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Review of professional learning

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Introduction

In undertaking this professional review of learning, I plan to explore aspects of my professional development through both chronological and thematic lenses, drawing on points that have influenced my continued interests in my selected area of research; collaborative professional learning. With over twenty years in the statutory education sector in Wales and multiple roles in schools as well as across the educational system in the inspectorate, local authority, regional consortia and Welsh Government, I hope to demonstrate not only how my learning about others' learning raises important questions about effective development of professionals in the education sector, but also how it has, in part, developed my professional identity as a leader and researcher in education. More specifically, this review will focus on the area that I have chosen to examine as part of my PhD; that of collaborative professional learning and its impact on the individual, their organisation and more widely.

Collaborative professional learning in the educational context

Change is an inevitable part of any profession as each seeks to evolve its practices to yield better outputs and outcomes. Teacher professional learning models and structures are no exception to this and have been evolving over time; however, universally, practice is not yet in line with the vision as set out in the Professional Teaching and Leadership Standards and professional development review (Welsh Government, 2024; Welsh Government, 2019). These documents outline the importance of learning from both academic sources and professional practice as well as preferred formats including both individual and collective development.

Previous professional learning within education often focused on the individual with any collective work being about information giving typically about outcomes. However, the change to standards, initial teacher education programmes (Furlong, 2016) and the publication of a teacher led curriculum developed collaboratively, as examples of change, have been helpful communication pieces to support a changing set of values that deems the process of learning to be at least of equal importance to the outcome. There has been a notable shift away from one day 'courses' in the professional learning offering in Wales (Dixon, 2016) in favour of multiple day programmes with the latter often requiring some level of collaborative planning, interim activity and dissemination in later sessions. These shifts are not universal and so there are some important questions to consider about the interrelatedness of change in professional identity and change in practice and the level of challenge or opposition this presents to progress or improvement. As Vahasantanen (2015) notes, changes in practices and the linked changes in professional identities are difficult to achieve and are often not brought about quickly.

Welsh policy makers are not alone in recognising collaboration as being important for educational practitioners' professional learning. Indeed, aspects of collaboration and

enquiry can be seen across the world and in the British educational system for the past few decades and the Professional Teaching and Leader Standards which were revised in recent years (Welsh Government, 2019) have collaboration, enquiry and innovation as three of the five elements that standards for practitioners are written against. Despite these practices being in place for decades in the British educational systems and an increasing amount of practice in this domain in the past decade from Welsh Government, there are still gaps in the empirical knowledge base around evaluation and impact. This is particularly true for impact beyond the practitioner.

Reflection, critical reflection and critical review in a school

Teaching and learning are both complex concepts with so many combinations of variables that would be impossible to capture in their entirety. It is, however, important to attempt to deconstruct holistic learning episodes to support the growth of understanding about effective teaching. Of the thousands of interactions and actions that happen in a classroom in any given lesson, there is a proportion that appear habitual or automatic, but all contribute to the outcomes for each individual pupil, as well as the collective of the class. It is important to draw out points of learning from practice and to link it with theory (Furlong, 20016) and to be able to articulate the 'why' around practice. For both examples here, this involves reflection, whereby individuals, through consideration of a past event with the intention of learning, can transform implicit learning into deliberative learning (Eraut, 2000) with the outcome being an awareness of the output. Through a collection of their own and others' learning points, a professional identity is developed (Sternszuz et al, 2020). Reflection, therefore, is an important part of professional learning for teachers in their continuing learning and development.

Reflection, as an important part of learning for teachers, is not new. The value of a reflective practitioner in one guise or another has been a constant for many decades. Key works by Dewey (2008) supplemented by Schon (1991) about reflective practice have provided a strong rationale for the importance of this in bringing together academic and professional learning and this is evident in current and more recent initial teacher education programmes, as well as the policy documentation produced over time. The Professional Teaching Standards guide initial teacher education (ITE) programmes currently as the standards that qualifying teacher must attain; however, previous iterations of ITE programmes were effective in encouraging student teachers to draw bi-directionally on both their academic and professional knowledge to enable distillation and deliberation of points of tacit learning.

With structures in place within both school and university in the role of mentors and tutors, importance has been placed on reflective practice in the initial year (or two years, dependent on programme) of training and, more recently, the Welsh Government has funded Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) programmes which has meant that this time, space, structure and support is in place for those in the very earliest years of their career. After this

point, the space and structure typically stop and is not routine in practice in very many schools. There are often frequent discussions between practitioners at recreation times however the next 'enabling' of reflection that could be linked is line management when a practitioner takes a teaching and learning responsibility.

Models for reflection

Models of reflection (Gibbs, 1990; Kolb, 1984) and critical reflection (Driscoll, 2007; Eyler et al, 1996) have their differences, most notably, that critical reflection is a deeper exploration of 'meaning making' that also involves evaluation and next steps. Reflection and critical reflection models unsurprisingly have commonalities with coaching models: GROW for example (Whitmore, 2009). These typically have a framework not to just learn from an event but to put that learning into practice, with some having an expectation of making a commitment to action within the coaching session.

I intend to use the Driscoll (2007) model of critical reflection to review aspects of my learning to this point. This model is cyclic and has seven stages: actions; reflection - 'what'; action; reflection - 'so what'; action; reflection - 'now what'; and, action. While these seven stages will not necessarily be chronologically evident within the events I have selected I believe that this model aligns well with the nature of the cyclical school improvement systems.

Critical review of professional learning

Building capacity within my mathematics department as a middle leader

In role as head of department for mathematics, I had to build capacity by improving the quality of teaching and learning to impact on pupil outcomes with a team that was more experienced than I was. I changed department meetings to be times for collaborative development of teaching and learning approaches and resources with the rationale that if everything was available and they had made a commitment to use and feedback on the materials to the group, it would have some impact on pupils' day to day experiences and likely feed into an improvement in outcomes.

