

School Leadership

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Volume 8.1

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All Change in the Teaching Unions

The election of Geoff Barton, in the face of the ASCL's establishment's opposition, marks one of two major upheavals in the education firmament. Under its new leadership, ASCL is likely to commence a shift from being from a generally quiescent association that saw its role as policy promotion and negotiation to a more campaigning organisation determined to fight for an education agenda.

The second is the culmination of years of negotiation that will finally see the creation of the biggest education union by far with the merger of the NUT and ATL. The ballot has just gone out but the leaders are quietly confident that, in the face of the unprecedented crisis in education, the union of the unions will get the thumbs up from members.

The rejection of a bureaucrat at the head of the ASCL with an outspoken headteacher and critic of the government is in many ways the most remarkable. ASCL has been more worried about upsetting any of its various constituencies than it has in taking a stand on the multitude of issues around the funding and accountability of academies, the re-emergence of grammar schools, the EBacc and a rampaging Ofsted. Its main response has been to protest, quite mildly, at the hounding of its members out of their jobs if they had been deemed by Ofsted to be failing or had fallen into the grasp of a predatory corporate MAT.

Its only area of militancy, if one could call it that, was over the threat to pensions and here the Association did have some success. It combined with other unions and wrested some very large concessions from the government. Unions do have to look after their member's interests first and foremost but it showed both the potential of ASCL when allying themselves with other unions and the restrictive nature of the field they felt able, or willing, to fight on.

The absence from the field of headteachers – and one has to include the NAHT in this too – in terms of formulating any sort of coherent and combined response to Government policy has weakened the whole profession. Individual heads have been left powerless in the face of the Ofsted Supremacy and the autocratic power of a Corporate MAT Ascendency. It's a very interesting example of how leaving politics alone has adversely effected ASCL's individual members' interests, with heads resigning, being summarily sacked or being downgraded to frightened supplicants inside corporate systems.

It's not, however, just the heads that have failed to roar! Mary Bousted, head of ATL and putative joint leader of the new combined mega-union, accepts that the whole profession has been pretty supine in the face of the government's education agenda, with the result that the education system now has a multi-level crisis. Teachers have been too over-worked to be anything other than compliant, she told SLT in a wide ranging interview – and headteachers unions? ...well, she strongly welcomes the election of Geoff Barton.

She hopes that the combined union will be able to spend more time and resources campaigning on education than on narrow industrial claims, because in the end they affect members working lives. But although size means leverage she is doubtless aware that without the headteachers fighting with them, the potential for taking action is much curtailed. By their very complacency they have been a powerful brake on teacher resistance. And because they are heads they wield disproportionate influence with parents and the news media, which (in a critical public service) are always decisive factors.

But this can cut both ways. The funding and recruitment and retention crisis in education is now crystallising a lot of discontent within all tiers of the profession, but the most interesting political aspect of the crisis is that headteachers, seemingly without any coordinated campaign, have become politically savvy and have started sending letters home to parents explain the cuts and asking them to write to Theresa May and their local MPs demanding that they fund schools properly.

This is causing immediate ripples in Westminster and the media. Of all the stakeholders in education it is parents who the government fears the most. So Geoff Barton becomes General Secretary of ASCL at time of crystallising anger against the government from teachers, their representatives, and parents, and when new levers of political power are emerging. It could make a previously small, easily discountable association into a pivotal political broker that could lead the resistance and introduce some sanity into the government's approach to education. No pressure then!

Cover Story

Cover Story

Two and a half cheers for the new funding formula

Peter Downes assesses the new funding formula and finds some progress... and some major concerns. **p08**



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**Editorial Office****Editor**

Howard Sharron

PRODUCTION EDITOR

Jacob Ward

DESIGN MANAGER

Devinder Sonsana

ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

0121 224 7590/91

MARKETING DEPARTMENT

0121 224 7580

CUSTOMER SERVICES

0121 224 7599

Company registration number 02445043

© School Leadership Today 2017

ISSN 2040-1310

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Contact us

School Leadership Today is published by Imaginative Minds, U205 The Jubilee Centre, 130 Pershore Street, Birmingham, B5 6ND

■ Tel. 0121 224 7599
■ Fax. 0121 224 7598
■ www.teachingtimes.com

Head teacher resistance likely to grow with Barton election

The surprise election of Geoff Barton as the general secretary of the headteacher union ASCL reflects a strong grass-roots movement for change.

The question is, will he be able to budge a very conservative organisation?

On his blog, Barton declared, "we and our Governors, not politicians, should choose how we run our schools." It is clear that Barton will avoid the comfort of cozying up to politicians, and instead intend to speak the truth to power, on behalf of his members.

Barton's outspoken attitude has previously caused concerns about his ability to lead the ASCL. In his TES piece, he controversially announced, "I will be the last person in England dragged kicking and screaming to be an academy head."

The incoming ASCL president Carl Ward criticised this remark, stating that his "outspoken comments on Academies and Grammar Schools are not consistent with an ASCL membership which has so many members working within such."

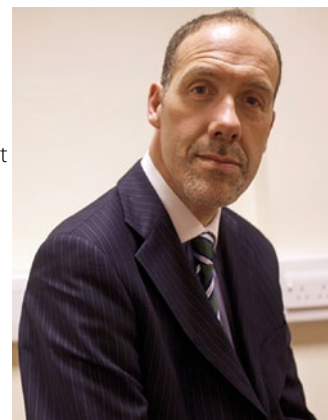
Rather than shying away from dispute, Barton posted an open letter, explaining he was against forced academisation. He also said that he didn't apply formally for the post because he believed he would not get through a traditional appointment process, given his known disagreements with elements on the council. He felt he had a better chance in an open election.

Barton's key dissatisfaction with the Association is that it fails to take robust enough positions on government policy, the Year 6 & SATS tests for example.

As an ASCL council member of more than eight years, he has witnessed first hand the loss of "vigorous engagement," the "hesitancy" of the council and the need for the union to take a "more robust position."

His opponent, Chris Kirk suggested that the new leadership should "build momentum, not perform a handbrake turn." Yet, it is a change of direction that the membership voted for.

Significant numbers took to social media to share their desire for "a voice that will not shirk away from challenge but will grapple with it with integrity and moral purpose." Barton's more confrontational approach appears to chime with Headteachers' increasing frustrations with funding cuts and the willingness of the government to spend scarce funds on free schools and grammar schools.



Headteachers should join our mega union, says ATL leader

The leader of ATL, who is negotiating a mega union with the NUT, has invited headteacher unions to consider joining them.

Mary Bousted, who will be co general secretary of the new National Education Union if their members agree in a ballot to merge, said that teachers need a single unified voice if they are to challenge the sort of policies that have created 'multi-level crisis' within education.

She said: 'Teachers in Finland and Australia have single unions to represent teachers and it means the government simply has to involve them in policy decisions. Here, with five unions, we are more easily divided and played off against each other.'

She admitted that on pure education issues, rather than conditions of service like pensions, the unions had been unable to challenge very hostile policy developments that

created the recruitment and retention crisis in education, chaos in the national exams and a curriculum that did not serve the best interests of many children and the country at large.

"When it comes to [political leverage] size does matter," insisted Mary Bousted. "And my hope is that we will be able as a combined force to exert more pressure on the issues we care about and divert more time away from competing with each other."

She welcomed the election of Geoff Barton at the ASCL and, whilst she felt he would initially have to get to grips with internal issues, the 'door would be open' to discussions about a merger.

Both the NUT and ATL have Leadership sections and many of the members within these have joined membership with the ASCL and NAHT.

Controversy rages over body cams in class



Opinion has sharply divided over the use of body worn video cameras in class to help monitor and manage bad behaviour.

Two UK schools are now trialling police-style bodycams in the classroom in a bid to manage behaviour during lessons and protect teachers from violence and false claims against them.

The cameras are already widely in use in US schools since 2015, with heads reporting an improved ability to manage behaviour. A TES survey found that one third of teachers would be prepared to use them here.

In the US the American Civil Liberties Union has protested about their spread, saying they risk introducing more students in the criminal justice system by making classroom evidence more easily usable in court. But their concern is as much about their use by 'security enforcement officers' in American schools who are not trained to work with children and who adopt a legalistic 'justice' model to misdemeanours.

Here the pages have been filled with warning that the cams will destroy student-teacher relationships and lead to the stigmatisation of children with behaviour difficulties and a greater willingness to exclude.

But violence in class and disruption is fuelling support.

Surveys in the UK have found that four out of 10 teachers have experienced violence from their pupils in the last year. Nine out of 10 staff reported having to deal with challenging behaviour with one third backing the cameras as a behaviour management and protection tool.

Despite the concerns about civil liberties and a 'pipeline' from school to prison systems, body cams in class have won support in the US.

A frequently quoted case study by supporters of body cams is that of Aldo Leopold Middle School in Iowa. When Principal Mark Yeoman was accused of kicking a student, the school used the recorded footage to assess the situation. It proved that the career threatening allegation was false. Mark Yeoman said "they didn't have to take my word over their child's word. They were able to see it."

And in the UK a prominent criminal justice academic at Portsmouth University has written backing the idea. He said: "filming only occurs when it is legitimate, proportionate and necessary to resolve problems. The cameras are 'incident specific' and are not on all the time."

He added: While cameras can be viewed with suspicion, it is important to consider the wider and rapid technological changes that will impact the classroom and school environment. Teachers could be filmed at any moment by anyone with a smart-phone – whether they are made aware of it or not. Body cameras are not only a way to balance this out, but they also offer security to teachers who – if properly trained – will be able to provide high quality footage of events with narrative and evidential value.

Ultimately, these types of cameras have the potential to reduce the time teachers spend resolving conflicts, allowing them more time to get back to doing what they do best: teaching. And what could be more important than that?

“Size does matter!”

Last week ATL and NUT members began their vote on a proposed merger. **Howard Sharron** speaks with **Mary Bousted**, leader of the ATL, about a potentially tectonic shift in the industrial landscape.



You might think that a union strongly advocating a merger with a competitor twice its size is not unlike a turkey voting for Christmas. It says something about Mary Bousted, the leader of the Association of teachers and Lecturers which is seeking to amalgamate with the mighty NUT, that if the vote is yes she will become joint general secretary of the new mega-union and one of the most powerful people in education.

It's a brave venture which has been mooted for some time, and has been slowly inching forward over two years of detailed, painstaking negotiations. One more month will call it, and she is quietly confident that the membership will back her. The way previous governments have, she says, rode roughshod over the profession in the last decade and engendered what she calls a 'multi-level crisis' within the profession will, she is sure, prompt a call for unity and resistance.

But won't ATL members, seemingly much less militant than those of the NUT, be worried that the distinctive culture of the union will be lost? 'The majority of members in the NUT and the AT have much more in common than divides us,' she responds.

"I think amalgamation speaks more exactly to what will be happening. The two unions, if the members vote 'Yes', will become a new union – The National Education Union – and that will have a broad membership. School leaders, college management, teachers, FE lecturers, school support staff, a large independent school membership will change the composition of the NUT – so it will legitimately be a new union."

The fact that she will be joint general secretary of the organisation is, she says, an important sign that the ethos of the ATL will remain alive. Competition between the unions tends to increase their difference but the policies of the NUT and ATL are remarkably similar, she asserts. Nor is it the case, she adds, that the ATL (as is often supposed) is a non-strike union. Its members take industrial action, always as last resort – when they have to defend their job or when they simply can't work under the conditions imposed on them any longer.

Indeed, although the NUT tends to grab the industrial action headlines, local

industrial action by ATL members is surprisingly common around the country. Given that the union has problems maintaining a strong school rep presence it speaks volumes about the responsiveness of the union hierarchy to its members and their own ethos of solidarity.

This responsiveness has been one of her main achievements since she was given the post after responding to an advert in the Guardian in 2003. She had no previous experience of executive responsibilities within a union, having spent the previous 12 years lecturing in education departments, ending up as the head of the Education Department at Kingston University. In this her appointment was remarkably similar to that of Geoff Barton's – a non-bureaucrat outsider with a mission to change the way things are done.

When she got the job the union was losing membership and influence, and she swept away the fossilized system of committees and the outdated concentration on minutes and matters arising, towards getting things done and including members as much as possible in the policy-making process of the union.

It has grown in membership since then, albeit not by huge amounts, but enough to play a very strong hand in the amalgamation negotiations. With the constant danger of being squeezed by the two giants, the NUT and NAS/UWT, this has been no small achievement.

The new industrial landscape, where the power to strike has been further curtailed and requires unions to find new ways to make their voices felt, will undoubtedly favour Mary Bousted's style of operation within the new union. She likes to use research, well rounded policy papers and thought-out alternatives to press her case for reform. After the years of darkness with Gove and Morgan, she now feels that Justine Greening is much more willing to listen to the profession. It's an ideal time to get together with the NUT and create a bigger voice. "Size does matter!"

She is proudest of the way she has challenged the credibility of Ofsted for the huge stresses it has put on teachers, using authoritative research as her battering ram.

"Workload stress is definitely the biggest issue facing teachers, and it's caused in my view by an accountability system that is capricious, lacks consistency, doesn't look at the right things and has driven workload through the roof – and I include Ofsted in this.

"Now you are not thought to be teaching properly or leading effectively unless it is evidenced and written down. Less than half of teachers have more than 10 years experience and there is a massive spike of teachers leaving after 5 years. Teachers' working lives are becoming impossible!"

Wilshire, the former head of Ofsted, was a disaster for education, she believes:

"I am not a Wilshire fan. I think, to his credit, that he was unafraid to express something clearly to government when he believed it, such as the public letter on MATs and how many are under-performing and their huge cost.

"But he resisted Ofsted becoming more research and evidence led, refused to really accommodate the issues of schools in disadvantaged areas, and had encouraged a very counter-productive command and control notion of leadership in schools.

"The Education Policy Institute, founded by David Laws, did some research on Ofsted which revealed that schools in affluent areas could see their value added scores fall for years and still be measured good or outstanding. Yet schools in disadvantaged areas would never be marked outstanding.

"Using this and other research, ATL has led the charge, and questioned the accuracy and reliability of its judgements and the validity of its role, and as a result it has come under pressure as never before. Even the idea of giving schools a single grade is, we have shown, meaningless and hides more than it reveals. In-school variation is often much bigger than the variations between schools."

This campaign has been a brave one, she says, and has led to a lot of personal abuse, some if it not at all pleasant. But she believes the tide is turning.

The way heads have started to write directly to parents about the cuts is evidence that they are becoming more resistant and more politically savvy in their response to government policy. The election of Geoff Barton, who she worked alongside when she was an academic, is evidence of this and the unifying of the unions will be a further indication of a greater willingness and ability to resist.

She accepts fully that on education policy all the unions, and the profession as a whole, have not in the past had any real sense of agency in the face of a very strident, inattentive government and have concentrated on bread-and-butter issues like pensions. It's been a failing that has left teachers and children vulnerable to policies that profoundly damaged education. If the merger goes ahead, Mary Bousted will become a major national figure seeking to redress this omission.

Howard Sharron is Managing Director of Teaching Times.

Mary Bousted is the leader of teaching union ATL.



Two and a half cheers for the new **funding formula**

Peter Downes assesses the new funding formula and finds some progress and some major concerns.

Stage 2 of the government's process of moving to a 'Schools national funding formula' was published just before Christmas. Unlike Stage 1, which was about the *principles* of a new formula, this consultation gave some figures for people to scrutinise. Not surprisingly, it has provoked much reaction. The winners and losers have rushed into print. MPs in areas which will have more money have claimed credit for the success of their campaigns; Heads and Governors in areas likely to be worse off have howled in anguish.

In this article we will look at:

- a. Exactly why a new funding formula was necessary
- b. How previous opportunities for achieving this have been missed
- c. What is positive and welcome in the latest proposal
- d. What needs to be done to make it better

Before the 1988 Education Reform Act and the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS), Heads and Governors had no idea of what money was being spent on their schools. Everything was provided and paid for by the Local Authority (LA) who really did control schools, deciding how many teachers could be employed, how many responsibility points allocated, how many technicians, secretaries and teaching assistants appointed and even when the classrooms were to be re-decorated. Of course, the LA councillors and officers knew what it all cost because they raised most of the money through the rates. Consequently the money spent on schools varied widely across the country, depending largely on the priority councillors gave to education and their political appetite for raising taxes.

LMS gave schools much greater financial autonomy, allocating to the governors the sum that would have been spent by the LA. This was broadly welcomed at the time, giving schools greater flexibility, at the margins, to adapt their spending to local needs. So far, so good. But Ken Baker's 1988 Act also introduced a national curriculum, national testing, leading to a national inspection regime and national school league tables. Financial management and budgeting decisions became a hot topic in professional associations, especially the Secondary Heads Association (SHA). Heads started to compare their budgets with similar schools in other parts of the country and were astonished to discover the different levels of funding available. In about 1992 it dawned upon secondary school Heads that their schools were being judged against *national* criteria but being funded on the basis of *local* decision-making. The manifest unfairness of this led to the setting-up of a campaign for a fairer national funding formula and the first pamphlet on this issue was commissioned by the SHA from the London School of Economics in 1994.

Over the last 22 years the clamour for fair funding has grown as public scrutiny of school performance has intensified. Professional and academic support for a more equitable distribution of resources has spread widely but has only recently gained political support.

“

Heads started to compare their budgets with similar schools in other parts of the country and were astonished to discover the different levels of funding available.



Opportunities for reform have been missed. John Major's Conservative colleagues were impressed by the cogency and clarity of the case but felt unable to take matters further. As one senior Department for Education official put it: 'In matters such as funding, a little obfuscation assists the political process.' The Labour government took it much more seriously and set up a powerful and widely representative working party – the Education Funding Strategy Group. This group commissioned specialist reports on all aspects of school funding and came up in 2002 with a full and detailed proposal which would have commanded widespread if not unanimous support. Although they appeared to be convinced by the merits of most of the proposals, the DES Ministers, Charles Clarke and David Miliband, refused to recommend it for implementation. In broad terms, it would have meant moving money away from the Labour conurbations into the Tory shires and that was hardly likely to appeal to Tony Blair. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that this was a big mistake because the Labour government was, to its credit, increasing expenditure on education significantly in real terms between 2000 and 2005 so it would have been able to improve allocations to the less well-funded areas of the country without having too negative an impact on those who had generous funding (sometimes without realising their good fortune).



In the last fourteen years there have been many changes in the way education funding is administered and distributed, generally moving power away from local to central government with money for schools coming from central government as a ring-fenced Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), with limited powers for the LA-based Schools Forum to adjust its distribution formula to individual schools. Apart from some specific grants and technical adjustments, the government's policy was to replicate the historical funding pattern so as not to cause major disruption. The exception to that came in the last year of the coalition government when an extra £350 million was built into the allocation for the benefit of those at the bottom of the pile.

The fundamental disparities have never been addressed. Let's be clear: the advocates of reform were *not* claiming that funding should be the same in cash terms across the country. They acknowledged that it costs more to employ a teacher in London than it does in Barnsley because London teachers' salaries are higher because of cost of living factors. But, even allowing for that, the real terms funding gap was, in some cases, £1,500 per pupil.

Political lobbying and pressure have been mounting over several years, notably through the teaching unions and associations, the Local Government Association (LGA), and F40 (a campaign group comprising the 40 least well-funded LAs). The need for a root and branch reform was accepted by the coalition government and the commitment to it carried forward by the present government.

The Stage 2 consultation has many positive features: it lays out very clearly how money will be allocated. The basic allocation for all pupils will be the same wherever they are in the country (£2,712 for primary, £3,797 for KS3 and £4,312 for KS4). To this will be added 'Additional Needs Funding' which, according to the government, is 'vital

to improve social mobility'. Deprivation funding will be allocated to schools for the number of pupils who have qualified for Free School Meals (FSM) in any of the previous six years, with a higher figure for those currently on FSM to cover the cost of providing the free meal. Deprivation funding will also be given to schools on the basis of the deprivation indicators for the areas from which they draw their pupils. Pupils with 'low prior attainment' will attract extra funding. This will be welcome even though there is some professional disagreement about the validity of the criteria used. More money is allocated for children who have English as an Additional Language (EAL) and a small amount is allocated to schools where there is a high level of pupil mobility. Given that the Pupil Premium is additional to the formula deprivation funding, those campaigning for investment to reduce the achievement gap should be pleased.

School-led funding is allocated as a cash sum of £110,000 to all schools irrespective of size, with a small additional amount for sparsity. Extra money is also allocated for premises-related factors, in 2018-2019 based on historic spend and later in an as yet unspecified way via LAs. Finally, it is recognised that the provision of an equal amount of service costs more in some part of the country than others and so there will be an Area Cost Adjustment (ACA) which will be based on a hybrid of teaching salary differentials and the general labour market (GLM).

The clarity with which this is laid out in the consultation document and its Technical Note are welcome. There will still be debate about the validity of the criteria used but the new formula should raise the level of the discussion above 'Boo, you get more than me, it's not fair'.

New formulae inevitably bring about changes and the government proposes to limit the amounts a school can gain or lose, tapering the impact over two years. Over the country as a whole, more schools will gain than lose. Most important of all, the reasons for the differentials will be open to public scrutiny.

So why can we only give the proposals two and a half cheers rather than three full-throated ones?

- a. This change is happening at a time when public spending on education is severely constrained because of the wider financial crisis the country is facing. Even most of the schools that will benefit from the new formula will still find themselves worse off in real terms over the next four years as inflation bites (increases to national insurance contributions, employer pension contributions, cost of living increments,





The government proposes that, from 2019-20, funding will be allocated to every individual school according to the national formula.

the ESG and the new apprenticeship levy). The claim of protecting school budgets is manifestly specious; their policy impacts negatively on school budgets and potentially standards, putting pressure on Heads, business managers and governors grappling with setting a workable budget at school level. **Failure to invest in children and young people is a false economy.**

- b. There is no attempt by the government to specify what level of service it thinks it is funding (e.g. class-size, teaching assistant support ratio, curriculum balance, teaching materials, examination entry costs). One of the strengths of the rejected Education Funding Strategy Group report in 2002 was its use of Activity-Led Funding (ALF), an ambitious attempt to define what level of provision our pupils are being offered. **Government should not introduce changes to the expectations on schools without being able to demonstrate that they are properly funded.**
- c. The government assumes that schools will be able to protect front-line services by reducing back office costs. It argues that if schools work together to procure ancillary services (school improvement, legal, HR, premises etc), they will be able to make savings. This is in conflict with another government policy which has been to reduce the role of the Local Authority which, at its best, provided these services cost-effectively. **The recent policy of reducing funding to local authorities should be reversed in the interests of cost-effective and efficient provision of support services.**
- d. Over recent years the final allocation to individual schools has been made by the LA-based Schools Forum comprising representatives from all education sectors, serviced by the technical expertise of LA officers, with observer status for unions and councillors. This had the flexibility to tweak the formula to meet locally recognised pressures e.g. more pupils with high needs, erratic demographic patterns of pupil number growth or decline. Apart from its practical value in making the agreed best use of the money, the Schools Forum has had the symbolic role of collective ownership of the responsibility for the best use of resources. The government proposes that, from 2019-20, funding will be allocated to every individual school according to the national formula, what they call a 'hard' formula. This could make life very difficult for a small minority of schools in difficult circumstances. For example, a small rurally isolated school facing a falling roll and staffing recruitment problems may not be adequately protected by the national formula. Local people would know that the school needs to be kept open mainly for the benefit of the local community but also because, if the school closes and the pupils have to be transported to another school, the cost of that falls on the Local Authority which is already being seriously squeezed by other government funding policies. **The role of the Schools Forum needs to be maintained.**
- e. The proposed 'hard formula' fails to recognise that many schools are now in academy chains and Chief Executives of Multi-Academy Trusts have been cross-subsidising their schools by top-slicing from their constituent schools, either to meet short-term problems in particular schools or to fund the high management costs of MATs. **The freedom of MATs to ignore the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document should be removed and a new mandatory structure for MAT remuneration introduced.**

A perfect solution to the school funding problem is probably unachievable. It has taken too long to reach the present position. Much progress has been made. It would be foolish to scupper the present proposals because of the strong feelings of the 'losers'. Nor must we confuse the general shortage of funding with the effect of the new formula. The London lobby must not once again shout louder than the rest of the country. Having got used to having more money, in real terms, than everybody else (even allowing for deprivation factors and area costs), they are understandably anxious but what we expect and need from central government is a fair **national** funding formula.

