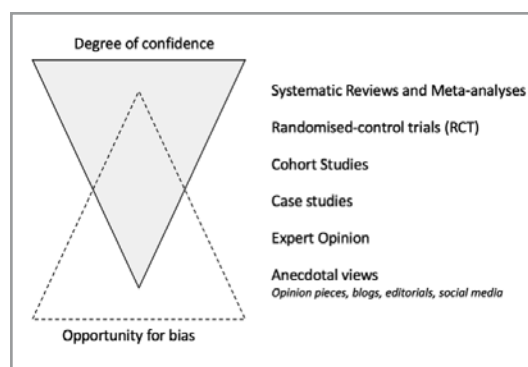
Once an authentic picture of practice is established, it is useful to consult the research evidence to investigate potential ways forward. The academic evidence base can act as a guidebook or route planner. At this stage, we seek to build a strong bridge between the real-life concerns of teachers and the academic-evidence to help inform the design of an enquiry.

In schools, time is often identified as the most limited resource. Consequently, we can use the evidence-base to explore the ‘best-bet’ strategies that are most likely to have the greatest impact on the issues teachers are facing. In the past few years the profession has enjoyed increased access to several useful sources of trustworthy evidence,

set out in some very accessible formats. The Educational Endowment (EEF) Teacher Toolkit, for example, offers authoritative information in the form of meta-analyses. The Chartered College of Teaching (CCT), in addition to offering publications that pull together research evidence, offers access to several databases, including Bristol University’s document summary service which offers a monthly, monthly digest of selected research in education policy and theory. It summarises major reports by key organisations in education such as the DfE, EEF, Ofsted or NFER.

It is helpful for teachers to reflect on the sources of information that sometime make the headlines in the mainstream media. It is advisable to be aware of the differences between claims made by independent, non-aligned organisations such as the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) and those from think-tanks with particular ideological agendas to promote and sponsors to satisfy.

**Figure 2; Considering the veracity of “research” claims**



The Enquiring Schools programme seeks to support teachers in becoming critical consumers of research literature. We provide ways to evaluate the information teachers are likely to encounter. It is my experience that, with the proliferation of online resources, teachers are keen to identify trustworthy and reliable sources of information. Appreciating the degree of confidence one might place in any particular claim, or recognising the opportunity for bias, is a starting point. We find



that using the diagram in Figure 2 is helpful when considering the veracity of a claim made in a blog, for example, compared to one derived from a rigorous meta-analysis. Simple questions like ‘Who is saying this?’ ‘Who else agrees or disagrees?’ and ‘What is their agenda?’ are simple approaches to help navigate the landscape.

Having a framework to help evaluate the strengths of the claims made is important and can act as a counterbalance to the sort of polemic one often encounters online. Scientist Richard Feynman offered this helpful quote. “The statements of science are not of what is true and what is not true, but statements of what is known with different degrees of certainty.” For teachers, the ‘false certainty’ of some of those using ‘evidence’ as cudgel to promote their personal agendas might be more usefully interpreted as ‘what does the evidence say are the best-bets, how might they enhance my repertoire and how shall I test them out in my own setting?’

### **Making a journey – human-centric approaches**

The document ‘Developing Great Teaching’ (Cordingley et al, 2015), commissioned by Teacher Development Trust,<sup>7</sup> is a review of the international research into effective professional development. It noted that skilful external facilitation is often a factor in successful

CPD. In the most successful professional development processes, external input provides expertise, diverse perspectives and is sufficiently independent to be able to constructively challenge orthodoxies within the school. Facilitators of the most successful programmes can also act as coaches and mentors to participants.

The role of a critically constructive friend seems to be important. In the Enquiring Schools programme, we work in collaboration with schools’ internal coordinators, (often heads of CPD, Research Leads or Middle leaders) to providing a range of input and workshops. Alongside the more formal workshops and debates, coaching and mentoring is a key approach. Time set aside for coaching individuals (and small groups) provides a safe-space for reflection, honesty and challenge. The research suggests that ‘successful facilitators build a relationship with participants that allows them to share values, understanding, goals and beliefs with participants, while providing important challenge at the same time.’

In the complex system of education, where teachers encounter many competing and contradictory voices, it is helpful to have a trusted guide. Trust and impartiality are important. Schools benefit from facilitators who can act as an honest broker, promoting no commercial, political interests, and ideally letting the evidence speak for itself. contexts.



In schools where we feel the Enquiring Schools programmes has had the most impact on the culture of an organisation, time is set-aside for training days (or half-days) and, importantly teachers are released three or four times over a year for a series of 45-60 minute coaching sessions. Some time is also ear-marked during staff meetings to update others, share thoughts and ideas and provoke dialogue around the issues that are emerging.

On a practical level, facilitators also support participants with the nuts and bolts of a rigorous action research methodology, helping to develop theory-based hypotheses to test, drafting and refining enquiry questions and suggesting appropriate research instruments that can be used to evaluate impact with a degree of credibility and authority.

As important as academic evidence is to our work, the Enquiring Schools team also recognise that teaching is an art and craft, as well as a science. So, while signposting participants to research, we acknowledge the dynamics of the classroom where relationships are central to so much of what goes on. Work done by Lesley Saunders describes how factors like tone of voice, facial expression

and physical presence in the classroom play a key part in creating positive climates for learning.<sup>8</sup> For many teachers this is often tacit knowledge, acquired through the act of teaching and by dint of their demeanour in the classroom. We also recognise that there is a craft to teaching. The ability to question effectively or model thinking aloud are examples of the practical skills that can be practiced and honed over time to improve enjoyment and effectiveness.

We believe that 'building repertoire' is a better way to construct a positive narrative about teacher growth. It certainly trumps the discourse of dichotomy and derision that typifies far too much of the online education debate. Philippa Cordingly, chief executive of CUREE, captures our approach when she says... 'Evidence from good research is wrought to be generalizable. Evidence used in practice has to be related to the starting points of particular schools.'

We try to encourage teachers in our programme to ask three important questions about evidence. Firstly, what evidence do I have about what is going on now in my classroom? Secondly, what evidence from research can help inform my thinking and subsequent actions?



And finally, what evidence I will gather to evaluate the impact of my actions?

Through the Enquiring Schools programme we are not simply disseminating information and asking teachers to apply it in their classrooms. We are working to create a space in which teachers, through practical experiment and enquiry, can grow their professional understanding and wisdom.

### Key messages

From what we have learnt through the Enquiring Schools approach some key messages have emerged and these are given below as a concluding professional development resource for readers.

#### For teachers:

- Think principles rather than prescription. So, for example, we have good evidence that feedback is a positive thing – what sort of feedback is manageable and how will I make it work well with my class?
- Think about ‘enhancing your repertoire’ rather than joining a ‘pedagogic tribe’. Wisdom is a cumulative thing, developing over time and informed by experience as well as reading research.
- Make ‘fitness for purpose’ the guiding principle when making pedagogic choices.