I observed teachers' and pupils' responses and reactions to different approaches in the classroom and had frequent discussions with staff. I found better outcomes when qualitative information was being shared with teachers as feedback. This would perhaps come from other peoples' observations, pupil voice activities or parental feedback. The real value of the qualitative information was that it made for a deep level of professional dialogue that included reflection in contrast to times I had used quantitative information, for example pupil grades or compliance monitoring when it led to a rather short conversation relating often to a binary point with the rationale often being a truncated response.

The observation aspect of information gathering for evaluation purposes, both formally and informally, meant that I was able to put individuals' responses in the context of them as I was cognisant with their typical behaviours. The importance of context in reflection is noted in Eyler et al's '4Cs of critical reflection' (1996). This gave me important information in evaluating progress as, for some, the smallest of steps can represent a very large amount of progress. 'Connected', from the same model of critical reflection, puts forward that the experiences that I have had to be able to bring the 'information' from these activities to the fore; what Eraut (2000) would refer to as making implicit learning deliberate. I found that, while considering context, there needs to be a simultaneous consideration of both myself and the individual including biases, both conscious and unconscious. There are often biases present and highlighting them doesn't necessarily serve to eradicate them but to acknowledge them allows for reflection through a lens which perhaps adds more depth. As a leader, part of my ongoing professional learning is to become and be self-aware about myself and how others perceive me. Over time, I have had to work on some areas where my evaluations can be impacted by bias, for example, I am aware that I place good value on positivity of approach and effort and can favour individuals that exemplify those qualities over those that don't despite outcomes being very similar.

I have learned from implementing these activities that change takes time and, while in many models of improvement implementation is recognised as a discrete stage of development or improvement (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018), I see it as continuous. Staff must actively decide to implement policies and processes because it can take years for something to become embedded in practice and therefore more habitual. Implementation does need to run simultaneously alongside monitoring and discussions about next steps. This needs to be part of a transparent routine so that people are aware of how it will be monitored and evaluated, and the individuals preferably need to be part of the monitoring and evaluation process in a way that is meaningful for them and supports their learning. I have learned that a hierarchical approach to monitoring and feedback has its rightful place in a school setting however more significant impact can be achieved if this comes from a peer as it sets out alternative approaches at the same level which can raise many questions for individuals. It is important for teachers to see how other teachers do the same role.

In terms of my continued study, this learning raises many questions about moving away from generalised models of implementation to those that are more specific for individuals but also considering models of implementation with more continuous aspects as being more relevant to the education environment.

Enabling collaboration across schools

Working as a senior leader in the largest regional educational consortium in Wales, my role was to move almost five hundred schools towards school-to-school collaboration to strengthen the performance of schools and outcomes for children in the region. The pivotal

factor here in achieving a level of progress were creating the capacity to enable regional facilitation of this.

I developed a set of school to school working structures (schools acting as hubs, brokered support relationships between two or more schools, professional learning delivered by schools, school to school working groups, group peer enquiry) using funding of over £4 000 000 to be paid to schools as service level agreements so that they could plan for and enable reduced timetables for specific members of staff and/or release staff to participate in school to school working.

With such significant sums of funding, there were calls for a show of impact almost immediately with an expectation of quantitative outcomes showing improvements in pupil outcomes for schools that had been receiving support with causal relationships. While there were specific examples of brokered school to school support which had led to increases on a school's mathematics GCSE results, these examples did not exist across the full system. Tensions became evident between over-simplified views of impact, the misunderstood word 'outcomes' meaning only quantitative changes and misapplied definitions of causation were unfortunate. There was also a lack of value attributed to anything that could remotely be considered qualitative data.

While the model was iterative and there were more tangible outcomes coming from the information gathered over time, there was a previously unidentified need to work with those 'judging' the impact to establish sets of success criteria in this very complex and complicated set of school to school working models that had multiple factors interacting in so many different ways. In several workshops, done regionally and with all stakeholders, I facilitated collaboration to develop these specific criteria that were agreed by people at all levels in the system so that successes could be measured against those.

This experience has meant that I understand that collaboration needs to be in place for all parts of a 'project' or 'piece of work' and that those participating need to learn together so that there is a high level of understanding of what we are trying to do, how we are trying to do it as well as how we will know if it, or aspects of it, are having an impact. It clarified for me that measuring impact and defining outcomes is not well understood by so many in the education system. This, for me, raises important questions for further research into what impact can be seen when all parts of the education system are measuring successes with common criteria and how achievable that is when there is prescription or autonomy.

Line management across the school

From my role working with schools across Wales, I identified that too often, line management in education takes a disproportionate focus on compliance checking and performance monitoring to the detriment of any learning about 'why' something is or is not having an impact. A Times Educational Supplement article written by Facer (2020) supports this statement with some very astute observations.

In becoming headteacher, I wanted to re-culture the school (Price and Weatherby, 2023) to centre a vision around the recognition of the value of learning at all levels. A key area of change was line management which was limited in both its use and its impact. Re-defining this to a mechanism for professional learning meant that its definition became collaboration to include challenge, support and development for every member of staff in the school to be valued as an individual and to become more effective and more confident in their roles.

Staff voice activities undertaken with individuals during line management meetings or sometimes in focus group formats have proven helpful in evaluating the implementation of the principles of line management and the themes coming out of professional dialogue from these, put alongside themes from analyses of line management notes and quantitative information gathered from staff questionnaires and reviewing compliance have well supported the implementation of learning points from these activities. In this though, I recognise how different groupings of staff members and the number of staff members involved in evaluation activities can have quite a profound impact on behaviours and therefore outcomes. I have observed that while there has been an ongoing piece of work around removing hierarchy from professional learning situations, there is an informal, implicit hierarchy in place between staff that is not necessarily dependent on job role or experience as many might suspect.

