

Inspiring leaders to
improve children's lives



National College
for School Leadership

Schools and academies

Research and development kitbag

Secondary phase case studies

Resource

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Case study summaries: Secondary phase

Comberton Village College

Mary Martin is Deputy Headteacher at Comberton Village College, which is a 11 – 18 Comprehensive, approximately 1700 roll. Located 6 miles west of Cambridge. 20 year history of collaborating with Cambridge University, Faculty of Education to promote, support and develop Action Research as integral part of ITT, NQT, RQT and experienced teacher professional activity. Currently member of CamSTAR, a 20-school network linked with Cambridge University for purposes of encouraging and sharing research activity among network.

In this case study she explores the lessons that the college has learned whilst promoting a research culture within the staff team to drive up standards in teaching and learning.

Kings Oak Academy

King's Oak Academy is in Kingswood, East Bristol. We are located in an area of deprivation, serving a predominately white working class population. It is an 11-18 Academy, with 720 students on roll (80 of which are in Post-16). The latest Ofsted inspection (of our predecessor school, Kingsfield) rated us Satisfactory in March 2011.

Their case study investigates how creating learning communities within the staff team has promoted research and practitioner based enquiry to help maintain and drive up standards, and engage staff in continuing professional development.

Notre Dame High School

Notre Dame High School faced the same challenges as other schools; staff who were keen to develop professionally and experience more responsibility but unable to provide enough permanent posts. The senior leadership team were acutely aware that increasing the number of staff who could lead on self identified Teaching and Learning initiatives had great potential to increase the capacity for continuing school improvement.

The Curriculum Innovators scheme was launched in 2005 with five, temporary one year posts appointed for staff to develop a department or whole school initiative based on their own action research, which would have a sustainable impact. Post holders were given a bursary of £1000-£2000. Over the ensuing years the scheme became increasingly successful as it evolved and has been an approach to school improvement and CPD, which has inspired others to adopt a similar model including an LA initiated G & T project with local National Challenge Schools.

Esher High School

Esher High School has been developing a research based approach for some time; the first cohort of teachers started an MA in 2004 and the leadership team had been using evidence based research to show progress made on the school improvement plan since 2006.

Working groups have been used as a way of seeking improvement through dispersed leadership since 2006, and individuals with a clear focus and good leadership skills led the most successful groups. The the greatest learning took place in groups that spent time researching, piloting ideas and collecting evidence to show improvement before feeding back

to the rest of the staff. Working groups became research and development groups; there had been a change in emphasis and a need to backup vague hunches and inspirational ideas with proof of impact.

The Bishop Stortford High School

The Bishop's Stortford High School (TBSHS) is an 11 – 18 boys Foundation School of 1150 pupils and five form entry, with a large mixed sixth form. Located on the Hertfordshire / Essex border between London and Cambridge, it serves the local town and outlying villages of Bishop's Stortford along with five other secondary schools, one private school and twenty-two primary schools. The school has become a teaching school in 2011 in alliance with the Herts and Essex High School for Girls.

For the purposes of this case study, the focus will be on TBSHS and how they have embedded effective approaches to research and development in the teaching school.

The Fallibroome Academy

The Fallibroome Academy has significant experience of establishing research and development projects both at whole school and individual level, and in disseminating the findings and evaluating the impact. The original catalyst for our involvement in research into teaching and learning approaches was our engagement with the Campaign for Learning and the University of Newcastle.

Although that project has now ended we have maintained our commitment to practitioner enquiry through becoming a FutureLab Innovation Hub school and participating in the Expansive Education network. At a whole school level we are investigating student engagement and effective middle leader behaviours and we also actively support individual engagement with practitioner enquiry through facilitating staff participation in National College programmes such as MLDP and have a significant proportion of the staff engaged in Masters' accreditation.

Bristol Brunel Academy

Bristol Brunel Academy (BBA) opened in 2007. It serves communities across East and Central Bristol, and the student body reflects this, with above average indicators of deprivation and a significant number of students for whom English is not their first language. Previously the Academy had been a school whose examination results had been a serious cause for concern. Although the building and senior leadership team of the Academy were new, the vast majority of colleagues in the predecessor school transferred to the Academy as did all the students. The Academy ethos is inclusive in the fullest sense of the word, exemplified by a refusal to use fixed term exclusion, and a willingness to avoid at all costs permanent exclusion. The Academy is committed to all young people achieving their potential regardless of their background. This meant bringing about a rapid culture change for both staff and students. The development of the Academy as a 'learning community' was a core strategy in this process. The idea of the Academy as learning community exemplifies the importance we place on adults' professional learning, alongside the learning of our students. We have devoted significant efforts into enabling our colleagues to develop and take forward their own learning by acquiring the skills and dispositions of critical, enquiring and reflective professionals. This was essential as we were developing a new pedagogy and a new approach to the curriculum.

The Cabot Learning Federation

The Cabot Learning Federation is made up of five Academies in Bristol and Weston super Mare. John Cabot Academy (JCA), Bristol Brunel Academy (BBA), Bristol Metropolitan Academy (BMA), Hans Price Academy (HPA) in Weston and King's Oak Academy (KOA) in Kingswood, Bristol.

This case study investigates the benefits and challenges of working across the federation within English Departments with a view to sharing best practice and driving up standards. It aimed to do this through closer collaboration, shared training opportunities and the ability to increase capacity and training opportunities across the Academies in the federation.

Full Case studies: Secondary phase

The following section contains the full case studies provided by secondary schools and academies across England who have successfully implemented research and development practice in order to drive up standards.

Comberton Village College: Lessons for promotion of a research culture in school

Case study:

Comberton Village College, CB23 7DU – 11 – 18 Comprehensive, approximately 1700 roll. Located 6 miles west of Cambridge. 20 year history of collaborating with Cambridge University, Faculty of Education to promote, support and develop Action Research as integral part of ITT, NQT, RQT and experienced teacher professional activity. Currently member of CamSTAR, a 20-school network linked with CU for purposes of encouraging and sharing research activity among network.

Key learning :

- Crucial to have HEI input and guidance because academic knowledge provides the background against which new research can be situated
- Important to have support of Head in school so that resources made available to undertake research activity and that status of research engagement as valid CPD is upheld and given strong profile
- Necessary to create research team so that load can be spread for 1:1 mentoring/coaching
- Important to devise visible structures for meeting/sharing/learning
- Good idea to re-appraise research “site” context on regular basis as whole school needs vary according to history and staff turnover
- Multiple strategies helpful in enabling messages to reach to all areas

Note:

- Background Due to long history of connection with Cambridge University, we have deep links via ITT and Research with a good deal of personnel crossover. This means that subject-specific guidance re research literature is readily available through our existing contacts. This makes a great difference to new researchers as they try to negotiate the plethora of information accessible via the web.
- Over time we have benefited from various small waves of government funding for school research which had accreditation expectations attached. This has allowed us to recognise the need to make progress pathways clear so that new practitioners can see how small-scale action research projects can eventually lead to Master’s dissertations. The link between sophisticated professional learning and the reflective practitioner needs to made explicit.

Key Challenges:

Generating and sustaining interest:

- How to sustain interest in a climate of budget constraint where few funds are available to enable teachers to undertake research activity e.g. lesson observations, questionnaire design, focus groups, interviews, work scrutiny, literature review etc.
- How to provide necessary support including supervision of research design, teaching of research methods and modelling research behaviours.

Re-shaping concepts of professionalism:

- How to convince new teachers especially that research can be part of everyday life and not additional in an overly onerous way.
- How to ensure that they recognise that deep personal learning about their own practice means that some aspects of research behaviours must inevitably become second nature among their repertoire of professional habit and discipline.

Solutions:

Using Induction Programmes as springboards:

- Part of all staff induction includes presentations of recent staff research that has impacted on the practice of the teacher/researcher.
- NQTs are invited to attend an NQT Conference in the Autumn Term with the intention of inspiring them to see what is possible.
- These showcase experiences are backed up with lunchtime opportunities for research sharing with colleagues.
- A simple gathering structure on the 'Speed Dating' model allows colleagues to find out each other's research interests.
- Short seminars on basic research methods e.g. conducting successful interviews are led on occasion by our University Critical friend or by a member of the research team using the same resources.

Using Performance Management as lever:

- Performance targets can be framed within school development research targets.
- Gathering evidence for achievement of targets typically involves using research techniques e.g. data analysis
- Making mini-presentations of research process and findings an integral part of Summer Term NQT/New staff Induction completion
- Encouraging use of research engagement as acknowledged sign of reflective practitioner raise profile of this aspect of professional learning
- Publicising research success via findings or accreditation achievement in school magazine enhances awareness of this as aspect of high performance
- Making role of research engagement within teacher development profile explicit when offering promotion opportunities

Next steps

Currently, we are continuing to build our culture within the CamSTAR network and with the excellent support of Cambridge University colleagues. We are trying to develop the CamSTAR website with colleagues from the network: www.camstar.org.uk. Additionally, we are continuing to develop our own "In House" website for use as an internal networking tool: <http://www.research.combertonvc.org/default.asp>. We also plan to continue to expand our "Knowledge creation" awareness by publishing on the website easy digests of our own research for inspiration and use of colleagues. Examples include: Impact of Single Sex classes in English, Impact of teaching 'enquiry-based learning' on attitudes to KS3 Geography, Impact of analysis of and addressing adolescent risk behaviours on reducing smoking addiction and impact on academic rigour of teaching cross-curricular Mathematics/Science lessons.

Further information

mmartin@comberton.cambs.sch.uk

King's Oak Academy. Learning Communities: A Case Study

A programme of practitioner enquiry

The Academy context:

King's Oak Academy is in Kingswood, East Bristol. We are located in an area of deprivation, serving a predominately white working class population. It is an 11-18 Academy, with 720 students on roll (80 of which are in Post-16). The latest Ofsted inspection (of our predecessor school, Kingsfield) rated us Satisfactory in March 2011.

