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Issue: 18.3

Effective Professional Learning

Qing Gu investigates the impact of Teaching School Alliances

Sonia Blandford explores what can be done to reach disaffected learners

Lindsay Palmer and Nicola Theobald provide the HOW TO guide to enquiry-based professional learning

Philippa Cordingley sets out the evidence for effective professional development and learning

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

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Effective professional learning

Graham Handscomb reflects on the range of ingredients that comprise effective professional learning.

Connected learning

What enables teachers to give of their best to pupils? What contributes to great teaching? How can teachers make the most difference to student learning and outcomes? What professional learning enables teachers to improve? What professional development is most effective? These are perhaps the most prescient issues currently facing the teaching profession. The assumption which underpins, and to a great extent connects, these questions is that the professional learning of teachers on the one hand and the learning and outcomes of the pupils they teach on the other, are intimately interrelated.

This was the clear message emerging from the major synthesis of evidence into *Teacher Professional Learning and Development* conducted by Helen Timperley and colleagues (2007). In constructing their "teacher knowledge building cycle" they concluded that: "Many factors influence student learning, but it is increasingly clear that what teachers know and are able to do is one of the most important of all." Indeed the Timperley *Best Evidence Synthesis* came to see "that what goes on in the black box of teacher learning is fundamentally similar to student learning." This integral link between teacher and student learning is also the basis of the recent Sutton Trust report on *Developing Teachers* (2015), and of the review carried out by Coe and colleagues (2014) into *What makes great teaching*. Here we gain some important insights into what might be the essential ingredients of effective professional learning:

Sustained professional learning is most likely to result when:

- *the focus is kept clearly on improving student outcomes;*
- *feedback is related to clear, specific and challenging goals for the recipient;*
- *attention is on the learning rather than to the person or to comparisons with others;*
- *teachers are encouraged to be continual independent learners;*
- *feedback is mediated by a mentor in an environment of trust and support;*
- *an environment of professional learning and support is promoted by the school's leadership.*

(Coe, Aloisi, Higgins and Elliot Major, 2014)

Collaborative contribution

This pursuit of what constitutes effective professional learning is reflected in the range of contributions to this issue of *Professional Development Today*. One of the clear expectations of Teaching Schools is that they be a means of providing effective professional development and a vehicle for improving schools. In the first article Qing Gu gives a detailed account of large scale research into the impact of Teaching Schools and their Alliances (TSAs). The evaluation was carried out on behalf of the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) by a team from the ISOS Partnership and Universities of Nottingham Trent, Oxford and Manchester. Twenty-six TSAs were visited and over three hundred of the first three cohorts were surveyed.

The overall picture that arises from the investigation is pretty positive: "Teaching Schools and their alliances have made a significant contribution to the sharing of good practice among schools and to enhancing the professional practice of many teachers and school leaders within and beyond alliance partnerships." A number of significant features make up this portrayal. This includes the TSAs' provision of a continuum of bespoke professional development from new entrants to teaching through to leadership development. They are seen as "a vehicle for professional relationships across a range of settings and as having opened doors to further development and improvement opportunities" and the Teaching School model is judged to have "an important role to play in driving forward a school-led 'self-improving' system."

The article also reports on the importance of these groupings needing to connect and contribute to each other and to schools beyond their alliance. Although there are signs of such reaching out, it is significant that "collaboration between TSAs and with other schools and school networks in an area can be triggered more by LA activity than by TSA activity." Other challenges facing the future development of TSAs are issues of resourcing, stabilising relationships

with higher education partners and addressing the lack of clarity as to how Teaching Schools and their alliances are to be judged as effective. If Teaching Schools are to be a fundamental feature of the educational infrastructure then there is "a widely perceived need to join up relationships, resources and capacity to produce a coherent and systemic approach to school-to-school support."

Empowering teachers and reaching the disaffected

In her article Sonia Blandford is keen to explore the professional learning and growth needed to make a difference to the many children who have become disaffected with education and switched-off learning. Professional learning that has been shown to be effective has drawn on the *Achievement for All* approach which "aims to transform the lives of those vulnerable or disadvantaged students by raising educational aspiration, access and achievement." In common with the messages in other articles, there is an emphasis on empowering teachers in their own development as continuing leaners, "buying into their personal and professional aims and their aspirations for their pupils."

Effective enquiry

In Qing Gu's account of the impact of Teaching Schools she reported that a culture of research and development was beginning to emerge and develop in most TSAs. This is certainly the case in The Mead Teaching School Alliance which is the source of the contributions to our HOW TO section. Lindsay Palmer and Nicola Theobald describe how The Mead Primary School and its alliance sought to make school-based research the key foundation for its whole approach to professional learning. In doing so they provide readers with a guide on how to establish an R&D culture; how to use a model of Learning Sets to promote teacher research; how to integrate practitioner enquiry with performance management; and how to grow leadership capacity for research engagement.

Expertise in professional learning

A good deal of understanding into what effective professional learning looks like is gained from Philippa Cordingley's article. She describes the analysis of systematic reviews of research by her organisation CUREE which examined support for professional learning and the follow up activities initiated and sustained by teachers. The review confirmed many elements we know to be part of effective practice such as the importance of sustaining professional learning over time; the need for teachers to organise and test their own learning through the lens of their aspirations for their pupils; and developing an underpinning rationale about why approaches do and don't work in different contexts. There were also a number of new insights gained; these included recognising that no single element worked on its own; developing assessment for learning (AfL) strategies; and facilitators having expertise in teacher professional learning.

The article draws on specific research carried out in twenty eighty schools gathering data through interviews, focus groups and surveys. The findings from this emphasis the crucial importance of "differentiating support for CPD and involving teachers and CPD facilitators in building coherent and personalised sequences of professional learning." They also stress another fundamental issue. If we are to take professional learning of teachers seriously then there is a need to invest in evaluating systematically the depth of expertise of those who facilitate the professional learning of their colleagues.

External involvement

One of the key issues identified by Cordingley in the CUREE research and review of evidence was the significance of "contributions from experts who are sufficiently external to the day to day working context to be in a position to challenge orthodoxies supportively." A potentially negative consequence of the otherwise welcome focus in recent times on school-led and school-focussed professional development has been a tentative resistance to external expertise. Glenys Hart argues that ignoring the benefits that external involvement can bring is counterproductive. External consultants can complement school-based programmes, bring new ideas and provide the stimulus of evaluative challenge. She presents a wide array of sources and contacts and in particular explores the range of on-line expertise and modes of engagement that are available to enhance teachers' professional learning experience. This reflects the fundamental point made elsewhere in other articles that effective professional learning is not one dimensional but entails a range of ingredients, a potent mix that dynamically enriches teachers' development and makes a significant difference to student outcomes.

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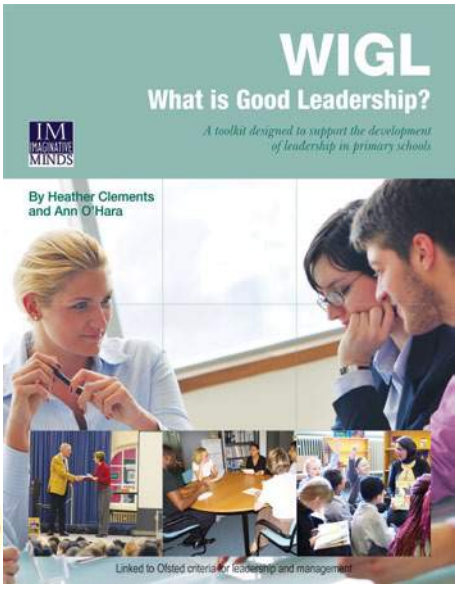
> "The matrix is a fantastic way to benchmark where a school is in its practice."
>
> Leckhampton C of E Primary School



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Developing Teachers and School Leaders: how Teaching School Alliances make a difference

Do Teaching Schools make a difference – particularly to the professional development of teachers and school leaders? Qing Gu reports on a major investigation which points to compelling evidence that they have made a significant contribution to effective practice.

The concept of Teaching Schools has benefited from and contributed to a much wider educational debate about the nature of collaboration between schools as a means of providing effective professional development to teachers and as a mechanism for improving schools. This reports evidence from a two-year study into the effectiveness and impact of teaching schools on improvement.

The policy drive

Teaching Schools are outstanding schools that have been established as one of the main policy levers designed to fulfil the Government's vision for a self-improving school system. In 2010 The White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, set forth a firm commitment to the roll out of a national Teaching Schools programme across the country. This policy initiative was to give these 'outstanding' schools (as

judged by Ofsted inspections) the role of leading and developing 'sustainable approaches' to teacher and leadership development across the country (Department for Education, 2010: 23). A year later the first cohort of 100 Teaching Schools were designated, and by September 2015 there were 691 Teaching Schools leading 537 Teaching School Alliances (TSAs).

In March 2016, the role of Teaching School Alliances (TSAs) as centres of excellence was reinforced by the White Paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere*. They are expected to prioritise and focus their activity on school-based initial teacher training, school-to-school support and evidence-based professional development for teachers and school leaders.

Evaluation of the impact of Teaching Schools

Since late 2012, a research team led by the University of Nottingham has been evaluating the effectiveness and impact of Teaching Schools on behalf of the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL). Members of the team[1] together with colleagues from the Isos Partnership and Universities of Nottingham Trent, Oxford and Manchester visited 26 teaching school alliances (TSA) and surveyed the first three cohorts of 345 teaching school alliances. The team's report (Gu et al., 2016) was published in late February 2016 – **Research and analysis: Teaching schools evaluation: final research report**[2].

The evaluation found compelling evidence that Teaching Schools and their alliances have made a significant contribution to the sharing of good practice among schools and to enhancing the professional practice of many teachers and school leaders within and beyond alliance partnerships. The provision of a continuum of bespoke professional development, from new entrants to the profession, through CPD for serving teachers, and on into leadership development was believed to be a key strength of the TSA offer. Designing and delivering such provision was widely seen by all involved as their best career development opportunity. In every case study TSA, there were examples of effective school-to-school support work that had led to considerable improvements in standards of teaching and learning. The best examples suggest that teaching schools may hold a key to the organic emergence of a coordinated collaboration between partnerships across localities and regions.

In this article, I will focus on the nature of TSA partnerships and the ways in which they have contributed to teacher and school leader professional development.

Forming partnerships

Teaching School Alliances are led by Teaching Schools and represent a network of schools and organisations that have agreed to work together to deliver the six core areas of responsibility identified for teaching schools[3].

Evidence from the study suggests that there is no single concept or organisational 'map' of a teaching school or an alliance. The nature, forms, operating structures and priorities of partnerships vary considerably. Since designation, in the majority of case studies there had been a greater mix of schools joining their alliances from different phases, of different types and with different Ofsted categories. About 80% of the TSA leaders in the national survey also reported this greater mix over time, with more than a third (40%) in strong agreement.

The extent to which Teaching Schools were able to engage and develop new partnerships was shown to be influenced by:

- TSA leaders' values and visions,
- different individual cultures, and
- prior histories of partnership and collaboration between schools within and across regions.

Leading a Teaching School Alliance is perceived unanimously by TSA leaders as a hugely time-consuming but highly worthwhile enterprise. They articulated a strong **altruistic mission** and a commitment to make a difference to the learning and life chances of all children. Such commitment and moral purpose played a key role in their decision to lead a teaching school, despite the recognition that building and leading a teaching school alliance is proven to be 'sheer hard work.'

Membership of a TSA was found to be a fluid

concept in almost all alliances in our study, and therefore developing mature and effective partnerships remained an **evolutionary** and **dynamic** journey. When forming an alliance, strategic partners tended to be schools and institutions from teaching schools' existing collaborative partnerships who shared similar educational values and philosophies and with which they had already developed 'solid' and trusting work relationships through their previous StSS (School-to-School Support) and/or ITT (Initial Teacher Training) work. Overall, the membership of these core groups remained relatively stable compared with the 'ordinary' and 'associated' alliance members.

It has taken almost all TSAs one to two years to become clearer about who they are (i.e. **identity**), what they are for (i.e. **mission**) and how they can achieve their aims (i.e. **action**). This is in part because TSA membership represents **loosely connected and overlapping sets of different partnerships** (or groups of schools and institutions) that focus on different aspects of the teaching school activity. ITT provision, CPD, school-to-school support (StSS) work and, in some cases, leadership training and development programmes, have played a key role in forming and expanding partnership connections with other schools, agencies, local authorities and higher education institutions (HEIs) within and beyond the locale. These different groupings and connections are all within the overall umbrella of a teaching school alliance.

Over time most case study alliances have become less concerned about partners leaving the TSA and more focussed upon retaining the commitment of those who share the same values, who have complementary expertise and capacity and, more importantly, who are willing to work together in the partnership to achieve the shared visions, values and goals. This has implications for the use of TSAs to drive school improvement across the system as it seems that forming and developing alliance partnerships require participant schools to have a willingness to engage and embrace similar values.

Deepening and broadening partnerships

The expansion of the Teaching School work has created opportunities of further collaboration within and beyond Teaching School Alliances. For almost all case study alliances in our study, these opportunities enabled them to not only strengthen the relationships with their existing partners but also broaden the scope of their TSA partnerships. **Almost all teaching school alliances in our study are now reaching out and linking up with local authorities and other TSAs within and beyond the locality.**

Teaching schools had different motivations for collaborating with other TSAs and local authorities. However, irrespective of the differences, it was perceived to have become **imperative** that they form wider collaborative partnerships in order to join up capacity and thus increase resources to improve the effectiveness of their work and to achieve impact on a greater scale. Close to 90% of the TSA leaders reported working collaboratively with neighbouring TSAs, local authorities and other school networks and partnerships in the national survey. They did not see their role as leading the system in isolation from other partners. Seventy-seven per cent of survey respondents reported agreement that 'Teaching Schools and their alliances alone could not achieve a self-improving system.'

While many set out on a competitive footing in their first year as a teaching school, in part perhaps fuelled by eagerness to set out their own offers and in part the competition posed by other alliances and providers in the locality, this has been gradually replaced by a greater confidence in the benefits of collaboration. In the national survey, 86% of the TSA leaders reported joining up capacity and resources with other TSAs or school networks in order to scale up the provision of support. However, it is important to note that **collaboration between TSAs and with other schools and school networks in an area can be triggered more by LA activity than by TSA activity**. This accords with the wider research evidence about the world's best performing education systems (Mourshed et al., 2010) which demonstrates the important role of a 'mediating layer' in providing targeted support to schools and brokering and buffering school-to-school collaborations and school improvement in the locality and region.

Ongoing funding support and clearly defined accountability measures are perceived as necessary to incentivise collaborations at different levels and move the Teaching School concept forward effectively and sustainably. However, **sustainability in terms of finance and capacity has been a real challenge for all TSAs in our research.** The majority of the TSA leaders lamented, also, that the current accountability framework for individual schools, in particular Ofsted inspections, took very little account of their work as TSAs. The reliance on single schools and single alliances to develop, broaden and deepen social and collaborative capital for improvement can only add to a sense of vulnerability.

Supporting teacher and leadership development: collaboration for improvement

Sharing of practice

There is clear evidence in the study that Teaching School Alliances are only one of the many partnerships and networks in which Teaching Schools and their partner schools are engaged. In many cases, partnerships overlap and have grown together in an organic manner. The overlap of partnerships has given member schools **access to a wider network of support, ideas and opportunities to share and disseminate good practice more widely.** This is demonstrated in the example given in BOX 1.

Box 1: Overlapping partnerships

The South Lakes TSA is led by Queen Elizabeth School, a cohort 1 Teaching School. There are established and emerging partnerships in the area in which the alliance is located. These contribute to a complex set of relationships between schools. In addition to the South Lakes TSA and three other teaching school alliances, there are also i) the Kendal Collaborative Partnership – a limited company comprising 17 schools; ii) the South Lakes Rural Partnership, comprising 34 schools in the South Lakes area; and iii) the Local Alliance of System Leaders which works under the Cumbria Alliance of System Leaders comprising representatives of the three teaching schools, the local authority, the University of Cumbria and the NCTL associate. It is felt that where there are overlapping partnerships in an area, clarity of role is essential if the TSA is to establish its place in local provision. Links with TSAs within and outside the area can help to broaden the perspective of an alliance, and this is felt to be particularly useful for rural TSAs to work together regionally on initial teacher training and school-to-school support.

From 2014 we have also seen the emergence of an **inclusive 'hub' approach** for cross-phase and inter-institutional partnership development. For example, the Hallam TSA, in collaboration with four other local Teaching School Alliances, two university partners and the South Yorkshire Local Authorities, successfully launched the South Yorkshire Maths Hub in 2014. Their vision was to build 'a collaborative mathematics educator community to help colleagues to achieve the best for our students' (South Yorkshire Maths Hub website). This was to be achieved through 'reflecting on best practice strategies both locally & worldwide and conducting school based action research to measure impact of these practices' (South Yorkshire Maths Hub website).

Within Teaching School Alliances **joint practice development** (JPD) across partner schools was rated by the majority of the TSA leaders in the national survey as being beneficial to the improvement of teaching and learning in their schools. Perceived benefits included significant changes in relation to 'improved expertise amongst teachers to design, implement and monitor innovative practices across the alliance' and 'increased collaborative planning of JPD projects across partner schools.' For example, the experiences of the Transform Teaching School Alliance (a cohort 2 alliance led by Sneinton St Stephen's Church of England Primary School) provide a detailed account of how the values and visions of the TSA and the maturity of the partnership have enabled the sharing of practice, enhanced shared commitment to quality, and increased collective capacity for school improvement across schools in the alliance (see Box 2).