Outcomes from prior evaluations have identified that both parties in the line management meetings need professional learning in terms of the aims and expectations of these meetings as discrete entities but also what their progression looks like over time and the contribution that they could potentially make to the collective development of the school. Where both parties have a good understanding of the purpose of line management, they can utilise the time to good effect often preparing by planning what to discuss but also how to discuss it and whether this constitutes a point of challenge, support or development or any interaction of these. Professional learning sessions have been important here with both parties attending the same; each therefore knowing what the other should and should not be doing. Ongoing professional learning has also allowed development in this area and an additional person attending a sample of these meetings as an observer has both provided useful information to support evaluation but also enabled professional dialogue specifically about the progress of the person in the line management role but also the person being line managed. Facilitating reflections on both roles in this arrangement has been a useful enabler of individual development.

These evaluations have shown that it takes time to establish the relationship, the arrangements, the effectiveness and the impact and so changing line managers after one year is not conducive to maximising the impact of line management. Relationships are important in a line management setting, and they need to be productive and constructive. There is a delicate balance to be achieved between giving time for the relationship to

develop and determining that the relationship is not likely to develop sufficiently to support this activity.

It is difficult to disaggregate components of school systems and structures and, in all schools, however, providing evaluation points and sharing information and evaluation but also enabling staff to form summative and collective evaluations has developed them in the role of evaluator and learner in the policy, processes and purposes. This learning poses questions about the dynamics of collaborative development in one-to-one relationships and how best to optimise the quantity and quality of learning in what will always be a challenged space and time due to resources. While coaching models can be useful here, there remain questions for me about the changing identity of a teacher to a mentor and/or a coach and again, links to the ease, or lack of ease, in changing professional identity. (Vahasantanen (2015))

Collaborative enquiry and professional learning

Teaching can become quite an isolated role. While often teachers are grouped into departments or areas, the larger part of the role involves being the sole 'worker' in a classroom with pupils. However, across the whole school there is a large volume of knowledge and skills about how to best meet the needs of individual pupils and how to therefore progress teaching and learning however there is still further learning to be done. Facilitating collaborative enquiry across all staff has been useful in progressing against this school improvement priority.

Through iterative developments where teachers have been grouped by methodology or approach selected from a small number and area of focus for their enquiry, they have been able to develop their knowledge and skills in a wider range of methods and, as staff have become more confident with the use of the term enquiry and research, I have adapted approaches so that there are a wider range of methodologies available to select from, that staff create their own enquiry questions and that we have a research symposium to enable informal sharing.

Key to the developments here has been the recognition of the starting points of staff, being aware of the rates at which they progress their understanding and being able to recognise where further support is required. It has been important not to be inflexible about the rigour of the activities undertaken as the steps made in the past years have been significant for individuals and for staff. It is about prioritising what is important, and, in this, it has been about taking away the stigma attached to the words enquiry and research, making a 'fit' with the context of the enquiry and pulling through points of learning that can be implemented into practice both with the individual and across the school.

I have come to place significant value on professional dialogue and think that the power of listening is underestimated in school settings. The amount of evaluation that I can complete by listening to teachers talk while sharing their enquiries is significant and, this, being

encapsulated within context with knowledge of the teacher and the pupils ensures that I can interpret it well. This is a very simple statement but carries importance in identifying my epistemological stance as a researcher as interpretivist. Enabling teachers to be able to verbalise their tacit knowledge creates high levels of accuracy and knowledge in evaluation. Molander (1992 cited by Eraut, 2000) asserts that knowledge cannot be totally tacit but also that which is explicit cannot be without tacit elements. The limitations with exploring and evaluating non-formal learning as individuals in recounting do potentially mean that the content shared is selected, either consciously or subconsciously however I would also suggest that by sharing events and experiences and reflecting collectively, some of these elements are removed from the tacit nature that the individual would place.

Thinking again about research going forward, there are questions here about the extent of the advantages of collective experiences and reflecting on those as a means of securing greater learning to be balanced against the resource management element.

My values and questions as a researcher and how the professional learning has developed this

While there is a likely optimism in my reflections due to not just being the 'insider' but the 'insider' that is accountable for all aspects of the school, I think it is important to note both potential bias and subsequent reflexivity in recognising that. There is an overarching reflection that while the approach I take to improvement is my favoured of iterative development, that, over time, the aspects that are of focus for improvement become additional to those which are already on perpetual implementation and are much smaller details or aspects but higher in number; altogether this increases the complexity and complications of bringing improvement about. Building capacity within the organisation would be the likely answer that most would render to this insight however capacity is another component part that takes time and space to create and there are tensions about whether that capacity will develop in line with the values and how their learning will impact on the strategic design overall.

These evaluation activities, the learning points presented by them and the iterative changes to aspects of this practice, as well as its notable impact on many individuals and the school collectively have led me to place greater value on a subjective ontological position I have learned that those methodologies and approaches that limit wider exploration are unlikely to yield the development of rich further questioning and rather provide a perhaps 'flatter' summation. The real strength of qualitative methodologies is that they provide the opportunity to understand outcomes within the context of an individual, their values and how that sits within the wider context of the collective whole. Without an interpretation of why someone may be giving a particular response, I consider that the findings and outcomes lack meaning. Knowledge of the individual and the context allows me to elicit a greater explicit realisation of tacit knowledge by either being informed enough to scaffold questioning or to observe, present a construct and discuss. This helps to release 'that which

we know but cannot tell' (Polyani, cited by Eraut, 2000). Without the more flexible nature of qualitative approaches, research can be blunt, and I consider that the real outcomes of research are to provide a response to questions asked but also to generate the next set of questions.

