



2020

Rose Learning Trust Special Issue CollectivED Working Papers

Working Papers from Rose
Learning Trust working
with CollectivED; the
Centre for Mentoring,
Coaching and Professional
Learning

A University Research and Practice Centre
where collaborative conversations create powerful
professional learning

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To cite working papers from this issue please use the following format:

Author surname, author initial (2020), Paper title, Rose Learning Trust Special Issue CollectivED Working Papers, pages x-xx, Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University.

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Introduction to the Rose Learning Trust Special Issue CollectivED Working Papers

This collection of CollectivED papers were written by staff working within the Rose Learning Trust, an English Multi- Academy Trust (MAT) based in the authorities Doncaster and NE Lincolnshire - England.

Our Vision – Transforming futures collaboratively

Our Mission – Expecting more than others think possible

We are a Trust of seven schools with over 2500 primary pupils aged 3-11, founded on a shared belief that the best interests of children should be at the heart of the future of our schools, so that all children have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Our focus is to ensure all our children have the best tools and support to learn and grow in a safe, enjoyable environment. We acknowledge that results are not the full picture. If pupils do not enjoy school or do not gain the appropriate knowledge and skills to make the most of their qualifications, success might evade them. We aim to provide an environment in which children can develop wholly, not just academically.

We support and challenge each other to improve the outcomes and life chances of all our children across the communities of the Trust, whilst respecting the aspects of practice that are distinctive to our individual communities and the autonomy of each school.

Our motivation is sustainable, mutually accountable collaboration and school improvement, focusing predominantly on how this will raise standards of teaching and learning for our pupils. With effective collaboration, good practice and the sharing of resources, we aim to strengthen and broaden the future opportunities of both our pupils and staff.

Our aim is not only to grow our Multi Academy Trust (MAT) successfully, but also sustainably. We believe that through quality, not quantity, we can facilitate opportunities for our Trust that can be invested back into the people who will secure our future: pupils and staff.

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‘Searching for Bright Spots and Looking to the future’ Appreciative Inquiry and the power of positive frame

A Practice Insight Paper by Debbie Secker

‘Considering the Appreciative Inquiry model of searching for bright spots, and learning from successes rather than fixating on What is broken may move us forward.’ Jill Berry wrote these words in ‘Leadership to support a coaching culture – A think piece working paper’.

January 2017 and eight weeks into the seconded role of head came the Ofsted call! The British inspectorate due to arrive at our school. Jill Foster the previous head was eight weeks into her seconded role as CEO of our small trust – The Rose Learning Trust. Outcomes from the visit were positive however from the experience what really remained with me as a leader was the multitude of questions fired - exploring the schools perceived deficits. The conversation that lingered the most was around the Ofsted questionnaire. ‘Why won’t 19% of your parents recommend the school?’ I was asked. Indeed why not – stumbling through my response my reply was ‘Did they understand the question? – Green I know!’

A Year Later ...

Fast forward a year and the school entered into its first school based enquiry. A chance to

change the approach to school improvement and really focus on pedagogy. Six heads from our small trust all arrived at Richmond Hill to explore a problem in practice our Senior Leaders had developed ‘ How can we naturally get our pupils to age related expectations in reading without the need for significant intervention?’ From this enquiry developed some really interesting perspectives. Heads began to seek out the ‘bright spots’ in practice around the school naturally sparked by their love of learning. The enquiry outcome was to look at ensuring consistency in approach from the bright spots seen which was then left for our Leadership team to action.

Summer 2018

Move to the beginning of this year – the summer 2018. A time to read and reflect on the previous year. Reading ‘Leading Learning by Graham Nuthall I looked at the 6 important characteristics of excellent teachers as outlined by Hopkins & Stern (1996)

1. A passion commitment to doing the very best for their students
2. A love of children enacted in warm caring relationships



3. Pedagogical content knowledge (e.g knowing how to identify, present and explain key concepts)
4. Use a variety of models of teaching & learning
5. Collaborative working style with other teachers to plan, observe and discuss one another's work
6. A constant questioning of, reflecting on and modifying of their own practice.

What occurred to me was that these qualities could be identified in abundance within the school. Point 6 with the emphasis on a teacher- led approach for me would be the way we would really achieve improved outcomes for our pupils.

Ownership at every level within the organisation to move our school forward which would require a structure where constant questioning, reflecting and modification of our OWN practice would occur. In order to move us forward at every level we needed to seek out a change management tool that incorporated everyone. This needed to be built around our common golden thread 'passion for our pupils' and paved the way for Appreciative Inquiry.

As a highly collaborative open trust Jill Foster the CEO shared with me the Trusts vision for developing on from the initial school based school improvement enquiries that had taken

place. The model - Appreciative Inquiry. I began to read around the model, Jill had produced a work book to accompany the Trust vision which expertly wove both positive change management structures with distributing leadership. This was exciting moreover exactly the direction Richmond Hill required to move into the future. It signalled a real opportunity to focus on the child, the staff and the stakeholders whilst growing leadership at all levels.

October 2018

'Getting people involved (AI) is not enough alone to effect successful change; however, distributed leadership and organisational learning are each necessary to support and sustain change.' David Cooperrider, Suresh Srivasta,

Planning was paramount and took time. Crafting positive frame questions to construct the culture we wished to drive forward to truly energise the school and take collaboration to another level. We planned the involvement of pupils, staff, leaders, parents, stakeholders & trust school leaders. Despite the time effort there was a real sense that this approach would A) Work and B) Be welcomed, as staff began to be interested in the endless honest conversations taking place both contributing to and listening in. As a head it was a real journey of self-discovery taking time to really focus on the lead values



of the school and how these could be driven forward with integrity by everyone in the school.

Soon we had an established area of school we really wanted to improve – aspirations. As a research rich school we wanted to harness the ‘bright spot’ we had in terms of outcomes for our most disadvantaged. We had undertaken a body of learning with Marc Rowland Deputy Director of the National Education Trust. The school had many examples of teacher-led class based enquiries with positive research outcomes for our disadvantaged pupils. The components of success suggested a rise in expectations along with parental engagement had moved pupils and parents aspirations for the future and along with it progress and attainment outcomes.

Discover

Following the 4D cycle of Appreciate Inquiry we set about our first Inquiry. By far the most time consuming element within the approach is Discover but it is so beneficial. ‘Discover’ seeks to appreciate and value what we already had in place. What a morale boost! Pupils spoke of belonging to the school, being listened to, feeling valued, feeling part of a family, going the extra mile because they are proud to be ‘Richmond’. Staff spoke of belonging to a school team where opinions matter, being valued, receiving recognition,

team/family feel, shared purpose of what’s the best for every child, empowered to go beyond – ‘we do what’s needed’. Parents spoke of the schools good reputation in the community, of a family feel to the school, of a feeling of care for their children, of high standards in reading and maths, of safety, of accessibility to people if problems occur. The Energy this approach produced was phenomenal. The perception by staff and leaders was that of parental barrier. However here was the parental barrier gushingly reaffirming what their children were telling us – You’re doing a good job! Why? Because the question was changed. If you keep asking the same question be prepared for the same answers. Changing Does your child like school? (Yes)(No) then scrutinising the results to within an inch of its life with no real context behind it – does this shape or change anything? To actually frame the question to provoke conversation opened up the discussion giving ownership to the individual ‘ Why did YOU decide to send your child to Richmond Hill Primary?’ The human aspect restored, interactions and conversations that enabled genuine perspectives across the school. This provided the reality of the school currently, then moved clearly into phase 2 ‘Dream’ even better if...

Dream

In this phase each sector looked at the strengths and crafted what they envisage the



school might be – planning for its future. A key focus was beginning to emerge relationships at all levels particularly teacher/parent relationships. Pupils dreamt of sharing their proud moments more with their families so they became part of the school family. Staff dreamt of deeper and enriched parental engagement to match those of their pupils. Parents dreamt of more engagement in the school day, communication from one source and relationships with staff particularly in Key stage 2 where they did not get to interact with the teacher.