Box 2: Mature partnerships: sharing of values and visions

A collective moral purpose is a key principle for Transform which drives the development of an *'inspirational'* partnership. Because of the shared values, openness and sharing of vulnerabilities, a healthy transition from competition to collaboration between schools became possible in the earlier development of the TSA. As an SLE from a partner school maintains, *'we are genuinely trying to be better.'* It is felt that 'the values that underpin the spirit on which the partnership is built' has enabled the alliance to *'manage the hard edge of challenge'* (Strategic Partner).

There is a shared view that the infrastructure of the partnership is *'very professionally organised': 'Transform has the capacity to support, challenge and allow schools to make a contribution.'* (Strategic Partner) A school that has been receiving support from the Alliance remains a member of the Strategic Development Board and its headteacher commented, *'we work very collaboratively. I feel part of a team. It is not done to you. … You feel you are not on your own and you are valued for what you bring.'*

As trust develops and embeds in the TSA over time, there is a sense of greater maturity in the partnerships. The alliance is developing a culture of annual peer health checks which is seen by partner schools as an opportunity to '*act as critical friends in triads*' (Director of TSA). This '*development opportunity*' will not be '*just data related*' but will involve developing an understanding of the context, beginning with a tour of the school. A strategic partner regards the support of the TSA for one supported school as 'Transform's Midas Touch' which has '*raised levels of attainment and outcomes for vulnerable groups'.*

Leading professional development

The opportunity to develop senior and middle leaders in the TSA was perceived to have been 'the most impactful' development. The majority of the

TSA leaders reported in the survey that they had seen significant changes in their ability to diagnose and make decisions about changes needed for improvement in other schools.

Leading and engaging in the design and provision of ITT and CPD programmes and StSS (including SLE support) in particular was seen to have helped to 'empower schools from middle up.' They also provided increased opportunities for staff to work beyond their own school. This is illustrated in the example given in Box 3.

Box 3: Professional learning – within and beyond the school

In the Cultivus TSA (a cohort 1 alliance), despite the challenges, SLEs themselves have been highly positive about the experience of becoming and being an SLE. It is perceived as having been a thought-provoking professional learning and development experience for them. The training they have received had caused them to think beyond their subject knowledge:

"It has made me much more self-assured about my own skills and abilities. It has made me look beyond in an open door; it has made me respect the skills of others, to be able to help other people questioning and to be able to see that you can have an impact on how other people perceive themselves. It is very rewarding. It ultimately gave the chance to reflect on my own practice, on my own leadership skills." (SLE, Cultivus TSA)

There is also evidence which suggests that the experience of working with other schools has enabled SLEs to bring back new experiences and expertise that would benefit the staff and the children in their own schools:

"I feel particularly honoured to be asked to do that but it enabled me not only to share my own expertise but also to be able to bring it back into school strategies and other areas of excellence that I have recognised that could benefit our own school. I have been able to bring that back and share it with Peter, with the staff and with the children in the class and with my teachers as well. So the impact has been twofold: not only for the school in which I have supported so far, but also back into our own school here." (SLE, Cultivus TSA)

Examples from the case studies show that common leadership development opportunities included:

- formal leadership training (including SLE or Lead Practitioner training and deployment);
- opportunities for leaders to visit other schools and shadow their leaders;
- experience of short-term assignments or secondments in another school so as to meet specific sets of opportunities as they are identified, and
- taking part in school to school support work.

These opportunities, especially the formal leadership training courses, have also enabled teaching school alliances to **identify talent with leadership potential, build leadership capacity** and **develop strategies for succession planning.**

However, it is important to note that, for the majority of the TSAs in this study, **talent management and succession planning across the TSA remains 'the**

most difficult part of the job.' This requires a culture change, as, understandably, headteachers are often reluctant to lose their best teachers to other schools. This situation appears to be of particular relevance to schools in rural areas where there tend to be particular teacher recruitment and retention pressures.

Teacher supply and quality

The majority of the TSA leaders in this study reported that involvement in the TSA work had helped to improve the **supply of good quality Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs).** Almost all case study Teaching Schools have a strong track record in initial teacher training. Even where this has been their first engagement in leading the delivery of their own ITT provision, the designation as Teaching Schools and the creation of an alliance were perceived by most as having created a framework within which the necessary capacity, capability and experience could be developed and expanded (see example in Box 4).

impact on pupil achievement. It was reported that R&D activities 'added to our professional knowledge and practice' and 'helped to sustain and nurture school leaders who are then more able to support their teaching colleagues.' As the Professional Lead for Research and Development from the Liverpool North TSA explained,

> … people get a bit hung up about numbers and quantifying things but a lot of work that goes on in the classroom can be around a case study or the impact of a particular process on their children and on themselves as practitioners. … I think it's look at research in a different way and getting teachers and leaders to believe that they have a role to play in research and that it can have a real impact on the work they do with their own children.

The example from the Portswood TSA in particular illustrates the impact of a research-based mentality which has enabled the Teaching School to lead, develop and embed a successful culture of coaching within the TSA (see Box 5).

Box 4: A framework for development

In the North Liverpool Alliance (a cohort 3 alliance), while they appreciate the important role of universities as the accrediting body, they believe they can ensure a higher level of quality from their position in the system by developing their own accountability and monitoring structures, as this deputy headteacher explains: 'something we've added in as an additional accountability measure for the mentoring of the trainee teachers is to add in an additional layer of quality assurance which has meant that the schools are very much leading the system rather than it being top-down and university led. Yes, we know that universities are there as the accrediting provider. However, the decisions are being triangulated with school and trainee and quality assured by us as the lead school then passed on to the university.' For example, the alliance schools have regular mentor moderation meetings where trainee mentors discuss the mentoring process, any issues they might have and share ideas, which the deputy headteacher of the lead school describes as 'incredibly powerful.' Furthermore, the salaried route enables a consistency of practice across the alliance schools in terms of ITT, as the Professional Lead for ITT explains; 'the schools that are involved are all sending out the same messages about teacher training … I really value it very highly.'

Enquiry-based approaches to teacher learning

There are promising examples from our study which illustrate how participating teachers and leaders claim that involvement in research projects and **evidence-based practitioner enquiries** has enabled them to improve their understandings of learning and practice of teaching – which would subsequently have a positive

Box 5: A research-based outlook

In the Manchester TSA (a cohort 3 alliance), the R&D work is driven by a commitment to improve the learning experiences of the children: 'We are open to new pedagogical approaches and relish the opportunity to talk about latest research and how this relates to our own setting.' (MTSA website, 2015).

The TSA is currently involved in a project 'Maths-Reflective Inquiry'. Using an action research model in which teachers and leaders examine their own educational practice systematically the project is set to promote the professional development of teachers and through this, enhance student learning.

The first year of this programme is focusing on Maths with a strategic partner school leading the initiative that currently involves three primary schools across which outcomes and learning will be shared. The project is being run in partnership with the University of Manchester's Coalition of Research Schools that is managed from the Manchester Institute of Education (MIE). The coaches from all three schools meet regularly to share outcomes and revise thinking about best practice.

The results of this inquiry indicate that 100% of focus pupils are making expected progress and 56% are making more than expected progress. MTSA has also recently become a strategic partner for the National Maths Hub, an £11 million government initiative involving 30 hubs across the country that will provide strategic local leadership to support tailored maths education support for participating schools. The idea is to harness expertise and knowledge in maths across an area and spread good practice more widely. There are three hubs in the Northwest of England (MTSA, 2014).

HEI partnerships are perceived by the majority of the case study Teaching Schools to have **provided promising R&D opportunities.** The large majority of the R&D projects reported by our case study TSAs involved HEI partners. Schools were highly positive and appreciative of the roles that their HEI partners played in the design and development of their R&D activities – not least because of the research knowledge, skills and expertise as well as resources and networks that their university partners could offer. There are also examples of HEI qualifications being moulded more closely to the schools' development priorities, and even to delivery taking place on school sites. However, **relationships with HEI partners are not always stable.** Changing partnerships through ITT, for example, can pose challenges to existing R&D projects.

Nonetheless, R&D activity remains an area for further development in a vast minority of case study TSAs. In the alliances where senior leaders are committed to using R&D to develop pedagogy and joint practice development in teaching schools and across partner schools, the breadth and depth of engagement from schools vary considerably. Only in a minority of case study TSAs has the engagement in R&D activities become widely spread across partner schools. In other words**, the culture of R&D is still emerging and developing** in most TSAs in this study.

Challenges for partnerships, sustainability and quality: reflections

Although there is ample evidence in our study which shows that Teaching Schools can play and are playing an active role in building and developing a school-led self-improving system, the picture is, by and large, variable and fluid.

First, irrespective of Teaching Schools' increasing commitment to collaborate with their peers, there remain **underlying concerns about the availability of resources and the limited capacity of the market.** There are also concerns about supporting schools that are in most need of support but do not or are unable to access the TSA offer. The reliance on single Teaching Schools and single alliances seems to have added to a sense of vulnerability that underlies many system leaders' passion and commitment to continue to improve the life chances of children.

Second, as yet, there is **a lack of clarity as to how the Teaching School concept should be defined and how Teaching Schools and Teaching School Alliances are judged to be *effective***. More thinking is required about how and to what extent schools within alliances need to hold each other to account. A fundamental question related to this is 'What is the purpose of being involved in an alliance?'

Third, although partnerships have evolved significantly in almost all Teaching School Alliances in our study, **close and deep relationships are usually to be seen within a small core group of strategic partners**. There are still considerable challenges to engaging and deepening partnerships. It appears that some schools still have limited knowledge of the purpose of Teaching Schools. There are examples of schools that are suspicious of receiving support from a Teaching School because of the fear of a 'takeover' or the feeling that the alliances are owned by and exist to serve the needs of an elite group of 'outstanding' schools that are 'the centralised machinery of government'. There are also examples of schools that take services from a Teaching School Alliance but do not feel part of the partnership, as evidenced in an 'us and them' attitude. The support and services can pre-date a TSA which again raises questions about what defines 'being part of' or 'a member of' an alliance, and indeed what defines an alliance at all; and by extension, whether and how alliances can come to be accepted by the system as a support function for all.

Fourth, **effective TSA partnerships are not about comfortable collaboration.** Evidence suggests that focussing on the quality of provision of support and training is key to attracting and engaging the 'hearts and minds' of partners and schools. A key challenge is to develop and establish quality assurance and internal accountability mechanisms. These would enable TSAs to understand, monitor and evaluate how teacher and leadership capacity is being built in all schools involved and whether and the extent to which improvement in the quality of teaching and learning is being made (not only through Ofsted judgements and end of key stage outcomes) in these schools.

Finally, as one of a number of government initiated innovations, designed to achieve a 'self-improving' school system, Teaching Schools and their alliances have taken on a challenging role. It is clear that, within the system, there are many different, dynamic and complex relationships and partnership infrastructures. **There is a widely perceived need to join up relationships, resources and capacity to produce a coherent and systemic approach to school-to-school support,** and through this, **enhance sustained and sustainable impact on school improvement within a locale or region.**

Thus, Teaching Schools and their alliances can make and have made a marked difference to the sharing of good practice among schools and to enhancing the professional practice of many teachers and school leaders within and beyond alliance partnerships. In this sense, **the Teaching School model clearly has an important role to play in driving forward a school-led 'self-improving' system.** However, as yet, the lack of measured overall effect on pupils' academic outcomes within TSAs[4] suggests that **caution should be exercised in making claims concerning the potential contribution of the Teaching School model to raising attainment in schools across the partnership.** With so many changes taking place in education policy, and schools generally being involved in many different partnerships, it would be difficult for many alliance schools and evaluations to tease out which change, and which partnership, makes the most difference, and thus be able to consider being part of a Teaching School as the only or primary factor that determines impact.

Relationships, trust, alignment and shared moral purpose: a final note

Taken together, evidence from our study shows that as one of a number of government initiated innovations, designed to achieve a 'self-improving' school system, Teaching Schools and their alliances have taken on a challenging role. Leading inter-school partnerships requires cognitive and emotional leadership and management qualities and skills, integrity, commitment and resilience. The level of inter-personal relationships and trust between leaders of partner schools are likely to be paramount in determining the extent to which relationships between schools grow, develop or fail. In short, it is about the **individual and strategic alignment** of organisational priorities, needs and

interests as well as their expertise, skills, resources and capacity to **pursue a shared moral purpose.**

It is clear that, within the system, there are many different, dynamic and complex relationships and partnership infrastructures. Teaching school alliances represent **a diverse pool of expertise** where partner schools 'give and take' for the improvement in their own schools. Their development relies on 'like-minded people' working together to develop collective and collaborative intellectual and social capital through working together to support and improve standards within and/or beyond the alliance. They are seen as **a vehicle for professional relationships across a range of settings and as having opened doors to further development and improvement opportunities.**

There is a widely perceived need to join up relationships, resources and capacity to produce a coherent and systemic approach to school-to-school support, and through this, enhance sustained and sustainable impact on school improvement within a locale or region. Our analysis suggests that **effective accountability structures that promote improvement and collaboration are a necessary condition** to support Teaching School Alliances in their endeavours to grow. Success also requires social and collaborative capital that harnesses local knowledge and expertise in order to make a systematic and systemic difference to the quality of teaching, learning and achievement.

Notes

1. Simon Rea, Lindsey Smethem, John Dunford, Matt Varley, Pam Sammons & Paul Armstrong
2. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-schools-evaluation-final-research-report
3. They are known generally as 'The big six': School-led initial teacher training (ITT); Continuing professional development (CPD); School to school support (StSS); Identifying and developing leadership potential; Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs); Research and Development (R&D)
4. Evidence from Professor Daniel Muijs' (2016) independent statistical analysis of pupil outcome data during the three year period studied from 2012 to 2014.

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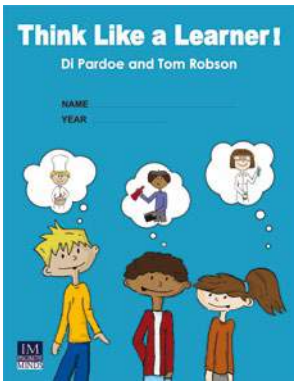
THINK LIKE A LEARNER!



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- *It's good to be in the challenge zone and get out of the comfort zone*
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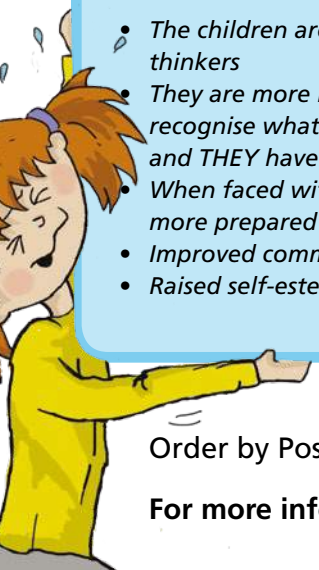
- *We understand that learning is our responsibility and that we have got to take part*

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*



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IM IMAGINATIVE MINDS

Don't Like Mondays – providing hope for the disaffected

How can schools and their staff make a difference for the great number of disenfranchised young people? **Sonia Blandford** explores a way forward along the *Achievement for All* journey.

Why I'm in teaching - 'Our chance to change their world'

What keeps me awake at night is, I am guessing, what keeps others, and particularly many headteachers, awake at night: the pupils whose futures seem to be mapped out by their background, personal circumstances or special needs. These are the children and young people who really 'Don't Like Mondays'. These are the vast number of young people - over a million at last count – who are not in education or employment, half of them not deemed work ready. The tantalising knowledge is that through education their lives could be different, their self-belief sturdier, their achievements greater, and their futures so much more in their control. That is why we all go into teaching isn't it? The belief that it could be different and the understanding that as part of an education system we can have a profound and positive impact on all children who move through our country's schools.

Stepping back and seeing the bigger picture.

But for so many - too many - teachers and headteachers there is the stark realisation that many pupils - pupils just like my own children - seem out of reach in an environment where heads and their staff can feel forced to focus on the ones who are progressing and who can help them meet targets. And while they're doing that, they're already busy firefighting as they prepare for the return of Ofsted, deal with social or mental health issues among the pupils, cope with discontent among their staff, or address problems with families who seem on the fringes of the school community. That can be the experience of a leadership team in an outstanding schools or a school in special measures.

While they are fighting those fires headteachers tell us they often live with the fear, and too often the reality, that those pupils who inspired them into this profession will remain where they are, and that they won't make the difference to them they know they could and should be making.

The first question I ask the headteachers I meet is what would happen if they continued to do what they were doing every day, every week, every year for the rest of their careers. What would happen if they never got the chance to stand back and reflect on their original ambitions when they took the post? What would happen if they had chance to explore and draw on ideas outside their own frame of reference to help them achieve those ambitions?

What is your view? Why did you enter teaching?

Achievement for All 3As is designed to empower heads to do just that. It is proving every day it can give you back the advantage by helping you take your eyes of the minutiae of the day and focus on wider, bigger, better outcomes for the children in your school. It is being welcomed into schools struggling to help children make progress, and schools who are already deemed outstanding but who don't want to stand still. Primaries, comprehensives, grammar schools, special schools, Academies and pupil referral units are all among the thousands now signing up. It's a programme that works irrespective of a schools' governance, structure, funding source or admissions policy.

Have you considered accessing coaching, information, training and on-line support to help you develop your practice in engaging those pupils with challenges, needs, or those experiencing disadvantage?

A new way of closing that learning gap

Achievement for All 3As started life back in 2009. A state funded pilot programme it was, quite simply, set up to help children not achieving in schools. It was clear that most schools had got used to boasting that 80 per cent of their children achieved a minimum of five GCSEs, without explaining what happened to the other 20 per cent of students – or more importantly why. Closing the gap is a challenge for all teachers, the most recent DfE data indicates that 28% of all children and young people are achieving below national expectations in English and maths.

How many pupils in your school are falling behind in reading, writing and maths? Do the schemes and support mechanisms you employ make a difference? Do they impact on learning?