Conclusion

Having reviewed my development to this point, I consider that I have been fortunate to have been able to undertake a variety of different roles across the education sector and this has helped to refine and further develop my professional identity by being able to consider a range of different perspectives. There are many facets to my professional identity and an interrelatedness with my personal identity but the strongest link between the two is a genuine interest and pursuit of learning and, in doing so, being able to contribute to the development of individuals, groups, organisations and systems.

In terms of collaborative professional learning, there is an evidence base that responds to some aspects of the questions that I have raised from my own professional learning however there remain gaps in learning about the impact of those aspects collectively as a whole school or organisation. The developing points from my professional learning as shared contribute a set of smaller questions that will support a response to this much 'larger' question. I consider that doctoral level research in this area should contribute useful learning to inform wider development and moving to responses to the questions that I have posed will make a valid system contribution.

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Appendices:

4586 words in total

Appendix I: Annotated curriculum vitae

1592 words

Laura Morris

LAURA MORRIS

Senior leader in education

EMPLOYMENT

Headteacher and deputy headteacher, Ysgol Nantgwyn

2018 – current

Having been out of schools for over four years, I was keen to return and start to implement aspects of my learning from having had the broader perspectives and different lenses of working for local authority, regionally and nationally. Moving into a relatively new sector in Wales, that of the all age school, I determined would mean for different opportunities than that of the primary and/or secondary sector particularly with the ongoing development of the Curriculum for Wales as was happening at the time. My misperception was that all staff would have a new sense of motivation to make changes for children and that there would be a sense of innovation as part of purpose. Six years on and we are probably at the point that I thought we would be after two and there have been many, many points of learning.

The first is that innovation is relative to the individual and to the context and, in this respect, people develop their innovative practice at different rates and in different ways. The rationale for development must be clear to provide sufficient motivation; for most, this is about learning and experiences for children but this does not extend across all.

The second is that when I have levered, and continue to lever, change in the culture and ethos of the school there are those that remain unchanged and this impacts the culture in a range of different ways. There are differences between people – there are those that chase change and those that run from it and various fractions in between. It has been really important to take very careful, accurate reading of where staff are as a collective, where groups are and where individuals are to garner the most amount of change at any point in time, as well as recognise when to pause.

The third, and linked to collaboration, is that there are many almost imperceptible changes that don't present on a day to day basis and therefore it is important to consider progress in change over time, as well as take a variety of different readings and sources, so that evaluations aren't overly influenced by the 'here and now' and have good reference to where we have come from. Progress is not linear, progress is not continuous and not all progress is good progress.

Senior strategic lead, Central South Consortium

2013-2018

Expert adviser, Welsh Government

2013-2015

The most curious part of working as a civil servant was the code of conduct. While not in disagreement with most aspects of it, I had been employed as an expert adviser yet learned very quickly that I would not be affording any advice, rather facilitating others in doing so. Previous positions that I had been in often meant that I was one of the most 'knowing' in the room however, with this role, I engaged with a very wide and varied set of stakeholders, often working in sectors that I had very limited knowledge of. I was often the least qualified person and youngest person in the room. I quickly became adept at presentation of information in order to garner others' views and learned that it was often better to leave something in draft, with an element of 'unfinishedness' and preferably with a suitable range of options explored with advantages and disadvantages so that others could grant their views.

Local authority mathematics lead, Cardiff

2012-2013

This role taught me about 'tall poppy syndrome'. I had been recruited into the local authority due to the very high rates of progress that pupils were making in mathematics in the school that I was working in. The school was in a very challenging area with significant socio economic disadvantage and poverty of many descriptions. And yet, we were outperforming many of the schools that did not have as much challenge as us. I was appointed to work alongside five other schools in the main, to offer leadership support and challenge to their heads of mathematics with the aim of improving GCSE attainment for pupils. As a young head of mathematics, this meant that I was often working with people who had done the role for much longer than I had and, while I truly thought that collaboration in this way would be received positively, I was by the headteachers but not by the heads of mathematics.

While I only undertook this role for a year, I made some headway with pupil GCSE attainment with most schools improving by around 10% in their A*-C and one by almost 20%. What became very evident quite early on was that these heads of mathematics were appointed to their roles on the basis of them being good teachers however, their leadership was under- developed. The role was not well understood, nor was what was required of them. At this point, I learned that the value of working with people, to develop them in a way that was appropriate for them without losing sight of the aim, was the most important thing. These people felt under-valued with someone else being brought in, as they thought, to 'tell them how to do their jobs' but no one in their school had invested any time with them previously. I learned at this point that leadership is a fully generic concept and any effective leader can develop another effective leader.

Head of mathematics, second in mathematics,

Mathematics teacher, various

2002-2006

I was so caught up in the public service, doing good mentality that I hadn't stopped to realise that not everyone was like me. I was lucky to work in a department that really supported me but they'd

also protected me. The staff room was a different mentality. While still a variety of voices, there was a level of moderation to a normalised voice of not necessarily particularly liking children and teaching being about doing enough.

I moved into various different positions of responsibility - teaching and learning advocate, teaching and learning support where I learned quite quickly that 'no one likes a show off' in one context and that 'show offs' are celebrated for their impact in another. My voice adapted to the different contexts with slightly different narratives however my professional identity was already well developed - I was in this for the children and seeing them do well genuinely brought me joy.