Source of emerging ideas, which informed the setting up of this staff learning community

The impetus for setting up this programme of practitioner enquiry was generated from a range of sources.

- Feedback from a previous KOA staff development project based on coaching trios which suggested that staff had very much enjoyed talking to colleagues about their practice;
- As a response to staff desire to build on the coaching programme;
- Theoretical research informed by reading Dylan Williams, Louise Stoll
- An existing model for staff learning at an outstanding community school in Hampshire that Assistant Principal Kate Willis visited
- The Academy's PM process; OFSTED feedback; the SIP and DIPs
- Discussion colleagues had with line managers concerning developing practice
- Kate Willis also visited CLF Academy Bristol Brunel Academy and discussed the implementation of Learning Communities with Vice-Principal Alan Salt.

Definition of Learning Community

'A professional learning community is an inclusive group of people who;

- *Are motivated by a shared learning vision*
- *Support and work with each other*
- *Find ways inside and outside of their immediate community, to enquire on their practice*
- *Together learn new and better approaches that will enhance all pupils' learning'*

Louise Stoll 2006

The consultation process

The staff team were consulted through a process of questionnaires and informal conversations. They were asked to evaluate the previous year's staff development programme of coaching. They were also asked how they felt they had developed professionally and how the programme had improved their practice. Most responded that they'd like to continue their coaching conversations with a focus on developing their current practice through asking well formed questions which would lead to practitioner research. They were then asked to nominate 3 areas of their practice that they wanted to develop, after discussion with line managers and reference to Academy Departmental Development plans.

Non-teaching staff and TAs were not involved in the process.

Outcomes for the programme

- To raise student achievements
- To improve the quality of teaching

Emerging outcome

To enable colleagues to work in cross- faculty groups, made up of staff with a range of teaching experience, responsibility and who worked across key stages.

Staff ownership of the programme

Initially KW structured the groups through interventions that ensured the mixture of participants would include someone engaged with a Masters' programme who became the group leader and a rich variety of staff, including SLT members. Colleagues were able to change groups after the first two sessions. Staff chose coaching partners within the group. Each participant's area of research was titled in such a way through negotiation so that research discussions could nest within the group's umbrella title. This helped give the group its direction and internal alignment.

Selection of participants

The programme was run in directed time and replaced termly staff meetings so the expectation was that all staff would attend.

Values and principles that underpinned the research programme

It was seen as important that, within a framework, staff could choose an area they wanted to research, though discussion around choice was informed by wider aspects of Academy and Departmental development plans and performance management professional targets, in order to establish an individual over-arching goal. There were few interventions around choice, more guidance and tinkering around the edges.

Setting up

Initially Kate met with the Learning Community leaders two weeks before the first whole staff meeting to devise the best structure for those meetings and anticipate problems by running through a mock agenda and reflecting on best practice. There was a requirement that each time the groups met for individuals to present current learning reflections.

Incentivising participation

The programme was organised in directed time so attendance was expected. Refreshments were provided for the groups. Those studying for Masters' qualifications were financially supported. There was provision of a bank of on line resources for all staff.

Colleague Action Planning

All participants engaged in Action Planning with their coaching partners, sharing their outcomes, considering success criteria and discussing ways of further exploring research ideas.

Programme review and evaluation

At midpoint in the programme, staff presented the current stage of development in each group so that all colleagues have shared knowledge. At the end of the programme, the range of Practitioner Enquiry research findings were written up and published in a Learning Journal for colleagues, students, parents and regional HEIs

The review and evaluation process included staff questionnaires for consideration of personal learning targets, impact on student progress, meta-learning and future thinking.

Programme leader learning

This could include:

- Consideration of the structure of groups
- Exploration of other coaching models
- Further thinking about ways of supporting more staff in academic study
- Looking at developing staff resources to support research

Notre Dame High School: Innovation and School improvement delivered through one-year sustainable professional development opportunities

Case study

The use of one year Curriculum Innovator posts at Notre Dame High School to empower staff to shape school development and take the lead on new initiatives based on an action research model.

Key learning

- The Curriculum Innovator model broadens the number of staff who lead on Teaching and Learning and those involved change every year. As a result the initiative has helped to create a strong learning culture in school, where taking risks is encouraged and which has contributed to an ongoing rise in standards.
- Curriculum Innovator projects are shaped by the successful post holders and have led to high quality, ground breaking, innovative work which has allowed the school to develop national recognition in the areas of ICT and Maths.
- Providing temporary one-year posts has offered an excellent opportunity for staff young in their career to gain broader leadership and management experience. For more experienced staff it offers opportunity and status to share expertise across the school and beyond.
- The posts have allowed the school to make deeper progress at an accelerated rate in areas identified on the School Development plan. Over the years this has included Gifted and Talented provision, environmental projects and developing a School VLE
- Staff have been empowered to identify themselves areas for development and produce action plans which have gone beyond the School Development plan and this ensures that we 'stay ahead of the game'. Examples include Diagnostic assessment and Transition from GCSE to A level. The staff involved 'own' school improvement not just the senior leadership or middle management teams.
- Posts are not limited to teachers – this model has allowed the school to provide opportunities for outstanding support staff to move us forward in areas such as using data and VLE's to support Teaching and Learning and has helped demonstrate strongly that all members of the school contribute valuably to the school's successes and continued improvement.

Background

Notre Dame High School faced the same challenges as other schools; staff who were keen to develop professionally and experience more responsibility but unable to provide enough permanent posts. The senior leadership team were acutely aware that increasing the number of staff who could lead on self identified Teaching and Learning initiatives had great potential to increase the capacity for continuing school improvement.

The Curriculum Innovators scheme was launched in 2005 with five, temporary one year posts appointed for staff to develop a department or whole school initiative based on their own action research, which would have a sustainable impact. Post holders were given a bursary of £1000-£2000. Over the ensuing years the scheme became increasingly successful as it evolved and has been an approach to school improvement and CPD, which has inspired

others to adopt a similar model including an LA initiated G & T project with local National Challenge Schools.

Key challenges

Ensuring future sustainability of one year projects

Unlike permanent posts the expectation was that the project had to be self sustaining after a year. This was a concept that the Curriculum Innovators found difficult initially to address.

Ensuring demonstrable success

Given the distributed leadership model used in the project which empowered post holders to deliver an often highly individual new initiative – it became apparent that steps needed to be taken to ensure that the impact could be measured and would support whole school or department level improvement.

Solutions

Coaching and mentoring

Post holders were coached and mentored by a member of the leadership Team. This enabled specific, challenging, realistic targets to be set at the onset that all agreed would deliver the desired outcomes. Regular meetings helped them to work through solutions to problems that otherwise may have derailed their project, often reshaping the initial plans and helped them to use their time effectively.

Diagnosis of needs

Projects worked best when they related to genuine school or department identified areas for improvement rooted in improved pupil outcomes. For others to engage with and support the projects colleagues needed to understand how they would meet targets or enhance existing provision.

Sharing good practice

Providing appropriate opportunities for staff to feedback and showcase their work to colleagues through meetings and to the Senior Leadership Team at the end; motivated them to deliver high quality outcomes, gave post holders goals to work towards, built confidence and self esteem and ensured that the school benefited fully from the projects.

Maximising the use of ICT

The school VLE proved to be effective as a place to; store resources, ideas, outlines of case studies and proved to be a preferred method of accessing good practice for some. Where Curriculum Innovator projects involved engaging with colleagues in other schools to support them in their development, using a dedicated website for this purpose helped overcome challenges posed by lack of time, costs incurred by releasing teachers and travel difficulties.

Peer support and learning

Post holders benefited from meeting as a group as well as with their Senior leader coach to provide support for each other. Using 'problem solving team building' methodology helped empower post holders find solutions to their own problems and develop skills needed as future leaders in school.

Next steps

As a Teaching School with a commitment to the ongoing professional development of staff, including the promotion of continued academic learning, we are working closely with one HEI partner to find ways to credit these action research based school improvement projects with Masters level credits.

Further information

For further information contact dcleary@notredame-high.co.uk

Esher High School: Embedding Research and Development within a School

Case Study

Esher High School has used research to inform development through the following channels:

- In house MA which enables teachers review and seek to improve their own practice through a research project which is linked to the schools self improvement plan. Tutored by a teacher practitioner the group draws students from within the school and from schools within the area. The course is run by St. Mary's University College.
- Linking school improvement plans to robust research and development practice; originating with the senior leadership team this has now been rolled out to middle leaders. Plans have a narrow focus and half termly progress reports take place when staff bring evidence to support claims of improvement.
- Research and Development groups lead by teachers investigate areas highlighted by the school's improvement plan. Working together for one academic year these groups meet on a half termly basis, researching and then presenting findings at the end of the year during inset time.
- NPHQ visiting candidates negotiate an area to investigate and then spend time researching within the school before feeding back findings to the leadership team and Governors.

Background

EHS has been developing a research based approach for some time; the first cohort of teachers started an MA in 2004 and the leadership team had been using evidence based research to show progress made on the school improvement plan since 2006. Working groups have been used as a way of seeking improvement through dispersed leadership since 2006. The most successful groups were led by individuals with a clear focus, good leadership skills and it became apparent were groups that spent time researching, trialing ideas and collecting evidence to show improvement before feeding back to the rest of the staff. Working groups became research and development groups; there had been a change in emphasis and a need to backup vague hunches and inspirational ideas with proof of impact.