Peter Downes was a headteacher for 21 years and was President of the Secondary Heads Association (now the Association of School and College Leaders) in 1994-95. He served on the Education Funding Strategy Group 2000-2002. He is now a primary school governor, a Cambridgeshire County Councillor, a member of the Cambridgeshire Schools Forum and Vice-President of the Liberal Democrat Education Association. He writes in a personal capacity.



Ten Million Minutes Reading Challenge

Register now for the Ten Million Minutes Reading Challenge!

Don't miss out on your chance to win a new library or reading area for your school worth £10,000 courtesy of Peters!

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To find out more and to register your school, visit afaeducation.org

"I've never seen anything like it - children we can't normally get interested in reading are spending break-time with their heads buried in books!"

Chieveley Primary School



Leadership Briefing is a weekly online summary of all that's new and relevant to education, linked to original source documents that can be downloaded or viewed on screen, and available to everyone in your school leadership team. The briefings here give a sample of what's on offer.

Educating All

This report by the charity, RECLAIM, found over 70% of students who identify as working class, feel that their class is a barrier when integrating at university, compared to only 12.5% of those who did not identify as working class. Working class young people are still failing to see universities as a 'place for them' and lack the same sense of entitlement and belonging as their middle class peers.

Educating All is a youth-led research project, commissioned by the Manchester based, social change and leadership development charity RECLAIM. The campaign aims to move away from the status quo and provide a voice to working class young people, who too often do not have a say in decisions that affect them the most.

Key Findings

- Although universities provide financial support for students from low income families, our survey found that finance is still identified as a barrier for many students. In total 84.5% of respondents had been worried about finance while at university. 86.7% of those from comprehensive schools had been worried about finance compared with 60% from private schools.
- Working class students are still failing to see these institutions as 'places for them'. Many lack a sense of belonging and entitlement to their place at university and feel isolated and alienated in that environment.
- Working class students tend to lack the same sense of confidence and entitlement in their opinion as their middle class peers. Some may find interacting with tutors in positions of authority and peers from private school backgrounds intimidating.
- Mental health support needs improvement. Measures to improve mental health support include additional funding and resources, greater awareness and understanding amongst staff and students about this issue and more effective advertising.
- Financial support at the institutions explored in this research is often adequate if not generous during term time. However support over non-term time periods for students may be necessary as many working class students have to work to earn money rather than undertake an internship, volunteering opportunities or travelling.

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Key Recommendations

- Academic staff should have to undertake training in how to deal with the specific needs of working class students. This could include unconscious bias training, awareness of how to deal with certain issues that are specific to people of different 'non-traditional' backgrounds. Lecturers should not make assumptions about students' previous knowledge.
- Universities need to break down barriers that separate different types of staff and students including social, ethnic and political barriers.
- Universities should appoint a Working Class Diversity Officer. This officer would have the responsibility of representing working class students and dealing with issues specific to them. Many universities have a diversity officer who concentrates on equality and diversity within the university. This often includes race, gender and sexual orientation and universities should ensure that class come under this post as well.
- An alumni mentoring scheme should be created, with students being matched with alumni with a similar career interest and background. It is particularly important to ensure that students have contact with people from a similar background that have gone through a similar experience. Alumni mentoring schemes should be put in place at all universities.
- Universities should have greater engagement with nearby communities. Disadvantaged communities close to elite universities can feel disconnected from the university.
- Community engagement would involve partnering and engaging with a wide range of people and groups beyond the university.
- Internship schemes should be created including financial support and also support with making contacts. Financial support should be made available to those who would not otherwise be able to undertake an unpaid or low pay internship or volunteering opportunities. Additional support on networking, linking students to contacts in positions of influence is also needed.
- Oxford and Cambridge need a standardised approach to access, mental health, financial support and accommodation across the colleges. Oxford and Cambridge should provide free or affordable accommodation for students from low income families who want to stay at university to study and have access to resources over the holidays.
- Universities should publish a measurement of success recording the progress on social mobility and working class retention and attainment rates. Universities should have a responsibility to publish key figures and statistics on the retention rates, attainment and wellbeing of target groups such as working class students. This can be used as a measure of success of universities and the implemented recommendations

Conclusions

- The underrepresentation of working class students in elite institutions remains one of the biggest problems. Universities need to do more to encourage and actively increase working class applications, including direct contact and extra support to manage the process. The support should extend to comprehensive sixth form colleges, which often do not have the same resources or expertise as private schools.
- It is vital that staff are aware that once students have a place at university, the work is not over. The initial transition and the period of adjustment is one of the most crucial stages.
- Working class students need to be made aware of the support provided by the institution academically as well as for welfare and wellbeing.
- This initial phase has a high impact on the retention rates of working class students and aids the feeling of belonging. Universities need more flexibility in the academic, financial and pastoral support they provide to their students, acknowledging the different circumstances and factoring in the unique nature of individuals. For true and lasting change working class students can no longer be made to feel like imposters.

[Read the full report >](#)

Parents' Views And Demand For 30 Hours Free Childcare

This DfE brief summarises findings from a survey which aimed to examine parents' views and demand for the 30 hours free childcare extended entitlement for working parents of three- and four- year olds, due to be rolled out in September 2017.

As part of the Childcare Act 2016, the government entitlement of 15 hours free childcare, which is currently available to all three- and four- year-olds and some eligible two – year- olds will be increased to 30 hours for some eligible parents of three- and four-year-olds over 38 weeks or the equivalent number of hours across more weeks per year. The 30 hours free childcare, due to be rolled out nationally from September 2017, will help working families by reducing the cost of childcare and will support parents into work or to work more hours, should they wish to do so.

Key Findings

- Nearly all three and four year olds in the survey received some form of childcare with just over a third (35%) of these children receiving a mix of informal and formal childcare.
- The majority of parents asked (88%) said they were aware of the existing government entitlement of 15 hours of free childcare, with 65% reporting they currently receive it. Out of these parents, 86% reported they use all 15 hours of the current entitlement.
- Of those currently using the free hours 83% said they would likely or would definitely take up the additional 15 hours of free childcare if they were available to them now. Responses were similarly high for those that had been eligible in the past - 85% who said they would likely or would definitely have taken up these additional hours.
- Of those who intend to use the existing free hours in the future when their child became potentially eligible, 82% would likely or would definitely take up additional hours.
- Parents who said they would use the additional 15 free hours if these were available to them were asked why. The top reasons for using the additional hours included:
 - 'The extra hours will cover the cost for the childcare I already pay for/ will reduce my childcare costs' (29%)
 - 'I can go back to work' (26%)
 - 'I can increase my working hours/ days' (17%)
- Forty-seven per cent of respondents in work said they would change the number of hours they work in the week if they could use the additional 15 free hours. Of this group, 54% would increase the number of hours they worked in a week and 26% would work longer hours over fewer days. Of those not in work, 60% said they would likely or would definitely look for work to become eligible for the additional 15 hours of free childcare (21% definitely would, 27% very likely, 12% fairly likely).
- Those parents in work were asked how likely or unlikely it would be that they would look for a more suitable job (i.e. one that met their needs in terms of salary, flexibility and working hours) if they were able to use the additional 15 free hours of childcare per week. 39% said they would likely or would definitely look for a more suitable job, whereas 51% said they would not (10% not very likely, 19% very unlikely and 21% definitely would not).
- Out of all the 46% of parents who currently pay for childcare over the current free 15 hour entitlement for their three or four year old, 81% agreed (67% strongly agreed, 14% tend to agree) that the additional 15 free hours of childcare would significantly reduce the cost of childcare for their household.
- The majority of respondents who pay for childcare agreed (88% overall, with 71% strongly and 16% tend to agree) that they would use the additional 15 free hours towards the childcare that they currently pay for.
- Forty-five per cent (24% strongly agreed, 21% tend to agree) of all respondents with two or more children aged 0-4 stated that they would use all or some of the additional 15 hours even if it meant their children had to go to different childcare providers (i.e. from their sibling) with 38% disagreeing (12% tend to disagree, 26% strongly disagree).

- Fifty-five per cent of these parents interviewed agreed (39% strongly agreed 16% tend to agree) that they would use the additional 15 hours if they could use the same provider for all their children with 31% disagreeing (22% tend to disagree, 9% strongly disagree).

[Read the full report >](#)

Evaluation Of Subject Excellence Cluster

This DfE report shows how secondary school departmental heads use performance and entry profile data to improve pupil progress and departmental performance.

The findings come from the evaluation of subject excellence clusters (ESEC) project. The evaluation examined heads of subject departments' use of detailed information on GCSE entries and performance to make decisions on:

- examination entry for groups of pupils
- allocation of pupils and teachers to classes
- performance management of teachers within departments

Key Findings

- Schools generally first set GCSE targets for pupils either in year 7 (35% of departments), when they enter the school, or in year 9 (30%) and 10 (32%), when GCSE courses begin. More effective departments (departments with higher performance at GCSE) tend to set targets earlier, as do more effective schools (schools with higher performance at GCSE).
- In the majority of departments (57%), targets are set by senior leaders, with the next most significant single group being teachers (14%) and then specialist members of staff (10%).
- In both key stage 3 and key stage 4, just under 70% of departments reported assessing pupil progress at least once every half term. Effective departments assess pupil progress less often during key stage 3 but just as often during key stage 4.
- It was more common for pupil progress to be assessed at least every half term in maths (76% schools) and English (73%) than in science (62%) at KS3. At KS4 it was more common for pupil progress to be assessed at least every half term in English (77%), followed by science (70%), and least common for maths (63%).
- Almost all heads of department (96%) reported that they could confidently name the most effective teachers in their department. When asked how important pupil attainment data is in making these judgements about teacher effectiveness, 58% of respondents cited it as one important factor amongst others, and only 6% said it was the most important factor, with observation and appraisals also playing a part.
- When asked about their own department's performance in the 2012/13 and 2013/14 GCSE cohorts, 43% of departments believed they performed better than their counterparts in schools with similar intakes, 31% believed they performed similarly, and just 16% thought they performed worse. The remaining 10% did not know how their department performed relative to their counterparts. This imbalance suggests that many departmental heads experience illusory superiority, the psychological phenomenon that people tend to overestimate their ability relative to others.
- English departments have slightly more accurate self-perceptions of their performance relative to other departments in their schools, compared with maths and science departments.
- Respondents from departments with better GCSE results (high performing departments) were more likely to rate themselves as superior, and less likely to rate themselves as inferior. Nevertheless, there was still a significant proportion of high performing departments who mistakenly believed themselves to be inferior (8%) and a remarkably high proportion of low performing schools who mistakenly believed themselves to be superior (29%), with another 43% believing they perform similarly to others.
- Heads of department reporting that they 'didn't know' whether they were better

or worse than equivalent departments in similar schools tended to be high performing, suggesting they may be less complacent. A similar result was found when looking at heads of department comparisons with other departments in the same school.

Conclusions

- The research shows that heads of department are confident about their ability to interpret and use pupil performance data. They are also very familiar with performance data, including information comparing their department with others in the same school, and with equivalent departments in other schools. However, departmental heads tend to overestimate the ability and performance of their department relative to others.
- Providing schools with performance data and school exam entry information in alternative formats is useful to schools, particularly when it is clear and simple. Whilst schools are able to understand the information given to them, using it to aid decision-making and to implement change is more difficult.
- The extent and nature of school collaboration in the England suggests that it is difficult to foster. Schools struggle to collaborate because of time constraints and workload pressures, a lack of clarity about the purpose of collaboration projects and being unable to make contact with counterparts in other schools.

Read the full report >

Literacy Vulnerability Score

A study by the National Literacy Trust and Experian has revealed that the vast majority of constituencies in England (86%) contain at least one ward with serious literacy issues. According to the data, children's futures will be put in jeopardy if action isn't taken at a local level to tackle England's deep-rooted literacy crisis.

The research involved analysing data about the social factors most closely associated with low literacy to create a "literacy vulnerability score" for every single electoral ward. The score is based on the social mix of the resident population in each ward and combines metrics from the 2011 Census and Experian's socio-demographic classification system, Mosaic.

It found that 86 per cent of English constituencies have entrenched literacy problems. The constituency with the greatest problems is Middlesbrough, followed by Barking, Hackney South & Shoreditch, Liverpool Walton, and Sheffield Brightside & Hillsborough – see table, right.

Key Findings

- In England, 458 constituencies contain at least one ward with greatest literacy need, which leaves just 75 constituencies with no serious literacy issues.
- Furthermore, inner cities have the most significant literacy needs, dominating the list of locations with a need for the greatest literacy support – all 50 places suffering the most come from cities, towns or districts surrounding urban areas.
- The constituency with the greatest literacy problems is Middlesbrough, followed by Barking, Hackney South and Shoreditch, Liverpool (Walton) and Sheffield (Brightside and Hillsborough)
- Although there are clear hot spots, such as areas in the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber and the North West, the analysis reveals that low literacy levels aren't restricted to regions with low income, employment and social deprivation. In England, 458 constituencies contain at least one ward with greatest literacy need, which leaves just 75 constituencies with no serious literacy issues.
- Inner cities and their surrounding areas dominate the list of locations with a need for the greatest literacy support. All 50 places suffering the most come from cities, towns or districts surrounding urban areas. From this list, six constituencies are situated by the coast, including Birkenhead, Hartlepool and Grimsby.

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Inclusion in action: Making the SEND Code of Practice come alive

'Easier said than done' is how **Ann Stacey**, head of Aldermoor Farm Primary School, viewed the Code. Then she tried to make it work.

The latest SEND Code of Practice is full of high hopes and good intentions. Some of these have been translated into good practice within our schools, but others have proven to be more problematic. This is how we, as a school, have attempted to fulfil these ideals. But first, a little about our context.

There are 46 languages spoken at Aldermoor Farm Primary School, with 54 per cent of our children speaking English as an additional language (EAL). The school incorporates an Enhanced Resource Provision for eight children with autism, and caters for an additional 137 children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). These include children with communication issues, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), gross developmental delay, anxiety, depression and eating disorders. Pupil premium allocation is high, with over 54 per cent of our pupils eligible for this funding. The local community is predominantly social housing and, as a result, transience within the school is high. This academic year, the percentage has been 27 per cent.

Engaging parents from the very start

There are numerous mentions of parents and carers throughout the Code of Practice, and we have endeavoured to embed our work with all parents, so that they feel they can add value to their child's education, rather than merely drop off and collect at either end of the school day.

This work starts when we distribute flyers throughout the local area and in key venues, outlining the work we do with children and families. We arrange open mornings for parents and their children to visit our setting and to see the school in action. These open mornings are coordinated by our pastoral manager who line manages a team of five—a family support worker and a team of four learning mentors.



When children have been allocated to our school, the pastoral manager and the early years leader undertake home visits. These have been crucial in determining what support is needed for each child and family. We see the child in an environment where they feel secure and can see how they interact with siblings and or parents/carers. Parents feel more comfortable because they are 'leading' the discussion and it is not



in a more formal office. The visits allow us to plan the induction so the child has a calm start to the term with the necessary resources in place. We are also able to determine if there are any agencies already working with the family or if there is a need for a multi-agency meeting.

As these home visits usually occur four to five months prior to the child starting at school, it allows the support to be in place from day one, rather than delaying it by half a term. Good relationships have been developed with Health Visitors, pre-school settings, housing and so on, so that any issues identified at the visit can attract support from the most appropriate agency.

Another important aspect of the visit is to determine the child's strengths and interests. This information is used to personalise labels in their classroom to capture their interest as soon as they walk through our door.

This sharing of information sets the tone for all our work with parents and children. We look on it as the three legs of a stool—if one leg is missing then it is unbalanced and not fit for purpose.

Before their child starts school,



we invite parents to attend workshops on a variety of topics—not to frighten them with our expectations, but rather in the hope that, by sharing how we work, there will be more consistency between school and home. Some of our parents have had negative educational experiences, so we try to make the workshops as interactive as possible.

We have had sessions in our local library, concentrating on stories and rhymes, and ending the session with every child receiving a library ticket so that they can have access to books and activities in the holiday leading up to their joining the school. There have been sessions on messy play, maths around the home and even how to potty train your child so that they are out of nappies when they start school. We give stickers and reward charts for a variety of reasons—for example, not using a dummy, walking into school or not using a buggy. Translators are available when necessary so that we can communicate with parents. With 46 languages in school, we are usually able to find someone who can help spread the message!



Sharing knowledge and best practice

When a significant concern is raised at the home visit, we will invite the parent to meet with the special educational needs and disability coordinator (SENDCo), either in school or again in the home, so that a plan can be established to meet the needs of the child. Parents can put a face to the role and know they can approach her informally for advice, whether that be on the playground or in a more formal meeting.

The SENDCo is often expected to be the font of all SEND knowledge. Many teachers and support staff are still intimidated and anxious about teaching children with SEND, especially if the child has significant and complex needs, which is becoming increasingly common even in a mainstream school. Our SENDCo has delivered training



and has weekly drop-in sessions for staff in order to support the child is properly supported.

With the financial cutbacks affecting Local Authority services and the support from outside agencies dwindling as fast as the need for their services increases, we made the decision to train our staff in a variety of interventions which would not traditionally be delivered by school staff. We have school staff trained in speech and language screening and interventions, vision screening, dyslexia and dyscalculia screening, and talk and draw therapies, as well as the more usual academic interventions.

There have also been whole-school training sessions around improving working memory and attachment disorders. Members of staff have recently been trained in the Thrive approach, which helps adults understand children's behaviour as communication. This approach is now being used across the school. Staff are encouraged to undertake further research in an area that interests them and to cascade that knowledge to other members of the team.



As we have an Enhanced Resource Provision for children with a statement or EHC plan for autism spectrum disorder (ASD), many of our staff are highly skilled in this area. The strategies used within the ERP are used throughout the whole school to support children where needed. This may be the use of visual timetables, the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), or a care plan if there is a medical need.

Supporting every child

Every half term, following our usual assessment cycle, we hold pupil progress meetings. During these meetings, every child in the school is discussed and their next steps planned. The meetings are attended by the child's class teachers, phase leader, phase learning mentor, as well as the pastoral manager, the SENDCo, the deputy head who leads on assessment, and myself. Each member has an input into the provision for each child and, by including different leaders, a holistic view is gained.

Children who are not making the expected progress have an intervention identified for them to close the gap. Minutes of the meeting record who will deliver the intervention and the impact expected. This will be reviewed in the following pupil progress meeting. Referrals to outside agencies are logged too, so we can see how long it is taking for the assessments to take place and take action if necessary. We identified, for example, that there was an 18-month waiting list to see an occupational therapist, so our sports coach started to develop a programme which could be delivered to small

groups or on an individual basis based on previous Occupational Health targets. This does not alleviate the necessity to see the expert, but it does mean that we can be delivering some extra support while we await further guidance.

This plan, deliver and review cycle fits with the graduated approach mentioned in the Code of Practice. It allows us to determine which are the most effective interventions and which provide the greatest impact. As all the interventions are logged and measured, we have to hand all the evidence required if it becomes necessary to apply for an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan.

All decisions made in the pupil progress meeting are shared with the parents and the child by the class teacher, and parents are given advice as to how they can support their child at home, usually by the sharing and playing of a game. The conversations with parents follow the format of the structured conversations as used in Achievement for All. Since introducing this way of sharing information with parents, we now have 96 per cent attendance at parents' meetings, as contrasted with the 42 per cent before we started the programme.

Bringing the children on board

The curriculum here at Aldermoor Farm is personalised so that all children can access it. This has, on occasion, meant that children have worked in year groups not linked to their chronological age to help fill the gaps in knowledge and skills. This has always happened with the approval of parents and is part of the usual half termly review. Children are encouraged to work with children from other year groups through an established buddy system. We have reading buddies, number buddies and play buddies. This has resulted in some of lower achieving Key Stage 2 children having increased self-esteem, because they are helping younger children. A definite win-win programme.

Within lessons, there is an expectation that children be independent and use the scaffold that is right for them, whether that is a writing frame, visuals or even





technology, to allow them to achieve the outcome of the lesson. There are regular discussions with children, through the school council, as to what they think is needed to help them achieve. Suggestions have included having more 'quiet time' in lessons to help them to concentrate, and vocabulary lists before the start of a new topic.

Many of our children also need to learn a variety of life skills, so there are many opportunities to teach these incorporated into the curriculum—for example, using a knife and fork, crossing the road, setting a table or making a sandwich. One of our most popular rewards is a lunch date with myself or another teacher where a child can display their table manners! Our next step is to invite parents and younger siblings in

for lunch so that these basic skills can be taught at home.

Some of our children find playtime and lunchtimes difficult, with an unstructured playground proving the most troublesome. As a result of this, we changed our provision. The playground is now divided into zones, so if a child wants to play football, they will not stop someone using a skipping rope or sitting reading. Staff are assigned to zones and are trained to play traditional games with the children—keeping them busy helps to avoid disputes! Our young sports leaders have been trained to act as referees and to encourage children to find their own solutions to disputes. There are also indoor areas available for those who want to stay in and draw, or play with Hama beads or board games. Staff run a number of lunchtime clubs for target children to help develop social skills.

These activities have resulted in a dramatic drop in playground incidents and a calmer, quicker start to afternoon lessons.

The heart of the community

An annual feature of our academic year is Aspirations week, where we invite a number of speakers into the school to talk about their profession and the path they took to get there. This year, 45 speakers came into school, including a hairdresser, a biomedical scientist, an anaesthetist and an engineer. The speakers talk to children throughout the school, but we always target our Year 5 and 6 children to show them the wealth of opportunities available for all of them. A Year 6 boy with an EHC plan struggles with literacy and numeracy but is a fantastic artist. We made sure that we had an artist visit his class to reinforce our message that he can have a career in art in later life. Speakers are prompted and given our key messages before talking to the class. It is amazing how an outside speaker, giving the same message as a teacher, will be believed!

