Teacher Leadership

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Editorial

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The commitment of this journal to enabling the teacher voice to be heard is undiminished. Teacher voice is a key issue for our times. In the face of global concerns about educational standards and the implications for economic competitiveness, policy makers are groping for what they imagine to be the levers of change. In the attempt to find the right lever we often see 'education policy borrowing' (Halpin and Troyna, 1995; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004) where top-down change strategies are used to try to implement practices that appear to have produced results in quite different cultural contexts. However, the relationship between reform and innovation is a complex one (CERI, 2008) and change that is centrally mandated often fails to make the difference that policy makers expect.

The body of evidence in relation to teacher voice and self-efficacy is growing. Research undertaken for Education International, the global association of teacher unions, indicates that amongst teachers everywhere there is an appetite for taking responsibility for educational change (Bangs and Frost, 2012). In addition, evidence presented in the report from the International Teacher Leadership project shows that it is possible, in a variety of cultural contexts, to enable teachers to act strategically to bring about change (Frost, 2012). These messages were shared and affirmed at a significant international seminar – 'The Future of the Teaching Profession' – in Cambridge in February 2012 (www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/lfl). The event had been organised by the Leadership for Learning group at Cambridge, in collaboration with the Open Society Foundation, OECD and Education International. From there, key messages were conveyed to the International Summit on the Teaching Profession convened by the US Department of Education in New York on the 14th and 15th of March. There can be no doubt that teacher leadership is on the march. It is against this backdrop that I am delighted to be able to present another excellent collection of accounts of teacher-led school improvement initiatives.

Given that this journal originated in the HertsCam Network it is not surprising that many of the accounts in this issue are from that source, but we also have one arising from the National Union of Teachers' 'Learning Circles' programme and another from a teacher leadership programme at Athens College in Greece. As always, we have two sorts of accounts: brief stories and more substantial articles. What is common to all ten accounts in this issue is that they feature the initiation, planning and leadership of a 'project'. Adopting a project based approach to leading change brings to bear a framework in which strategic planning becomes focused and powerful; consultation and negotiation with key stakeholders takes place; momentum is maintained and new practices become embedded in the fabric of the school.

Leadership is another common dimension of the work presented here; successful projects have benefitted from skilful, strategic leadership. For example, in Heather Mollison's project involving the development of the use of the 'Building Learning Power' programme, she exercised leadership as part of a strategic approach involving members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Similarly, when Sue Meaby wanted to develop the UK Resilience Programme in her school, she started with establishing the collaborative relationship and involved senior leaders in the endeavour. Vanessa Androutsopolou's project featured a strategic approach from the beginning, but in this case it could be described as straightforward collaboration rather than a strategy involving the organisational hierarchy. Vanessa simply persuaded a group of her colleagues to join her in tackling the issue of 'spelling' which was a shared concern.

In some cases the leadership dimension is not so explicit or to the fore at the beginning. Teachers often begin by focussing on experimenting with new approaches within the confines of their own classrooms; they tend to feel a sense of modesty about their own leadership. However, what happens quite typically is that, as their projects reach a level of maturity, the aspiration to share the benefits, spread the word and see the innovation grow throughout the school tends to become more manifest. This is very clear for example, in the case of Claire Simmons' project focusing on her use of the idea of 'Thunks'. This quite idiosyncratic initiative turned out to be very effective and, as momentum gathered, so did confidence in the idea which led quite naturally to a desire to share and integrate this into a wider range of practice in the school. We can see a similar pattern in

Carol Ringhoffer's project in which she developed a differentiated approach to the learning of German as a modern foreign language. What seems clear in these projects is that teachers are learning about leadership experientially – by doing leadership.

There is a good deal of common thinking about matters of pedagogy central to which is a focus on what we might call person-centred learning. For example in Gertie Bustard's project the breakthrough to learning came about when she discovered how to give her students a real sense of purpose by becoming authors and publishers. Their enthusiasm for writing was kindled by the opportunity to produce stories that became Christmas presents for their relatives. In Ase Welsh's work we can see the positive dispositions cultivated by enabling students to act as mentors to other students in the fight against bullying. A high point in Vanessa Androutsopolou's project was when the students created their own digital dictionary which became a service to other student groups in the school. This sense of purpose is a recurring facet of effective learning.

Purposeful learning is closely linked with personalisation which is evident in Carol Ringhoffer's project in which students' learning is focused on their actual level of attainment rather than on a judgement about the level of the class as a whole. The same principle is operationalised in the spelling project in Athens College where the whole class approach is abandoned in favour of a differentiated and personalised one. The intellectual open-endedness that is a feature of Claire Simmons' 'Thunks' project plays a vital part in nurturing students' agency. This is a fundamental human capacity which can so easily be diminished by the experience of schooling. This is why initiatives such as Sue Meaby's play such an important role, helping to build dispositions such as resilience and self-efficacy. In many of the accounts in this issue we see these dispositions being cultivated by drawing students into the process of improvement through consultation, evaluation and joint planning.

What all these accounts of teacher-led development work show is a high level of creativity in addressing professional concerns. This is particularly evident in Rebecca Kuberek's project in which she enabled children with special educational needs to engage with story telling through the use of a variety of sensory techniques. This shows us how it is possible to overcome the barriers to learning that stem from the students' 'moderate and profound learning difficulties'. Susie Bailey's initiative also addressed problems

arising in the context of special educational needs. Her endeavour – to shift the emphasis from care to learning for students with severe and profound learning difficulties – involved focusing on the professional development of Teaching Assistants. This project moved beyond mere training to a more profound reconstruction of professional identity for the TAs involved.

All of the work presented here could be said to be indicative of a significant change in teachers' professional identity. This is at the heart of Caroline Creaby's project in which she initiated and developed a teacher leadership support programme in her school. A recent report from Louise Thomas at the RSA (2012) suggests that, if school-based curriculum development is to be productive, we need to embrace alternative conceptions of teachers' professional identity which might be shaped by notions such as democratic professionalism and activist professionalism. I think that this issue of Teacher Leadership once again illustrates that teachers are developing a professional identity that corresponds with such conceptions and meets contemporary needs.

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Gertie Bustard's development work

Turning reluctant boys into published writers

at Edwinstree Middle School, Buntingford

Many boys in Gertie's class seemed to dislike writing. This had an impact not only on their enjoyment of school but also on their learning in general. When required to write for the purposes of assessments, these boys did not produce writing which accurately reflected their ability. This issue was not isolated to these particular pupils however. The development of boys' interest and attainment in writing had been identified as a development priority for the school as a whole. In staff meetings colleagues had agreed to collaborate to develop appropriate ways forward. Gertie was determined to find a strategy which would result in enhanced enthusiasm and interest in writing for the boys in her class and might also influence whole school policy and practice in supporting writing development.

She thought deeply about the reasons for this problem and was very influenced by her reading of the book, 'Toxic Childhood' (Palmer, 2009) which highlighted some of the features of modern childhood. For example, children in contemporary Britain are more likely to play on their own using technology rather than engaging in imaginative play with other children. Gertie wanted to create opportunities for the enhancement of children's imaginations through real experience and writing for a purpose.

She adopted a very student-centred approach. She formed a working group with six boys with varying writing abilities who would help her develop alternative approaches to supporting their writing. The boys thrived in the collaborative environment of this working group, providing exciting ideas which Gertie incorporated into her schemes of work. Gertie then supplemented these ideas with other suggestions from her reading (Palmer, 2006; Palmer, 2009). The working group members agreed that children need to have a purpose for their writing and this set the direction for the new activities. One suggestion was that they could write their own stories and then record them on to CDs which could be given to family members as Christmas presents.

The impact of this change in approach was considerable, with the boys now showing a much more positive response to writing activities and developing enhanced writing skills. Noticing the impact which a collaborative approach had on the pupils, Gertie continued to meet with the working group on a regular basis. They worked with her to evaluate lessons, to design activities for forthcoming lessons and to decide together how learning objectives could be achieved in exciting and innovative ways.

Gertie was amazed by the levels of maturity demonstrated by pupils, by their fantastic suggestions and by the dramatic impact which her new approach was having on pupils' attainment. The working group decided to ask all the other children for feedback about approaches to teaching writing. They gave out post-it notes and asked their peers to indicate the benefits of the new approach to developing writing.

At this stage in the project, a children's author and poet, Wes Magee, was visiting the school and he led a workshop with Gertie's class. Together they created a poem. The children asked if it could be published in Wes Magee's next book but the author explained it wasn't his poem, it belonged to the class. The class therefore decided to produce their own book in which to publish their writing. Gertie discussed this idea with the senior leaders in her school and got a very enthusiastic response. The previously reluctant–to–write boys set up a writing workshop to produce material for the book. This idea excited the pupils so much that they immediately began to write with publication in mind. Some of the previously reluctant writers even created stories at home in their spare time in the hope that they would be published in the class book.



Gertie's development work had immense impact in numerous ways, some of which she had not previously imagined. She has developed confidence in her students' abilities and is now able to give them the opportunity to shape their own learning experiences. The students are now not afraid to tell their teacher if a teaching strategy is not working well and will suggest alternatives. They are developing their love of writing, with some of

them now writing for the sheer joy of it. They are constantly exploring a variety of ways in which to plan, discuss and execute their writing which has resulted in a direct impact on their understanding, enjoyment and success as learners.

The impact of Gertie's development work has spread beyond her own classroom. The leader of literacy in her school took an active interest in this work and agreed to try some of Gerties' approaches in her own classroom. Gertie also discussed her work with teachers from other schools at a HertsCam Network Event, during which teachers across Hertfordshire come together to share stories of their leadership of development work. She was delighted to find that teachers in other schools were very interested in her approach and wanted to experiment with it.

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Claire Simmons' development work

Using 'Thunk' questions to improve participation and thinking skills

at Dame Alice Owen's School, Potters Bar

At the time Claire initiated her 'Thunks' project she was a History teacher with a special responsibility as 'Head of Student Progress' for Year 12 (16-17 yr olds). She had become aware that many of these students were either unable, or perhaps unwilling, to take responsibility for their own learning; they seemed unable to think independently. She wanted to develop a more participative approach to learning and help students develop their thinking skills so that they might become more independent learners.

The term 'independent learning' has been, and continues to be, the subject of debate. The Department for Education and Skills provided some guidance in their 'Vision 2020' report.

> Learners are active and curious: they create their own hypotheses, ask their own questions, coach one another, set goals for themselves, monitor their progress and experiment with ideas for taking risks, knowing that mistakes and 'being stuck' are part of learning.
>
> (DfES, 2006: 6)

Claire identified that one of the main obstacles to students becoming independent learners is that they do not always see the relevance or significance of what it is that they are being asked to learn. She read an article about teaching and learning in History by Doreen Tan (2004) who criticized the tendency to rely on teaching from textbooks which seem to represent 'a body of knowledge that is cast in concrete' (p. 197). This results in students not being expected to interpret material or form their own opinions about it. She decided to experiment with new methods to help students develop the skills to construct knowledge for themselves and make better sense of the subject of History, in particular to be able to analyse, synthesise and evaluate.

She came across 'The Little Book of Thunks' by Ian Gilbert which contained 260 questions on a wide range of topics that most

importantly have no definitive answer. A 'Thunk' is defined in Gilbert's book like this.