Back in 2009 it had become clear that the changes seen in the education system since the '80s had done little or nothing to help this 20 per cent, our target group. They are pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), Looked After Children (LAC), pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and other vulnerable and disadvantaged children who were most likely - at their school - to experience very different levels of commitment and support from staff, be bullied, have poor school attendance and fail to gain the qualifications they needed to progress. For too many the impact of their SEND or the social-economic context of their family is a real (if unintended) lowering of aspiration by their teachers, parents, school leaders and wider professionals, resulting in limited access to learning.

When we looked at the 1.5 million pupils identified with SEND it was perhaps not surprising, then, that we discovered a gaping achievement gap of 42 per cent at each key stage, and we saw no signs of it closing. What's more, it has become clear that our failure to give children with SEND and other vulnerable children the same chance to reach their potential as their peers represents a huge loss of talent, and we know society ends up footing

the bill. This is a problem not only illustrated by the NEET figures but by the fact that those who do not gain English and Maths GCSE's are higher in number in our prisons and drug centres and in records of premature deaths. An Inquiry (led by Brian Lamb, OBE) exposed failures in the system, huge frustration among parents and too great a focus in schools on processes rather than outcomes. It was Lamb who recommended the creation of *Achievement for All.* His inquiry (DCSF, 2009) marked a turning point for SEND, placing it more firmly within the domain of school leadership and bringing greater focus to inclusive education.

Taking a lead and taking control

The programme's aim was – and still is – to transform the lives of those vulnerable or disadvantaged students by raising educational aspiration, access and achievement, and - crucially - to better engage parents and carers in the process. In real terms that means a partnership between you (or one of your leadership team) and a designated Achievement Coach who together bring to your school a bespoke framework of support for school improvement. This will include a needs analysis, coaching and continuing professional development – both on line and via a community of practice support - that you can tailor to meet your needs and priorities. It is not designed to take you in a new direction; it's designed to help you move in the direction you want to go (see Table 1 breaking down barriers).

We ran a pilot study in 450 schools reaching 28,000 students across 10 local authorities between 2009 - 2011 to try to discover what was going wrong and discovered that in too many cases schools were simply not expecting some of their students to figure in final year results. We discovered that the programme helped schools not only transform things for that 'bottom' 20 per cent, but raised the bar for every child - their friendships and feelings of self-worth. This, of course, translated into higher results in the classroom. Schools which might initially have considered this as one more pressure on their timetable were seeing the benefits, and seeing them quickly. They felt a cultural shift - among the staff and students. They came to see that this is a programme designed to be completely flexible (more of how it works in Table 2), allowing their staff to benefit from outside expertise and a wealth of resources and ideas, but which they could adapt or develop to suit their setting and the individual children in the classrooms.

During the pilot the programme, it was further endorsed by the SEND Green Paper (*Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability* DfE, 2011) which acknowledged its role in helping children with SEND achieve better educational outcomes and a follow up report recommended the national roll out of *Achievement for All*, so that more schools could access the programme (see Table 3: Early impact of AfA).

As a result, this charity formed to lead the national roll out of the programme, and we are now in thousands of schools and seeing extraordinary results as a result of the inspiring and committed head teachers we work with across the UK.

Support to achieve your own goals

When initially encountering the programme many school leaders and teachers tend to think - like the headteachers we met in our pilot study - that they do not have time to take on a new programme like *Achievement for All* in a way that was meaningful. However, when they see the evidence from other schools and hear the stories being told by other heads and their staff they soon come to realise that outside help is not a sign of weakness but an essential leadership skill. It's a step towards getting the support they desire to do the job they know they can do, in *order* to achieve the aims they have. They recognise that this community of experts we represent, and who we can introduce to schools, are not inspecting and judging what is going on, but instead buying into their personal and professional aims and their aspirations for their pupils. They understand the context, setting and challenges they face, and share ideas and expertise that they can enlist to empower them - in their own way and in their own school - to help educate the children in their care.

What I have discovered by working with those heads and their leadership teams is that there is a way we can help each other make a profound difference. There is a way school leaders and their staff can feel less isolated

by the competition between neighbouring schools and less worried about their league table place, and more focused on working with and helping each other - and other professionals in other schools - to raise the bar for all children in this country. The results they see when that happens are an important part of this work, but headteachers in our programme now see those longed for results as just a measure of the much more life changing stuff that is going on every day in the schools where they are based.

The barriers we need to break down

It is important for all practitioners to understand what the position has been across the country, and the challenges children and young people face day to day. This is outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Breaking down barriers

When our charity launched:

- *Only 36 per cent of people claiming FSM and 22 per cent identified as SEND achieved five or more GCSEs (grade A-C compared to 63 per cent of all other pupils.*
- *Less than 18 per cent of those whose primary need involved behavioural, emotional and social difficulties achieved standard GCSE expectation including English and Maths. (BESD are the largest group of SEND primary need at Key Stage 4).*
- *Children with SEND were more likely to be bullied by their peers and nine times more likely to be excluded from school. There is a big overlap between children with SEND and LAC and those receiving FSM. Some 73 per cent of LAC were identified as SEND.*
- *Some 30 per cent of 16 year olds with a Statement of SEN were NEETS by the time they were 18.*

The *Achievement for All* pilot (2009 – 2011) enabled us to develop an evidence informed approach to breaking down the barriers to learning in every classroom where 5 – 16 year olds needed additional support. A

combination of the *Achievement for All* evaluation by the University of Manchester (DfE, 2011) and a further parallel study by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL, 2011) provided the evidence needed to develop the *AfA* model. Table 2 gives an overview of the main ingredients of the approach.

Table 2: Achievement for All - how it works

How it works:

Collaborating with your AFA coach and building on your current practices, you'll access a framework including four key elements:

1. Leadership of school, classroom and teams.
2. Teaching and learning, assessment and data tracking, planning and delivery.
3. Parental engagement and structured conversations.
4. Wider outcomes such as improving behaviour, attendance and participation in school life.

The early indications of impact were profound, with significant changes to pupil outcomes in English, Maths and attendance (see Table 3). The University of Manchester had demonstrated how, by working in collaboration, a peer led programme can make a difference to outcomes. *Achievement for All* had also demonstrated how parents and carers could be encouraged to support their child's learning irrespective of challenge, need or disadvantage.

Table 3: Early impact of Achievement for All

An independent evaluation (by the University of Manchester) of the AFA pilot study which ran from 2009 - 2011 showed that:

- *37 per cent of pupils with SEND achieved or exceeded expected levels of progress in English compared to all pupils nationally.*
- *47 per cent of pupils with SEND achieved or exceeded expected levels of progress in maths compared to all pupils nationally.*
- *A 10 per cent drop in absenteeism.*
- *Enhanced relationships with parents. The number of schools reporting excellent relationships with parents increased by 36 per cent.*

As an organisation led by teachers we have gathered in-depth evidence to inform our practice, refreshing our programme over the period of delivery since national roll-out began in 2011. All of the data has been evaluated by PwC Strategic based in Northern Ireland. Based on a theory of change that incorporates each of the four elements set against three core targets (reading, writing and maths), and behavior and attendance, PwC has compiled an independent report assessing the social impact of the programme (PwC, 2015 – see Table 4).

Table 4: Achievement for All - evidence since 2011

Recent findings from the independent review (PwC, 2015) of the Achievement for All schools programme, have shown that in schools working with Achievement for All:

- *Pupils exceeded national expectations for attainment in reading, with an average increase in Average Point Scores of 4.8*
- *Pupils exceeded national expectations in writing, with an average increase of 4.6 APS*
- *Pupils exceeded national expectations for attainment in maths, with an average increase of 4.4 APS.*
- *An overall increase in pupil confidence and aspirations*
- *The beneficiaries of the Achievement for All programme include: 3760 settings; 1,767,100 pupils (indirect); 172,111 target pupils (direct); parents/carers (direct) 252,238; teachers (direct) 69,197; 12, 879 school leaders (direct) and 29, 650 wider professionals (direct) (Achievement for All Impact Report, 2015)*

Prioritising the vulnerable

It might be helpful if you were to consider what approaches are taken to help disadvantaged young people in your school. What would be the evidence base for each of the interventions used to address disadvantage in your school. Examine the gap, what are the causes? How do you meet the needs of every pupil? Are you supported in your own professional learning?

The following case study illustrates how a school leader and his staff has made a difference by adopting the *Achievement for All* framework, which included working with parents to improve the outcomes for their children.

Don't Like Mondays? No child or young person should experience school in such a negative way. Through your own professional learning journey you can make a difference to every pupil in your classroom irrespective of background, challenge or need. Raise aspirations, improve access and raise achievement in your school by collaborating with other professionals.

Professor Sonia Blandford is founder and CEO of Achievement for All

Case Study: Tenacious joined-up working

Steve Dool is head teacher at a large (1700 student) comprehensive in Neston on the Wirral. He is a man with a vision, and it matches the vision of AFA. "When you find something in education that captures your enthusiasm, and gives you a fresh impetus to improve things further you want to embrace it," says Steve.

Can I tell you about Simon? He was a student who was disinterested and disaffected from his early days at school. He avoided lessons whenever he could. We identified his low levels of literacy and difficulties in language and communication and put him on a Reading Recovery programme*, which involves focused one to one recovery work with target students. This was more than reading support; so some 20 staff here underwent specialist training and, with our *AFA* coach, we identified the students who would benefit. Over eight weeks the gains were remarkable for all of those children, including Simon. We have video clips and you can see, in front of your eyes, how his body language changed and his confidence grew the more he achieved and the more positive feedback he got. He's now performing well at GCSE level.

I was trained in that Reading Recovery programme, as was our *AfA* champion, a school governor and some 20 teachers and teaching assistants. I think that in itself sends out a strong message to the school that the vulnerable students really matter and we really believe they deserve and will benefit from the money we invest in professional development and the help we can give as a result.

We encourage an open door policy across the school and have made sure teachers are comfortable being observed and coached - *AfA's* focus on professional development. There is a pressure on young teachers to think they are an authority on all matters linked to education or the children in their class. I want to show them that quality first teaching recognises their strengths *and* areas where they can improve. We've developed a team of staff led by our assistant head teacher and other key leaders who've developed new ways for the staff to work together, including coaching support and demonstrations of quality first teaching. Our staff don't – and never should - feel threatened by that. Good teachers require passion and energy and enthusiasm - *and* support from each other.

Parents are a hugely underused resource in schools and *AfA's* commitment to and coaching in structured conversations has proved to be so important. I find going to my daughters' school for a parents' meeting intimidating sometimes – and I'm a head teacher! I can see how some parents can lose confidence in any sort of partnership, disengage and then risk being ignored. We need to consult and collaborate with these parents much more. *AfA's* structured conversation training helped me communicate to staff how important it is to listen, observe, take in the parents' or carers' ideas to help us identify barriers to learning and adjust teaching to suit. To understand pupils better we have to understand what makes them tick. And that kind of information only comes from a partnership with parents.

Our student discussion forums focus on particular pupils who might be struggling and we share ideas as a team about the barriers each student might be facing, and strategies that might work better. Students targeted by our *AfA* programme are already very high profile in the school and teachers adjust strategies and techniques to suit them all the time. But these discussion forums take that to a new level and allow us to come together to consider in more detail how well things are working, and to draw on outside expertise and new ideas to support children with particular needs.

We also have a personal development programme, this time involving the students who are invited to review their achievements, qualities and strengths alongside their academic reviews. They write up their own personal statements, highlighting where they'd like to improve. We are always seeking to highlight success - it could be in art or sport or performing arts or any other subject - to demonstrate their very real talents and so build confidence to promote learning in other areas. I always say to them at these meetings that they all have a gem inside them. Some may have discovered theirs and it may be shining, others may be waiting to find and polish theirs up – but we as a school are here to help.

I've adopted what we call the '*team around the family*' for every child in the school now. We hear from the student, the parent and the school and any outside experts what is helping or hindering each pupil and develop that into an action plan.

John was someone we reached as a result of this process. He was having huge difficulty engaging with others and was getting a reputation for his very negative behaviour. When we kicked off the 'team around the family' process the team involved the educational welfare officer, CAMHS, John's parents, John's student mentor and a key teacher. John had a particular talent in sport and the action plan we developed included getting him a free scholarship for the local hockey and cricket club, something the family couldn't have afforded. I think simply being noticed and accepted and valued by his school, and hearing how we were going to nurture his sporting talents had a huge impact on him and his behaviour. And now? He plays cricket for the NW of England.

Students like John can help other students too through our student leadership programme. It involves email buddies who reach out to prospective students in primary school and answer their questions, and then mentor them when they arrive here. We also have a whole team of peer mentors in year 9 and counsellors in our sixth form.

Modeling behaviour is important here. We want students and teachers to see and hear from those making progress. We have our students with SEND come in and lead staff meetings, and when we had a special event to celebrate our learning support assistants it was the *AfA* target students including those with SEND who presented at the lectern, telling the school how much they'd learned from and appreciated the help they'd had, and how they had progressed as a result.

I'm chair of the head teachers' association locally and invited *AfA* to come in and talk to other heads about the work they are doing and the strategies they use. *AfA's* vision is our vision, and the impact it has had in our school is marvellous.

*(Reading Recovery, developed in New Zealand, is a programme used with children, where literacy difficulties are identified early. The programme involves one-to-one lessons with a trained teacher for 30 minutes a day for between 12 and 20 weeks; evidence shows a positive effect on reading achievement).

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Confidence is everything in learning!

As the work of Carol Dweck has proved, no matter how able, a child's perception of themselves as learners will determine their academic careers. If it is poor it will:

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- Make them defensive learners, unwilling to challenge themselves
- Make them over-reliant on teachers and on received opinion
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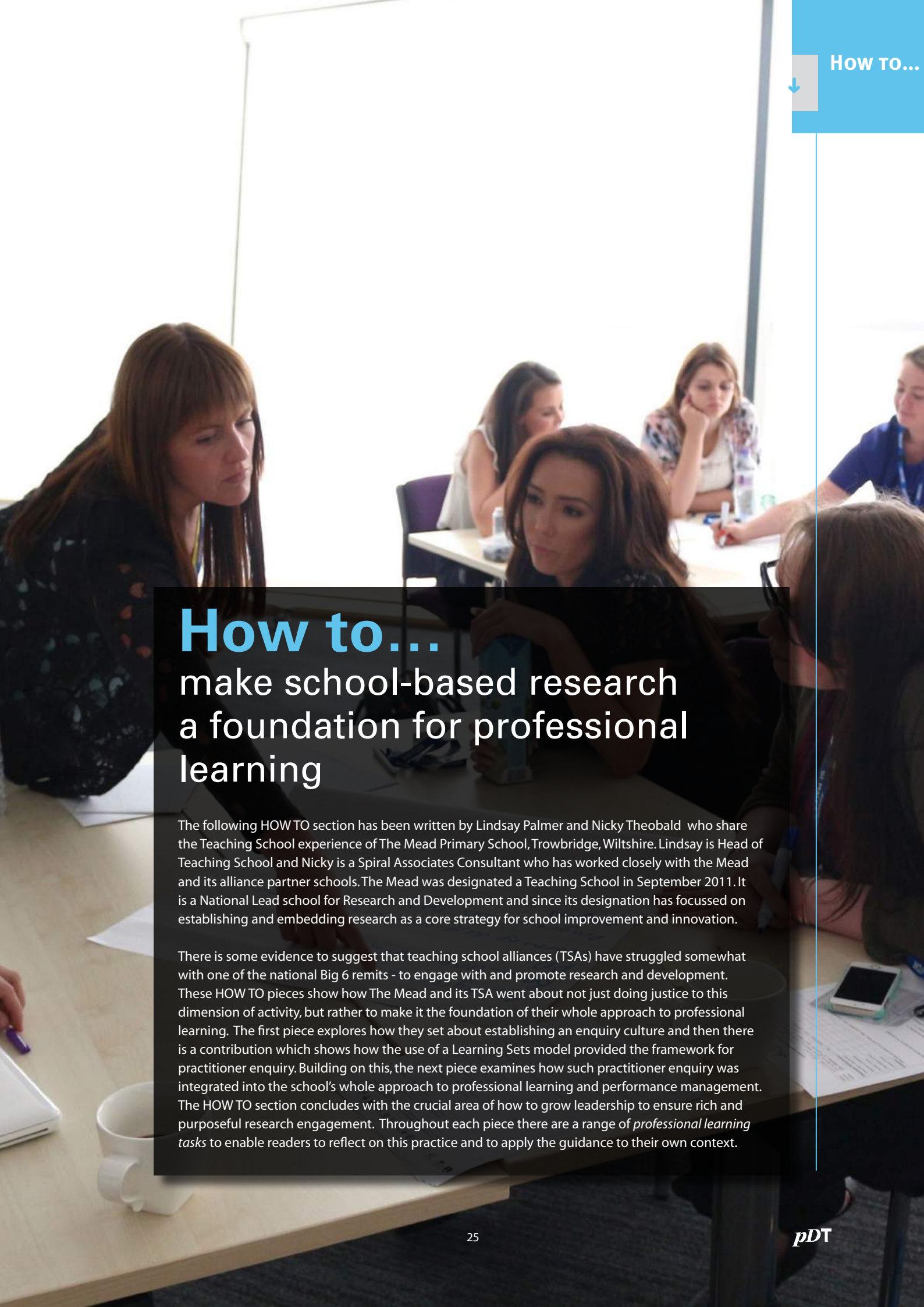
- Have low aspirations and under-achieve in life

Whilst there are other self-esteem tests, no other test measures a child's perception of themselves, specifically as learners, so well. This is why MALS has gone around the world as the key test to use to measure a child's image of themselves as learners and thinkers. Using it will enable you to:

- Uncover, beneath external shows of confidence, which children have poor views of themselves as learners and therefore will be liable to under-perform
- Pinpoint exactly where their problems are
- Measure progress in developing 'open-mindsets' in children

Teacher Skills

The MALS is also a very subtle test of teacher performance – those teachers who succeed in lifting a child's MALS score have the ability to motivate and teach the skills of independent learning... and vice versa! This too is often far from being easily visible.