‘Students are more likely to succeed if teachers have positive perceptions of parents’
(add reference)

Design

Staff at all levels began to discuss the emerging themes – the staff room became a haven of Professional Development with real in depth questions posed, analysis of points raised, conversation and innovation. The process accelerated the Leadership team to another level with staff taking personal and collective responsibility aligned to the culture and ethos of the school. Instantly parents received feedback an invitation the following week to drop and collect their children from the KS2 yard- staff willingly supplying extra duty days to ensure the relationships were built whilst maintaining safety the reason for closing the school down to its community. The

school text was designated the point of contact & communication reducing workload to manage the app, twitter, website etc. Plans were also put in place to organise a whole school open day event for parents to enjoy a coffee, chat to other parents then view their child learning in maths ‘bright Spot’.

Deliver

Maths Mastery open day for parents. Huge take up – Huge success. 322 parents welcomed through the doors over the course of two weeks. Each parent providing quality feedback on their experience - which I’ve never witnessed before in my 22 years at the school. The school office began to report a reduction in the amount parents reporting issues at main reception as parents had already passed the information to the teacher face to face. Relationships began to build.

Aspiration Alley – all 422 pupils within the school displayed, written on their board they are holding is what they want to be when they grow up. A simple idea from one of our teachers became the most viewed display board in school. Parents not only interested in their child’s aspirations but also the aspirations of their friends. Pupils interested in their friends aspirations, teachers interested in their class aspirations – previous class aspirations. Just a haven of conversations and discussions around jobs, qualifications and experience. From this offers



from parents to come and discuss their occupation with the children; Dentists, NHS workers, Firefighters, Police, Small Business owners. With links from a parent 80 of our pupils partook in Amazons first tours of the Doncaster Site.

To the future

For Richmond Hill the Appreciative Inquiry Model has been the most fast paced change action in school improvement we have seen. In evaluating why this is the case its core principals are key. Investment – Appreciative Inquiry allows every person who is part of the organisation to discuss and be a part of the process this in turn leads to everyone being invested in the process and the outcomes. Growth from Strength '**seeking out the bright spots**' is absolutely key. If the Ofsted question about my parents had been framed differently would I have panicked as much? Had they said

'Out of the 844 parents you have 53 have return this questionnaire and of those 81% would recommend your school – what are your thoughts on this?' Firstly there would then have been some proportionality to the response – but my thoughts, conversations and questions may have been; I wonder why it's not 100%, how can we get we get the proportion higher to respond and give a measured view of the school, indeed if you would not recommend the school then why do you continue to send your child there? Identifying the strengths allowed the school to identify its greatest assets and from this distribute leadership to move areas forward with strengths. For our school and our context it is an approach now that is intrinsic to how we develop our school into the future.

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How to make your buffalo fly or How a holistic approach to staff well-being contributes to a positive culture of trust and happiness and creates a driving force to develop professional and personal skills

***A think piece working paper by
Vicky Stinson, Felicity Burton, Gemma Snow and Erica Fawcett***

As Julian Birkinshaw wrote, everyone wants to work in an engaging, exciting workplace. We don't have to stumble far into Google to find article after article asserting that happy employees are more productive, such as a study by the iOpener institute into organisational success which revealed that employees who feel happy in the workplace are 65% more energetic and twice as productive. In fact it is the driving tenet in Henry Stewart's Happy Manifesto, to which Julian wrote the foreword.

But how does it happen? It is important at this stage to understand that, as Sydney Harris says, happiness is a direction, not a place. So if, as Martin Seligman suggests, the way we see life is the way it becomes, we should perhaps see the process as being the most important factor in improving workplace satisfaction, employee initiative and productivity and changes should have rationale and consistency; be principles perhaps, and not policies. However, if we subscribe to Dr Christine Carter's advice and remember that happiness is more than a

subjective experience or a by-product of external factors but comes instead from the way we choose to manage our thoughts, actions and reactions then purely environmental changes won't make much difference. At best, there has to be subscription at a psychological level from employees to be willing to access the array of positive emotions available to them and consciously choose to implement them. At the least we should create a place where people can be authentic. Sometimes it's enough to have contentment in just being allowed to be.

In the Rose Learning Trust, appreciation of staff and workplace positivity is a major theme that runs through the Developing Excellence Plan. But to achieve such appreciation and positivity is not just a job to 'tick off' or a target to be achieved. It is about releasing talent, developing strengths, promoting authenticity and above all writing integrity through the schools, like 'Blackpool' through a stick of rock.

Owston Park, a school which is part of the Rose Learning Trust, took part in an



Appreciative Inquiry (AI) at another Rose Trust school quite early on in the new school term and it was then I realised that some of the questions we were asking of stakeholders were the perfect 'warm-up' to performance management sessions held here at Owston. Questions such as:

- Why do you still work here?
- What have been your best experiences at work?
- What do you value about yourself as a person and a teacher?
- What achievements at home and work are you proud of?
- Apart from money, why do you come to work?

The questions had some teachers stumbling on their words, unable to move past their weaknesses and the areas they felt needed to be developed. Things at Owston Park had recently been tough. The previous couple of years had been gruelling in terms of end of key stage results, staff negativity and academisation. The culture had become, quite literally toxic. I knew it; but it was like watching a garden die and having no access to water. I was sad, after some of those interviews, that grown adults had very little of worth to say about themselves.

But I realised as the interviews went on there was a quiet common theme that began to bloom – the staff realised they were thirsty

and they were desperate for sustenance. They were prepared to bloom and grow together. They did like each other, they did respect each other's professionalism, they wanted to develop as teachers for the children. They just didn't know this about each other. The weeds had got in the way, they'd lost sight of each other and I'd lost sight of them.

So, some quick wins? I had to get staff back into the staff room, just talking and sharing. Teachers love food right? 'Fish Fridays', happened, 'Munch Mondays', 'Weight-Gain Wednesdays'. Just a day a week when we sat and ate together – didn't do marking or planning or dash out to photocopy. Also, 'Staff Shout-Outs' read out during staff briefings where staff got to nominate each other for being kind, helpful, supportive or anything positive and there was a goody basket of prizes to choose from.

Training day hours were given back to staff to prepare their curriculum planning. Staff meetings were used for triad working so that when improvement plan targets needed action teachers could use trial and error to work out what was best for the children in their class – they created their own curriculum principles rather than just having to comply with a policy written by SLT. I made sure it was ok to disagree, or to suggest, or to adapt. The garden started to grow, bees were buzzing, cross-pollination was happening. A



school council was started, a PTA was set up, an eco-schools award group was founded.

It became ok for teachers to tell each other when they were struggling – the energy that went into pretending that everything was ok, into working out who you could trust, into worrying that everyone was better at it than you, began to go back into the stem and the roots. We began to like each other, more importantly we began to trust each other. More importantly still we showed each other so.

When the Trust conducted an AI at Owston Park later in the year it became clear that staff no longer struggled to articulate what they valued about themselves and school. They liked coming to school, they loved the kids, advocated for them even and knew they could trust each other to each do their part to improve the life chances of our children. As one teacher said during the AI; “We can give our views now and not be judged. We listen to each other about what’s working well.” Another said; “There is consistency, we all want the same things and have the same expectations of the children.” And finally; “Staff are supportive of each other, there is a friendliness in school, lots of positive experiences. My heart is here.”

Can I or SLT take credit for all this? Absolutely not. The stars aligned I think and we all just ran with it. The hearts and minds of the

people in the culture had been brought to life. They made the change. As Christine Carter again says; “Happiness cannot be micro-managed or mandated, but the conditions can be made right.” For it to be sustainable we just have to see leadership from the point of view of those being led and enable a little bit of leadership in everyone.