EDUCATION

EdD (unfinished), 2017-2019

PGCE and BSc psychology, Swansea University, 2018 – 2002

Having completely changed direction from forensic psychology on a whim to doing a PGCE to give me a little more time, I was rather overwhelmed when I found out that I both liked it and was good at it. I enjoyed the pursuit of pupils' learning, I enjoyed the pursuit of positive relationships including the ones that I had to really work hard at, I liked that every day was so different and there were so many permutations and combinations of events that could happen and I had to steer groups of thirty teenagers to move towards a mutual goal. I was emotionally invested and I knew so quickly that this was the type of role that I could continue in.

I was given almost complete autonomy for what I could do in the classroom: the what was determined but not the how. Another strand of professional learning came in here of research into effective pedagogical approaches, explanations, concrete examples and I was hooked. I could be my creative self without restraint because the pupils that I taught trusted me. My personality was allowed and I laughed along with the pupils. I was reviewed and told that I was excellent.

A levels – mathematics, psychology, law, further mathematics, Coleg Glan Hafren

Learning a smaller number of subjects that I had picked and having teachers that were absolutely passionate about what they taught was a revelation. Learning about things that I thought I would spend my career doing gave me purpose and I worked the hardest that I ever had.

GCSEs, Cardiff

I had a very mixed relationship with secondary school and came out with results that I was completely undeserving of overall having not done a bit of revision for any examination. I have, however, spent much of my adult life teaching myself how to learn possibly as a result of this.

I was incredibly disengaged with much of the learning that I had across these five years and the way that I learned it. Secondary school, without a shadow of a doubt, taught me that I was only

interested in the things that I was interested in and no amount of attempted compliance would make a difference to that.

Primary school

Standard four of junior school also stands out as a point of learning and reflection. Strange that, while I have lived it, there isn't a huge amount that I remember about my primary education. The things that I do remember are connected with big emotional response that I can still feel to this day. The teacher that we had for our last year of primary school was new to the school, male, reasonably old and, without doubt, the most terrifying and horrid person that I have ever met still to this day. Gentle encouragement and formative feedback was replaced by pages torn out of books and art pieces ripped into two, four, eight in front of the whole class and when pieces of work were repeated, time spent sitting outside the headteacher's office. I registered my concerns with said headteacher on many an occasions, I campaigned at the injustice of the 'teaching approach' writing petitions and speeches calling for the removal of this teacher but all to no avail. My plan was to complete perfunctory pieces of work to demonstrate that this teacher was not helping me to learn. I learned here that the system is bigger than me and that where and when people do not want to listen, they won't.

OTHER QUALIFICATIONS

NPQH

Coaching and mentoring

Safeguarding level 3

OTHER EXPERIENCES

Volunteer – pregnancy, labour, childbirth and early weeks

Volunteer – MIND Cymru

Volunteer – appropriate adult, youth services

Appendix II: Annotated professional leadership standards

195 words



Note: These are extracts from my professional review against the leadership standards.

The leadership standards are accessed here: <https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/19bc948b-8a3f-41e0-944a-7bf2cadf7d18/professional-standards-for-teaching-and-leadership-interactive-pdf-for-pc.pdf>

Collaboration

Sustained highly-effective formal leadership descriptor: Confident leadership represents all schools in positive collaboration or negotiation with interest groups to the benefit of learners across the education community.

The key learning point here is outlined in the standard descriptor itself and I have learned that where we work as a collective of professionals and non-teaching professionals, the outcomes and experiences are richer for all.

Assessment against standard

Provision:

- Self-evaluation processes to engage all staff, analysed and outcomes shared. Professional learning is collaborative and developed around identified needs.
- Evaluation and learning mechanisms developed to enable monitoring and evaluation processes and inform need for further action and/or follow up.
- Teachers work collaboratively with teachers from other schools in a variety of arrangements including School Improvement Groups, leadership triads, teacher triads, peer coaching and teacher swap arrangements.
- Through performance management, line management and whole-school identification mechanisms ensured that all members of staff have planned suitable progression for their own development.

Impact:

- Teachers report a high level of collaboration and give high value to this in terms of supporting their development and enabling them to support the development of others.
- Consultation has yielded useful information that has been used to strengthen planning and actions (both at CSC and school). It has supported the establishment of a culture of involvement and ownership.

Appendix III: Personal learning plan

268 words

Name

Laura Morris

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN for period September 2024 to August 2025

No	Issues	Recommended Action	Action taken and outcomes		
			Resources needed	Timescale	Outcomes
	Biases impacting decision making.	Explore events through professional coaching to become more aware of biases that I have and that impact how I lead and work with others. Re-plan some past events with consideration of biases to determine how decision making might have been different. Examine the impact of biases on individuals, groups and more widely.	Professional coaching sessions Allocated planning sessions	Academic year 2024-2025	The capacity to develop this level of things in others.
	Moving to a level of embedded practice rather than maintaining an implementation phase.	Collective evaluation of the impact of changing emphases with leaders across the school. Collection and synthesis of stakeholder voice on change to highlight the individual and potential group differences in perception.	Professional learning and evaluation scheduled time	Academic year 2024-2025	A better model of implementation that will yield better outcomes by being context specific and better understood by leaders.
	Different views of 'success' across the school.	Re-configure whole school improvement planning activities with to include all relevant stakeholders in defining success.	School calendar activity time	September 2024	Outcomes of evaluation become more aligned internally and progress towards

		Ensuring re-iteration of success criteria developed throughout the year.		Throughout the year	'success' is more rapid.
	Development of teachers as mentors and coaches. Enabling changes in professional identity.	Implementation of mentor and coach reflection space in a similar vein to 'clinical supervision'. Matched pairs of mentors and coaches to support the development of professional identity.	Individual calendar directed time.	Throughout the year	The quality of mentoring and coaching improves and there is less potential conflict for members of staff in their broader roles.