Aldermoor Farm Primary School is at the heart of the community and is proud to support the families within the area during challenging times. Within the last two years, the school has built up a wealth of experience in supporting families. This has been achieved by assisting families to flee domestic violence, offering money, housing and immigration advice through our trained Citizens Advice pastoral team, and issuing food bank vouchers to families known to the school and in the wider community. In building working relationships with external agencies, the school has also been able to offer numerous parent workshops on child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, smoking cessation and HIV awareness.

The children at the school are supported with their non-educational needs through intervention groups that focus on counselling, art therapy, mental health and bereavement counselling. Many of our staff are trained in these areas and are able to carry out these sessions on a one-to-one basis.

Our school also actively encourages children to partake in visits to theatres, museums and art galleries. We believe that it is important that children at Aldermoor Farm have the same opportunities and experiences as a child within a more affluent area.

A growing tension

The Code of Practice states that there should be a 'stronger focus on high aspirations and on improving outcomes for children' and that 'all children are entitled to an education that is appropriate to their needs, promotes high standards and enables them to fulfil their potential'.¹

We believe that we promote inclusion and work tirelessly to ensure that children with SEND take part in the activities of the school alongside children who do not have SEND and make good progress. However, a child may make good progress from their individual starting point, but this will not match the expected progress as determined by the Department for Education. Inclusive schools attract children with additional needs, because parents know that we can see beyond a label—that we will tailor support to the needs of an individual.

There is, then, a growing tension between giving children with complex needs access to a mainstream education and trying to ensure our Key Stage 2 data reaches the government's floor targets. That is what keeps me awake at night! I do not have all the answers and am sure that our school is not unique in how we support children and their families to remove barriers to learning. I do feel that it is imperative that for inclusion to be truly successful there needs to be a change in how the 'success' of a school is measured. It is far more than the scores achieved by children in Year 6.

Ann Stacey has been headteacher at Aldermoor Farm Primary School in Coventry since 2012. She is passionate that all children experience an education that will open doors to the world, regardless of their background.

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How power dynamics influence learning

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Vol 8.1

School Leadership Today
www.teachingtimes.com

What are power dynamics and how do they impact on the development of social community within the classroom? **Louise Kinnaird** considers how power comes to play a critical role in classroom social relationships and how it can influence the experience for both pupil and teachers.



Classrooms, like other communities, are social environments where relationships are influenced by the power dynamics at play between different individuals. When we look at classroom relationships from this perspective we see that teaching is not a simple exchange between teacher and her pupils who are told how to behave, what to learn, or when and how to learn it, but a series of small power-loaded exchanges. This interests us most particularly if these exchanges relate a teacher's loss of control when managing pupil's behaviours. But teaching is not all about the power held by the teacher. Teaching is also about the empowerment of pupils to make decisions, the shaping of a learning environment to build productive relationships, and enabling

individuals to influence others in positive ways.

Any teacher will acknowledge that there are diverse amounts of power that exist in every individual in every classroom and that power will largely determine his engagement in learning. In a classroom where pupils are powerless due to an imbalanced dynamic on the part of the teacher, pupils may battle to regain power but offered the opportunity to gain positive power then pupils will more likely engage in lessons.

Foucault (1977) states that power relationships are not constant but always in motion. Manke's *Classroom Power Relations* and Gallas's *Sometimes I Can Be Anything* explore power in classrooms and both acknowledge the ways that power is not only dynamic but also mutually constructed and negotiated between teacher and pupil, and between individual pupils.

Himley in her book *Political Moments in the Classroom* writes, 'Power is best understood as a multiplicity of force relations that are immanent, constitutive, relational, and dynamic'. In the classroom, through their interactions some pupil may have more power and influence over others, including in some cases over teachers, and this will fluctuate and change depending on the individuals involved.



Classrooms as social environments

As a social environment the classroom faces issues similar to those in the broader social community, issues such as inclusion/exclusion and identity, where different individuals with diverse personalities and a wide range of abilities come together to create a complex web of human relationships. In the classroom for instance, a child may adopt certain roles to negotiate power, perhaps as class clown, and may use humour to alter the path of classroom dialogues. Teachers have their traditional roles as facilitators but are also holders of power and pupil gain or lose power depending on the extent to which the teacher yields her own power and the extent to which she creates boundaries for individual pupils.

The Carnegie Trust and the JRF published a **paper** which details the uses of power and defines different types of power; they specify *power over*, which is a dominating form of power (the urge to control others), then there is *power within*, this might be called personal empowerment, or emotional intelligence which includes learning, accomplishing goals, and achieving competence or excellence. Third is *power with*, which is the power we attain when we work cooperatively with others. It is the role of the teacher to engage in dialogue with pupil and validate multiple points of views, yet to yield to an individual pupil's *power over* is likely to end in some other pupil feeling powerless. Promoting *power with* however results in a more healthy spread of power among all pupil.

Teachers must also be role models for pupils, demonstrating how power can be shared. Creating opportunities within the classroom for joint problem solving between individual pupils can also serve to offer *power with* opportunities and provide chances for pupils whose voices are heard less often. In this way teachers can influence the day-to-day quality of all pupils' social experiences within their classrooms.

Interactions between pupils

Gallas describes how in their interactions with each other pupils make sense of identity, power, gender, race, and language in the classroom. In her book she looks at how pupils understand gender and race, assume different identities, such as stereotypically male or female personalities, and how, as a result of these identities, they share and control power in the classroom.

Pupils make sense of social and power dynamics the way they do other aspects of the world around them – through experimentation. Gallas describes how her pupils experiment with different ways of interacting with others and shows how in adopting certain identities, the pupils see the benefits and gains of personal and social power these identities bring.



There are numerous ways in which both pupils and teachers try to obtain or maintain power in the classroom. Manke's study shows how teachers use certain kinds of speech to gain power and get pupils to comply with their requests, and how pupils resist and try to assume the teacher's role. Gallas describes how certain pupils use certain kinds of talk (e.g., stories that include or exclude, gross talk, strategic questioning) or silence to manipulate the outcome of classroom events. She tells the story of Rachel, a quiet pupil who refuses to speak in class, fears not knowing what to say, and as a result misses out on many learning opportunities. Gallas realises that this gives Rachel a certain amount of autonomy that other pupils don't necessarily share, such as leaving the classroom without risking punishment. She describes how Rachel's social power increases when she finally breaks her silence in an occasion that positions Rachel as courageous and unusual and therefore a holder of power.

Manke, Gallas, and Himley discuss the various ways in which knowledge is brought to bear on power in the classroom. Manke shows ways that pupils and teachers define classroom knowledge and explores how pupils use their own knowledge to determine the course of a classroom activity and therefore gain power. Gallas describes the ways some pupils use knowledge of other pupils' weaknesses in skills such as reading to

further their own power.

Gallas focuses on peer interactions and how certain kinds of pupils use and manipulate their identities and others' perceptions of them to gain power and influence their own and others' experiences. But Gallas is of the opinion that even 'bad boys', like most pupils, are simply being experimental rather than being heartless. They are acting out small social experiments studying how their behaviour impacts on others. Such experiments begin in infancy and are gradually expanded outward into the world. And just as parents help their child to reflect upon and take responsibility for their actions, so do teachers.

Managing power

Pupil can be powerful social negotiators who impact other pupil's experiences. Those pupils who feel the need to seek *power over* might demonstrate behaviors like cheating, bullying, disrupting a classroom, or engaging in vandalism or violence and will engage teachers in power struggles. Imagine the playground bully, an extreme case of power at play, but should the bullied child respond from a powerful stance he can disperse the overly powerful impact of the bully, leading to more equitable power.

Teachers too can be influenced by a young pupil's power-gaining behaviours. There may be times when a teacher may become uncomfortable, and sometimes afraid of losing control in response to particular pupil's powerful presence. Sometimes it is necessary for teachers to regulate individual pupil's power within the group, particularly those who may want to push forward their own agenda. In order to empower all pupils for all voices to be heard equally, it is necessary to disempower some pupils.

In some situations, teachers may find themselves in power struggles with pupil, a situation that requires a choice on the part of the teacher. For example one child might want to dominate a conversation and set an agenda for the group discussion, a teacher may face a dilemma between allowing the pupil to continue, and silencing the child to give others a chance to speak. The decision for the teacher is to determine when to support the individual child and when to support the needs of the rest of the classroom.

If teachers provide pupils with opportunities to achieve *power with* and *power within* they are likely to promote healthy, productive, and responsible working relationship between the pupils and between themselves and pupils. An important concept to understand is that by helping to empower pupils' inner power, teachers enjoy more, not less, power. By understanding this teachers are able to reflect upon whether they are unconsciously responding differently to pupil with powerful voices, compared with pupil without, and understand their roles as agents and negotiators of power in their classrooms. (Katz, 1984)

When teachers provide opportunities for pupils to gain power, behavioral problems can be reduced. Teachers may offer opportunities for pupils to meet their need for power by giving pupils a say in the classroom, helping them gain recognition, or adopting classroom procedures to help pupils gain personal empowerment in school.

If a teacher involves pupils in developing clear behavioral guidelines, for instance, the pupils will see the power between them as more equal; *power with*, and the relationship is enhanced. This allows pupils to be a part of creating a shared vision of a quality classroom, helping them meet their need for power and instilling a sense of responsibility for their learning environment. In this situation pupils will be much less likely to disrupt the learning environment, which in turn increases the likelihood that they'll engage in learning.

Listening - One of the most effective ways to help pupils meet their need for power is simply to listen to them. It is essential that they believe they've been heard and understood. In the classroom this could translate as a class meeting for example, where everyone has the opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions and to be listened to by both the teacher and the other pupils.

Responsibility - Pupils feel empowered when they are allowed to take responsibility for class tasks. Taking the attendance register to the office for example. Any time we can give pupils responsibilities for necessary tasks, it is an opportunity for them to gain power. Engaging pupils in teaching or tutoring other pupils empowers both the pupil doing the teaching and, by increasing her chances for success, the pupil being tutored.

Environment - Manke explores the ways teachers arrange class time and space to proactively control pupil behavior and promote learning. She emphasises the importance of pupils' 'interactive contributions' to classroom power. She suggests that teachers who share power with pupils, use indirect speech, and give pupils choices in their learning can more efficiently get their pupils to engage in the tasks they design to promote pupil learning.

Manke described a fifth-grade teacher who favored giving pupils choices and believed that "student learning is enhanced when they feel they are in control of their environment." In her classroom, pupils and teacher frequently rearranged desks to help facilitate their learning task. She suggests that physical arrangements of a classroom space can create a "safe space" for pupils to venture out of their comfort zones. Gallas too says that to create safe spaces where pupil can try on new personalities that will help them integrate into the classroom as a community and cast off those that limit opportunities. Himley asserts that teachers must actively learn to understand how to harness the power dynamics so that learning can take place.

There are a number of power reducing behaviours that teachers ought to avoid, says Glasser (2000). He refers to common behaviors such as criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, and bribing as the 'Seven Deadly Habits' and says that not only do these behaviors destroy relationships, they widen the power gap that exists between teachers and pupils.

Conclusion

Power in the classroom is deeply connected to individual perceptions, experiences, and ways of making sense of the world. It is a highly complex concept, with multiple motivators and perceptions, and as such we often fail to fully understand the ways in which different pupils' voices contribute to a dynamic classroom environment. Power shifts back and forth between teachers and pupil and managed well this creates a community-centered classroom where power is shared between all individuals.

Because of the dynamic and fluid nature of power, no one person can always be empowered, and both teacher and pupil are able to disempower each other in everyday classroom situations. Such are the complexities of power dynamics that if there is a stronger focus on overall 'control' than 'autonomy' of pupils in the classroom, that the effects are detrimental to the whole classroom.

Effective teachers understand that by providing pupils with opportunities to meet their need for power, they are helping to prevent behavioral problems. In other words, by appealing to pupils' need for *power within* and *power with*, the teacher is avoiding *power over* struggles. If we empower pupils by giving them a voice in the classroom and really listen to what they say, if we regularly provide all pupils with recognition for the unique strengths they bring to the class, and if we intentionally provide pupils with other ways of feeling like they make important contributions to the class, we are creating a truly empowering environment.

Louise Kinnaird is a freelance writer, specialising in child development and psychology.

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TeachingTimes

The secret to excellent middle leaders

A strong work culture and climate is integral to the success of your middle leadership. **Andy Buck**, Dean of the Leadership Faculty at education charity Teaching Leaders, explores ways you can empower your leaders.

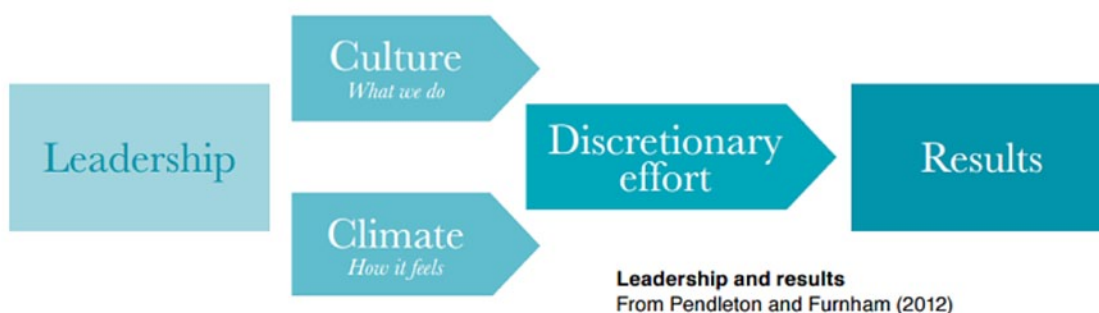
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Vol 8.1

School Leadership Today
www.teachingtimes.com



Great delivery in schools doesn't happen by accident. It is the result of all the staff and pupils working together to achieve a clear set of objectives. To move from a vision or a strategy to strong delivery requires buy-in and focus from the school-wide team. The role of middle leaders in enabling this is critical. They are the people who most directly lead and manage the front line of delivery in classrooms. But as the diagram below summarises, the relationship between leadership and results is not a direct one. Creating the right culture and climate is essential.



Culture and climate

In this model, culture is taken to mean 'the way we do things around here' which relates to the systems, procedures and common practices and in particular, to the high standards that exist in the way these are delivered. A useful way of thinking about culture is to consider what someone new joining a team would see happening on a day-to-day basis and the extent to which everyone in the team is working in the same way and to the same level of expectation. Is there a consistent set of high expectations from middle leaders for their individual teams? As a result of this, is teaching and learning of a consistently high quality? Are the learning environments inspiring and well organised? Do pupils have strong and supportive relationships with their peers and all the staff they work with?

Climate is more about how it feels to work in a team. This reflects team morale, how supported and challenged teachers and other staff feel and the degree of trust within the team as a whole. This is much more difficult to describe or measure, but detailed research has shown that the effect of climate on team productivity is considerable (Corporate Leadership Council 2004).

Discretionary effort

Taken together, the more positive the culture and climate middle leaders create, the more likely all the staff are to go the extra mile. This concept is known as 'discretionary effort'. It is commonly described as the input from individuals over and above that which they need to contribute in order to keep their jobs. Critical in this context, however, is that the effort individuals make is directed productively. Sometimes, well-meaning and hard-working colleagues, regrettably, do not have the impact that their efforts deserve because they are too often focused on doing the wrong things. In a classroom context, it's all very well having fantastically enjoyable lessons but not if what the pupils are learning doesn't relate to the curriculum they are meant to be following or the assessments they will have to take.

Delivering through others

One of the biggest temptations for leaders in any role, is to do everything themselves. Very often, middle leaders will be able to carry out a particular task to a higher standard and more quickly than the average member of their team. They may also just relish the opportunity to just show someone how to do something. So for strong delivery through others, it is critical that leaders are in the right mode. As Steve Radcliffe suggests in 'Leadership: plain and simple' their first thought should not be 'what shall I do?' but 'who do I want to engage and what is the request I want to make of them?' This is a shift in mindset and one that some leaders don't always make easily. Encouraging leaders to pause for a while and ask themselves these questions can be helpful:

- How strong is their tendency to just do a job for themselves?
- Is making the request of others their first or second thought?
- Who are the people they make requests of?
- Who are the people they don't?

Empowering middle leaders themselves

Of course, these principles don't just apply to how middle leaders develop the mindset that brings out the best in their teams. In the case-study below, a Teaching Leaders Alumnus who is Deputy Head of a secondary school in Eastbourne outlines how the school's senior team have applied exactly the same approach with their middle leaders themselves.

Case study

When our school was established 13 years ago on the south coast, the vision included the aim that both staff and students felt empowered members of their community. In relation to the management structure, this led to a distributed leadership model which continues to underpin the relationship between the senior team and middle leaders. Our senior team is relatively small (five, recently enlarged to seven and including our Business Manager and SENCO), reflecting the desire to avoid a 'top-heavy' hierarchy. It encourages senior and middle leaders to work closely as an extended leadership team, from shaping the school ethos and development plan, to day-to-day behaviour management. For example, our leadership briefing every Monday morning includes middle leaders.

A key element of trust-building is creating an environment where middle leaders feel that they are genuinely listened to and that their contributions are valued. A complaint I frequently hear is that often policies are announced by senior leaders without any or little consultation, yet middle leaders are expected to 'sell' these policies to their teams and ensure compliance. To avoid this scenario and to ensure that we benefit from their input and experience, we have a middle leadership team meeting (with senior leaders) every half term. It provides an extended opportunity to solicit the contributions of middle leaders and provides a forum for discussion and debate. Line management meetings (which can be neglected in a busy school environment) are also given precedence as the foremost opportunity to focus on priorities, problem-solve and motivate, empowering middle leaders to move forward.

Additionally, our headteacher is always looking for opportunities to distribute leadership and empower staff, from creating working parties to design policies (our successfully embedded marking policy was the product of such a group), to giving individuals responsibility for delivering whole-school initiatives (our school is an accredited UNICEF Rights Respecting School because of the exceptional leadership of one of our middle leaders). She has also promoted the National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership (NPQSL) and two middle leaders who completed the qualification have now become members of our senior leadership team. Currently, we are encouraging middle leaders to consider becoming Specialist Leaders of Education.

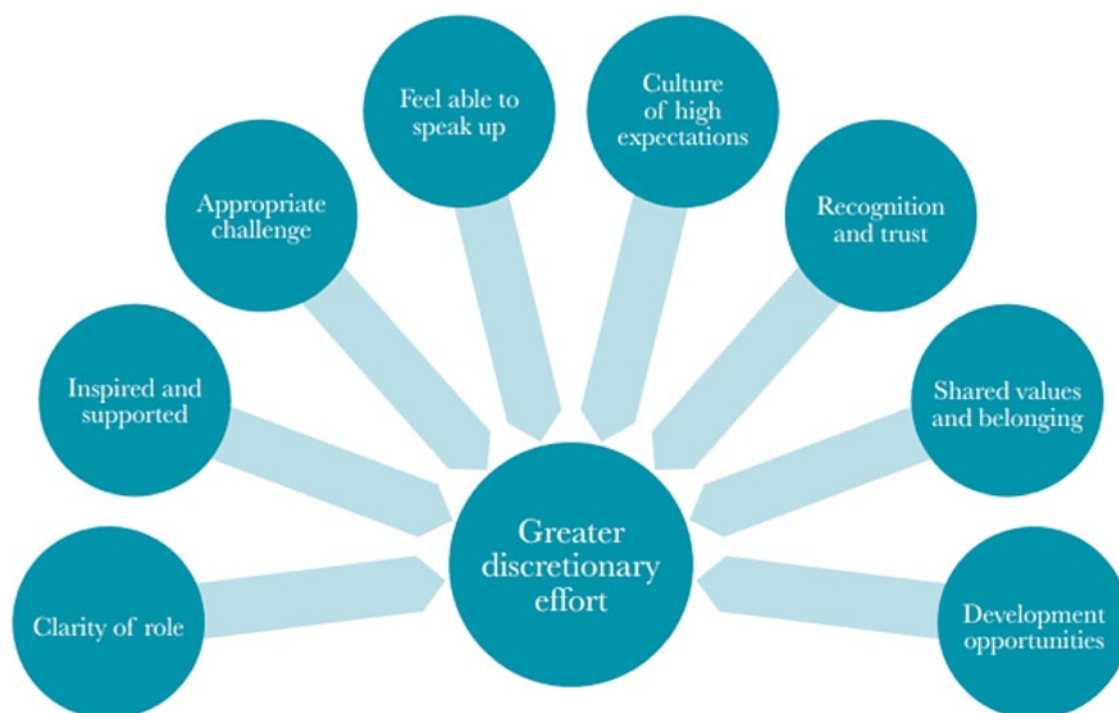
The relationships between senior and middle leaders become even more important in a challenging context: shortly before I joined the school it received a 'Requires Improvement' judgement, having previously maintained a 'Good' rating. This has led to all staff, but leaders in particular, being held to a higher level of accountability which can undermine trust and confidence. As a senior team, we have consciously been open and honest about the need for all of us to strive to improve standards, whilst highlighting existing good practice and acknowledging the efforts of our middle leaders and their teams. We still seek to work in a collaborative manner and this year, as part of our monitoring process, have piloted peer review between our maths and humanities departments – this has been successful and we plan to further embed peer review next year.

But for both middle and senior leaders to be able to deliver through others does require their discretionary effort to be high. The diagram below summarises what the best leaders do to build the discretionary effort in others. So, delivery is not a standalone aspect of leading. It follows on directly from having clarity about goals for the future and having a very engaged team. This is well captured in the story Steve Radcliffe recounts of the two stone-carvers. One was asked: "What are you doing?" He replied: "I'm carving stone." A second, more motivated carver was asked the same question and he said: "I'm building a cathedral." What the story tells us is that when you need people to deliver consistently for you, you cannot ask them simply to carve more stone. You have to help them imagine a powerful sense of a bigger, more compelling future and you need to engage them in that future so that they're feeling that it's not 'your' cathedral it's 'our' cathedral.

Conversations for delivery

But ensuring great delivery is more than just creating these conditions. There needs to be a simple and systematic approach to making things happen through others.

Although delivery can seem immensely complex, in the end, Radcliffe suggests, it is potentially just about four stages of conversation. If leaders in school are robust in having these conversations, they will inevitably deliver more.



Conversation 1: making the big request

This is where a leader makes a request for delivery. Ideally it is made in a way that leaves others engaged by the vision for the future that they are seeking to achieve and leaves them wanting to deliver what's needed.

Conversation 2: maximising the probability of delivery

This is the ongoing conversation that a leader has until the result is achieved. Its purpose is to maximise the probability of delivery. For many middle leaders, this is about supporting teachers to be better teachers through incremental gains in mastering excellent habits in the basic teaching competencies.





Conversation 3: delivery is acknowledged

This is the conversation where the leader acknowledges that something is going well and being delivered on time and to the standard required. This is also a major opportunity to build more capacity and capability for the delivery in the future.

Conversation 3a: non-delivery is addressed

This is the conversation that takes place when what was required is not being delivered on time or to the required standard. It can require some emotional fortitude and courage from the leader but also provides another great opportunity to build more capability to deliver in the future.

Conversation 4: the wrap-up

This is simply a final conversation when the job is eventually completed.

Where to focus?