#### For CPD leaders:

- Ground your CPD in your context - real teachers with real students in real classrooms.
- Effective change takes place over time - it is rarely achieved through a series of one-off events.
- Use collaborative enquiry and problem solving to promote thinking, dialogue and professional growth.

#### For school leaders:

- Remember that teachers operate as part of a bigger system – look for points of leverage and explore ways to maximise the positive forces for learning and minimise/mitigate the unintended consequences.
- Seek top-to-bottom alignment – from the values and vision that drive the organisation to the systems and strategies that are implemented on the ground.
- Look for honest brokers to act as constructive critical friends to support thinking and offer professional challenge.

**Note: GCSE data obtained from FFT Education Datalab. A project funded by the Nuffield Foundation. See <https://results.ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/gcse.php?v=20190822.2>**

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# Will Better Coaching Take Teaching Assistants Off The Bench?

**Fiona Tobin explores to what extent coaching can improve the impact of Teaching Assistants**

## **Investing in Teaching Assistants' development is important**

How to create an effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme continues to be an area which garners much interest, particularly in the context of the changing and increased demands of educational reform, requiring a high-performing workforce. The exponential growth in the number of Teaching Assistants (TAs) in school now means that there is a critical part of the workforce which has generally less depth of education than teachers but who have a significant impact on the most vulnerable; low ability, disadvantaged and SEND students. These students' needs are best catered for by high quality TAs who in turn benefit from tailored and effective CPD.

As Ward notes:

*“Between 2000 and 2013, numbers trebled from 79,000 full-time equivalent posts to 243,700. The EEF estimates that nurseries and primary schools in England now have more TAs than they do teachers.”<sup>1</sup>*

The overall number of TAs continues to rise. In 2018 the number of full time equivalent TAs was 263,900 (NAHT, 2019). However, Ward goes onto state that:

*“The majority of schools are failing to make the best use of teaching assistants, despite the £4.4 billion spent each year on employing them, according to research.”*

Yet, five years after Ward’s article was published there is still little investigation into CPD for Teaching Assistants. The role of the Teaching Assistant, has never fully shaken off the concerns generated by a spate of negative headlines following The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff report.<sup>2</sup> The authors have since been at pains to dispel the notion of a negative relationship between support from Teaching Assistants and pupil progress<sup>3</sup>. They argue that the central issue is not the TA but how TAs are deployed in schools. Indeed, Lee, using the later research by Webster for the Education Endowment Fund (EEF), noted that TAs, used effectively, “... can help students to progress by an extra three to four months over an academic year”.<sup>4</sup> Surely it is now time for the role of the TA to shake off the erroneous misconceptions that arose in 2009 and finally be celebrated as a valuable part of the education workforce. This article investigates the role that coaching, as a form of CPD, may play in taking TAs off the bench and out onto the pitch.

There is considerably more research available on CPD for teachers than there is for support staff. The lack of research into developing TAs may be understandable (the primary focus for training and development will always be teachers) but it is also troubling. Whilst the research that has been done in this area (e.g. Bubb and Earley) seems to support the view that support staff can have a positive effect on pupil outcomes, schools seem unwilling to significantly invest in their support staff.

### The case for coaching as effective CPD

It is generally the case that school professional development programmes tend to be geared toward school development priorities and this can sometimes lead to the neglect of the development needs of the individual. The emphasis on the school rather than the individual agenda is in contrast to Matthews’ observation: “In England, the teacher effect on students’ progress is much greater than the school effect, yet the quality of schools tends to dominate national policy agendas.”<sup>5</sup> This goes to the heart of the matter, generally CPD programmes are school wide, and deliver improvements at an institutional level whereas a good deal of the literature indicates that the emphasis should be on the individual and it appears that coaching can offer improvements on an individual scale.

Before looking at coaching in more detail we should note a further discernible shift in school CPD programmes. Over the past 20 years, sometimes due to financial pressures, CPD has moved increasingly away from external courses towards professional development which is school-led, linked to the needs of the school and focussed on teaching and learning. Much more common now is internally delivered professional development such as twilight sessions, observations, book scrutiny and classroom visits. In my experience internally delivered CPD has been far more apposite than attending an external course which can often be more general and sometimes poorly aligned to the school setting and the needs of the classroom. (Although, ironically, external courses are still generally seen by teachers and TAs as more valuable than CPD delivered internally.)

### The transformative power of coaching

Bubb and Earley list 17 factors to be borne in mind in the development of an effective staff development programme. The last factor being: “It gives staff renewed enthusiasm for working with children and with colleagues.”<sup>6</sup> Through the research I also aimed to investigate whether coaching meets this criteria of finding renewed enjoyment and enthusiasm for the work of support staff.

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A final criticism of CPD events such as Training Days is that they do not have a sustainable impact on individuals. Ideas that seem very persuasive, whilst on a course, sometimes get lost in the never-ending to do list. Coaching seems to offer a more sustainable pathway to change as initiatives agreed on in one session can be followed up in subsequent sessions.

Great claims have been made about the transformative power of coaching in fields as diverse as sport and medicine. In his review of effective coaching practice in school Matthews cites Bambrick-Santanyo a head teacher in New Jersey ‘Effective observation and feedback isn’t about evaluation; it’s about coaching’ and he further asserts that ‘by receiving weekly observations and feedback, a teacher develops as much in one year as most teachers do in twenty.’ (2016). However, there is little research available on the impact of coaching relative to the quality of teaching and pupil performance, be the coaching with the teacher or TA.

In addition, Matthews notes that:

*“Incremental coaching has much in common with the marginal gains approach to improving performance. Marginal gains theory shows how small improvements aggregate and together can result in significant*

*improvements. The evidence for rapid and substantial benefits to teaching practice is overwhelming.”<sup>13</sup>*

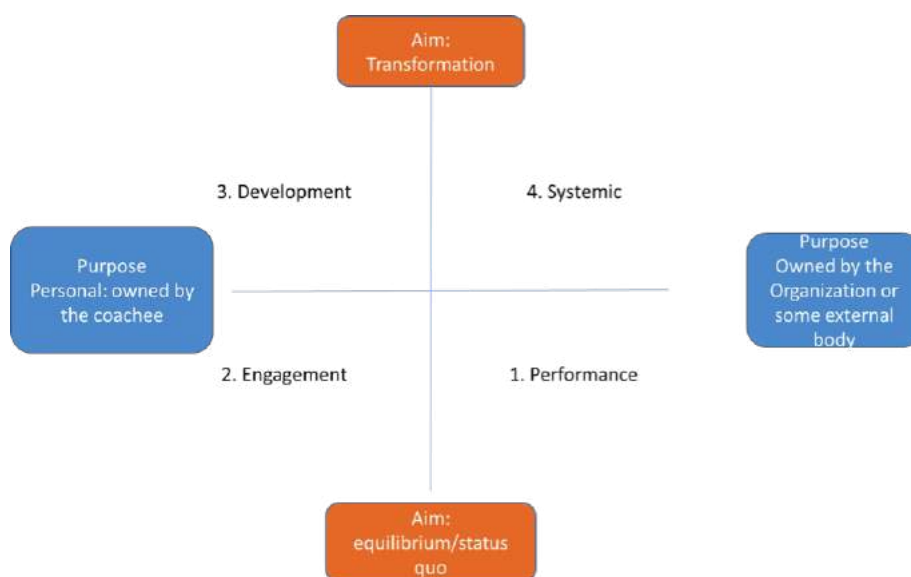
The literature around the positive impact of coaching is certainly convincing, the opportunity to refine small areas of practice to ensure that there is regular and sustained improvement in the experience of students coupled with renewed staff enthusiasm ensures that a coaching programme offers an interesting possibility in terms of staff CPD.