Similarly at Crowle Primary Academy, another school in the Rose Learning Trust, we have seen that in busy organisations it is easy to lose sight of each other and ‘the team’. When this happens, staff can become suspicious of others and self-doubt their abilities and value in the organisation. Change is needed. People don’t fear change they fear the process of getting there and in order to overcome this it is important for senior leaders to create a climate for change.

So senior leaders set about creating a culture of trust and happiness by taking the time to listen to staff and discuss ideas in an environment where it was okay to make mistakes and move forward to put things right (do we not tell the children this on a daily basis?) Staff were empowered through their teaching, individual leadership responsibilities and projects based on their passions, interests and strengths and were given ownership to implement ideas and evaluate success. As a result, the staff felt valued and appreciated for their efforts. In staff meetings, teachers and learning support assistants were brought



together to improve curriculum design and new initiatives were researched individually and discussed as a team. This went a long way to restoring passion and teamwork in the implementation of initiatives.

CPD approaches such as lesson study and opportunities to openly discuss what was working well and not so well through phase meetings and self-evaluation discussions following lesson observations, in which targets were decided together, helped bring the team together and develop a setting of openness and honesty. As a result, nurture and cooperation amongst staff also increased.

Staff have been further reunited through 'Wellbeing Wednesdays' (a chance for staff to get together and chat), appreciation of each other through the 'You're awesome' mug and our Thursday after school walk/ jog have all helped to increase morale, reduce self-doubt and recreate 'the team'.

From a different perspective, at Hatchell Wood Primary Academy, another of the Rose Learning Trust schools, the theme of trust and staff appreciation now feels truly embedded and is a key factor in the extremely high retention rates of staff here. It is a culture that has been created and developed over a much longer period of time and has focussed on promoting staff wellbeing by nurturing and cultivating a happy and safe environment to work in.

Many initiatives which have been introduced over the last few years are now well established practices and together these all contribute towards creating a positive team that people want to be part of and work hard for. Each term a wellbeing day is given to all members of staff, (teachers, TAs, midday supervisors and office staff) as a thank you for their hard work and a reminder to take time for themselves.

The 'you've been mugged' mug of kindness is a special cup filled with goodies and given to a different member of staff every Friday. Whoever receives the cup chooses what to fill it with and who should receive it next, just another way of showing appreciation between colleagues.

We also have a 'Staff Shout Out' notice board in our staff room which people fill with post it notes of thanks, inspirational quotes for the week ahead and a social calendar for people to add birthdays, anniversaries, etc. All of these things help us to show appreciation to our colleagues as well as celebrating people's achievements and things that are important to them. The group of people that we work with then become more than 'colleagues', they become our friends, people we care about, people we want to help, support, work hard for and achieve with.

As has been previously said, this culture cannot be achieved by one person, it has to



be a buy in with every member of the team fully on board to truly create a positive culture of trust and happiness. However, having said that, it has to be noted that one of the key driving factors in the cultural shift which began many years ago at Hatchell Wood came from our Headteacher and the compassion and consideration which he has always shown to all staff. He has always been incredibly approachable and when people need help, support or time off for special circumstances, whatever the reason, he always listens and allows people to take this time where ever possible. Staff appreciate these small tokens of flexibility so much and because they can see how much he cares and values them, they never take advantage of this. Ensuring this same attitude filters down to the senior leadership team and through to middle leaders, classroom teachers, teaching assistants and all other members of staff was an influential factor in embedding and creating a whole school ethos where everyone feels appreciated and valued.

In a recent survey staff were asked why they had chosen to work at our school, what they liked about working here and why they continued to work here and the same four

words continually came up in their answers, they were: positive, flexible, loyal and trust. They want to work in a positive environment. They appreciate that they are given flexibility and this makes them loyal. Above all they want to work with people they trust in a place where they feel happy and safe.

We continually strive to build upon and improve the culture at Hatchell Wood. Feedback from staff is that they would like us to enhance some aspects of our working environment, in particular the staff room. A number of staff have volunteered to investigate this further and lead on making these changes, aiming to make the space less intimidating and enabling more relaxed conversations.

So in conclusion, it feels like throughout our Trust, like the geese in flight taking turns to cut the air, we have found ways to understand and support each other as well as sustaining ourselves. We aren't like the buffalo, who when their leader dies, have nowhere to go, no direction and no-one to turn to.

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Let's keep to the 3 Is of Intent, Implement, Impact, not have 4 – there should be no I in subject leadership and curriculum development

A Practice Insight working paper by Kate Hope

Does adopting a team approach to curriculum and subject leadership drive curriculum intent, implementation and impact to a greater effect?

There is a focus within the new Ofsted School Inspection Framework for the United Kingdom on the curriculum, looking at the 3 Is – Intent, Implementation, Impact. In driving the curriculum and building an outstanding broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils, we need to adopt a team approach and not leave subject leaders to be a single voice or lone advocate in a busy school.

Background and experience of subject leadership and curriculum development

Throughout my career I have led many subjects across the primary curriculum, often in isolation and with no guidance or chance to share ideas or success in these subjects. I am now curriculum lead for the school and firmly believe collaboration between teachers, ownership and professional discussions are the key to embedding and sustaining an outstanding curriculum for our pupils. Teachers rarely have time to share their subject leadership vision and monitor their subject with colleagues, let alone have opportunities to share and celebrate success or opportunities across busy schools. Time for subject leadership is hard to manage for some teachers, so as leaders we need to create

opportunities, combine discussions and provide a platform for professional feedback, discussions and sharing of good practice.

Curriculum Leadership

When I started to lead the curriculum at my school, it was daunting to lead such a vast area. There with so many teachers at different points in their subject and so many different aspects of the curriculum to have an overview of. In order to have an in – depth insight, knowledge and collaboration across the whole curriculum, I set up a curriculum team. I wanted a team approach, driving the curriculum and making people feel valued and supported whatever their experience. I wanted us to have ownership of the curriculum for our pupils, not to buy in a published scheme.

I adopted a team approach to my leadership, drawing on Kotter's 'Theory of change model' (1996). Further reading of Kotter and Cohen 'The heart of change' (2002) supported how I built the sustainable team, adopting the 8 step change model.





In adopting this model, there needed to be a sense of urgency, driving change for our pupils so they had the outstanding curriculum they deserve. All subject leaders were invited to be part of the team, empowering staff and forming the whole school vision, values and priorities for our curriculum and for our team as a working party. This was to be a forum for Continued Professional Development (CPD), to share good practice, to ask for support and to celebrate success as subject leaders. The team met for 2 hours each half term, with approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of the teaching staff choosing to attend. This was not part of the Professional Development Meetings we have for CPD.

The team initially established a vision, roles and proposed standing items for the agendas, such as feedback from each subject leaders, events and book scrutiny. The agenda was circulated a week before, with subject leaders having chance to add to it, but also time to prepare and complete actions. Within this, lines of communications were vital. We started a buddy system, so staff unable to attend could share their subject actions and updates through their 'buddy' colleague but also received feedback and actions from the team. This was highly effective in ensuring subject leads embraced the changes and monitoring cycle. It also meant that a culture of collaboration was fostered, with leads enjoying the opportunity to be an advocate for their subject and share success. Within each meeting we were able to hear about

every subject, discuss next steps for individual leads and decide on whole team priorities or projects. We would action next steps in monitoring, plan collaborative book reviews and decide roles and responsibilities for the next half term's monitoring.

As overall lead, it meant straight away my knowledge was secure, I could strategically prioritise not only individual subjects, but plan whole school changes and CPD. Subject leads really enjoyed sharing their news about their subject and the depth of discussion rose dramatically. Teachers continued to come every half term, bringing completed actions and wanting to share ideas and discuss their plans - it was great to see!