Great delivery also requires effective prioritisation. In her meta-analysis of school leadership, Viviane Robinson identifies five key things that leaders do to ensure strong delivery and the very best outcomes for pupils. Looking at the top three areas, the evidence reinforces the importance of clarity of goals and expectations. If colleagues are clear about what the whole team is trying to achieve and feel part of this ambition, then delivery will improve. When it comes to monitoring and evaluation, stages 2 and 3 of the conversations for delivery require robust ways of knowing what is actually going on in classrooms. The more regular and 'everyday' that this intelligence gathering takes place, the better. Set piece lesson observations, for example, can often tell leaders little about what is typically going on. A culture where colleagues are always in and out of each other's classrooms is far more productive. Making sure that all the available evidence is properly triangulated is also important. Data about pupil progress needs to be looked in conjunction with feedback from learning walks, lesson observation and work scrutiny.

Goals and expectations

0.42

Resourcing strategically

0.31

Planning, monitoring and evaluation

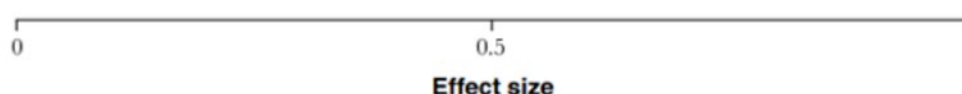
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Supporting teacher development

0.84

Ensuring good behaviour and safety

0.27



Five key activities from School Leadership Matters

Adapted from Viviane Robinson's Student Centred Leadership (2011)

Improving delivery

Finally, the top priority from Robinson's research: supporting teacher development. Building on the four-stage conversation process outlined above, one way for middle leaders to support teachers to be better at teaching is to use regular 'incremental' coaching. This approach is based on the work of Paul Bambrick-Santoyo in his book 'Leverage Leadership'. Typically, this might involve a short drop-in to a lesson where the short coaching conversation that follows elicits the areas of strength, a single area of focus for improvement and some strategies to try. The teacher then spends just one week really focusing on this single area for improvement until the next short drop-in a week later when there can then be a discussion about the progress that has been made. This may result in another week on the same focus or the opportunity to move into a new area. Over time, this incremental process enables teachers to develop mastery in the full range of basic classroom skills and pedagogies that will lead to improved classroom delivery and improved outcomes for pupils. Such strategies allow teachers to have ownership of their work, develop mastery and deliver results. If you want your teachers to be better teachers, setting aside time for their development will both improve their practice and build discretionary effort. Then you will truly be able to deliver through others.



Andy Buck is Managing Director of Leadership Matters (leadershipmatters.org.uk) and Dean of the Leadership Faculty at Teaching Leaders—an education charity aiming to address educational disadvantage by developing high-potential middle leaders working in schools in the most challenging contexts. For more information, visit: teachingleaders.org.uk.

Buffering NQTs

Entering the classroom for the first time can terrify NQTs. Mitigate the stress and assuage fears through managed expectations and an honest approach.

Preparing newly qualified teachers (NQTs) for the realities of being a classroom teacher is a challenge I've been working on for years and have still to conquer. We've tried employing NQTs at the end of the summer term and where possible we train our own teachers and they've been with us for a year, but it seems nothing quite prepares them for doing the whole job, and each year it becomes a rising concern. Increased workload has become something of a 'norm' in the teaching profession and NQTs may find themselves in a 'sink or swim' position quite early on; suffice to say, that doesn't mean it should go unchallenged or unrecognised.

On the contrary, it is the duty of the head and department leaders to ensure every teacher, (particularly NQTs who don't have the benefit of years' of experience), are adequately supported and that their workload is manageable.

Too many teachers seem to be marking class work and planning lessons in the evenings and at the weekends. In fact, reports of working 50-60 hours per week are not uncommon amongst the profession, something that may come as quite a shock to the unsuspecting NQT.

As leaders we must understand the drivers for increased pressure

Changes have meant that it's no longer satisfactory for teachers or NQTs to simply deliver the curriculum, they need to design it too along with the assessment framework. Workloads quickly spiral even for experienced teachers (let alone one with limited teaching years behind them).

Aside from the greater numbers of children currently in mainstream education, there are a number of contributors to increased workloads on teachers today. The provision for SEND pupils, the complexity of individual needs of children, the lack of funding for that provision and of course, and the higher parental expectation that children's needs are met to a high level, all have an impact on workload.

For teachers generally, this is exacerbated by the continual pressure on schools in terms of the diversity of issues they *should* be providing educationally, not to mention the increasing numbers of vulnerable pupils who need social and pastoral care. Pressures on other public sector services such as the NHS, social services etc. mean that gaps in provision and meeting the needs of families often fall to schools to be filled.



Clearer expectations for NQTs

Both maintained and academy schools struggle to meet the demands of the curriculum, although academies at first sight might appear to have more freedoms, the constraints of narrow assessment measures in effect reduce the potential to respond to those freedoms. The issues that both types of schools face regarding increased workloads are very similar.

If we are to stand any chance of reducing workloads for teachers and the future generation of NQTs we must start by improving how we teach day-to-day. Specifically, head teachers need to find a way to give much more support to NQTs. We have to find new approaches to offer practical support with the planning and delivery of the curriculum.

Many heads are rightly cautious about the quick-fix solutions of commercial schemes but carefully chosen resources used with skill can support NQTs and current teachers. This is not an invitation to use endless worksheets or just open a textbook but high quality resources, chosen because they support the schools pedagogy. This can free up NQTs and teachers time to focus on the delivery and assessment of the lesson. Less experienced teachers in particular benefit from the support of a well-designed curriculum and planned sequence of learning, allowing them to focus their energies on how they are going to teach the lesson.

Increasing productivity through delegation

Schools should be encouraging their NQTs right from the start of their career to think very carefully about what makes a difference to children's learning. For example, some tasks can, and should, be taken on by support staff and don't necessarily need a teacher's input. An exercise that compares the tasks that teachers do, the time they take and the impact they have on learning often provides interesting food for thought. What activities are window dressing and how long do they take?

School websites and the plethora of policies every school generates are two areas well worth reviewing – what impact do they have on the outcomes for children and how long do they take?



Shared experience should not be overlooked

The sharing of plans and previous experience is vital in our pursuit to support NQTs and is an important opportunity for teamwork that is often overlooked in schools. Ask the question: has someone done this project before? What were the best bits? Which resources did they use and where were they stored? What can we learn from the previous experience?

If we are going to improve workloads for our NQTs we must learn from previous experience and inherit that good practice rather than starting from scratch. This is an important area that leaders can provide support in, particularly for new teachers or new members of staff. Schools have a wealth of data available to them; leadership isn't just about knowing what works it's knowing how to make it easy to do it again.

We are working to provide NQTs and teachers with more support on long term curriculum design so that they can focus their energies on planning how to teach the lesson rather than designing and re-designing what needs to be taught and how to fit it in. Revisiting marking, to focus on what makes a difference to pupils learning rather than feeling the need to leave an evidence trail for external scrutiny, are just two examples that could have a huge impact on reducing workloads.

Finding the solution through change

In summary, there is no question about it, heads need to adapt and flex to change if they are to regain control on the level of work that is placed upon teachers on a daily basis. But that change should also be about evolution, rather than sudden, impulsive activity. Whether that means extended school days, summer schools, creating new roles within the teaching profession to reduce the admin burden, or making changes to the current staffing structure, we need to be determined to improve workloads for



teachers, after all we rely on the intake of future NQTs. With more teachers leaving the profession within ten years of qualifying, head teachers have to think hard how to support a team of teachers that have less experience to carry them through.

Find out what is eating your teachers' time; making resources, photocopying, writing bids for grants, processing data, phoning parents... and then think carefully – does a teacher need to do this?

The burden of data gathering in schools is a challenging area. On one hand it doesn't need a teacher to gather the data, but sometimes it's the process of recording the data that ensures it's really understood. Equally mistakes can easily be made when data is collected by someone who doesn't understand it, correcting them can take even more time. There are no easy one-size fits all answers, except to recognise the challenges, be prepared to think differently and avoid the default of automatically adding to a teachers' workload.

Future strategies

Supporting NQTs and making changes within our schools also means being creative, innovative and often brave. But if those changes result in finding new solutions to current challenges, it can only be a good thing for our schools and the future quality of our teaching, not to mention the end goal: the difference we make to children's lives, which is surely what we are all ultimately striving to achieve regardless of seniority or position.

Amanda Godfrey is Executive Headteacher at the Spiral Partnership Trust, a community of schools working together to make a positive difference to children's lives. She is a National Leader of Education and has worked extensively to support schools in challenging communities.

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Rediscover Learning to Learn



A new approach to Learning to Learn has resulted in significant academic gains, especially among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. **James Mannion** explains how.

Learning to Learn (L2L) is a branch of educational theory and practice concerned with helping people become more effective learners. As can be seen in Figure 1, the amount of literature published on L2L has expanded significantly throughout the last 40 years. This literature centres around the concept of metacognition – often taken to mean ‘thinking about thinking’ – following the introduction of the term by John Flavell in his 1976 paper *Metacognitive aspects of problem-solving*.

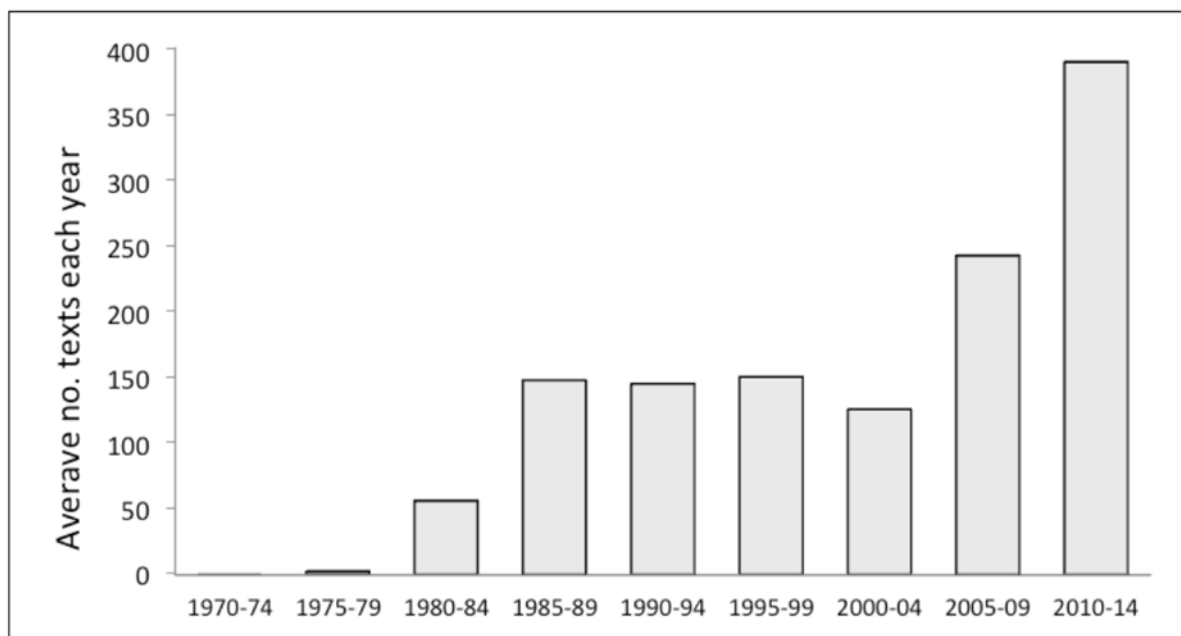
Figure 1: Published literature on 'Learning about Learning' ** As featured on eric.ed.gov

Table 1 lists some examples of educational programmes which have appeared in the literature on metacognition throughout this period. These programmes vary in focus and scale. However, it is also clear that they overlap in significant ways. For example, it could be said that initiatives such as 'Learning to Think' and 'Thinking about Thinking' centre around metacognition, whereas 'Learning about Learning', 'Learning How to Learn' and 'Thinking Together' involve broader notions of meta-learning and self-regulation. Explaining the difference between these two notions, Chris Watkins describes metacognition as 'awareness of thinking processes, and "executive control" of such processes', while 'meta-learning (making sense of one's experience of learning)... covers a much wider range of issues than metacognition, including goals, feelings, social relations and context of learning' (Watkins, 2001, p1). Underscoring the distinction, Watkins asserts: "metacognition is a defining characteristic of our species: meta-learning is its dynamic epitome" (Watkins, 2001, p7).

Table 1. Examples of educational initiatives oriented toward metacognition.

Saljö, R. (1979) Learning about learning, <i>Higher Education</i> , 8, 443-451.
Hounsell, D. 1979, Learning to learn: research and learning in student development, <i>Higher Education</i> , vol. 8, pp.453-469.
Novak, J.D. & Gowin, D.B. (1984) <i>Learning How to Learn</i> , Cambridge University Press.
Gibbs, G. (1986) <i>Learning to Study</i> . National Extension College.
Perkins, D.N., Goodrich, H., Tishman, S., & Mirman O. J. (1994). <i>Thinking Connections: Learning to Think and Thinking to Learn</i> . Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Group.
Collins C. & Mangieri J. (Ed.) (1992), <i>Teaching Thinking: an agenda for the 21st century</i> . Hillsdale NJ, Erlbaum.
Mercer, N., & Littleton, K. (2007). <i>Dialogue and the development of children's thinking</i> . London, UK: Routledge.
Claxton, G. (2002). <i>Building learning power</i> . Bristol: TLO Limited.
Claxton, G, Chambers, M, Powell, G & Lucas, B. (2011) <i>The Learning Powered School: Pioneering 21st Century Education</i> . TLO, Bristol.
Smith, A., Lovatt, M., & Turner, J. (2009) <i>Learning to Learn in Practice: The L2 Approach</i> . London: Crown House Publishing.

Evidence for L2L: a mixed picture

In 2011, the Sutton Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation jointly published a Teaching and Learning Toolkit, with a view to helping schools decide how best to allocate Pupil Premium (PP) funding (Higgins *et al.*, 2011). Regularly updated ever since, the Toolkit has been well-received by the teaching profession, and the majority of schools in the UK now use it to inform strategic planning. Ranked first in this league table of educational effectiveness are “meta-cognition and self-regulation”, which are described as having ‘high impact for low cost, based on extensive evidence’ (Sutton-EEF, 2015).

Meta-cognition (sometimes known as ‘learning to learn’) and self-regulation approaches aim to help learners think about their own learning more explicitly... The evidence indicates that teaching these strategies can be particularly effective for low achieving and older pupils.
(Sutton-EEF, 2015)



The educational value of developing students’ metacognitive and self-regulatory abilities is also supported by the results of a number of interventions showing large effect sizes on learning and study skills, and a range of academic attainments (e.g., Whitebread, 2013; Dignath, Buettner and Langfeldt, 2008; Hattie, Biggs & Purdie, 1996).

Despite such a compelling research literature, attempts to translate the insights of the metacognitive movement into educational programmes of study have often fallen short of fulfilling the goal of consistently improving academic outcomes. In the UK, a number of large-scale initiatives have been trialed throughout in the last 15 years. These include the Campaign for Learning’s *Learning to Learn* project (Higgins *et al.*, 2007; Wall *et al.*, 2010); the *Learning How to Learn* initiative (James *et al.*, 2006); *Building Learning Power* (Claxton *et al.*, 2011); and the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) *Opening Minds* programme (e.g. see Aynsley *et al.*, 2012). Large-scale evaluations of these initiatives reveal that they have not resulted in the kinds of learning gains that we might expect from programmes designed to help young people become more effective learners. Which begs the question: where did it all go wrong?

One increasingly popular way to answer this question is to assert that generic skills do not exist – that skills are context-specific and remain context-bound, and that the



transfer of skills is an impossible dream. There is some support for this viewpoint in the literature (e.g. see Willingham, 2007), and it is well understood that transfer does not always happen automatically. However, there remain alternative explanations for the mixed outcomes of L2L initiatives to date, which suggest that perhaps all is not lost. To provide a detailed critique of the L2L literature to date is beyond the scope of this article, but to summarise, there are key issues around interpretation, implementation and scale. Each of the initiatives listed above *interpret* L2L differently – e.g. as a competence, or as an expression of formative assessment. Each saw L2L being *implemented* differently, ranging from single teachers working on their own initiative, through to more coherent, whole-school programmes. And in terms of *scale* – many of the evaluations listed above have comprised several dozen schools, from across several different local authorities. Such large-scale evaluations often cite isolated instances of good practice – often where a coherent, whole-school approach has been implemented – but when evaluations include so many schools with so many confounding variables, the noise overwhelms the signal and the net result is often one of ‘no discernible impact on academic outcomes’. However, none of these problems are insurmountable.

Reconceptualising L2L as a complex intervention

In 2010, the secondary school where I worked as a Science teacher (which I will refer to as Sea View) decided to implement a year 7 ‘learning skills’ curriculum. A team of five teachers was appointed following a competitive selection process, and were allocated five lessons a week in which to deliver a course for the whole of year 7. Right from the outset, this appointment of a dedicated team marked a key distinction between the Sea View approach, and the description of teachers of L2L at other schools as ‘a mixture of volunteers and skeptical conscripts’ (e.g. see Downey *et al.*, 2013, p378). Similarly, the amount of time we were given is unparalleled in the research literature... five lessons a week, for Year 7 alone!

At first, we considered buying in an established programme of study such as *Opening Minds*. However, upon review of alternatives, we decided we could do better. Reasoning from first principles, we set out to re-conceptualise L2L as a so-called “complex intervention”, comprised of multiple effective practices. The theory

behind complex interventions – commonplace in medicine and psychotherapy – is that the marginal gains emerging from each individual area of practice stack up and possibly even interact, to produce a larger effect size overall. The resulting learning skills curriculum, as it has become known, combines a number of areas of practice for which there was some evidence in the research literature of academic gains.

In 2010-11, a taught course was delivered to all students in year 7, in mixed ability classes. Conceptually, these initial lessons were rooted in three concepts central to L2L: self-regulation (project-based learning); oracy (paired talk, group tasks, weekly philosophical inquiries); and metacognition (reflective learning journals). Interim evaluations throughout the first year found wide-ranging support for the L2L programme from teachers throughout the school, Ofsted Inspectors, school improvement partners, parents and the students themselves. Student attainment data suggested that the first L2L cohort had performed better than the previous year group, who were very similar at entry to the school, and this was also reflected in the students’ Attitude to Learning scores. So in 2011, the decision was taken to expand the L2L curriculum into year 8 for three lessons a week, and in 2012 the curriculum expanded again into year 9, for 2.5 lessons a week. In total, students in the first L2L cohort participated in more than 400 lessons of L2L over three years. Conversely, the pre-L2L control group, who had comparable prior attainment at entry, had more than 400 *more* subject-based lessons throughout Key Stage 3, compared with L2L cohort 1.

By the end of three years, the L2L ‘complex intervention’ had expanded beyond the initial three areas of metacognition, self-regulation and oracy. The components which made up the L2L programme at Sea View after three years are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Components of L2L at Sea View, with examples of supporting literature.

Component of L2L at Sea View		Supporting literature
Y7,8	Self-regulation (project-based learning)	Barron, B., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2008). Teaching for meaningful learning: A review of research on inquiry-based and cooperative learning. In L. Darling-Hammond, B. Barron, P.D. Pearson, A. Schoenfeld, E.K. Stage, D. Zimmerman, G.N. Cervetti and J. Tilson, <i>Powerful Learning: What We Know About Teaching for Understanding</i> . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Hung, W. (2008). The 9-step problem design process for problem-based learning: Application of the 3C3R model. <i>Educational Research Review</i> , 4, 2, 118-141.
Y7,8	Collaboration (paired → group, familiar → unfamiliar)	Howe, C. (2009). Collaborative group work in middle childhood: Joint construction, unresolved contradiction and the growth of knowledge. <i>Human Development</i> , 39, 71-94. Howe, C. (2010). Peer groups and children's development. Oxford: Blackwell. Laughlin, P., Hatch, E., Silver, J., & Boh, L. (2006) Groups perform better than the best individuals on letters-to-numbers problems: Effects of group size. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> , 90, 644-651. Slavin, R. E. (2010). Co-operative learning: What makes groupwork work? In H. Dumont, D. Istance, & F. Benavides (Eds.), <i>The nature of learning: Using research to inspire practice</i> . (pp. 161-178). Paris, France: OECD.
Y7,8,9	Oracy (paired talk, P4C, formal debates, public speaking...)	Mercer, N., & Littleton, K. (2007). <i>Dialogue and the development of children's thinking</i> . London, UK: Routledge. Topping, K. J. & Trickey, S. (2007a). Collaborative philosophical enquiry for school children: Cognitive effects at 10-12 years. <i>British Journal of Educational Psychology</i> , 77, 271-288. Topping, KJ & Trickey, S (2007b), 'Collaborative philosophical inquiry for schoolchildren: Cognitive gains at 2-year follow-up' <i>British Journal of Educational Psychology</i> , 77, 4, pp. 787-796.
Y7,8,9	Formative assessment (comment-based feedback)	Black P, William D (1998) Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through Classroom. <i>Assessment Phi Delta Kappan</i> 80(2) 139-148. 2. Hattie, J. (2009) <i>Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses related to achievement</i> , Routledge, London. Higgins, S., Kokotsaki, D. & Coe, R.J. (2011). <i>Toolkit of Strategies to Improve Learning: Summary for Schools Spending the Pupil Premium</i> . Sutton Trust-Educational Endowment Foundation.
Y7,8,9	Metacognition (language of learning, plenaries, journals)	Whitebread, D. & Pino Pasternak, D. (2010) Metacognition, Self-Regulation & Meta-Knowing. In Littleton, K., Wood, C. & Kleine Staarman, J. (eds) <i>International Handbook of Psychology in Education</i> . Bingley, UK: Emerald.
Y8	Personal effectiveness (organisational skills)	Harrison, N., James, D. and Last, K. (2012) <i>The impact of the pursuit of ASDAN's Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) on GCSE attainment</i> . Project Report. UWE/ASDAN.
Y9	Thinking & reasoning skills (critical thinking, debating)	Halpern, D. F. (1998). Teaching critical thinking for transfer across domains: Dispositions, skills, structure training, and metacognitive monitoring. <i>American Psychologist</i> , 53, 4, 449-455.
Whole-school	Growth mindset (shared language of learning)	Claxton, G, Chambers, M, Powell, G & Lucas, B. (2011) <i>The Learning Powered School: Pioneering 21st Century Education</i> . TLO, Bristol.; Perkins, D. (1995). <i>Outsmarting IQ: The Emerging Science of Learnable Intelligence</i> . New York: Free Press. Dweck, C. (2006). <i>Mindset: The New Psychology of Success</i> . Random House: New York. Engle, R. A., Lam, D. P., Meyer, X. S., & Nix, S.. "How does expansive framing promote transfer? Several proposed explanations.," <i>Educational Psychologist</i> , v47, 2012, p. 215-231.

