



# CollectivED

Working papers from CollectivED;  
The Hub for Mentoring and  
Coaching

A Research and Practice Centre at  
Carnegie School of Education

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## Editorial: Welcome to CollectiveED

CollectivEd: The Hub for Mentoring and Coaching is a newly established Research and Practice Centre based in the Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University. As we develop our networks, practice and research we aim to continue to support professionals and researchers in a shared endeavour of enabling professional practice and learning which has integrity and the potential to be transformative. We are interested in all voices, we will learn from many experiences and will engage with and undertake research. We will not paint rosy pictures where a light needs to be shone on problems in education settings and the lives of those within them, but we will try to understand tensions and offer insights into resolving some of them.

Welcome to our first issue of CollectivEd Working Papers. It has been an absolute pleasure to collate these papers. They represent the lived experiences of researchers and practitioners working to support the professional learning and practice development of teachers and other education staff at all stages of their career. There is a theme running through them; the value of collaboration and professional dialogue for individuals, the institutions they work in and consequently their pupils and students. Please do read them and use them to provoke your own reflections and action. Information about the contributors is provided at the end of this issue, along with an invitation to contribute.

In our first research working paper **Ruth Whiteside**, an assistant headteacher in a primary school which was considered to be 'coasting' discusses her practitioner research undertaken for her Masters during which she was both a member of SLT and a teacher coach. In her paper she outlines the tensions between her ideal of coaching as 'love in action' and the persistent culture of performativity surrounding schools and teachers 'at risk'.

Our second paper is written by **Rachel Lofthouse**, the founder of CollectivED. This is a think piece working paper based on lessons learned from her research related to both coaching and mentoring. It provides a conceptual framework for collaborative professional conversations.

Next **Daniel Brown** has contributed a practice insight working paper which describes a very particular approach to professional learning based on The Discipline of Noticing. He writes about how this was used at a departmental level in an FE college in London to engage colleagues in new forms of observation, reflection and discussion.

Lesson Study has been the subject of a recent EEF research report and this practice forms the context of the fourth paper. Here **Colin Lofthouse and Claire King** provide practice insights into how lesson study was adapted and used at a primary school in Sunderland. Their analysis of the impacts suggests it offers a means of cultural change.

Another dynamic professional learning approach is the focus of our fifth working paper, in which **Lou Mycroft and Kay Sidebottom** share their expertise and knowledge in the 'Thinking Environment'. In this paper they outline the principles of the Thinking Environment and outline a range of adaptations which suit it to a variety of professional contexts.

## Leeds Beckett University

Using the metaphor of 'Breathing Space', **Rebecca Jackson** outlines how changing opportunities and purposes of staff meeting time enabled her colleagues to prioritise school development projects, and learn alongside each other to implement, review and connect them. This piece offers glimpses into what difference this made in each classroom of her Northumberland first school.

The next piece is a research working paper written by **Liz Beastall** based on her doctoral studies into teacher stress. It makes sobering reading that reinforces the need for school cultures that value individual teachers and offer opportunities, through communication and collaboration, to build teacher agency.

Our eighth working paper is written by **George Gilchrist**, and provides an example of one such environment. This practice insight paper outlines how the use of practitioner enquiry and a coaching approach to leading change created a learning culture in his Scottish primary schools.

In the ninth paper Educational Psychologist **Ben Greenfield** draws on his doctoral research to discuss teacher resilience and how Peer Group Supervision supported this. His model of teacher resilience offers insights into its complexities, but also a productive way to understand it.

Broadening our focus, the tenth paper, written by **Simon Feasey** explains a coaching based approach to building community capacity. The significance here is in the recognition that the community around the school plays a huge role in children's wellbeing and learning.

Our final working paper is a think piece by **Chris Chivers** in which he considers the relationships between coaching and mentoring approached in an Initial Teacher Education context. He offers really practical examples of how a balanced and purposeful approach develops student teachers' practice and understanding.

So, this really does feel like a bumper issue, digging into practices that make a difference, providing evidence from case studies and empirical research of the lives of teachers and how to support their professional growth. In a time of genuine concern about teacher retention these papers offer new knowledge to the sector, allowing a range of voices to be heard. We hope they are read with interest and reflected on critically to move your thinking on, and perhaps to develop new practices. We also hope they signify the need for ongoing research and more nuanced policy-making in a national educational setting which still has much to learn.

### **Professor Rachel Lofthouse**

[www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/riches/our-research/professional-practice-and-learning/collectived/@CollectivED1](http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/riches/our-research/professional-practice-and-learning/collectived/@CollectivED1)

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# Is coaching for transformation possible in a culture of performativity?

## *A Research Working Paper by Ruth Whiteside*

### Abstract

Research seems to suggest that coaching is a useful and effective tool to develop teachers. Much is written about the prerequisites for successful coaching: trust, working towards a shared goal, being willing to engage in a genuine learning conversation. However, my research indicates a tension with the current education system being too caught up in a culture of performativity to enable true coaching to take place. This paper is based on my recently completed dissertation for the degree of M.Ed Practitioner Enquiry, awarded by Newcastle University.

### Context

In my current setting, as a senior leader in a primary school, my main remit is to ***develop teaching and learning through coaching those teachers identified as under-performing***. My interest in coaching as a means of sharing practice and an opportunity for CPD meant that this seemed a valuable opportunity to really get to the heart of teacher development. The head teacher was fully behind the 'programme' and ensured I had

adequate funding to provide dedicated release time for the teachers I worked with. I could see how the evidence I was collecting in the course of my every day job as a result of the coaching would help me identify the 'best bits' so that we could then use it as a tool for school improvement. What I did not appreciate was how difficult my dual role – as both practitioner and researcher – would be.

It struck me, very early on, and perhaps shows my naivety, that a key question to ask was what coaching would look like in the scenario described above. What follows is discussion of my findings, illustrating how my practice-based research reframed my thinking.

### Why coaching?

Philosophically, Tschannen-Moran's definition of coaching is the ideal to which I aspire: coaching, they say, is 'love in action'. This is because coaching should be based on relationships rooted in mutual respect, where the participants are equals, and there is a genuine willingness to share practice. Trust and rapport can thus effect positive change for both the teacher, the pupils and the school as a whole.

So, to what extent have I been able to successfully – if at all – create the space for coaching to happen? What could I do to motivate and empower our teachers? I could:

- listen to what our teachers could tell us about their practice
- recognise and celebrate what they could do, whilst preparing them for their future learning
- ask and trust them to take charge of their own learning, and reframe challenges and difficulties as an opportunity to grow
- remind them of the moral imperative of their role – why they do what they do
- support, encourage, facilitate our teachers to build teams
- be positive, find the humour in any given situation, learn to relish ‘failure’ and how we can learn from it – and then pass that ‘can-do’ attitude to our teachers

For me, this is coaching: love in action.

### The dilemma

However, it became impossible to work to this model because of my role in school as a member of the senior leadership team – the one who identified through drop-ins and formal observations just who those under-performing teachers were and then

imagined they would be happy and willing to work with me to improve their practice!

‘Teachers do not resist making changes; they resist people who try to make them change.’ (Tschannen-Moran, 2010)

Never was a truer word written!

Initially, my coaching was met with what I can only describe as cautious interest. The school was under-going intense scrutiny by the local authority as a result of the new head and leadership team realising that what appeared to be a ‘good’ school was, in fact, a ‘coasting’ school. The new head took up post in January 2016 and the LA deemed the school as ‘requires improvement’ in April. The summer term saw a flurry of resignations teachers who had been judged as ‘poor’, with others either on, or about to go on, a formal support plan.

I joined in September as assistant head, with my main role one of improving teaching and learning. However:

‘Leadership has been, and will continue to be, a major focus in the *era of school accountability* ...’ (Stewart, 2006, p. 2) (*my italics*)

Therein lies the problem: as a school leader, I am responsible for ensuring accountability. As coach, I am supposed to be fostering openness, a willingness to share, developing trust. It seems counter-intuitive that I could perform either role

well as there seems little room for a peaceful co-existence.

### **The practice**

The coaching model I adopted was to spend time with the teacher to unpick what was happening in the classroom. Given that I was the identifier of those areas of weakness, and had the remit to say so as the assistant head with responsibility for developing teaching and learning, it was obvious from very early on that my ostensibly supportive role was not always welcomed by the teachers.

The initial coaching session ended with what was effectively an action plan, which we would work on together to improve aspects of practice. I felt it was important for me to model different strategies in the classroom, because I felt very much as though I needed to be a credible coach and get my hands dirty in a classroom setting so that the teachers could see that I was an 'expert', and not just dictating practice.

Our joint practice would then be discussed, unpicked, explored further in the third session of the coaching cycle, with the 'action plan' reviewed or extended and the cycle would begin again. The three sessions took place within the same week as much as possible so that it was fresh in our minds and while we were so

tightly focused on specific aspects of practice.

I worked intensively with five teachers from the middle of the autumn term through to the end of the academic year. Of these five, one – an NQT on a temporary contract – left after unsuccessfully applying for a permanent contract; one left as part of a managed retirement; and three – hurrah! – valued the work we had done together.