How to...

make school-based research a foundation for professional learning

The following HOW TO section has been written by Lindsay Palmer and Nicky Theobald who share the Teaching School experience of The Mead Primary School, Trowbridge, Wiltshire. Lindsay is Head of Teaching School and Nicky is a Spiral Associates Consultant who has worked closely with the Mead and its alliance partner schools. The Mead was designated a Teaching School in September 2011. It is a National Lead school for Research and Development and since its designation has focussed on establishing and embedding research as a core strategy for school improvement and innovation.

There is some evidence to suggest that teaching school alliances (TSAs) have struggled somewhat with one of the national Big 6 remits - to engage with and promote research and development. These HOW TO pieces show how The Mead and its TSA went about not just doing justice to this dimension of activity, but rather to make it the foundation of their whole approach to professional learning. The first piece explores how they set about establishing an enquiry culture and then there is a contribution which shows how the use of a Learning Sets model provided the framework for practitioner enquiry. Building on this, the next piece examines how such practitioner enquiry was integrated into the school's whole approach to professional learning and performance management. The HOW TO section concludes with the crucial area of how to grow leadership to ensure rich and purposeful research engagement. Throughout each piece there are a range of *professional learning tasks* to enable readers to reflect on this practice and to apply the guidance to their own context.

How to … establish a culture of teacher research and development

Lindsay Palmer and **Nicky Theobald** share how an enquiry culture was established within their Teaching School and its Alliance.

New outlook

Building on The Mead School's commitment to research and evidence-based practice we naturally found ourselves reflecting on the place of research and development within the National Teaching School *Big 6* agenda, recognising the potential of research as a key driver and enabler for many aspects of its work. In order to deepen teacher understanding of research and development as a core strategy for school improvement, and thereby embed a culture of research, it has been necessary to establish new roles, processes and systems to secure capacity and capability for research activity.

Within this, the allocation of time and creation of tangible structures have been pivotal in securing commitment and understanding of how research 'fits with', and indeed underpins, school improvement. Critically, an investigation of the conditions needed to establish a professional research culture has supported positive, manageable change. The articulation of these conditions into an overarching research strategy has been a key focus, enabling a deeper understanding of how to embed research within and across schools to meet identified priorities.

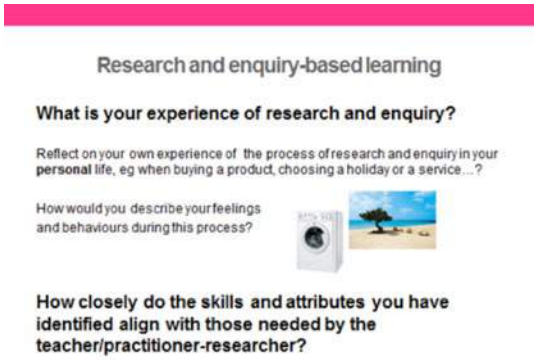
Establishing a supportive professional research culture

Defining the skills and attributes of the teacher researcher

A starting point…

An exploration of the behaviours and attributes of a researcher provided a useful stimulus for whole team

discussion during an Inset session. We undertook an initial session with all of our teaching staff, approximately 35 in total, with an aim to evaluate its success before widening the input to our Teaching Assistants. In view of the fact that we had a large teaching team, comprising staff with a wide range of experience and qualifications, the following activity provided a level playing field for all, prompting full engagement and a lively exchange of experiences!



Through this activity we gained a deeper consideration of the skills and attributes demonstrated both at a personal level and professionally. This was powerful in establishing a shared definition of what it means to be a 'researcher' and how our professional competences build on our everyday experiences. It also supported the facilitators in fostering a positive research ethos, encouraging all staff to see themselves as researchers and that research is not purely the jurisdiction of external agencies and universities. As Handscomb and Macbeath have reflected the term 'research' can have unfortunate connotations of white-coated boffins in laboratories, and unread impenetrable articles in esoteric journals. "The experience of teachers working in schools that are committed to research is in sharp contrast to this stereotype. In these schools research covers the widest gamut of activities, rooted in the day-to-day life of the classroom and the ongoing business of the school itself and its relationship with the community.' (Handscomb and MacBeath, 2003)

Teachers as knowledge creators

The belief in teachers as enquirers and knowledge creators has a strong heritage, and has been pivotal in effecting change in our context, both in relation to teachers changing perceptions of professional learning, but also significantly in relation to how they identify themselves as professionals.

The BERA-RSA Inquiry into the role of research in teacher education (2014) recognised 'research literacy' as a 'key dimension of teachers' broader professional identity, one that reinforces other pillars of teacher quality: notably subject knowledge and classroom practice (see Box 1 below).

Box 1: Dimensions of teacher effectiveness and teachers' professional identity (BERA, 2014)

The sharing of reports and think pieces highlighting the importance of teacher research is helping to endorse school-based activity and is building aspiration. Further evidence cited in the BERA-RSA Inquiry has provided such endorsement. In summary, the report confirmed that:

- internationally, research-rich school environments are the hallmarks of high performing education systems;
- to be at their most effective, teachers need to be engaged ***with*** and need to be equipped to engage ***in*** enquiry-oriented practice;

- a focus on enquiry-based practice needs to be sustained so that disciplined innovation and collaborative enquiry are embedded and become the normal way of teaching and learning rather than the exception. As facilitators, one of our key drivers has been to unlock teachers' professional curiosities, enabling them to recognise both their professional expertise and responsibility to contribute to a wider knowledge base. An ongoing expression of this belief and expectation, reinforced by senior leaders, is instilling teacher confidence and promoting risk-taking and greater self-questioning.

This is supporting teachers in understanding their role in the context of the current self-improving school system, recognising Hargreaves (1999) long-standing call 'to treat practitioners as the main (but not the only) source for the creation of professional knowledge' builds on his claim that, 'education should learn from industry and medicine in creating knowledge and call for a more central role for practitioner research in such knowledge creation, linking it directly to the agenda for school improvement'.

A culture of empowerment, supporting professional autonomy, where teachers are given encouragement and 'permission' to make decisions and pursue preferred lines of enquiry underpins our work. A research hub model of working is now embedding, as explored more fully in the next section. Collaborative research is giving rise to a stronger articulation of practice and generating rich professional dialogue, instilling confidence and helping to cement new professional relationships across the alliance schools.

Making time for enquiry

The importance of allocating **time** (team meetings, full staff meetings, INSET days) to establish the conditions within which research can flourish cannot be underestimated. In reality, time remains an ongoing challenge, particularly in view of the pressures of 'top down' directives and high stakes testing regimes, generating a sense of disenfranchisement and disempowerment.

The investment of time has enabled the introduction of new, visible roles, structures, systems and processes to ensure robust, rigorous and systematic approaches to teacher research. These include: the establishment of research hubs and communities for collaborative research; the application of a common research methodology to support research journeys and induction for SLEs and senior leaders as research advocates.

Ethics

A focus on research ethics has been an important key focus, supporting teachers to make reflective decisions throughout the research process to determine the nature and impact of their enquiries. The adoption of the BERA Guidelines for Educational Research (2011) is supporting this decision-making.

Professional learning task: Creating the right conditions

How do you currently create opportunities for staff to articulate their practice and engage in reflective professional dialogue and deep questioning?

To what extent do your teachers regard themselves as researchers? Is there a need to de-bunk any myths…?

The Leadership of Enquiry

School leaders' understanding and endorsement of research and enquiry has been pivotal in establishing a research culture. Citing teacher research in the context of a change embracing vision for school improvement and innovation has proved a powerful, persuasive strategy across the Teaching School Alliance. The modelling of research and evidence-based practice on an everyday basis by senior leaders is further strengthening the research culture; promoting an ethos of empowerment and risk-taking. On a practical level, this has included:

- ensuring research and enquiry maintains a high profile at alliance-wide steering group level;
- raising the profile of research activity through headteacher peer challenge programmes;
- the definition of research questions, specifically relating to leadership activity currently in development through a 'Shaping Inspirational Leadership 'programme to foster a sustainable culture of research ;
- the circulation of research papers and 'thinkpieces' to generate discussion around research engagement;
- dissemination of research findings, enabling the sharing of documented evidence of impact of on a regular basis.

Championing research-engaged practice in this way senior leaders are seen to be 'giving permission' for their teams to investigate new pedagogical approaches to address improvement priorities and the specific the needs of their learners. However, leaders across the teaching school alliance cite a number of challenges they face when seeking to establish a research culture in their schools (see Box 2 below).

In the context of the challenges facing school leaders, it has been important to recognise issues concerning manageability, and in particular the levers that hold schools to account. The following references, located in the Ofsted inspection framework (2015) and National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers (2015), are helping senior leaders and governors to reflect on their roles and responsibilities in fostering research practices within their schools.

Excellent headteachers:

- Establish an educational culture of 'open classrooms' as a basis for sharing best practice within and between schools, drawing on and conducting relevant research and robust data analysis.
- Shape the current and future quality of the teaching profession through high quality training and sustained professional development for all staff.
- Model entrepreneurial and innovative approaches to school improvement.

(DfE , 2015)

- Leaders and governors use incisive performance management that leads to professional development that encourages, challenges and supports teachers' improvement.
- Staff reflect and debate the way they teach. They feel deeply involved in their professional development. Leaders have created a climate in which teachers are motivated and trusted to take risks and innovate in ways that are right for their pupils.

Ofsted (2015)

Box 2: Challenges facing leaders

Perceived 'risk' element for school leaders working in schools in an Ofsted category. Perception research detracts from focus on core pedagogical approaches.	Maintaining high profile for research at a time of rapid change - notably local expansion/ academisation/ sponsorship of schools currently a key strategic priority.	Strengthening HEI links to foster research partnerships. Seeking affordable accreditation routes for all staff and securing access to library facilities to support teacher research.
Building capacity to secure grant funding for school-based research.	Wider engagement of school governors to raise the profile of research.	High stakes testing regime generating a culture of fear, disillusionment and disempowerment.

establish a culture of teacher research and development

Professional learning task: The contribution of leadership

Consider the following questions with leaders across your group of schools/ alliance to identify the next steps for strengthening the leadership of research:

- *How can the* National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers (2015) *be used to raise the profile of research as a key system leadership responsibility?*
- *How can peer to peer support and challenge strategies (e.g. Headteacher Challenge Trio/ Quads) provide a vehicle for raising the status of research as a core strategy for school improvement?*
- *How can governor and trustee participation in and understanding of school-based research be widened?*

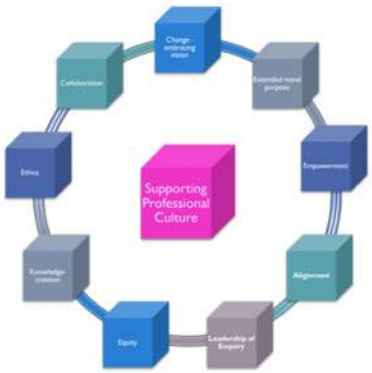
Alignment with school improvement priorities

Further consideration of manageability issues facing school leaders has highlighted the importance of aligning research foci with identified school and alliance-wide improvement priorities. A key solution to address this has been the establishment of a cross-phase, alliance-wide data and information sharing protocol. This protocol, signed by the alliance headteachers, enables the collation and collective analysis of pupil performance data, Ofsted findings and 'softer' data, including consultation feedback from headteachers. This analysis informs both the planning of school to school support and identifies priorities for joint practice development and teacher research. Such information has been critical in promoting alliance engagement in research activity, enabling schools to feel a tangible alignment between individual school and wider alliance research and development priorities. In view of this, a key task for groups of schools/alliances is to consider how sustainable capacity can be secured to ensure the collation and timely analysis of information to inform priority setting for joint practice development and school-based research.

Cohesive strategy for research engagement

Reflection and evaluation of the necessary conditions for effective teacher research is an ongoing process. As recognised by Nelson, Spence-Thomas and Taylor (2015), trust is a critical prerequisite for collaborative teacher research, enabling calculated risk-taking and experimentation. Within such a supportive professional culture, teachers are motivated and empowered to pursue lines of enquiry relating to improvement priorities and their own professional curiosities.

At The Mead Primary School, we believe that supporting a professional culture of research is best be established through a cohesive strategy for research engagement underpinned by key principles and elements as shown below.



Above all, collaboration and partnership-working is shaping the nature and character of our research culture as we seek to provide richer experiences and improved outcomes for children.

References: BERA, (2014) Research and the Teaching Profession. Building capacity for a self-improving education system. Final report of the BERA-RSA inquiry into the role of teacher research in teacher education, BERA, London ■ Handscomb, G and McBeath, J. (2003)The Research Engaged School. Chelmsford: Essex County Council ■ Handscomb, G."Empowering Teachers! Through Practitioner Research".2013. Presentation. ■ Hargreaves, D.H (1999) 'The knowledge creating school'. British Journal of Educational Studies, 47 ■ McIntyre, D (2004) Schools as research institutions. In McLaughlin, C., Black-Hawkins, K., and McIntyre, D. (Eds.) Researching Teachers, Researching Schools, Researching Networks. A Review of the literature, University of Cambridge ■ DfE (2015), National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers. ■ Nelson, Spence-Thomas and Taylor (2015): What makes great pedagogy and great professional development: final report. Teaching schools Research and Development network national themes project 2012-14. Institute of Education. ■ OFSTED (2015), The Common Inspection Framework: Education Skills and Early Year.

How to … grow leadership capacity for research engagement

Lindsay Palmer and **Nicky Theobald** explore how the attitudes, understanding and skills of leaders can be transformed to enrich enquiry-led professional development

Specialist Leaders of Education (SLE) as Research Mentors

Our teaching school alliance was involved in the Teaching Schools National Themes Research programme, Theme 2 '*What makes great professional development leading to consistently great pedagogy*?' This has enabled us to scope and refine strategies for SLE leadership of school-based research and enquiry. Early on, we recognised the need to identify research advocates and to grow leadership capacity to facilitate and quality assure research hub activity. This presented quite a challenge and required a review of role specifications to make explicit the responsibilities of SLEs in relation to research and enquiry. It further necessitated consideration of the professional learning needs of the SLEs in fulfilling this role, leading to the design of an induction programme and ongoing development seminars for SLEs as research mentors. Importantly, this strand of work has been developed in the context of an overarching research strategy and culture, including research hubs, common research methodologies and ethical guidance, providing structures and an ethos in which SLEs can be successful.

Induction programme for SLEs

An audit of research capability revealed a gap in knowledge and understanding of teacher research among some senior leaders, including SLEs. Collated results of the audit gave rise to the following findings:

- it cannot be assumed that outstanding teachers and leaders (designated as SLEs) have the capacity and skills to facilitate research groups and provide coaching and mentoring for teacher enquiry.
- where teachers had studied at Masters level, a greater understanding was evident, but often few or no clear meaningful links were established between own study focus and impact on shaping pedagogy towards addressing school improvement priorities. This disconnect was surprising.

In response to these findings, an induction programme for SLEs as research mentors was written to support the development of research capability. This programme was co-designed with the SLEs to ensure it met their learning needs. The diagram below shows the key modules included in the induction programme. This was co-facilitated by the Head of Teaching School and Teaching School consultant, both of whom have continued to provide coaching support for SLEs. Following the diagram is a brief description of each of the modules.

In the context on a self-improving system this module aimed to deepen understanding of the significance of working for, and on behalf of all children and schools. This included a focus on the three core features of system leadership as identified by Hargreaves (p11, 2010):

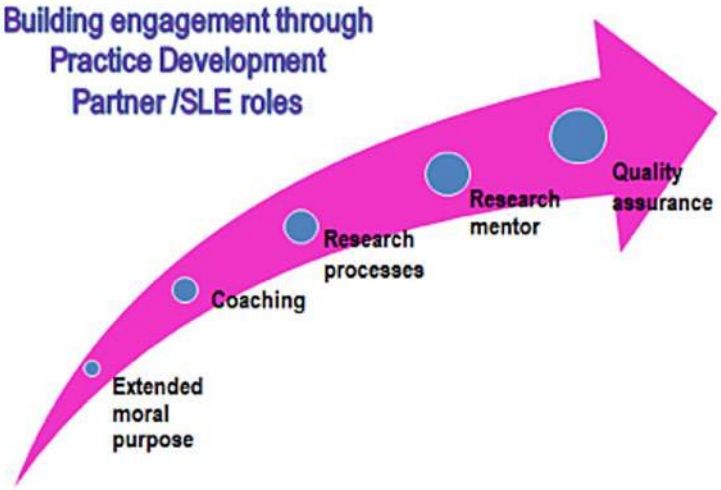
- *a value*: a conviction that leaders should strive for the success of all schools and their students, not just their own;
- *a disposition to action*: a commitment to work with other schools to help them to become successful;
- *a frame of reference:* understanding one's role (as a person or institution) as a servant leader for the greater benefit of the education service as a whole.

Coaching

This module included a focus on generic coaching skills including establishing a coaching climate, scaffolding coaching conversations and exploring a range of coaching models. This emphasised the principle that "coaching does not offer a quick fix; instead it provides a vehicle for change through evolution" (CfBT, 2010).

Research processes

In the research module introduced The Spiral Research Methodology (Theobald, 2011) providing a common language and framework.



grow leadership capacity for research engagement

Research Mentor

Time was spent exploring the role of SLE as an advocate for research and how research activity could be championed through modelling and group facilitation.

Quality Assurance

This module focussed on the importance of robust, rigorous and ethical research processes being followed. This included aspects such as, data collection, triangulation and peer review to ensure validity of findings.