> A 'Thunk' is a beguiling question about everyday things that stops you in your tracks and helps you start to look at the world in a whole new light.
>
> (Gilbert, 2007: 3)

The book gave Claire a vehicle to develop strategies for independent thinking. By posing questions without any definitive answers, students would be enticed into thinking for themselves.

She started by consulting the students and explaining how Thunks could be used. She gave examples, some of which were related to History.

> Is democracy an elected dictatorship?
> Is the future closer today than it was yesterday?
> Can you have a friend you don't like?

She planned a series of Thunk sessions and made a wall display for the classroom which illustrated different types of questions. Another teacher who used the same classroom was inspired by the display and started to use Thunks in his lessons. Claire was pleased with the display but afterwards thought that it could have had more impact if it had been in a more public place and made accessible to a wider range of staff.

Claire drew colleagues into her development work by consulting members of the History Department and by making a presentation about her work at a whole staff meeting. She led a workshop at a HertsCam Network Event and found it helpful to hear how people from other schools had used Thunks. This helped her to think about how to increase the impact of her project.

To review the process and assess the impact of Thunks, Claire filmed sessions and carried out interviews. She found that students were becoming more able or disposed to think and go beyond the information given to them; they enjoyed using Thunks that related to their studies but also to issues in their own lives. Here are some of their comments:

> *Because Thunks have no definite answers you can contribute anything you like without worrying that you may be wrong.*

It's great to discuss random things which you might not have thought of before and they stimulate your thinking; its good to listen to other people's perspective on things.

Claire's enquiries indicated that students' were enjoying intellectual challenges, arguing, expressing their opinion and dealing with uncertainty. She felt there was a culture shift towards a more collaborative, participatory approach to learning and concluded that using Thunks had an impact on the way the students define intelligence; moving away from simply remembering information towards a wider range of intellectual skills.

Leadership is a key element of the School Improvement Plan at Claire's school and there is considerable encouragement for the development of leadership amongst staff at all levels. Claire was invited to attend a meeting of the Senior Leadership Team and was able to explain the impact of her project on her practice as well as on the students and other staff; it was also mentioned in the Governors' Report.

Through this project Claire had identified a wide range of other ways that Thunks could be used. She wanted to build on her success and explore strategies such as those listed below.

- A Thunk Club starting with Year 12 students
- Thunks to be built into Form Time (tutorial sessions)
- A 'Thunk of the Week' to be made available to members of staff.
- Developing a 'Thunk Pack' for staff

She also planned to collaborate with Advanced Skills Teachers to look at how Thunks could be used more widely.

Since completing her project, Claire continued to use Thunks extensively in her lessons with excellent results. She led professional development sessions for the History department and introduced Thunks into schemes of work. She contributed Thunks sessions to the Personalised Learning Programme for colleagues and has shared teaching guidelines during staff briefing meetings. Thunk books have been bought and distributed amongst staff. Claire has also made a variety of resources including wall displays and laminated Thunk sheets. She has introduced a Thunks approach to tutorial sessions for post-16 students because they are a useful preparation for university interviews, amongst other things.

Following this project, Claire joined the HertsCam masters programme and, at the time of writing, is pursuing further development work focused on independent learning.

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Rebecca Kuberek's development work

Developing sensory story-telling for students with special needs

at Willow Dene School, Plumstead, London

Rebecca was a class teacher working in a large primary school for children with special educational needs when she joined the National Union of Teachers (NUT) Learning Circles programme. Her school caters for children with both moderate and profound disabilities and for children with autistic spectrum disorders. Many of the children Rebecca works with have difficulties in accessing the curriculum due to their issues with communication. Rebecca wondered if developing the use of sensory stories would help the children to participate in story-telling more readily.

Rebecca already used some aspects of sensory story-telling practice in her work. For example, she used large books and props wherever possible to bring the story to life for the children. However, this was not always enough to assure their continuing attention to the end of the story. Rebecca wondered if increasing the children's actual participation in the story would motivate them to listen for longer periods. She also wondered if increased attention would lead to increased understanding.

Rebecca undertook some background reading in order to learn more about sensory approaches to story-telling (Albera, Griffin, Griffin, Fitch and Gingras, 2006; Chilvers and Cole, 2006). She tried to find other teachers who had developed their sensory story-telling skills without much success, but she did find a powerpoint presentation developed by a teacher in the resources area of the Times Educational Supplement website. The story of a very busy spider was represented in an innovative way through the PPT slides. Rebecca was encouraged to experiment with using ICT as a new way of teaching through stories. She felt that the use of the Interactive Whiteboard would help the story to have a greater visual impact for the children. She therefore uploaded the busy spider story to her Interactive Whiteboard and found some props which related to it. Plastic and furry animals were to be used both during the story-telling and afterwards.

Rebecca asked one of her colleagues to observe her story-telling lesson and then give her feedback as to how she could develop her practice. Her colleague gave her some very helpful advice. Rebecca then observed another colleague's literacy lesson to gain more ideas. She then built on what she had seen, developing the story her colleague had used into a powerpoint presentation by scanning each page and inserting symbols to support the children's understanding of the text. She also inserted sound effects which appealed to the children's auditory sense and motivated them to engage with the story as they needed to press an icon to activate the sound. Rebecca and her colleague then decided to share any resources they developed.

Rebecca's continuing research led her to a firm which produced 'Story Sacks'. These sacks contain props related to a story that can be used to help to make story telling a more interactive experience. She again made the story into a powerpoint presentation and used the props to help the children to understand the focus of the story at a given moment. She was then able to introduce the sign for the prop in British Sign Language, thus developing children's language skills. The contents of the story sack were very effective in securing student involvement in the story-telling activity, but they were expensive to buy so Rebecca decided to create her own. This time, a colleague trialled the story and Rebecca observed the lesson. The children responded in a positive way to the session. The story was about a red hot chilli pepper and the children were given food to touch and taste. This gave the story a sensory dynamic which enabled the children to access the story and participate more. As time went on, Rebecca became more and more inventive with her use of sensory props. For example she used essential oils to denote flowers and water sprays to denote rain. Her repertoire continued to expand.

Once her ICT resources were made, Rebecca faced the challenge of inspiring other colleagues to take advantage of them in their teaching. In fact, this did not prove difficult. Colleagues were more than happy to adopt such innovative and effective practices. Staff now talk regularly about story-telling and collaborate much more freely. The impact of Rebecca's development work on her pupils is clear. They are more attentive during story-telling and more willing to participate, even requesting certain stories by the use of the appropriate sign. On a personal level, Rebecca feels more able to talk to colleagues about their teaching and to offer ideas which she

has developed through her practice. She continues to work on developing the ICT and story-telling aspects of her work.

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Sue Meaby's development work

Strategies to support students' emotional wellbeing

at Heathcote School, Stevenage

Sue was responsible for the day-to-day management of the Learning Support Unit (LSU) at Heathcote School, a secondary school in Stevenage. The regulation of emotion was a key issue for many students at the school, so Sue wanted to raise the profile of emotional health and develop better strategies for supporting students.

Sue attended an eight day course as part of the UK Resilience Programme provided by the local authorities in South Tyneside, Manchester and Hertfordshire. When she shared an outline of the programme with colleagues at the school, they seemed responsive to her proposal to use the programme with Year 10 students. The Resilience Programme was derived from the 'Penn Resiliency Programme' designed by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania for younger children. It was based on cognitive-behavioural theory which explains how a lack of skills in regulating emotions can lead to depression and a lack of belief in efficacy (Cutuli *et al.*, 2006, Reivich and Shatté, 2002). Sue read around the subject particularly concentrating on Martin Seligman's work (1990, 2007) and revisiting Carol Dweck's 'Self Theories' (2000) which is often referred to as a framework for understanding 'learned helplessness'.

Initially Sue collaborated with the Inclusion Co-ordinator, Head of Year, Assistant Head of Year and form tutors, all of whom had a real interest in empowering students by developing their emotional strength. She started by using the material from the course which had been designed for Year 7 students. Perhaps not surprisingly, the feedback from students showed that she would have to adapt the material to meet the needs of the older students. Asking students to write about their feelings was not a positive experience for them as they had, by Year 10, developed barriers to writing. She adapted the programme to include visual demonstrations and worked with the students to agree ground rules for group discussion, both of which were more effective. The programme of lessons enables students to

explore the link between thoughts and feelings and learn how to analyse their own emotional responses to challenges and develop assertiveness. Lessons feature, for example, guidance on how to avoid jumping to conclusions and how to use relaxation techniques to build coping strategies.

As the programme gathered momentum, Sue had a meeting with the Senior Leadership Team which gave her an opportunity to explain the concept behind the programme and discuss the practical aspects of teaching it. This allowed her to stand back, consider the successes of the programme so far and think about ways to improve it. The issue of some students' perception of the course as being 'not a proper lesson' was also discussed. She sought the support of the Inclusion Co-ordinator who subsequently discussed the programme with the students, highlighting the life skills they were developing.

To evaluate the programme Sue began by seeking the views of the students and those of the Year 10 tutors who know the students well since they see them daily. She wanted to avoid questionnaires and use more creative and kinaesthetic tools that might elicit deeper responses. She decided, therefore, to ask the tutors for a thumbnail sketch of each student's progress and she used the 'Blob Tree' method to help them to identify where they thought their students were in relation to others.



Sue used the Blob Tree as a tool for discussion with the students themselves. It was very encouraging to see the change in students' attitude towards the programme. Following the changes she had made to the programme, the students seemed more positive and had grasped the principles behind it. This gave her the confidence to move on and address ways to develop students' assertiveness which, until this point, they had been confusing with aggression.

Next, Sue planned a relaxation session in the drama studio. She consulted the students first and they all agreed to take part, although two girls subsequently withdrew. The first half of the session involved discussing ways of dealing with stressful situations by using relaxation techniques. One student did not want to take part and watched from the sidelines, but the majority of students responded positively and asked if they could do it again. She fed back the outcomes from the session to her SLT colleague who felt that such a skill should be made more readily available to all students in line with the emphasis on emotional wellbeing in the 'Every Child Matters' policy (DfES, 2003).

Evaluating the success of an emotional wellbeing programme is always going to be difficult, but there had been very positive feedback from the students themselves and from colleagues. The group dynamic had improved markedly: the students had changed from being a collection of disparate individuals to being a cohesive group with a distinct identity. Sue shared her work with a wider audience by making a presentation at a HertsCam Network Event. She also shared her work at school through a 'speed dating event' attended by the whole staff. She received positive comments following this event and felt her work was validated when she was asked to teach the programme to several groups of students in the following academic year.

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Carol Ringhofer's development work

Strategies to introduce students to German at age 13

at Freman College, Buntingford

Carol had been working as a German teacher at Freman College, a 13-18 comprehensive upper school in rural Hertfordshire, since 2004 when she began this development work.

Dealing with students coming from a variety of middle schools meant that Carol was faced with students who began at Freman College in Year 9 with a wide variety of knowledge about the German language. Some had been taught German for a year, while others had only a basic vocabulary; some had never learnt German before. Carol reflected on this situation which had concerned her for some time, and decided to explore ways of tackling this widely varying knowledge base of students in her care, such that all students in her mixed ability classes would be able to make excellent progress.