Continuity, consistency and collaboration to monitoring and evaluating the curriculum.

Another aspect of the curriculum team was to ensure continuity and consistency in leadership, monitoring, action plans and in the leader's subject evidence file. Each agenda would focus on an aspect to monitor and actions would then be decided by the team, with staff offering to support or monitor in triads to help workload and staff development. For example, they decided to monitor the teaching, learning and progress in history in triads. By doing this, each teacher would monitor within a phase, feedback to the triad and then share at the next curriculum team. They often went to another phase to increase their knowledge and to be able to look at continuity of teaching across school. New subject leads found this very valuable and it also ensured continuity in how subjects were monitored as well as reducing workload. This was part of Kotter's model, step 5 and 6, leading to sustainable change.

Further focus within the team included looking at how to gather evidence for some



subjects where portfolios of work weren't as consistent. With leaders now being confident in their professional discussions, they would ask for support and discuss next steps with each other, such as "How can I evidence French in the children's portfolios?' Equally, if subject leads monitored together, they could discuss timetabling and be aware of challenges or barriers across phases and have a discussion of the best way forwards. This has in the past then led to theme days or weeks to address an imbalance in some subjects, thus making actions swift, ensuring we maintain a broad and balanced curriculum.

Leadership styles and approaches

I wanted to use Kotter's model to drive curriculum change, but also to use research to further support staff development and focus on leadership styles for sustainability, whatever the stage and career experience they had.

Hill, Melon, Laker and Goddard (2016) looked at 5 different types of leaders; the soldier to tighten, trim and focus, the accountant to invest and grow, the philosopher to discuss and debate, the surgeon to be decisive and incisive, and lastly, the architect to re-design and build for sustainable long term impact. As a surgeon, I acted decisively to change how subjects were led and changed some leadership roles, as well as create new action plans and agenda formats. I swiftly ratified decisions the team made or had further discussions if barriers or actions were going to cloud our vision. As a soldier, I rallied the troops, got them all involved and on the same journey to form the curriculum team. At this point my leadership and the curriculum team now shared the same styles as we became a strong team of philosophers debating and discussing the vision, the intent and implementation of the curriculum. As

architects, we carefully crafted the plans and secured the implementation with strong foundations and clear drivers. As a team, we were, and still are, very strong and true to our architectural foundations. Clear long - term and medium – term planning, curriculum intent for all subjects and clear values and ethos drive all we do, with these being re-visited and evaluated. With curriculum design in its' second year, we then further developed guidance on subject leadership, setting expectations and an annual cycle of collaborative monitoring, with a focus on not adding to workloads, but ensuring we had secure knowledge of each subject then the curriculum as a whole.

Assessment and tracking of progress and knowledge acquisition across the curriculum subjects and phases

After the team established effective relationships and curriculum planning and monitoring was embedded, the team now focussed on developing foundation subject assessment across school to identify progress and knowledge. This needed to be purposeful, not unmanageable and most importantly inform teaching and learning to promote further progress for all pupils. Again, through collaboration the team formulated a template and cycle which subject leads then populated with knowledge expectations and skills for each year group and teachers trialled. Subject leaders now have secure knowledge in how pupils make progress and can support those not making good progress swiftly in their subject alongside their class teacher. We have also completed a subject knowledge audit so we can provide bespoke support to teaching staff moving forwards.



Collaborative evaluation of the curriculum

An important piece of work more recently, over a term, by the team was to evaluate the whole curriculum. The team approached it together, asking ten questions and then posing these to all stakeholders, listing evidence, views and feedback to answer each question. Questions we posed included;

- How does your curriculum reflect the culture, climate and values of your school?
- How do you balance the drive for high standards in both core and foundation subjects?
- How does the curriculum provide for physical and mental well – being?

Within our team, we discussed each question, philosophising then I was then able to write a summary, list evidence and use the team's next architectural steps for the next focus of the team's work. With the in – depth evaluation, we were able to be honest, decide as a team on priorities, review each curriculum intents, implementation methods and desired impact for pupils. I do not believe this scale of knowledge from the evaluation or understanding would have been possible without the collaboration of this team. The rigour of subject leadership, clear vision, breadth and balance and progress in the knowledge pupils have is testament to the drive this group have had over the last three years, embedding change which is sustained and supports colleagues at all levels of their career to successfully lead their subject area.

Supporting Continued Professional Development for all teachers at all points of their career (CPD)

I am very proud of the team within my school; it has been, and will continue to be highly supportive and effective in empowering staff,

ensuring consistency in teaching and learning and in making sure knowledge is at the forefront of our teaching. I am particularly pleased with the impact the team approach has on teachers in their subject leader role. With the opportunity to share, be part of the team and work with a colleague to maximise communication, we have reduced workload and anxiety in subject leadership and have developed highly effective middle leaders.

Being a passionate mentor and coach, I feel the curriculum team is fundamentally important for newly qualified and early career teachers. Through sitting in, observing and listening, joining in when they wish to, teachers have increased their subject knowledge, felt confident and are ready to then successfully lead their own subject in the knowledge of the support which is consistently behind them. Equally, the curriculum team has enabled me to refine my leadership, adopt different styles and successfully manage the role and have secure knowledge of the whole curriculum, maintaining an outstanding curriculum for our pupils that they so deserve. In addition to the curriculum team, I have also introduced an English team, drawing on expertise and interests across school and we have effective leadership and succession planning as a result too.

Reflection

I would highly recommend curriculum teams be adopted in primary schools to ensure subject leads are supported and that school leaders can gather the wealth of knowledge they need to understand their curriculum and action plan to ensure it is outstanding for all pupils. The Local Authority, partner schools and more recently the lead inspector during our Ofsted inspection, have all praised this team approach to Curriculum development.



They have complimented the leadership and broad, balanced and bespoke curriculum we provide as well as the knowledge and strength of subject leaders across school. True collaboration through teams is the key to driving whole school change and ensuring that good practice is shared and sustained. This

has been and will continue to provide our pupils with a bespoke and outstanding curriculum, equipping them with a broad knowledge and skills for the rest of their life.

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‘A Rose without the Thorns’ using Strengths-based Appreciative Inquiry to support capacity building in schools

A Practice Insight Paper by Jill Foster

Abstract

Deficit-based school improvement models are the considered norm in education, diagnosing problems in schools and seeking to create change by fixing errors. Education has experienced one reform after another.

Despite these well-intended efforts, the top-down implementation dictated has had a limited impact on the system. The educators expected to implement the reform, the experts in the field, are rarely consulted and are often resistant to the changes being imposed upon them (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Stories of failure teach you what not to do, but they do not necessarily teach you how to succeed.

School reform efforts ignore the “positive core” of an existing system and attempts to force change onto schools rather than involving professionals in positive and constructive ways (Cooperrider, Whitney, Stavros 2008). This article explores and considers the process and approach that can be a useful for educational school improvement as part of a self-improving system.

Introduction

It is my personal belief that we need to nurture and support the special kind of leadership that is required to create a generative community; a dynamic school organisation that supports vitality, creativity and motivates learning at all levels of the school. Leadership that is collaborative and participatory, bringing together all the voices of the school through collective conversations – much like a coaching conversation – where there is active listening and a genuine interest in what others are saying, sharing and reflecting upon.

We wanted to use an alternative approach – Appreciative Inquiry (AI). A methodology to use with the schools in our Trust, working from evaluated strengths and creating opportunities to inspire creativity and innovation as a collective community. This approach allowed us to address difficult to move areas faster, in better and enriched ways as a community, ultimately putting us in a stronger position.