In summary then, there appears to be growing interest in coaching as a form of CPD not just for teachers but for all support staff. It meets the criteria for effective adult learning. The flexibility of coaching and the focus on developing the individual seems to set it apart from some other forms of CPD. There is a need for more research into the benefits and possible drawbacks of coaching particularly relative to support staff.

### Trialling coaching in the workplace

The model below<sup>7</sup> on situational coaching illustrates the various intentions and approaches to coaching in a professional setting. My aim was to trial a Coaching process that would fit into Category 3: Development.

**Figure 1: ‘Coaching with Empathy’ cited by Rogers (2008)**





In terms of questioning techniques I used the GROW model as outlined by Bubb<sup>8</sup>. In Bubb's work she reflects on this choice relative to research for coaching TAs in a special school. She concludes that the GROW model is apposite because:

*"...it fitted with the school's approach to helping students manage their behaviour because it was about them making choices about pursuing different courses of action."*

In my school we follow a similar approach in helping students manage their behaviour and approach to learning so the GROW model allowed me to replicate that approach with TAs.

### Can line managers coach?

The thorny question of whether line managers can coach is addressed by Swart<sup>10</sup>, who suggested that one key issue for the coaching process is that; "People can feel vulnerable exposing their fears and weaknesses, and the manager's closeness to the situation may not help either of them gain new insights into the issues at hand"<sup>11</sup>. Swart concludes that, "Even if they have the time and

credibility, the relationship with a direct report is not usually commensurate with coaching". Swart succinctly highlights the disadvantages of a coaching process where the line manager is the coach but I think there may be some contexts where having a senior member of staff with some line-management responsibility for staff in that particular area may bring some benefits to the coachee. For example, if the coachee wants to try something experimental or unusual the line manager can create opportunities for that to happen. Furthermore a line manager may have experience or contacts in an area that the coachee wishes to explore. The additional experience of the line manager may indeed be useful in exploring opportunities particularly if the conversation becomes 'stuck' and the coachee is uncertain of potential solutions. I would agree that depending on the purpose of the coaching, generally it is better if there isn't a line management dimension to the coaching relationship because of the power imbalance and subsequent difficulties examined by Swart but in a school context sometimes the most effective and empowering coaches might well be on the Senior Leadership Team and this source of coaching shouldn't be dismissed because of the disadvantages explored in Swart's research.

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I coached three TAs over a half term period. A separate one hour slot was agreed with each of the TAs. After the process of coaching the TAs were interviewed to find out more about how they viewed the process and the benefits and disadvantages both for them and the students they were working with.



### The coaching case study

The three TAs were at different stages in their career development at levels 1, 2, and 3 which is the highest level of TA in my school although the Level 3 does not have the formal qualification of Higher Level Teaching Assistant. The TAs had also been at my school for differing amounts of time from one to nine years. The three TAs were selected, on the basis of their openness to participation and willingness to engage in a different process as well as current success in their respective role, in conjunction with the SenCo.

I was both coach and interviewer and this may have led to some bias both perhaps in my selection of questions and how the interviewees chose to answer the questions. Although I am not the line manager for the TAs, I do have ultimate line manager responsibility for the SEND department and the literature suggests that this is not optimal. There are issues of differing power bases as well as insider research dynamics that could have a basis on any conclusions reached. I have also considered the question of ethics. However, I ensured that this was taken into account when analysing the ways forward in the conclusion.

The TAs were given the opportunity to select the topic, on which they were coached, the only guidance was that it must be in the professional sphere. I then interviewed the TAs about their experience on the coaching programme.

The sample of only three TAs may be too small to be able to make any overarching claims about the process and the time length of a half term might also be too short for any substantial conclusions to be made.

### What was discovered

Each of the TAs who participated in the research said they had taken advantage of a wide range of CPD opportunities in school. They were enthusiastic about the range of training that they had been offered. For the Level 1 TA individual opportunities such as observations had provided her with the best opportunities to improve. For the Level 3 TA, training on her specialist area of SEND had the greatest impact.

The TAs were positive about the impact of coaching on their practice but to different degrees. The Level 3 TA felt that coaching had provided her, 'with food for thought' and an opportunity to focus on areas of her practice that she might otherwise have neglected. The Level 2 TA felt that the process had given her 'greater confidence' in trialling differentiated work for the SEND students in her care. For the Level 1 TA the process was transformational in the final interview she said: "I feel like a different person". This clearly resonates with the suggestions of Bubb and Earley<sup>12</sup> that CPD should provide 'renewed enthusiasm' for the job but also meets other criteria in their definition of successful staff development such as 'development of the individual'.

Two of the TAs had decided to focus on career development in their coaching sessions while the third had chosen to focus on questioning techniques. Interestingly they all chose similar interim tasks which focussed on working with a small number of SEND or disadvantaged students and trying out different strategies to support student motivation.

Two of the TAs stated that the coaching had changed the way they understood their contribution to student progress. Previously they had been trying to make work more understandable for students but over the course of

the coaching sessions they had come to the conclusion that the students, they were working with, really needed support with removing their barriers to learning rather than help with the specific tasks. The third TA identified student motivation as a key issue but realised she had to provide more differentiated work in order to build the student's self-esteem.

The TAs were all able to identify improved outcomes for students over the course of the coaching sessions. For one student it was improved performance in spelling tests; for another it was managing to regulate her behaviour and stay out of the behavioural facility for more than a week when previously she had been in there for some part of every day. Another student who had previously been reluctant to complete maths work became the maths champion whose work was used to benchmark the rest of the class.

### Reflections on the findings

I was perhaps most surprised by the relative speed with which the impact of the coaching had an impact on students' learning and wellbeing. Even after one session the TAs were keen to tell me about strategies they had tried and the subsequent impact on students.

However, it should be noted that at least one of the TAs felt it was too early to tell whether these positive improvements would be sustainable in the long term.

Matthews refers to 'suspicion'<sup>13</sup> as being a potential barrier to the successful implementation on a coaching programme. In terms of the success of this project I had selected TAs who I had felt would be open minded. However, in the course of the research interview it was clear that all of the TAs thought that it would be difficult to implement a coaching programme for all, without greater clarity about its objectives, because they believed that others might indeed be 'suspicious' of the motives and that therefore they might not participate fully.