She began by focusing on lower ability students, but quickly decided to change this when she reflected that all students find some things easier or harder than others and she wanted to facilitate more effective learning for all students. She was determined that no student should come to her lesson dreading it and feeling unable to achieve any progress.

After attending a professional development session focusing on differentiation, Carol trialled some ideas for materials to support students' listening skills (Pachler and Field, 2001). She designed a range of resources which all students could use at varying levels and found that they improved students' confidence and willingness to participate in the lessons. These resources or support sheets took many forms; sometimes a question and answer sheet, sometimes a description of a writing task, sometimes instructions for a conversational activity. Carol realised that any differentiation she used would have to be created specifically for her own students' needs and that this required a flexible problem-solving approach that could respond to students encountering difficulties.

Having used specific support sheets, Carol found that students achieved good marks, were able to recognise key words and, in addition, were able to identify and use some new verbs in the infinitive. This was a positive start and generated enthusiasm for both Carol and her students. She felt it was important that she was giving support sheets to all students, not just some, as this changed students' attitude to working with the resources.

Spurred on by this success, Carol continued to develop support sheets in response to student need. She found that they were being used by more able students to extend their writing and develop phrases, while less able students were able to produce a sustained piece of writing but without just copying. When she moved on to a new topic, Carol noticed that her students' ability to listen out for key words was much improved: additionally, their test scores were rising, leading to greater confidence and self-esteem. For an end of topic reading and writing assessment, Carol produced support sheets which provided students with the opportunity to gather vocabulary and prompt ideas. These acted as a writing framework, and despite being very simple, were effective in enabling students to produce sustained pieces of their own writing.

It was interesting that, once the routine of using support sheets had been established, Carol was then able to target specific students with sheets designed specifically for them. These were accepted willingly, with a positive effect on progress, behaviour and motivation. She was becoming more and more convinced that the use of such support materials was leading to increased student participation and motivation.

Pausing to evaluate

Having sought parental permission, Carol decided to ask a mixed ability group of students – some with no prior knowledge of the language – for their views on their German lessons. She used a semi-structured interview technique and the thermo-evaluator technique (McCabe and Horsley, 2008) to focus the discussion. This was an enriching meeting which gave her important insights into how her students perceived their learning. Their views on the use of support materials were very positive, achieving high scores on the thermo-evaluator. They felt confident in the four skill areas of the subject and made it clear that they were enthusiastic to learn and enjoyed the challenge of learning German. Carol was pleased that her work was enabling students to access the language but also not

making the work too easy for them. Her students provided detailed feedback on what worked for them in her lessons and Carol found this to be the most rewarding part of the process.

Carol was pleased when her work was given more formal recognition by being an agenda item at her department meetings. This gave her opportunities to share strategies with colleagues and gain more ideas from them. One good idea came from English where students are asked to show their comprehension of texts by producing drawings. Feedback from colleagues who used Carol's resources was very positive, making it clear that students gained in confidence to produce their own writing and brought the language to life.

There have been many benefits as a result of Carol's development work. As well as finding the work beneficial to her students, she also found it personally enriching to be part of a group of people committed to improving teaching and learning. She also learned to see her teaching through the eyes of the students and to create simple resources which allow them easier access to German. She now sees this way of working as an integral part of her teaching. She wants the work she has done to develop beyond the support sheets to wider strategies. Perhaps most importantly, Carol's understanding of and confidence in her own ability to lead and contribute to teaching and learning practice within and beyond her department has grown enormously.

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Vanessa Androutsopoulou's development work

Personalising the learning of spelling at the elementary school

within Athens College, Athens, Greece

Vanessa was a 4th grade teacher at the elementary school which is part of the prestigious Athens College run by the Hellenic American Educational Foundation.

Vanessa participated in a programme based on the principles of teacher leadership. At the beginning of the programme she had articulated her core values as follows:

> ...to help students participate more and enjoy the learning process. They must feel confident about themselves and believe that they can manage their difficulties. I would like my students to be independent learners, researchers, open-minded thinkers, knowledgeable and caring.

She identified a very down-to-earth problem – that many of her students were struggling with learning how to spell correctly – but approached it with clarity about her professional values and a sophisticated view of the goals of education.

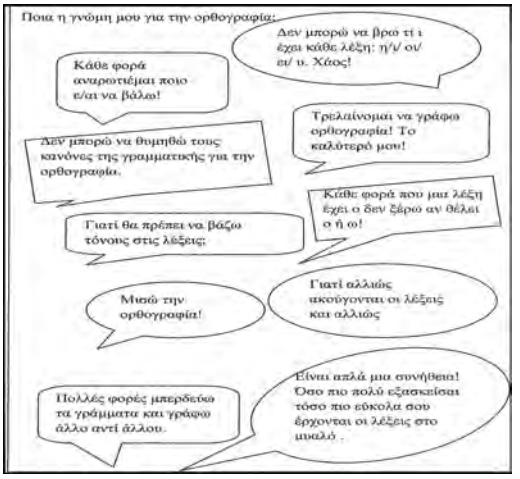
For many Greek teachers, the teaching of spelling follows a very prescriptive pattern. For example, students receive a list of 15-20 spellings to be learned on a Monday. A number of whole class strategies are used to support students in learning how to spell these words, such as crossword puzzles and repeated copying of the words. Students are then tested on their ability to spell these words on Friday. It was clear to Vanessa however, that whole-class strategies were ineffective because students do not all start from the same position and they learn in different ways. She decided that she would need to develop differentiated approaches to supporting her students' learning with regard to spelling.

Vanessa first turned to the literature to look for alternative methods of supporting the learning of spelling. She found the available research-based material daunting at first, but overcame this and began to enjoy the breadth of ideas which her reading was offering

her. She was particularly engaged by those studies which offered suggestions for practical classroom strategies (e.g. Keller, 2002; McMurray, 2006). She also found useful some research on the impact of differentiation (Tomlinson, 2001). Some of her reading challenged Vanessa's long-held assumptions, but she endeavoured to keep an open mind.

Vanessa became increasingly committed to the idea that a new approach was needed; one which takes due account of the differing needs of individual students. She emailed the other 4th grade teachers and set out her view of the problem; she invited them to meet with her after school to discuss it. At the meeting she proposed a collaborative approach. Following a good discussion about the potential benefits and obstacles, colleagues readily agreed to work with Vanessa to re-design the approach to teaching spelling to students in the 4th grade.

Meetings with colleagues were arranged on a regular basis under the banner of 'Differentiated Spelling Instruction'. The first task was to develop an action plan. The first stage of the plan was really diagnostic; they needed to determine the areas in which students were proficient and those in which they required additional support. Vanessa proposed that all 4th grade teachers use a common activity to teach spelling that would enable them to discuss the students' responses and engagement with the activity. The activity included a strategy for getting feedback by asking students to write comments in speech bubbles which were then projected onto the Interactive Whiteboard.



Another diagnostic tool involved a work sheet which featured the 'Thermo-evaluator' (MacCabe and Horsley, 2008). The students had to place a variety of words at the right place on the thermometer to indicate the level of difficulty.

Having undertaken this mapping exercise, the team developed new strategies for learning spelling, including differentiated spelling lists for students, rather than asking all students to learn the same words. They also developed particular strategies for those students who found spelling most challenging. These included using spelling partners who worked together to determine which strategies were most useful in learning new spellings. They engaged in peer-assessment by exchanging their notebooks and correcting each other's spellings.

One of the most successful strategies that Vanessa tried involved enabling her students to help create a digital dictionary in the form of a Wiki. Each student identified a letter and then a number of words that began with this letter. They searched for explanations and definitions for each of their chosen words and then drew illustrations to go with each one. All of this material was assembled on the Wiki so that the students could add to or correct each others' work. The final product was then shared with other 4th grade classes. Vanessa's students led the presentation which included advice about how to avoid spelling mistakes. The other students posed questions and joined in the discussion.

Vanessa and her colleagues trialled the new approaches and developed their own strategies to suit their particular students. However, they continued to meet to evaluate progress and often worked collaboratively on developing new ways forward. During these weekly meetings, they reviewed student progress and shared what they were learning from the project. They agreed to share accountability for key decisions and outcomes, whether positive or negative. The teachers found this collaborative approach very supportive and, through it, they gained the confidence to experiment and to challenge deeply-ingrained practices.

At one of their team meetings Vanessa and her colleagues evaluated the effectiveness of these new approaches. Students' scores on spelling tests had improved dramatically. Moreover, the teachers observed that the new activities both challenged and motivated students, providing opportunities for the development of alternative

strategies to underpin success. Vanessa and her colleagues concluded that the differentiated spelling programme allowed for differences in students' readiness to learn and was thus far more successful in scaffolding learning.

Clearly the main point of Vanessa's project was to improve students' spelling, but there were wider aims and some benefits that she hadn't predicted. She had wanted to disrupt her students' complacency through her own innovation. By taking risks herself she wanted to support her students in developing their risk-taking capacity. She had asked for the collaboration of her fellow 4th grade teachers because she wanted to improve the standard of spelling as a whole, but the effect of this was to build a much more collaborative professional culture in which colleagues developed the confidence to innovate and improve their practice. It was also notable that the students benefitted through the modelling of effective collaboration.

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Developing a teacher leadership programme

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Abstract

Caroline Creaby was Head of Business Studies and an Advanced Skills Teacher at a secondary school when she introduced a teacher leadership programme for colleagues in her school.

Introduction

In 2009, I introduced a teacher leadership programme at my school and, over a three year period developed it. I took up the challenge of being the 'tutor' of a school-based Teacher Led Development Work (TLDW) group, and in the first two years of its operation, had the benefit of support from a colleague from another school who had some prior experience of the programme. Our practice in the first year was somewhat tentative but, having managed the first run quite successfully, I decided to undertake a review and identify how the programme might be improved. Having reflected on the limitations of the programme in its first year, it became clear that the impact of the programme could be enhanced. I was also concerned that the programme relied too much on my own energy and commitment. I wanted to re-think the organisation of the programme so that it might be more sustainable and less dependent on one person's leadership. In this article I discuss the key interventions that I put in place in the second year of the programme to address these concerns.

Context

The TLDW programme has been developed within the HertsCam network, a partnership originally formed between the University of Cambridge and the Hertfordshire local authority, instituted to support the development of classroom practice and leadership amongst Hertfordshire teachers. Within a TLDW group, participants lead a project which involves developing a specific area of their professional practice and potentially spreading this practice to other classrooms in the school. This leadership of classroom innovation is supported through in-school twilight sessions and one-to-one tutorials. Participants are also expected to collaborate with other

teachers both within their own school and in other schools in the HertsCam network to help them develop improved strategies and to share their learning. This collaboration is supported by regular network events. Participants document evidence of their development work in a portfolio which is the basis for the award of a post-graduate certificate from the University of Cambridge.

The impact of the first cohort of teachers to go through the TLDW programme was significant. All participants developed aspects of their classroom practice and grew in confidence. Most shared their work within their departments, and in some, this practice became embedded. A few projects reached further into the school, shaping practice in several departments. A good example of these early projects is accounted for earlier in this issue (Claire Simmons' project, page 8). Most importantly for my headteacher, teachers' projects served to get people talking about teaching and learning, a factor he believed fundamental in improving not only classroom practice but also the professional culture in our school.