The AI approach is a complete contrast to the problem-solving approaches that we are all used to, which can be narrow in their focus on what is 'wrong'. AI is a fresh lens through which to view our schools. A reflective one; in particular, recognising the strengths of our school and using that as a launch pad for future plans.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a model of change management (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). AI also is described as a strengths-based, capacity building approach to transforming human systems (Barrett & Fry, 2005). AI has been recognised further as an approach to organizational analysis and learning (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). *In Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change*, Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) tie it together this way:

AI theory states that organisations are centres of human relatedness, first and foremost, and relationships thrive where there is an appreciative eye – when the people see the best in one another, share their dreams and ultimate concerns in affirming ways, and are connected in full voice to create not just new worlds but better worlds. (p. 61)

“Appreciative Inquiry is not a search for positives as opposed to negative, or a good as opposed to bad. It is a search for what nourishes people for better performance and

organisational excellence, what excites, energises, and inspires employees and the community.” (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2010)

From Case Western Reserve University, Cooperrider is renowned for his research in Appreciative Inquiry (AI) over the past 30 years. He has advised prominent world business and society leaders, as well as a number of leading global corporations and the United Nations. Professor Cooperrider and other researchers estimate that we spend 80% of our time at work trying to fix what's not working, and only 20% of our time trying to build from our strengths. Working from our strengths provides us with our best opportunities for growth and success.

Professor Cooperrider conceived the concept of “Appreciative Inquiry” in 1990, concluding that “the act itself of asking positive questions affected the organisation positively; asking negative questions affected the organisation negatively” (Martinez CF, 2002). In other words, language frames thinking and perspective.

Schools are networks of people. When people begin to talk with one another around a shared theme they co-construct the structures, strategies and processes they need



to move forward. The varied perspectives make conversation robust, spark fresh ideas, and stimulate creativity. It builds whole system awareness, learning and collaboration. Professor Cooperrider coined the phrase ‘words create worlds’. When you get people talking about a compelling, shared future, you begin creating new levels of understanding and the future in the process.

AI is also a genuine form of inquiry. To quote Gervase Bushe: “The theory’s central management insight is that teams, organisations and society evolve in whatever direction we collectively, passionately and persistently **ask questions about.**” Bushe, G.R. (2001) Meaning Making in Teams.

This does not mean that problems are avoided in the Trust. Sometimes it is important to recognise and directly address problems, as it would be foolish to pretend problems don’t exist however the AI process helps our schools reframe problems so that they become an expression of a desired future.

When we are too quick to offer a solution as a leader, we miss hearing the other – often better – ideas that are in the room. Executives who learn to ask questions and listen well

have an advantage over answer-giving colleagues because they are better learners.

Research Question

The focus of one of our first Appreciative Inquiries was around raising aspirations of and for our pupils. This was not to say that there were low aspirations for pupils, but we were curious to know how could we improve on our current position.

Principal Debbie Secker “We know there is already good practice within our school, we just want more of it, at every level” (Debbie Secker CollectivEd 2019). The school was fully aware of the research around the impact of high expectations, especially for our most disadvantaged pupils.

Our AI aim was to focus around increasing the positive culture, expectations and empathic environment, in which all staff know and care about pupils, share their visions of the goals of the school and share their ideas in how we can achieve these goals.

Methodology

The AI approach in our schools was based on the classical steps of Appreciative Inquiry referred to as The “4D” Cycle – (Ludema ,Whitney, Mohr & Griffin)



- 1) Discover: appreciate and value the best of what already is, or has been
- 2) Dream: envision what might be
- 3) Design: dialogue about what should be
- 4) Deliver: innovate what will be

The most time-consuming aspect of the task was generating the “Collective Conversation” questions, to collect and harness the “Discover” element of the model conducive to a primary school setting. The crafted questions of AI encourage staff to look at the things that are right in the world.

We created collective conversation questions on three levels

1. Pupils
2. Staff at all levels within our school community.
3. Parents and carers and community as a whole

Vogt, Brown and Isaacs (2003) put forward the example of contrasting the question “What did we do wrong and who is responsible?” with “What can we learn from what has happened, and what possibilities do we see?” The first question assumes error and blame, encouraging defensiveness. The second encourages reflection, and stimulates learning and collaboration.

The crafted questions were used on as many members of staff, pupils and parents that we could manage to speak to over two days, some even being facilitated and cushioned by tea and biscuits (always a step to success). The theme of the question was individual to each school, but all shared the golden thread that it was something that the school was finding hard to move through general school improvement strategies.

We succeeded in bringing together all the voices of the schools through collective conversations, much like a coaching conversation where there is active listening and a genuine interest in what others are saying and sharing.



Reflections from staff

Headteacher 1	<p>"The process is the best improvement tool that I have used – the fact that so much information is gathered so quickly, and all stakeholder voices are heard contributes to a really effective process. I loved the fact that children are involved in improvement planning.</p> <p>It was great that other staff, especially support staff being heard and involved.</p> <p>The use of research informed practice has changed the way I think as a leader. I am no longer alone and afraid I am making the wrong decision. To quote my research... 'I didn't know my eyes could see that far!'"</p>
Headteacher 2	<p>"The AI allowed supported delegated leadership of the projects we have planned. It utilised fully the Trust manpower. It is a process that I would highly recommend, due to the high buy in of all staff and stakeholders. This has led to powerful co-ordinated and fast paced shared actions, which allow the accumulated urgency of the process to impact. Stakeholders can see that they have been actively engaged and are thus bought into the process. It is part of everyone."</p>
Headteacher 3	<p>"The one thing that has moved our school this year is the AI. School Improvement on super-fast speed. Total buy in at all levels. Mobilisation of the team was intrinsic as they were part of the process. The two days changed our school."</p>
Teachers School 1	<p>"A united and involved method for progression"</p> <p>"Generating feeling a sense of well-being and belonging"</p> <p>"Demonstrated the strengths and values already embedded within the school- a firm foundation to build and expand upon in the future for all our community."</p> <p>"Demonstrated that every individual in our community matters and has a role to play in school improvement. 'together we are stronger, seeing things from different perspectives."</p> <p>"I think this will have a great impact on our children and their learning It makes the school a key focus of the wider community."</p> <p>"Our action plan is formulated from listening and hearing the collective views of our community. It can't fail as people are involved in developing their own destiny."</p>
Teachers School 2	<p>"I feel part of the process and plan."</p> <p>"I fully understand what the school is doing and why!"</p> <p>"I'm so excited to put this into action. I'm ready for action and enthused."</p>
Teachers School 3	<p>"I've never really got school improvement action plans before, they were not mine and I didn't get where they came from. This however is a positive process that I really understand. I see how it is generated and where it comes from and where it is going. I'm bought into all the plans – there is group ownership."</p> <p>"Everyone is bought into the process as the golden thread of pupil voice is so prominent."</p>
Pupils	<p>"We know as much about our school as the adults. We come everyday!"</p> <p>"It's good to know that adults listen to us and actually hear."</p> <p>"The letters that came home straight after the summit showed everyone that the school meant business and that everyone had a voice. Things that worked were important, but we can still improve."</p>
Learning Support Assistant 1	<p>"It was us identifying areas for improvement rather than just being told what to do – it has set a momentum of change that everyone shares"</p>
Parents	<p>"I've been asked for comments before and saw nothing change. This process included everyone. I could see our conversations coming through the outcomes"</p> <p>"I understand why the school is moving towards these actions."</p>



Conclusion

AI does not ask people to ignore problems, nor does it minimise negative experiences. Instead, during the time of an AI project, participants are asked to share the positive experiences as a way to stay “focused on forward”. It allows the exploration of strengths that might be deployed to mitigate any weaknesses.

The underlying assumption of Appreciative Inquiry is that people and organisations are always evolving, growing, and moving toward the future. It focuses the whole organisation on identifying its greatest assets, capacities, capabilities, resources, and strengths – to create new possibilities for change, action, and innovation. This focus changes the

questions we used and changed the answers we got.