Whole-school	Transfer (managed approach)	Engle, R. A., Lam, D. P., Meyer, X. S., & Nix, S.. "How does expansive framing promote transfer? Several proposed explanations.," <i>Educational Psychologist</i> , v.47, 2012, p. 215-231. Hipkins, R., & Cowie, B. (2014). Learning to learn, lifewide and lifelong learning: Reflections on the New Zealand experience. In R. Deakin-Crick, C. Stringher, & K. Ren (Eds.), <i>Learning to learn: International perspectives from theory and practice</i> (pp. 303–320). London, UK: Routledge.
Whole-school	Action Research as CPD (collaborative inquiry)	Bell, M., Cordingley, P., Isham, C. & Davis, R. (2010) <i>Report of Professional Practitioner Use of Research Review: Practitioner engagement in and/or with research</i> . Coventry: CUREE, GTCE, LSIS & NTRP. Available at: http://www.curee-paccts.com/node/2303 Crippen, K. J., Biesinger, K. D. & Ebert, E. K. (2010) <i>Using Professional Development to Achieve Classroom Reform and Science Proficiency: An Urban Success Story from Southern Nevada, USA</i> . Professional Development in Education, 36 (4) pp.637-661. Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (2002) Student achievement through staff development. In: Joyce, B. & Showers, B. <i>Designing training and peer coaching: our needs for learning</i> . VA, USA: ASCD. Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H., & Fung, I. (2007). <i>Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration [BES]</i> . Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education. Available at www.educationcounts.govt.nz/goto/BES .

Note to editor: Again, feature full references here

The importance of transfer

There is not space here to explore each of these components in detail. However, as can be seen in Table 2 the L2L curriculum at Sea View formed part of a whole-school approach to teaching and learning, which aimed to ensure that the skills and dispositions developed through the L2L curriculum were able to *transfer* meaningfully to other subject areas throughout the school.

The issue of transfer has often been the Achilles heel of L2L initiatives, since it is well understood that skills tend to remain rooted in the contexts in which they were developed (e.g. see Willingham, 2007). While it is self-evident that transfer can and does happen, to varying degrees – school would be rather a waste of time if it did not – it certainly does not always happen automatically, and thus requires careful planning and monitoring. One key way in which transfer was facilitated at Sea View was through a shared language of learning, used by teachers throughout the school to focus on the how, as well as the what, of learning (see Figure 2). For a more detailed discussion of transfer at Sea View, see Mannion & Mercer (2016).

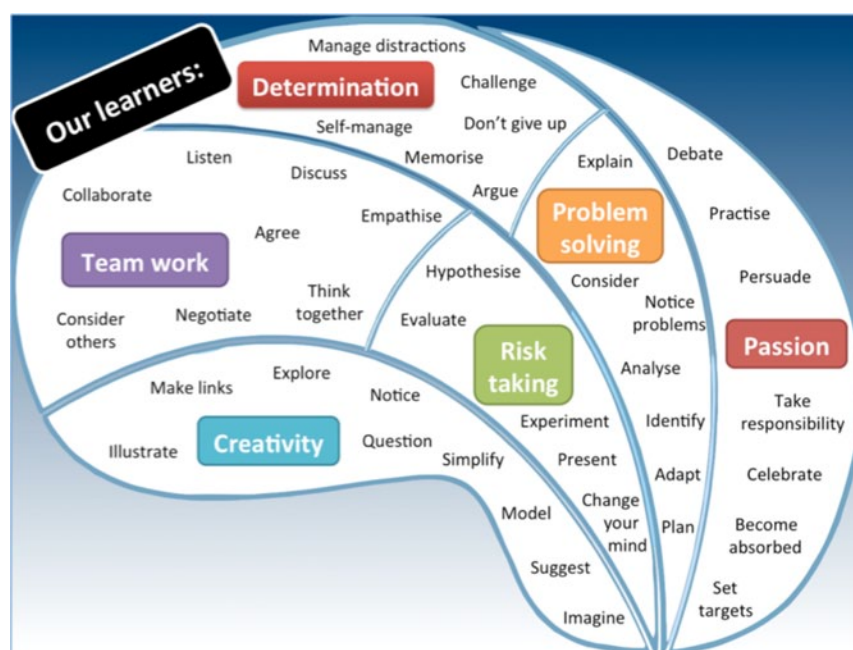
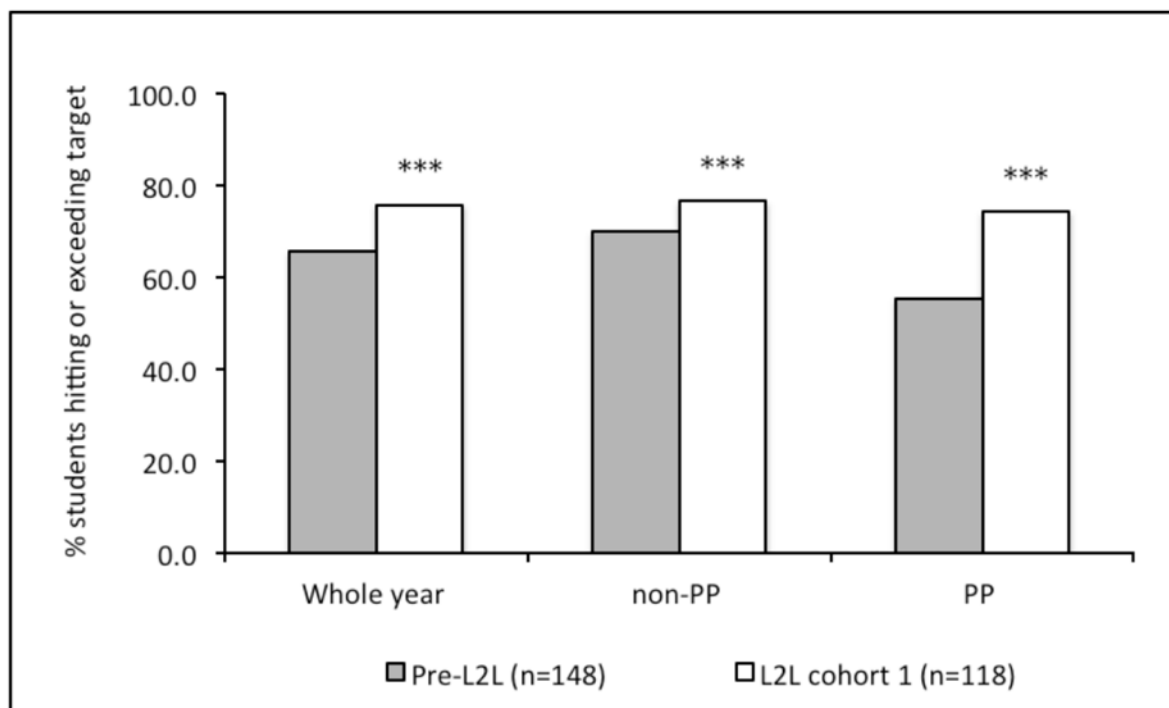


Figure 2. The shared language of learning at Sea View, comprising the school's six core values with examples of supporting 'processes of learning'.

What was the impact of L2L at Sea View?

By the end of year 9, there was a significant increase in the proportion of students either hitting or exceeding their target grades in the L2L cohort, compared with the pre-L2L control group. As can be seen in Figure 3, these improvements were even more pronounced among students eligible for the PP (often used as a shorthand for social or economic disadvantage). It is worth emphasising that the pre-L2L control group had 400 more lessons of subject learning throughout Key Stage 3, making the gains in subject learning in the L2L cohort all the more remarkable.

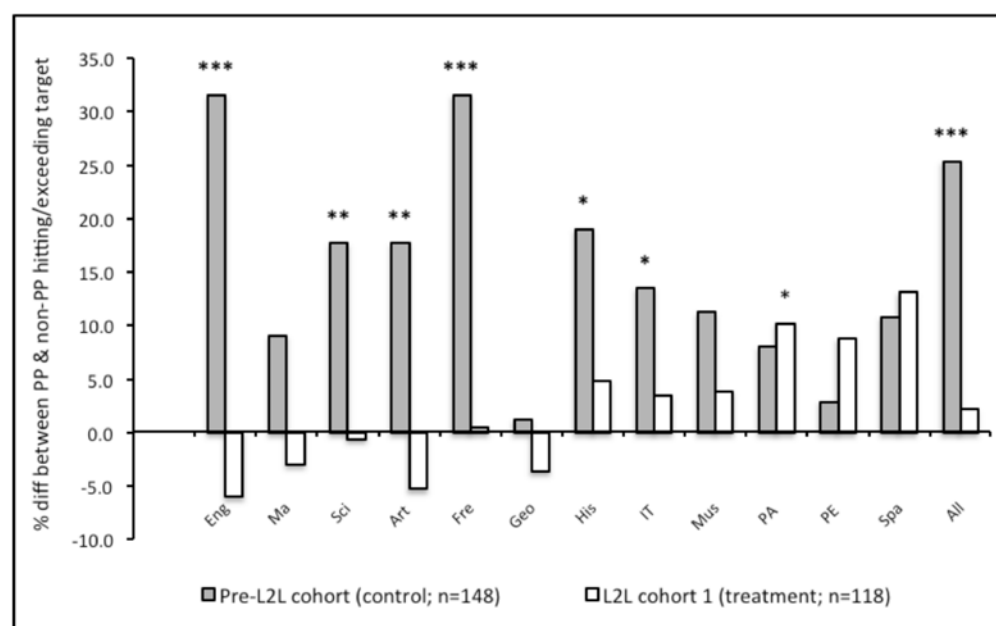
Figure 3. Students' attainment after 3 years: L2L cohort vs pre-L2L control group.



Statistically significant differences, vs. control group; $P \leq 0.001$.

To examine this closing of the PP gap more closely, Figure 4 compares the attainment gap between students eligible for the Pupil Premium and their peers, and shows how this gap closed significantly in the L2L cohort, compared with the pre-L2L cohort.

Figure 4. Closing the gap: L2L cohort 1 vs pre-L2L cohort (attainment at end of year 9)



$P \leq 0.001$; ** $P \leq 0.01$; * $P \leq 0.05$ (statistically attainment gap between PP and non-PP students)
Pre-L2L (control group): PP students $n=45$, non-PP $n=103$; L2L (treatment) PP $n=37$, non-PP $n=81$.

To break this down a little, this figure shows 'the gap' – the difference in attainment between PP and non-PP students – and compares the pre-L2L cohort (grey bars) with L2L cohort 1 (white bars). So if we look at English (the 2 bars on the left hand side), we can see that in the pre-L2L cohort, there was a gap of more than 30 per cent between PP and non-PP students, by the end of year 9. In the L2L cohort however, the gap had closed so completely in English by the end of year 9 that PP students were outperforming non-PP students by the end of year 9. As we can see here, this was the case for five subjects (those where the white bar is beneath the zero line – i.e., where there is a "negative PP gap"). If social or economic disadvantage was not a predictor of educational attainment, this is that we would expect to see – PP students sometimes outperforming non-PP students, and sometimes not.

But most striking here are the data on the right hand side of Figure 4. Combining all subjects together, we see that at the end of year 9, the attainment gap between PP and non-PP students in the pre-L2L cohort was 25 per cent; in the L2L cohort, the gap was just 2 per cent.

Discussion

This evaluation of L2L at Sea View suggests that, when the attainments of students in the L2L cohort were compared with those of the 'control' cohort from the previous year, this programme was associated with:

- Improved attainment across the curriculum (10 per cent overall increase in the proportion of students hitting or exceeding their target grades);
- A closing of the attainment gap between Pupil Premium students and their peers (from 25 per cent in the control group to 2 per cent in the treatment group, by the end of year 9).

A follow-up paper is due out later this year with the 5-year GCSE outcomes, which are equally encouraging. This evidence of improved attainment, with particular benefits for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, appears to validate the Sea View approach to L2L, based on a reconceptualization of L2L as a 'complex intervention'. This included providing regular structured opportunities for students to develop metacognitive and self-regulatory functioning; an ongoing focus on developing their speaking and listening skills; and a coherent whole-school strategy for promoting the

transfer of skills and dispositions developed through the L2L curriculum to other subject areas, as well as to the students' lives beyond the school gates. Thus, while any one feature of the programme might have had a small but non-significant effect on student learning, the multimodal nature of the L2L programme at Sea View means that several such factors may have aggregated and interacted to produce the significant overall gains in subject learning outlined above.

Despite the academic / conceptual nature of the curriculum as outlined in Table 2, Learning Skills teachers at Sea View found that because of the central focus on oral communication, much of their classroom practice centred around on things like interpersonal development, conflict resolution and discussions about emotional intelligence. This is evident in the students' learning journal entries, where they often spoke about 'finding their voice' and 'standing up to bullies' (e.g. see Figure 5).

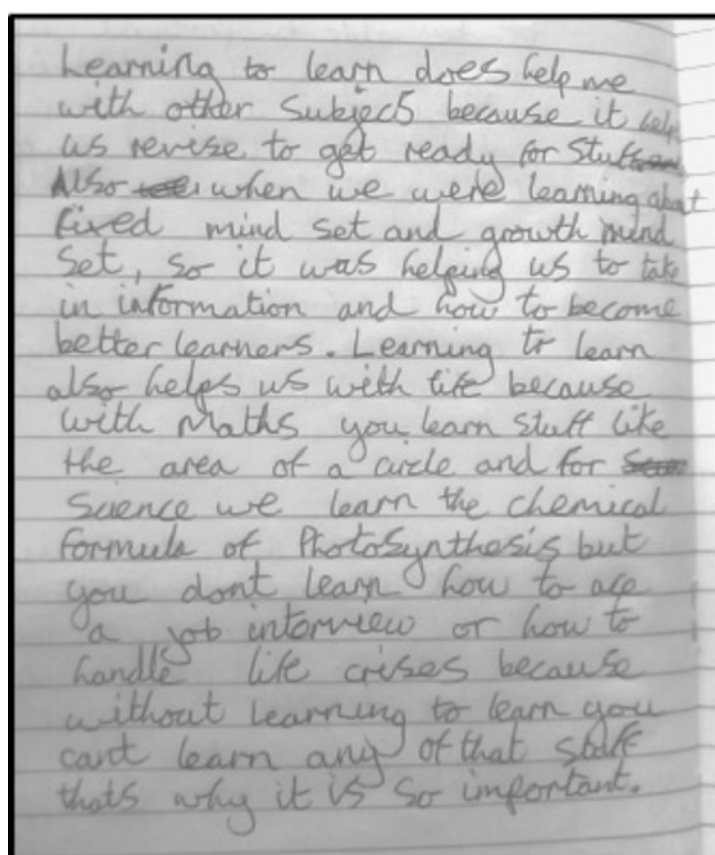


Figure 5: Excerpts from three year 7 Reflective Learning Journals.

learning to learn has helped me so much its taught me to stand up for my self and what I want to say is important. I have found my voice and I think more harder than I ever have in using the right language. But what I said ~~about~~ about me getting bullied learning to learn has helped me in maths because I have to sit next to the person how bullied me

The thing I would do is to make people find there voice and be more confident.

I really enjoy reading your thoughts [REDACTED] even when they were difficult grand - it is lovely to see how strong you have become and able to deal with some very difficult things. You should be very proud of yourself!

I think that ~~to~~ learning to learn does help me to learn better, because it helps me communicate better in other subjects. When working in a group, I think about what we've done in this lesson and it helps me to tolerate anything, I can work in a group with anyone new, without blowing my top! It definitely helps me, even at home, & especially

Progressive ends, through traditional means

It is worth noting that whilst aspects of the L2L curriculum might be considered and even dismissed by some as “progressive”, the ethos at Sea View was to develop a range of learning-centred skills and dispositions through traditional teaching methods, including modelling, explaining, providing opportunities for deliberate practice and plenty of high quality feedback, within a culture of extremely high expectations and individual accountability.

The teaching and learning practices that comprised the L2L curriculum at Sea View were selected because they have been found previously to be particularly effective at raising the attainment of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, a number of the most effective strategies identified in the Sutton Trust-EEF Toolkit (Higgins *et al*, 2011), which was designed to help schools decide how best to invest the Pupil Premium, feature centrally in the L2L approach we developed at Sea View (e.g. feedback, meta-cognition, peer tutoring, using exploratory talk for learning). So while the ‘bottom-up’ closing of the Pupil Premium attainment gap at Sea View was entirely welcome, it was not unexpected – rather, it simply suggests that the L2L programme at Sea View achieved what it set out to achieve.

The findings presented here provide a persuasive case for extending this approach to other schools. In the last year, three of the original learning skills teachers from Sea View have set up a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to helping develop these practices in schools more widely. This is not an off-the-shelf approach – each school is different – and so we approach each school differently. If you would like to find out more about the learning skills approach, or to arrange a free consultation, visit learning-skills.org.

James Mannion is an associate at the London Centre for Leadership in Learning, UCL Institute of Education, and Director of Praxis Education CIC. For more information, visit: learning-skills.org.

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“ The matrix is a fantastic way to benchmark where a school is in its practice. ”

Leckhampton C of E Primary School

What is Good Leadership?

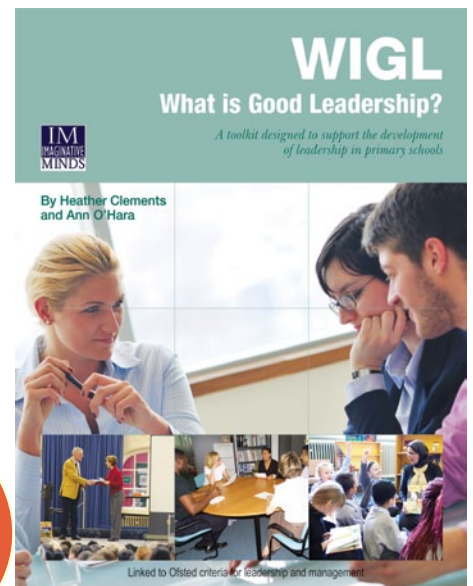
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We are experiencing a time of unprecedented pressure on school: greater accountability, a narrowing of the curriculum through more prescriptive assessment, a flood of directives and additional budget pressures.

It threatens to overwhelm the profession and lead to a fragmented and fragile system in which we are inclined to cling to what we know or seek simple answers to ever more complex questions.

Paradoxically, there has never been a more important time for teachers to take control of the teaching and learning debate, to acknowledge the challenges we face educating children for the 21st century and to recognise our capacity to lead on innovation and improvement. It is not only essential it is also a moral imperative.

We must remain vital and energised by our potential and aim to develop as organisations rich with interpretation. No matter how comfortable it feels, we must not seek equilibrium. We have to create a culture in which we are continuously motivated and intrigued with the chaos and complexity of new ideas. As Timperley, Kaser and Halbert have so clearly stated, new approaches to learning are necessary and new designs for learning are required.

Through a disciplined approach to collaborative inquiry, involving all stakeholders, we hope to gain the insights and the mindsets required to design new and powerful learning systems. This process we believe will transform our school into a more innovative learning environment and powerful institution that leads rather than follows.

Creating the conditions

At St. Luke's Primary School in Brighton, we have been engaging in research led improvement for the last five years. We knew that our context, like all schools, is unique and that one-size-fits-all solutions are merely sticking plasters which do not address the underlying local issues and needs. Traditional CPD risked making us unthinking professionals who grabbed the latest idea and applied it without owning and deeply understanding the true nature of the problem, never mind the so-called solution.

We came to realise that we needed to create the conditions where curiosity and experimentation were encouraged, developed and sustained. The problems we faced were complex (and always will be) and so it was essential to open up thinking, to deconstruct our assumptions and habits, and to explore powerful and innovative approaches to learning and teaching. We knew that we had to move from staff simply listening to and commenting on improvement ideas to staff creating improvement ideas. We were well aware of the competing demands of creativity and basic skills in learning but did not see it as an either-or situation but rather looked to promote both through our explorations.

St. Luke's growth has become an organic process where we are continually moving through what are termed spirals of enquiry which I will explain later. We recognised that our true capacity for improvement had remained dormant. It lay with the experience, knowledge and intuition of the staff. As a head, the key to releasing this rich resource was straightforward. It was to lead an organisation with:

- A strong and mutually agreed vision and values' system which acts as the touchstone for all our questions and actions and which keeps us focussed and driven even when things become messy!
- A commitment to sharing information with all so that everyone can freely contribute.
- Clear channels for teacher voice.
- A risk free environment which recognises failure as part of the process for even stronger learning.

The impact

Through committing to an action research based approach to professional development we have seen:

- More positive staff well-being, sustainable and significant changes to practice, and a strong belief in chosen improvements as they have been tested by our respected colleagues with our particular children, and found to be effective.
- We know that there has been a significant impact on learning outcomes and it has created a dynamic solution focused ethos in the school, with a consequent rapid growth of expertise within an energised team. In the process we have seen the development of staff who are reflective beyond their areas of their research and who now take enquiry into their day-to-day work in the classroom. Most gratifyingly, we have seen a deep on-going professional dialogue between colleagues.
- And not least, we have arrived at a very cost effective solution to learning issues with often unforeseen wider ranging impact.

The journey

We gained the courage to start our journey from the 2011 CUREE report 'Understanding

what enables high quality professional learning'. This report identified the following key actions:

- enquiry oriented learning activities spread over (usually) two terms or more;
- peer support to embed new practices and support risk taking;
- professional dialogue rooted directly in evidence from trying out new things and focused on understanding why things do and don't work in order to build an underpinning rationale (also known as 'professional reflection');
- carefully targeted (usually external) specialist expertise including the selection of high leverage strategies, modelling them, the provision of support via observation and debriefing and gradual transfer of control over learning to the teachers involved;
- learning to learn from observing the practice of others;
- ambitious goals set in the context of aspirations for pupils.



The Simple Action Research Model

We developed our initial framework for research through following the model provided by Jean McNiff in her 2002 booklet 'Action Research for Professional Development – Concise Advice for New Action Researchers'. Using this booklet and other online literature as a guide, all the teachers received training in quality action

research practice. We then designed our approach, always ensuring it encouraged enquiry that was focussed and deep rather than shallow and broad. I include this model as an example of how action research can be introduced whilst fully recognising that school culture and structure varies greatly and other approaches may be just as viable.

Practical steps

Step 1

At the end of the summer term the Leadership Team reviews data and our current practice. We identify a key aspect that we want to investigate.

Step 2

At the beginning of the Autumn Term, the Leadership team carries out a research literature review on the identified area. We also carry out a Circle of Learning review across the school; this entails short observations of pupils' learning experiences across the school in the key area e.g. low attaining writers. To avoid any changes to normal practice, we do not tell the teachers the focus for our observation. We then simply observe and make notes of our observations trying to avoid making any judgements. We interview the children with their work after the lesson and ask them to comment on how they thought their learning went. We also interview the teachers to glean their perspective of the lesson and the children's performance.

Step 3

Through an INSET day after the October half-term, we present the literature reviews and the observations from the Circle of Learning. We ask the teachers to reflect in year groups on the information we have provided and to begin to develop some hypotheses specifically relevant to their classes/year groups.

Step 4

Over the next few weeks we use some staff meetings and formal coaching meetings to develop questions for research and an action plan to support the research. We use the simple format below.

St. Luke's Action Research Planning and Record Sheet

Group/Class/Year Group		Date:
Theme: What changes can we make to accelerate the progress of low attaining writers so that average progress matches or exceeds that of their peers?		
1. What is your question? E.g.		
☐ How does oral feedback impact on progress in writing? ☐ How can partner role models impact on expectations in writing? ☐ How does children's choice of the context for writing impact on engagement and progress?		
2. Why is it important we answer this question?		
3. What do you think you could do about it? Possible activities/strategies?		
Strategy/ies	Timetable	
How would you know that your judgement about what has happened is reasonable, fair and accurate?		
What kind of evidence would you collect to help you make some judgement about what is happening? e.g. Peer observations, pupil interviews, writing examples		
Types of evidence (note any implications for cover etc.)	Timetable	
Baseline evidence		
Reflection		
Interim evidence/findings following initial action(s)		
Reflection		
Final evidence following revised action(s)		
Final findings and additional questions		

Step 5

We use the Spring Term to carry out the research. We meet together regularly as coaching teams to review and critically evaluate the research and to modify approaches in light of what we have found out.