### **Reflections**

So, back to my original question: is coaching possible in a culture of performativity? I would argue that no, it isn't. It certainly isn't what I would regard as 'true' coaching. Interestingly, in a blog post, Lofthouse says that the concept of individualized consideration is based on a genuinely shared goal, 'rather than from an imposed agenda' (Lofthouse, 2016). This is where I feel my coaching came unstuck – it is not a truly shared goal as it has been imposed on our teachers. Trust, particularly mutual trust between the senior leaders and the teachers, was practically non-existent, and trust is: '...critical for building healthy relationships and positive school climates...' (Lofthouse, 2016)

Moreover, the world of education is horribly caught up in a system of performativity:

'Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic).' (Ball, 2003, p. 216)

Trying to be a 'coach' when I was, in fact, the person making the judgement in the first place was never really going to work!

There is also the insider versus outsider issue (Dwyer, 2009). In its simplest terms, the outsider as researcher is detached and objective, and the insider as employee is culturally embedded and subjective. If I apply that to my context, I am researching responses to coaching from teachers in a school under pressure to perform better, and extrapolating from my data a sense of the different issues and tensions arising from that situation. Meanwhile, I am a paid employee of that same school, working sometimes as

teacher, sometimes as coach, always as a member of the senior leadership team.

How, then, can I possibly find any 'space between' (Dwyer, 2009) those two distinct roles? This limits therefore my capacity to research objectively.

There are, then, some significant limitations on the validity and objectivity of my research. However, as I mull it over some more, I wonder if stating from the outset what the terms of engagement are so that the coach and coachee are clear about the expectations and desired outcomes, that perhaps it is still coaching – just a different type...and if we were honest about it and called it 'coaching to address under-performance', then maybe we might manage it better. Into my second year, I am pleased to be able to say that our teachers are coming round to the notion of coaching as a self-improvement tool, and because I have made sure that it doesn't happen unless we are able to provide an afternoon of supply cover, it has become something that is seen as a welcome step back from the chalk face and an opportunity to reflect.

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## Improving Mentoring Practices through Collaborative Conversations

### *A Thinkpiece Working Paper by Rachel Lofthouse*

Providing a mentor for beginning teachers means giving them support and ensuring that they build up their professional capacity, knowledge and skills. A mentor is usually a colleague with relevant, school-specific experience. Mentoring also bridges the transition between initial teacher education and full employment. In some situations, mentors make judgements or provide evidence that the new teacher has demonstrated required professional competencies.

While national and cultural expectations of mentoring vary, engaging in mentoring conversations is common. However, in most educational contexts there is limited time for teachers' professional development. It is therefore critical that where time is assigned for mentoring the professional dialogue is engaging and productive.

'Targets' (usually about teaching and learning) are a common part of mentoring or coaching conversations: deliberating over what targets should be prioritised, making targets realistic and measurable,

evaluating progress towards them and providing feedback prior to setting new ones can become an all-consuming activity. Add in workload pressures, anxieties about being judged or having to make judgements, and the mentoring conversations can become restrictive. They can go one of two ways: some people experience them as having high stakes, others feel they become relatively superficial.

#### **How can we ensure that mentoring enables genuine learning processes?**

Mentoring conversations can be a **transformative** space where important aspects of professional practice are debated and emerging professional identities, both as a new teacher and a mentor, can be constructed. Creating a genuinely valuable mentoring experience is possible, and much of it comes through conversation.

Trust seems critical, but cannot be assumed. Opportunities to explore problems without fear of punitive judgement need to be created. Respect

for the value of the combined expertise offered by the unique mentoring partnership needs to be felt. Even the newest teachers have something to offer their mentor, so mentoring can be a two-way dialogue.

Lessons from research can help teachers conduct better mentoring conversations. Following a UK research project on teacher coaching, we began to understand professional dialogue through what we called coaching dimensions.

**First**, there is a need to '**stimulate**'. Good mentors know how to initiate thoughtful reflections and stimulate decisions with their mentee. But they also know when hold back and let the beginning teacher take the initiative. They are aware of how to collect and use available learning tools. Some use videos of lessons (their own and their mentees'); some make lesson observation notes focused on agreed aspects of the lesson; sometimes the beginning teacher creates a professional learning journal from which points for discussion are identified.

**Secondly**, mentors need to '**scaffold**' the discussion. They can, for example, use critical moments in teaching and learning – or the lesson as a whole – to help the

beginning teacher discuss broader themes about teaching and learning, or explore the 'big ideas' about relationships between school, individuals and society.

**Finally**, it is important to '**sustain**' the learning conversation. Good mentors become aware of their tone of voice, keeping it neutral and curious to encourage open discussions. They create opportunities for their mentee to think back, think ahead and think laterally. The conversation is also sustained through finding meaning and value in it. The mentor and the beginning teacher need to work together to create a dynamic conversation in which there are opportunities to share problems, to pose and respond to questions, to extend thinking, to build solutions.

Mentoring can form part of the social glue between colleagues. It should support the emergence of a network of strong professional relationships which empower the new teacher to play an active role and to meet the needs of the school community. Conversations have a significant role in realising this potential.

*Originally published, with references at*

<http://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/viewpoints/experts/improving-mentoring-practices-.htm>

## Researching our practice using The Discipline of Noticing

### *A Practice Insight Working Paper by Daniel Brown*

In essence, *The Discipline of Noticing* provides a systematic approach towards noticing possibilities for acting differently in the moment. The Discipline of Noticing was developed by John Mason, former Professor of Mathematics Education at the Open University and author of a number of books on teaching mathematics. This book took Mason over 20 years to write, following Mason's contact with J.G. Bennett in the 1970s. This article provides a brief summary of my experience of using this approach alongside colleagues as a framework for professional development. The context was a mathematics department of a large inner city London sixth form college.

There is much more to The Discipline of Noticing than *just noticing*, but it is the first step. It starts by noticing something that is significant for us. It may be something that evokes a feeling in us, or perhaps a resonance with something someone has said, or something we have read. The next step is a movement from noticing to what Mason calls *marking* - becoming able to recall what was noticed - through to *recording*. Mason suggests recording

significant events through writing descriptive, *brief-but vivid* accounts,

*'If we want to be in a position to analyse some event, some situation, then we must first be clear on what that event or situation consists of, as impartially as possible.'* (Mason, 2002, p.39)

Mason describes this as *accounting-of*, not *accounting-for*. An *account-of* describes events as objectively as possible. We found that this is not as easy as it might seem, and that trying to record what was said and done as accurately as possible was a basis for a good account. Here is an example of such an account made by my colleague Katy Sillem, who focuses on a student's response to her teacher question 'What do you think?':

*"About 30 minutes into the first lesson of the day, Student M said: "Miss you always say think! ... I think... What do you think? ... It's really frustrating. Either it is, or it isn't. I've got a headache and I want to know if it is or it isn't." I had said that I thought  $1 - 2$  and  $1 + -2$  are equivalent,*

*agreeing with a student who claimed they were.”*

Whilst it only takes a few minutes each day to record one or two accounts, we found that systematically recording accounts was not easy. Whilst all six teachers in the department considered The Discipline of Noticing to be a good idea, only three of us managed to systematically record accounts over a period of time. Setting oneself to notice and systematically record events requires commitment.

The next step of The Discipline of Noticing is to come together to share and discuss common themes, a process Mason calls *validation*. We held optional meetings once a week, which were well attended, even by those who were not regularly making accounts. The way we held these meetings was crucial. We found that it was important that people could speak at length without fear of being interrupted, judged, or receiving unsolicited advice. It transformed the way we listened to, and supported, each other as a department. After sharing an account, we would probe an account, or part of an account, in more detail. Often we found that we had similar accounts that we could offer in return. Often, we found it beneficial to explore particular words and phrases in more depth. Often these were words used to

describe emotions, such as *'frustration'*. During validation, we considered possibilities for acting differently. We found it useful to move away from 'if onlys' and 'should haves' towards questions along the lines of: 'How could I have acted differently? How might things have been different if...?'.

This sequence means that by recording what happened as accurately as possible, and exploring other possibilities, comes the chance that we might recognise a *possibility* for acting differently in the moment.

*'Choosing in the moment to act in a certain way requires two things: noticing a possibility to choose (i.e. recognizing some typical situation about to unfold), and having alternatives from which to choose... Finding yourself doing something is easy; catching yourself about to do something and choosing to act differently in a more informed manner, is much harder...'* (Mason, 2002, p.72)

I have found that recognising some situation about to unfold, in time to do something about it, is the difficult part, particularly if I am acting through habit, or an action that is grounded in some firmly held belief. One way of doing this, and the part that I personally find most difficult, is to *imagine* myself acting differently in a



similar situation in the future, in order, as Mason suggests, to ‘...draw the moment of awakening from the retrospective into the present, closer and closer to the point at which a choice can be made.’ (p.75)

The work of The Discipline of Noticing, then, is to become more sensitive to habitual behaviours that may be more or less helpful, towards recognising and then making available other possibilities for acting. It is not easy to measure the effect this work had on teaching, and children’s learning. There was an improvement in exam results, although it is impossible to say how much of this can be attributed to this work on noticing. All of the teachers who took part felt very positively about it. My colleague, Christian Atwell, described it as follows:

*“For me, the Discipline of Noticing is about learning to notice, to listen, to try and do things differently, to care more about what you are doing. It is about believing that you have the power to effect change. For me, it is about supporting and challenging colleagues, resulting in the deepening of professional and personal relationships.”*

We found that we became increasingly able to challenge each other’s beliefs and practices. I suspect this comes from the formation of trust. In an attempt to

illustrate the power of the Discipline of Noticing, I provide this reflection made by my colleague Katy around a year after making the account recorded above:

*“Asking, ‘What do you think?’ comes from a vague sense of well-meaning - trying to empower students. But I believe that I may have a reticence to tell people what is the truth and what isn’t. Students have on many occasions expressed frustration about the way I was going about things saying things like: “You don’t teach us anything”, and, “Just tell me the answer”. I often resist the pressure to tell, and continue to expect them to come up with some justification for themselves. It is difficult to know whether I should develop ways of helping students become more able to cope with this ‘not telling’, or whether I have misjudged the amount of assertive direction needed in certain situations. I have become more aware of the continuum between telling, and encouraging students to form their own opinions and explanations during this project, and have since experimented with moving around it as consciously as possible.”*

The level of Katy’s self-reflection came through the freedom to research her own practice with others, for which The

Discipline of Noticing provides an excellent framework.