As previously mentioned I was conscious of the implications of being in a line management relationship with the TAs and aimed to build this awareness into my interpretations of the findings. In doing this I was confident that this did not unduly affect the responses of participants and there was indeed some indication that my overall line management for TAs gave them

greater courage to explore practices that they might not otherwise have done.

The literature suggested that when coaching was used the coachee was, 'more likely to enact desired teaching practice and apply appropriate teaching practices more appropriately'.<sup>14</sup> This was certainly the case for some of the TAs who had benefitted from school CPD on differentiation but did not appear to have the confidence to approach some teachers to discuss differentiated tasks. Some of the suggestions made by the TAs were ideas that I might have expected them to already be implementing but prior to the coaching, they did not have the confidence to make suggestions to teaching staff who in reality were glad of the recommendations. Instilling the TAs with confidence to approach teachers and make recommendations was a clear benefit of this programme to two of the TAs.

A clear message coming through the literature on coaching is that CPD should be about 'reflection and enquiry'. The TAs all commented on the fact that the coaching sessions gave them a space to reflect and think about their practice and in some cases to persevere with students they might have otherwise avoided.



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### Increased understanding through coaching

For me the coaching process was really helpful in understanding why some strategies which we had implemented at whole school level were more successful than others. For example, I had thought that TAs would feel more confident in suggesting forms of differentiation to teachers as we had worked on them in training sessions but this seemed to depend firstly

on the TA and secondly on the teacher that they were working with at that time. It also gave me a greater understanding around key students who seemed to be making less progress than others. The desire that all the TAs had, to make a positive change for the students in their care and the satisfaction they got from seeing the improvements in their chosen students in turn inspired me and gave me a greater feeling of job satisfaction.





There is a gap between what the literature proposes i.e. the greater use of a coaching model and what is happening in school environments. There is still mistrust about the coaching process and how it fits relative to performance management. Clearly there is some work to be done around changing mindsets of support staff. To adapt Dylan Wiliam's much cited quotation I would like to work in a school where "Every TA needs to improve, not because they are not good enough but because they can."<sup>15</sup> Participating in a coaching programme might well be the way to achieve this mindset.<sup>16</sup>

### The way forward

The coaching programme had an immediate impact on staff performance and pupil wellbeing as noted above and this would compel me to expand this project more widely. Other members of staff, although not TAs, have asked whether I would coach them mostly in relation to career development. In the light of the positives from this research I would like to trial the approach more widely with TAs and for a longer period. The challenge, as always in school, is in terms of time. One solution could be to use the coaching process during the summer term after exam classes have left and there is more flexibility in how we use our 'gained time'.

The key recommendations from the TAs for coaching in school, was that participants should "focus on a small

area of practice so that you can see the results". They also noted that more work would need to be done on changing staff mindsets.

In the final analysis it seems that coaching could offer a panacea to issues both of staff development and staff wellbeing. This small scale investigation appears to echo the message from the wider literature that there is potentially a significant impact on students. It would seem from this study that coaching can indeed improve the impact of TAs as well as delivering other benefits such as renewed enthusiasm for the job. In the current climate of increasing financial pressure on schools then a CPD programme that could deliver better quality learning experiences for students, develop excitement and autonomy in staff and be tailored to an individual's specific needs all for a relatively small outlay is certainly worth investigating more fully.

So in answer to the question posed in the title yes, coaching certainly has the potential to take TAs off the bench and put them centre-field in helping students achieve their goals and ambitions. After all, all students deserve the chance to achieve their own golden boot whatever their field of endeavour.

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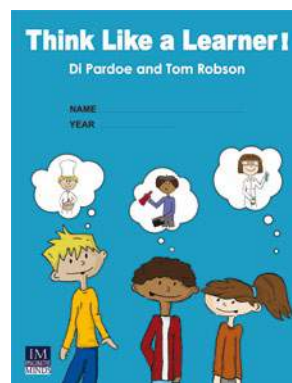
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# Professional Development By Design

**Fiona MacDonald** looks at what teachers can gain from the continued professional development opportunities offered by the Design Museum.

### Learning at the heart of design

Design – as a way of thinking and working – has a lot to offer both teachers and students and the Design Museum prides itself on offering students and educators world class design education facilities, supporting a vibrant and hands-on programme of learning activities.

Learning sits at the heart of the Design Museum and our learning programmes focus on being practical and relevant. They are informed by the wider ecology of design practice today and connected to our communities of practicing designers in different fields. Our schools programme supports the National Curriculum for Design and Technology and is tailored to Key Stages 2, 3, 4 and 5. Working closely with teachers and schools across the UK, we are acutely aware of the current crisis in creative education. Since 2010, the uptake of Design Technology at GCSE has declined by 57% in England alone. Despite this, participation in the Design Museum's schools learning programmes continues to grow year on year and, each year, we seek to align our programmes ever closer to meeting this growing need.

This is particularly true of our offer for teachers. We have curated unique Continued Professional Development (CPD) opportunities to prepare and support teachers so that they can offer the best design education possible to their students, the potential designers of tomorrow. While tailored to Design Technology, teachers from Art and Design, Textiles and Enterprise have gained a lot from taking part in our programmes. Two programmes that stand out in particular are our Design Ventura programme and our Teacher Summer School.

### Design Ventura

Design Ventura is the Design Museum's award-winning national design and enterprise challenge for students in KS3 and KS4, supported by Deutsche Bank. Design Ventura has been running for ten years and in that time, more than 92,500 students have taken part and 914 teachers have been trained through its free CPD opportunities.

The programme offers a real-world opportunity for both students and teachers. Each year young people work in teams to answer a live brief, set by a leading designer, to design a new product for the Design Museum Shop. The winning product is made and sold and the proceeds go to a charity of the young people's choice. To date, Design Ventura has made and sold 9 student designed products, raising over £12,000 for charity. It is unique among programmes of its kind for offering a live brief that results in a tangible real-world outcome.

The Design Ventura programme supports participating schools with a range of free activities including: teacher training, online resources, webinars, museum-based workshops and museum visits for students, all of which are supported by volunteer experts from the design and business sectors. Aligned to the Design & Technology syllabus and offering workshop plans, handouts, videos and more, Design Ventura seeks to lessen teacher's workload while offering something new and different to their classes. The programme is flexible so that teachers can run it in a way that works for them, in lesson time, as an off timetable day or as an extracurricular club, and the Design Museum team is on hand to support teachers at every step of the way.