Key Challenges

- Leadership of groups: careful choice of leaders to ensure they will be able to manage the groups and work generated. How can you know this if you are dispersing your leadership?
- Support for leaders: experienced middle manager used to kick start the groups and suggest ways of working, the leaders met initially to discuss what could be achieved in the given time and possible ways to achieve this. Group leaders are contacted after each meeting to allow them time and space to discuss achievements, possible ways forward and any difficulties. Will you restrict them too much or make them feel watched?
- Staff on board: involve staff in research, look at the make-up of the groups carefully ensure they understand what the expected outcomes are and use all staff in the delivery of findings. Do the members of each group have a stake in the area being researched?
- Choice of areas to research: link areas to the SIP and DDP's and whole school inset. Will it be possible to research and collect evidence in the time available?
- Time for research: use MA students to read around the subject and experienced staff with specialist knowledge within the groups. By linking the research to whole school policies is it possible to use departmental and pastoral time to complete research?

Solutions

Improving teaching and learning: teachers receive inset based on findings that offer a range of ways to improve teaching and learning. A previous group focused on Assessment for Learning, a visiting Ofsted inspector commented this year; *'The AFL I have observed here is better than anything I have seen elsewhere'*.

Embedding research at the heart of the school's development:

initiatives are backed up with background reading, case studies, creation and trialing of possible solutions to produce robust research; findings that can be justified and defended. Staff are encouraged to question their own teaching and to seek ways to improve it.

Dispersing leadership and empowering leaders:

Members of staff have the opportunity to develop leadership skills on time bonded projects, moving them outside their own departments and areas of expertise into the whole school context by leading the group and presenting to the whole school.

Developing learning communities:

Using other schools within the alliance to further research, to investigate good practice and to feedback findings to. Local Universities have been used to help with background reading and current research in education. Brunel University has been working closely with one of the groups this year.

The Big Picture:

Ensuring that SIP's, DDP's, SEF's and performance management targets are interlinked. Tasks completed for one will feed into and support work in other areas. Staff are clear about what is trying to be achieved and why.

Next Steps

It has become clear during this year's round of the research and development groups that further work needs to be done on the following areas; training and providing support for the group leaders, ensuring that the research focus is sharp and clearly understood and that all members of the groups are clear about the end term expectations. Future groups will be directly linked to the research being carried out by MA students who by feeding into our leading the groups will further their own research and development as well as that of the school. Closer links within the schools alliance and with higher education will enable sharing of good practice, cross fertilization of ideas and produce more robust research. Links with higher education will also enable the ideas to be shared with a wider audience through conference presentations and publication of findings.

Further Information

For further information contact: hgregory@esherhigh.surrey.sch.uk

The Bishop Stortford High School : Effective approaches to research and development in teaching schools

Context

The Bishop's Stortford High School (TBSHS) is an 11 – 18 boys Foundation School of 1150 pupils and five form entry, with a large mixed sixth form. Located on the Hertfordshire / Essex border between London and Cambridge, it serves the local town and outlying villages of Bishop's Stortford along with five other secondary schools, one private school and twenty-two primary schools. The school has become a teaching school in 2011 in alliance with the Herts and Essex High School for Girls. For the purposes of this case study, the focus will be on TBSHS alone.

Background

TBSHS has had strong links with the Faculty of Education at Cambridge over the last fifteen years. The IQEA project in the late 1990s encouraged practitioner research in the school, and this evolved into the Cambridge School Teachers and Research (CamSTAR) network of approximately twenty-four secondary schools (led by Cambridge) committed to promoting and disseminating research within its network, through its website and at annual conferences. Alongside the CamSTAR model, TBSHS became a lead school for the GTC Teaching and Learning Academy, with both providing levels of accreditation. Following the demise of the TLA, CamSTAR now supports individual and collaborative research, between and within schools, and offers a hierarchy of accreditation from toe-in-the-water research projects to the blended Masters in Researching Practice. Individual staff are supported in other research routes with Cambridge and other providers such as Hertscam and other HEIs, utilising the now defunct Best Practice Research Scholarships and the new TDA scholarships. A cycle of Research and Development (Teaching and Learning) meetings have been calendared so that all staff can meet and contribute to researching classroom practice, with the focus on key themes such independent learning, iPod use in the classroom, student voice, differentiation and provision for the gifted and talented. As a teaching school leading R&D, a team has been created, populated by representatives from local primary and secondary schools and HEIs.

Key Learning from a decade's experience

- Support and guidance from HEIs is invaluable in order to help design research projects and provide the academic knowledge, rigour and accreditation that underpins all levels of research, from ITT level work to Doctorates
- Staff are best engaged when embracing research as a natural part of being a reflective practitioner, on their terms and in their own time frame
- Whilst timetabled research meetings and expectations that all staff get involved provides structure and can be tied into institutional needs, this model can also be seen as imposed and alienate some staff who see research as a bolt-on and a burden
- Externally imposed, government-led, quota driven and prescriptive structures such as the TLA create hostility if presented as top-down decision making
- A clearly-defined Research Coordinator role with a focus on guiding, supporting and negotiating research can be instrumental in winning hearts and minds
- The Head Teacher and SLT need to buy into the idea of a self-improving ethos, and where possible provide time and money to support research
- The most sustainable research models are those which are collaborative: within and across departments, and between schools
- Dissemination opportunities are crucial to validate the time and energy invested in research projects (website, research journal, inset, CPD opportunities), and in the

case of action Research, change should be seen to be implemented where appropriate

- It is beneficial if those with research expertise in schools coach other colleagues so that the support is collegiate and personalised, and non-hierarchical

Key Challenges

- Engaging staff in researching their own practice at a time when resources are limited (especially time, and increasingly funding for higher level accreditation), and accountability in terms of league tables and expectations is the perceived priority
- Overcoming distrust of research models which are seen as imposed and threatening, especially if tied into a judgemental style of performance management
- Sustaining a commitment to R&D in as many staff as possible so that it becomes integral to self-improving reflection, practice and dissemination
- Finding the most beneficial routes for dissemination
- Building trust between the teaching school and local schools so that both primary (especially) and secondary schools buy in to collaboration and sharing of expertise

Solutions

- Provide regular opportunities for dissemination during inset days, through the research websites and in-house research journals, and during departmental meetings, so that discussion about research becomes integral to improving practice and meeting targets
- Ensure that staff are not coerced into participation, but are provided (by HEI or in-house expertise) with personalised support based on individual need, and a coherent expression of the links between research and both improving practice and effecting change
- Offer levels of accreditation that reward all scales of research, as demonstrated in the CamSTAR structure which offers both CamSTAR certification and Faculty of education certification, carrying the Cambridge branding and offering routes into Masters level research
- Model research clearly through examples or presentations tailored to the level and interest of the participants
- Create clearly defined destinations for research dissemination, such as Professional Studies for ITT trainees, NQT induction sessions, the annual CamSTAR conferences, and encourage as many colleagues as possible to contribute or attend
- Make commitment to research an expectation in recruiting and promoting staff
- Embrace a range of providers to encourage diversity in higher level research and funding
- Undertake an audit of both expertise and need in the local community of primary and secondary schools and use this information to bring together schools as partners in collaborative research events and projects.

Next Steps

At present, we are in the process of re-launching a bottom-up approach to research, taking into account the number of new staff joining the school in recent years and the residual negative feelings of staff towards the TLA's model for research. This has included:

- Presentations to Faculties and departments: building and maintaining bridges
- One-to-one discussions with individual staff on research questions and their relevance to good practice
- On-going use of a published research journal to raise the profile of research and disseminate ideas
- The development of the school's research site, with a focus on showcasing projects and practitioners

- Regularly disseminating useful literature regarding pedagogy (e.g. G&T Update) both electronically and through hard copy
- Embedding links with CamSTAR and offering different designs for research projects, and encouraging participation through one-to-one support

We are also developing the Teaching School R&D theme as follows:

- Creation of a team to lead the R&D initiative, with members drawn from local schools and HEIs.
- An email to all local primary schools, inviting Heads if they would like to participate in the network, and what they would like to see in a shared research event later in the year (expertise and needs)
- The use of NLEs / LLEs to undertake a neutral and official audit of local school needs and expertise
- Feedback to all partners from National College R&D events
- The development of a teaching school website for R&D dissemination and advice, as well as using websites created by CamSTAR, Hertscam and other providers where appropriate.

Further information

simon.macneill@tbshs.org

www.camstar.org.uk

The Fallibroome Academy: Establishing and Sustaining Research and Development / Practitioner Enquiry

Case study

The Fallibroome Academy has developed practices and structures which support research and development at whole school and individual practitioner level.

Key learning

- Make Research and Development high profile and a high priority
- Involve colleagues from all levels of the organisation
- Use the expertise of an external partner / HEI
- Tolerate risk and uncertainty and value the questions raised as well as the answers provided
- Invest in Research and Development
- Create time and a support structure for practitioner enquiry
- Value student voice input and be creative about how this can be achieved
- Celebrate Research and Development findings

Background

The Fallibroome Academy has significant experience of establishing research and development projects both at whole school and individual level, and in disseminating the findings and evaluating the impact. The original catalyst for our involvement in research into teaching and learning approaches was our engagement with the Campaign for Learning and the University of Newcastle. Although that project has now ended we have maintained our commitment to practitioner enquiry through becoming a FutureLab Innovation Hub school and participating in the Expansive Education network. At a whole school level we are investigating student engagement and effective middle leader behaviours and we also actively support individual engagement with practitioner enquiry through facilitating staff participation in National College programmes such as MLDP and have a significant proportion of the staff engaged in Masters' accreditation.

Key challenges

The first challenge in establishing research and development in school is creating the culture of enquiry throughout the organisation. Once this has been embedded then further challenges lie in creating structures and processes which sustain the momentum of the initiatives; facilitate sharing and transferring of the learning to colleagues who may not have been fully involved in the early stages and embedding the new learning securely so that it becomes part of new and improved practice.