Despite such positive outcomes, it was clear that the effectiveness of the programme could be improved in a number of ways. First, I wanted to develop participants' identities as leaders of change. Despite some excellent projects that resulted in real change in our school, my research revealed that participants in the first cohort did not describe themselves as exercising leadership. This troubled me. They had acted to varying degrees as leaders and I wondered what their projects might have become had they considered themselves as leaders, rather than just a teacher 'doing' a one-off project. Second, I wanted to enable participants to extend the scope of their collaboration. In most cases, collaboration was what I would term informative, or one-way, whereby participants simply told other members of staff about the development work being carried out. Alternatively, in a few cases, collaboration was more 'reciprocal' (Hobby, Jerome and Gent, 2005: 10) where the participant built up a two-way relationship with another member of staff in order to develop their projects. The Hay Group called for a 'new model of influence' (Hobby, Jerome, and Gent, 2005: iii) for teachers and suggested one that rests upon their ability to connect effectively with other staff rather than on traditional assumptions about authority and line management responsibilities. In leading the next cohort, I aimed to develop further the capacity of participants to collaborate in a more reciprocal way.

In addition, I wanted to establish the TLDW programme so that it became a recognised feature of teacher development and knowledge creation within the school. I therefore worked to organise the programme so that it would utilise school mechanisms and systems more effectively. In the following section I outline the key interventions that aimed to address my concerns and embed the programme more effectively within my school.

Building identity by steering the dialogue

As identified above, one of my concerns centred upon participants' identities as leaders of teaching and learning. Teachers' perceptions of the scope of their professional role affects their confidence and ability to lead (Frost and Harris, 2003; Gronn, 1999). At the school, colleagues were generally very professional regarding their conduct and 'willingly choose to go the extra mile' (OFSTED, 2009). However, despite members of staff regularly extending their efforts, they were not necessarily 'extended professionals' (Hoyle, 1972, 2008) possessing a school-wide perspective and seeking to innovate and lead change. Rather, their professional identities seemed to be generally confined to carrying out their designated role well. The practice of teacher-led development work, described in Figure 1 below, posed a challenge to this identity.

Figure 1: TLDW description

Teacher-led development work

Teachers, with or without positions of responsibility:

- taking the initiative to improve practice
- acting strategically with colleagues to embed change
- gathering and using evidence in collaborative processes
- contributing to the creation and dissemination of professional knowledge

(Frost and Durrant, 2003)

The practice of teacher-led development work relied on participants taking the initiative, acting strategically, collaborating and building professional knowledge. These were behaviours that could challenge participants' identities. Looking back, I had rather naively thought that joining this programme and leading on an area of classroom

practice would automatically lead to participants' incorporating such aspects of leadership into their professional identities. Scheiffelin and Ochs' (1986) paper was helpful in this respect since it reminded me that the process of socialisation to a new culture, which the notion of teacher-led development work entails, is not an automatic one. Therefore, throughout the programme it was crucial that I offered participants opportunities to reflect more explicitly on their projects and the extent to which they were demonstrating leadership.

One crucial mechanism to support the development of participants' identities was dialogue. Penlington (2008) argues persuasively that dialogue that fosters reflection better enables mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1990) making self-perceptions 'vulnerable to change' (Penlington, 2008: 1314). Therefore, the opportunity to talk, explain and share ideas with other participants, couched in terms of leadership, proved helpful to participants' understanding and practice; they were able to make meaning of leadership for themselves and start to describe their own practice in those terms.

As the group's tutor, my role was to facilitate the programme of workshops but also to provide one-to-one tutorials. An insight emerged about my influence as the group's tutor on the growth of the identities of participants. The concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) had become particularly influential in my thinking and planning. Self-efficacy refers to 'judgements of personal capability' (Bandura, 1997: 11) and measures one's view of what one thinks they can *do* and can be highly predictive of behaviour (Pajares and Miller, 1994). Importantly for me as the group's tutor, self-efficacy is to a certain degree 'malleable' (Henson, 2001: 831). Although the main mechanism by which self-efficacy can be shaped is personal experience, 'verbal persuasion' can also prove influential, particularly if it is from 'significant' others (Bandura, 1997: 101). Upon first reading of this, I immediately questioned whether I would be of any 'significance' such as to influence participants' views of themselves. Casting humility aside, I accepted that I was the group's tutor and began to act as though I was significant. Indeed, I began to see each interaction with participants as an opportunity to encourage and support their leadership.

Reflecting on my role during the first year of the programme, I realised that my language had not necessarily helped participants to see themselves as teachers who exercise leadership. Analysing my records of one-to-one tutorials from the first cohort using Wordle, a

content analysis tool that enlarges words most commonly used within a piece of text (Feinberg, 2009), my most commonly used word was 'students' (see Figure 2 below). This reflected a focus on classroom-based activities which constituted only one aspect of teacher-led development work.

Figure 2: One-to-one tutorial reflections 2010



Mindful of my potential influence, my tutorial reflections in 2011 were more considered and an analysis of their content in Figure 3 below reflects my explicit use of the language of teacher leadership. Here, the word 'students' is supplemented by 'teachers', 'collaborate' and 'develop' as the most commonly used words.

Figure 3: One-to-one tutorial reflections 2011



This reflected a shift in my perception of the influence of a TLDW group tutor which led to a conscious effort on my part to use every opportunity to offer participants confidence in their roles as leaders. This resonated with the effect of verbal persuasion on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and the importance of reflection and dialogue in promoting change within teachers (Penlington, 2008).

Twilight sessions (4.00-6.00pm) constituted the majority of the programme time and offered valuable opportunities to support participants. These sessions had been planned and evaluated during the first year, but in the second year, this was done more critically.

Activities were designed to support the notion of leadership and to support participants to engage in collaboration more effectively. I did not expect any single activity to lead to a dramatically different outcome for participants and their projects, but I recognised that these more targeted activities provided a range of opportunities to re-enforce the language and norms of teacher-led development work.

Knowledge building in the school

The aims of the TLDW programme go beyond changing the identities and practices of those directly participating. An over-arching goal is to build professional knowledge within the school and beyond (Frost, 2012).

A key strategy was to harness the expertise of the previous cohort of TLDW participants. Whilst developing a TLDW group within her own school, my colleague Hill (2011) observed the role the first cohort played as models for the subsequent cohorts. This informed me of the potentially powerful influence that members of the first cohort could have in my school. I firstly asked them to speak at a HertsCam Network Event to share accounts of their projects. I then asked them to act as informal mentors to the current participants, support their projects and offer advice. This began with them attending a twilight session in which they shared their projects. This offered new participants 'vicarious' experience (Bandura, 1997) of teacher-led development work. After this activity, some of the members of the previous cohort met with those in the new cohort and offered advice about their projects. Although this was used to varying degrees, teachers' portfolios reflected heightened collaboration and recognition of the support from the previous year's cohort.

A factor that has since proved important was the instituting of opportunities for TLDW participants to speak at school meetings. For example, every week, my school scheduled meetings for members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) at which matters of school leadership were discussed. I negotiated for TLDW participants to attend these meetings each half term to describe their projects and to seek feedback. Similarly, at other scheduled meetings such as those for Heads of Department, I was able to negotiate such opportunities. In the first instance, this provided TLDW participants with access to those beyond their existing social network (Buchanan, 2002; Scott, 1991), such as the school's SLT, which enabled them to collaborate more widely across the school.

Crucially, they have continued to feature as regular items on school meeting agendas, ensuring that participants in the programme continue to benefit from such collaborative opportunities with other school leaders.

Addressing the issue of sustainability

As outlined already, one of my concerns was to ensure the future sustainability of the programme; I wanted it to continue in the future without reliance on my personal energy. I was at the time considering applying for posts in other schools, so sustainability of the TLDW programme was increasingly an important concern.

Another practical issue regarding sustainability I was facing at the time was the struggle to identify a potential successor to lead the programme in my own school. In order to establish new TLDW groups, the HertsCam network relies upon building capacity from within participating schools rather than relying exclusively on the expertise of the university. A school local to my own was keen to set up a TLDW group and I was encouraged to offer support. I developed a relationship with the representative from that school, Nancy Simpson, who wanted to set up a TLDW group, having built up knowledge of the programme whilst completing her masters degree within the HertsCam network some years previously. As our relationship developed we decided that, in the following year, we would lead one group which would serve participants from both our schools. Nancy was grateful of the support I could provide her in the co-leadership of the group and shared my concern for future sustainability in her own school. Co-leading a group together would build both our expertise and yet reduce the reliance on either one of us for the programme's future continuation.

Outcomes and achievements

At the end of the second year of facilitating teacher leadership in my school, it was evident that the TLDW programme had made a significant contribution to building a collaborative culture. The evidence also told me that this form of support can build participants' self-efficacy as leaders of change.

What was particularly noticeable when analysing written reflections from each cohort was the difference in participants' self-efficacy with respect to leadership. The first cohort largely confined their personal reflections of the TLDW process to their classroom self-

efficacy; they felt they had developed better practice and as such had grown as teachers. In contrast, participants in the second cohort frequently reflected on their own leadership skills whilst describing their developments of their projects. For example, participants described themselves explicitly as leaders and outlined which this meant to them in the following ways.

> *Because I am curious about how to change my own teaching and to work with colleagues in sharing good practice and to implement new approaches to our teaching.*
>
> (Participant 1)

> *I want to be involved in collaborative learning and sharing good practice.*
>
> (Participant 2)

These are just two of many similar reflections and were significant because they reflected a reconceptualisation of their roles, moving beyond developing practice in their own classrooms to developing practice in conjunction with others. Furthermore, a theme of empowerment emerged strongly, evident in another participant's reflection:

> *The conversations have highlighted that as teachers we can implement change in our schools towards a better learning experience for our students... I have become more adept at working with other members of staff and framing an idea so that it appeals to all. I have negotiated my way through sensitive committees and sown a seed of inspiration in a number of colleagues.*
>
> (Participant 3)

The confidence with which participants articulated their own leadership was powerful evidence that the interventions had been effective. Being more considered and deliberate in the language used when engaging in dialogue, coupled with the changing focus of twilight activities, was leading to a more effective socialisation to a new way of being, as an 'extended professional' (Hoyle, 1972, 2008).

It was clear that all participants appreciated the value of collaboration but it was the participants from the second cohort who provided a more sophisticated explanation of why collaboration was so crucial to the success of their projects. One participant identified that her initial collaboration with staff shaped the direction of her

project and *helped me work out what I needed to do and how I should go about it* (Participant 5) which reflected enhanced 'situational understanding' (Frost and Harris, 2003: 491) and 'micro-political literacy' (Penny, 1999: 333). Two participants identified collaboration as an important part of driving their project forward successfully within other departments and that without it, their projects would have lacked the transferability that they went on to possess.