### Professional development opportunities

Design Ventura offers two day-long professional development experiences at the Design Museum and two shorter online professional learning opportunities for those unable to travel to London. The Museum professional learning programmes seek to reignite teacher's passion for their subject by offering them an inspiring day of creativity and hands-on learning. This year they take place on Thursday 9 July and Wednesday 26 August at the Design Museum in Kensington, London and are free for any teacher registered on the Design Ventura website: [ventura.designmuseum.org](http://ventura.designmuseum.org)

The day is led by freelance Museum Educator, Ellen Ferguson, who kicks off with an overview of the programme, looking at inspiring stories from the world of contemporary design. She then delves into an examination of cutting edge sustainable materials such as GumTec, a plastic made from recycled chewing gum, Pinatex or pineapple leather and mushroom packaging. A leading designer offers an industry insight talk about their practice and leads the teachers in a fun and fast paced workshop, tackling the Design Ventura brief themselves so that they can return to the classroom knowing what they are asking their students to do, aware of some of the challenges that they may face.

This lively and enjoyable day gives teachers the opportunity to network, see the Design Museum's exhibitions for free and take home practical classroom skills and a collection of design products to support the delivery of this teaching. Commenting on this year's CPD session at the Design Museum, teacher Sam Makinde from Thomas Alleyne Academy said it was "an excellent day, which I will recommend to colleagues..." and Fiona Exley from Dunottar School said, "There is no cost for the CPD (and it was so much better than any paid CPD I've been on!)."

We understand that not all teachers can travel to London and, as a national competition, we want to support teachers up and down the county. As such, Design Ventura offers online professional development each year, this year taking place on Thursday 10 September. These free, virtual learning experiences offer an introduction to Design Ventura, with a past

winning teacher offering their top tips for running the programme, a leading designer talking about how they would tackle the brief and the Design Ventura team on hand to answer any and all questions.



### Webinars

As the programme continues to grow, we are always looking to innovate and find new ways to engage and inspire teachers around the UK. That is why, this year, we are extending the online offer to include a series of free weekly webinars for teachers. These 45-minute 'train the trainer' sessions will support teachers in the key stages of the design process: Idea Generation, Testing, Prototyping and Communication. A leading designer will talk about how they themselves work through each stage of their process and they will set a short 'tik tok' style design challenges to help with specific problems such a creative block or how to test an idea. Teachers can set students these five minutes 'tik tok' challenges for homework or during class time. The webinars and online CPDs are all recorded and made freely available on the Design Ventura website.

**Registration for Design Ventura 2020 opens in May at [ventura.designmuseum.org](http://ventura.designmuseum.org)**

**To find out more please contact [ventura@designmuseum.org](mailto:ventura@designmuseum.org)**



### Teacher Summer School

If you're looking to delve deeper, for longer, into your professional development as a teacher, the Design Museum's Teacher Summer School would be the perfect place to start. Now in its third year, this three day summer school focuses on designing, making and using. The summer school uses design thinking processes to revitalise educators' creative approaches to curriculum content. Teachers are challenged to work on their own mini project based around a provided theme. Last year saw teachers work with the theme of sustainable design thanks to course leads [Re]Design. This year we're working with design agency Resolve Collective to focus on upcycling and reusing waste materials. The three-day course will see teachers creating their own design briefs, working in Imperial College's Reach Out Maker Space and hearing from guest speakers from the design industry and education.

You can book on to the Design Museum's Summer School via: <https://designmuseum.org/the-design-museum-campus/schools-and-colleges/cpd-for-teachers-and-lecturers/teacher-summer-school-2020>

### Tackling challenges

At the Design Museum we recognise the challenges that teachers face and our professional development opportunities respond directly to these:

■ **Lack of resources:** our programmes demonstrates how design education can take place with minimal, basic equipment and easily sourced, often recycled materials such as card and paper. Furthermore, each teacher who attends the Design Ventura CPD leaves with a free handling collection of design objects to take back into their classroom to inspire their students.

■ **Lack of experience:** we recognise that increasingly teachers from broader backgrounds - without prior experience or training - are expected to deliver Design & Technology teaching. We therefore ensure that our professional development is both accessible for those starting out, as well as inspiring to those with years of experience looking for something new to invigorate their teaching practice. We also feel that design thinking provides useful tools for every subject from Art to Maths. Design Ventura as a design and enterprise challenge is open to any subject teacher and our provision aims to be cross-curricular in its application.

■ **Lack of time:** our opportunities are designed to demonstrate how learning about design can be condensed into short, manageable chunks, as short as a five minute ice breaker, that can have positive impact and appeal for learners of all types: kinaesthetic as well as visual and aural learners.

In these challenging times for creative education, the Design Museum recognises its pivotal role in supporting teachers to deliver inspiring and informative design education – within or outside formal design lessons. Through the breadth of our offer we intend to provide something for everyone from the new teacher, to the experienced practitioner, to the curious science teacher, all with an emphasis on delivering an engaging process as well as an inspiring end result.

Please get in touch if you would like more information on any of the Design Museum's groundbreaking learning initiatives.

**Fiona MacDonald is Head of Learning at the Design Museum.**



# TALKING LISTENING LEARNING



**Developing communication skills is now a key component of the teaching and learning requirements in the new Ofsted Framework.**

Effective communication is the bedrock of all learning. Yet many children are coming into schools with under-developed skills. The famous Listening Skills series pioneered the response to this problem and has sold over 10,000 copies worldwide. The skills they instil are taken further through the Listen Up resources, and the acclaimed Thinking Together title adds talking and reasoning skills to the mix. Together they make a high-impact programme to develop communication skills.

**Games to improve concentration and attention    Improve numeracy by improving listening**



**Listening Skills - Early Years**  
**Listening Skills - Key Stage 1**  
**Listening Skills - Key Stage 2**

By Sandi Rickerby  
and Sue Lambert  
**Price:** £19.99 each

These books have proved a huge success in helping teachers develop effective listening skills with children of a range of abilities. Each of the photocopiable worksheets is accompanied by detailed step-by-step instructions for the teacher to read out and

the children to act upon. By reading these only once, the teacher can establish how much the children have remembered and understood. Of course these instructions can be repeated or broken down for those who need extra support.



**Maths Listening Skills - Early Years**  
**Maths Listening Skills - Key Stage 1**  
**Maths Listening Skills - Key Stage 2**

By Sandi Rickerby  
and Sue Lambert

**Price:** £19.99 each

The fun tasks in these packs encourage children to listen carefully, while also giving them practice at mental arithmetic. Each book contains detailed instructions to be read aloud for

the children to act upon. Their understanding and listening skills will be tested by how they complete the task. These instructions can be repeated or broken down for younger children or those who need additional support. These games are ideal for helping children to improve their concentration and attention span.



**Listening and thinking skills for Key Stage 2/3**

**Listen Up! and Listen Up! 2**

Edited by Linda Evans - **Price:** £29.50 each inc VAT

Youngsters are continually bombarded with so much visual stimulus these days that their auditory functioning is often under-developed. Listen up! and Listen up! 2 are innovative books containing activities, with photocopiable sheets for pupils and scripts for teachers, to encourage pupils to think about what they hear. A record sheet and certificate are provided in the book, to encourage pupils' self-evaluation of their listening skills and help them in their personal target setting.