The need to enhance capacity at every level around the theme seems obvious. Setting a cultural transformation of a learning system in motion requires buy-in throughout the entire institution and across the Trust. Appreciative Inquiry has given our schools the potential to engage educators and the community in which they are based in creating a positive future, by building on the strengths and effective practices that currently exist within each school. It is an holistic and collaborative methodology that we have adopted positively and continue to use for our next chapter in developing the intent of our Trust “area”-based curriculum.

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Maximizing Mentoring: Investing in the Future

Practice insight working paper by Helen Harrison

To what extent can online mentor training be enhanced through follow up opportunities for professional dialogue complementing the course materials? Could this also be a vehicle for whole school improvement?

Background

As Head Teacher at Woodfield Primary School and also the Strategic Lead for Initial Teacher Training (ITT) within the Doncaster Teaching School Alliance, I considered that the current mentor training had some limitations.

Although ITT mentor training sessions were well attended, the content was mainly operational and procedural. Training was led by the lead ITT tutor and often comprised of what could be termed 'briefing sessions.' It seemed that we were forgetting what the real essence of mentoring was and were missing opportunities to help our mentors develop the skills and attributes to support them more effectively in their work with trainee teachers. Not only that, but could investing in a better quality and holistic mentoring training programme impact more widely on whole school improvement?

Consequently we were pleased to have the opportunity to work in partnership with Sheffield Institute of Higher Education and Sheffield Hallam University in creating a bespoke online mentoring programme. The 'Enhance Your Mentoring Skills' programme was aimed at ITT and Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) mentors across schools within the Teaching School Alliance. The online programme includes the opportunity to complete workbooks alongside the awarding of badges and certificates. The assessment of the workbooks is carried out by Sheffield Institute of Education.

Some underpinning research and reflections

Within the context of ITT, mentor training is mainly face-to-face but the explosion of web-based technology has seen a massive range of opportunities for mentors in terms of developing their mentoring and coaching skills. Much of the research on this focuses on the experiences of mentors mentoring mentees but can be applied to training for mentors. As long ago as 1999 Single and Muller (1999) proposed a model for structured face-to-face mentoring and applied it to the e-mentoring context. They considered that 'electronic mentoring



provides opportunities for mentoring prohibited by face to face mentoring programs.' 'The information age is changing the dynamics of many relationships including mentoring' according to Bierema and Merriam, who in 2002 came up with a new definition and a conceptual framework for e-mentoring as 'a computer mediated, beneficial relationship between a mentor and a protégé which provides learning, advising, encouraging, promoting and modeling. It is 'often boundary less, egalitarian and qualitatively different from traditional face to face mentoring' (2002). A decade later social networking was seen as a way forward and today Twitter and Facebook offer what may be termed informal networking opportunities.

Although there are some drawbacks to face-to-face mentor training such as time and resourcing in terms of facilities and materials I considered that reflecting on practice and creating opportunities for interaction and collaboration are essential if learning is to have a significant impact on professional practice. So can online mentor training in its entirety achieve the same objectives? Without opportunities for face-to-face discussion, sharing ideas and challenging colleagues in a social context, might the professional development of the mentors have a more limited impact on practice? The success would also depend on the mentors'

confidence in using the web-based technology.

Our process

With this in mind, the facilitation of a support group comprising of a small group of mentors who were engaged in the online mentoring programme was set up in the school where I am currently the Head Teacher. I was committed initially to leading a regular discussion group of class teachers/mentors who were working on the online mentoring programme. I decided that I would also register for, and embark on the on-line training scheme and learn alongside my colleagues. This would be a collaborative kind of learning journey in terms of developing mentoring skills and competencies within the context of the online learning materials. It would be a kind of 'follow up seminar' that would hopefully extend and build on the on-line learning of the participants.

Ground rules for the meetings were set up. They would be relatively informal and would include trainees and NQTs when, and, if appropriate. The focus of each discussion would be an aspect of the online workbook. Over the last few months we have explored Gibb's reflective practice model as a structure that can be followed for reflection to impact positively on teaching practice. Some interesting discussions emerged from a



consideration about what has most impact on practice such as team teaching, watching videos in practice etc. This was explored from the differing perspectives of mentors and NQTs. The differences between mentoring and coaching have been discussed and expectations from all parties explored in some depth.

So far.....

It is relatively early to make fully informed conclusions about the outcomes of these meetings and the impact on mentoring practice. However, so far the verbal feedback has been positive with all participants fully engaged and enthusiastic. Our discussions are complementing the content of the workbooks. They are also enabling mentors to stay on track with the course materials. Mentors have said that they appreciate this forum within which they can consider issues in more depth, share their thoughts and different perspectives and generally develop a deeper insight into the mentoring process.

My own personal reflections have been as follows. Each mentor/class teacher brings different but complementary strengths to the group and the involvement of trainees and NQTs is a bonus. It gives us a forum in which we can openly discuss aspects of mentoring in

a non-hierarchical manner so that different perspectives are constantly being explored. The most rewarding aspect is observing the development in critical thinking and reflectivity on the part of all involved, particularly the trainees and NQTs when they are present. It has to be said that the mentors are all models of good professional practice and have experience of articulating and making explicit the factors that underpin their teaching/learning. So the discussion groups give opportunities to share thinking and any concerns but primarily they are a means of drawing on the collective expertise of all involved. It is also good to see how relationships are built and fostered within the group, as primarily the foundation of effective mentoring is the quality of the professional relationship between the mentor and mentee. Having the course materials as a focus for our discussions is invaluable. They provide a clear agenda for each meeting and a focus for our discussions that is complemented by participants' background reading and research.

It is also gratifying to consider how as the staff develop their mentoring skills they can become more proficient as class teachers. Reflectivity, active listening, questioning, coaching etc. are all part of the teacher's repertoire and are integral to the process of teaching and learning. The collaborative learning culture and positive ethos in school is



being further enriched. It will improve the quality of teaching/learning throughout the school for the benefit of all our pupils. The setting up of a support group and learning alongside staff has not been easy but it has been rewarding and also made me reflect on the wider whole school benefits of mentor training.

As a school leader I understand that although an 'equal partner' I am probably playing a pivotal role in the on-going progress and maintenance of the discussion group. In her think piece working paper Berry quotes from Campbell and Nieuwerburgh as follows:

"If we accept the view that schools are networks of people engaged in various forms of conversation designed to progress the purpose and goals of the school (Campbell, Coaching in Schools 2016) then the leader is a key person setting the conversational tone"

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Acknowledgements

Sheffield Hallam University / Sheffield Institute of Education : *An open online course (SHOOC). Enhance your mentoring skills*. Richard Pountney.

Moving forward

In the process of working with the discussion group I am seeing members grow in confidence as mentees, mentors/class teachers and school leaders themselves. I am confident that in time others will step up to lead the group and build on the foundations established. To what extent this is a sustainable model remains to be seen. So the impact of our participation in the 'Enhance your Mentoring Skills' on-line programme combined with, what may be termed, our 'follow up seminars' seems to be having a beneficial whole school impact. It is also a timely reminder to me that the best way that school leaders can make a difference to the learning of all members of their community is by promoting and actively participating in the professional learning and development opportunities. There is no substitute for learning alongside, and with others.



Using ‘Collaborative Conversations’ alongside ‘Team Teaching’ to develop a ‘Community of Practise’; Context - Novel Study

A practice insight paper by Kelly Cousins

Building a ‘Community of Practise’

‘A community of practise (COP) is a group of practitioners who collaborate with one another to improve their practise. This collaboration is “both a reciprocal and recursive venture where individuals work together to achieve a shared aim in which they engage in a process of reflection” to learn within a shared environment and to develop professionally,’ (Bevins & Price (2014) cited in Tallman, K.A. & Feldman, A (2016)).