Solutions

Make R&D high profile and a high priority

The major message about successfully establishing a culture of enquiry is to make it high profile and a high priority. If the project is a whole school one then involve staff and students from across the organisation and ensure that they have the opportunity to lead aspects of the project. Regularly discuss the project at staff meetings; middle leader meetings; in professional development sessions; through the teaching and learning bulletin etc. to ensure widespread awareness of the area being investigated by all staff even if not all are actively involved in contributing data. As far as possible, try to link initiatives together

coherently, for example an initial project on assessment for learning might lead on to more targeted projects about questioning techniques or use of improvement time in lessons. By using the findings from one project to inform the design of subsequent ones staff understand that enquiry is part of a long-term cycle and this encourages participation because the projects are part of the way the school works not just initiative overload.

Work with an external partner

Schools can really benefit from a link with an external partner, an HEI or an organisation such as FutureLab, which has created a Toolkit for Enquiring Schools. They can act as a critical friend and a source of external inspiration and their expertise helps bring an extra level of reliability and validity to the data, which emerges from the project. During our involvement with the Campaign for Learning our link with the University of Newcastle was invaluable. They were able to give very clear and specific advice on the design of the project; the advantages and disadvantages of different data collection tools; they helped us narrow down a core list of relevant wider reading and linked us to other schools researching similar areas.

A particularly useful aspect of their support for us was analysis of the data we had gathered from student questionnaires as a baseline and at the conclusion of our research project on Assessment for Learning (AfL). Through access to their software analysis packages we were able to show the statistical significance of the changes in attitudes from the students, which meant that that information was a particularly powerful and compelling element when making the case for further development in AfL.

Tolerate risk

Research and enquiry projects need to be carefully designed but they are unlikely to always run completely smoothly: some aspects will not work out as expected and this could be for the better or for the worse. It is important that the leaders of the project regularly communicate through what they say and what they do that the research process is about valuing the questions raised by the enquiry as well as the solutions. Without this overt commitment to working through the complications it will be difficult to achieve commitment from the participants. Scaffold risk-taking with your staff through investing in coaching programmes. Learning new practices and unlearning old ones is a challenging process and time spent talking through the issues in small groups or one to one is invaluable both in demonstrating commitment to the staff involved and to the core aims of the project.

Invest in R&D

Investing in R&D is crucial to encourage staff to engage because it reinforces the message that this is part of the way the school operates. We have extensive webpages dedicated to teaching and learning and things, which have inspired us. The staff library has a wide selection of books and we have monthly bulletins devoted to good practice and new ideas in teaching and learning and behaviour management, with articles both from external sources and from colleagues in our school.

We invest considerably in CPD for our staff and, when doing so, we try to look for courses, which promote practitioner enquiry such as MLDP, Leadership Pathways, and Expansive Education Network. We have actively encouraged as many staff as possible to engage in Masters' accreditation and a member of the Leadership Team has been trained to support colleagues with drafts of their Masters' assignments and to run in-house tutorials. This has been very useful in terms of maintaining commitment and has resulted in high levels of completion of assignments.

In-house we have found that having a limited number of professional development allowances has been a strong incentive in encouraging individual or department level practitioner enquiry. Some of these allowances are available to existing middle leaders who

wish to develop their skills in a whole school context but others are aimed at main-scale or early years teachers who do not hold a formal post of responsibility. Applicants must identify an area where practice could be improved, put together an action plan and present it to a panel and if successful they regularly report back on progress over the year leading to a presentation to governors and the Leadership Team. This process has been very successful in encouraging structured improvement cycles and staff who have participated report positively on benefits to their skills and confidence when leading change.

We are now investing in equipment for recording lessons, which will have considerable benefits for the R&D agenda as well as for ITT developments.

Create time and space to facilitate R&D

We have disaggregated 3 INSET days and changed the school day on a Tuesday so that school finishes slightly earlier and we have fortnightly professional development sessions. The programme on offer is extensive, with some courses being optional and some compulsory for different groups of staff. At least one of the courses chosen by staff needs to directly link to a performance management objective. Four sessions are given over to individual reflection time and there is also the option for departments or cross-curricular groups to bid for extra time to address specific priorities. Outcomes from the CPD sessions are monitored through performance management, through department improvement plans and evaluations and through the evidence emerging from the various cross-curricular projects under investigation.

Celebrate and disseminate the findings

A final element in keeping R&D high profile and a high priority is to recognise and celebrate the findings. Staff have research articles published on our website and in external journals. They are encouraged to present at local and national conferences. We have hosted two TeachMeets and intend to organise a TED Ed conference this year following on from our successful TEDx events for sixth form students. We regularly host Visitor Days for colleagues from other schools and encourage our staff to contribute. One of our next areas for development is to make more use of social media to share learning and provoke discussion.

Next steps

- Workshop for schools in our alliance and beyond about taking first steps with R&D
- Increased use of social media
- Maintain the use of CPD allowances linked to structured improvement plans
- Continue to investigate ways to involve students more

Further information

For further information contact Jane Knott, Director of Teaching School, The Fallibroome Academy. ktt@fallibroome.org.uk

Bristol Brunel Academy: Establishing a “Learning Community” in Practice

An extended case study.

Abstract

The Bristol Brunel Academy Idea of “Learning Community”

Bristol Brunel Academy (BBA) opened in 2007. It serves communities across East and Central Bristol, and the student body reflects this, with above average indicators of deprivation and a significant number of students for whom English is not their first language. Previously the Academy had been a school whose examination results had been a serious cause for concern. Although the building and senior leadership team of the Academy were new, the vast majority of colleagues in the predecessor school transferred to the Academy as did all the students. The Academy ethos is inclusive in the fullest sense of the word, exemplified by a refusal to use fixed term exclusion, and a willingness to avoid at all costs permanent exclusion. The Academy is committed to all young people achieving their potential regardless of their background. This meant bringing about a rapid culture change for both staff and students. The development of the Academy as a ‘learning community’ was a core strategy in this process. The idea of the Academy as learning community exemplifies the importance we place on adults’ professional learning, alongside the learning of our students. We have devoted significant efforts into enabling our colleagues to develop and take forward their own learning by acquiring the skills and dispositions of critical, enquiring and reflective professionals. This was essential as we were developing a new pedagogy and a new approach to the curriculum.

Professional Learning as part of the BBA “Learning Community”:

The theoretical framework professional learning and development for colleagues in the Academy has been driven by the idea of learning community, using the definition proposed by Mitchell and Sackney; “A learning community emerges as individuals reflect on, assess, critique and reconstruct their professional capacity and their capacity for collegial relations and collective practice.” Our own practice was significantly influenced by their book, “Profound Improvement”. In particular, their key chapter headings: ‘The Search for Knowledge’, ‘The Construction of Knowledge’, ‘Building the Learning Community and the Team’ and ‘Sharing Leadership’ underpinned the processes we put in place at BBA to take this work forward.. In addition, the work of Judith W. Little on teacher learning, and the power of teachers having on going conversations with each other in which they “*tell their stories*” which become a resource for their own professional development, has also been influential in our thinking.

The framework for professional learning has evolved over the last four years, and includes;

- teacher and non teacher action enquiry research;
- learning community groups as a forum for researching, sharing, reflecting and critiquing practice;
- the evaluation and sharing of practice around new pedagogy in response to curriculum changes, especially the introduction of Project Based Learning.

These initiatives are framed within a performance management system designed to help colleagues ground their professional learning in a meaningful context.

The Impact of the BBA Learning Community

A core strength of our learning community processes has been the range, richness and authenticity of the evidence and data collected. This has included: detailed records of learning community discussions, collections of staff reflections and evaluations, visual presentations using powerpoint, posters and video. Given the variety and richness of this information generated by learning communities, effective methods for storage, retrieval and sharing were initially a challenge. We now use "Realsmart" online platform for doing this. Colleagues have show great willingness to both progress their own learning, and to contribute to the learning of others. Higher education partners have been able to link with and contribute to individual action research in school. The leadership team has been able to use broad Academy priorities to frame individuals learning in the context of whole school improvement.

This paper will describe our journey as a learning community, provide detail on the strategies used and will consider in particular the interplay between educational research and practice. It will seek to offer a model which is practically applicable- and "doable"- for all levels of staff expertise, both teachers, and non-teachers in student facing roles, such as mentors, learning support assistants and pastoral staff

Acknowledgements

The development of the learning community model described in this paper has been supported by Hilary Street, Consultant to Bristol Brunel Academy. The specific 'enquiry process' developed at the Academy was based on the process developed by Hilary Street and Jane Reed during their time at the International School Effectiveness and Improvement Centre at the Institute of Education, London.

1. The BBA Idea of “Learning Community”

The concept of developing a learning community has gained increasing significance in school improvement processes. Whilst much has been written theoretically, there has been less written about the detailed structures and processes that need to be in place to enable a learning community to develop.

Mitchell and Sackney propose a definition of a learning community as something that *“emerges as individuals reflect on, assess, critique and reconstruct their professional capacity and their capacity for collegial relations and collective practice.”*

Since Bristol Brunel Academy opened in 2007, this definition has guided and informed our efforts to engage colleagues with their own professional learning. Most often, this definition of a learning community has been more commonly articulated to colleagues as a desire to engage themselves professionally as “reflective practitioners”.

The concept of a “learning community” has been central for a number of writers and researchers on school improvement, who see it as essential to support a collegial way of working, encourage more distributed leadership and ensure that professional learning remains grounded in colleagues’ own practice, and so has more impact on teaching quality and student outcomes.

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) of the Academy also wanted to embed processes that would be sustainable, and support the development of the Academy ethos as set out in the vision for BBA. The SLT believed that being proactive to ensure that BBA developed as a learning community was an important strategy to help manage a process of deep and rapid change.