A CD is also included, featuring recordings of five of the activities performed by professional actors, with music and sound effects to enrich the listening activity. These books provide opportunities for developing concentration, improving memory skills, engaging in logical thinking and can also be used as a stimulus for creative writing.

# The Ten Key Elements For Effective CPD

**David Woods** describes how the building of great schools has been founded on high quality professional development

*'Continuous learning for everyone is central to the notion of the intelligent school.'*

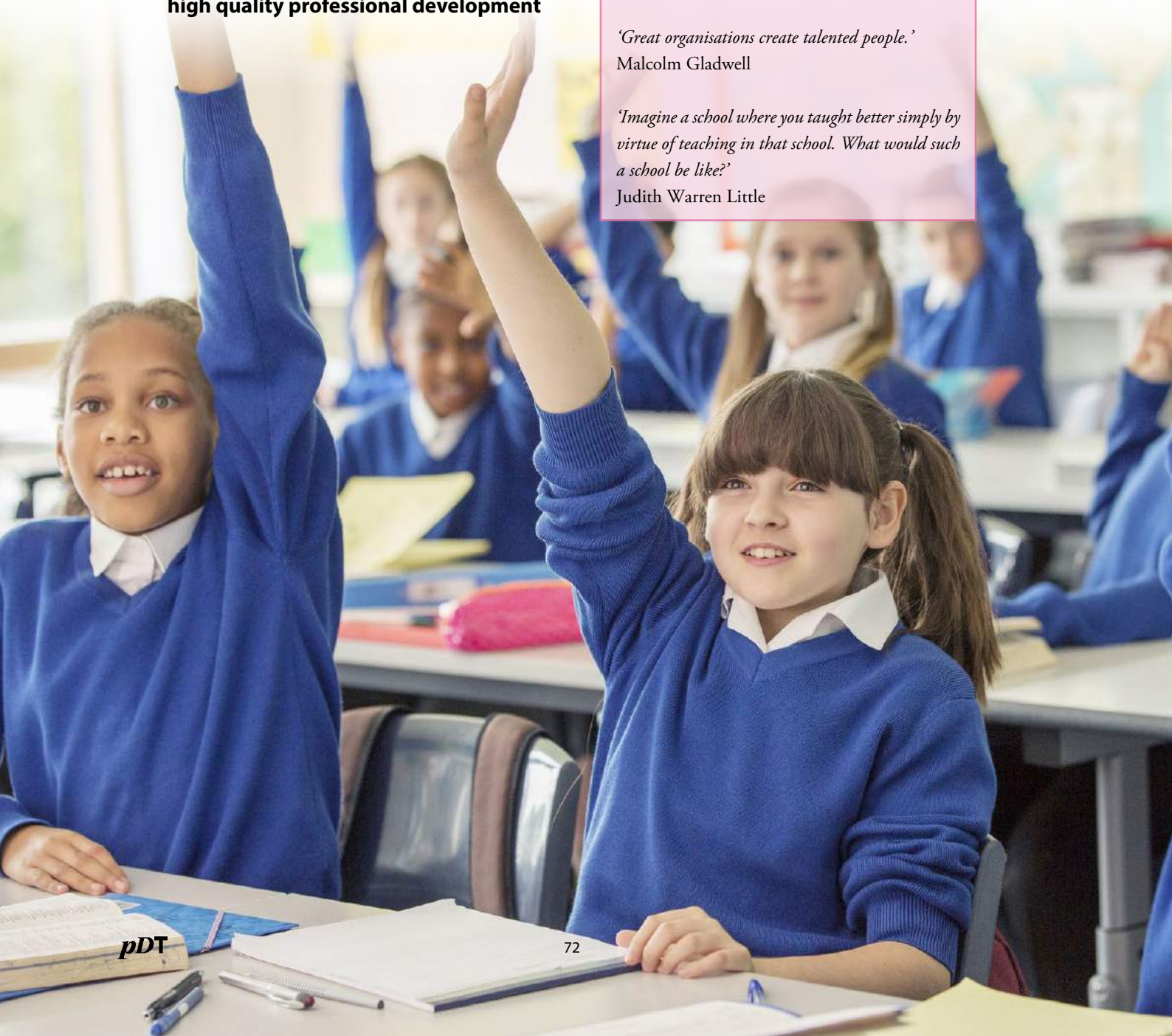
Barbara MacGilchrist, Jane Reed and Kate Myers

*'Great organisations create talented people.'*

Malcolm Gladwell

*'Imagine a school where you taught better simply by virtue of teaching in that school. What would such a school be like?'*

Judith Warren Little





### Pillars of greatness!

In 2018 the London Leadership Strategy produced a book entitled 'The Nine Pillars of Great Schools', based upon nine years of action research and practitioner collections of case studies from London schools who had participated in the 'Going for Great' programme<sup>1</sup>. These Pillars have been developed from seminars, debates and discussion with London school leaders and are in brief:-

- A shared vision, values, culture and ethos
- Inspirational leadership at all levels
- Exceptional teaching and learning
- A relentless focus on engaging students
- Personalised and highly effective continuous professional development
- A stimulating and inclusive learning environment
- A rich and creative curriculum
- High quality partnerships
- Robust and rigorous self-evaluation

At their core great schools have developed a highly effective system of continuous professional development which builds capacity and sustains success and helps to support other pillars mentioned above. The characteristics that emerged from many of the case studies written on CPD are as follows:-

- The school continually emphasises the importance of the study of learning and teaching as the core business of the school.
- There is effective staff development which involves discussion, coaching, mentoring and observing; developing staff as teachers and leaders.
- All members of staff feel valued, invested in and developed.
- The school is a knowledge-creating institution which audits professional knowledge and manages, validates and disseminates new knowledge.
- High performance is sustained through effective knowledge transfer in and between schools and other leading organisations.
- The school is a learning community. Staff and governors, as well as students, regularly and openly model their learning and articulate their own learning

challenges and goals.

- Learning groups/communities are fostered and developed; they present, review and adapt existing practice and provide quality CPD led by professionals for professionals.
- Innovation and improvement promote critical thinking, build capacity and sustain the vision.
- The school is enquiry-minded, geared to innovation and research, and has a commitment to publishing case studies and organising learning seminars and conferences.
- The school fully mobilises its intellectual, social and organisational capital to produce excellent educational outcomes.



### Range of effective professional development

There is a comprehensive literature on continuous professional development, complemented now by the use of social media – Twitter and blogs, both in individual schools, groups of schools, and across the education system. It is also a rich area for action research. The Going for Great case study collections reflect this and there are many studies describing a considerable range of practices in great professional development. Some of these describe various opportunities for staff to 'act up' either in senior leadership, on other teams or by shadowing posts as 'associates'. This is an effective strategy both to develop and retain staff. Others concentrate on improving teaching and learning as the core business of the school, with opportunities for teachers to observe and reflect upon each other's practice

## The Ten Key Elements For Effective CPD

– sometimes through videoed lessons, a structured programme of observed lessons with appropriate follow-up and support, learning walks, or collaborative lesson planning and reflection in triads. Many schools have developed their own Specialist Teaching and Learning resource centres with facilities to record teachers teaching and for them to reflect on their practice ‘Skills on Show’ Directories area also available together with a range of other materials.