Appendix IV: Annotated job description

2531 words

Job Description and Person Specification

SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITY

Directorate:	Education and Inclusion Services
School:	Ysgol Nantgwyn
Post Title:	Headteacher
Post Number:	N/A
Responsible to:	Governing Body
DBS Required Level:	Enhanced
Date of Description:	March 2023

The Headteacher will take overall responsibility for the leadership management, organisation and conduct of the school in accordance with:

- Education Acts, regulations, Codes of Practice and other legislation;
- Conditions of Employment of Headteachers as contained in the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document;
- The policies of the County Borough Council and approved plans and policies of the Education and Inclusion Services Directorate;
- The school's vision, mission statement, values, plans, priorities and targets.

JOB PURPOSE

- To develop and sustain the school;

Key within this bullet point is the need to 'develop and sustain' which has implicit within it the expectation that the school is improved and those improvements are embedded. It also suggests that this is a continuous expectation and that fits well with our whole school annual cycle of school improvement priorities and continuous monitoring, evaluation and learning. While each school will vary in the approach, the one that I have taken here is to 'root' the priorities throughout the school so that all members of staff have responsibilities and personal improvement priorities that contribute to the overall improvement. The biggest challenge with this aspect of the role is ensuring that I maintain a level of resistance to the distraction to the volume of the operational issues that arise in an organisation of over 1200 people, their families and associated partnerships and stakeholders.

- To exercise overall responsibility for the organisation, management and conduct of the school within agreed strategic priorities;

The points around organisation and management, I feel, refers to the policies, systems and processes that have been set up across the school. When I arrived there was little coherence and a large amount of time was spent explaining to staff members retrospectively why an action that they had taken was not in line with expectation.

Drawing on the collaboration point here, I have found it helpful to co-construct these important documents and sets of expectations with staff and also place them in a position to be involved in the evaluation of them in relatively simple way (what is working well and even better if) as well as more focused activities of looking at the impact of the policies and their implementation on our staff and pupils. This means that staff systematically return to documents and ask the question whether practice reflects policy and whether policy reflects practice which has been instrumental in ensuring that actions across the school stay in line with intentions and expectations but also that our documentation stays current.

- To provide effective leadership for the Senior Management Team/Leadership Group and all other school staff.

This is a key point and is both explicit and implicit in all that I do. I became headteacher of a senior leadership team that had lost sense of their identity in education. They had become fully operational in role and stuck on a 'treadmill'. They were questioning whether they would continue in education and most were seeking roles in other sectors and/or industries.

Referring to collaboration, there was a need to move these 'managers' to 'leaders' and to support the re-development of their identity as an educational leader with vision and values

that was impacting positively due to strategic improvements led by individuals and supported and challenged by an open, transparent team. While supported by other aspects, the team meeting became a critical mechanism for leveraging this change with its previous format being several hours after school with leaders giving narratives of their strands of 'work' with little to no discussion pursuing this. Agendas were incoherent and often not linked to the school improvement plan.

The meeting has now changed to become a true team forum where the collective mission to improve the whole school, rather than individual areas, is palpable. Agendas are developed across the course of a half term and ensures that each area of the school improvement plan is explored. There are now very limited slides with the greater proportion of time spent reflecting on evaluating the implementation of actions and working to identify where further developments can be made. Together, as a team, aspects of the school improvement plan are summatively assessed so that leaders develop their understanding of how to do this. Again, over time, the sources of information used to evaluate has broadened from solely data to include a variety of different collections of informations gathered using a variety of methodologies and approaches. We have moved from being data rich to information rich to learning rich. Nothing is out of scope and there is no hierarchy of people.

More recently, senior leadership team meetings include a critical review within their cycle. This models itself on the medical profession practices (and possibly others) where a 'mistake' is reviewed through consideration of key details. This has taken a couple of different formats, including where the 'mistake' is posed as a scenario for others to consider, discuss and propose sets of actions however, ultimately, the aim here is to reinforce leaders as learners as well as ensuring opportunities for learning outside individual portfolios of responsibility.

AREAS OF RESONSIBILITY AND KEY TASKS

Strategic direction and development of the school

- Leading by example and provide inspiration and motivation to the school community;
- Generating vision, ethos and policies for the school which promote high levels of achievement and meet equality objectives;
- Creating and implementing a strategic school development plan, underpinned by sound financial planning, within the national and local context, which identifies

priorities and targets for ensuring that pupils achieve high standards, and that teaching is effective;

- Building and establishing an effective positive working relationship with the governing body;
- Securing success and improvement for the school through school self-evaluation
- Developing and securing agreement on a rolling strategic plan for the school;
- supporting all staff to achieve the priorities and targets which the school sets for itself, provide them with the motivation to support its aims;
- Ensuring that the management of the school, including finance and administration support the school's policies, its vision and aims;
- Monitoring and reviewing all aspects of attainment, priorities, targets and policy and take necessary action.

A school's relationship with its critical stakeholders, including the community, is influential in guiding it towards continued improvements. The to which parents, for example, value and support the policies and processes of the school is often reflected in the extent to which their children do the same. The relative influence of happy pupils and parents in a community where multiple schools serve the area and [do not but actually do] compete for pupils is significant.

With the exception of parents' evening and additional meetings where parents where issues had arisen for individual pupils, there were no opportunities for parents to engage with the school. Coupled with an out of date website, parents had almost no opportunity to receive information about the school. Consequently, this often led to the perception that pupils, parents and the school were entirely discrete entities that had no overlap and varying degrees of conflict in more difficult discussions.