2. The ‘Learning Community’ Model as a Change Strategy

Developing and embedding:

- a new Academy vision and ethos;
- a new approach to curriculum;
- a new pedagogy
- new partnerships with other schools within the Cabot Learning Federation were core elements the new Academy and are discussed briefly below.

a) The New Academy Vision and Ethos and the “Learning Community”

Firstly, the ethos of the new Academy can be seen to dovetail with the desire to develop as a learning community. The vision for the new Academy was articulated to colleagues in 5 key principles:

- i. An acceptance that students are children who are still developing
- ii. A duty as educators to educate the whole child
- iii. An acceptance that teachers’ expertise lies in their understanding of pedagogy
- iv. An understanding that hierarchies can stifle creativity and decision making
- v. A belief that a sense of belonging will encourage growth

The Academy opened in September 2007, and the new leadership team, of which I was a member, sought to establish a new ethos in the Academy based on these principles. The predecessor school had been often been characterised by an atmosphere of confrontation, inflexibility and inconsistency when dealing with students, as well as an extremely high number of fixed term exclusions and a falling intake of students.

Similarly, relations between staff were sometimes characterised by a lack of opportunities or willingness to share practice, a culture of blame, defensiveness and negativity, and in some places a lack of professional identity and respect.

The concept of a learning community can therefore be seen as important not just to improve teacher effectiveness and student learning, but also as a way of modelling our non-confrontational and inclusive approach to students, in our dealings with colleagues. In particular the development of a learning community would support the achievement of the principles iii), iv) and v) outlined above.

b) New Curriculum Approaches and the “Learning Community”

Since opening as a new Academy major changes have been made to the curriculum driven by a need to improve student attainment:

- an emphasis on literacy and numeracy in the students first years in the Academy
- a flexible curriculum at GCSE level.
- a project-based curriculum and Project Based Learning (PBL), based in literacy but encompassing thematic study of driving questions that draw in a variety of other disciplines,

The move to PBL has required teaching staff to be adaptable and skilled enough to not only teach outside of their “traditional” subject area, but also develop a facilitative approach to learning that enables them to work with students who may be engaged in a number of different tasks across a typically 7 week project, either individually or in groups, at any one time. This requirement for a significant number of colleagues to ‘rethink’ themselves as a “Teacher of PBL”, as well as a teacher of their core subject, was one which we felt could only be addressed if we could facilitate (through the adoption of a learning community model) colleagues’ *reconstruction of their professional capacity*, to paraphrase Mitchell & Sackey. Whilst we felt we could, to an extent, “teach” colleagues some of the basic approaches to facilitating learning in PBL classes, a willingness to critically engage with the redevelopment of their practice was seen to be paramount.

The curriculum changes at GCSE level have also put pressure on teachers to change and develop their practice. To help this pressure, the development of BBA as a learning community has facilitated the exemplification and sharing of practice and personal reflection and development. The flexible GCSE curriculum, and progression of students through PBL programmes in their first years at the Academy, has meant that teachers have had to adapt. Examples of this would be coping with mixed age ranges in GCSE classes, and, now that the Academy is in its fourth year, addressing and responding to the needs of students familiar with enquiry-led and more independent styles of learning from their experiences of PBL.

c) New Pedagogy and the “Learning Community”

A key principle of the new Academy ethos is that teachers’ expertise should lie in their knowledge of pedagogy, as opposed to subject knowledge. The development of a learning community at BBA has helped staff engage actively with their colleagues to understand and implement the new pedagogical model at the Academy.

Following a progress review in 2010, the Academy’s third year open, the SLT wanted to have one coherent pedagogic framework which would help develop teachers’ practice in PBL, support highly effective teaching for GCSE and BTEC and enable students to develop their Personal, Learning and thinking skills (PLTS) as development by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in 2009.

The Academy had already drawn on the work of Guy Claxton and Building Learning Power, and decided to use the model of the 4Rs (See Figure 1) as its pedagogical framework.

Figure 1: The 4Rs Framework at BBA

<p><i>Reciprocity</i></p> <p><i>“Being able to learn alone and with others”</i></p> <p>Interdependence – knowing when it’s best to learn with other people, and when it’s best to learn on your own</p> <p>Collaboration – knowing which skills help you to learn well with others</p> <p>Empathy and listening – being able to know what others are feeling, and really listening to what they think</p> <p>Imitation – watching other people and picking up their habits to help your own learning</p>	<p><i>Resourcefulness</i></p> <p><i>“Being able to learn in different ways”.</i></p> <p>Questioning – knowing what good questions are, and how you can use them to help you learn</p> <p>Making links – seeing how the different things you are learning can link together and make more sense</p> <p>Imagining – using your inner imagination to be creative and help you find new solutions and methods to learn better</p> <p>Reasoning - how to think clearly to help you find solutions and methods that help your learning</p> <p>Capitalising – knowing what resources to use and how to use them to learn better.</p>
<p><i>Resilience</i></p> <p><i>“Being able to cope with feelings whilst learning”</i></p> <p>Absorption – being really into what your learning, and getting lost in what you’re doing</p> <p>Managing distractions - recognising what interrupts learning, and managing to reduce these interruptions</p> <p>Noticing – Looking closely at learning, and focusing carefully on detail of what you learn.</p> <p>Perseverance - ‘Stickability’; making sure you can manage your feelings when you are learning</p>	<p><i>Reflection</i></p> <p><i>“Being aware of your strengths and weaknesses”</i></p> <p>Planning - Working out what and how you’re going to learn in advance</p> <p>Revising - Monitoring and adapting your learning along the way.</p> <p>Distilling - Drawing out the lessons from what you’ve been learning.</p> <p>Meta-learning - Understanding learning and yourself as a learner</p>

Adapted from Chambers, M, Claxton, G & Gornall S “Building Learning Power in Action” (TLO 2005)

The learning community model by then well established with staff provided the opportunity to engage colleagues in the co-construction of new practice based on the 4Rs approach. A more detailed account of the process by which this was done is outlined in section 4, “Transferability of This Model”.

d) New Partnerships: Cabot Learning Federation and the “Learning Community”

Since its inception, Bristol Brunel Academy has been part of a wider federation of secondary schools serving predominantly the local area (The Cabot Learning Federation). The federation currently comprises 4 secondary academies in the East Bristol area, plus one in the neighbouring town of Weston-Super-Mare. By September 2012 another secondary school is likely to join, and the federation's already close links with primary schools will continue. In July 2011 the federation was one of the first 100 “Teaching Schools” to be established in England, with an agenda from central government that includes brokering school to school support, supplying Continuing Professional Development, and developing new models of Initial Teacher Training.

The federation link has involved colleagues at all schools working in a variety of CPD contexts. The development of the BBA learning community has helped equip our colleagues with the ethos and practical skills for shared reflection with their colleagues in the wider federation. It has also offered the Federation a model that can be replicated in other schools.

3. Systems and Processes to Support a Learning Community in Practice

a) The “Professional Learning Conversation”

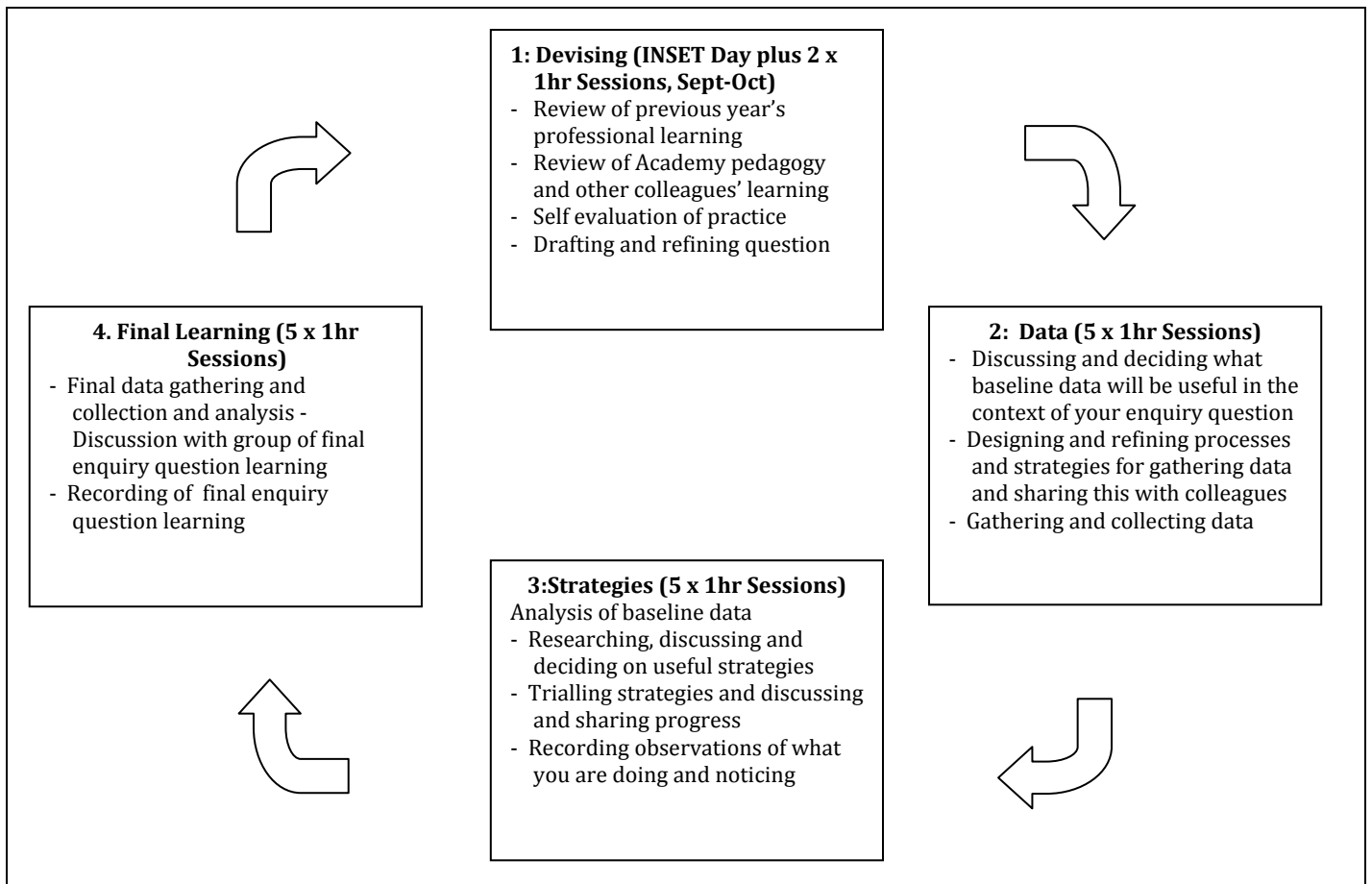
Schools in England are required to have a Performance Management Review (PMR) system. The national frameworks have developed over time and include the 1999 White Paper, “Modernising Government”; “Learning and Teaching: a strategy for professional development”, (DfES 2001) and The White Paper “Schools: Achieving Success”, (DfES 2001).