> *The cross-curricular collaboration has shown that independent homework selection can work with a variety of age groups, subjects and ability.*
>
> (Participant 3)

> *I think really, in terms of driving the project forward, having other people do it and seeing that they found it beneficial and enjoyed it, saw the kids enjoying it, that was really the driving force.*
>
> (Participant 6)

The professional culture in the school is said to be a key determinant of the extent to which teachers are able to lead change (Durrant and Holden, 2006). My co-tutor and I discussed the culture in my school at the time we introduced TLDW and were doubtful that it was sufficiently conducive to collaboration and teacher leadership. However, it was clear that the TLDW participants were contributing to the development of a more collaborative culture. In effect, the cultural psychology (Bruner, 1996; Cole, 1998) of the school was changing and thus influencing the second year's participants. In an interview with my headteacher, the TLDW administrators asked about the role the TLDW was having in the school and my headteacher also suggested that it was having an impact upon culture.

> *It helps to generate talk about teaching and learning, trying to build professional culture so that this it is normal. We started the direction and this is a contributory factor, it is a significant factor.*
>
> (Headteacher)

My headteacher saw the TLDW group as a significant factor in changing the culture. This resonated with Fullan's assertion: 'learning in context actually changes the very context itself. Contexts do improve' (Fullan, 2006: 9).

The role of the tutor

It is difficult to clearly identify the factors that contribute to the positive developments described above. However, it became clear to me that a key support for participants' projects and their leadership development were the one-to-one tutorials I provided. One function they served was to give participants' projects *validity*. One participant commented as follows.

> *The quality of the feedback improved my confidence, both that my development work was valuable to me and the school as a whole and that there were people in the school that responded positively to what I was doing.*
>
> (Participant 4)

Such personal confidence was vital to developing what Bandura (1997) termed 'mastery' – the secure knowledge that one is capable as a result of being personally successful. Such feelings were common amongst the participants and served to develop their projects yet further as illustrated by this comment.

> *This gave me a great deal of motivation to develop the idea into something larger.*
>
> (Participant 3)

This confirmed to me the importance of dialogue in the development of this relatively new way of working. Furthermore, despite me not being a member of the school's Senior Leadership Team, nor possessing a title or remuneration in line with the normal hierarchy of the school, my role nevertheless had a significant impact on the participants in the second year cohort; indeed I was perceived as a 'significant other' (Bandura, 1997: 101). It brought into focus for me how important it is for tutors to realise the impact they can have on participants new to a teacher leadership programme. I had not intended that my intervention would serve to enhance my own self-efficacy as a leader, but I am grateful that my project has offered me this obliquely (Kay, 2011).

Conclusion

Carrying out this project has made me realise that to be an effective leader of sustained good practice it is imperative to reflect in a systematic manner on one's own strategies and interventions. I received praise for the apparent success of my school's engagement with the TLDW programme in its first year. It would have been easy

to view this, as was conveyed explicitly by some influential leaders within my school, as following 'naturally' from my innate leadership. However in the second year the increased impact of the project did not arise necessarily from any leadership traits I may possess but rather because, after evaluation and reflection, I improved the support I provided for participants. This has led me to conclude that successful teacher leaders, if they are to sustain their self-efficacy over time and beyond their initial zones of interest and influence, must demonstrate the same commitment to learning from their own practice that they would expect from their most diligent students.

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Combating bullying through peer-mentoring

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Abstract

Ase Welsh was a Humanities teacher and Subject Leader in History when she initiated and led a series of development projects aimed at helping students to overcome barriers to learning in a secondary school.

When I first joined the Teacher Led Development Work (TLDW) group at Astley Cooper School, I had no clear aim in mind. I found my work at the school challenging and wanted to find better strategies for addressing some of the barriers to learning that many of my students seemed to suffer from. My participation in the TLDW group enabled me to identify my professional concerns which became the starting points for a series of development projects. Having completed three such projects I sat down to write a commentary which would allow me to reflect critically on what I had achieved and consider what they had contributed to the development of practice in the school as a whole.

A common thread running through my projects was the need to help students to overcome the challenges they face, both in their learning and socially. I was committed to try and foster in my students the skills they need to be successful in the wider world. In articulating my values I drew encouragement from David Hargreaves who said the following.

> At the heart of moral purpose in education is the professional commitment to ensuring and further developing the well-being of every student.
>
> (Hargreaves, 2008: 2)

This is also reflected in the 'Every Child Matters' agenda (DfES, 2003) which promotes the conviction that children can overcome the difficulties they face through involvement in school life, receiving recognition and praise and having positive role models.

Starting with support for controlled assessment

My first project addressed an issue that arose when a new approach to assessment for the GCSE History was brought in. My awareness of the need for mentoring came later. The new GCSE regulations required controlled assessment rather than independent coursework. I devised a set of homework tasks which involved Key Stage 3 students completing written tasks within a particular time frame to try to mimic the conditions they would have to face in controlled assessments for their GCSE examinations. This was discussed within the Humanities Faculty and the idea was taken up by the team as a whole. We evaluated the initiative by asking students for their views. We asked them to carry out self-assessment in their books and then discuss this with me in focus group sessions. I wanted to tap into their 'collective expertise' on controlled assessment (James *et al.*, 2006). I prepared questions in advance to ensure that the time in the sessions was used effectively (Durrant and Holden, 2006). These evaluations provided me with useful information about how successful the controlled assessments were and how we could improve and refine the process for the students. We discussed the outcomes in meetings of the Humanities Faculty and subsequently, we were invited to share our work with colleagues at a whole school staff conference. I received positive feedback from staff who felt it would be a useful tool for them to use although I felt that the impact of this was limited, perhaps because colleagues were required to attend, rather than wanting to attend.

Although this project dealt with a relatively superficial dimension of educational achievement, it nevertheless had an impact in a number of important ways. From a personal perspective, it helped me to realise the importance of experimenting with, and refining, a process in order to aid students in their learning. It also helped me to appreciate how important it is to gather the views of students and other staff members in order to improve your work and tailor it to their needs. I learnt that, as a leader, you have to be responsible for moving things forward and you have to try to find ways to overcome the barriers you face in your work in order to be successful.

The use of mentoring to combat bullying

At the conclusion of this project, I felt proud of what I had accomplished and very positive about the whole experience of leading an initiative. I enjoyed sharing ideas with colleagues and eliciting their advice. The impetus for a second project came when

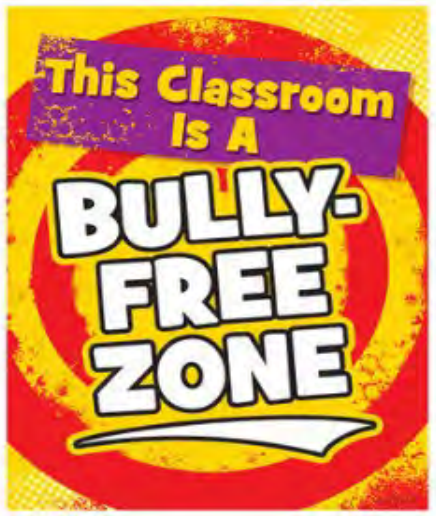
my school commissioned an external survey of staff, students and parents. This aimed to identify what the school did well in a number of different areas and also highlight the issues and problems which needed to be addressed. One of the top concerns for parents and students was the way in which the school controlled and tackled bullying. I was interested in this as I was teaching Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) to Year 7 at the time and we were looking at bullying. I approached my headteacher and suggested that I could ask the students to produce a display on anti-bullying. She told me that she was having a meeting with some KS3 students about how to tackle the problem during the following week and asked me if I would like to come along. I was keen to be involved in this and agreed.

During the meeting with the students, a number of interesting ideas were put forward. The students came up with the idea of having mentors to help new students settle into school but said that they thought it was better if these students were closer in age to the new Year 7 students. Following this meeting the Headteacher and I discussed the ideas and arranged to have a meeting with the Progress Leader of KS3 and the Assistant Headteacher who had responsibility for anti-bullying activities in the school. The idea of mentoring was discussed in this meeting and it was suggested that I should be asked to assume responsibility for this. At first I felt nervous about this; I had never been involved in anything outside my subject area before and the challenge of trying something new, and more importantly, wanting to make it a success, was daunting.

I consulted colleagues and began to put together an action plan which aimed to address how mentoring would work. This included strategies for selecting the mentors, raising awareness of mentoring in school, and dealing with incidents of bullying through mentoring. The action plan helped me to prioritise and organise. The first step was to recruit the mentors which I did through assemblies which would also provide an opportunity to raise awareness among both the students and the staff. I felt the recruitment of my mentors was a powerful opportunity to develop students as leaders (Frost and Roberts, 2011). I wanted to encourage them to be responsible and to make their own decisions.

The students seemed enthusiastic and many took application forms. Once I had received the completed application forms, decisions were made about who the mentors would be. They were invited to attend

a one day training session with me. This aimed to develop the skills they would need to be successful mentors, such as listening and decision-making. I also felt it was important to cover confidentiality and child protection with them so that they would know what to do if they were presented with a sensitive situation. Initially, I planned for mentoring to run twice a week: one session would be a breakfast club, designed to support students and set them up positively for the day ahead; the other session would be a drop-in session, where anyone experiencing problems or bullying could come along and meet with a mentor. Responsibilities with mentors were agreed and mentoring was promoted via assemblies, posters in register racks and letters home to parents.



Initially, we didn't have many students attending mentoring. I realise now that change is about initiating a process that will be to some extent unpredictable (Fullan, 1993). This was certainly true of mentoring at the start. I had sought to bring about a change in the way we handled bullying as a school but could not predict how well this would be received by staff and students. It was pleasing to see that numbers participating increased as the year went on. One of the reasons for this was that the Anti-Bullying Week I organised with my mentors was successful in raising awareness of what we did. Secondly, I found that students did not always want to attend on a voluntary basis so attendance was made compulsory for some students. I also worked with the Behaviour Unit in school, who referred some students who were involved in bullying incidents and needed help in improving their behaviour. By Christmas we had a

core of 'regulars' in mentoring and it had established itself with the students to the point that attending mentoring became part of their weekly routine and this meant that less reminders needed to be given to some students.

Evaluating and refining the provision

I needed to continually reassess and evaluate mentoring in order to keep it moving forward. After one term, I decided to disband the breakfast club and replace it with another drop-in session as there appeared to be more of a need for this. This proved to be successful. In addition, I sought to get my mentors involved in as many aspects of school life as I could. I wanted to continue to develop them as leaders. It is clear to me now that participation becomes far more effective when students are able to make decisions and have opportunities to take part in improving the school and contributing to leadership (McBeath, Frost, Frost and Pedder, 2007). They played an instrumental role in the preparation and execution of an Anti-Bullying Week. I sought their ideas and felt that the week would have a more powerful impact if the ideas for it came from them. This view is echoed by other teachers in the HertsCam Network including two colleagues from a primary school who had pushed the boundaries of pupil participation.