In order to enhance our existing practise at Richmond Hill Primary Academy, for the teaching of reading, it was important to establish a working ‘community of practise’ (COP) whereby staff wanted to strive for improvement by reflecting on current practise in an open and honest manner. Research was introduced to the group, focusing on the metacognitive principles taken from the ‘Improving Literacy in Key Stage 1 & 2, Guidance Reports’ published by the Education Endowment Fund. CPD that staff had accessed was also discussed alongside the research, delivered by The Literacy Trust. From here, we collaboratively decided upon our principles under which we would ‘hang’

our new Novel Study approach on, in order to improve the teaching of reading across the Academy.

Collaborative Conversations

Using ‘collaborative conversations’ through our ‘community of practise’ allowed staff a voice in terms of how we were going to approach this change in delivery and more importantly ensured that staff were on board to aid driving this change forward.

As Rachel Lofthouse (2017) states, ‘Mentoring conversations can be a transformative space where important aspects of professional practice are debated and emerging professional identities, both as new teacher and a mentor, can be constructed. Creating a genuinely valuable mentoring experience is possible, and much of it comes through conversation.’

Staff fondly spoke of strategies that they were currently using whereby they could see impact and also gave suggestions as to what was not working in order to shape our new pedagogical model.



Team Teaching

Team teaching was introduced in order to ensure that what we were delivering was meeting the needs of the children and that the new metacognitive approach was consistent across classes. This allowed for various ‘collaborative conversations’ on an ad hoc basis, discussing the most appropriate use of strategies. Having reflective practitioners at this stage of the process was necessary to ensure the drive for improvement was a positive process.

Davis, J.R.(1995) states, *‘William Newell suggests that “one needs to consider whether potential [team teaching] participants are open to diverse ways of thinking; wary of absolutism; able to admit that they do not know; good at listening; unconventional; flexible; willing to take risks; self-reflective; and comfortable with ambiguity.”* (Cited in ‘Team Teaching: A Brief Summary, BYU, Centre for Teaching and Learning.)

Fortunately for us, the staff involved in the ‘community of practise’ offered all of these qualities which enabled the change to be driven forward.

Team teaching occurred initially in each of the pilot classrooms, partnering up to ensure consistency of delivery. Due to the purposeful discussions that arose from this process, staff from other year groups were interested to see the new approach in action, meaning

observations of the new practice were scheduled. This resulted in the staff that piloted the project coaching other members of staff on how to deliver the new approach, based around the metacognitive principles. Staff coached each other on how the content could be adapted to better suit the age and stage of children that they taught. The development of the coaching process meant that the new approach quickly resulted in a ‘bottom up’ model, enabling all staff to have a voice in the process.

Metacognitive SATs Style Strategies

To further ensure that we were meeting the needs of our learners in terms of gap analysis, content domain coverage as well as question types were focused upon after scrutinising children’s KS2 practice SATs papers. Doing this as a team allowed for further discussion and CDP for staff involved, as it soon became obvious to them how they could tailor their delivery of the Novel Study approach, whilst ensuring they were hitting the areas that were pinnacle to drive standards forward. I introduced Dunlosky’s (2013) theory of ‘practice testing’ to inform practice alongside Rosenshine’s (2012) suggestions of using ‘practice models of worked-out problems.’ Providing the research allowed me to drive these suggestions forward in the classroom, as the staff were more inclined to use these strategies due to them being tried and tested already. This allowed for ‘collaborative



conversations' to be had within the team as to how they had introduced these strategies with their children and what impact they had had.

With the challenge looming ahead- SATs, staff felt it was important that the children knew how to revise properly and efficiently. This allowed me to easily introduce Dunlosky's approach to a 'study planner' whereby children use 'distributed practice' effectively across a couple of weeks, which in effect reduces cramming.

The impact of utilising research in order to introduce small changes to the delivery of English meant that staff were more inclined to take this forward in their classroom and steered them to look at other researched strategies that could enhance their current delivery.

Teacher Journal Clubs

In order to move forward further with this project, it is my hope that a Teacher Journal Club will further enhance the coaching and learning opportunities provided by staff, for staff, based around research of their own interests. This will then hopefully further enhance the practice that has developed for the teaching of reading across the Academy. Teacher journal clubs are the perfect environment to establish a 'community of practise' based around 'collaborative conversations' which enable staff to be highly

reflective and strive for better outcomes for pupils on a daily basis.

'Journal clubs – traditionally used by medical doctors – are a regular cycle of meetings at which teachers discuss research. In each session, the participants summarise the findings of an article, critically discuss them, work in pairs to plan how they will incorporate them into their practice and then choose another article for the following meeting. In the following meeting, the session begins with participants feeding back and discussing their experience implementing their plans from the last session and what they have learned from the process, before moving on to the next article.' Sims, A. & Moss, G. & Marshall, E. (2017.)

Our journey of Novel Study is ongoing and ever changing in order to create an approach fit for purpose and to meet the needs of our learners. Ultimately, I strive for all pupils to develop a love of reading and for them to leave our Academy with a broad range of texts that they can access and refer to fondly when they have children of their own.

As Pat Riley suggests, *'Excellence is the gradual result of always striving to do better'*.

Kelly Cousins, Head of School, Richmond Hill Primary Academy, The Rose Learning Trust.



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Incremental Coaching and the Impact on Pupil Progress and Attainment

A practice insight working paper by Karen O’Keeffe

During my teaching career, I have spent the majority time as an EYFS practitioner and have therefore developed a particular interest in teaching children to read. We had as a school identified greater potential than we were currently attaining in both Good Level of Development (GLD) for reading, Early Years Profile and the Year 1 phonics screen. We were already using a phonics scheme but were disappointed with the outcomes and the amount of interventions we were administering. A visit to a model school supplied the answer and it was clear that training would enhance our delivery this phonic scheme, which in turn should improve pupil outcomes.

A successful bid was now in place, and as part of my role of Assistant Principal I accepted the opportunity to take on the lead role for this Teaching and Learning Innovation Fund (TLIF) phonics programme. As an experienced student mentor/coach, I felt confident that I would be able to apply these skills in this new role.

Organising two full days of Continuous Professional Development (CPD), for all staff including the Senior Leadership, marks the start of the new academic year, our new learning journey begins.

Teacher modelling for each step using the my turn, your turn technique is a significant feature, listed here are some of the key elements of step 1 where teacher modelling is continuous:

- Oral accuracy- teacher says the sound pupils repeat
- Visual reinforcement picture hook/grapheme representation
- Aural/Oral blending
- Teacher repeats accurate pronunciation to lock the word into memory
- Writing grapheme introducing a simple phrase to aid memory
- Handwriting practise
- CV/CVC Word building visual
- CV/CVC Word building practical for pupils
- Silent rehearsal
- Revisit for pace of blending words



- Pupils write the word
- Pupils 'tick and fix'

Miskin R. (2016) *Read Write Inc.*

At these early stages of reading, the scheme ensures that only phonemes children have already learnt are practised during the word-building element, thus promoting conditions for success. As the training days progress it became clear that every step builds on prior knowledge, visual, auditory and oral elements, practical elements, rehearsal, practise and self-assessment.

Every element of reading and writing followed this finite level of delivery, clearly consistency of delivery in the classroom with such specific small steps would be a challenge, clearly the main difficulty - remembering every element. The pattern of whole staff training days with the expectation that new knowledge would be given over to teacher autonomy; then expected to become part of teaching practice without further intervention or support just would not, I felt, be feasible.

I very clearly understood that the small steps, structured approach was built around pupils working memory; greatly reduced teacher talk and the kinaesthetic approach of aural, oral, visual and tactile were designed to support all pupils. Rehearsal and practise in such small

steps designed not overload working memory, to help embed new learning, first to short term memory and then secure into long term memory. To achieve the greatest potential for all our pupils, the structure and consistency of delivery were essential.

I attended a further two full days of CPD that were based around the reading leader role, the school Principal was also expected to attend to ensure the TLIF programme had the backing of the senior leadership team.