As a result of this induction programme SLEs were empowered to lead the Teaching School *Learning Sets* and wider alliance *Learning Communities*. SLEs have played a pivotal role in raising the profile of research.

Professional Learning Task: Key Skills

What are the key skills needed by your staff to lead and develop a culture of learning and enquiry ? How will your staff be supported to identify and develop these skills? How will you involve the staff in this journey so they have ownership of the process?

Building engagement through the role of SLE

Through a process of reflection and evaluation on our induction programme and on-going development of the role of the SLE as research mentor it is evident that:

- SLE leadership of research is growing a **critical mass** of knowledge and experience across the alliance. This involves changing teacher perceptions of what effective professional development looks like and the nature and character of school improvement. In turn this entails establishing a strong, distributed model of system leadership in relation to research engagement.
- SLEs are empowered, equipped and excited to facilitate research groups, **modelling** research engagement themselves and **demonstrating a growing knowledge** and understanding of research methodology and its application to managing school improvement priorities.
- A **change in teacher attitudes and behaviour** is tangible with teachers demonstrating professional curiosity, risk-taking and self-questioning. Improved confidence in the articulation and description of their own practice has also been a notable feature, alongside a sense of pride and enjoyment in sharing their research journey and findings.
- A programme **of induction and on-going coaching** is supporting quality assurance. This is helping to ensure that that teacher research is systematic, rigorous and ethical; all considered to be critical in strengthening the profile of teacher research evidence.

Key messages.....

Establishing the role of SLE as Research Mentor is enhancing the capacity and capability of the alliance to lead research and development.

Sustaining a focus on **IMPACT** and explicitly linking research with developments in teaching and learning is critical in strengthening engagement.

Research coaches and 'experts' provide an important QA function in relation to the work of SLEs and work at a strategic level to foster links with university and external partners.

This approach is growing future leaders across the alliance, supporting wider leadership strategies for talent spotting and succession planning.

Professional learning task: Putting structures in place

- How can you ensure that teacher researchers have access to mentoring and expert advice?
- Consider auditing where the research experience and expertise lies across your group of schools/alliance. This will enable you to identify research advocates who will champion teacher research, providing a critical mass and strong platform for the further development of research activity.
- To what extent is responsibility for research and development made explicit in the role specifications for your SLEs? How can SLEs be supported in fulfilling responsibilities in relation to the leadership and facilitation of research across the alliance?

Next Steps

Assessment against the maturity model for research and enquiry (explored in previous section) has enabled us to recognise those aspects that are well developed and now embedding. It further enables us to be solution focussed to address challenges ahead. We are now in the process of shaping questions for reflective dialogue with our colleagues. These include:

Has research and enquiry…..

- supported the development of teaching and learning?
- extended the teaching repertoire and expertise?
- raised awareness of any barriers to learning?
- allowed pupils to see the staff as learners too?
- opened up a wider educational debate?
- informed strategic decision making?

References: Lofthouse R. Leat, D. and Towler, C (2010) Coaching for teaching and learning: a practical guide for schools Guidance report Rachel, CfBT Education Trust: Reading ■ Hargreaves, D (2010) Creating a self-improving school system, NCTL: Nottingham ■ Theobald, N. (2011) Spiral Research Methodology

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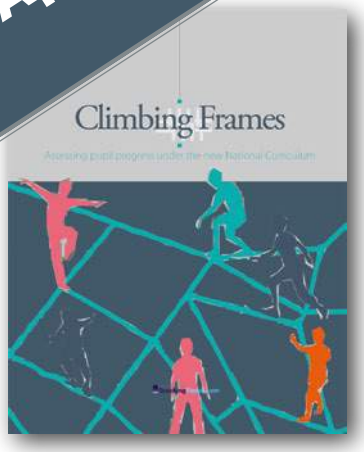

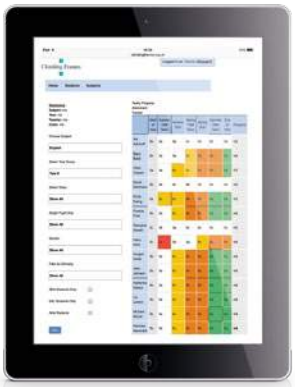

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How to … integrate practitioner enquiry into professional learning and performance management

How can practitioner enquiry make a real difference in your schools? **Lindsay Palmer** and **Nicky Theobald** provide guidance drawn from their practice.

Research engagement and practitioner enquiry has become an integral part of our approach to continuous professional learning and to the performance management process. It is part of a culture of research based, joint practice development aiming to embed 'best' practice and cultivate 'next' practice across our school. There has been a significant journey in mindsets and attitudes, from a limited understanding of the role of research in professional development, to a firm belief that research engagement is an entitlement which has a considerable impact on the practice of individuals and of the collective.

Joint Practice Development (JPD) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

After a review of our approach to CPD it was clear that it was having a limited impact on school development priorities, professional practice and most importantly outcome for children. Staff were attending training and development events and despite there being structures in place for dissemination there was limited evidence of impact on for instance improved changes to teaching and learning. It became clear that a new approach was needed; however it was first necessary to explore our current approach and consider current research into effective models of professional learning.

An audit of professional development activity identified two clear strands:

i) compliance led activity, eg First Aid, Fire Marshall training, food hygiene etc.
ii) pedagogical development linked to subjects, leadership and teaching and learning.

The focus of the review would be that of pedagogical activity and reviewing how to develop a model of professional learning that would impact demonstrably on practice and outcomes.

A review of literature and research suggested that our current approach relied heavily on an 'empty vessel' model where staff attended training and development sessions which were facilitator led. There was little opportunity for staff to share their own knowledge, skills and experiences. Hargreaves, (2012) asserts that professional development is "less about attending conferences and courses and more about school-based, peer-to-peer activities in which development is fused with routine practice". It became apparent that we needed to develop an approach to professional leaning that relied more on 'explicit rational discovery', rather than 'tacit rational discovery'. We needed to move from professional development approaches that do not recognise previous knowledge and experience or value discussion to one that explicitly encourages collective discourse and collegial support (Palmer, 2004). As suggested by Aristotle "collective deliberation by the many is always preferable to the isolated deliberation of the individual" (Carr, 1998, p71)

Joint Practice Development (JPD), is described by Hargreaves (2012) as an activity that captures the essential features of professional development. It is a joint activity that values interaction and prior knowledge, that focusses on practice development, not simply listening to how things can be done but amending and changing practice as part of the process. Evidence strongly suggested that this JPD approach strongly enhanced professional development and was far more effective and powerful in changing practice than individual CPD activity (Stoll, Harris and Handscomb., 2012 and Cordingley, Bell, Isham, Evans, and Firth 2005).

Through our review of the literature it also became clear that research engagement is an essential element of professional learning, as it promotes a regard for evidence which can be used to develop and practice and improve outcomes for children (Stoll, Harris and Handscomb, 2012). BERA (2014) further emphasise the relevance of researchful practice to teacher development, suggesting that to be at their most effective teachers need to engage *with* research and enquiry (keeping up to date with developments and reading findings) and also be equipped to engage *in* research activity (having the capacity, confidence and motivation). Indeed, both BERA and Handscomb, 2013 assert that every teacher should be entitled to a research- rich environment that's supports their development, and every learner is entitled to teaching that is informed by research.

It was therefore established that both JPD and research engagement should be at the core of our professional learning approach. However, it was also agreed that in order to establish this as an effective model there would need to be a significant shift in the mindsets of staff toward professional development and it would need to be embedded within the framework of self-evaluation and performance management.

Changing hearts and minds and the culture of professional development

It was recognised that in order to establish a new approach to professional learning there would need to be a significant shift in culture. Historically professional development had been through the engagement in training events, usually off site one day courses, following an 'empty vessel' model. Staff were used to seeking to their professional development in this way and were likely to need support to understand the proposed cultural shift to practitioner led, joint practice research based development.

Hargreaves (2012) suggests that for JPD to be effective it requires people to meet often and engage in the process with a collective moral purpose. Staff already demonstrated very high levels of moral purpose. Staff placed children at the heart of their collegiate approach to the planning and assessment of an enriched and innovative curriculum. This commitment to collaboration and collegiate working now needed to be utilised to shift the culture of understanding linked to a culture of enquiry and professional learning.

A series of developmental training events were planned for staff. These sessions began exploring some key questions about professional learning through

integrate practitioner enquiry into professional learning and performance management

activity and discussion. Staff began to articulate aspects of their own experiences of professional learning that had been effective and impactful. Staff highlighted aspects including, working alongside other people, a direct link to a key development area, learning had been over a period of time rather than a one off event and where there had been opportunities for gap tasks, development and reflection. These insightful personal reflections enabled us to place them at the heart of current academic research. Staff were able to see how their own thinking correlated with the that of researchers, immediately and visibly heightening the value of research and enquiry.

Professional Learning Task: Effecive CPD?

Is your current CPD model effective? Are you able to identify impact on professional practice?

How will you ensure staff develop their understanding of effective approaches to CPD and JPD and how this links to practitioner research?

The next step was to further engage staff with thinking about research and enquiry of their own. Beginning with exploring the use of research in everyday life and moving on to explore practitioner enquiry, 'what it is' and 'what it is not'. Over the period of training and development sessions, there was a palpable developing culture of enquiry. Staff understood research engagement to be an important and integral element their professional development (Handscomb, 2013) and how collaborative experiences helped to give meaning to their own individual work. (Cordingley, Bell, Isham, Evans, and Firth, 2007).

Embedding research and enquiry in to self-evaluation and appraisal frameworks

Having successfully begun to develop and embed a researchful and collaborative approach to professional development, it was vital to make clear links between this developing culture, self-evaluation and appraisal. "Where professional development is effective, leaders integrate professional development with performance management and school self-review" (Ofsted 2006). The current Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011) do not make reference to evidence based practice and practitioner research. As such it was decided to create a framework of research and professional learning

competencies to sit alongside these standards. The model was created using three key strands 'Continuing professional development', Joint Practice Development' and 'Research and Enquiry'. The following table shows an extract of the maturity model for Research and Enquiry (see Box 1 below).

Box 1: Research and Enquiry			
Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Enhancing
Demonstrates reflective thinking through peer dialogue and… ..Evaluates practice in relation to best practice models ….	Applies developing knowledge …… of school-based research and enquiry processes in real contexts. Contributes to pedagogic documentation … Evaluates practice in relation to wider reading.	Has established knowledge and understanding of collaborative research/ enquiry… Demonstrates analytical thinking in relation to wider research… Leads research and enquiry processes and disseminates findings….	Initiates and leads collaborative research and enquiry programmes within and beyond school context…. Acts as a research mentor… Takes a lead role in the collation, publication and dissemination of research findings.

This model along with the Teacher's Standards was developed in to a digital cloud based platform. This platform enabled staff to self-assess, upload key evidence in the form of documentation, photographs or videos, and identify next steps. This self-assessment would then be discussed and agreed through a formal appraisal meeting. The parity of the Teachers' Standards alongside the Professional Learning and Research maturity model, raised the status and value of these activities further. Staff were very clear that research engagement and professional learning is not only an expectation but an entitlement.

Impact and Outcomes

It has taken three years to reach our current activity point. It has been a iterative process. It began with a significant focus on developing an understanding of a research culture and of effective professional learning. On reflection this was indeed time well spent.

Requests to attend 'one off' training events have diminished. Requests that are made are demonstrably linked to school development priorities, appraisal and research foci. Staff are clear that professional learning is not an ad hoc activity, but one linked to wider aspects of school and Trust development. Collaboration and joint practice developed is valued. There a recognition that "collective deliberation by the many is always preferable to the isolated deliberation of the individual" (Carr, 1998, p71). The language of research is embedded throughout the school. Staff are heard to talk about 'evidence', 'impact' and 'dissemination' and share articles and readings. There is a palpable degree of professional dialogue and deep reflection. Staff have been able t observe at first-hand how their engagement in active research has given them significant ownership over the direction of school development. Outcomes from research have been embedded into practice within the school, across The Trust and disseminated to other

colleagues within the teaching school alliance.

The importance of the development of a culture of enquiry and research cannot be underestimated. The level of insight and comprehension demonstrated by staff has without doubt enabled the visible shift in the culture and nature of professional learning and research.

Professional Learning Task: Embedding research engagement in your school

What vision do you have for research engagement in your own school? How do you plan to introduce, develop and embed the concept?

Consider how you will use staff development sessions to make this happen. Think carefully about the early stages in order to embed the understanding of a changing landscape of professional learning.

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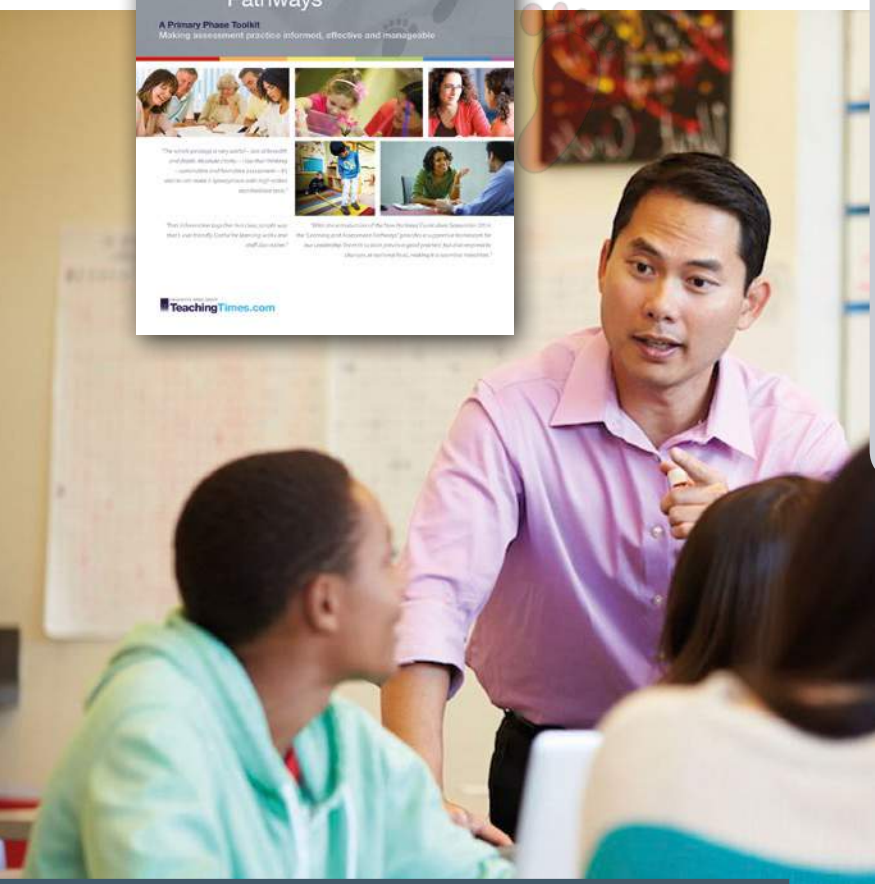

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Anita Warwick, Headteacher Uplands Primary School, Forest Learning Alliance Teaching School

How to … use research Learning Sets as basis for practitioner enquiry

Lindsay Palmer and **Nicky Theobald** show how the model of Learning Sets can provide the framework for developing practitioner enquiry within a school.

In our ambition to embed a culture of enquiry across the school it was decided to establish research Learning Sets for all teaching staff. It was our aim to create school-based learning and development groups which would promote researchful practice through reflection, professional dialogue and systematic enquiry. These groups would be a vehicle to shape, refine and drive school development priorities through collaboration, support and challenge.

Learning Sets, embedding and understanding practitioner enquiry

The idea of Learning Sets was introduced to the teaching staff through a series of facilitated professional development sessions. These sessions included a review of the research relating to practitioner research and how implementing research Learning Sets could recognise, value and share many features of current outstanding practice. Time was also spent considering research methods and research methodologies, and introducing the Spiral model (Theobald, 2011) that the Learning Sets would follow. The sessions were interactive and encouraged teachers to share their experiences of research and how this related to their own development, challenging perceptions and reframing their understanding of professional learning and development. Emphasis was placed upon how research and enquiry are key to effective professional development and can make an important contribution to self-evaluation, improvement and professional learning (Stoll, Harris and Handscomb, 2012; Handscomb, 2013).

Professional Learning Task: Introducing the value of enquiry

How will research and practitioner enquiry be introduced to staff? How can you enable staff to understand the value of research and its potential impact on their practice and outcomes for children?

Six Learning Sets were formed focussing on aspects linked to school development issues, maths, behaviour, reading and early years, and computing. Senior staff, many of whom are designated as Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs), were asked to lead the Learning Sets. Set facilitators engaged in further training supporting their role. The first meeting of the Learning Set groups concentrating on establishing the focus of the research and beginning to draft research questions. Key to the work of the Learning Sets was their interrogation of research findings from external research sources (Stoll, Harris and Handscomb, 2012) using this to support the framing of their questions and data collection.

The Learning Sets continued to meet regularly. It was clear as the meetings progressed that there was a commitment to the process with a persistent focus on outcomes. There was a balance of collective and independent actions. Teachers valued the opportunity to take calculated risks with their practice within an ethos of innovation and change (Opfer, Pedder and Lavicza, 2008). There was a demonstrable understanding of

how engagement with the research process and the exploration and reflection of their practice could significantly contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning (Handscomb, 2013).