> Involving children in the planning process had a very powerful effect as they felt empowered and valued in undertaking this important role.
>
> (Edwards and Gilbert, 2011: 19)

I wanted my mentors to know that their ideas and contributions were valued. I also felt that a key component in successfully creating an effective 'dialogic climate' was to ensure that my students had influence over what they did (McBeath *et al.*, 2007). This view is reinforced in Schultz Jorgensen's 'Ladder of Participation' (2004) which clearly shows that participation becomes most effective when students are making decisions albeit with support from adults. I continued to involve the mentors as much as possible because of this. In the autumn term, I selected a number of mentors to come in and work with Year 7s in STRIVE lessons to promote mentoring and run some anti-bullying workshops with the students (www.strivenetwork.org). I felt this was important in helping the mentors to build relationships and trust with the younger students so that mentees would feel more comfortable in approaching them if they had a problem. It also helped in creating a climate of

participation and conveyed the view that the students were becoming part of a successful partnership for learning. It also supported the view that 'pupils learn best when they teach others' (McBeath *et al*., 2007: 42). At the end of the first term, an opportunity arose to have 5 mentors trained as 'cybermentors' for the Beatbullying charity's 'cybermentors' website. This was, in my view, a fantastic privilege. The mentors were selected via an application process and received training with the charity within a few weeks. By the end of this, they were accredited cybermentors who could log on to the site and help those being bullied across the country.

Rewarding the mentors was, to me, an important component in ensuring that mentoring thrived. There were perennial rewards for them in helping others, developing their own skills and having increased responsibility. These rewards, from my point of view, were much more significant than anything tangible that I could reward them with because it was derived from their own work rather than something given by me. However, I did recognise that these students were only 12 years old and experience has taught me that students like to have rewards which are material and measurable. This view was echoed in another teacher's account: 'praise gives them encouragement and self-confidence; stimulates positive attitudes and motivation; helps cognition; makes them feel satisfied; and strengthens the student/teacher relationship' (Lyons, 2007: 18).

It was with this in mind that I ensured that I met with my mentors every week to review how the week had gone and to also check their behaviour points. I established a reward system whereby the mentors were rewarded with 5 merits points if they had no negative behaviour points in that week. This was put in place to encourage them to be positive role models. They were rewarded with an additional 5 merit points if they attended their duty. They also received certificates and prizes for their involvement in Anti-Bullying Week and at the end of the year were recognised and rewarded in the Celebration Assembly with certificates and their favourite chocolate bar. In addition, I wrote letters home to parents praising them for their hard work and organised an end of year trip for them. This succeeded in creating a climate of honesty. They were always eager to show the progress they had made each week and recognising them in assemblies succeeded in increasing their profile among their peers. Recognising them in this way also had a galvanising effect on others in the year group; more students wanted

to know how they could get involved in mentoring and wanted to prove that they could contribute something towards helping others.

I felt it was important to evaluate the impact of mentoring for both the mentors and the mentees so, towards the end of the year I produced a questionnaire for the students to complete. The responses I received back from the mentors and mentees were very positive. It was clear that mentoring had helped the mentees to feel happier in school and developed their skills of reflection and decision-making. It had also helped the mentors to develop their skills and made them feel that they were making a valuable contribution to helping others and improving school life. On reflection, perhaps I should have done more to elicit individual students' views. However, I do feel that in some ways this was not necessary as the nature of mentoring meant that I was continually having conversations with the mentors and mentees, as well as mentor meetings and this meant that a 'participation climate' was being developed and was supporting and valuing their contributions (McBeath *et al*., 2007).

Even without this data, the impact on the students was clear to see. Students who had come to mentoring at the beginning of the year feeling upset, nervous and lacking confidence were seen, by the end of the year, to be thriving and showed more confidence in making their own decisions and asking for help. I felt incredibly proud of this and even more so of my mentors, who had shown an amazing ability to adapt and learn in difficult situations. When they began mentoring, they were very unsure about what questions to ask and seemed intimidated by mentees who were relying on them for help. As the year progressed they became much more skilled in dealing with issues that were presented to them that it was soon at a point where they required very little input from me in mentoring sessions. It was clear to me that my work was doing much to make progress towards achieving different facets of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda (DfES, 2003).

The project also had a positive impact on the students by making them aware and reflective towards their own actions. My mentors wanted to prove themselves as role models and were keen to show me that they had received no negative behaviour points during the week. I also noticed that they exhibited honesty when they had done something wrong by telling me about mistakes they had made and

trying to prove that they were sorry. This showed that they were developing into mature and responsible individuals.

It was also successful in raising the profile of the school. My cybermentors were interviewed on a regional radio show and I ensured that any achievements were publicised via the staff and school newsletters.

The project also had an impact on me. It reaffirmed for me the value in working with students in this way. I felt that I was creating and participating in something which was meaningful to the students. I also derived enjoyment and empowerment from being able to try out ideas without the constraints of the National Curriculum or exam boards, something which has a major impact in my role as Subject Leader of History.

Expanding mentoring

Following the completion of my second project, I knew I wanted to continue with mentoring and build on what I had achieved. One of the problems I had during the previous year was that I was leading and managing mentoring by myself. This proved to be problematic when issues of bullying arose that needed to be dealt with while I was running mentoring sessions. I also found it difficult to balance the demands of mentoring with my other responsibilities in school. I knew that I needed support from others in order for mentoring to be sustained (Bourne, 2007). I found that some staff wanted to get involved and one colleague agreed to help me run mentoring on a regular basis. I met with her early on and agreed our priorities for the year. One of my aims was to try to expand mentoring to work with different schools, as well as building on what had been achieved in school. This was because I had seen the transforming effect that mentoring had exhibited during the previous year and I wanted this work to transcend beyond the boundaries of my own school.

Following my meeting with my colleague, I produced an action plan which aimed to address the issue of expanding mentoring and working with other schools. I started with small things first of all. I then did assemblies for KS3 students with the aim of recruiting more mentors. One of my aims was to try and establish a system where my current mentors (who were now in Year 9) were training new mentors, who were selected from Year 8 and 9, in order to support students across the entire Key Stage, with a particular emphasis on Year 7. I wanted to create more unity between these year groups and

try to foster an environment of harmony and cohesion. I also felt that this was a more powerful way for the mentors to exercise influence over others, and would have more impact than anything I could hope to do (Murphy, 2007).

In addition to this, I made contact with three local primary schools with the aim of using my cybermentors to perform an assembly to the whole school and then do a workshop for a selected group of primary school students. I wanted to create a climate of participation on a much grander scale. One primary school took us up on the offer and I encouraged my mentors to produce all the resources and the assembly themselves so they had ownership over what they were doing. Following our visit to the local primary school, I encouraged the students to evaluate their work so that we could improve for next time.

From March 2011 onwards, my work expanded to involve a number of secondary schools. I was given the contact details of a Senior Teacher at a local secondary school who was looking to set up her mentoring scheme. I contacted her by email and arranged a meeting with her. I also had discussions with a former colleague who is now an Assistant Principal in another school. She was also keen to set up her own mentoring system after having seen what I had done during the previous academic year. I arranged to meet with her and some of her colleagues to talk through what I had done so far. We then arranged a follow-up visit so she could bring her mentors to observe a mentoring session. In order to evaluate the success of this work, I requested feedback from all three schools. The primary school did not come back to me. However, I received a positive evaluation from the Senior Teacher at the secondary school and my former colleague, referred to above, wrote a letter to my Headteacher praising the work that had been achieved. She also encouraged the students at her school to reflect on what they had learnt. This illustrated an important message about collaboration – by exercising shared values and a shared desire to achieve something in relation to a problem, it becomes much easier to initiate change. It was clear from this contact with different secondary schools that I was beginning to have influence beyond my expectations. I had not planned for this contact with secondary schools and it was a pleasing by-product of my work.

In addition to this work, I sought to build on the success of the first Anti-Bullying Week by trying to get more students involved. I

wanted participation in mentoring to extend beyond the mentors and mentees to encompass the whole school. I used PSHE lessons to encourage students to sign up to 'The Big March' which was organised by the Beatbullying charity; we developed a quiz for form time, continued with the 'Nominate a Positive Role Model' activity and ran an Anti-Bullying stall. I also did another assembly to promote the week. In addition, we developed a number of follow-up activities so students could see the impact of their involvement. I then organised follow-up assemblies several weeks later to reward students for their involvement.

My project has continued to have a positive impact on the students involved. In recruiting new mentors, I wanted to provide an opportunity for young people who had not always proven themselves to be model students. I did this for two reasons: firstly to ensure that the views of all students were being listened to (Rudduck, 2005 in Bourne, 2007) and secondly, to try to give them increased responsibility as a means of developing improved maturity, commitment and reliability (Bourne, 2007). This has worked very successfully and one particularly challenging student proved that he could make changes in his attitude and behaviour in order to make an effective contribution to the school community.

The project also had an impact on me as a leader. I have found it challenging to work with other schools and other members of staff. I have recognised the importance of empowering others as a facet of effective leadership.

Evaluating my development work as a whole

Through the completion of this development work, I was able to identify several key themes running through my projects. Helping students to overcome barriers was one of these themes. I feel that I have been successful in implementing strategies and structures to support students in doing this. When I began my development work, I did not plan for much of what I have achieved. Fullan (1993) argues that 'change is a journey, not a blueprint' and I certainly found this to be the case. I have appreciated the importance of gathering students' views as a means of implementing effective change. Instigating collaboration is not easy, and one of the main barriers I have faced from staff in my school and others is from those who have not always shared the same values and attitudes towards effecting change as me. Leadership has been developed, both in the students and in myself. I have appreciated how powerful and

rewarding the empowerment of students and staff can be. One of the most important lessons I have learnt is that it is vitally important to ensure that you continue to sustain your work in order for it to be effective and meaningful. If mentoring is to grow and flourish in my school it needs to involve all staff and become embedded within school structures and policies. I am proud of the success of my development work and hope it will continue to support and empower many students.

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Developing pedagogy with Teaching Assistants

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Abstract

Susie Bailey was a teacher in a special school for children with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) when she led a project to address the professional development needs of Teaching Assistants in her school.

The children at my school (age 3 to post-16) have mental and physical disabilities, which hugely affect their ability to learn. Most of them are heavily reliant on adults for their learning and day-to-day care. For this reason there is a high ratio of staff to students and for every teacher there are three Teaching Assistants (TAs).

The context of my development work

In our context it falls to the TAs to do a lot of the hands-on 'teaching' which is not problematic in itself, but a discussion with teaching staff concluded that it can be difficult to ensure that lessons are being carried out in the way they have planned. Many of the TAs did not seem to share our ideas about learning and teaching. We thought that this was because the majority of our TAs have had no training in pedagogy. They seemed to want students to achieve their objectives perfectly which sometimes led to completing learning tasks for them. This makes it difficult for students to develop their skills and understanding and for teachers to be able to assess students' learning. Understandably, TAs build very strong relationships with students and have detailed knowledge of them, which teachers depend upon, but there tends to be a focus on 'care' as opposed to a 'learning' which can be problematic. I felt strongly that although care is important, the main emphasis in my classroom should be on learning. The emphasis of my development work was therefore to improve the effectiveness of the Teaching Assistants at my school which necessitated an exploration of their roles and professional identities.

In my school the format of a lesson is not dissimilar to that in a mainstream context. There will be starter activities involving the whole class, followed by individual or small group work, concluding with a plenary. Due to the nature of our students, they require, if not one to one, then at least one to two 'teaching' especially during the individual or group work part of the lesson. Hence our TAs play a vital part in the learning of our students.