Some case studies are concerned with the identification of outstanding practitioners as ‘teacher champions’, ‘leading teachers’, or ‘specialist leaders of education’ and their role as coaches in developing great

teaching and learning throughout the school. There are some excellent studies in developing professional learning communities and becoming a research-engaged school with the expectation that staff should carry out action research and disseminate their findings through blogs, reports, case studies and workshops. Some of the studies reflect on teacher development and growth through different stages, particularly in the Early Professional Development phase, ‘growing their own’ in order to secure high-quality teaching and learning. Reading all these case studies along with the literature, it is possible to establish what is personalised and highly effective CPD within a learning community.



### Essential elements

Developing the bullet points at the beginning of this article further, there are some essential elements of highly effective, continuous professional development. It is vital that there is an agreed school policy about the practice of teaching and learning, which is subject to continuous review. The policy should emphasise a shared philosophy and a shared language about learning and teaching and cover the central issues of learning styles, teaching skills, assessment practices, inclusion, as well as resources for learning. The key message of the overall policy will be transmitted effectively into every area of the curriculum. Staff working in year groups, key stages or subject departments can base their planning on these overt principles, processes and

practices, and monitor and evaluate accordingly. In a great school there is a consistency of educational practice across all staff in the school, founded upon values and beliefs about the complexities of learning and the craft of teaching, connected to high expectations and appropriate challenge.

### Focus on student outcomes and achievement

In 2015 the Teacher Development Trust published ‘Developing Great Teachers’, a significant piece of research by Steve Higgins, Phillippa Cordingley, Toby Greany and Robert Coe<sup>2</sup>. The key finding of this review was that professional development opportunities that are frequently designed with a strong focus on

pupil outcomes have a significant impact on pupil achievement. The components that make up careful design were said to be:

- The duration and rhythm of effective support
- The consideration of participants' needs
- Alignment of professional development processes, content and activities
- The content of effective professional development
- Activities associated with effective professional development
- The role of external providers and specialists
- Collaboration and peer learning
- The leadership of professional development

The report highlights not only that it is possible to grow and develop great teachers but also that it is through 'careful design, as listed above, that teachers will have the greatest impact on pupils. Great teachers are seen and see themselves as learners flourishing in a community of learners.

### Leadership, support and resources

It is vital that the school, and in particular those in leadership positions, continually emphasise the importance of the study of learning and teaching as the core business of the school. Great leaders help teachers improve their practice and sustain their commitment over time: in short, better leaders produce better teachers. There are some obvious manifestations of this, such as a staffroom notice board dedicated to the practice of learning and teaching where everybody takes it in turns, either individually or collectively, to provide appropriate material such as newspaper articles, book reviews and generic teaching resources. As previously mentioned many schools have a staffroom resource area or reference library where staff can gain easy access to information to help them develop their practice. They may have a staff book club where colleagues come together regularly to discuss educational texts they have read. It is most powerful when staff conduct such meetings during the school day in a venue such as the library, in earshot of the students, so modelling that they are continuous learners and reflective practitioners.

The learning and teaching policy and CPD policy are displayed, along with the priorities outlined in the school development plan. Great schools might have an annual publication of case studies of the best practice in learning and teaching, written by and based on action research conducted by members of staff, with an expectation that teaching and operational staff will wish to contribute.

There could also be collections of 'butterflies' (small ideas with great leverage) on various themes such as starting lessons, plenaries, the best use of ICT and so on. Also available in hard copy and online will be a collection of reports that staff have written after returning from courses, conferences or visits to other schools, written to an agreed format so as to easily inform everybody's practice. Perhaps most crucially no opportunity is missed to share top tips or thought pieces about an aspect of teaching and learning, at the start of a staff meeting, once a week at staff briefing, or in the staff newsletter.



### The power of collaboration

Collaboration is supported and fostered. What makes a great school is the crucial ingredient of collegiality among the staff, initiating, supporting and sustaining improved learning and teaching. Great schools have the organisational capacity for staff to work productively both in groups and subgroups to ensure high-quality learning for all pupils and the case studies reflect this. Professional development and collaboration is not left to chance or even goodwill but timetabled carefully and structured through study groups, reference groups and cooperative planning sessions. All meetings will have an

## The Ten Key Elements For Effective CPD

element of CPD, led by a range of team members. The successful school will have a commitment to sharing and designing planning for learning and preparation and dissemination of learning materials. The more that staff work together in appropriate teams, the more a shared understanding emerges about the complexity of learning and teaching with the aim of impacting significantly on pupil achievement.

### Collective enquiry

Great schools recognise the power of learning groups and practitioner networks as a focal point for professional development inside and outside the school. Much has been written about ‘professional learning communities’ and ‘communities of practice’ which provide opportunities for studying classroom practice to increase the focus on student learning. They provide time for collective inquiry, the sharing of evidence and the development of action research. By working in particular groups, the whole staff can become a nurturing unit which stimulates continuous professional discourse and creativity. There are bespoke programmes at individual and group level using a core group of CPD training staff who are themselves outstanding practitioners. There are also ongoing professional conversations and reflections, with all teachers completing a learning journal focusing on differences made to their teaching and its impact on students.

### Professional learning culture

Judith Warren Little<sup>3</sup> reminds us that the ultimate test of a culture of professional development is whether new teachers can improve their practice just by joining the school. In the best cultures the new teacher is automatically caught up in the buzz and excitement of teaching and learning and is energised to undertake a continual, dynamic programme of professional development. She goes on to say that schools are successful when the following four things happen:

- Teachers engage in frequent and increasingly precise talk about the complexity of teaching.
- Teachers frequently observe each other teaching and provide each other with excellent feedback.
- Teachers plan, design, evaluate and prepare their teaching together.
- Teachers teach each other the practice of teaching – they have to be advanced learners in order to develop new skills and insights and grow professionally.

We might develop this further with reference to great schools and refer to all staff talking together about the complexity of teaching and learning, building a culture where talking frankly and knowledgeably about learning is essential. Some of this will be done informally but other discussions will be in phase, year, subject and whole-staff meetings or in specific professional



development sessions. Staff talking about teaching and learning is often best illustrated through everybody leading parts of meetings on some aspect of evidence-based practice. Successful schools now have their own teaching and learning blogs, allowing them to share resources and best practice online.