The Leadership Team supporting a culture of effective research engagement

Key to the development of research culture has been the involvement of the senior leadership team. It has been important for the leadership team to model a 'learning never stops' approach to professional development and ensure that research approaches are at the heart of policy and practice (Handscomb and MacBeath, 2003). The leadership team were part of the Learning Sets and attended along with all other teachers. Their role was one of participant not leader. The leadership team recognised that the success of the Learning Set approach was dependent on their ability to create the necessary culture and conditions (Stoll, Harris and Handscomb, 2012). This included the provision of resources, especially the resources of time for teachers to meet as a Set and time to develop aspects of their findings and outcomes (McIntyre, 2004). A programme of regular staff meetings and professional development sessions were allocated to support the activity within school. Links were overtly made to school development plans and how through the work of the Learning Set teachers could have a significantly increased impact upon direction of travel.

During every Learning Set meeting the Head of Teaching School and Teaching School consultant were available. Time was spent with each Set, supporting the development of research questions, research methods, data collection and impact evaluation. Learning Set facilitators were also supported in their role. One to one and group development meetings were scheduled regularly. These meetings were facilitated with a coaching and mentoring approach, aiming to up skill the facilitators further with their own skills in the leadership of enquiry. External sources of research regarding the leadership of enquiry and effective Learning Sets were also regularly shared, aiming to increase knowledge and understanding of wider issues regarding practitioner research. Above all the leadership team aimed to establish a culture where, teachers have confidence in the process, and enjoy mutual support in exploring their thinking, scrutinising their practice and taking good ideas further (Handscomb, 2013)

Professional Learning Task: Modelling and supporting the process

How can your leadership team support a culture of research? How will they model research engagement and the use of evidence based practice?

How can you give staff the confidence to try new strategies and innovate practice? How will you ensure that evidence is gathered to record impact?

Developing the research focus

It was agreed from the very beginning of the Learning Set development that all research activity should be embedded within the context of the school's current development needs. Research clearly suggests that "effective professional development is based on the assessment of individual and school needs", (Stoll. Harris and Handscomb., 2012). There was a strong commitment to connecting research with everyday practice, rather than viewing it as an add on. It was also considered that staff would understand the relevance of the research activity if the foci were already part of what they were considering as part of subject development. During the first Learning Set meeting facilitators were asked to consider their subject/aspect development plans and explore areas in which a research project may be a way in which to effectively explore and develop best and next practice. As the research process continued the following questions were developed:

- **Behaviour**
  How can 'the 5 point scale' approach be adapted effectively for whole school implementation?

- **Computing**
  How can parental engagement be increased and maintained through the use of the new school virtual learning environment?

- **Reading**
  How can parental engagement in children's reading activities be increased and maintained?

- **Early Years**
  Does an increased level of child initiated learning impact upon progress and achievement?

- **Maths**
  Does an increased use of manipulatives impact on progress and achievement?

The research Learning Sets were able to make direct links between their engagement in research activity and their subject/aspect development plans. Practitioners were able to take ownership of activity and valued the opportunity to shape the direction of practice through research and action. There was evidence of a high degree of professional dialogue and deep reflection arising from their research engagement.

Professional Learning Task: Focus and key development areas

Consider what you can do to ensure research foci will support wider school development. How will you support teachers to identify key developments areas that can be advanced effectively through research engagement?

A common methodology

It was decided that in order to support the staff with their research approaches a common user friendly research methodology should be used. In past research projects the Spiral Learning model had been successfully and thus it was chosen as the model for research Learning Sets to follow.

The Spiral (Theobald, 2011) provides a model of research and inquiry that promotes confidence and has shown to be highly effective in inspiring practitioners to take a leading role in transforming practice. As practitioners journey through the Spiral, they are empowered with the skills to shape and refine new pedagogical approaches in their own contexts.

The Spiral provides common language and framework upon which to build research activity by moving through four key stages:

Discovery

At this stage research groups are asked to 'Explore and define' the nature of their research focus. Due consideration is given to 'what' is to be researched and 'why'. Through this exploration initial research questions are developed, enabling the groups to narrow their research effectively to a specific focus.

Research

Throughout the research phase, practitioners refine their research activity by considering who will undertake what aspects of the research, refining roles and expected outcomes. It is during this phase baseline data information is gathered and recorded.

Effect

During the effect phase practitioners focus on the 'validity and impact' of their research. They explore

the evidence and data they are collecting and consider what it is telling them. What difference is it making to outcomes and what does this mean for future practice? Practitioners begin to consider how this should impact upon wider practice and staff development.

Growth

In the final phase of the Spiral practitioner consider how their findings and learning can be 'cultivated' to innovate and change practice. Practitioners consider how to embed changes to practice across the school.

The Spiral model is seen as a dynamic, evolving and fluid research model. Phases are not of fixed duration and there is significant interplay between them. The Spiral has no fixed end point and often during one research project the four phases may be explored on more than one occasion.

Dissemination and learning exchange

"Effective professional development starts with the end in mind", (Stoll, Harris and Handscomb, 2012, p2). With this as a clear message, the Learning Sets were made aware from the outset that their work would be shared and disseminated to wider colleagues and the wider community through website presence and reporting protocols. There was also an expectation that a Case Study would be written for each Learning Set.

Guidance and support was given to Set facilitators regarding the writing of a research case study. Set facilitators took the lead role in its writing and were given a flexible scaffold to follow. These case studies are now available for wider reading on the Teaching School website.

It was decided a Research Learning Conference would be arranged to provide a forum for dissemination and exchange of learning. The Learning Conference took place on a teacher development day. Learning Sets were challenged with creating a 'Market Place' stall, which would show case their research, considering how it had followed the Spiral research model. It should also clearly share the main findings, outcomes and impact. Preparation and planning sessions were timetabled into the staff meeting timetable.

The whole school was turned into a research market place with each Learning Set being allocated an area in which to establish their display. A keynote, giving by Professor Graham Handscomb, launched the day and all staff (including school Teaching assistants not yet directly involved in the research sets), spent time visiting the displays, gathering information and asking questions. During this market place activity there was a palpable sense of interest and enquiry, a genuine buzz of enthusiasm for the research. Participants were given the opportunity to draw to together their thinking and consider what impact the findings from other Learning Sets may have on their own practice.

During the afternoon all staff were involved in a "research café" discussion, exploring the following questions.

- "How can we ensure that our research brings about improvements in teaching and learning?"
- "How can we share the fruits of enquiry meaningfully and systematically with our partners?"

We had recognised throughout this first Learning Set research cycle that there were potentially many ways in which we could develop and enrich the research experience further for staff. The research 'café' enabled staff to discuss key questions which could support this development. This interactive and engaging approach empowered all staff, once again giving them a key role in deciding on the future direction of research approaches.

The research learning conference successfully connected work-based learning and external expertise (Stoll, Harris and Handscomb, 2012), valuing the remarkable work of the Learning Sets whilst placing it in the context of wider practitioner research approaches and developments.

use research Learning Sets as basis for practitioner enquiry

Professional Learning Task: Sharing research learning

How could you share research learning within your own school, the school's wider community and beyond? Consider the value of both special events such as a research conference and ways in which knowledge exchange can be built into the day to day life of the schools and wider networking practice.

Wider impact and development

A full evaluation of the Research Learning Set approach has established that teachers have a significantly increased level of understanding about how engagement in research is core to practice development and professional learning. The change in teacher attitude and behaviours is tangible with increased teacher curiosity, risk taking and self-questioning (Palmer and Theobald, 2014). The evaluation process, including information gained from staff highlighted the following as key aspects relating to the effectiveness of the approach:

- Time invested in the initial training sessions to ensure staff clear about evidence regarding practitioner research and research methods.
- Staff knowing the time frame for the research process as a whole, that is the dissemination event (Learning Conference was scheduled to be 18 months after Learning Set Launch).
- The investment in resources, especially that of time, by the Leadership team valuing the approach as a key professional development activity.
- Staff knowing the expectation of the outcomes of the research Learning Sets, for example the Learning Conference and writing of case studies.
- The professional freedom given to staff to develop relevant questions that would impact upon their subject leadership strategy and action plan.
- The involvement of all staff in the on-going development of the approach.
- The interactive nature of the dissemination activity and involvement of all staff, including teaching assistants.

On a very practical level the implementation of the Learning Set approach has made an impact on aspects of school and subject development. For example, in response to the results of the maths Learning Set maths 'manipulatives baskets' are now in place across upper key stage two. Children are encouraged to use manipulatives in all aspects of their learning. There has been demonstrable improvement in children's ability to work and solve problems independently.

The behaviour Learning Set developed a behaviour management approach using the 5 point scale (Dunn Buron and Curtis 2003) that was implemented across the whole school and has subsequently been, reviewed and implemented across the other two Academy Trust schools. Staff have seen at first hand, how their research work has been valued and used to make a significant contribution to the development of the whole school and the Academy Trust.

Having completed the first cycle of Research Learning Sets the approach has continued to develop. There is an increasing focus on the involvement of all Teaching Assistants within the Learning Set model. Teaching assistants have now undertaken the same initial professional development as teachers to explore the nature of practitioner research and how this relates to their role as teaching assistants.

One question we continue to ask ourselves is regarding the validity of the outcomes, a question that is often linked to teacher researcher enquiry (McLaughlin, 2004). We subscribe to McIntyre's assertion (2004), "There is a term known as 'good enough research' which means generating research designs that are valid and reliable to their purpose and context, rather than to the purity of knowledge or its generalizability". Our comprehensive review of the process has clearly identified that within the context or 'our schools', 'our Trust', 'our children' and 'our communities' the research is valid and results have impacted significantly on development and practice.

References for all four HOW TO pieces: Dunn-Buron, K and Curtis, M (2003) The Incredible 5-point Scale. Autism Asperger Publishing, Co,US GTC, CUREE and LSIS, (2011), Report of Professional Practitioner Use of Research Review: Practitioner Engagement in and /or with Research, London, GTC ■ Opfer, VD., Pedder, D. and Lavicza, Z. (2008) Schools continuing Professional Development in England: State of the Nation research project, London TDA ■ Palmer, L and Theobald N (2014) Research into Action, Headteacher Update March 2014, MA Education Ltd ■ Handscomb, G (2013), Empowering Teachers!... through Practitioner research, Education Today. Vol. 63, Number 3, Autumn, 2013 The College of Teachers ■ Handscomb, G and MacBeath, J, (2003) The research- engaged school, Chelmsford, Essex County Council ■ McIntyre, D (2004) Schools as research institutions. In McLaughlin, C., Black-Hawkins, K., and McIntyre, D. (Eds) Researching Teachers, Researching Schools, Researching Networks. A Review of the literature, Univeristy of Cambridge ■ McLaughlin, C (2004) Practitioner research and enquiry. In McLaughlin, C., Black-Hawkins, K., and McIntyre, D. (Eds) Researching Teachers, Researching Schools, Researching Networks. A Review of the literature, Univeristy of Cambridge ■ Stoll, L., Harris, A., and Handscomb, G (2012), Great Professional Development which leads to great pedagogy: nine claims from research, Nottingham, NCTL ■ Theobald N. (2011) Spiral Research Methodology. Spiral Consultancy.

Striving for coherent, effective professional learning

Philippa Cordingley reports on a major review of evidence on professional learning and development which poses some fundamental issues about effectiveness, sustainability and coherence.

Navigating the headwind

What professional learning works in schools? This is perhaps one of the most important and pertinent questions being asked in education. For four years CUREE (Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education) has been collecting evidence in partnership with schools about the effectiveness and efficiency of schools as professional learning environments through our SKEIN school improvement service. SKEIN is not an acronym – it is the collective noun for geese flying in a "V" formation. We think it offers an interesting metaphor for effective learning environments – ones where different leaders absorb the strain of navigating and of coping with headwinds in turn. It also builds on the other metaphor we think is important in providing effective leadership of and support for professional learning – the importance of practising what we preach. The pamphlet I wrote to

celebrate CUREE's first ten years in action describes in practical detail how "what's sauce for the goose is also sauce for the gander", (ihttp://www.curee-paccts.com/resources/publications/sauce-goose-leaflet-pdf-format). We first wrote about this work for PDT in 2014 (Cordingley and Buckler, 2014).

This article reviews the rich picture emerging from our growing SKEIN database in the context of the findings of our systematic review of evidence from research reviews which explore evidence about effective professional development and learning for teachers, *Developing Great Teaching*, (Cordingley et al 2015 http://www.curee-paccts.com/news/2015/06/developing-great-teaching-new-report-effective-teachers-professional-development). We do though recognise that this is a self-selecting group of schools, whose members have all expressed a specific interest in and commitment to enhancing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and exploring and developing the professional learning environment they provide for colleagues. In recent years systematic research reviews have started to make clear the importance of focussing specifically not just on the support we offer to teachers i.e. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) but also on the learning experiences and activities of teachers as they put that support to work - Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL). This most recent review explores both sides of this coin. This article refers consistently to CPD as specifically planned support provided for development and to CPDL as the combination of support and follow up activities initiated and or sustained by teachers.

Systematic review findings

The *Developing Great Teaching* report was based on an analysis of systematic reviews of research about CPD and CPDL. The criteria we used to decide which studies to include in the review were that they needed to provide evidence about impacts for both teachers and for pupils/students. After careful searching and systematic filtering, a set of reviews were selected which were thought rigorous enough to be used. These were organised into a hierarchy of rigour and analysis was structured around findings from the most robust reviews. The reviews were then analysed separately and their findings were split into a series of claims, which were compared and contrasted with each other and weighted according to the strength of the evidence supporting them, before being grouped thematically. The net effect of this process was to produce a series of claims which are (at the strongest level) equivalent in strength to the four padlocks used to designate weight of evidence in the Sutton Trust-EEF Toolkit.

The review confirmed many findings from previous reviews about CPDL which had used less demanding inclusion criteria. Broadly these relate to **time**, especially to timescales, to **participants' learning experiences** and to **forms of support**. So it emphasised:

Time - the importance of sustaining professional learning over time, usually two terms or more and of a sustained rhythm of regular bite-sized episodes following initial "instruction" rather than intense "hits". Sustaining professional learning emerges as crucial because it creates multiple, cumulative opportunities for teachers to test, review and refine practices in the light of pupils' responses. Sustained and iterative professional learning experiences were the characteristic of all the most effective approaches to CPDL. However, there were also a few instances of effective approaches where a shorter and more intense CPD intervention was successful, when it was focussed on a very narrow and specific intervention to solve an equally narrow and specific challenge. One example of this kind of more narrowly defined learning goal was addressing specific issues around spelling.

Participants' experiences - including a combination of:

- explicit identification and recognition of colleagues' individual starting points;
- activities that help colleagues develop a collective sense of purpose (which mattered much more than being a volunteer or a conscript to a programme of professional learning);
- a focus on organising and testing their own learning through the lens of their aspirations for their pupils to ensure its relevance;
- opportunities to explore and challenge their existing theories, beliefs and practices in a supportive environment;
- being challenged to develop meta-cognitive control of new approaches for example by:
  - analysing and evaluating CPD content, along with evidence from observations of one's own and other people's practice about interactions between practices and the responses of different groups of pupils; and
  - developing an underpinning rationale or practical theory about why things do and don't work in different contexts side by side with practice.

Support – including:

- Contributions from experts who are sufficiently

external to the day to day working context to be in a position to challenge orthodoxies *supportively*. Although external, supportive challenge was a strong characteristic of effective CPD activities, this was not necessarily a majority contribution; sometimes, for example, those contributing external challenge were explicitly working in partnership with internal specialists to build capacity

- support from peers to expand perspectives, sustain momentum and create an atmosphere of trust. Shared vulnerability seemed to be associated with speeding up the risk taking that inevitably accompanies integrating new approaches into established professional practice.

Emerging insights gained from the review

But the review also highlighted some new insights. The first was the importance, for CPD providers, of recognising that no single element worked on its own. What was crucial was the creation of a logically connected sequence of diverse, iterative, evidence-rich learning experiences, focussed on aspirations for pupils.

The second major discovery was the criticality of providing assessment for learning (AFL) strategies to the teachers as a way of illustrating and contextualising new approaches for different subjects and groups of pupils, and of using the evidence revealed by these strategies both to provide AFL for teachers and to inform the process of refining the support for CPDL that they are providing.

Finally, the review brought into clear focus the importance of facilitators having expertise in the content of the CPDL, in teacher professional learning and in evaluating teacher and pupil progress in relation to the programme goal. Whilst this range of expertise might be provided by different actors its contribution was core to truly transformative CPDL.

Interestingly, the review also highlighted things that aren't effective, including:

- the provision of generic pedagogic CPD which is not contextualised for subjects;
- providing teaching and learning resources without also supporting (and requiring) a sustained process of iterative, evidence –rich analysis and refinement;
- providing time to experiment without a structure and an appropriate mix of peer and specialist support.

Using and refining the framework

We were concerned to ask how well are teachers in SKEIN schools being supported against this expanded set of criteria. The SKEIN Research Framework is based on evidence from previous systematic reviews, so we can expect SKEIN evidence to cast light on how practice aligns with many of these key characteristics. But the framework is also based on evidence about school improvement and the leadership of CPD and has not set out deliberately to test the new findings. So we thought it timely to re-analyse key data sets to help us consider both how well placed schools, CPD providers, and teachers are to respond to the challenges posed by the new review, and the extent to which we should be refining our Research Framework.

The SKEIN Research Framework

The SKEIN Research Framework is based on a combination of the evidence given above and on evidence about school improvement and leadership of CPD. It analyses information from documentary evidence (pupil progress data, the SEF and the School Development Plan, Performance Review documents, CPD materials and resources), a staff survey, interviews, focus groups and, where possible, observations. It explores the effectiveness and efficiency of the Professional Learning Environment through how the school approaches and embeds within professional learning experiences, taking account of:

- formative and summative needs analysis;
- use of collaboration as a strategy for deepening, sustaining and embedding professional learning;
- use of specialist expertise;
- use of qualitative as well as quantitative evidence;
- modelling, resourcing and evaluating professional learning by leaders at all levels.