Step 6

At the beginning of the summer term each year group presents their findings to colleagues who critically respond to the presentations.

Step 7

As a whole school team, we decide which approaches should be taken on by year groups, key stages or the whole school.

Step 8

We reflect on how we should approach the new questions that have arisen.

It is not all plain sailing!

We are all continually learning how to be better researchers. It is still by no means an exact science for us. Getting the question right is the most important task. It will need working on over a period of time and refining through discussion until you are very clear it is the right one. Being sure about what you expect to see is vital for you to know what baseline to establish and what evidence to gather. During the enquiry you recognise how complex the classroom environment is and how many possible influencing factors there may be beyond the changes you have introduced. It is important you acknowledge the factors in order to isolate the specific impact of the changes; sometimes this is not always possible but it can lead you into parallel, rich forms of enquiry. You must be ready to adapt your enquiry as a result of your observations and evidence. The concern is that you see what you are looking for. It is a struggle but vital to always try and observe without initial judgement. Remember, your idea is not always going to be successful but you never fail to gather plenty of food for future thought from the experience.

Some of our research projects

Over the last few years, we have researched lower attaining writers, feedback and response in writing and this year we have been looking at how we empower children in their learning through offering more choice in how, when and what they learn.

The 'lower attaining writers' research covered many of the areas we had identified



as barriers to learning for these children, through research literature and our own circle of learning.

Reception looked into how they could develop growth mindset towards writing through the use of growth mindset learning stories based around the lives of the 'Can't do' and 'Can do' dinosaurs. Can do dinosaurs became the puppets the children took to an activity to 'support' them if they were hesitant around a writing task. Teachers tracked hesitant writers' progress from a baseline and discovered a marked increase in their involvement in writing activities and the quantity of writing they produced as a result of this simple mechanism, combined with a strong culture highlighting effort leading to achievement.

Year 1 continued with the enquiry into growth mindset. They recognised that many of the ways we work with children can have negative impact on their self-image and attitudes to learning. They therefore challenged traditional classroom groupings where children become labelled as low attaining and clearly saw themselves as low attaining as a result, and how differentiation through support and scaffolding often caps expectations. Children were moved to mixed attainment groupings, participated in collaborative peer writing, which led to independent writing and fluid, open ended writing tasks. Lower attaining writers flourished in this richer environment. Attitudes to writing as well as quality and quantity improved greatly.



Year 2 recognised that handwriting is often a barrier to low attaining writers. They have the ideas but just struggle to get them down onto paper. They believed that openly engaging the children with this issue, they could hopefully address it more effectively. Therefore, together with the children, they devised an intensive six week handwriting support programme in class to crack their difficulties and so liberate them to write more freely. We have since changed our handwriting policy to try and ensure that by the time children enter year 2, they all have a confident handwriting style.

Year 3 and 4 looked into the work of Dr Sue Lyle and set up an immersion programme in stories and a writing workshop approach where children could write stories around any topic using the story patterns they had learned. Lots of sharing of stories, oral storytelling, performances of stories and publishing of stories led to a significant number of children including lower attaining and reluctant writers staying in at playtime to write and also producing stories at home.

Year 5 gave children a choice of context for their writing. Many lower attaining writers struggle to hold in all the information they need to write about something as well as remember to use all the higher order elements of writing. Rather than write a biography about the life of Roald Dahl as they had in the past, they were able to invent

their own Road Dahl type character and invent their lives. Using their imagination they produced longer, richer narratives with clearer genre elements.

Year 6 wanted to see if giving a writing issue to the children to solve would be more effective than the teachers coming up with an idea. A regular feature of teachers' marking was 'Remember your punctuation!' The children worked in groups to come up with ideas on how they could solve the problem. They came up with many inventive ideas and then chose the one they thought would work best. It probably didn't matter which one they had chosen as the important thing was that it was their idea and they were going to make sure it worked! Sure enough, their basic punctuation improved.



Changes to pedagogy

Choosing to take part in an intervention

Instead of children being taken out for interventions, children are now offered a menu of skills sessions they could take part in and they can then volunteer. As children have chosen to take part, they are more positive and learning is bridged much more effectively back into class.

Peer tutoring

Children in year 5 and 6 all take part in two day peer tutor training. They will all formally mentor and teach individual pupils during their time at the school. They also put their names on a board in the classroom offering areas in which they can tutor others in the class. Pupils then sign up to be tutored during assembly times. This programme creates children who are very focussed on developing themselves as learners within a community of learners.

Choosing when to leave the carpet during Maths sessions

Children choose when they are ready to leave the whole class carpet session when they feel they have understood the skill or concept.

Collaborative feedback

Children are trained in collaborative feedback and in setting their own targets for improvement.

Amber Zone

Children are regularly encouraged to check if they are in the Amber Zone, the challenge zone. The green zone is too easy as they are getting most things right or not trying

something new. The red zone is when they are stuck and should be using the agreed class strategies for the 'can't do it yet' moments. An assigned challenge partner also has responsibility for ensuring their friend is also setting an appropriate challenge.

Action Research as a non-linear model

Most models of action research in educational literature regard practice as non-linear. These models appreciate that children's learning is unpredictable and influenced by many factors, meaning their actions often do not follow a straightforward trajectory. It quickly became clear at St. Luke's that an action research cycle quickly turns into new action research cycles, as new areas of investigation emerge. The processes can be shown as a spiral of cycles, where one issue forms the basis of another and, as one question is addressed, the answer to it generates new questions. For example, our research into low attaining writers highlighted other areas for further research around pupil choice in their learning, growth mindset and interventions and collaborative feedback. All of these areas have since become part of our school improvement plan or adopted practice.

Creating the culture for spirals of enquiry

Once you have unleashed the power of teacher curiosity, you have to be prepared to fully nurture it and recognise where traditional systems may be working against you. The strict accountability and high stakes linked to Performance Management mitigates against real risk taking and innovation. We realised we could not ask teachers to explore new ideas and then tie their success or failure to their self-esteem and their livelihoods. Teachers need to feel safe to be brave and experimental. They need to see that we are all in it together including the head and leadership team. We see ourselves as a



professional learning community rather than isolated individuals having to continually prove their worth as professionals.

We have therefore developed our 'Professional Development through Coaching' model. Within this model, teachers plan three professional development activities during each term. They chose the specific focus and time but these activities are always around the research or exploration of learning linked to school priorities. Each of these activities will be supported with a follow-up coaching session with a member of the leadership team. The activities may be a short observation, peer observation, review of video of own teaching, review of video of pupils learning, pupil conferencing or team teaching – quite simply whatever is the best method to give us the information we need to continue developing practice for better pupil outcomes. Through putting children's learning at the centre of this model, it has also become obvious that the children themselves have a vital role to play in school improvement.



Developing Pupil Voice

Following inspiration from Professor Graham Handscomb's work around 'Pupil Researchers and Pupil Power', we have come to an understanding that pupil involvement and leadership in the design of the curriculum and the learning experience is vital in ensuring the effectiveness of any improvement. For too long children have been victims of a 'done to' model rather than being fully engaged with the

process. Through discussions with children within Philosophy for Children, we can gain vital insights into their ideas around attitudes to learning, choice in learning, what we should be learning and how we should be learning. Training children as young researchers to lead enquiries offers a school very powerful contributions to its problem solving work. Their work at St. Luke's around strategies for improving writing came up with the same and even additional possible solutions twice as fast as the teacher team!

Where next?

Through working within a spiral of enquiry, we are seeking to develop our school as an organisation rich with interpretation. We are becoming more adept at observing without initial judgement which allows us to see things more clearly and objectively. We can challenge entrenched habits and explore disruptive thinking. We understand that capacity for change is generated by relationships. The more we can foster open relationships between all the staff and the children and allow them to see their joint responsibility, value and voice in improving the school, the better we will be at identifying and making the right improvements. We are aiming to live in a state of disequilibrium and curiosity grounded on strong values.

We know that education for both teachers and children is becoming more about ways of new thinking; involving creativity, critical thinking, problem solving and decision making; about new ways of working, including communication and collaboration and about new tools for working. It is only through being a school which is fit to engage confidently with this change that we can continue to provide an education relevant to our children and society.

Jonathan Cooper is headteacher of an 'Outstanding' inner city primary school and a national leader of education. He leads Brighton and Hove Research and Development Forum and worked closely with the Institute of Education, London, in a project on developing pupils as researchers.



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Elaine Ricks-Neal, Jt. Principal Adviser for School Improvement, West Berkshire Council



Strategies to support reflective practitioners



Confucius, the ancient Chinese philosopher, is attributed to have said that there are three ways to acquire wisdom: 'first, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third, by experience, which is the most bitter.' Well-meaning tutors and mentors often tell trainee teachers that they will improve with experience.

This is, of course, not necessarily the case. Experience itself is not enough. Teachers – like children – learn by making sense of experience. And reflective practice can help in this process. Reflection offers educators the opportunity to question, refresh and enliven what they do, to avoid becoming stale and static. But how does one capture reflections? And what is needed to go beyond the cosmetic, surface level – to see what lies beyond the mirror? This second article in the three-part series considers these questions.

Recording reflections

There are various means of recording and supporting reflective practice. The choice very much depends on whether there are plans to share outcomes with others and the available time and resources. More structured approaches are useful for systematically collecting data but these are more time consuming than, say, informal discussions. Figure 1 is not exhaustive but sets out some common contexts, strategies and tools used to record reflective thoughts.

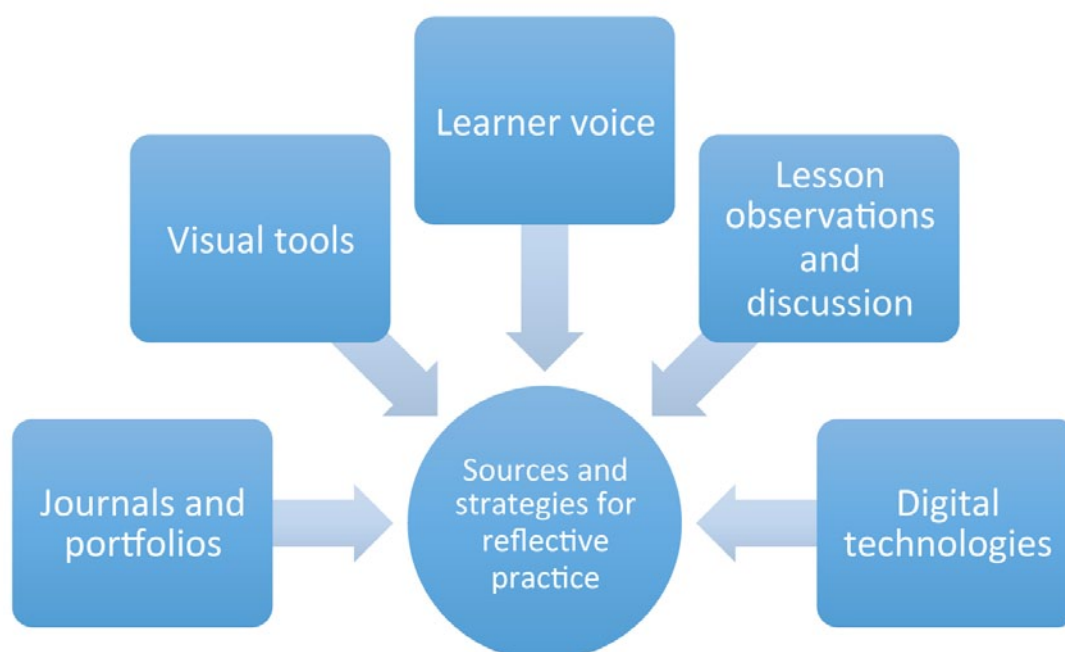


Figure 1: Sources and strategies to support reflective practice

Journals and portfolios

Reflective journals are perhaps the most widely used means of describing change in practice and identifying how this might be improved. Journaling comes in many forms – from impromptu jottings on sticky notes to more structured formats that follow set prompts. Keeping a journal is essentially a linear process but maps and other visuals can be used in a more fluid manner to record connections and relationships between ideas and information. Portfolios are also widely used, particularly in initial teacher training where trainee teachers collect evidence of their progress towards standards for qualified teacher status/ teachers' standards. In the context of reflective practice, such portfolios can include annotated lesson plans and evaluations, data on learners' performance and how this has been interpreted, feedback comments from colleagues and examples of professional development. However, the maintaining of such portfolios and other records should not become a chore if the value of reflection is to be realised. The danger is reflection becomes a mechanistic process of compliance.

Visual tools

The power of mind-maps, diagrams, doodles and other visual tools should not be underestimated as a form of stimulating reflective thinking. Once dismissed as an idle use of time, doodling is now



recognised in helping people to stay focused, retain information and spur creative thoughts. Sunni Brown, author of *The Doodle Revolution*, points out that the likes of Einstein, Edison, and Marie Curie were all inveterate doodlers. Similarly, 'sketchnoting' is becoming increasingly popular in schools and the business community. Sketchnoting is a strategy to help capture thinking visually, remember key information more clearly, and sharing this in an engaging way. To be able to sketchnote, you don't require advanced drawing skills, but do need to visually synthesize and summarise via shapes, connectors, and text. In other words, a sketchnote is a personal, visual reflection. In terms of reflective practice, this could provide a starting point for gathering thoughts about a lesson, topic or class of learners. The finished sketchnote also provides a discussion point for use with children – who can reflect on the lesson.



Learner voice

In the first article we introduced Brookfield's model that offers practitioners different lenses through which to explore what happens in the classroom. One of these lenses, learner voice, has become increasingly important over recent decades in the context of children's rights. The late Professor Jean Rudduck wrote extensively on the value of listening to learners, particularly in building relationships and more inclusive communities. For reflective teachers, tapping into the rich potential of learner voice has the advantage of seeing their practice from a different, fresh angle (Rudduck and Flutter, 2003). By its nature, reflective practice is inherently subjective. By creating an inclusive environment in which learners and others feel confident enough to speak openly, teachers can gain greater insight into the impact of their work. This does not mean necessarily that learners know better than teachers, nor does it mean treating learner voice as representing one homogenous view. When learners' views are considered alongside other sources, teachers are able to build up a more rounded picture of what is happening in the classroom. This can help shed light on what otherwise might be missed. Learners can express their views in lots of informal ways, such as jotting down comments on sticky-notes and drawings as well as through class councils and school parliaments, focus groups, newsletters and questionnaires. These can prove an important stimulus for teachers' reflective thinking.

However, these models rely on personal reflection, which, although valuable runs some risks. How do you know if you are reflecting on the right things to improve the teaching and learning in your class? What if we are unaware of some of our practices – both the good and the not so good? And, of course – what we think we do is not necessarily what actually takes place in the lesson – so how can we ensure that we are reflecting on actual and not perceived events?

One way to improve the quality and effectiveness of reflection is to work with others – discussing and sharing reflections. Through open, honest and supportive

dialogue, reflective practice can become an effective tool for self-improvement. The remainder of this article looks at two approaches that allow reflection to develop through dialogue and discussion.

Peer observations

Lesson observations by peers are a potentially rich source for reflection – for both the observer and the observed. Most schools have systems in place to enable teachers to observe each other's practice, and sometimes this extends to observing teachers in other schools. Where such observations have a clear focus they can prove a useful stimulus for reflection. The benefit of peer observation is that everyone involved can benefit from the process – with a non-judgmental atmosphere the discussions around lessons can result in the sharing of ideas.

A review of the literature in the field suggests there are clear benefits to peer observation of teaching, including:

- increased teacher confidence;
- greater collegiality;
- encouragement of debate and dissemination of best practice;
- improvement of teacher interactions with students (Marshall 2004; Bell and Mladenovic, 2008); and
- supporting less experienced staff improve teaching skills, and absorb the values of the school or setting (White, 2015).



While any shared discussion should be conducted respectfully, if it is to contribute to changes or improvements in practice then it should not become too cozy or self-congratulatory. Such discussion requires an open-minded, a receptive spirit (demonstrated by both observed and observer), and a common goal of analyzing practice with a view to extending knowledge and understanding of the agreed focal points. The observer and the observed should meet soon after the observation to discuss what went on. The focus should be on identifying the strengths of the teaching observed, as well as the sharing of practical ideas as to how the teaching might be improved. Where two experienced teachers are involved they may use the opportunity to reflect on the underlying rationale of their teaching, as well as procedure or

technique. The University of Yorkshire has a policy for the 'Peer Observation of Learning and Teaching' (POLT) process, which has some useful guiding principles underpinning it:

Our POLT process is underpinned by guiding principles drawn from work across the sector to develop schemes designed to increase staff engagement in the process (Gosling and Mason O'Connor 2009).	
Professional autonomy	The control of the observation process belongs to the individual staff member being observed
Self-evaluative and reflective	The object of the observation is to stimulate a more reflective and scholarly approach to teaching
Developmental	It is a developmental process designed to support peer learning amongst colleagues
Collaborative	The process requires colleagues to work together collaboratively on the basis of mutual trust and support
Constructive	POLT should improve professional practice and enhance student learning
Dialogic	Talking about teaching promotes reflection on one's practice
Scholarly	Uses available pedagogic evidence
Consistent with good professional practice	It reflects how professionals learn
Manageable in terms of time	In order to make it part of regular on-going practice the process has to be manageable and not add to the staff burden. It should therefore be factored into the non-teaching aspect of work load planning.

Figure 2: Peer Observation of Learning and Teaching (POLT)

Source: <https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/PDF/Peer%20Observation%20A5%20-final.pdf>

However, peer observation is not without limitations. For example, in smaller schools, releasing teachers to observe may prove challenging to timetable. Observers may feel uncomfortable giving genuine feedback and the observed may find some feedback difficult to hear however constructively it is given. Discussions can be rather superficial and lack rigour. The final approach that we discuss in this article offers a potential solution to some of these issues.

Video Stimulated Reflective Dialogue (VSRD)

This is quite a mouthful – however the underlying principle to this approach is very simple. When professional discussions revolve around the use of video-recordings of lessons, there is an opportunity to refer back directly to evidence. VSRD is a tool which allows 'an opportunity to reflect with a knowledgeable research partner on one's own teaching' (Moyle *et al.*, 2003:4). VSRD makes specific reference to the dialogic element of the process that is needed to make this as effective as possible. Through VSRD an experienced coach can skillfully move professional discussion on from initial superficial description (e.g. how a teacher appears on screen) to more perceptive analysis of teaching (e.g. the quality of interaction with learners). So, in the VSRD process lessons are videoed by the teacher who is being observed. This teacher then views the video alone and selects a short episode – maybe only a minute or so in length, to discuss

with their colleague. They maintain ownership of the video, and the choice of the clip to watch with their colleague is theirs. Video allows the teachers the chance to pause, rewind and replay their lesson, and it preserves the verbal and non-verbal elements in an interaction (Quigley and Nyquist, 1992). This helps the teacher look closely at the learners as well as themselves, and can support them in finding elements of their practice they were unaware of. It also means that the observer and the observed are not necessarily both in the class at the same time – which can be beneficial from a logistical perspective. The colleague has an important role in the process – supporting and scaffolding the process of reflecting deeply on the actual events of the lesson. Clearly this involves a level of trust, confidentiality and respect.

The model in action

We worked with groups of experienced and trainee teachers to explore the impact of VSRD. The findings were consistent across all groups, no matter what point in their careers they were. These findings included:

- All individuals agreed that VSRD was a beneficial process, helping them to identify clear aspects of their practice to develop;
- Only a few respondents (8%) felt that the process was too time-consuming to undertake. Nearly half the respondents felt that VSRD was the most useful reflection process they had engaged with;
- Mentors of students felt that the video enhanced their weekly review meetings and encouraged sharing and discussion; and
- All respondents would recommend VSRD to colleagues.

Muir and Beswick's (2007) three levels of reflection – technical, deliberate and critical – provide a useful analytical frame for VSRD. For most teachers, the first reaction to observing their teaching tends to be at a very basic level, such as their appearance. Here is the initial reflection of one teacher we worked with:

'I was not thrilled to think about making a video of my teaching if I am honest. I did spend the first few minutes feeling a bit embarrassed, but I quickly got used to the idea, and the children were completely relaxed about the whole thing. When I watched the video, I was glad the first time I was alone. I could get over myself, you know – my hair, my bum and stuff and then start to actually look at my teaching.'

This is a typical reaction – teachers initially comment on their hair, voice or other physical features. They then moved to more technical reflections on what happened and how 'well' the lesson had gone. It is the role of their colleague to help structure the dialogue to move beyond this to focus on deeper levels of reflection. In our study, all participants moved from technical reflection of general accounts of 'what went well' to deliberate reflection on critical incidents. One trainee teacher noted:



'When I talked to my mentor about the lesson, it was really useful to have a little bit of video to talk about. I didn't use a lot – just a few moments really, but we were able to focus in on them and talk about them. I was looking at my questioning – and we could look at this in a lot more detail because it was there in front of us.'

In many cases, this dialogue supported deeper, critical reflection – where the participants moved beyond the incident to offer suggestions and alternatives. For example, one trainee reflected: *'I began looking beyond what had happened to discuss reasons why James was sat in the corner fiddling with his laces and worked on ways to address these.'*

All of our teachers reported that the video revealed elements of their practice that they would not have reflected on unless they had seen the video. However – they also offered a word of warning as they did feel that it was easier to focus on the aspects that they felt they had not done so well – rather than also talking about their best practice. There is also no doubt that VSRD requires additional time to view the video and to discuss it. It is not a quick tool for reflection – but our studies show that it can support teachers at all levels in their career reflect deeply on their teaching and pupil learning.

Conclusion

This second article shows that reflective practice can be undertaken in many ways. We have particularly discussed the use of peer observation and VSRD because, done well, these enable teachers to peer beyond the superficial features of their practice, to zoom in on the details and ask searching questions so that they gain deep insight.

The problem with the standard image of reflection – the mirror – is that in seeing an image of ourselves, we limit the range of possibilities to transform who we are and who we might become. By looking in the mirror, we can ignore both physical and emotional aspects of ourselves. By looking *beyond* the mirror, however, we can illuminate the unconscious, to describe not only existing appearances but what might be. This requires a supportive school climate and the third article in this series discusses how teachers and leaders can create such an environment.

Helen Lewis is Programme Director for PGCE Primary at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. She is completing a PhD on metacognition in the early years.

Dr Russell Grigg is executive head of research at the Wales Centre for Equity in Education. He has more than 25 years' experience in education, working as a primary teacher, head of school, inspector and teacher educator.

Russell Grigg and Helen Lewis

G.R.Grigg@uwtsd.ac.uk

H.E.Lewis@uwtsd.ac.uk

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Knowledge trails

1. The Welsh Government has provided useful materials on how to develop pupil participation, including a Good Practice Guide, available at:

<http://www.pupilvoicewales.org.uk/uploads/publications/540.pdf>

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IMAGINATIVE MINDS GROUP
TeachingTimes

Is your website effective?