With reference to observation and feedback, a glance at several case studies reveals a variety of practice in great schools rather than simply relying on observation as a form of performance management. Some schools have developed detailed peer-observation programmes with an emphasis upon effective feedback; others have adopted the full 'lesson study' approach in groups of three. Making use of technology, some schools have set up the chance for all staff to have their own practice videoed and for them to review the outcomes with trusted colleagues. In terms of planning, monitoring and evaluating work together, much depends upon the school developing this expectation and a consistency of approach. The more that staff contribute to the design and provision of an engaging curriculum, the more likely it is that this will be taught well. They are better able to treat teaching and learning as a clinical practice – using evidence to underpin judgement and getting better evidence to support what is done through joint action research.

Teachers teaching each other is better expressed as staff learning from each other, which of course demands a change in the traditional approach to staff development. Staff have to be advanced learners in order to develop new skills and insights. It is their personal and professional growth that has the most impact on pupil development and outcomes. Through joint practice development, staff can improve their skills and their capacity to reflect on their practice.

### Joint practice development

David Hargreaves stresses that the most powerful influences on teachers are other teachers but professional development policies have rarely built on this fact. He has argued in several publications<sup>4</sup> that the best way of exploiting this phenomenon is through regular, face-to-face encounters among practitioners that focus on the improvement of teaching and learning.

John Hattie expresses similar views in *What Works Best in Education: the politics of collaborative expertise*<sup>5</sup>. John West-Burnham and Dave Harris in their book on *Leadership Dialogues* (2015)<sup>6</sup> propose an approach which is referred to as JPD (Joint Practice Development) rather than CPD (Continuous Professional Development). The key differences are that CPD is frequently driven by an external source with the process managed by school leaders and often with a generic content; whereas JPD is a more leader-facilitated process, planned by teachers, focusing on issues particular to the school. Great schools provide much of their CPD in-house or with local partner schools. Where a colleague attends an external course, they will go well prepared with the questions they want answers to, the knowledge they require and a plan of how this information will be shared on their return to school, to ensure maximum impact and value for money.



### Evaluation and sharing best practice

In the provision of highly effective continuous professional development, great schools continually review their practice. They inquire about the performance of particular groups of teachers and the quality of their evaluation procedures. They are curious about the process of capturing and sharing best practice and how social and organisational capital is to be developed so that the capacity of the staff to learn directly impacts on their pupils' performance. In such a school the staff accept that they have to give more to get more back.

As part of staff development in any successful school there will be well-organised coaching and mentoring



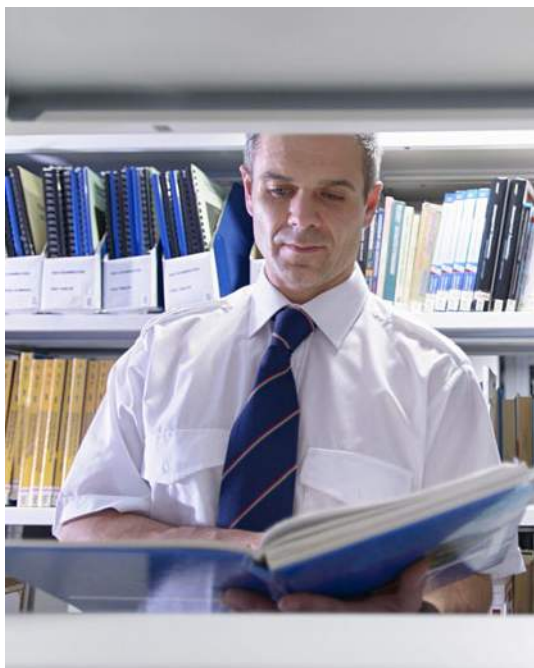
involving pairs or small groups of staff working together. We are familiar with the role of mentor as applied to new or trainee staff, but less familiar with the concept as applied to other staff. We need to be clear here about the distinction between mentoring and coaching. Coaching goes beyond general advice and personal support to homing in on the specific enhancement of skills in learning and teaching. Successful schools have explicitly identified their coaches, commonly acknowledged as outstanding practitioners or specialist leaders of education, and skilfully matched them to other staff with the explicit purpose of improving delivery and raising standards.

A team of practising coaches adds considerably to the capacity of the school to make all of its teaching consistently good or better. They can analyse individual lessons, provide instant feedback and suggest practical strategies for improvement. Coaches can also lead aspects of professional development and action research and are a vital part of any professional learning community. As Matthew Kraft says, 'Coaching is likely to be a more effective form of CPD compared with traditional efforts because it is individualised, sustained, intensive, focused and context-based.'<sup>77</sup> (Kraft et al., 2018)

### Pursuit of evidence

Great schools pursue evidence-based practice and are always curious to find out more about what really works. They encourage all staff to complement their professional judgement with evidence-informed practice so that even more students can experience success in school. It is also important in terms of professional development for leaders and teachers to be aware of ineffective practices and stop spending time and energy on them.

Great schools and teachers need to have a collective understanding of intelligence so that they can develop policies and practices to help all children reach their full intellectual potential. They also need to understand the range of barriers that may undermine the aspirations and attainment of young people, especially those from low-income backgrounds. The joint task is to develop a culture of inquiry to find research which is relevant and can be successfully implemented in classrooms, complemented by a strong focus on action research within the school. In a great school, action research and professional reflection are the norm rather than the exception. In such an effective learning and teaching culture there will be an expectation that staff, either



individually or collectively, carry out action research and disseminate their findings so that practice is continuously evaluated and improved. Teachers are natural researchers in the sense that all teaching is based upon enquiry, and the response of the pupils and the pupil voice generally provides ready evidence as to the effectiveness of various learning and teaching methods. The school commissions additional research from groups of staff and pupils to find out what works best in its particular context and thereby provide the evidence to make adjustments to policies and practices. Some of this action research is often carried out as part of a school/higher education link and it could contribute to a staff accreditation programme, where all teachers have to provide a 'professional reflection' or a 'learning narrative', or it could take place on a smaller level as part of everyday practice.

### Integrated approach to development and planning

In successful schools, performance management and CPD are fully integrated. Performance management is crucial, particularly at assessment stages and especially as teachers have more responsibility for their own CPD. Within a culture of action-planning and target-

setting, CPD needs are recognised and shared. Great schools give time and attention to planning well-crafted whole-staff CPD programmes as well as personalised opportunities for development. The skill is to ensure that these programmes meet whole-school requirements, linked to the School Improvement Plan priorities, whilst also meeting the personal needs of individuals.

The teaching standards provide areas to look towards, especially the way they are set out as a progression model. Using these standards alongside the future-based planning model through performance management objectives, staff can plan for, and define, development needs. Where CPD personal development plans can lead to an 'excellent' teacher – specialist leader of education and senior leadership posts in particular – all staff are encouraged and supported to identify appropriate development needs and links to succession planning.

### Improving through learning

What is clear about great schools is that they share a strong commitment, at all levels of the organisation, to develop as professionals and continually improve their performance. The staff strongly believe in acting in a collaborative way, reinforcing and emphasising a shared set of expectations and procedures. They know that learning in the workplace is a huge stimulus to school improvement – particularly the sharing of best practice. Self-directed learning is at the heart of their collective success.

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