Finally, a note of caution. Whilst professional development is about personal change, I think it is dangerous to desire or expect it. Paradoxically, in realising that we cannot change others, change becomes possible. This is echoed

in this mantra from The Discipline of Noticing: *“I cannot change others, I can only work at changing myself”*, which I have adapted to: *“I cannot change others, but I can help create a climate in which change becomes possible.”*

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## **From teachers being accountable to taking collective responsibility; using Lesson Study for cultural change** *A Practice Insight Working Paper by Colin Lofthouse & Claire King*

As Headteacher at Rickleton Primary School in Washington I have faced a dilemma; learning in my two-form entry, 3-11 maintained school, was good enough but not great. Teachers typically adopted models of teaching founded on an uncritical acceptance of suggested 'best practice'. Although staff wanted to become more self-determining and had hunches about what would work better, they lacked a shared professional language to discuss teaching and learning. They needed to re-discover critical analysis to reflect on teaching outcomes. They also needed permission and the right 'space' to do it in.

Enter Claire, the co-author of this article. Claire first provided research-based CPD on effective questioning for the whole staff. She then went on to work with two lead teachers to introduce lesson study as a model for a collaborative practitioner enquiry network. This approach was used to support teachers in carrying out small teacher designed inquiry tasks in their own classrooms. Originating in Japan, lesson study is a joint practice development approach where teachers collaboratively plan a lesson, observe it being taught and

then discuss what they have learnt about teaching and learning (Dudley, 2014).

While wishing to remain as true as possible to the original spirit of Lesson Study we made some adaptations in order to suit our context. Our particular lesson study practice is outlined here, alongside reflections on its emerging impact.

For their lesson studies our teachers worked in cross-phase triads and chose one area of focus from the effective questioning training as the basis of their classroom research. As such they were not focused on the differences between phases, or subjects, but rather the pedagogical similarities and parallels. While they individually planned their lesson, they consulted their peers to promote reflection and anticipate critical points where student response would be pivotal to learning. As is normal in lesson study the target pupils were identified as the focus for the teachers' peers to observe. This shifted the focus away from the teacher to the pupils as learners. The three target pupils were also interviewed by the observers immediately after the lesson to capture their view of the success

of their own learning. The teachers then all participated in a post-lesson discussion to analyse the outcomes for the target pupils. Through this collaborative discussion the teacher began to reflect on their own pedagogy and how it had impacted on the pupils learning.

Claire acted as a 'knowledgeable other' taking an 'outside expert role'. She also observed the lesson (focusing on her own target child) and played a key role in shaping the impact analysis, making suggestions for improvement, pulling together ideas, and tying the discussion to larger subject-matter, pedagogical issues and good practice literature as well as developing lesson study protocols to ensure deep learning for teachers.

As the teacher triads worked through their first cycle changes were immediately apparent. The process fundamentally develops skilled active listening habits, a shared language for talking and thinking collaboratively about pedagogy and a way to shift a range of deeply ingrained habits and behaviours which were holding some members of staff back in terms of developing their practice. Polite and supportive exchanges about practice became replaced by rich and challenging conversations about learning, which were

owned by the teachers themselves. Teachers gained an improved ability to listen to understand and in turn create shared meaning. Staff were no longer afraid to challenge each other and were less defensive about their own practice and able to ask questions to clarify their understanding. They were also more able to elaborate on others' ideas. This is about listening beyond what people are saying to the deeply held values, beliefs and assumptions that are shaping behaviours and norms (Hargrove, 1995).

Thus the Lesson Study process provided a frame in which questioning, as both a pedagogic focus and an adult learning tool, helped to build collaborative relationships as the teachers became better listeners. A significant turning point, from a whole school point of view, came when the first triad to complete their cycle presented their findings and views to their colleagues in a twilight meeting. As the teachers presented their findings the interest, engagement and excitement was palpable. Teachers who had never previously stood up in front of their colleagues to present learning about their practice had the undivided attention of their colleagues and rich and purposeful dialogue ensued.

Though still a work in progress the use of Lesson Study has supported staff to take responsibility for the continued development of their knowledge and skills through self- and co-regulated learning. By giving teachers greater ownership of the improvement effort the senior leadership team are now seeing teachers display a much stronger commitment to learn from, with and on behalf of each other and their pupils. A study of teachers engaging in Lesson Study in the Philippines indicated that improvements to teaching were 'sustained through the constant collegial and constructive interactions of the Lesson Study team and the knowledgeable others' (p. 813, Gutierrez, 2016). In our case this interaction seems to have been achieved. It may be significant that we both have a background in coaching; having

developed and/or studied coaching for a range of professional purposes. As senior leaders, participants and expert others this background may have sustained a focus on quality and characteristics of the professional conversations in the Lesson Study triads. That does not mean that there are no challenges ahead, and these might be mirrored in other schools. There will always be a question of sustainability of the external facilitation and expertise provided. In a time of tightening budgets will an external role of 'expert other' be affordable? If we prioritise it we need to consider how the time and effort afforded to it can be used to ensure that there is a sustainable future and builds on the growing expertise of teachers to support future Lesson Study, in our school or beyond.

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- Lofthouse, R.M., McElwee, S., King, C. and Lofthouse, C. (2017) Lesson Study: an Opportunity for Collaborative Teacher Inquiry. In: Boyd, P. and Szplit, A. eds. **Teachers and Teacher Educators Learning Through Inquiry: International Perspectives**. Kielce–Kraków: Wydawnictwo Attyka, pp. 63-79, available at <https://atee1.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Teachers-and-teacher-educators-learning-through-inquiry-international-perspectives.pdf>



# Using Thinking Environments for Emancipatory Coaching Practice

## *A Practice Insight Working Paper by Lou Mycroft & Kay Sidebottom*

*“If you knew that you were inherently intelligent and capable, how would you begin to write your essay?”*

This liberating question was formulated by a student, Jacob\*, towards the end of a ‘Thinking Environment’ tutorial. It came at a time when he was ready to drop out of his PGCE course; the tutorial itself was a coaching intervention, aimed at unblocking limiting assumptions. Beyond asking a few structured and incisive questions, the tutor offered attentive silence for 20 minutes.

Jacob went away with clear actions, but more importantly he had discovered the reason behind his consistent inability to write: a lack of self-belief was preventing him starting, every single time. Jacob’s journey wasn’t an easy one, but the thinking environment enabled him to develop both the academic confidence he needed to pass his course and a determined belief in his right to have a voice in academic spaces.

The thinking environment is a philosophy of communication developed by Kline

(2009), which enables people to think for themselves and think better together. It is a simple, rigorous and radical set of processes. We have been using thinking environments as pedagogy - in class, digitally and in tutorial situations - for more than ten years in a variety of different educational settings. Although this article focuses on our experience of supporting trainee teachers on higher education courses in further education contexts, our participants have previously included prison workers, politicians, youth, community and family support workers, Council officers, senior management teams and trade union officials amongst many others. Without exception, those experiencing a Thinking Environment for the first time have commented on how unusual (and liberating) it felt to be genuinely listened to.

Thinking environment practitioners believe that the quality of all that we do depends on the quality of the thinking we do first. In our experience, teachers (and students) rarely have good quality time to think. Our work has become reactionary, fire-fighting

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the demands of an over-scrutinised, top-down system and finding fewer and fewer “*spaces to dance*” (Daley, Orr and Petrie, 2015). Learning environments are often built for speed; keep the students moving and engaged through a bite-size series of activities (so the philosophy goes) and they won’t misbehave or get distracted. Ideally, thinking environments are the bedrock of an organisation’s culture, but can also (as Jacob discovered) provide an individual with a few focused moments which enables them to move forward.

Facilitating a thinking environment means holding ten components (values) in place using simple frameworks, rigorously applied: *place, equality, encouragement, attention, appreciation, ease, diversity, information, feelings* and *incisive questions*. Shaping questions around the components is a helpful way for teachers to consider each aspect of their teaching practice. For example:

- How am I ensuring that each student voice is heard in class today? (**equality**)
- Does this teaching environment tell students that they matter, and if not, how can I change it? (**place**)
- Is there any bias in the content of what I am teaching today, and what can I do to balance it out? (**diversity**).

The components are also a useful, and Ofsted-convincing, link to fundamental British Values. Democracy is explicitly demonstrated through the component of equality and the potential for co-production, tolerance (particularly of diversity) grows via the development of a thinking environment culture where respect is implicit. Promoting the thinking of those who have been traditionally silenced is pivotal, as hooks (1994, p.40) suggests: ‘One way to build community in the classroom is to recognise the value of each individual voice.’