An effective school website ticks all the boxes: it is slick, informative, and serves both the student body and parents. But how exactly does a school achieve it?

Schools are under increasing pressure to ensure their websites adhere to the DfE's most recent requirements. It can be a challenge for already stretched headteachers and school leadership teams, particularly if they are without IT expertise.

Like anything in life though, a website needs to be managed, and it needs to be updated regularly if it is going to be a worthwhile investment.

Since it was amended in 2014, the 'School Information (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012' now states that schools all over the country must have a facility to publish specified content online, meaning schools need to have the staff resource to create and maintain it. Schools without a website are obliged to make the necessary arrangements to acquire one, and schools that have one must ensure it meets these regulations.

As one of the first things that prospective parents see when considering a school for their child, the website plays a crucial role. It needs to make a considerable first, and lasting impression, and hold all the necessary information to help parents make an effective school choice.

And once a child is enrolled at a school, parents are naturally keen to be involved; to be kept up to date, but also to offer support where possible, and the website is the ideal platform for this. School staff can use it to share what they are teaching and how; objectives or goals from the curriculum; details of homework that has been set; important dates, events, and school trips, and tips on how to extend learning at home. It also provides the perfect bridge between school and home, acting as a general communication tool for teachers and parents, essentially creating an interactive platform for the school. It is in essence, the face of the school.

Is it Ofsted-ready?

It is now a well-known fact that Ofsted now looks at a school's website before visiting in person. Before an inspector goes to a school, they will look very closely at the website to check it gives parents all the necessary information about the curriculum. They're also likely to look at how the school communicates with the wider community, and check additional features, like links for the children – making sure that the games are safe, for example.

What should maintained school websites include, according to the DfE?

- The school's contact details
- Admission arrangements
- A copy of, or link to, your most recent Ofsted reports
- Details of exam and assessment results
- A link to the DfE's school performance tables website
- The content of your curriculum
- Your behaviour policy
- Details of how your school spends its pupil premium funding and sports premium
- Your schools' special educational needs (SEN) policy
- A copy of your charging and remissions policies
- Your school values
- A statement of the school's values and ethos

Be creative

The visual appeal of a website is extremely important; it doesn't necessarily need to be technically innovative but you want site visitors to like what they see and find it easy to view and navigate. Think of it as an extension of the school itself, so include your logo, mascot if you have one, and use your school's colours and branding throughout. Inject some personality into it and make your school stand out from the crowd! Photos are a great way to show how much fun your pupils have, anything that helps to capture your school's ethos and shows your facilities can help bring it to life.

Give parents what they want

If used properly, your website can play a vital role in parental engagement and act as the perfect communication tool, so make sure you're providing the information that parents want and need. Be sure to cover all the basics such as term dates, copies of letters and details of school lunches which will save many calls into the school office. Perhaps consider circulating a simple survey to parents asking them to provide feedback on what they'd like to see more or less of on your website. By taking steps like this, they'll feel involved and will hopefully invest more time in using the website.

Keep it updated

The task of updating a website is considered a tedious one by many schools, especially if the system isn't easy to use. It's not uncommon for website content to become out-dated, which doesn't make a good impression, especially when site visitors could of course be parents of prospective pupils. There are systems available, like with PrimarySite, that make updating web content extremely straightforward – as easy as attaching a file to an email in fact.

Also, try to avoid putting all of the responsibility onto one person; remember, many hands make light work! If you've got a website that is easy to update, there's no reason why all members of staff can't update their own content. If you have class pages, for example, make it each individual class teacher's or teaching assistant's responsibility to update their page.



Involve your pupils

It may be that your pupils are too young to update the website themselves, but don't forget there are other ways of getting them involved. Even just by showing them the website and guiding them through it, they'll understand its purpose and hopefully take an interest! Encourage them to show their mums and dads too.

Why not introduce blogs or podcasts to the site as well? They're perfect for involving children, and the feedback we've seen for ourselves suggests that pupils really gravitate towards activities like these. Pupils are now required to create online content as part of the National Curriculum – a blog is the ideal platform for this. Ask your pupils to write a regular blog for the website; it can focus on anything, from what they've done at the weekend to something they've learnt in a particular lesson.

Julie Falkinder is a teacher at Five Lanes Primary School in Leeds, here she talks about her experience of introducing a blog in the school:

"Our school blog has undoubtedly become one of our most powerful student engagement tools to date, however, we did have a few initial concerns around e-safety that needed to be addressed before we made a final decision on whether or not we would incorporate it into our website. Headline statistics on e-safety can keep parents and teachers awake at night. It's no surprise that safeguarding children has been made far more complex by the evolution of technology, and we did question whether introducing another platform for digital interaction was the right decision. However, we were reassured by Ofsted's 2010 report, 'The safe use of technologies' which found that 'pupils who are given greater freedom at school to use new technologies, have a better knowledge and understanding of how to stay safe online.'

In addition, PrimaySite's blogging system has been developed especially for primary schools, so only those with a login can write a blog post, and it is possible to choose whether posts are public or need to be approved by a member of staff. Once it's up on the website, anyone can comment on a post. None of the comments that other pupils, staff or parents leave show up on a blog until they've been approved by me though, so we can rest assured nothing inappropriate is appearing on our website.

We've certainly found that blogging is the ideal way to create online content as part of the new National Curriculum, and I wholeheartedly recommend it to any school looking for ways to meet this new requirement."

Save money

Can any of your current communication channels be transferred online to save time and money? Consider using your website to host an electronic newsletter, for example, and invite parents to sign-up, in place of the paper format. In that scenario, for every

colour copy not being printed, you'll make a cost saving.

A website is the perfect platform for alerting parents to anything that needs instant attention, and saves you printing letters each time. Text messages are great too, but when most schools send a text, it only goes to one parent or guardian – whoever the contact is for a pupil – whereas, everyone can look on the website, such as grandparents. A specific banner section on the website is perfect for these alerts, if you let parents know that they should check there regularly!

If we could offer you one other piece of advice, it would be to ensure your website is compatible with trends in website design and technology too – that way, your website can always be viewed properly by the people searching for you. We thoroughly test our websites in different browsers such as Google Chrome, Internet Explorer and Firefox to ensure the sites are compatible.

All of our websites are also responsively designed as standard so you can rest assured that people viewing on tablets and mobile devices will get the full user experience.



CASE STUDY

Getting your school website Ofsted-ready

Not only is Jane Langley the head teacher at Alwoodley Primary School but she is also an Ofsted inspector, so knows exactly what is required from both points of view. Here she explains how Alwoodley's website is incorporated into daily school life.

Background

When it came to re-launching our website earlier this year, we knew that we needed it to be primary friendly and we wanted to use a small company that would consider our specific needs. We had some idea of how we wanted it to look, and our aim was to use it as a communication tool, for liaising with parents and also to celebrate successes within the school. Based on our brief, the team at PrimarySite showed us some examples, and were able to adapt our ideas using their knowledge and experience of what does and doesn't work.

The Benefits

One of the many benefits of working with a company like PrimarySite is the fact that ongoing changes aren't a problem; we have the opportunity to suggest things, if we'd like something added for example, and they do it. Our account manager always finds a way of doing what we ask, which is impressive given that we do sometimes have some challenging requests!

One of the things we really like about our website is the fact that it's so easy to update. We can delegate updating the content to all teachers, learning support assistants (LSAs) and the secretary. Everybody is in charge of a different area, so our secretary updates the newsletters, staff do their curricular areas, teachers update their year group pages and LSAs upload photos. Because it's so simple to update, lots of people can take ownership of it and it really is no hassle, so it actually gets done!

The feedback we've received from staff has all been extremely positive; they love the fact it's so easy to use, but also that it lets them be creative. If, for instance, one of the teachers wants their year group page to be a bit sparkly, they can do that! Whenever we get requests from other staff, children or parents, we email PrimarySite and they always respond quickly with a suggestion on how we can do it, and they provide really user-friendly instructions on how we can do certain things ourselves.

Building a community

Where the school community is concerned, I would say that the website has drastically improved our engagement with parents, and that is again because it's so easy to update, so everything can go on there. It means that everyone can be involved – if parents have split up for example, or if there's a pupil whose grandparents live in Australia, they can all use the website. We also have Google Translate on the site, which has proved extremely worthwhile, especially as we have a multilingual school body. It enables us to translate key information into a language that they can perhaps read more easily, which comes in really handy.

We've done surveys with parents, specifically about the website, as we want them to be involved, a large part of it is for them after all. They are always extremely positive. When we were re-designing the new website to replace the old one, we did surveys with parents and fed their responses back to PrimarySite, who were excellent in addressing everything that was said and considered what parents wanted from the new design. As an example, lots of parents asked if it was possible for the website to have a search engine, and PrimarySite listened and made it happen!

Cost saving element

In terms of cost savings, we've definitely noticed a difference, particularly due to the communication element. For example, if we have an inset day, I text parents but I also put an alert on the website with information. So it saves us printing letters every time, offering another channel of communication; when we send a text, it only goes to one parent or guardian – whoever we have as the contact for each pupil – whereas, everyone can look on the website, so both mum and dad, for example. We have a banner section on the website that we use for these alerts, and parents are very much on board with that and know to check it!

It's very individual for our school, so we know it doesn't look like anyone else's!

Praise from Ofsted

This is the second website we've had from PrimarySite; we've been with them for around nine years in total and the new one was launched in July this year. We got two 'outstanding' grades from Ofsted with the previous website and were also praised by HMI on how literacy is enhanced by ICT – so three reports praising the website specifically, and three reports where the website has helped us achieve 'outstanding'!

I'm actually an Ofsted inspector myself and I know that a school's website is one of the most important things that an inspector looks at before they visit a school, so it's always been a priority of mine as a head teacher. When I know I'm going to do the inspection of a school, I look very closely at their website to check that it includes all of the information that is required by law – pupil premium details, funding etc. I also look at how the school communicates with parents, and check additional features, like links for the children – making sure that the games are safe, for example.

Geoff Millington is Managing Director of PrimarySite, the UK's leading primary school website provider. For more information, visit: primarysite.net

Jane Langley is an Ofsted Inspector, and headteacher at Alwoodley Primary School.



THINK LIKE A LEARNER!

A new practical guidebook to help children acquire the language, skills and self-awareness of successful learners

This book asks children to involve themselves in key questions about learning and develops their self-awareness as self-critical thinkers and learners. It asks:

- How do we think and talk about learning?
- What is 'bouncebackability' and how do you get it?
- How can we make sure our team learning is high quality?
- How does making choices help us to become more responsible for our own learning?

Ofsted has observed how children 'really enjoyed learning' in a school using the guidebook.

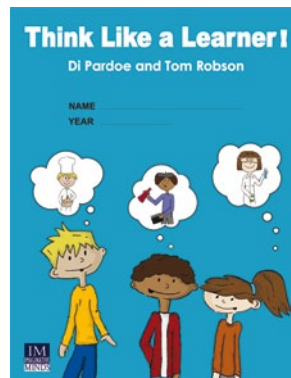
Hundreds of schools and thousands of children have used the questions and ideas from the 'Think Like a Learner' approach and the authors, Diana Pardoe and Tom Robson have now turned them into a workbook for children aged 8-12.

Comments from children:

- We now work harder
- It's good to be in the challenge zone and get out of the comfort zone
- We understand we need to co-operate and know how to do it
- We understand that learning is our responsibility and that we have got to take part

Comments from teachers:

- The children are becoming more divergent thinkers
- They are more in control of their learning. They recognise what makes them successful learners and THEY have the responsibility for learning.
- When faced with difficult tasks the children are more prepared to have a go and to take a risk
- Improved communication skills
- Raised self-esteem



Help your children make the transition to secondary school with **Think Like a Learner**

Carol Dweck has shown how important children's self-concept as learners is to their performance, no matter what their ability and Bob Burden's *Myself As a Learner Scale (MALS)* suggests how children's self-concept as learners can grow when taking responsibility for assessing their own work. A child's ability to reflect on their own thinking is now recognised as critical to them becoming resilient and successful learners.



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Making assemblies count

Headteacher **Will Ryan** explores how to make sure you can inform, deliver and guarantee pupil engagement through assembly.

It was on the day the population passed seven billion the idea of the book *Twenty First Century Assembly and Classroom Activities* became a firm idea in my mind. Like many people I paused to consider how the earth could possibly support such a population. Even more frightening was the fact that the population would rise to eight billion by 2025. However, that wasn't the only event that day that triggered the thought processes behind the book.

The second event came later the same evening I was walking through the streets of Nottingham on the way to the theatre. Ahead of me was a *Big Issue* seller, a lady wrapped in several layers of warm clothing to keep out the December chill. She was politely trying to sell her wares. Like all *Big Issue* street vendors she was wearing a luminous, bright, high visibility jacket. These are worn for protection. Frighteningly in

twenty first century Britain a *Big Issue* seller has a one in three chance of being mugged for the small amount of cash they may hold. I didn't necessarily see this elderly lady being robbed, but I did witness her being attacked. A group of half a dozen teenage girls walked towards her chanting, "Scrounger, Scrounger Scrounger!" They then grabbed the magazines from her hands and tossed them on to the floor in a crumpled heap. They moved on into the distance shrieking and laughing whilst the lady sat on a nearby wall weeping and uttering the words, 'I am not a scrounger, I am not a scrounger', and of course she wasn't, because anybody who was more enlightened about how the *Big Issue* works would know that she was being trained to be an entrepreneur. The philosophy of the organisation is to 'offer a hand up not a hand out'. This was the second event which triggered the book.

I read that the current generation passing through our schools is referred to as Generation Z. The eras of the Baby Boomers, Yuppies and Millennials are behind us. The young people passing through our schools today recognise the significant challenges the world faces. They see so-called leaders who have created political and financial turmoil. Acts of violence and terrorism seem to be broadcast daily. Youngsters see their parents' generation as the first who grew up as latchkey kids, and then became adults who were saddled with debt. As a consequence they work excessively long hours and



So how do we as teachers help Generation Z to change the world? I have long promoted a curriculum model that is partially based on children imagining what a better world might look like. Many would argue that the curriculum is already overcrowded and there is little room for anything to be added. As an educational consultant I have long been less interested in what you teach but how you teach it. For example the Human Geography section of the National Curriculum pays scant regard to humans or the challenges associated with growing up in rapidly changing communities. Some teachers will help pupils to have a clear set of notes in their exercise books about how certain villages developed in a ribbon like manner alongside roads whilst other teachers will bring the human element of the subject to life by exploring the richness and diversity of modern Britain.

The teachers who do this create young people with the five minds they will need for the future. Firstly they develop youngsters with a disciplined mind that holds key knowledge and skills. Secondly the pupils and students will have a synthesising mind that sees the links between subjects. The third mind being developed is creative, as it constantly asks questions and seeks solutions. Fourthly learners develop a respectful mind, which allows them to celebrate the diversity of other people and cultures and finally there is an ethical mind that allows a person to behave responsibly.

The curriculum could be overcrowded (though I am not totally convinced by the argument). However as an experienced school improvement professional I believe that there is one key element of the school day that could be used to create greater impact. Far more could be made of school assemblies, and all the suggestions that follow also refer to the use of Philosophy for Children in the Classroom.

Way back in time when I was on an interview for a deputy headship I was asked the following question. "A hymn, a prayer, and a telling off. Is this an accurate description of a school assembly?" The question threw me but made me think. Just consider the mathematics of assemblies. If an assembly lasts for 20 minutes daily and there are 38 weeks in a school year then it equates to 63 hours of children sitting in assembly each year. As a minimum that would be 29 days of a young person's life sitting in assemblies.

Now that could be a heck of a lot of hymns, prayers and telling offs, but equally it could be a time to imagine what a better world might look like and for a young person to contribute something to the other seven billion people on the planet. Surely a key message has to be that there is more in this life that unites us than divides us.

With this in mind I started to develop new materials and approaches to assemblies. The resources created could be used equally well with a class or smaller group of young people. The materials are divided into three key areas: how we can create a better world, a better nation and a better local community. Key themes have been devised for children to explore under each heading. These include issues such as global warming, pollution, child slavery, sweat shops, the need to recycle, what makes a great leader or a great community. Where an idea has a link to a particular faith attention is placed on looking at the similarities that exist across the range of religions. Each theme is introduced through a powerful visual image and the book *Twenty First Century Assembly and Classroom Activities* is blessed with a range of stunning photographs supplied by the talented photographer, Jane Hewitt. Each photograph is available on a CD-ROM so it can be projected on to a larger screen. The visual images are a significant part of the approaches promoted. Our eyes are our windows on the world, and what they see can trigger an emotional response. By doing this we engage the heart first which then increases the brain's capacity to process information.

The next key feature is the use of new technologies. The young people that make up Generation Z are sometimes referred to as 'screenagers'; they see information as something they can glean as and when necessary at great speed. The teacher is not the font of all knowledge to the youngsters of today. Whilst it is the laptop, tablet and mobile phone that provide huge amounts of information it is important that teachers still provide some knowledge and teach skills. However, it is even more important that the teacher should provide the inspiration which in turn allows the children to make an inspirational response.

So, what if you now put the two elements together. There can be great merit in having a team of six or so experts seeking out additional information about the area being explored using technology as the activity or assembly unfolds. I have used an image and the story of my *Big Issue* seller on occasions with primary aged pupils in school settings. The team of experts, armed with tablets or laptops, have collected information and told me within minutes that:

- The *Big Issue* supports the homeless or vulnerably housed.
- It was devised by Gordon Roddick (of Body Shop fame) and John Bird who in the past was homeless.



- The youngsters in the team of experts quickly add that:
- There are over 2,000 vendors in the United Kingdom and
- That 90% of vendors are men. In Britain today many families are just three pay-cheques away from being homeless.
- The concept of the magazine has now spread to five continents.
- The magazines are purchased by the sellers for £1.25 and sold for £2.50. Then, of course, there is the startling fact the vendors who are well trained in how to deal with their potential customers still stand a 1:3 chance of being attacked.

The youngsters working as the team of experts may need some help in accessing the additional information in the early days, but they quickly adapt and become proficient within the strategy. Whilst this is going on the teacher provides the rest of the children with the relevant information. Within my book this is often achieved through a story that captures the key messages. If you are wondering why the stories are so important in the process you may wish to consider the words of Robert McKee and Patti Davis, 'Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience. They are the currency of human contact. Every story-teller knows that they are a teacher.'



So far so good! However, little impact has been created, nor can we be sure that lasting learning has taken place. The next part of the activity/assembly seeks to address this, and it is achieved by turning the youngsters into storytellers. Ernest Hemmingway argued that the smallest number of words you could tell a story in was six. His most powerful and moving six-word story was; "For sale, baby shoes, never worn." Six-word stories can be really powerful. Many of the world's most famous businesses use six-words stories for advertising purposes. For example, Calvin Klein proudly declare that, "Between love and madness lies Obsession." However my favourite is: "More experience than our name suggests," as claimed by Virgin Atlantic. Towards the end of the assembly ask the young people present to sum up the key message in just six powerful words. They must not just be bland words, but six words that make the hairs tingle on the back of your neck. This makes the activity or assembly a language-rich experience.

The six-word story is a technique that can lead to a really powerful plenary in any lesson. It also promotes the key skill that I believe our most inspirational teachers possess. I don't believe that these people are necessarily larger than life charismatic figures that bound around all over the place. I think that they promote a culture, which allows the children to rise up and give an inspirational response.

If the materials and approach are being used as part of assembly you may choose to conclude with a hymn or prayer, but definitely not a telling off or news of the football

team's last match. You could consider how the content relates to any positive school rules you possess but never ever let the key message be lost amongst whole school notices.

In 2011 I wrote a book entitled *Inspirational Teachers Inspirational Learners* which was based on spending the best part of 40 years going into some of the best classrooms in the nation. I argued that in our truly great classrooms there are four things that happen in abundance:

Firstly, the youngsters are asked to think and think hard. Their teacher knows that the brain functions like a muscle and if it doesn't get exercised it stops working effectively. In the best classrooms there can be a smell of burning because the brains are working that hard. A key feature of the inspirational classroom is that the children think in geography, history, mathematics and all the subjects of the curriculum, but they also think about how they can be good citizens who contribute positively both today and in the future.

- Secondly, the youngsters use their natural enterprise skills to seek solutions. Whilst this could include running mini businesses to raise funds for a worthy cause it could also include children making their own films or presentations that raise awareness or seek solutions.
- Thirdly, the young people experience literacy, story telling and the arts in a meaningful manner. Making a story come to life is the supreme of a great teacher.
- Finally, the young people experience a sense of awe, wonder and spirituality in its broadest context. Maybe this even creates a sense of wisdom which was once defined as, "knowing what to do when you don't know what to do".

I believe that the approach I promote packs all four elements of the best lessons into that 20 minute assembly.

However, the book *Twenty First Century and Classroom Activities* has one further advantage. Each assembly or topic is presented at three levels. The first of these, the three star assembly, is for those occasions when you have just a few minutes to plan and deliver a meaningful assembly. The second level, the four star assembly, is when greater planning time is available and therefore there is the opportunity to involve pupils or use additional resources. The final level, the five star assembly, is for those occasions when you genuinely seek to create the Rolls Royce, high impact, learning experience. Maybe it's for those occasions when the inspectors are sat there with their clipboards.

I hope you like the ideas and approaches suggested and will consider a longer look at the book, which is aimed at putting pupil creativity and involvement at the heart of school assemblies and turning the young people into superheroes with the capacity to change the world

Will Ryan has worked in schools in Rotherham, South Yorkshire for over 30 years as a teacher, headteacher and Local Authority Adviser. As a headteacher, he led a school that prized itself on genuine pupil creativity and was described by Ofsted as 'outstanding'. He is a speaker and associate of Independent Thinking Ltd. His book, *Twenty-First Century School Assembly And Classroom Activities*, is available from Crownhouse Publishing.



The Great Leap Forward

Facing the unfamiliar can be very traumatic and damaging to a child's academic performance. **Mark Bowles**, Director of The Training Effect outlines a new approach.

Graduating from primary school is a challenge for most children, but Risk-Avert Primary is a new approach to educating Year 6 pupils about risk-taking and coping with the transition from primary school to secondary school. It is an extension of the existing Risk-Avert programme, developed by The

Training Effect (TTE) in partnership with Essex County Council and delivered to Year 8 pupils in more than 70 schools in seven local authority areas across the UK.

The primary programme has been piloted over the last year in schools across Kent, Medway, Essex, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire.

Mark Bowles, Director of TTE and pioneer of the scheme, explains the complexities of teaching primary school children about sensitive subjects, some of the key themes the pilot has highlighted, and tips for Year 6 teachers on how to broach risk-taking and behavioural issues with their pupils.

Transitioning from primary school to secondary school is a huge step for any child and often this experience will stay with them for life – whether positive or negative.

Most children cope and feel comfortable in their new environment, adjusting well within the first couple of terms. However, others need more time to adapt and feel at ease with the pressures of a new timetable, teachers and peer groups.