At BBA we did not want colleagues to experience the process of PMR as simply a bureaucratic ‘process’ that was ‘done to them’. Rather we wanted to link our development as a ‘learning community’ with the process of PMR. We have endeavoured to make an explicit link between performance management and colleagues’ continued professional learning. The resulting performance management framework is centred on an annual “Professional Learning Conversation” in which all colleagues discuss with a senior member of staff objectives they wish to work towards in three areas. One of these is the “enquiry question” which requires colleagues undertake action research into their practice (see below). The other two are centred on professional learning; one being a self evaluation of progress in relation to either the BBA learning and teaching framework or a role-specific rubric for mentors and learning support assistants; and the other being a consideration of their ongoing professional journey that highlights specific development needs in relation to colleagues’ future careers.

b) The Enquiry Question Process

Perhaps more than any other methodology or process, the enquiry question encapsulates our model of developing a learning community at BBA. Each academic year, all colleagues are asked to undertake a small piece of action research into their own practice, and to share their learning with colleagues. This has provided a key method through which colleagues engage with their professional learning and to strengthen both their identities as reflective practitioners and co-constructors of shared pedagogical knowledge with other colleagues.

Figure 2: A flow chart showing the full enquiry question process.



The enquiry process starts with the annual Professional Learning Conversation outlined in a). This itself begins with colleagues being asked to reflect on their own learning and the wider Academy learning about pedagogy from previous years, and to evaluate themselves against the learning and teaching framework. Colleagues new to the Academy are inducted into the enquiry process, and the results of previous questions made available on line for all colleagues to consider.

A series of preparatory questions (Figure 3) are given to stimulate colleagues thinking. The broad areas for the enquiry question are determined by the Academy priorities, to ensure alignment between professional learning and outcomes for students. Within these areas, colleagues are encouraged to formulate questions that engage them in research into specific areas of their practice upon which they can have an impact.

Figure 3: Preparatory Questions for the Enquiry Process 2011

Enquiring about Practice

Why we enquire into practice at BBA

At BBA we place a heavy emphasis on developing ourselves as reflective practitioners- and enquiring into our own practice is one of the main ways we can do this.

Enquiring into practice is about the acquisition of new knowledge around pedagogy, but is equally about practicing the processes of learning.

Enquiring into practice also aims to create the conditions for colleagues to take responsibility for their own learning, for dialogue and questioning with others, and for supporting a number of different learning opportunities across the year.

How enquiry into practice works at BBA

Every colleague is required as part of performance management to undertake an enquiry into their practice ("the enquiry question"). Colleagues will outline this during their professional learning conversation on the INSET day on 21st October.

The enquiry question will be the focus for colleagues' discussions in their Wednesday learning community meetings for the first two "terms" of CPL.

There is an INSET day scheduled February 6th- the focus for this will be progressing enquiry questions through visits within or beyond the federation.

It is hoped that colleagues who wish to will have the opportunity to work in collaboration with a Bath Spa PGCE student on their enquiry learning.

Colleagues will be asked to share their enquiry question learning with the wider Academy in Easter 2011.

Teacher enquiries must clearly relate to one the 4 key Academy priorities for learning and teaching, and you should consider your question carefully by reading through;

- 1) The Improvement Plan Summary for Learning and Teaching 2011-12
- 2) The BBA 4Rs booklets
- 3) Colleagues summaries of their previous enquiry question learning (shared with you on Google docs)
- 4) The "BBA Self Evaluation for Learning and Teaching"

Colleagues starting on CPL will have their first session to do this.

Colleagues starting on enrichment will be given time at the start of the INSET day on 21st October to do this.

How to get started with enquiry into practice

- 1) What do I already know about the situation addressed in my enquiry question?
 - *Patterns I've noticed*
 - *Facts/ statistics/ figures I know*
 - *Feelings/ emotions*
 - *What people say*
 - *Other evidence- e.g. input from 4Rs booklets, previous enquiry questions, the BBA learning and teaching framework and observation feedback.*

- 2) What processes might help me research my enquiry question?
 - *What can I find out myself, and what I might need help on*
 - *Processes that might help; observing colleagues at BBA, observing colleagues elsewhere, searching the web, looking at teacher's tv, reading professional articles, linking with a University*
 - *What might be outside the scope of my enquiry*

- 3) What things might be barriers to my enquiry?
 - *my own or other's expertise*
 - *time commitments*
 - *understanding of my enquiry*
 - *personal feelings towards the enquiry process*

- 4) How can I refine my question?
 - *Relate it to a specific Academy priority*
 - *Relate it to a specific class or group of children*
 - *Focus it on what you can do, rather than what the students will/ can do.*

The enquiry process typically covers the majority of one academic year with colleagues beginning their thinking in September, and concluding their learning in May. This coincides with a half yearly review of their progress towards the objectives outlined through the Academy performance management process.

Initially, colleagues were allowed complete choice over the subject of their enquiry question, as long as it related to an area of their practice that puzzled, interested or concerned them in some way. This was done in light of the primary objective at the time of engaging staff with their learning- and our belief as an SLT that enabling colleagues to adjust to and experience the process of enquiry in the first year of the Academy was more important than the specific focus of their learning. Since the academic year 2009-10, colleagues have important been asked to focus their enquiries on Academy's learning and teaching priorities. These have remained unchanged since 2009 (with one addition) and are:

- better formative assessment, specifically, classroom practice;
- better learning facilitation, where learning facilitation encompasses a less didactic, subject driven approach to pedagogy;
- better level of challenge in learning, specifically extending students and moving away from practice exemplified by tacit classroom agreement to moderate the expectation of student learning;

- better student literacy, in response to the challenges we continue to face with literacy as a key barrier to students accessing learning.

c) Developing collaborative processes to support enquiry

Collaboration between staff has been central to the enquiry process. The importance of individuals following their own action research whilst sharing and supporting learning with colleagues has been important in what Mitchell and Sackney term “*building the learning community and the team*”.

Structuring Effective Teacher Learning: The “Learning Community Meetings” Process
Through the encouragement and requirement for individuals to undertake reflective research into their own practice, the Enquiry Question process in itself can be seen to address in part the concept of establishing a successful learning community. However, taking into account Little’s view that teachers telling their stories to one another can create new learning and professional development resource, and mindful of the duty of leadership to “engineer effective learning environments for teachers” (William 2010), it seems clear that creating a task such as the Enquiry Question might encourage professional learning, but would not be sufficient to enable the development of a learning community where sharing and critical appraisal of practice is the norm.

Figure 4 shows the model we have now developed to support colleagues working in small learning communities.

Figure 4: Learning Community Notes for Colleagues

Learning Communities at BBA

Introduction

Rationale

Learning Communities at BBA are groups of teachers and non teachers who meet every Wednesday during their Continuing Professional Learning sessions. Each cycle of meetings will last about 5 weeks. These meetings alternate with enrichment activities, so that a colleague would have 5 weeks of meeting in their learning community, then 5 weeks of staffing an enrichment activity.

Learning Communities (more often teacher learning communities) are common across a range of schools. At BBA we used the learning community model last year to provide a structured and stable forum in which individuals can develop their practice through personal reflection and enquiry, with support and questioning from colleagues. The focus of the meetings is our individual enquiry questions.

Terms of Reference

- 1) *The Learning Communities provide the framework within which individual staff continue to develop aspects of their professional practice. The Learning Communities provide professional encouragement and collaboration to all colleagues involved.*
- 2) *Teacher colleagues choose a focus for their enquiry question and ensure this individual focus links to one of the 4 Academy priorities for learning and teaching: improving formative assessment, better learning facilitation, raising the level of challenge in learning, and better student literacy.*
- 3) *Colleagues meet in Learning Communities each week for the first two terms in the Academy year. Each colleague updates the group about their own learning and progress with their enquiry question, and the other colleagues in the group ask*

question and make suggestions to help individual colleagues clarify their professional thinking and practice.

The Link with the Enquiry Question in the Professional Learning Conversation

As part of their Professional Learning Conversation, colleagues are asked to develop an enquiry question into an area of their own practice which they will seek to develop over the year. It is recommended that colleagues use the question they are focusing on in the Learning Community as the question in the PLC process. In this way there is no duplication of effort and the Academy's systems and processes 'join up'.

The Focus for the first 5 Meetings

- 1) Each meeting will be 50mins (14.45 to 15.35). Please organise your own refreshments if necessary. One member of each group needs to come to the staff work room to collect any paperwork at 2.35pm- this should be the facilitator for that week. Each learning community will have an agreed room to meet in. (As time is limited it would be appreciated if colleagues could arrive at their meeting room for a prompt start at 14.45.)
- 2) The format of the meetings will be as follows;
 - Meeting 1- All colleagues feeding back their initial thinking on their enquiry question and refining the wording of their question with help from the group
 - Meeting 2- All colleagues plan the first step of their enquiry question- gathering baseline data and information.
 - Meeting 3- Half the group feedback what they have found out to the group and reflect on what their learning is so far, and whether their question needs revising.
 - Meeting 4- Remaining half of the group feedback what they have found out to the group and reflect on what their learning is so far, and whether their question needs revising.
 - Meeting 5- All colleagues action plan their intended steps ahead of the next meeting.