Training that I have previously received as mentor and then coach involved developing personal advocacy, with its primary aim focusing on building trusting relationships, designed to support and guide others to make their own decisions, based on new their knowledge and skills. There is always an element of modelling when appropriate, suggestions if requested. However, this further training took on a new form of coaching - an incremental coaching model:

The incremental coaching dialogue typically includes review, praise, feedback, reflection, modelling, planning and goal-setting. The essential characteristics are:

- The process focuses on one action-step at a time



- Each step is followed up until the coachee has demonstrably embedded it into their practice
- The interval between observation and follow-up is minimal
- Observations and follow-up conversations are planned into the organisation of the school
- Incremental coaching is disciplined, with common elements and training for coaches
- Coaches are lead practitioners in the same school
- Incremental coaching is developmental and not part of performance management
- Coachees have ownership of the outcomes of incremental coaching

Matthews P. et al (2017) *Incremental Coaching*

No room for individual teaching styles or teacher autonomy, this is now a mind-set change for both the teaching team and myself.

As a school, we were to receive ongoing development days from our Consultant Trainer (CT). I knew that part of my leadership role involved weekly continuous professional development and updates for the teachers, side-by-side coaching and monitoring of classroom practice. To support the incremental coaching model we have an

online portal that offers good practice videos for each element, relevant documentation, a weekly blog, a help line and a direct link to our CT.

During the first week of term, Year 1 and Year 2 were assessed for phonic knowledge and reading accuracy in order to organise them into homogenous groups. Reception phonic assessment would take place after we had baselined and all pupils had started full time school.

Years 1 and 2 were now organised and ready to embark on this new phonics journey.

Teachers given their own handbook with detailed lesson plans. Everyone looking forward to putting his or her new skills into practise. During my first monitoring visits, it very quickly became apparent that individual teachers had remembered different aspects of the phonics lessons and that each had adapted steps according to their interpretation of the training.

I noted what I saw and considered my next steps. How would we move forward to ensure this phonics scheme was delivered with the exacting standard required? I decided to ask the teachers how they felt their first lessons had gone, if they had met any challenges or whether they felt confident



in their delivery. Clearly all the practitioners had found these early lessons problematic, issues of pace, remembering each step, and the order of each step, were common amongst the group. I shared my own feelings of having to follow the lesson plans too, to ensure that I knew what I was looking for.

I wanted to reassure the group that during ongoing CT no one would be criticised or publicly humiliated; that incremental coaching practise would be used to address the issues we had identified, would be ongoing and supportive, no judgements carried out. We collectively acknowledged the need for further training and agreed that any future modelling, side by side coaching or feedback would be solely concerned with development of expert teachers of reading and improved pupil outcomes.

Our first development day with our CT, arrived and everyone was feeling apprehensive, the usual response to the unknown. As we visited each group, notes of practice were recorded by both the CT and myself; practice discussed and training planned. The knowledge and skill of CT was phenomenal, her approach kind and supportive yet with clear intent – to develop exceptional reading teachers.

The day continued with the CT demonstrating further activities designed to support our bottom 20% of pupils. Individual interventions designed to pin point finite next steps for these children. Differentiated and specific to move reading forward, focusing on working memory and learning behaviours through modelling, rehearsal and continuous routine with no teacher talk to disrupt learning. Praise for effort left until the end of the session.

A fundamental message that came with this training – no child is unteachable, the phonic lead demonstrated delivering these interventions with our hardest to reach children and learning was evident.

The now familiar pattern of classroom observation, CPD needs addressed, one to one tutoring training and targets set, began. This level of intense scrutiny and or support was at first challenging. Some practitioners openly stating that they felt it was compromising their teaching practice. Some were struggling to reduce the amount of teacher talk as they moved through the lesson. Some becoming quite distressed at the thought of being observed, stating that only qualified teachers should be observed in this way (a number of our reading teacher's had not had this experience prior to this



training; it is not usual practice for their role of teaching assistant).

At the end of the day, I was left with my first action plan, giving detailed next steps for individual teachers, CPD needs for the group and a deeper understanding of the enormity of the task ahead.

The routine of daily lesson observations, weekly CPD and new targets set started. We openly discussed issues they were facing, how the teachers were feeling about their practice, anything they wanted clarifying. I wanted to ensure that all the practitioners felt they had some ownership and their views were important to me. As time passed I saw a shift in attitudes, we agreed that the routine was getting easier, that they now felt more confident at delivering each element of the scheme. The majority of the team were happy to see me enter their teaching space; they knew and understood my agenda. A small minority still felt uneasy and continued to complain about the erosion of their teacher autonomy.

An integral part of the phonic scheme is pupil assessment the foci specifically phonic knowledge and reading accuracy, adjusting groups to keep them homogenous and appropriate to pupil needs. This takes place

during the penultimate week of each half term. Assessment for learning (AFL) by practitioners is employed between assessment periods to ensure pupils were moved if they are over/under challenged. Evidence from each data capture point demonstrated the extent of the progress pupils were making. Assessment identifies slower readers and intervention put in place. The faster readers are reading with a secure reading rate demonstrating fluency, expression and understanding of what they are reading.

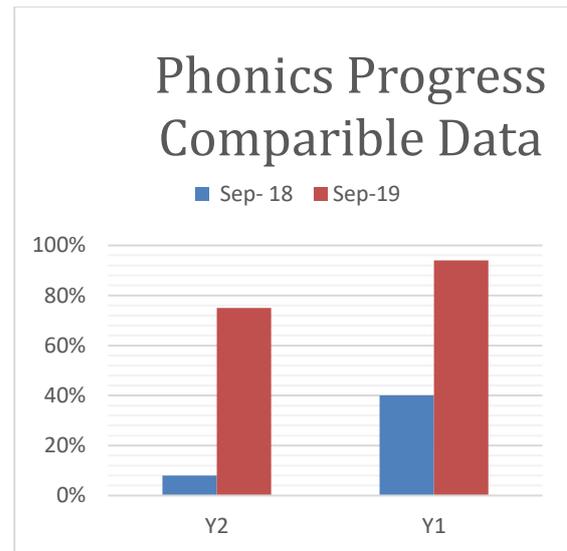
Now our discussions during CPD sessions are affirmative and teachers have an appreciation of their own abilities as expert reading teachers. They know that they have had a positive impact on learning outcomes for the pupils they work with. When I asked the questions

1. Has incremental coaching developed/improved your teaching of reading?
2. Has incremental coaching helped you to understand how different pupils learn?
3. Do you have a better understanding of the need for AFL in every lesson?
4. Has ongoing CPD impacted positively on pupil outcomes?

All teachers felt they were better placed than in previous years. The same phonics



programme is yielding better outcomes within a relatively short period. This journey is far from complete, ongoing CPD will be essential to maintain the teaching standards we are currently attaining. We are yet to be scrutinised with the phonics screen only weeks away; our summative assessment for this academic year remains unknown. Looking ahead, I feel that our current Reception cohort should continue to progress well and currently 94% are on track to complete the programme by the end of Y1. With our current Y1 pupils a minimum of 75% of the cohort will start Y2 having completed the programme. This contrasts with the current Y2 cohort that started this year with 8% having completed the programme.



Pupil progress is the driving force; success with phonics should in turn impact positively on future results across all ages. I therefore conclude that in this instance, incremental coaching is having a positive outcome for pupil progress and attainment, especially our lowest 20%, there has been a mind-set change for all members of the Richmond Hill expert teachers of reading group. All children can and will learn to read. They feel empowered in their teaching and this in turn is positively influencing delivery of the whole curriculum. Incremental coaching will feature in future CPD regardless of the subject focus.

References

Matthews P. et al (2017) *Incremental Coaching*. Ambitious School Leadership
 Miskin R. (2016) *Read Write Inc*. Oxford University Press



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