The key aim here was to re-build Nantgwyn as one team that consisted of pupils, parents, staff and governors and for that to become part of daily life at the school. Various actions have been taken to move forward in this aspect which include:

- Our relentless messaging about being one team working together to three common aims – getting the best outcomes and experiences in learning, becoming and being an amazing human being and working together to have a nice day, every day.
- Up to date communication mechanisms that contain the most important information on our website, through monthly newsletters written by staff, half termly newsletters written by pupils, weekly newsletters sent to pupils, open afternoons, parent assemblies, concerts and exhibitions.
- Establishment of the PTA
- Re-setting the way that staff work collaboratively to evaluation, learn and plan.
- Establishment of a parent forum to share information and consult on further developments in the school.
- Re-development of the working practices of governors, ensuring that they have

opportunities to participate in activities where outputs and outcomes are considered and evaluated.

- Establishment of a pupil leadership team with a role to engage with all pupils across the school against areas of the school improvement plan and contribute to evaluation and next steps planning.
- Updates on progress made in relation to the school improvement priorities shared with all stakeholders.

The impact of these actions has led to a lessened demand for information to be shared with parents, over-subscribed applications for parent governor roles, a large and growing parent forum, pupils that can talk confidently about what we are about as a school and how we are trying to improve, together.

Teaching and learning

- Ensuring that the curriculum promotes Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig and satisfies the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales;
- Creating an environment which secures effective learning across the breadth of the curriculum and to promote high standards of achievement, behaviour, discipline and attendance;
- Determining and organising the curriculum and monitor and evaluate its effectiveness;
- Monitoring the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements including the analysis of performance data;
- Developing links with parents, other schools, educational establishments and the wider community, including business and industry, in order to enhance teaching and learning and pupils' personal development;
- Ensuring that curriculum continuity and progression are achieved across the key stages with partner schools;
- Ensuring that effective systems are in place to identify pupils who have special needs and to ensure that appropriate provision is made for these needs;
- Promoting opportunities for and encouraging participation of all pupils in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including culture, sport, the environment, and citizenship;
- Contributing, as appropriate, to the teaching in the school;
- Encouraging and engaging in sharing good practice;
- Ensuring effective assessment procedures, including assessment for learning.

Teaching and learning reflected a recent Estyn outcome of 'special measures' where the overall approach was prescriptive in terms of the what, as well as the how. It demonstrated a complete absence of 'why'. Staff moved through schemes of learning at the same pace an

in the same format for all pupils. While this had impacted positively on summative outcomes and Welsh Government performance measures, the picture at individual and cohort level showed a clear lack of progress which was set alongside poor behaviour and a lack of interest in school and learning.

The overall aim in development has been and continues to be the 'why' for both pupils and staff. Strategies have included developing a better understanding of individual pupils and their profiles as well as their needs as individual people. Staff have collaborated to develop a curriculum that is fit for purpose for 2024 and guides pupils in their development in the four purposes of the curriculum as set out in Successful Futures (). Through successive iterations and cycles of enquiry, staff have worked collaboratively to innovate and consider a range of different issues (working with free school meals children) utilising an increasing range of research methods and approaches before evaluating and considering implications for implementation. The outcome of this work has been that staff map learning for individual pupils and can clearly articulate the 'why' as well as the 'why not'.

Leading and managing staff

- Developing an appropriate staffing structure for the approval of the governing body that takes account of the changing needs of the school;
- Developing positive working relationships with and between all staff and governors;
- Implementing and sustaining effective strategies for the management of all staff;
- Planning, evaluating and supporting the work of groups of staff, delegate appropriately and clearly and evaluate outcomes;
- Enabling and challenging staff to develop expertise in their respective roles through the identification of needs, ensuring an effective programme of access to continuing professional development;
- Enabling performance management systems to operate effectively and to engage with appraisal requirements of the head teacher and relevant staff;
- Sustaining personal and staff motivation.

The greatest deficit in the staff skills and knowledge was not being cognisant of how learning is evaluated. The implication of this in practice was evident in pupils not being taught the right things at the right level and an assumption that everything was good as well as completing judgements for the sake of judgements and nothing or very limited actions arising from the outputs or outcomes of these activities.

Over time, I have worked with staff individually and in groups to take an approach that follows lines of enquiry when evaluating while at the same time extending their use of different information, providing feedback on evaluations and challenging their thinking further. In open forum, I have developed a set of evaluation sessions where staff work collaboratively to

explore different lines of enquiry taken from summative data reviews. These activities expect that staff will consider the holistic picture of the child and undertake professional dialogue with those closely linked, pupil voice activities with the pupil, look at provision, observe the pupil in their learning and look at their learning outputs before coming into a forum that provides the space for colleagues to respond more formally to the line of enquiry set. The outcome of these activities have well supported the ethos of Nantgwyn being about all pupils' needs all of the time but also have improved outcomes and experiences for our pupils by bettering the understanding of why provision might not have been impacting as expected and what alterations will be put in place going forward.

Moving forward from this, we are entering a stage where middle leaders are starting to generate their own lines of enquiry and the vision is that this will eventually replace lines of enquiry being identified by others.

Effective deployment of staff and resources

- Supporting the Governing Body to set a balanced budget;
- Advising the Governing Body on the impact of financial decisions, both in the short term and medium term;
- Ensuring robust processes are in place to report in year actual forecast spend against approved budget with explanations for key variances, highlighting key risks;
- Maximising the school's income from external funding streams;
- Working with governors and colleagues to recruit high quality staff;
- Ensuring that all staff and governors understand their respective roles and responsibilities;
- Deploying and developing staff to make most effective use of their skills, expertise and experience and to ensure the effective management of the school;
- Managing and organising the use of the school accommodation efficiently and effectively;
- Managing and organising relevant groupings of children to ensure effective teaching and learning takes place and that children's personal development needs are met;
- Establishing priorities for expenditure and monitor the effectiveness of spending in line with the priorities identified in the school's development plan and within the financial regulations of the LA;
- Monitoring the use of resources with a view to achieving value for money, within the school's financial context.