A number of pedagogical practices bring the thinking environment to life. Working in this way requires focus and commitment; due to the rigour of “thinking rules” you are either in a thinking environment or you are not. The simplest introduction is a thinking round, where students take it in turns to answer a positive, open question. This opener is based on the principle that “no-one has truly arrived until they have spoken” (Kline, 2008); even in a class of 20-plus this need take no longer than ten minutes. The facilitator must enforce the thinking environment rules of listening without interruption, paying generative attention, and allowing students to speak for as long as they need, whilst at the same time working on the self-discipline of succinctness.

Other thinking environment interventions are more explicitly about coaching and mentoring:

- **Thinking Pairs** - a partnered listening activity, aimed at uncovering limiting assumptions and identifying liberating actions for growth and development (particularly useful in tutorial situations)
- **Thinking Councils** - a group solution-focused exercise, useful for improving individual or collective decision-making. For students undertaking group projects, this technique can transform the way in which they work as a team.
- **Thinking Dialogues** – these two-way conversations can help manage disagreements and facilitate productive and restorative outcomes; a safe and affirmative practice in situations of conflict.

It can take time for students to get used to these practices as the emphasis on

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listening without interruption is counter-cultural. For many adult students, the chance to speak out will be a new and perhaps difficult experience, given possibly negative prior experiences of being in a learning environment; cultures of managerialism and consumerism across all sectors of education are increasingly working against independent thinking in pursuit of metrically measurable outcomes. Agency has been chased out of our professional repertoire and only the boldest dare think for themselves in a zero-hours, Ofsted-led culture, particularly where students are equally switched off from the enriching potential of learning. The epidemic filters down into our teaching, so that we further limit students by not allowing spaces for them to think. As a profession - for pedagogy, for organisational culture change and for our own mental wellbeing - we could do much worse than widely accept the discipline and liberation of a thinking environment.

## **Breathing Space; enabling professional learning through alternative staff meetings**

### ***A Practice Insight Working Paper by Rebecca Jackson***

As a headteacher I want to release the enthusiasm of my colleagues to support the ongoing development of our school, Hexham First School, in Northumberland. This ideal requires effort if it is to become reality, as the daily life of every member of staff at any school is a very busy one. Last throughout last year we made that extra effort to find the time and space essential to the ideal. Each member of staff focused on a specific school developmental project, and we held a series of alternative staff meetings to shape up, support and share this work. Each participant (teachers, an HLTA and myself the headteacher) identified an aspect of life and learning in school which they were keen to develop. Our half-termly meetings were arranged after school and out of school, some at Newcastle University and others at Hexham Abbey.

Each session offered the participants a chance to reflect on and explore their ideas and practice in the company of their colleagues, with the support of Rachel Lofthouse, who then worked at Newcastle University. Rachel's role was to provide tools to support our thinking, helping the staff make connections between their own ideas and the wider world, occasionally drawing on research, sharing experiences, offering a theoretical lens and sometimes asking naïve questions – ones that an outsider has permission to ask, but which are not always asked in the flurry of school development work. A flavour of our work is given here, followed by some reflections on how this alternative staff meeting.

*Alison* chose to focus on our partnership with the Seven Stories' Reader in Residence scheme. In discussions she reflected on the impact of the project on her Yr3 pupils. She noted that it offered a different opportunity for learning and was very positive for her class. The children enjoyed the time to explore new books, found themselves immersed in the stories, and used it as an opportunity to get dressed up and role play. During a school governor observation visit it was recognised that the children were talking about more about books, using wider vocabulary, and showing real enthusiasm for stories and reading. Alison reflected on this using the phrase 'breathing space', a theme which will return at the end of this paper.

As headteacher I was also keen to find out more about what impact the Reader in Residence scheme had on the pupils. I have ambitions of developing pupils as researchers, and this project has helped me to start to develop that idea in practical ways, starting with ten pupils in Yr4 who supported the evaluation process. I worked alongside Debbie Beeks (then the Learning and Participation Manager at Seven Stories) to and used a drama based inclusive approach to gather the pupils' ideas and evaluations of the Reader in Residence scheme. It seemed that that the scheme had had a genuine impact, with pupils having vivid and positive memories of the books from around the world shared with them by Emma (our Reader in Residence). They also said that the book sessions were a time in the school week where they felt very calm but also very engaged. The reading sessions typically led to open questions which created lots of opportunities for pupil engagement and follow up activities.

During our alternative staff meeting I and the teachers discussed the importance of dedicated time for whole class shared stories, where pupils can engage with reading without 'the catch' of being tested on their comprehension or having to do a linked writing task. An emerging idea was that the teachers could take turns to read with each other's classes, maintaining part of the essence of the scheme in which the reader visits the class for a special and valued session. As I reflected I also realised how much I have learned about alternative approaches to facilitating evaluative with pupils, and I am committed to trying to practice this in future.

In addition to the Seven Stories project there was also a focus on developing reading for pleasure in the Reception class, where *Bernadette* had been working with pupils to revitalise the reading corner and transform its use. Strategies included redesigning the space as a welcoming environment, sourcing lots of new books (many of which have been chosen by the pupils), and making headphones available so that pupils could experience sitting quietly and listening to audio materials. As the changes were introduced the pupils started to show a real enthusiasm for books, particularly enjoying the excitement of the whole class being involved with opening up the box of new books and talking about each one in turn as they were unpacked. Pupils loved finding books they were familiar with and sharing these with their peers and became more proactive in using the book corner to read together. In the reading corner itself pupils stay longer, read more and take on new social roles, like role



playing being teachers and helping each other read. During our discussions we considered how to build on this impact as Bernadette's class were getting ready to start Yr1; what good practices can be taken up to Yr1, and how staff there could ensure the pupils continue to feel a sense that they have choices and ownership when it comes to reading. The Yr1 teacher committed to asking her new class their views and to work on these approaches.

Up in Yr4, *Natalie* worked on developing new approaches to grouping children in class, and aimed to develop a constantly changing social dynamic. She was keen to find out how the children felt about working in different groupings, and this was one of the themes that the pupils wrote about in a letter written as persuasive writing to communicate with a new student teacher. By sharing what they liked and didn't like about the classroom environment and routines they provided both the student teacher and Natalie with insights not always available to them. Predictably different pupils had different views, but Natalie found it revealing to discover these views and found that some of her assumptions about individual pupils were being challenged. What was most powerful was the recognition of the importance of finding ways to listen to children and how this helped to build respectful relationships in the classroom, and once again our discussions allowed us to explore the implications for transition between classes at the end of the year.

The life of the school is not only contained within its walls and *Jo* focused on outdoor learning and specifically started to plan how to redesign the Early Years outdoor area. While getting started on raising funds, and planning grant applications Jo built up relationships with parents, local companies and councillors which created new opportunities and momentum for the development of the outdoor space. She also visited other schools to explore possible options and following our discussions started to think about how she could begin to involve pupils in helping the plans come to fruition. We discussed (as a whole staff) the possibility of taking pupils to other schools to see their grounds, and watching how children use spaces, and how staff use the space to create learning opportunities. During our final session there was even talk of using some of the Yr4 pupil researchers to work with Early Years pupils to help them create and share ideas.

Back inside the building *Helen* was working on a project which combines reading with innovative design of new areas, involving both pupils and parents. Plans are now afoot to develop the nurture room in school as a new space where children and parents can read for

pleasure, bringing in more flexible furniture, book storage that puts the books centre stage and invites engagement and different seating areas to suit a variety of purposes. Like Jo she is working on sourcing funding for this development, but has already had professional plans drawn up to share with staff, pupils and families. Sharing these images during our discussions sparked enthusiasm amongst the teachers and helped them to engage in critical thinking about the space as a learning resource. Once again there are plans to engage pupils in the decision making.

What is interesting about these vignettes is that they illustrate our school as a 'community of engaged & inspired learners', and here the word community really matters. Staff, visitors, partners and parents are all invited to learn and to contribute to the learning opportunities that the children have. During our alternative staff meeting discussions it was clear that staff are all very open to new ideas, keen to create positive changes and willing to experiment and provide valuable feedback to each other. This contributes to a high staff morale, and a culture where they respect, share and think about each other's ideas. They are constantly refreshing their thinking and practice and their decisions are rooted in the realities of our school, the learning opportunities and challenges they wanted to offer our pupils and their families and the ambitions they had for our school's future.

The staff offered feedback on our alternative staff meetings. They had been built into CPD time, but unlike one off training sessions as time had gone on these had become more and more discursive and also productive. After Alison had used the idea of 'breathing space' when talking about her pupils the staff held on to that phrase. There was a genuine sense that these sessions; spread gently across the year, with an external critical friend and facilitator, took them momentarily away from their classrooms, desks, marking and other meetings, had create a space for change, what they now recognised as vital 'breathing space'. It ensures professional development and learning is collective and cumulative. The school community of staff needs this just as much as our pupils do.

# "They just don't realise how fragile people are." One teacher's story of stress and giving up on teaching.

## *A Research Working Paper by Liz Beastall*

### **Abstract:**

This discussion paper details one narrative, (Alistair) collected as part of an EdD qualitative study into teacher stress, when multiple interviews were conducted with 10 educational professionals over an 18-month period. Currently, many schools are reporting issues with retention and recruitment, alongside increasing numbers of staff who are absent from work for stress-related reasons. This paper considers the vulnerability of the teacher self in an environment that is frequently referred to as marketised, neoliberal and heavily surveilled, focusing on what Day & Gu (2010, p.161) call 'relational resilience'. It is important to consider the function of supportive working relationships and how they can affect the individual teacher self. Alistair's story raises some important points for discussion, such as the impact that feeling isolated and disconnected can have, both on the individual and on the wider school environment, and the need to consider how schools and policymakers can support individuals who are struggling to cope.