The Plowden Report in the 1960s recommended the 'provision of aides' in the classroom (DfES, 1967) and the government introduced the single job title of 'Teaching Assistant' in an attempt to avoid the confusion arising from the existence of 48 different job titles for classroom support staff (Smith, Whitby and Sharp, 2004). I think the title 'Learning Support Assistant' is more helpful, a view that is borne out by others (Cowan, 2005; Farrell, Balshaw and Polat, 2000). Most of the research on TAs highlights the positive impact they have on students' learning. Their roles have developed from the 'washing paint pots' stereotype to active involvement in the learning process (Smith, Kenner and Barton-Hide, 1999; Mencap, 1999; Rose, 2000). An Ofsted inspection of our school reported the good work of skilled TAs (Ofsted, 2008), yet, as a team of teachers, we felt that our TAs often lacked pedagogical skills and understanding.

The problem was manifest in the recording of students' work. Our TAs are expected to complete documentation at the end of each lesson for each student they have worked with. This serves both as a record of what has been done and as a formative assessment tool for the teacher. It was not uncommon for TAs to write comments such as 'Charlie enjoyed this lesson' which says nothing about what he has learnt and what he might be able to learn next. Sometimes TAs did not focus on the learning objective set by the teacher.

Teachers have a role to play in the professional development of TAs, especially through modelling. We needed to consider and reflect on the role of the teacher in their communication with the TAs and the modelling of good practice as well as the provision of training.

Professional development for TAs

Research indicates that, although TAs are generally invited to whole-school training sessions, less than half regularly attend (Smith, Whitby and Sharp, 2004). The TAs at my school are paid hourly and only for the hours of the teaching day. Due to the structure of the school day, TAs usually have a 45 minute lunch break, although the

calculation of their pay assumes a break of only 30 minutes. We could therefore accumulate the additional 15 minutes per day and ask TAs to stay after school on Mondays for an extra hour and 15 minutes. I planned to use this time slot to provide training sessions and, if necessary, conduct interviews.

The content of training for TAs varies and is often not directly linked to teaching and learning. Research indicates that 'First Aid' tends to be the dominant topic (70%) with topics like 'assessment and recording' getting scant attention (8%) (Smith *et al.,* 2004). Teaching and learning does not feature at all. Is it not essential that TAs have a basic knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning and pedagogy? Nearly all the TAs at my school had attended both internal and external training on various topics such as 'Understanding Visual Impairment' and 'Physical Intervention'. They generally reported finding such training sessions useful to some degree, but not in terms of their 'teaching' abilities in the classroom. Indeed, the vast majority of training our TAs receive is very topic-specific. For example, all our TAs are trained in basic sign language. This of course aids their communication with some of our students but does not necessarily help them build more specific teaching skills.

After careful consideration I planned a project in which I would work with TAs from my class (11-12 year olds) and TAs from a primary class (8-9 year olds). I chose to work collaboratively with a colleague and to liaise with the Deputy Headteacher. This had potential benefits in that we would be sharing and supporting each other in the work of the project, thus sharing any risk-taking involved (Hargreaves, 1992). I anticipated that we would need to have some discrete training sessions, but most of the professional development for TAs would probably occur in the flow of classroom practice through teachers such as myself modelling the desired practices. This has already proved to be successful in my school and has been noted to be an effective leadership tool by others (Hall and George, 1999; Watkinson, 2003).

Introducing the project

I shared my project plan with my primary colleague and discussed with her what was involved. The project was then introduced to the TAs from the two classes at a Monday night staff meeting in early September. I explained that I wanted to interview them to find out what they thought about their role and to explore their professional

development needs. I would then design a professional development programme that would meet those needs and we would evaluate it.

All but one of the TAs agreed to take part in the project. The one exception was someone who was fearful of the idea of being interviewed or being observed; she saw it as a 'test'. Perhaps this was because her only experience of being observed was by the Headteacher as part of a performance management process. On reflection it may have been better to avoid the word 'interview' when introducing the project.

Time pressure was an obstacle even at that early stage; the content of the Monday night staff meetings was already mapped out for that academic year. There were only three meetings available to work with the TAs in the Autumn term and this would normally be used to make resources and discuss students' current needs. I was forced to conduct the interviews in the 15 minute 'tea break' between teaching and the after school sessions. The unwillingness of some TAs to be involved in the project during anything but their paid hours was frustrating if understandable. TAs are paid hourly and, for many, salaries do not reflect the level of responsibility (Lee, 2002; Lee and Mawson, 1998; Farrell *et al.*, 1999; Watkinson, 1999; Smith *et al.*, 2004). Our TAs said they wanted to learn and improve their skills but felt their role was not sufficiently valued.

Exploring TAs' needs and knowledge

By late October I had conducted all the interviews with the TAs. I used a semi-structured interview technique and a digital recorder because I thought this might put the TAs at ease. Some TAs were still cautious with their responses even though I made clear that data would be used in an ethical and sensitive way. On reflection, I felt that the TAs generally looked on these initial interviews as 'tests' rather than part of a learning process. This I think is partly due to the style of their annual appraisals with the Headteacher over the last two years, in which many TAs reported finding it like a job interview.

All of the TAs shared the view that their main role was to 'support or assist the teacher'. Practically this meant tasks such as laminating symbols. Only two out of the six TAs interviewed talked about supporting the students, but even then they used words such as 'support' or 'care'. The word 'learning' did not feature at all in their comments. Of course the fact that I was a teacher asking the

question was likely to have influenced their response. Their view of the teacher's role also seemed limited to practical activities such as planning lessons and scheduling staff breaks. Again, there was no mention of learning. In relation to their professional development needs, TAs requested training on specific practical tasks such as using the computer to print pictures and symbols. Only one person wanted help to improve her 'teaching skills' in spite of the fact that they had all said that they had received very little or no training on how to 'teach' students and follow lesson plans and learning objectives given by the teacher. This was puzzling.

Following these interviews I undertook some informal observations. What emerged from this was that the TA might be working with a student on a specific activity without fully understanding how that activity linked to the learning objective. This meant that often the activity was not focused in the right direction and what was recorded as achievement was unrelated to the learning objective. To address this I introduced 'I can' cards for each student. Prior to each lesson I attached an individual learning objective to the top of each card in symbol form and starting with the phrase 'I can'. This meant that not only was I communicating the learning objective to the students but also to the TAs and they would be able to refer back to them when writing the student's record. I found this to be very successful in improving the focus on the learning objective.

Classroom activities: work or learning?

I shared what I learned from the interviews and observations with the TAs, my primary colleague and the Deputy Headteacher. The discussion centred on their role in supporting students' learning. It seemed significant to me that the word most commonly used to refer to students' activity in the classroom was 'work' rather than 'learning'. It was clear to us that we had to focus our professional development programme on learning objectives and thought it might help also to enable TAs to become more familiar with 'P levels' which are the prescribed assessment statements we use to assess students' achievement.

It was decided that we would run two half-hour training sessions, one on introducing P levels and the other on lesson plans and learning objectives. Each training session involved the teacher working through a sample lesson plan and giving examples from recent lessons. TAs were then encouraged to ask questions and discuss the

documents as a group before designing a short activity to suit a learning objective or identifying the level of achievement evident.

At the end of the first session we asked the TAs if they had found it useful. There was a general consensus that sessions were useful, but it was difficult to elicit any detailed feedback. One useful comment made the following morning was noted in my journal.

> *Lucy said she found the session had made her think and focus more on what the learning objective was for the child she was working with and not on the activity. Therefore she felt she now had a bit more confidence to adapt and extend an activity to enhance the set learning objective.*
>
> (Journal, November 2008)

I asked Lucy why she had not communicated her feelings about the session when immediately invited to. She explained that she did not have the confidence to express her opinion immediately after the session, as it meant doing so in front of her colleagues. She felt that she would have appeared 'too keen' or even a 'teacher's pet' if she had shared her enthusiasm and interest in the session. I eventually came to understand that there was a culture which demanded that you do only the job you are paid for and not take on, or show interest in roles that were considered to be predominantly the teachers'. However, we noticed that our sessions were beginning to make some inroads into this. For example, one TA had commented that she had learnt how complex assessment of our students could be, and now appreciated why teachers were given specific time to plan and prepare.

We continued to observe practice in the classrooms and I chose to conduct interviews with the TAs as a group. This was partly due to time pressure, but mainly because I wanted to see if it would increase some of the TAs' confidence to elaborate on their responses compared to those given during the individual interviews. There were mostly positive responses about the first training sessions. They had given them a better understanding of either P levels or learning objectives. There was evident disagreement: two of the TAs said that they now felt they understood all they needed to know about learning objectives and that they would not benefit from further training on this topic, whereas Lucy challenged this by saying that this was only 'the tip of the iceberg'. Others quickly disagreed with Lucy, arguing that it was only teachers who needed to know more about such topics. This felt like a backward step.

Students' perspectives

I thought that it would be appropriate to involve some of the students at this point of the project. I was optimistic following the successful participation of some of our students in a previous 'student participation' project (MacBeath, Frost, Frost and Pedder, 2008). I had been impressed with how the students involved in the project had expressed themselves and were able to communicate their opinion to others, despite their disabilities. I selected two of the most able students from my class and interviewed them informally about their learning after they had worked with a TA, on a specific learning objective. I used a mixture of verbal and symbol-prompted questions about what they had been learning about that lesson. I tried this on several occasions but with very limited success. The lack of time was one problem but it was also very difficult for the students to express what they had been learning about and even more difficult to say how TAs had helped. One issue that was abundantly clear was that the students were unfamiliar with the word 'learning'. Sometimes, after encouragement from myself, they would demonstrate to me what they had learnt by repeating the activity.

I felt that to include the students in a more valid way in the project would require additional skills and techniques and fundamentally, more time than was available and therefore was beyond the scope of this project. Their small involvement did, however, highlight a key aspect of the work of the TAs; how they communicated the learning objective to the students with whom they had worked.

Putting myself in their shoes

When our school was hit by a viral infection, more than half the staff and students were unable to attend for a period of two weeks. In order to keep the school running safely we closed each class for one day and redeployed staff to other classes to cover for their sick colleagues. I was redeployed to the Foundation Stage class (3-4 year olds) in the role of TA where I found that one of the TAs had been asked to take on the role of the teacher. She was apologetic and said she found it strange even though she had many years' experience of working as a TA and had experience of leading a class (including other TAs). I assured her that the arrangement made good sense because of her experience and knowledge of the class. This experience proved to be invaluable; it gave me a great deal of insight into what it was like to be a TA at my school. I had been aware that the TAs with whom I work tend to see me as a role model, but I did

not realise just how much. Watkinson (2003) cites case study evidence to support this idea and adds that also it is often the informal 'fleeting' conversation that unwittingly adds to TA's knowledge and understanding. I also realised how difficult it was for TAs to find the time to read lesson plans and other documents since all the time was spent with the students.

Shortly after this experience I took the opportunity to repeat it in the context of my own classroom. I stayed to work as a TA during a session for which I normally had non-contact time outside the classroom while one of my TA's, Lucy, planned and led the lesson. I asked Lucy to regard me as a fellow TA rather than as a teacher. At the start of the lesson Lucy sought my approval and permission as she introduced the lesson and directed the other staff. I reminded her that she was leading and was the 'teacher' for the lesson and she soon settled into her own natural teaching style without my direct support. I found it surprising just how specific I needed Lucy's instructions to be in order to understand how the students were to complete the task. This was despite the fact that I was working with students I knew well and with my teaching knowledge and experience.