Figure 5 shows the detailed guidance given to support the process of each meeting of the learning community.

Figure 5: Guidance Notes to Staff for Learning Community Meeting Process

The Process in each Learning Community meeting

1. Colleagues will take it in turns to facilitate the meetings. The facilitator will be responsible for time keeping and for completing the discussion record to summarise the areas covered. *Please note- NQTs in your group should not be asked to facilitate in the first term!*

2. Hearing from colleagues

a) Each colleague shares their chosen area of focus

b) If time allows, other colleagues are encouraged to pose questions and make observations to help take forward individual colleagues' thinking

3. Recording the discussion

The Facilitator will make a brief record of the discussion on the Learning Community Record sheet.

Note: each colleague feeding back has 5 minutes in total which includes the time for other colleagues to question and make observations

3. Recording the discussion

The Facilitator will make a brief record of the discussion on the Learning Community Record sheet.

Ensuring the Learning Community Process works effectively

Learning Communities are not just about the content of discussions and the ideas raised- although this will be important! The process of the meetings is equally important in developing ourselves as collaborative professional learners. The following suggestions may be helpful to keep in mind;

Housekeeping

- 1) Please make your own arrangements within your group for refreshments.
- 2) Please make sure you are in the staff work room from 2.35pm every Wednesday. Please make sure you are ready to start promptly with your learning community by 2.45pm.
- 3) Time for the learning communities is limited, and precious! Please avoid using discussion time for other matters.
- 4) Please respect the role of the facilitator and recognise they will sometimes have to cut short interesting discussions to ensure the process moves on!

Language for Effective Collaboration

- 1) Please remember that non-judgemental and descriptive language is more helpful to developing colleagues' thinking than emotive and judgemental terms.
- 2) Colleagues should recognise and value the views of all colleagues- even when their view or perspective is different to our own.
- 3) Please show professional respect in your discussions for students and their families, even if you are describing challenging behaviour.

Acting Supportively for Effective Collaboration

- 1) Listen actively to your colleagues and be open minded about other colleagues suggestions
- 2) Be honest and encouraging in your suggestions to colleagues
- 3) Base your suggestions on actual practice and knowledge

Always appreciate that different approaches work for different colleagues

The observation from Peter Senge (1990) is important in this regard

'In essence the leader's task is designing the learning processes whereby people throughout the organisation can deal productively with the critical issues they face, and develop their mastery in the learning disciplines.'

d) External links

As colleagues' confidence in framing and addressing an enquiry question has grown, opportunities for external collaboration and research have been introduced. For example, in February 2011, colleagues used an In Service Training day to visit other schools and educational establishments, which had been identified as having expertise in an area related to their enquiry learning.

A pilot link was established in 2011 with Bath Spa University whereby seven students on their initial teacher training programme forged collaborative partnerships with colleagues at BBA based on the broad area of their enquiry question. Though limited in scale, and elective in nature, this pilot indicates the feasibility of established colleagues and trainee teachers sharing learning in a dynamic that participant commented was different from that of a mentor-trainee role.

e) Sharing the learning

A variety of methods have been used to facilitate the sharing of colleagues' learning, including poster displays within school, and written summaries of key learning points. It is envisaged that this year's learning will be shared by colleagues being filmed summarising their learning in 2 minutes. The sharing of learning in progress has been greatly enhanced by the use of an internet platform Realsmart, which is now the repository for discussion records, action plans, comments and resources regarding colleagues' enquiry questions, and also provides an easy way of colleagues accessing, interacting with, and commenting on each other enquiry research.

f) Making Time for Professional Learning

'We need to create time and space for teachers to reflect on their practice in a structured way, and to learn from mistakes' Bransford, Brown and Cocking (1999)

With this in mind, BBA made the decision on opening to have weekly professional learning scheduled as part of colleagues directed hours from the outset. This is enabled by having a hour long "enrichment" session for students once a week at the end of the Academy day. Older students in years 9-11 finish early. The remaining younger students in years 7&8 (numbering approximately 380) are then in enrichment activities organised by half of the teaching and non-teaching student facing staff (e.g. mentors, pastoral support staff and learning support assistants). This then leaves half of the staff available to attend professional learning sessions.

Initially, this model changed weekly, but has since been revised so that each member of staff has 5 weeks of enrichment followed by 5 weeks of professional learning on a rotating basis. Feedback from colleagues indicates they have appreciated the clearer and more intensive focus this has enabled them to bring to their professional learning, as well as making the process of running the enrichment with the younger students operate more smoothly. The importance and message of giving regular, directed time to professional learning has been vital in developing the learning community at BBA, and has given a strong message to staff about the value we place on their own learning.

During the meetings themselves, two members of the leadership team drop into the different groups at intervals. This is important to provide colleagues with opportunities to raise

practical queries over the process, but of course as well provides a wealth of informal feedback on how individual group discussions are working.

At the end of each 5 week round of learning community meetings, colleagues are required to post on the Realsmart site concise action plans of what they plan to achieve before the next meeting. This provides another opportunity to feedback to colleagues on their enquiry progress, whether publically to the group if appropriate, or individually by email.

Each learning community group has three blocks of 5 weekly meetings lasting 1 hour in which to progress their enquiry learning, which last from September through to April. Each 5 week block has a focus: the first concerns gathering baseline data that will inform evaluation of the enquiry question, but will also test and identify any misconceptions or assumptions in the question itself; the second focuses on strategies the practitioner is using to address the issue identified in the question; and the final block looks at drawing together and reflecting on the individual's learning from the process, and how and what can be effectively shared with colleagues (see Figure 2).

4. Transferability of the Model

We have used this model to help introduce new pedagogical practice based on Guy Claxton's 4Rs. One approach to introducing new practice commonly adopted in schools and other organizations would be to exemplify and explain in detail what the pedagogy was, to provide "training" time to show colleagues how it could operate, and then to monitor the effectiveness of its uptake and application.

We decided to use our learning community model to develop staff understanding and practice of the 4Rs. Colleagues were required first to work individually, within the support of their subject department groups, to construct small learning activities that they thought addressed an aspect of the 4Rs pedagogy. Department meeting time was used for this- and the learning community meeting model was employed so that each subject group had guidance on which sub group of the 4Rs they were examining, and discussion record to enable the group to record their thoughts and observations accurately. Each individual was asked to write a short evaluation of their activity and share it with the group. The Vice Principal and two colleagues with particular experience of the 4Rs pedagogy examined evaluations. Those considered "interesting", either because of perceived accurate exemplification of the pedagogy, or because of the level of colleague learning displayed, were collated in booklets and published to staff. In this way, over 6 months teachers built through a collaborative subject based process, a detailed handbook of what the 4Rs pedagogy could look like in practice at BBA. This has provided the foundation for expanding this pedagogy further through the Academy

The booklets provide a rich and substantial resource to use in the future.

5. The Impact of the BBA Learning Community: Results, Conclusions and Future Learning

a) Strategic Impact

Bristol Brunel Academy's progress since opening as measured by improved student attainment has been good, and appears to be sustainable. Measures of inclusion show that students and the community value our commitment to get the best education for all regardless of how challenging they might find learning. The Academy's popularity in the community has increased, as shown by the numbers making it their first choice. The Academy has undergone both a change of principal, and three external inspection visits from OFSTED, the most recent of which noted the link between our professional learning and

improved classroom practice (OFSTED 2011). Our ethos of the Academy as a learning community has underpinned and informed these successes.

a) Evidence of staff learning about enquiry and 'enquiry questions'

Feedback and learning from colleagues over the four years has shown a development of understanding of what constitutes an effective enquiry question, how best to go about it, and a growing acceptance that the process of enquiry is in itself beneficial, and not necessarily judged by perceived success or failure. Quotes from colleagues are given in Figure 6 and indicate an ownership of the enquiry question process and that it is based in colleagues' everyday practice- indeed, that it is vital to do so. The learning community meeting process has attracted positive feedback from staff, both formal and informal.

Figure 6: Quotes from Staff regarding the Enquiry Question (Feb 2011)

What makes a good enquiry question?

"a good question is one that relates to your everyday experience, ,but asks you to go beyond your everyday experience" Head of Department

"a good question encourages the application of various strategies and leads to an improved classroom environment" English Teacher

"it should be less general and focus on one simple issue so that you can investigate the issue fully" Cover Supervisor

"a good enquiry question is one that allows for analysis, changes in classroom practice, extension of student and staff understanding, and that can make a difference for the better" Head of Department

"a good enquiry question succinctly focuses on a measurable aspect of teaching practice and drives action research to improve the quality of teaching and learning" ICT Teacher

"A good enquiry question can be answered in stages over an extended period of time, and can be fine tuned as you go along" Humanities Teacher

What advice would you give to someone devising an enquiry question for the first time?

"don't be too specific at the start, as you'll find you can refine it as you go along" Maths Teacher

"make it specific and talk to your colleagues about it" Pastoral Leader

"take on a question that is relevant to your position, something you can easily work on and is part of your everyday life" Science Teacher

"ensure your enquiry is one that can be solved/answered/or addressed. Make it achievable" English Teacher

"to be very specific about your question- chose a particular class with a specific question and then work with it. Don't be too general or broad!" Head of Department

"to have a goal, but to remain flexible as your enquiry question can change as there's more to it than you first thought" Learning Support Assistant

"choose a question you are passionate about and that can make a difference to your department's practice" PE Teacher

The wording and subject matter of colleagues' enquiry questions show progress from research areas often characterised by broad assumptions and an over-emphasis on student motivation and behaviour, towards enquiries that focus closely on individual practice and what impact strategies employed by the individual can on student outcomes. There is less emphasis on using the enquiry question to identify the reasons behind student behaviours, some of which whilst intriguing and informative are beyond colleagues' control to impact on, towards a more pragmatic view of what as a professional an individual can improve in their practice that enables students to learn better. Figure 7 gives some comparison of questions from 2008 to 2010.