For each area, the evidence collected is used to evaluate

the quality and consistency of professional learning and the environment that embeds it systematically against three to five sub-components. We aggregate assessments for sub components to create an overall score for each area and for the school as a whole using a four point scale ranging from Developing, through Enhancing and Embedding to Transforming.

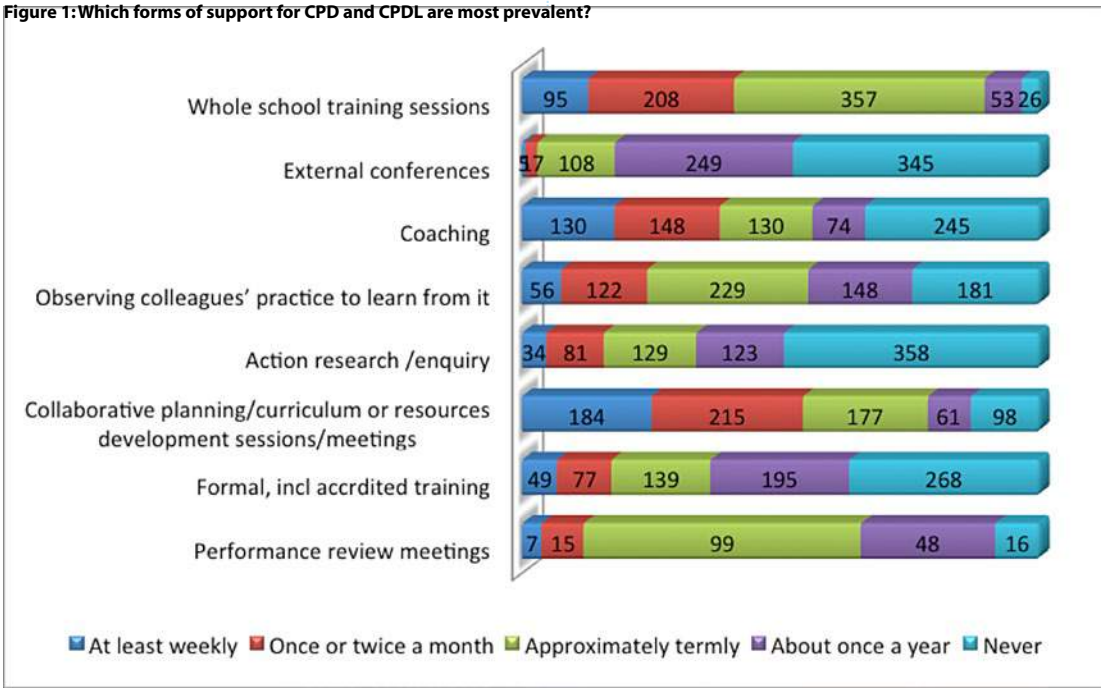
The evidence base for the remainder of this article comes from 28 schools 1 (14 secondary and 14 primary schools), 270 staff interviews, 242 staff involved in focus groups and 925 survey responses. The analysis was completed for a paper for the British Education Research Association conference in 2015 during August. So it excludes schools involved in the first year and pilot phase because we changed the framework in response to feedback and requests for additional information and therefore it was difficult to carry out consistent analyses across the full SKEIN cohort.

What's happening, what's working and what might we want to change?

In sustaining continuing professional development and learning (CPDL) over time and coherence, the first thing to explore is the approach to managing time. Is there evidence that these schools are able to organise support for CPD through a rhythm of sustained activity? The most striking feature of the organisation of CPD support in this sample is the predominance of whole school CPD sessions; they are the most extensive form of CPD support, as Figure 1 below shows. Collaborative planning and curriculum resource development sessions emerge as the next most extensive activity. For a significant minority of colleagues (184) this is also the most frequent activity; one that takes place on a weekly basis. The only other activities to occur on a weekly basis for many colleagues are coaching (130) and whole school INSET sessions (95).

These sessions do offer the *potential* for supporting iterative waves of professional learning of the kind highlighted by the review for those teachers (303) experiencing this at least once or twice a month. Such frequency was mostly associated with 3 overlapping activities which took place at varying intervals: regular opportunities to plan the curriculum and resources collaboratively (399), opportunities for coaching (278), and opportunities to observe others' practice to learn from it (178) – see Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Which forms of support for CPD and CPDL are most prevalent?



Realising the potential of support for CPD activities to create iterative, coherent and pupil oriented learning experiences doesn't just depend on frequency. It also depends on how far schools are taking steps to create coherence in professional learning and also on how far schools are able to identify and build upon teachers' individual starting points and to help them work with and through the lens of their aspirations for pupils.

Differentiation and building on starting points

In our sample more than half the schools took steps to try to align activities and create coherence for particular themes or issues. For example, in some schools, a year-long emphasis on assessment for learning or feedback enabled middle leaders and heads of some (but not usually all) departments or phases to make links between different stand-alone activities in some schools and to build a whole bigger than the sum of the parts. In other schools *Development Groups or Teaching and Learning Groups* carrying out sustained enquiries were able to make such links and help others to do so through their enquiry activities. In almost all cases this alignment was focussed on pedagogic strategies rather than trying to create, shape and track a sequence of teacher progression.

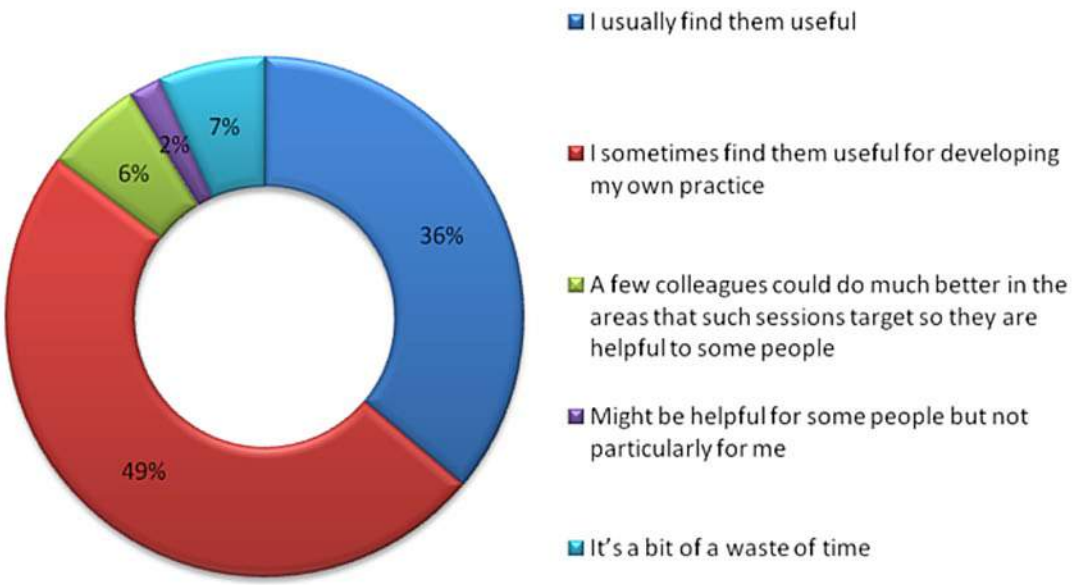
Figure 2 above provides some insight into how far the teachers themselves feel that whole school INSET sessions and other CPD sessions make a contribution to their professional learning.

Thirty six per cent of the teachers participating thought that whole school INSET sessions were usually useful. Almost 50% said they sometimes found them useful. Only 7% reported usually finding them useful. Supplementary information from interviews and focus groups suggest that the barriers to professional learning in whole school sessions include:

- too little chance to contextualise generic pedagogic strategies being introduced or emphasised by CPD;
- too little effort to identify and build upon prior experience and knowledge during CPD activities; and sometimes
- an over emphasis on briefing about whole school change and development.

These data suggest that there is still considerable progress to be made in **differentiating support for CPD** and involving teachers and CPD facilitators in **building coherent and personalised sequences of professional learning** highlighted by the review.

Figure 2: Teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of whole school INSET sessions



Better use of Performance Review

There has, of course, been very extensive emphasis on Performance Review (PR) in this country. It is true that there are puzzling numbers of participants in this data set who report that PR meetings take place only once a year (48) or even never (16). Other evidence from interviews and focus groups suggests strongly that these teachers are signalling that they feel that PR meetings are exclusively about accountability and not making a contribution to professional learning. But in some schools, CPD is provided on an integrated basis for teachers and support staff and those reporting such infrequent PR discussions are often Teaching Assistants for whom PR arrangements are often much looser than those for teachers.

But, as might be expected from schools that have already identified CPD (and sometimes CPDL) as a priority for school improvement, most SKEIN schools made extensive use of the outcomes of Performance Reviews to inform school self-evaluation and shape the CPD support being made available. Many also took active steps to ensure PR meetings made a developmental contribution in their own right. Some schools, for example, ensured that at least one PR meeting a year involves no formal grading; others ensured that at least one goal or target flows from the teachers' own personal development goals and aspirations. It is interesting to note though, that in only 6 cases was PR seen as helping teachers align goals and development activities. So there is certainly scope in these schools, and probably in many others, to extend and deepen discussion in PR meetings, about how particular CPD activities connect with their development goals.

More importantly for securing the kind of coherence and sustained, cumulative learning implied by the results of the review, is the way that schools analyse and use evidence about pupils' and professional colleagues' learning goals to shape CPD. We know, from documentary analysis and from our SLT focus group meetings that the agenda for whole school INSET days is frequently directly shaped by an analysis of PR targets and by the School Development Plan. For example, where coaching features regularly it is often specifically focused on supporting colleagues for whom challenges had emerged as part of performance review. There is therefore an attempt in principle to plan CPD in ways that recognise and build on evidence about teachers' starting points.

The evidence about teachers' experiences of whole school sessions suggests, though, that these links are not yet strong enough; that the learning processes and activities that take place during these events, and the efforts to connect them with other professional learning activities, may need further development. Concerns amongst teachers tend to fall into two groups. Either teachers express frustrations about the fit between the content of a session and its form; about, for example extensive, Power Point presentations about active or independent learning strategies for pupils. Or they report a good match between pedagogic strategies for pupils and for teachers but too little opportunity to explore these in practical ways such as for example in different subjects or ability groupings. There is clearly a need to consider how we support differentiation within CPD in more depth.

There may also be a case for making the thinking and links between aggregate analysis of performance review and CPD planning more explicit to colleagues. It is noticeable, for example, that in schools not yet included in this analysis, where middle leaders were actively involved in analysing and interpreting the aggregated PR targets and their implications for CPD, there was rather wider understanding and ownership of the goals of whole school CPD session. Here too, teachers in focus groups were able to provide more concrete examples of how issues explored in whole school sessions were being developed further in phase or subject meetings, through action research or coaching and were being used as part of curriculum planning.

Specialist contributions

One of the more controversial findings from the *Developing Great Teaching* review was the emphasis it places on contributions from specialists who are external to the school/site of development. In some ways this cuts across the widespread movement towards internalising CPD support to recognise and build capacity to conduct professional learning in-school. The widespread shift towards in-school CPD led by colleagues is a largely

English phenomenon. The recent expansion of school-led CPD to include school to school collaboration and support and the growth of Teaching Schools and Alliances is similarly unusual. So it is not likely that an international review of the evidence about effectiveness will capture the strengths or the weakness of this approach. Nonetheless, the strength of the evidence about the importance of in-depth expertise in the content of CPD, in the evaluation of impact for teachers and for pupils, and in effective facilitation of professional learning, is striking and worth consideration in principle. Specialist expertise is also one of the key areas for evaluation within the SKEIN Research Framework. How then do SKEIN schools approach specialist contributions?

We have evidence about the frequency with which teachers are able to draw upon specialist expertise and from whom in relation engage in:

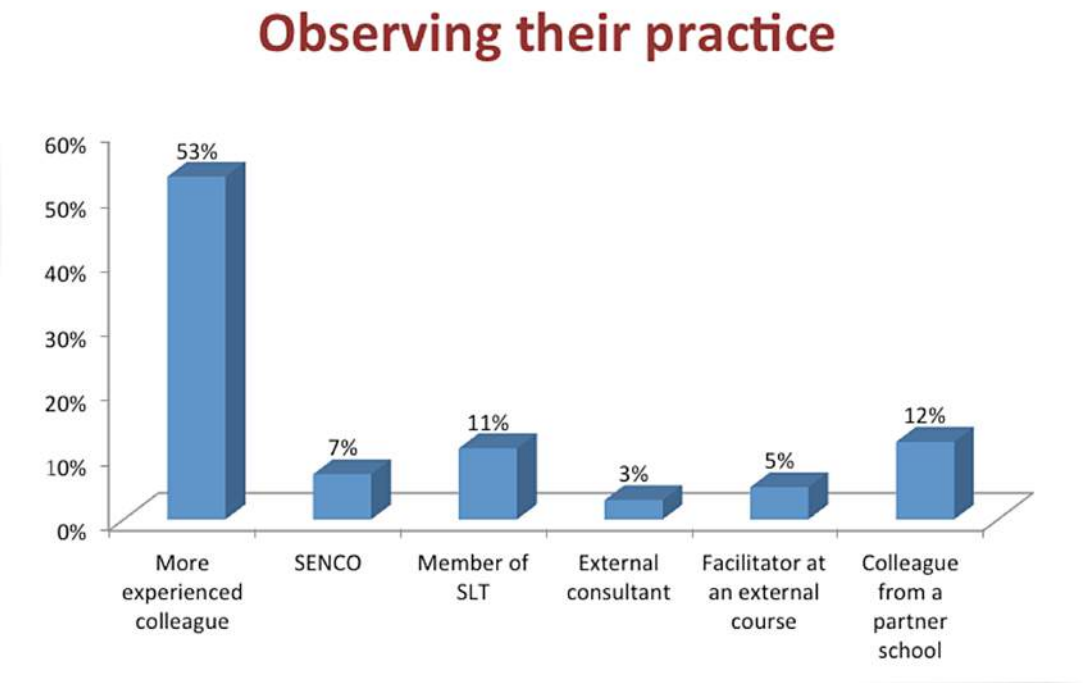
- Opportunities to observe experts' practice;
- Refining and extending aspirations for pupils;
- Making use of their tools, resources and research;
- Exploring why things do and don't work indifferent contexts.

An example of this evidence for the first of these is given in Figure 3 below.

Unsurprisingly, by far the most frequent form of what teachers see as specialist support comes from more experienced colleagues (53%). The next most frequent source of specialist support is colleagues from another school followed closely by SLT colleagues. Of course, these may or may not be specialists in any or all of the areas highlighted by the research evidence i.e. the specific content of the CPD, in both content *and* pedagogy and the evaluation of the CPD process and its impact on CPDL. Interestingly those who are more likely to have such expertise because of the nature of their roles i.e. SENCOS and external consultants and programme facilitators (who are unlikely to be used unless they bring expertise not already available within schools) are, in fact, those used least frequently.

The pattern is similar for the other areas. More experienced colleagues are identified as the sources of specialist expertise in over 50% of cases in every area. External consultants are identified as the least used source of specialist expertise. SLT members are the second most frequent source of specialist expertise

Figure 3: Opportunities to observe experts' practice



in every area except making use of specialists' tools and resources where facilitators on external courses and colleagues from partner schools (19% and 17% respectively) are second to more experienced colleagues. Interestingly, and importantly for building coherence in CPDL, the area where SLT members are thought to make the biggest specialist contribution (by 24% of colleagues) is in exploring why things do and don't work in different contexts and building practical theory.

What can we learn from these findings?

The evidence explored here comes, of course, from a self-selecting group of schools committed to investing in CPD. Reviewing this evidence in the light of findings from the new review has revealed an interesting and thought provoking picture. The teachers involved in this research frequently have many positive things to say about CPD and even more positive ideas about how deeper and more sustained professional learning could be embedded in day to day school life (a topic for a different article). Their instinct and/or opportunities are based on seeking out and building on the practical experience of immediate colleagues and those who lead them. There are undoubtedly some strengths in this situation. But the evidence showing how much the provision of specialist expertise builds on in-school accountability structures suggest that facilitation will need to be especially skilful if teachers are to feel trusted to make and learn from mistakes and/or to critique and enhance school policies. Furthermore, the strength of the evidence about the need for specialist expertise poses two challenges to school leaders. It suggests a need to:

- evaluate systematically the nature and depth of the expertise of those from within or beyond the school to whom school leaders allocate responsibility for facilitating their colleagues' professional learning. *Do facilitators, collectively really have in-depth understanding of the content of the CPDL, the CPDL process and its formative and summative evaluation? If not and they come from within the school, how can they be helped to develop this? If they come from beyond the school are there additional partnerships to be made that could strengthen the pool of expertise the school needs to draw down?*
- secure external critique and evaluation that tests how far the professional learning activities in the school do genuinely challenge orthodoxies and critique of current practice. *Do current peer review or School Improvement Plans explore CPD plans and processes in sufficient depth? Are there protocols and systems within evidence based forms of CPDL such as coaching, collaborative enquiry or research lesson study for ensuring that risk taking in professional learning is facilitated and supported and that beliefs, assumptions and standard approaches are genuinely explored through evidence about what is and is not working?*

Leading by example!

Collecting and analysing fine grained and concrete evidence about CPD and CPDL in their whole school context and working with school leaders on plans to address the resulting portraits is a huge privilege. Whilst synthesising this evidence highlights significant areas for development, it also reveals some very sophisticated and inspiring practices by school and CPDL leaders. I am always impressed by those who are committed to modelling their own learning about this important work by approaching it as an enquiry. So I will leave you with an example. One head teacher responded to a SKEIN recommendation that he should a) make stronger links between CPD and performance review, and b) make his own learning more explicit to his colleagues, in a very striking way. He volunteered to video his attempts to enhance the way he provided PR feedback by inviting colleagues to coach him on how to improve the practice in the video – providing, of course, the teacher in the video was happy for the video to be shared! Within a very short space of time there was a long queue of teachers wanting the opportunity to improve their own practice in the light of video evidence!