Over time, there had been a tendency to 'fix problems' by allocating more people and more money however the outcome of this had largely been an enlargement of the problem area as the complexities of leading and managing more people created more significant challenges. Line management had been avoided in the school and, where it was taking place, it was not done well with usually a discussion involving delegating a list of 'jobs' to be done.

Line management expectations were created; that all members of staff should have line management once per half term. The purpose of line management to support, challenge and develop employees using their job descriptions as the basis and enabling them to interpret and translate this into their practice. Line manager professional learning was undertaken by all so that the expectations for these sessions were clear for both parties in the meeting. Development of guiding, mentoring and coaching skills and the ability to recognise the importance of moving between these dependent on individual and dependent on desired outcome. The hierarchical line management structure enabled line managers of line managers to coach in line management and to provide feedback and challenge points of deviation and slipping back into old habits. The outcome of this activity is that staff are progressively becoming more efficient and effective in their roles and there is not a need to employ additional staff, which has helped the overall budget and resource management position. Moving forward, there is a need to embed this in practice.

Accountability

- Provide information and advice to the governing body so that it can meet its responsibilities and ensure proper accountability throughout the school;
- Ensure the school meets all statutory and legal requirements including: Child Protection, Health and Safety, Equal Opportunities, Race Relations, Disability and Human Rights legislation, Employment Law;
- Ensure that the financial accounts of the school are maintained according to LA financial regulations and that the governing body is effectively informed to enable it to be appropriately accountable;
- Create an ethos in which all staff recognise their accountability;
- Account for the school's performance to internal and external agencies through the analysis of performance data and appropriate reporting; the use of such analysis to inform planning at all levels;
- Provide relevant information about all aspects of the school to parents, the community and other interested parties;
- Ensure that the school meets all legal requirements in relation to equal opportunities legislation and that the school operates in the spirit of the law as well as to the letter;
- Ensure that the school complies with all statutory requirements relating to the

provision of education and other relevant legislation, e.g. The Children Act.

From reviewing these points, I consider that these are an output or outcome of other development areas in the main. The one aspect that I have needed to become more aware of are the legal responsibilities of the school and I would question my job title: headteacher implies that I am the lead teacher however the actual role, as outlined in commentary, is certainly not that. School leader would be a more fitting title. Legalities have included a lot of information about human resources and employment law, site health and safety compliance including tree inspections as well as the seemingly more obvious statutory entitlements of pupils in schools across Wales.

Strengthening the community

- Provide a comprehensive and holistic approach to the needs of children, and their families and the communities in which they live;
- Encourage and engage in collaboration between all interested parties including the LA;
- Encourage and engage in collaboration with other schools;
- Develop strategies to encourage parents and carers to support their children's learning;
- Ensure that the school plays a central role in the community;
- Identify and respond to the needs of the local community through an appropriate range of provision and activities throughout the year;
- Ensure that there are close working partnerships with the local community and that the pupils, staff and governing body have a good understanding of the wider aims of the school and its place within the community;
- Liaise and build effective relationships with the school's partners and with other agencies providing community support locally;
- Ensure that the school's strategic and operational development reflects local and regional community learning issues, and that decisions affecting community learners take account of the expressed views of the local community;
- Ensure that the development of lifelong learning opportunities take due account of the Council's strategic priorities for community-based learning;
- Create an effective partnership with parents and the wider community.

The relationship that a school has with its community is a very important contributor to the success of any school. It is important for communities in Wales to feel proud of the school that sits among it, particularly because they are part of a comprehensive education system and, in theory, each child should go to their local school as set out by catchment areas and admissions criteria. Where members of the local community do not feel positively about their local school, it manifests itself in house moves and greater transportation for children in their

family as they work to ensure that they have choice in the schooling of their child. Reputationally, this is damaging and this had indeed been the situation at Nantgwyn for many years with two other schools in the area being selected by parents instead of the 'school down the road'.

I have previously outlined the way that we are improving communication and engagement and involvement with key stakeholders and this has had a really positive impact on our pupil numbers however to gain the most in terms of reputation, we have had to step further into a community role so that we can reach out to other family members and those in the community that do not have a connection with us but still may speak about us from time to time.

I am working with staff to develop our well-being strategy which focuses on different aspects of well-being for pupils, parents, staff and the local community. While this is a sizeable piece of work and one which will never quite be complete, so far we have:

- Created termly community events so that different people can engage with us and each other in different ways. Carols around the tree at Christmas was particularly well received.
- Hosted neighbourhood events where our closest neighbours are invited to afternoon tea at Nantgwyn to thank them for their patience and understanding during the busy drop off and collection times.
- Contributed to local events. For example, sent our choir to the local Christmas craft market.
- Hosted family evenings – quizzes, discos, bingo, wreathmaking to supplement the offer available in the local area.
- Opened our facilities for local sporting clubs but also just generally in the evenings for families to have an additional facility to play basketball, tennis, rugby, football etc

The emerging impact of this work is that we are engaging with a wider variety of people on a more regular basis. The damage to our facilities in the evenings and over the weekends has decreased significantly as it has now become the community's and it is therefore being looked after better. Our pupil numbers have risen from under 1000 to almost more than 1100 as pupils move to us from other schools, having had some engagement with us as part of their local community and more parents are making the decision to send their child to the 'school down the road'.

Additional responsibilities

- To carry out health and safety responsibilities;
- Protecting Children is a core responsibility of all staff. Staff are expected to alert any concerns they may have regarding the abuse or inappropriate treatment of a Child or Young Person, or vulnerable adults.