Figure 7: Comparison of Enquiry Questions 2008 and 2010

Example Enquiry Questions 2008	Example Enquiry Questions 2010
<i>"How do I make Year 11 better independent learners? (In Modern Foreign Languages)</i>	<i>"What techniques can help students in Y8 with low literacy levels improve their reading levels in the context of a 6 week programme?"</i>
<i>"What is stopping pupils from being independent learners? (Year 11 Childcare)"</i>	<i>"What strategies help science teachers improve the performance of investigation and evaluation skills when Y10s are doing their coursework?"</i>
<i>"How to engage learning without teacher exposition".</i>	<i>"What strategies can I introduce to allow Y10 ICT students to track, share and assess their own progress?"</i>
<i>"How do I make students more independent and willing to take a risk and experiment".</i>	<i>"How could I use peer coaching to help progression of students in my Y11 English class?"</i>
<i>"How do I challenge my students to operate more independently and successfully in Year 11."</i>	<i>"How can I make psychological research methods more easier to comprehend for my A2 psychology students"</i>
<i>"How do I make my Year 10 more independent learners and motivated?"</i>	<i>"What are the strategies that I can use effectively that will help quieter students participate more in the devising process in Y10 Drama?"</i>
<i>"How do I develop my students' attitude to learning so that they become self-motivated learners?"</i>	<i>"What type of questioning works best to facilitate independent learning in students?"</i>
<i>"Why is there disaffection with some students - Year 11?"</i>	<i>"How can I raise the level of challenge in the</i>
<i>How to maintain students motivation (especially in Year 9 in Science)</i>	
<i>How do I encourage students within my Functional Skills group to reflect on their own learning and set realistic targets?</i>	
<i>How can I ensure that all learners are catered for in my Year 10 BTEC class.</i>	
<i>How do you reduce the impact of disruptive students on larger groups.</i>	

<p><i>How to reduce the impact of disruptive students on the whole class.</i></p> <p><i>What strategies are helpful to reduce low-level disruption/increase pupil engagement for large classes?</i></p> <p><i>Why girls do better than boys in business studies (more girls achieved higher grades)?</i></p>	<p><i>year 9/10 transition group using their intellectual ability to improve their physical performance in PE?"</i></p> <p><i>"How can I develop student oracy skills and engagement in oral tasks in my Y8 PBL group?"</i></p> <p><i>"How can I work with the PE and SEN departments to improve access levels of inclusion in physical activity?"</i></p>
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c) Evidence of 'on-going learning' from staff

Examination of the 'final enquiry learning' submitted by staff at the conclusion of the process indicates that we have colleagues who are engaged in their own professional learning and can see the impact that "research" can have on their practice. There is a consistency in colleagues reflecting on what to do next in their enquiries, and very few if any enquiry questions are brought to a conclusion without further questions being prompted.

"I need to give pupils a platform to ask questions that does not disrupt lessons, introduce a question box in the class to answer the following lesson" (Humanities Teacher)

"My next steps are to experiment with using these strategies in other classes of differing abilities (perhaps through other staff)" (Head of Department)

"In the future I would focus on a particular aspect of communication skill... further studies with this group could focus on considering the use of body language as a communication skill". (English Teacher)

This also helps to indicate the importance of the enquiry process as a continual, sustainable and everyday aspect of BBA as a learning community. Colleagues' learning prompts further questions that can form new lines of enquiry- and these need not be limited to weekly learning community meetings, but can begin to permeate everyday practice more thoroughly.

"I have learned that discussion and collaboration with colleagues across departments is invaluable in problem-solving...I now find it common practice when I encounter a problem to ask a few different colleagues how to address it, rather than staying within my own department". Newly Qualified Teacher

"I have found the Learning Community Meetings have been really beneficial...I work alone most of the time. Talking over shared experiences and my experienced colleagues sharing their experiences and frustrations has given me more confidence in my practice...I have appreciated the support and guidance of the people in my Learning Community and I feel accepted and valued by them which is not always the experience some of my friends have had in other schools" Support Tutor

Future Directions for the BBA idea of Learning Community

Given the centrality of the concept of sustainability to the BBA idea of learning community, the journey this paper has described continues. Engagement in and the processes for keeping collaboration and reflection amongst colleagues are robust. Yet challenges still remain in supporting colleagues to improve practice in the most effective ways. We have made steps towards this by aligning our professional learning with our Academy, but more might be

accomplished here were we to take one priority where research indicates the greatest gains might lie, for example better formative assessment, and framing all our teacher professional learning around it. This would involve what William identifies as *"preventing people from doing good things to give them time to do even better things"* (William 2010b), but is a challenge the development of a learning community ethos should make more achievable.

Alan Salt
Vice-Principal, Bristol Brunel Academy
December 2011

E-mail: asalt@bba.bristol.sch.uk

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Cabot Learning Federation: Learning Communities

Narrative Of A Journey Of Reflective Interventions

The Federation Context:

The Cabot Learning Federation is made up of five Academies in Bristol and Weston super Mare. John Cabot Academy (JCA), Bristol Brunel Academy (BBA), Bristol Metropolitan Academy (BMA), Hans Price Academy (HPA) in Weston and King's Oak Academy (KOA) in Kingswood, Bristol.

Background:

The impetus for setting up this Cabot Learning Federation-wide English-specific intervention was generated from a range of sources:

- In 2009, a desire to raise achievement in English across the then 3 existing CLF Academies: Bristol Brunel, John Cabot and Bristol Metropolitan;
- As a swift response to staff absence in the English Department in Bristol Metropolitan Academy;
- A sense in which English Departments across the federation would benefit from closer collaboration;
- An understanding that, though initially a speedy and reactive response, planned interventions, sought out by staff, carried out with sensitivity and predicated on the importance of building staff relationships can improve results;
- The CLF desire to build capacity through classroom support from specialists;
- On-going discussion among English colleagues about the need to develop practice;
- In 2010, a very successful conference for English staff, which allowed Jayne Crosby and Helen Angell, CLF Achievement team leaders in Literacy and English, to elicit staff needs and build a skills' audit.

Outcome:

- To establish, across the CLF English cohort, a sense of family where "siblings" could feel nurtured; build trusting, cooperative relationships and share resources in order to improve the quality of teaching and raise achievements for students

Intentions:

Strategies to support this outcome:

- Cross Federation training sessions to build relationships between English departments in all academies
- Establish a CLF English Forum to consider best practice and share resources
- Use CLF Inset time to look specifically at examination specifications
- Design a website to capture and promote shared English resources and ideas
- Use CLF expertise and experience with regard to enrichment by sharing opportunities for external visits, revision sessions and bringing writers and theatre companies into schools

The consultation process:

Heads of Department and Faculties met with Jayne and Helen to celebrate successes, share concerns and discuss ways forward. English teachers were consulted through a process of questionnaires and informal conversations. They were asked to evaluate the previous year's interventions and conference themes. They were also asked which areas of the curriculum they intended to develop and what were their concerns regarding examinations, students and staff support. Staff felt that the interventions, all of which focused on both raising student achievement and helping colleagues in planning, resource gathering and classroom management, had been very useful.

Non teaching staff and TAs were not involved in the process.

Emerging outcome:

To enable colleagues to work in cross- Federation groups, developing practice and themselves, through needs-lead staff initiatives such as coaching and modeling, through pedagogical discourse and through action planning

Staff ownership of the programme:

Staff have welcomed the opportunity to work alongside Helen and Jayne in informal, non-threatening ways. They have benefitted from casual conversations, suggestions, good listening, team teaching, shared planning, feedback and a renewed focus on teaching and learning. This has helped Federation English staff recognise their shared journey, their direction of travel and given a sense of internal alignment.

Selection of participants:

The intervention programme was initially devised to give support to Bristol Met in the absence of a crucial colleague. However it has developed to include a wider range of English teachers seeking opportunities to share and develop.

Values and principles that underpinned the research programme:

From the outset this intervention process was set up to help students gain their best grades. D-C borderline students were targeted at first and Helen and Jayne were driven by a desire to provide access for students to the right teaching.

Both were clear that the interventions would work if staff came willingly on the journey so it was important to acknowledge staff skills and achievements, respect their professional environment, recognise the variety of valuable teaching styles and understand colleagues' concerns.

In recognition of the potential frailty of colleagues working under pressure, it was clear that effective listening was at the heart of any dialogue and that Jayne and Helen had to build in reflection time and a bridge between the relentless drive to attain better results and the capacity of staff and students.

Setting up:

Initially the immediate intervention strategy had to be intense, student focussed and contained. Bristol Met staff welcomed their presence in the department and took every opportunity to observe them with students and to discuss planning, skills and techniques.

Incentivising participation:

Because this initiative grew out of a recognised desire to raise standards across the Federation, English staff saw it not as a threat but something to welcome, steer and develop to suit the needs of the students and staff in each academy.

Colleague Action Planning:

Helen and Jane draw up Federation wide Action Plans, reflecting their discussions with Heads of Department, who contribute to the process after internal discussions and who then share their outcomes, consider success criteria and think about ways of further exploring and expanding good practice.

Programme review and evaluation:

The review and evaluation process includes staff questionnaires. There is also consideration of targets, impact on student progress, meta learning and future thinking.

Programme leader learning:

This could include:

- Developing the model to include an even wider support base
- Enlarging the E-forum website
- Exploring coaching models and modelling projects to improve practice
- Further thinking about ways of supporting staff in associated Practitioner Enquiry, further research and academic study
- Looking at developing staff resources to support this research

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Triumph Road
Nottingham NG8 1DH
T 0845 609 0009
F 0115 872 2001
E college.enquiries@nationalcollege.gsi.gov.uk
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