References: Cordingley, P. and Buckler, N (2014) Who you gonna call? – Using experts effectively. Professional Development Today, Volume 16, Issue 2, pages 64-69.

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Expanding the horizons of self-improving schools

Evidence suggests that professional development is more effective when it is school-led; school-based and classroom focussed … but is there a danger of schools becoming insular and stale? **Glenys Hart** explores the benefits that external experts can add to schools' professional learning experiences.

Schools are extremely busy places. There is constant change and although reflective teaching is encouraged, the reality is very different. The growth of school autonomy is one of the defining features of the recent history of the English education system which aims to create a self-improving school system led by networks of schools. In *'The importance of teaching'(DfE, 2010)*, the then government stated that 'the primary responsibility for improvement rests with schools themselves' . The current trend of encouraging schools to self-improve has many positives features such as: growing their own experts, saving money and time going out of school plus providing many opportunities to try out new ideas but may miss access to the bigger picture. This may be provided by external experts who can facilitate the sharing of innovation and practices from schools across the country and the world. If schools keep everything in-house they may be recycling ideas that are less effective, choosing already failed strategies, making mistakes that others have already made, and may stop

investigating before they've fully explored an idea.

In a network of self-improving schools, theoretically, all can be raised to the level of the best but where are the new ideas coming from? Who is bringing ideas from further afield? Who is accessing education research ? Who is evaluating the projects? Schools leaders need new ideas; need to know major research findings and need to be able to evaluate projects properly.

Schools need access to new ideas

The concept of personalised learning for individual members of staff is becoming a reality thanks to the new technologies. Leadership, subject, pedagogical, research, and evaluation knowledge can now obtained from a huge range of people and sources around the country and from amazingly easily accessible global sources; a collaborative experience where teachers and leaders can access expertise; link to hundreds of teachers using Twitter to expand their skills, get ideas from teachers around the country and around the world; learn how Open Education Resources and MOOCs break the barriers to education by reaching millions of learners around the world, providing free educational resources.

In *The logical chain: continuing professional development in effective schools* (Ofsted,2006) HMI identified a number of concerns, based on the visits to the survey schools and to the schools visited by subject inspectors. Although senior managers identified their school's needs systematically and accurately, the identification of individual teachers' needs was not always so rigorous. As a result, planning for the professional development of individuals was often weak. Schools can struggle to evaluate the impact of CPD on teaching and learning successfully, largely because they failed to identify, at the planning stage, its intended outcomes and suitable evaluation methods. The foillowing will explore ideas to help address these key issues..

The most effective professional development of leaders and teachers tends to be through individualised learning and using the new technologies **can** help achieve this. In school CPD planners do not have the time and expertise to explore all the ever changing possibilities described in this article. Schools need experts, advisers and consultants that have had the opportunity to travel around the country and world and visit other education systems, see exam boards and teacher training, plus have the requisite twenty first century skills to share, collaborative and lead. The author, for example, has visited an extensive range of schools in twelve countries across four continents over a period of twenty years (more than many ministers) and has seen Mozart in the classroom, mind-sets, brain gym, Grant Maintained, Local School Management, bench marking, SATs levels, collective worship, Education,

education, education and assessing without levels, to name but a few! The list is endless. But where can school leaders find people who have the depth of knowledge that is vital for schools to tap into?

Pedagogy

How many leaders and teachers know that Slideshare has over 300,000 presentations with the topic 'teaching' and over 1,000,000 with the topic 'learning'? Youtube has a further 1.5 million videos about teaching and 1.6 million with the learning tag. Teachertube has 66,000 videos about teaching and over 80,000 about learning. A ground-breaking initiative by Stephen Perse Foundation school in Cambridge will make A-level, IB and GCSE courses available free online. Lessons can be downloaded through Apple's iTunes U service by pupils or teachers at other schools.

Through these sites alone there are so many high quality professional contributions being communicated across the entire globe which could enrich CPD if schools were aware of their existence. Staff could spend an entire day on Youtube learning from Professor John Hattie for example. As Isaac Newton once said 'If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.' C-CPD like this is enormously rich and stimulating but it requires people with time and commitment to research what is available and share it with school staff. This is where external support can be utilised effectively drawing on the contribution of people who have been teachers, leaders, advisers and inspectors who know and understand education; who have seen many changes, innovations successes and failures; who are in a position to guide teachers and school leaders and are competent to use the new technologies mentioned.

Schools need to draw on major research findings

Learning from research might not seem an obvious starting point for a busy school leader focused on improving a school and maximising children's chances. But creating a culture in which research, evaluation and evidence are routinely used to identify and understand what works can be a key to improvement. External experts can help schools access and understand the possibilities in this growing area of expertise. School staff do not have the time to assimilate and keep up to date with this vital information.

For example the Education Endowment Foundation funds and evaluates projects on raising disadvantaged learners' attainment. Schools can use the Sutton Trust-EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit to see how effective and cost-effective different teaching and learning approaches are at a glance or access information from the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) which supports the effective use of educational research to improve practice and policy. In addition the National College for Teaching and Leadership's online leadership library features research, guidance and tools for school leaders. Also available is the Department for Education research and statistics from across government on children and young people. The Education Resources Information Center is a vast, mainly American database of educational research. How useful for schools to have guidance from people who are familiar with the content of these sites.

We are entering a period of more local responsibility in education, with current policy moves towards decentralisation. In this environment, practitioners will more than ever require accurate, useful and accessible information on 'what works' for learners, in what contexts and at what costs. Nevertheless, despite an increasing body of useful evidence in education, and many notable initiatives to improve knowledge exchange, there are still significant challenges in linking research evidence to widespread decision-making.

Schools need to know how to evaluate properly

The Institute for Effective Education (IEE), based at the University of York, is working to establish what works in learning and teaching, by conducting rigorous evaluations of education programmes and practices. Their programme 'Evidence for the Frontline' is aimed at practitioners who are currently using, or wish to use, research evidence to inform their work. By participating in the scheme they will be able to access high-quality, independent research expertise and resources, with the

help of an intermediary 'broker'. The IEE also offers a free monthly e-letter on research findings applicable to schools.

Schools may also be interested in the work of the Coalition for Evidence-based Education (CEBE) which is an alliance of individuals and organisations interested in making research evidence more central to education policy and practice. CEBE aims to provide a platform to share ideas and information, and promote independent activity that is taking place across partner organisations. Once again schools themselves may not have the capacity to access the organisations and it may be a role for external consultants commissioned by them. Or schools can gain the NFER Research Mark in recognition of quality research in a school or college. It gives structure to research programmes and acknowledges the use of research to improve teaching and learning.

Where will you find this expertise?

The wisdom of many years local experience was found in the education offices up and down the country. Sensible, serious, calm and knowledgeable; people knew the legislation, solutions to problems, in depth curriculum knowledge and personnel issues. No longer in many Local Authorities many run their own consultancies or sign onto consultants' databases (Myscience - a database of consultants linked to the National Science Learning Centre - membership rose from 181 to 307 this year alone); after the end of the National Strategies and the demise of Local Authority provisionvery few curriculum consultants went back into schools. Also as the internet grew there was a globalization of education knowledge. The Society of Education Consultants saw their oversees membership grow by 7% in 9 months.

There has been much written about generations x, y, and z. Simply put generation z are younger, computer savvy, adaptable and collaborative problem-solvers and generation x are older, technologically less competent but they are hardworking and team players. But perhaps there are hybrids who have the best features of each generation who can work with schools to improve the skills of the teaching force and consequently improve standards in schools above. These 'hybrids' are education experts who have mastered digital skills like using Facetime, Twitter and social media sites; participate in online events or blogs; use an RSS feeds through Google Reader. They are aware of the astonishing range of Open Education Resources and websites that deal with Massive Open Online Courses which are available for people to develop their own areas of expertise and acquire additional specialised subject knowledge. They also contribute to Google Docs collaborating with others in continuing education projects and assignments and they use opportunities to share through Slide-share, You-tube and Teacher-tube for example. These people do exist and can be invaluable to schools.

Maintained schools, academies, free schools and indeed other types of schools (such as studio schools, UTCs and independent schools) need not only subject experts but leadership, pedagogical, educational research and evaluation methodology specialists. The 'hybrid' generation X advisers can guide leaders and teachers to access personalised subject knowledge, leadership and pedagogical information; and they can open the way to educational research and evaluation methodology specialists. So professional learning can be recast through online courses and collaborative networks, using a range of tools to participate in continuing education when it is convenient for them, without the constraints of the rigid school day; learning in their own time about topics that interest them specifically. Such learning does not have to be in the but rather can be on their laptops/ipads at home on the sofa or using mobile devices while walking or being driven in a car.

Finally, as we consider the need to base our teaching choices on the generations doing the learning, not on our own experiences of education, where do we look to find the knowledge we require? I would argue that the strengths of each generation (x, y and z) of educators are complementary; their combination provides the necessary synergy for success.

References: Department for Education (2010) The importance of teaching: The Schools White Paper HMSO
Ofsted (2006) The logical chain: continuing professional development in effective schools. Ofsted.

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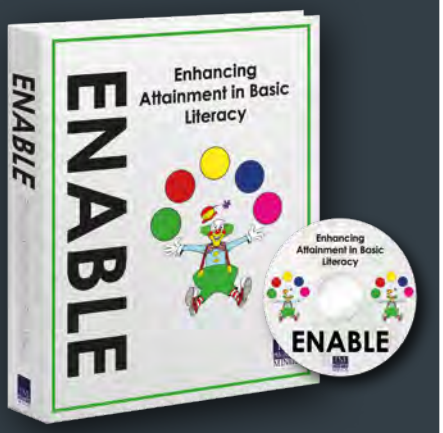

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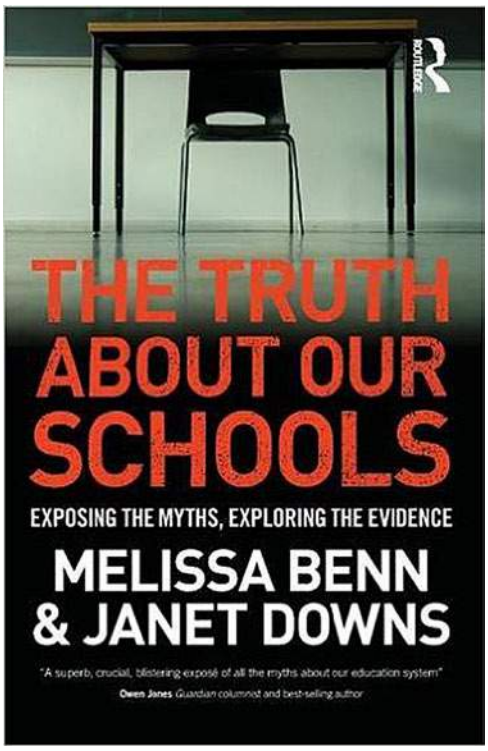
Education faultlines, hypocrisy and contested truth

The Truth About Our Schools – exposing the myths, exploring the evidence
Melissa Benn and Janet Downs, 2016, Routledge

Toby Greany reviews a book which provides a coruscating challenge to much Government policy but lacks some subtlety in its analysis.



Powerful polemic

In his quote on the book jacket, Owen Jones calls this 'a blistering expose of all the myths about our education system'. He's not wrong: this is a polemical but well researched book that pulls no punches in its attack on Conservative education policy since 2010. The authors are leading figures in the campaigning Local Schools Network website and the book also includes a series of short articles by the wider group of LSN founders – Fiona Millar, Francis Gilbert and Henry Stuart.

Debunking myths

The book is structured around what the authors describe as 'eight myths', pedalled by the Conservatives and their supporters in order to justify their academy, free school, curriculum and wider reforms. The myths are as follows:

- Comprehensive education has failed
- Local Authorities control and hold back schools

- Choice, competition and markets are the route to educational success
- Choice will improve education in England: the free school model
- Academies raise standards
- Teachers don't need qualifications
- Private schools have the magic DNA
- Progressive education lowers standards

Each myth is comprehensively examined and debunked, drawing on a lively mixture of academic research, ministerial speeches, parliamentary and think tank reports and news coverage of recent developments in the system. This journalistic approach is perhaps the book's greatest strength: even as someone who follows English educational developments closely I found plenty of evidence, quotes and specific examples of malpractice that was new. For example, did you know that 'since the 1970s private school teacher numbers have doubled relative to state schools'? (p112). On the down side, the references are all basic web-links, rather than full title and publication details, making it hard to track them down.

The analysis of the myths themselves will be mostly familiar to anyone who follows education debates at any level of detail. That is not to say it's not valuable: Benn and Downs do a good job of highlighting some of the genuine faultlines and occasional sheer hypocrisy in current English education policy thinking. For example, they are right in arguing that quasi-markets founded on parental choice and competition between schools make very little impact on pupil outcomes, and that that impact is differential – i.e. some schools might benefit, while others struggle – with school systems becoming more socially stratified and unequal as a result (Greany, 2015; Greany and Nelson, 2015).

Lack of nuance

All that said, I think the book has two flaws.

The first is that in their determination to attack current policy, the authors risk painting an overly rose-tinted picture of the comprehensive education system that went before. The truth is that while some schools and Local Authorities do appear to have been effective in that model, others weren't: or they were only challenged to improve by the high stakes accountability model that the authors decry (Woods, Husbands and Brown, 2014).

The second is that, as in any area of social science, the evidence base on school system reform is nuanced and disputed. For example, my reading of the international literature on school autonomy is that it is effective in improving outcomes in school systems, such as England, that also have high levels of professional capacity – ie where leaders and teachers know what to do with autonomy (Bloom et al, 2014; Di Liberto et al, 2014; Hanushek et al, 2012). So whilst it is eminently possible to critique the ways in which academies policy in England has been enacted since 2010, it is important to recognise that increasing autonomy may not, in itself, be wrong-headed. Benn and Downs are not really interested in this kind of nuance and as a result their book does not move us on very far in terms of how we might interpret and respond to the current policy maelstrom.

Toby Greany is Professor of Leadership and Innovation and Director of the London Centre for Leadership in Learning at the UCL Institute of Education. He is co-editor (with Peter Earley) of *School Leadership and School System Reform*, which will be published by Bloomsbury in late 2016.

References: Bloom, N. Lemos, R. Sadun, R. and Van Reenen, J. (2014) Does Management Matter in Schools? Centre for Economic Performance, LSE, Discussion Paper No 1312, London. ■ Di Liberto, A. Schivardi, F. and Sulis, G. (2014) Managerial Practices and Students' Performance. Economic Policy Sixtieth Panel Meeting, Rome. ■ Greany, T. (2015) The Self-Improving System in England: a Review of Evidence and Thinking. Association of School and College Leaders ■ Greany, T. & Nelson, N. (2015). Research into the impact of selective schooling and school composition, secondary school size, and academies and free schools. Guernsey Education Department. ■ Hanushek, E.A. Link, S. and Woessmann, L. (2012) Does School Autonomy Make Sense Everywhere? Panel Estimates from PISA, Journal of Development Economics. No. 296. ■ Woods, D. Husbands, C. and Brown, C. (2013) Transforming Education for all: The Tower Hamlets Story, London: IOE Press.

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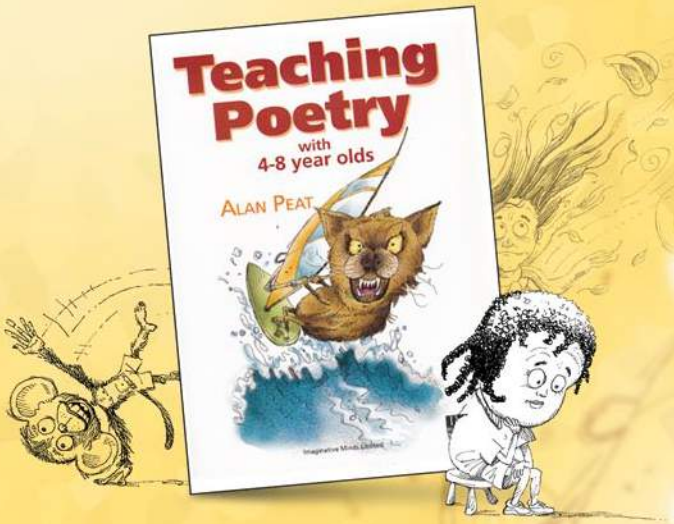

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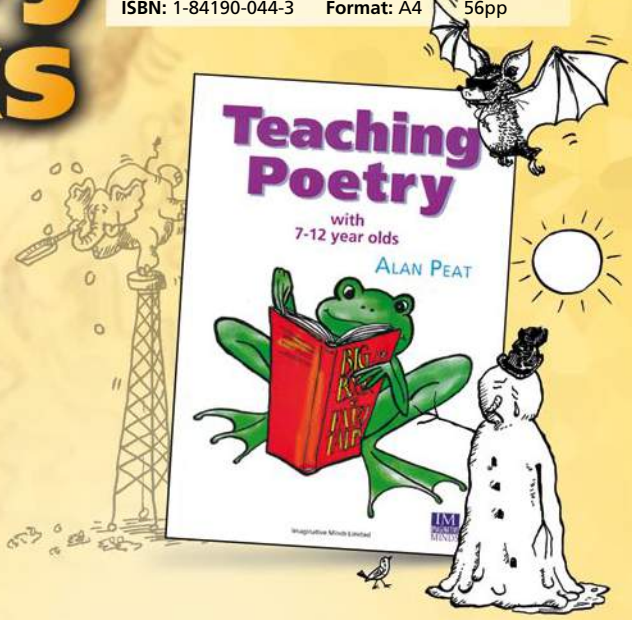

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