### **Rationale**

This paper will discuss one of several narratives collected as part of a qualitative study into teacher stress, undertaken as part of a research project towards the award of doctorate in education (EdD). This research began as a result of listening to friends and family members discussing their experiences in the school workplace and engaging in discussions about educational policy, practice and possible solutions. I felt that undertaking an academic inquiry into what was relayed to me as widespread disillusionment and fatigue, in some cases manifesting in absence from work due to stress, was legitimate, and that the personal element of using a narrative based research approach would be practical and effective.

### **Aims and research questions**

The research questions are:

1. How do teacher's stories of everyday experiences in schools reflects the popular media portrayal of a 'teacher crisis'?
2. How do teachers narrate the 'stress' experienced in their school roles?

3. What insights into the causes and effects of teacher stress can be gained?

This research aims to inform policy concerned with teacher retention and recruitment at local and national levels and hopes to act as a catalyst for effective organisational change, with regard to the everyday experiences of teachers in schools.

### Method

The EdD research involves 10 educational practitioners who were interviewed over a period of 12 months. Eight of them were interviewed three times each, for around an hour each time and the other two participants I spoke to twice. Participants were chosen using a convenience sample which is, as noted by Denscombe (2002, p.47) "reasonable" when working within a qualitative study that is not claiming to use random sampling. The sample consisted of four primary school staff and six secondary school staff, with six male and four female participants. The age range was between 25 and 55 and the staff had various roles in their schools, including members of senior leadership teams (SLT).

This paper will consider one of the narratives; a secondary school teacher

who was at the time of the first interview, on leave for stress-related reasons and who contacted me directly when he heard about my research. I spoke to him twice, at length, and have changed his name, taught subject and any other identifying factors.

### Why narrative inquiry?

When used in educational research, a narrative inquiry aims to represent and reflect what Clandinin & Connelly (1996 & Clandinin, 2013) refer to as the different landscapes found across the discipline. They note how narrative inquiry can represent the individual and to help their stories to emerge, with epistemological grounding, from within a social structure, while acknowledging that there are limitations regarding how far the impact will reach. Gubrium (2010, p.388) suggests, "the goal of narrative inquiry is to analyze (sic.) narrative material with the aim of identifying patterns of narrativity," and as such, is well positioned for investigating emerging social phenomena. It's important to remember that in identifying patterns there will be similarities and differences and that the differences are also important.

Narrative inquiry, as Clandinin (2013, p.13) notes, is a way of investigating

experiences that emerge from the individual's story, but also the relationships that surround and often help to define it. It is one of many available approaches to studying discourse. Taking this approach helps to establish a distinction between narrative inquiry and the more traditional discourse analysis, because, although other social phenomenon will emerge from the inquiry, the individual narrative remains the phenomenon under study and, as such, places the individual's story above any other dominant social phenomena.

### **The Teacher Self and the Sense of Agency.**

Archer (2000) considers how being human and establishing a sense of self involves a series of interactions, so that identities can be formed and individuals can become stable and develop a sense of self. This sense of self "emerges from our practical activity in the world," (Archer, 2000; p.3) and often relies on an individual's relationship with their everyday interactions. Part of this process of self-development and self-awareness is a reliance on human essentialism and notions of reflexivity; basically, the individuals' ability to reflect on their actions and reactions. It is fair to say then, that the teacher-self relies on the experience of being a teacher and the interactions that

come with that, for the positive sense of self to emerge and be retained.

As noted by Priestley, Biesta & Robinson (2015, p3) agency is not something that individuals have, rather it is something that can be developed over time in a conducive environment. Day and Gu (2010) consider how the current post-professional era of being a teacher affects this sense of self, agency and identity. They suggest that a teacher is constantly scrutinised and judged, based on very limited, and always shifting, assumptions of what a good/effective teacher is. Alternatively, the idea that individuals voluntarily relinquish their privacy, through self-surveillance is something that has also been identified by Page (2017), in relation to teachers' self-propagation through online profiling, and the complicit sharing of best-practice and performative nouns such as 'good' and 'outstanding'. How language performs in educational policy and everyday teaching practice and how, and if, it serves to reinforce the layers of power and subordination of teaching professionals will be explored in more detail in the wider study.

As a contrast, Day & Gu (2010) acknowledge how teachers can be well supported through effective and

supportive management, and stress the crucial role of relational resilience. They note that teachers can develop resilience to everyday challenges through good relationships with SLT members and peers, reinforcing Archer's (2000) point about the importance of everyday interactions for the individual self, operating within a potentially oppressive social structure. Hobson & Maxwell (2017, p.175) found that teachers, in their narratives, prioritised positive working relationships as a contributory factor to their well-being, and noted that their perception of their own competence was, often, because of a relational interaction and not through an autonomous sense of self.

### **Alistair's Story**

*"I don't think they realise just how fragile people are"*

Alistair had been teaching a total of 12 years when he first was signed off work due to what he referred to as "getting ill". He had been working as a Head of Department in a medium-sized secondary school for three years when there was a change of SLT members. In the year prior to this Alistair had gone through a particularly upsetting time at home, although at the time things had settled down. The changes to the SLT affected

Alistair because of increased uncertainty regarding his role at the school. Without one to one consultation, he was made redundant from his Head of Department role and was informed "anecdotally" to apply for other bits of work. He was quickly given some other work, based in behaviour management.

*"I had no idea what I was doing. I had not one ounce of support. I was too scared to ask the person who was my immediate superior for that support. So, I never talked to her as I was too scared to. I fell behind on the stuff, I didn't really know what I was doing, you know and so I resigned from that and that's when... And that's because I started to get ill. I started to not sleep, I started to feel sick in the mornings, I started to get, to have the runs, constantly which I still have to this day, it's never stopped, and, like sleep, my heart would go nuts, my blood pressure went through the roof, started to get these insane headaches right behind my eyes. So I was like, I'm dying, something is going on, I really thought this is it, I'm going to die before 40 at this point. So went to the doctor and he said 'it's anxiety' and put me on medication."*

Prior to these changes in SLT, Alistair had very good working relationships and felt very well supported, even during the busy times.



*"I felt really supported, for years and years, really good. You know he may not be the greatest Head (teacher) in terms of standards for the whole school, but as a person he was a really good person to work for. You felt like you could talk to him. He was a normal person, he was what I would be if I was a headteacher. He didn't know every kid's name he didn't walk the corridors and stuff, but he was a real person."*

Alistair's relationship with the new SLT was problematic from the beginning.

*"There was a big shakeup. At this point I'm scared to talk to 'up on high', they scared the s\*\*t out of me because people were going right, left and centre, people getting sacked, walked off the bl\*\*dy site, without ever seeing them again. Several people this happened to, literally walked off site by site supervisors, they can't go back in their room and stuff like that and I just thought I'm not rocking the boat. This is when it started getting scary."*

His inability to communicate with the members of SLT resulted in a fractured relationship between Alistair and the SLT, and was exacerbated by his perception of their robot-like manner.

*"They are like robots, you know they have absolutely no believable personality. You look at them, you talk to them and they*

*just seem like it's an act, like being human is an act."*

This meant that during everyday activities such as teacher observations, Alistair began to feel more and more paranoid.

*"I was always thinking that I'm going to be judged. I've never had a bad observation in my life, it's always been good and yet I always thought they going to sack me they're going to sack me. I wouldn't mind if there was a human coming to watch me. But, if there is a robot with a clipboard you know, who doesn't smile, doesn't laugh, doesn't say 'good work, I like this'. Doesn't do any of that, they just go and walk away. Opens the door, gone, not a word to you whatsoever. The previous Head was a person, this one is just a system. Yes, he was a person in charge, a personality with empathy. This one seems like a policy is in charge, yes, that's it, that's the best I can do."*

When I saw Alistair six months later he had left his role as a teacher and was looking for work. He had not been offered an exit interview and had not had the chance to discuss his issues with any members of the SLT. He noted that he would have had difficulty with this because he still felt scared to confront them, however, he did acknowledge that the SLT had been helpful when he made the

decision to leave and that they had given him a good reference.

*"So that's really it, I'm unemployed looking for work and I'm never going back into teaching, I don't think."*

### Discussion

Alistair's narrative represents what Archer (2000, P.3) referred to as 'a series of interactions' that resulted in a reduced or compromised sense of self. When interacting with previous colleagues, he was able to note that he felt a positive regard for himself and his level of professionalism, that came about as a result of a perception of mutual respect. When no relationship was developed with the new SLT, Alistair was left with a one-sided perception of his ability to do his job. In some ways, he began to develop a negative perception of his own ability to do the job he had previously done well, even though he received no information that would lead him to believe that he wasn't doing a good job. As suggested by Hobson & Maxwell (2017, 179) support from peers and SLT staff is one of the most significant factors affecting well-being and, as noted in one narrative, "the teacher gets no feedback or sense of closure. This prevents them from moving on psychologically."

Hobson & Maxwell (2017) make several recommendations regarding policy and practice surrounding early career teachers, including a very general call to address a duty of care. My research supports this and adds that this duty of care should be extended to all teaching staff. The shift towards the marketisation of education, noted by Ball (2003, 2013) and others, and the increased level of scrutiny and surveillance experienced by staff in schools, as discussed by Page (2016, 2107), has resulted in an environment that often does not foster a positive sense of self or agency. Alistair's narrative is full of opportunities to address his sense of isolation and revolves around his feeling disconnected from his peers and his SLT. As Hobson & Maxwell (2017, p.168) note "well-being is enhanced when innate psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy are satisfied," and while they are three separate qualities, this research finds that increased levels of agency are found when autonomy is developed through strong working relationships and not through isolated or individual action.