The broad age range and vastly different behaviours observed within secondary school populations can also be problematic. An 11 year old child in Year 7 obviously has very different life experience and behavioural drivers to a 16 year old in Year 11. These differences can also mean that young people may be introduced to risk-taking behaviours such as smoking, alcohol and drugs for the first time by their older peers.



Whilst most children will have received PSHE lessons related to these behaviours whilst in primary school, many may still be unprepared for the transition from childhood to adolescence and the inevitable challenges this brings.

If the correct foundations are laid before transition from primary to secondary school takes place to prepare the child, they'll be more likely to employ coping mechanisms and develop resilience to deal with difficult situations that they may face.

In most primary schools, and indeed secondary schools, risk-taking is often tackled using the 'information deficit' approach; namely that the reason why children and young people engage in behaviours which are potentially harmful to their health and well-being is due to them not having enough knowledge about the behaviour, its effects and risks. This supposition is flawed, however, as most children have good (albeit basic) knowledge that certain behaviours are dangerous or harmful. The reasons they may still engage are not due to a lack of information, but rather other drivers and factors that motivate them, such as family, peers or societal influences.

It is clear that the majority of primary aged pupils aren't engaging in risk-taking behaviours. Rates of smoking, alcohol and drug use in primary schools have been widely reported in the UK but the reality behind the headlines is that many children leave primary school without participating in any of these activities.

However early risk-taking seems to be focused on social media and the use of the internet rather than the 'traditional' behaviours of the past. Whilst children in primary school receive a decent level of education about internet safety, these lessons don't always focus on the additional reasons why, even when a young person may know the risks, they may engage in the behaviour anyway. Clearly the information deficit model is itself deficient as a means to explaining young people's continued risk-taking behaviour in spite of the evidence they are presented with.

It is these types of situations which led to the development of the Risk-Avert Primary programme.

What is Risk-Avert Primary?

Risk-Avert Primary is an early intervention programme aimed at primary school pupils in Year 6. Indeed, Year 6 was selected as the right primary age group to target as it allows a focus on pupils' transition to secondary school. It also reflects their increased likelihood of access to social media and wider, unrestricted use of the internet. We found that 61 per cent of pupils in this age range reported they had used the internet without an adult present and 76 per cent of children in Year 6 reported having a mobile phone.

Risk-Avert Primary addresses early risk-taking and provides the first stage in a spiral curriculum which develops alongside the child throughout their school careers.

The programme provides the following to participating schools:

- Anonymous survey completed by Year 6 pupils – this survey focuses on the children's experiences of using the Internet and their opinions on the behaviours of Year 8 pupils in schools.
- Life Skills Sessions – a four-session programme is delivered to young people in Year 6. This is focused on practical life skills acquisition that can help children navigate risky situations and make positive choices.
- PSHE Resources – schools are also provided with a range of PSHE resources which can help supplement their existing provision. All of these sessions share the common ethos and approach of the Risk-Avert Primary programme.



TTE's survey enables us to not just collect data related to the behaviour of the participating children but also promote positive social norms. Our survey consistently demonstrates a discrepancy between the beliefs of Year 6 pupils related to the behaviour of Year 8 pupils. Put simply, Year 6 pupils believe their older peers are engaging in risk-taking at far higher rates than they actually are. A key outcome of the project is to provide normative data to students, which they can relate to in order to help prepare them for their transition to secondary school.

Like the original programme, Risk-Avert Primary provides practical steps for children in primary school which will help them identify and manage risky scenarios



they may find themselves in as they grow up, as well as know how to recognise personal 'safe' and 'unsafe' feelings. Topics that form part of the scheme include bullying, smoking, road safety, social media presence and sharing information online.

The outcomes of the programme for primary school pupils include:

- Increasing resilience by giving skills and strategies to children to make them more able to face life's challenges.
- Helping young people to recognise and understand risky situations and behaviour and improve decision-making.
- Enabling pupils to stay safe and recognise their personal 'unsafe' feelings and teaching them strategies on how to deal with them.

The success of the Risk-Avert programme has shown us a great deal about how much young people value learning about managing risk. Targeting a younger age group allows pupils who participate in the programme to become much more confident and encourages them to consider risk with a greater knowledge and understanding of the potential consequences.

Results from the participating pilot schools were encouraging with the anticipated discrepancies between belief and actual behaviour observed in the participating children.

We found that whilst 97 per cent of primary school pupils reported they knew how to stay safe online, 79 per cent of them gave out personal information over the internet when requested. This personal information question was chosen by the school, with options including the name of the road they lived on, their shoe size or their favourite food.

This finding was crucial as it demonstrates the underlying approach and ethos of Risk-Avert. Even when pupils have the required information they may still engage in risky behaviours due to other factors.

It is clear from the pilot that primary aged children are already using the internet without adult supervision and whilst most understand that they should not share personal information online, the reality is that many still do regardless.

Work in schools should be focused on what additional factors may influence the decision-making of children, moving the emphasis away from the risks and outcomes of the behaviour. Instead, strategies should explore the underlying factors of pressures that may lead pupils to take risks, in spite of their knowledge and understanding of the potential harmful outcomes.

Following the successful pilot, the programme is now available in primary schools nationwide. For more information please visit www.risk-avert-primary.org

Mark Bowles is the Director of The Training Effect. He has worked extensively in the public sector as a practitioner, manager and commissioner. Mark's work focuses on drugs, alcohol, risktaking behaviour, families with complex needs, emotional health and well-being.

Formative Assessment **must start early!**

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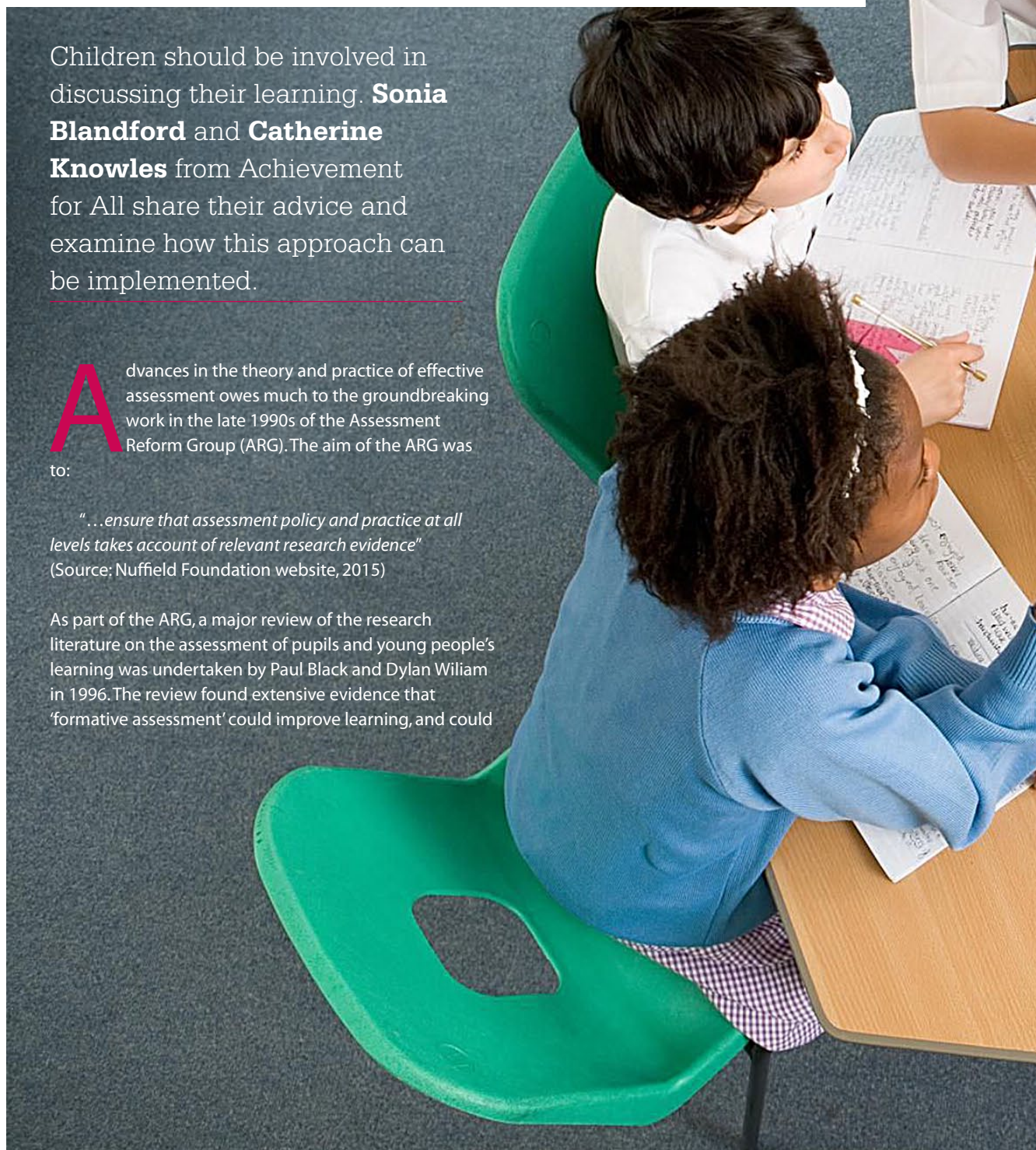
Children should be involved in discussing their learning. **Sonia Blandford** and **Catherine Knowles** from Achievement for All share their advice and examine how this approach can be implemented.

Advances in the theory and practice of effective assessment owes much to the groundbreaking work in the late 1990s of the Assessment Reform Group (ARG). The aim of the ARG was to:

"...ensure that assessment policy and practice at all levels takes account of relevant research evidence"

(Source: Nuffield Foundation website, 2015)

As part of the ARG, a major review of the research literature on the assessment of pupils and young people's learning was undertaken by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam in 1996. The review found extensive evidence that 'formative assessment' could improve learning, and could





deepen pupils and young peoples' learning and achievement. Their research led to the development of a framework which they called *Assessment for Learning*. It is based on the following 10 principles which they identified as being key in effective assessment: 'helps learners know how to improve, engages children in self-assessment, is central to effective planning, addresses how children learn, is crucial to classroom practice, is a professional skill, is sensitive and constructive, fosters motivation, promotes understanding of objectives, and recognises educational achievement' (adapted from ARG 2002). The theoretical framework of *Assessment for Learning*, based on the key principles, was often seen as cumbersome in practice; consequently *Assessment for Learning* has not been widely adopted in its entirety. However, evidence-based research exploring aspects of *Assessment for Learning* highlights the effectiveness of its various constituent parts as tools for improving children's attainment (Gipps et al. 2000; Sebba and Deakin Crick 2005).

In practice, early years settings and schools employ many of these principles in their assessment of children. Based on the work of the Assessment Reform Group and their delineation of *Assessment For Learning*, effective assessment means, as far as is possible, children and practitioners working together to identify, “*where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there*” (ARG, 2002).

In recent years government education policy has focused on giving children a ‘voice’ in their learning and development; that is, teachers and practitioners enabling children to share their views on matters affecting them. This article will consider those aspects of *Assessment for Learning* which enable children to be involved in discussing their learning, their self-assessment and planning their next steps; and consider how this approach can be implemented and developed in practice. Before you read the article consider, through the following activity, what assessment means to you:

Professional Development Task: What does assessment mean to you?

Enabling babies, toddlers and young children to develop a positive self-image and positive feelings for or dispositions to learning, calls for constructive sensitivity to assessment on the part of the early years practitioner.

The ARG 2002 suggests that comments which *focus on the work rather than the person are more constructive for both learning and motivation*.

To consider how this can be put into practice the following case study has been adapted from a training course provided for early years practitioners by Mary Jane Drummond (2003:159-161), a Lecturer at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. She employed an activity called *Judge and Jury* from *Making Assessment Work*, a set of activities originally developed by Drummond, Rouse and Pugh (1992):

In the following activity, early years educators *explored the distance in terms of power between the assessor and the assessed, and the rights and responsibilities associated with this relationship. The crude analogy, suggested by the title of the activity, ...can be justified as a reminder of the relative powerlessness both of the prisoner in the dock and of children in schools and classrooms.*

Judge and Jury

1. When I am assessing a child's learning, I feel....
2. When I write something down about a child, I feel....
3. When I think my judgements can help a child, I feel....
4. If I thought my judgements could harm a child, I would feel....
5. The word 'power' makes me think of....
6. As an early years educator/as a teacher, I have a responsibility to...
7. This responsibility makes me feel...
8. As an early years educator/as a teacher, I have the right to....
9. This right makes me feel....
10. I do not have the right to....
11. Children are powerful when....
12. Children have the right to...
13. If I knew what a difference my assessments might make in 20 years' time, I...
14. The best way to describe my relationship with the young children I work with is...

In the analysis of over 150 responses *a number clustered around the idea of a benevolent, enabling teacher, for example responses referred to the responsibility to reassure, nurture, encourage, care, provide for, reinforce, support and enable children. A smaller number of more emphatic replies refer to the responsibility to empower, enhance, stimulate, stretch and 'open doors'.*

Activity

How would you respond to each of these statements? (if you have not had experience of practice, there may be some questions that you will want to leave out).



Policy to Practice

It is now widely acknowledged and strongly endorsed by current government policy that the early years of education are critical for the development of “...the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life” (DfE 2014: 5). In practice, this means that the learning and development of the child is based on meeting their individual needs through ongoing observation and assessment (DfE 2014: 13). Ongoing assessment is also known as ‘formative assessment’. Formative assessment informs a continuous process of observation, feedback, evaluation and progress. Formative assessment informs teaching and learning; and should be central to day-to-day practice in settings and schools. The following are the two principle types of assessment used in settings and schools:

Formative Assessment – “assessment carried out during the instructional process for the purpose of improving teaching or learning.” (Shepard et al., 2005: 275)

Summative Assessment – “Summative assessment sums up what a pupil has achieved at the end of a period of time, relative to the learning aims and the relevant national standards ... There may be an assessment at the end of a topic, at the end of a term or half-term, at the end of a year ... A summative assessment may be a written test, an observation, a conversation or a task.” (NFER: 2007: 1)

Professional Learning Task:

Reflect on what you understand by Formative and Summative assessment. How would you go about implementing effective formative assessment in your daily practice? You can review this at the end of the article.

Being aware of how children learn and, more importantly, the learning needs of the individual children within your setting, will enable you to effectively integrate and manage the formative assessment process. Effective assessment involves the gathering and analysis of the evidence of children’s learning, and allowing time to reflect on how you will use this evidence to develop children’s learning priorities and/or targets and how you might involve them in the process.

It should be remembered that the approach to assessing young children can be different to that of assessing older children. The nature of teaching and learning in early



Talking to children: understanding of learning is a two – way process

The Assessment Reform Group (2002) emphasised the need for the understanding of learning to be a two-way process, where learners are made aware of how and why they are learning. This is supported by Overall and Sangster (2006:66) who refer to the centrality of the “*internal dialogue*”, which they define as “*talking within the head*” in the learning process. They propose paired or small group work as a natural means of enabling children to become aware of the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of learning. They further suggest that the interaction of the practitioner with the young learner in explaining how to carry out a particular task or getting them to talk “*about what they know*” or how they know if they have completed a task “*well or badly*” provide a natural means of enabling the child to become aware of the learning process. In addition, it provides a means of integrating children’s self-assessment into practice. There is also much to be gained by thinking out aloud and planning this with the children in your care.

Involving children in self-assessment and discussion of their learning.

Providing children with the opportunity to discuss their work provides a means of effectively re-channelling their thinking. To be of benefit, discussion needs to be given careful thought and consideration.

Black and Wiliam (1998:11) highlighted the benefits for children, in terms of *improved knowledge and understanding*, when they have the opportunity to discuss their work with practitioners. This can be done both formally and informally and provides a means of appropriately re-channelling children’s thinking. Often, this will be questioning children about their work. To be of benefit, it needs to be given careful thought. The following has been adapted from Black and Wiliam (1998:11-12) and provides a good framework for considering how to use questioning effectively:

- Give children *time to respond to questions* (reflection time)
- Let children *discuss their thinking in pairs* before one of the “pair” reports back (discussion time)
- Give children a choice of answers and let them *vote* on the correct response (consideration time).
- *Good questions are hard to generate and practitioners should collaborate, and draw-critically-on outside sources, to collect such questions (Development time - it is good to write possible ways of both asking children questions and answering children’s questions into short term plans).*

Good questioning is founded on the idea of teaching for independent learning. Practitioner questions should challenge and encourage children in their learning and wider development. Questioning should provide opportunity for the children to start taking responsibility for their own learning, opening channels for thinking, creativity, problem-solving and decision making. Black and Wiliam (1998:11) in their study of assessment highlighted the following: “....there are clearly- recorded examples of such discussions (teacher-child) where teachers have, quite unconsciously, responded in ways that would inhibit the future learning of a pupil. What the examples have in common is that the practitioner is looking for a particular response and lacks the flexibility or the confidence to deal with the unexpected”.

Professional Learning Task

Consider as many ways as possible of asking children questions or providing direction. Which approaches promote and enhance independent learning?

The routine, daily interaction of the early years practitioner with the child provides many opportunities for questioning in class room and whole-setting practice. For example, during the course of carrying out a particular activity a child may ask a question, directed at one of his/her peers or at the educator. The educator may respond directly, if this is appropriate, or respond with another question to draw out and spur a deeper thought process in the child. Alternatively the child’s question may initiate a related (or unrelated but productive) discussion between children. In both cases the child will be demonstrating and exploring his or hers knowledge, skills or understanding.

Effective Formative Assessment needs to be constructive. It should motivate children, encourage them, and move them towards self-mastery of skills and knowledge. It is important to remember that children’s confidence develops progressively step-by-step and is powered by their successes - recall the adage of “*success breeds success*”. This goal is best achieved by focussing on the individual child; their achievements and their continuing progress, this way practitioners can also provide opportunities for the child to self-assess. Whilst formative assessment necessarily needs to have a corrective aspect, failure should not be the focus of feedback, nor should practitioners compare a child’s achievement with that of their peers.

Motivational feedback (which focuses on progress and success) is central to effective formative assessment and is closely linked to enabling and equipping children to be ready, willing and able to learn in early years settings and their ongoing education. Margaret Carr (2001: 23), who has considered assessment in the early years through stories and also a writer of fiction, delineates these dispositions within the following context: “...*being ready is about seeing the self as a participating learner, being willing is recognising that this place is (or is not) a place for learning, and being able is having the abilities and funds of knowledge that will contribute to being ready and being willing*”.

Professional Learning Task: Being ready willing and able to learn

Reflect on the ways you could help a three year old child who has just started following the Early Years Foundation Stage to be *ready, willing and able* to learn.

In Key Stage 1, constructive marking and feedback, if used appropriately by teachers and other professionals, are powerful tools for enabling children to take co-ownership of their work and move towards self-motivated learning and improvement. This has three core elements:

1. The child is fully aware of their learning objectives
2. The child is made aware of the extent to which the learning objectives have been achieved
3. The child knows how to go about achieving the shortfall in the learning objectives.

For young children however, feedback is usually given by practitioners on a moment to moment basis - maybe orally or by the use of coloured stickers which young children can stick on their clothes or hands. Written feedback is less likely to be employed, or understood. For children at Key Stage 1, teachers will probably give feedback both orally and through written comment, with oral feedback providing greater opportunity for a child's self-assessment. Written comments can be time-consuming for the teacher and careful thought needs to be given to the purpose of this feedback. Teacher feedback is only constructive when children are empowered and enabled to and act upon it. Shirley Clarke (1998:70), suggests that effective feedback (at Key Stage 1 and beyond) needs:

- To be based on clear learning intentions
- To take account of pupil self-evaluation
- To highlight where success occurred and where improvement could take place
- To be in a form which is accessible to the learner
- To give strategies for improvement
- Allocated time in which to take place or be read
- Some focussed improvement, based on the feedback to take place

Involving children in planning their next steps

There is the expectation that practitioners, by making children fully aware of the learning objectives and outcomes of a particular activity/lesson and involving them in planning their next steps will enhance their learning. In practice how can this be achieved? Clarke (2002) suggests "*balancing the curriculum*" to cover both the teaching of skills, concepts and knowledge and their application, and "*sharing unit coverage throughout lessons and separating learning objectives from the context of learning*" will help children to be more aware of the goals on which they need to focus and develop. Every child is unique and the extent to which that child has achieved the expected outcomes will determine the next steps in his/her learning. For younger children, the following, adapted from an interview with the head of a school based early years setting highlights how feedback to children (3-5 year olds) can be used to involve children in this process:

Case Study

A lot (of feedback) is immediate. This age group needs immediate feedback- so for example we might say such things as- is that what you expected? Or could that have been done differently? Feedback needs to happen there and then.

So it's making use of opportunities as they arise. It's facilitating children to make choices and give reasons why. Staff planning is responding to children's needs as they see them.



Professional Learning Task

Do you think this is a good example of effective feedback to children? Why or why not? Make a list of all the ways you could give constructive feedback to children (particularly consider the needs and abilities of 3-5 year olds).

Essentially, involving children in the planning of their learning helps children to take ownership of their progress and achievements. For the early years practitioner, this will involve guiding children in their decision making: but this is guided choice, and not necessarily free choice. Child-initiated activities will lend themselves more easily to this type of child involvement than adult-led activities. However, there are always opportunities to involve children in discussing “what comes next?”

The responsibility is with the practitioner to consider how ‘next steps’ can be effectively implemented (for example, through constructive questioning or inclusive dialogue). For child-initiated activities, allowing time for the children to plan and discuss their activity in advance will bring greater clarity to the childrens’ thought process and will provide further opportunity for stimulating ideas. There will be children who do not want to plan – these children should be allowed and supported to get on with the task in hand. For example, the High/Scope curriculum is founded on this type of activity.



Conclusion

When careful consideration is given to the implementation and development of effective assessment processes, they can enhance children’s learning experiences and lead to improved outcomes. Aspects of *Assessment for Learning*, provide a means of involving children in that process, enabling them to be ready, willing and able to learn.

This article has been adapted from Blandford, S. and Knowles, C. (forthcoming) (2nd ed.) Developing Professional Practice 0-7, Abingdon: Routledge

Sonia Blandford is Founder and CEO of Achievement for All and one of the UK’s leading practitioners of education. She is the editor for Every Child Journal, another of our publications.

Catherine Knowles is the research and data manager at Achievement for All. Prior to this she worked as a researcher at the University of Greenwich and Canterbury Christ Church University.

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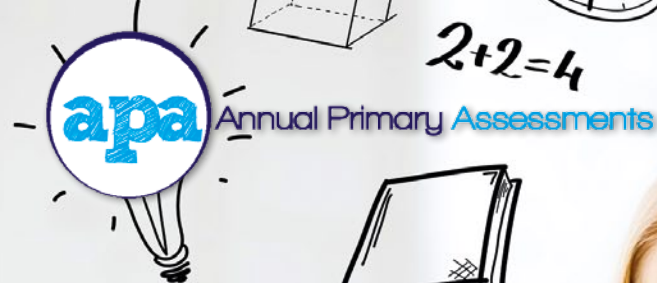
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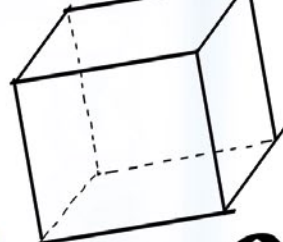


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