### Concluding remarks

This short discussion paper reflects on the narrative of one teacher and as such is not

put forward as a representative sample. However, it is important that individual stories are heard by an academic audience, particularly when many of the

individual narratives contain similar themes, such as isolation and stress. It is hoped that the wider study will contribute in more depth to this debate.

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## **Developing A Learning Culture In Schools** ***A Practice Insight Working Paper by George Gilchrist***

*'The biggest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching.'* (Hattie 2012)

For new headteachers, or principals, one of the key tasks faced is the development of a learning culture across a school, or schools. When I was appointed to lead two schools, I knew this would be one of my priorities, having identified that both schools operated in a typically hierarchical way with low levels of collaboration and high levels of direction. Having been a headteacher already, and from my engagement with researchers like Helen Timperley, Michael Fullan, Andy Hargreaves and Alma Harris, I understood that for schools, and teachers, to be continually developing, then a collaborative focus on the learning of all, not just students, was the best way of producing an ethos and culture that was sustainable, and which saw development as a disposition. Being busy, and doing lots of 'things', wasn't enough. There had to be positive, sustainable impacts for learners, and that would be only achievable when everyone saw themselves as a learner, then worked collaboratively to support each other's learning.

### **What was it we did, to develop such a culture?**

Firstly, I laid out my beliefs, values and principles around schooling and education. This was to be built on high levels of trust, support, professional commitment, with a relentless focus on learning and teaching, aimed at producing the best outcomes we could for all learners. It was also grounded in the unique context of each school, and we would be starting from where the schools were, not where others thought we were, or where we should be. Whatever actions we took, would be shaped by our context, and, most importantly, they would be informed by research and evidence. The second part was that it was now essential I spent time and energy making sure that my actions matched my stated philosophy and values, to begin supporting teachers, in particular, to construct their own vision and practice along similar lines.

The first part was most definitely easier than the second. Supporting people, to recognise how they can change and develop their thinking and their practice, takes time, especially if they are used to

strict hierarchies characterised by low levels of trust, and high levels of accountability. When they have been exposed to those types of cultures, their ability to think and act like individual professional practitioners, is taken away from them, as they get used to being told what to do, when to do it and what resources to use to deliver it! They have little agency and are unlikely to develop high levels of adaptive expertise, described by Helen Timperley and others, as amongst the professional characteristics of high-performing teachers. They lose the ability to think creatively, to take risks and to be professionally curious. Worst of all, is they distrust school leadership, learn to keep their heads down and how to survive through surface-level compliance.

Breaking down such behaviours and attitudes takes time and trust. It is all well and good for a school leader to come in and say one thing but, when teachers have had an experience as described above, they are rightly wary. The first thing you have to do is to develop trust by demonstrating your commitment to walk this walk, not just talk the talk. Trust develops over time and with every individual interaction that you have as a school leader, with each member of staff.

They watch what you do, as well as listen to what you say. It is key that you model what you seek. School leaders have to demonstrate that they too are learners, and wish to embrace the power of collaborative working.

*'We have known for a quarter-century that focused collaborative cultures generate greater student learning.'* (Fullan and Hargreaves 2008)

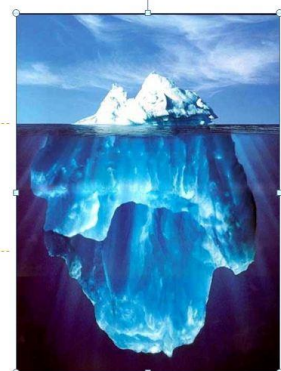
The illustration below is one I have used before when talking about the development of learning cultures, and how they can be sustained.

### The 'Learning Culture' Iceberg

Formal policies, systems & practices

Informal practices & symbolic actions

Beliefs, values & attitudes



This illustration captures the combination of formal policies, systems and practices, informal practices, symbolic actions, plus beliefs values and attitudes, that form and sustain a learning culture. I would contend that this particular 'iceberg' should be

turned on its head, because it is the beliefs, values and attitudes, and the daily informal actions and practices, that really construct and sustain deep learning cultures.

For anything to be sustainable or embedded into the culture of schools and systems, it is essential that we win over hearts and minds of the people who bring that culture to life. You cannot micromanage and mandate improvement, but you can create the conditions and culture whereby people are consistently reflecting on practice, based on their own assessment, 'not because they are not good enough, but because they know they need to get better' to paraphrase Dylan Wiliam.

I am not a great believer in the importance of lots of written policies, to me these should be demonstrated every day through the actions of people. Though, I did think a Learning and Teaching policy, and linked Assessment policy were important at the outset of our journey, as a way of saying to everyone, this is what we agree very good learning and teaching looks like in our schools. We tried to keep these to main statements of principles,

giving people the space to shape what this looked like in their own practice.

The major formal practice we introduced into the two schools, which was to improve learning and teaching for everyone, and which was fundamental in supporting the development of a learning culture was practitioner enquiry.

The value of practitioner enquiry can be traced back to John Dewey, Lawrence Stenhouse and others. But, our work was particularly shaped by Marylyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle, and their work 'Inquiry As Stance'. When we agreed as a staff to look at the adoption of such an approach, then began to engage with it, we immediately began to develop as practitioners. Each teacher began to understand how to look systematically at learning issues they had identified, from either their classrooms or practice. They started to read more, as they engaged with research and professional reading around the issues they had identified. They began sharing and discussing such issues with colleagues, as they identified possible changes to pedagogy and strategies used, in order to address these issues. They learned how to collect useful, but proportionate, data to help understand the impacts they were having, and they learned and developed different ways of



sharing their findings so that other colleagues and learners might benefit from their insights.

As well as specific skills of practitioner enquiry, they began to develop attitudes and dispositions, which were to change their professional identities, and which were to deepen and enhance the learning culture in, and across, both schools. They became innovative. They developed more collaborative working practices. They developed teacher agency and their willingness to take action. Adaptive expertise increased as teachers recognised the impact they were having on learning, and how their learners were reacting to various learning situations. Teacher-leadership and dispersed/distributed leadership began to develop, as previous hierarchies were 'flattened' and everyone recognised each person had a role in how the schools developed. Conversations about learning were now happening spontaneously across both schools, and participants were able to see how we were connecting all the 'things' we had to do, through a focus on learning and our learners. They better understood the importance of relationships. For our learners, attainment and achievement were raised and they saw teachers modelling themselves as learners.

*'Engaging in ongoing inquiry and knowledge-building cycles is at the core of professionalism'* (Timperley 2011)

My role became one of support, through coaching conversations and mentoring, as well as becoming a strong 'gatekeeper' against all the other 'things' that people from outside the schools still expected us to be involved with. I felt it was my responsibility not only to support and trust staff, but to also protect them from competing and conflicting demands from elsewhere. In our first few years of taking an enquiry approach, this was our only focus in our school improvement plan. We were still dealing with all the main national and local agendas, but we were doing this in a connected way through our enquiries.

Developing deep learning cultures is crucial to sustainable school development. This article details how we went about this. But, every school and context is unique. Therefore, it is the major principles around what we did that I think may help others. They then have to shape and apply these to their own context and stage of development.

*'To be most effective, teams have to learn the skills of collaboration. They have to learn to connect.'* (A Harris 2014)

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# What is Teacher Resilience and how might it be protected and promoted?

## *A Research Working Paper by Dr Ben Greenfield*

### **Abstract**

This paper is based on my research for the doctoral award of DAppEdPys. The focus is teacher resilience and this paper reports two research aspects; a summary of the literature review, and an evaluation of a teacher support intervention, through Peer Group Supervision. A new model of teacher resilience is offered which positions teachers' beliefs about themselves as central to a system which includes their actions, relationships, challenges and the context. The Peer Group Supervision offered a way to articulate these relationships and provide support for dealing with challenges to the teachers' resilience.

### **Introduction**

These are challenging times for the UK education community. Every year, 10% of England's teachers decide to leave the profession (DfE, 2017). More concerning still, this percentage rises to 26% for new teachers within their first three years. Several factors have been found to influence teacher attrition, with excessive workload and stress often cited (Smithers & Robinson, 2003). Of course, we must also consider the hidden number of

teachers who chose to stay but whose health, passion and effectiveness is hampered by the cumulative effects of stress (Kyriacou, 1987). In the face of these challenges, 'teacher resilience' is emerging as an important area of international research. This research is focused on improving our understanding of the range of factors that enable teachers to sustain their motivation, commitment and effectiveness in the role (Day, 2008). In short, it is about 'thriving not just surviving' (Beltman et al., 2011).

### **Teacher resilience; a literature review**

We now know that teacher resilience is best understood as a relative, dynamic and developmental process, involving interaction between individual, relational and contextual/organizational conditions (Day & Gu, 2007). As highlighted by Beltman et al. (2011), "conceptualising such a multifaceted, complex construct is an ongoing challenge" (p. 195) and further research to "disentangle" (p. 196) is required. This was the aim of my own doctoral research, and I began by conducting a systematic review of the recent literature (Greenfield, 2015). Using an approach known as meta-ethnography

(Noblit & Hare, 1988), I synthesized several qualitative papers that each explored how teacher resilience could be protected and promoted.

From this synthesis, key themes were identified and a new model of teacher resilience was constructed, reproduced below. It is proposed that teachers' beliefs about themselves and/or their role are absolutely central to their resilience. Key beliefs include the sense that one is capable and good at one's job, that one is following one's calling and making a difference, and (for new teachers especially) that things can only get better. However, teachers invariably face various challenges (e.g. difficult pupil behaviour, parental complaints, OFSTED) that can directly or indirectly damage these beliefs. Significantly, it is also proposed teachers' relationships with key others (e.g. trusted colleagues, school leadership, friends & family) and the actions they take (e.g. problem-solving, CPD, stress relief) may help to protect their beliefs from such challenges. In this way, relationships and actions can form a protective 'buffer' from the stresses and strains of the role. For more detail on each of the individual themes, please refer to Greenfield (2015).

The literature review concluded that teachers must be encouraged and actively supported to develop 'relational support

systems' (Doney, 2012) and to engage in resilience-enhancing actions such as those identified in the model. It is argued the responsibility for protecting and promoting teacher resilience must be shared between many stakeholders, including teachers themselves, school leaders, teacher training institutions and policy makers.

### Peer Group Supervision

In the second part of my research, I explored one potentially supportive mechanism known as Peer Group Supervision (PGS). Professional supervision can be defined as "...what happens when people who work in the helping professions make a formal arrangement to think with one another... about their work with a view to providing the best possible service to clients, enhancing their own personal and professional development and gaining support in relation to the emotional demands of work." (Scaife, 2001, p. 4). It is considered an integral part of practice for Educational Psychologists, counsellors and others (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010). Inspired by the work of Hanks (1999), Peer Group Supervision involves colleagues getting together to engage in

**A Model of Teacher Resilience**



collaborative focused dialogue, with the dual aims of learning from and supporting one another. Unlike traditional forms of supervision, the roles of supervisor(s) and supervisee(s) are shared between those taking part.

Using this model, a collaborative action research project was established that trialled Peer Group Supervision in a primary school for one term. Seven teachers volunteered to take part and we met for supervision two to four times every

month. In these sessions, teachers were given a safe and supportive space to talk about the various challenges they were facing and then to work through them together. In my role as a then Trainee Educational Psychologist (and as a practitioner-researcher), I facilitated each of the sessions to ensure they were as productive as possible. Solution Circles were used as a loose guiding framework for our discussions (Forrest & Pearpoint, 1996). A Solution Circle is an approach to group problem-solving that involves four stages:

1. A problem presenter describes in detail a problem they are experiencing.
2. The rest of the team brainstorm various possible solutions.
3. The problem presenter then leads a discussion about potential solutions.
4. First steps are identified and agreed.

At the end of the term, the project was evaluated using semi-structured focus groups. The transcribed data was then analysed using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Overall, teachers reported positively on the process of Peer Group Supervision. They felt it had helped them to develop more supportive collegial relationships and counteracted a mutual feeling of isolation. Furthermore, the trust that built between them encouraged open dialogue. A feeling of safety within the group allowed them to 'blow off steam' or 'ask stupid questions' without fear. Additionally, hearing others talk about the challenges they were facing made them realise they were not alone. Finally, Peer Group Supervision provided opportunities for collaborative problem-solving. Teachers

could share perspectives, experiences and ideas and on several occasions this led to meaningful changes in their practice. Conversely, there were also some costs to the process that should be acknowledged. Foremost, engaging in Peer Group Supervision takes time, a scarce resource for teachers given their high workloads. Additionally, it could sometimes lead to frustrations when teachers discussed issues they felt were 'out of their hands'. However, the group members universally agreed the benefits outweighed the costs. Therefore, it is concluded teachers and school leaders would do well to establish Peer Group Supervision as part of wider efforts to promote teacher resilience.

In closing, it is worth re-emphasising this is just one example of one supportive mechanism. In isolation, the introduction of Peer Group Supervision into schools cannot stem the steady flow of teachers leaving the profession – a great deal of work and a sizable shift in the educational climate is surely needed for that – but I would argue this seems a good place to start.

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## Community Capacity Building Coaching *A Practice Insight Working Paper by Simon Feasey*

I offer a coaching service to schools and school leaders on community capacity building. The approach I advocate is one based on relational leadership and lessons drawn from the field of community organising. I begin by listening and seeking to understand both school narrative and community narrative. We then work on bringing the two together by designing and embedding a relationship-centred and dialogical problem-solving approach that works for the school community. This process is bonded by the connections between people that are based on values of respect, trust, mutuality, reciprocity and dignity, and which result in conviviality, compassion and cooperation. Collective efficacy and action grow in strength as individuals form groups, groups identify issues and develop projects that recognise and harness the potential in the overlapping spheres of influence in the lives of our young people: family, school and community. We build school community partnership and generate this sort of activism by bringing people together and adopting a number of tried and tested, and impactful, techniques.

**What do I mean by relational leadership and community capacity building?**

I believe that **relational leadership** turns on our understanding of **relational power**, **relational trust**, and our willingness to truly engage with, listen to, and have authentic dialogue with all members of our school community. I would say, too, that in looking to exercise **communal leadership** we need pay attention to **community capacity building**.

Community capacity building approaches provide space for those most affected at the 'grass-roots level' to identify the constraints they are experiencing. The adoption of 'co-learning' and 'problem-solving... dialogue among equals' (Eade, 1997) trumps the idea of 'experts' administering to those deemed inexperienced. Smyth (2011) offers a relationship-centred and dialogical problem-solving approach. The approach hangs on the premise that if change is to be sustainable then what has to be engendered is ownership, and producing this means being patient and flexible in the way in which relationships are created and sustained around authentic trust, respect and notions of mutuality and reciprocity.

**Defining relational trust, relational power, and authentic partnership**

**Relational trust** (Bryk & Schneider, 2002)

has four discernment criteria:

1. Respect
2. Personal regard
3. Integrity
4. Competence

According to Bryk and Schneider's conceptualisation of trust, we typically use four key elements to discern the intentions of others in schools: respect, competence, integrity, and personal regard for others. Respect involves a basic regard for the dignity and worth of others. Competence is the ability to carry out the formal responsibilities of the role. Integrity is demonstrated by carrying through with actions that are consistent with stated beliefs. Personal regard involves demonstration of intentions and behaviours that go beyond the formal requirements of the role. All in all, a genuine sense of listening to what each person has to say marks the basis for meaningful social interaction.

Relational Trust:

- Reduces vulnerability and encourages risk taking
- Facilitates public problem solving
- Establishes a professional community of mutual support
- Creates a moral resource for school improvement
- Influences belief in the organisation's mission

(Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 116-117)

**Relational power** is defined by Warren and Mapp (2011), as follows: *'If unilateral power emphasises power "over", relational power emphasises power "with" others, or building the power to accomplish common aims'*. Neil Thompson (2007) extends this further in offering a model of four types of power.

1. power to
2. power over
3. power with
4. power within

**'Power to'** can be understood as personal power to achieve our potential in life. Self-esteem and self-belief are fundamental to it. It also helps us understand how domination leads to a 'culture of silence' by diminishing self-esteem and pathologizing poverty, that is, convincing people that their social status is due to their own failings.

**'Power over'** is related to relations of dominance and subordination that get acted out at structural, cultural and personal levels. Change has to take place at all levels before empowerment and equality will be cultural norms that replace disempowerment and inequality.

**'Power with'** is particularly important to the power of change. It implies not only solidarity among groups of people who identify with each other, but also alliances across difference in mutual commitment to change for the greater good of everyone.

**'Power within'** is a personal resilience that connects the individual to the collective. 'It is the basis of self-worth, dignity and self-respect, the very foundation of integrity, of mutual respect and equality, a dislocating of 'better than' or 'worse than' in order to create a world that is fair, just and equal.'

**Authentic partnership** is defined through Susan Auerbach's work on conceptualising leadership for authentic partnerships: *'Authentic partnerships are respectful alliances among educators, families and community groups that value*

*relationship building, dialogue across difference, and sharing power in pursuit of a common purpose in socially just, democratic schools.'*

Let us not allow 'community' to be an illusion within the globalised world. Community organiser, Jeremy Brent (2004), said: *'Community is a desire, continually replenishing itself as people seek voice and connectedness...'* I believe there is a strong desire for connectedness in our school communities. The adoption of a relational approach serves to ignite community capacity building, is in the best interests of social justice, secures inclusivity, and so works in the very best interests of all our young people, regardless of background and family socioeconomic standing.

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## Coaching and Mentoring *A Thinkpiece Working Paper by Chris Chivers*

The words coaching and mentoring seem to be regularly passing through my experience at the moment, partly as I am responsible for training mentors within a Teaching School Alliance and in my role as a university link tutor, but they also passed through a presentation by a colleague at Winchester University.

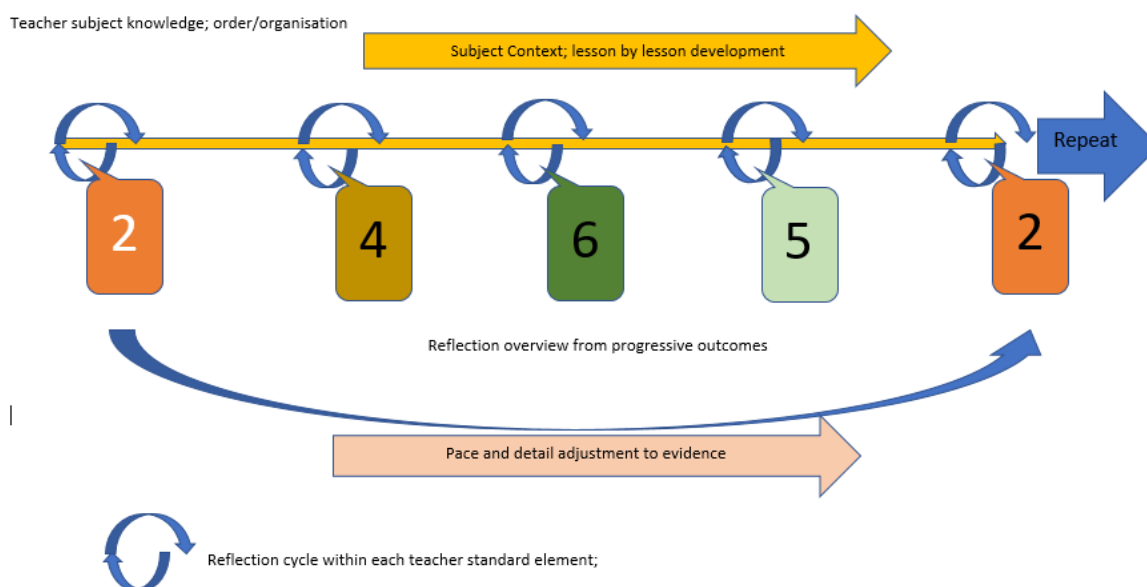
The role of a coach or mentor is focused on the person whom they are seeking to develop. The University example drew from sporting situations, where the guiding person is regularly seen as a coach.

Wondering what the difference is between a coach and a mentor, I came to the following conclusion; a coach is someone who supports development of discrete skills through exploration and

improvement advice in each area, whereas a mentor, to me, signifies someone capable of nurturing a whole talent, always focused on the bigger goals, helping the trainee to maintain their own focus on agreed targets.

Being a coach and mentor is not unusual. Teacher mentors for Initial Teacher Education are, at one and the same time, coach and mentor, keeping the bigger picture in sight while exploring the details along the thinking journey. It is a positive, developmental eye kept on the process of becoming a teacher, as well as the outcomes.

Below is a diagram exploring the thinking process within teaching; based on the analyse, plan, do, review, record idea.



**Teacher Standards;** 2 know children (progress and outcomes); 4 Planning; 6 Assessment; 5 Adaptation; 2 refined knowledge of children from performance outcomes.

These statements link with the Teacher Standards (QTS) as they currently exist;

- 2: Progress and outcomes (know your children),
- 4: Planning (order and organisation for lessons),
- 6: Assessment (thinking in and between lessons),
- 5: Adaptation (spotting needs and doing something about them).
- A return to 2 will be based on a more detailed understanding of the children, allowing subsequent information sharing and challenges to be more refined to needs and achievements.

The mentor role is to unpick the detail of each element within the whole, engaging in a reflective dialogue with the trainee, so that it can be put back together within the agreed lesson structure. I was introduced to the “whole-part-whole” approach by a PE inspector early in my career. While it can be overt in a PE lesson, it can also apply in any other learning situation.

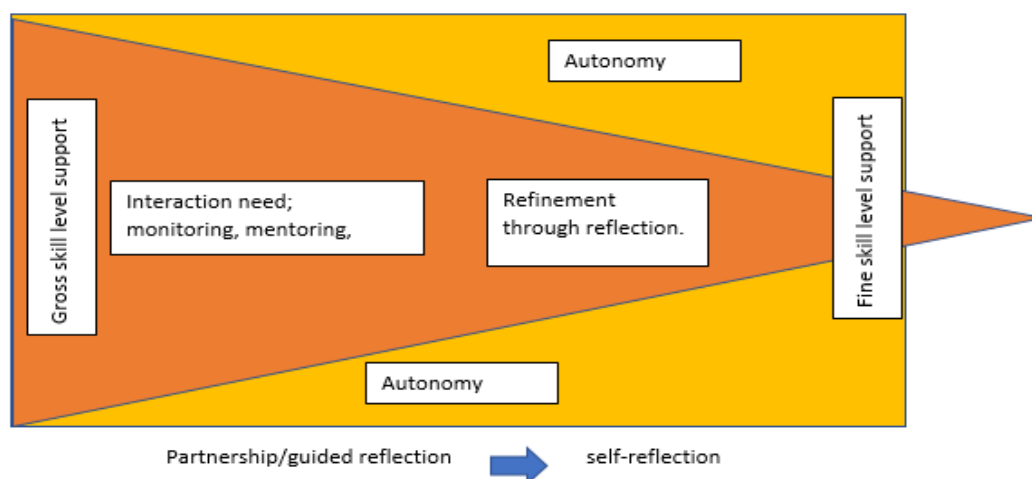
As a mentor, judging when to allow the trainee to operate “independently” is likely to be a key decision, based on many factors, but, more likely, an understanding derived from the dialogue that the trainee is confident and sufficiently organised to “have a go”. There may well be a need for the mentor to step in, quietly and unobtrusively, to prompt the trainee to take timely action. In many ways, this is more profitable than a reported conversation after the event. As mentor confidence in the trainee grows, greater autonomy is granted. There are similarities, in my mind, with parenting, allowing a child to make independent trips into town alone. As confidence in abilities grow, a more relaxed approach develops.

The mentor is then needed as a sounding board for discussion of the process and the outcomes, with the trainee, as much as the mentor, identifying the areas where further reflection is needed.



Mentoring qualities; humane, accessible, watcher, listener, questioner, communicator, guide, coach, teacher.

Mentee qualities; listener, continually reflective, communicator, learner, engaged, assimilate, enact, refine.]



But, and it's a big but, the difficulties arise within the complexities that exist in several areas.

Consider again; 2 Progress and outcomes (know your children), 4 Planning (order and organisation for lessons), 6 Assessment (thinking in and between lessons), 5 Adaptation (spotting needs and doing something about them).

The first (2) encompasses the whole of child development for the age groups being taught, across a wide range of subject areas within the Primary Curriculum.

Subject knowledge, standard 3, as a teacher must include the pedagogy of how to teach the subject, across the age range, understanding the steps that children have to take to acquire proficiency, selecting of appropriate vocabulary to aid the narrative of the lesson and also having a good understanding of the available resources

that are available in and outside the school.

Standard 4, planning, needs to consider planning over different timescales, long, medium and short term, to ensure coverage, use and application of the known in challenges. Planning structures can be a variable between schools, and imposed structures can become limiting factors for individuals. Plans should support the order and organisation of learning.

Standards 6 and 5 may well have to be the subject of much coaching, as they constitute the thinking teacher skills, inside and between lessons; reacting to evident needs and doing something about them, to affect the learning dynamics for individuals, groups or the whole class. Checkpoints and interventions (please don't call them plenaries) to need are positive. Just stopping the class to show that you can is a waste of time.

And then we're back to 2, a reflection on the lessons from the lesson, that will guide decisions for the next lesson, where adaptation may be required. It's **the get it,**

**got it, good approach to assessment;** get it, move on; not got it, review next lesson before moving on.

Holistic overview- Partner dialogue							
	2 Analyse	4 Plan	6 Do (Afl)	5 Review	2 Record	REPEAT	
Personal reflection in action	Analyse	Prior info ref children Talk, mentor, SENCO. Tracking	Long term Medium term Short term				Refined understanding of personal needs.
	Plan		Lesson plans				Refined challenge
	Do			Input Interactions Challenges Activity support	Interventions in-lesson. +/- challenge		Refined interactions.
	Review				Reflect and act Dialogue Guidance Support Moderate/QA		Refined interventions.
	Record					Evaluation notes. Evidence statements	Tracking
Mentoring	Prelim dialogue Insights, detail, sharing	Explore planning over different timescales; dynamics, rationale	Observer or participant observer; Watch, listen, intervene, prompt, reflect back. Moderate	Observer or participant observer; Watch, listen, intervene, prompt, reflect back	Dialogue; positive notes and areas for reflection		
Quality Assurance	Monitor QA 8,7, 1 Professionalism Policies Order/organisation of thinking confidence	Monitor QA 3,4, 1 Subject knowledge Order/organisation Narrative	QA 6 In-lesson and between lesson evidence of consideration of class needs	Moderate QA 5 Moderation; quality of outcomes. Work scrutiny; dialogue.	QA 2 Where next with the class/ specific groups/ individuals?		Trainee progress against professional standards.

The essence of all good coaching and mentoring is communication, mutual understanding of the job in hand and how it will be tackled. Dialogue is, by far, the strongest approach, with the trainee and the mentor working out together the needs of the trainee and the best training path over the agreed timescale.

The plan is for the trainee to enact and the mentor to oversee and provide a developmental commentary, together with personalised areas for further development, which, in the case of teaching, can be areas to reflect on, to read about or signposting to discuss with a knowledgeable colleague.

The mentor role will always be to make the trainee as good as they can be. Limitations can be very personal, in

understanding the complexities within each of the simple statements, such as planning and subject knowledge. It's sometimes like having all the jigsaw pieces but not a clear picture of how they fit together. That's a significant part of mentoring; holding onto the bigger picture. Mentors are, after all, good at their craft.

If we want high quality trainees entering teaching as effective NQTs, they must be mentored and coached well along the way. The mentor role as a specific part of the ITE process can easily be undervalued, especially if the university or training institution is a dominant partner in the partnership, but, I'd argue, they are probably the most significant members of the team, as they are developing the front-line knowledge and skills that make learning possible.

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