Building the dialogue

For the second series of professional development sessions we selected the topic of 'number skills' which is taught every day in both classes. The sessions took on the same format as the first sessions, with the teacher explaining the lesson plan and the learning objectives. The TAs were invited to discuss in pairs the learning objective for a specific student and how they would proceed to carry out the planned activity to support that objective. They were then encouraged to discuss how they would communicate the learning objective to the students and keep them focussed on achieving that objective. The pairs were then asked to share their conversations with the whole group and suggest and discuss alternative activities.

The second series of training sessions lasted just under half an hour. The other teacher and I had deliberately chosen to keep the sessions shorter than before, in order to allow time for questions. We wanted to create an opportunity for the TAs not only to ask questions about the training sessions but also to hold a professional discussion. After the first training sessions many of the TAs had not wanted to comment or ask questions. I was pleased to note that this was not the

case after the second training sessions. Nearly all the TAs had appeared to have more confidence in discussion.

Following these sessions I conducted further group interviews and here again found a noticeable difference in the level of willingness and confidence to contribute compared to the first group interview. I noticed a significant difference in not only the volume of responses but also in the language the TAs used; words such as 'learning objective' and 'achievement' were used. One TA even used the words 'success criteria' to help explain her point. We had not introduced this term but the TAs had begun to develop their understanding through informal conversations. A study on the impact of school-based learning by Swann and Loxley (1998) confirms the importance of increased confidence in the use of 'technical vocabulary' amongst TAs and that, with this new vocabulary, TAs found it easier to talk to teachers and others about education.

Evaluating our achievement

At the end of the project, the other teacher, Deputy Headteacher and myself met to evaluate the impact of the project as a whole on the teaching and learning in our classrooms. We agreed that there was a significant difference in the way in which our TAs worked. They now communicated learning objectives with students at the beginning of the activity. They nearly always referred to the learning objective when giving both verbal and written feedback, and, since the training on P levels, some TAs regularly discussed the students' progress towards the next level. TAs were now more realistic and accurate with their feedback on students' achievements during lessons, and no longer over-prompted students in order for them to achieve the learning objective. We agreed that the TAs now had a more helpful understanding of learning and increased confidence to question the students' achievement without regarding any lack of achievement as their fault.

A meeting immediately before school on a Friday morning is now solely dedicated for TAs to raise and discuss any issues they have, and for the teacher to share information on forthcoming lessons. Although this meeting technically takes place during unpaid time for the TAs, they are encouraged to attend through the relaxed and informal breakfast club style. Since I started to hold these meetings, the number of TAs attending has increased, as they have realised how beneficial the information gained is to helping them fulfil their

role. The other issues highlighted by this project, such as the need for clearer job descriptions, requires collaboration with the management of the school and further research to present possible solutions.

The technique of formal training sessions however, did not have the most significant impact on the development of the TAs teaching skills. The project itself initiated a number of informal professional conversations about learning, between teachers and TAs. I think it was a combination of such conversations and modelling by teachers that had the most signification impact on the development of the TAs' teaching skills.

All of the TAs involved in the project reported that they had learnt from the experience, saying that it has had a positive impact of their work. The other teacher involved reported that she too had learnt from the experience of being involved in the project. She felt she had improved her working relationship with her TAs. We both felt that the TAs' effectiveness in the classroom has improved. Therefore, the learning experiences and opportunities for our students' have improved.

The role of TAs and their professionalism, emerged as a key question during the course of the project. It had led to discussion about TAs' knowledge requirements, their understanding and how comparable it was to a teacher's. This shift in focus, from TAs' training needs to their roles and professionalism, reflects the changes in my learning and understanding during the project.

This project has been an immense learning experience for me. I have gained skills and experience in leadership and working collaboratively with colleagues. During the course of the project, I have been able to experience situations from the perspective of a TA at my school. I feel I have learnt the most by working through the challenges presented to me along the way.

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Building learning power in a secondary school

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Abstract

Heather is a teacher at Birchwood High School in Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire. She was Deputy Head of Science when she was invited to become a co-leader of a development project which aimed to establish Building Learning Power (BLP) within the school.

Introduction

The opportunity to jointly lead the whole school introduction of Building Learning Power (BLP) was offered to me because concerns that had materialised during my earlier development work matched concerns identified by the school's senior leadership team (SLT). Over the previous five years my school had seen an increase in academic results, but I questioned whether students' learning capacity had actually changed or whether students are merely getting better at fulfilling exam criteria. As part of an earlier project I had invited the Secondary Science Advisor from the local authority to carry out lesson observations and we subsequently agreed that students seemed to be content to engage in lower order tasks but were not sufficiently committed to learning and were reluctant to solve problems for themselves. I accepted the invitation to co-lead the BLP initiative because I believed it had the potential to address my concerns.

As a project, BLP was developed and publicised by Guy Claxton (2002) with the aim of developing study skills and 'good teaching'. BLP has since evolved and is now aimed at engaging students in the process of learning, enabling them to think and talk about their own learning. It also endeavours to encourage teachers to become better learners (Claxton, 2006). Ultimately the aim is for all students to understand themselves as learners and for teachers to be using BLP based teaching practice. BLP is a vehicle for students to develop an understanding of how they have learned something, as well as what they have learned, encouraging a learning dialogue based on four major learning dispositions: *Resilience*, *Resourcefulness*,

Reflectiveness, and *Reciprocity* – the 4R's (Gornall, Chambers and Claxton, 2005).

The vision for the first year was to train a small group of twenty interested, enthusiastic teachers in the principles and practices of BLP. We called this group of teachers the 'BLP champions', because they would be championing the BLP cause within their departments. They would also play a key role in developing a teaching style which embraces the language of BLP. The training offered would take the form of a whole school introduction and three sessions led by an external company – referred to henceforth as 'The Company' – with expertise in helping schools embed BLP into their teaching practice. We started small with one year group, Year 7, to increase the confidence of the BLP champions so that in the second year they could transfer their knowledge about what works to other teachers and students.

By encouraging students to learn more independently and persuading teachers to adopt more participative teaching methods we hoped that fuller responsibility would be taken by the students for their lives and learning (Deakin Crick, 2006; Black, McCormick, James and Pedder, 2006) which fits with the wider national focus on personalised learning and the Personal Learning and Thinking Skills framework (QCA, 2008).

BLP is an approach to learning which uses the concept of 'learning fitness' which is achieved by developing the four learning dispositions. Each disposition is cultivated by exercising a number of 'learning muscles' (set out below).

> **Resilience:** The ability to *persevere*, *manage distractions*, be *absorbed* in their own learning and *noticing* links or patterns in their learning.
>
> **Reflectiveness:** being able to *plan* learning, *revising* ideas, *distilling* facts or information and *meta-learning*, understanding themselves as learners.
>
> **Resourcefulness:** being able to *make links*, *imagine* what the end product will be, *reason* their ideas and processes and *question* to extend learning, as well as *capitalising* by drawing on the resources available

> **Reciprocity:** being *empathetic*, *collaborating*, *imitating* good learning practices and being *interdependent*
>
> (Gornall *et al*., 2005)

All of these 'learning muscles' must be exercised in order to become a 'fit' learner. The idea of learning fitness was useful because it encapsulated a language that can be used by both students and teachers. It resonates with the socio-cultural aspect of learning (Wertsch, 1985) and involves teachers and students in the process of 'paying attention' to how students go about learning (Claxton, 2006). BLP encourages students to understand themselves as learners through personal reflection which enables us to adapt and change when mistakes are made, thus becoming more resilient. It appeared to me that many perspectives about learning were wrapped up in BLP and confirmed to me that it was the right vehicle for improving student learning capacity.

The challenge of leadership

The opportunity to jointly lead BLP and the prospect of impacting on the learning of all students was exciting, it was also daunting, due to my lack of experience and because I did not hold a leadership post. My role changed from being an individual acting within my own classroom, to one where I was jointly leading a group of teachers interested in impacting on learning. Having accepted the challenge, I consulted the literature about school leadership.

There seemed to be some consensus that effective leadership has a starting point and ultimately an end goal or vision. According to MacBeath and Dempster (2009) the starting point for all leadership is moral purpose. Mine was to develop a deeper understanding of how we can help people learn more effectively. This purpose needed to be made clear to enable colleagues to start using the concepts of BLP, confidently guiding students through the learning process and giving them opportunities to assess both what and how they have learned.

To affect a change in practice teachers would need to develop their own sense of purpose. Their 'agency' needed to be nourished (Frost, 2006; MacBeath and Dempster, 2009). Human agency – the capacity to initiate and sustain activity voluntarily – can be seen to be the bridge between leadership and learning (Frost and Durrant, 2003). This was the key to making BLP successful.

The question was how to convey the moral purpose in such a way that teachers would be inspired. A list of useful leadership tasks can be derived from sources such as Sergiovanni (2000) and Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006). They included facilitating shared vision, linking to moral purpose, 'managing' in the form of supporting teachers with their day to day needs, 'motivating', 'modelling' and 'explaining'. One task I felt uncomfortable with was 'supervising', ensuring that the aims and commitments are met. I felt that teachers needed space to try out ideas without fear of being pushed to meet specific objectives. Other tasks pivotal to the leadership of BLP were recruiting, selecting and evaluating. Establishing a team of champions and facilitating successful collaboration would be needed. The 'collaborative' leadership style (MacBeath, 2004) depends on a reservoir of good will in which trust and expertise are shared. The notion of 'democratic' leadership highlighted the need for a diverse, collaborative group of teachers with a sense of shared purpose and affirmed for me the need to develop a democratic, collegial type of leadership with a cross curricular group of teachers.

Overall I believe that the road to increased learning capacity through the introduction of BLP is linked to both leadership and learning. The learning dispositions developed by students are dependent upon factors such as emotions (DFES, 2007) and experience (Black, McCormick, James and Pedder, 2006). They involve both an individual and a social process in which learning behaviours can be changed or developed. Success would depend on the development of collegiality and a strong sense of moral purpose within the BLP champion team.

The recruitment of the BLP champions and introduction of BLP was jointly led by Val, an Assistant Headteacher, Caroline, a Head of Faculty and myself. Val took financial responsibility and liaised with The Company referred to earlier; she also kept members of the senior leadership team informed about the progress of the initiative. Caroline and I made the initial introduction to all teaching staff and I took the role of supporting the BLP champions and organising the training days and meetings.

Introduction of BLP to the Year 7 tutor team

I began at the beginning of the academic year by introducing the concepts of BLP to the Year 7 tutor team whose enthusiasm and cooperation would be essential. I also needed the Year 7 tutors to

help the students to collate a learning portfolio, which would give the tutors a vehicle with which to discuss learning with their students. In September I broached the subject of BLP with the Year 7 tutors at their tutor meeting. Sewing the first seeds of BLP early was important although I was mindful that the first day back after the summer holiday is information-packed and for some it may be the first day in a new post. My part in this meeting was brief and I left the tutors with a document outlining the vision of BLP and their part in its introduction. I felt that the initial meeting had gone well and, although there were not many questions, there were a few members of the team who had shown enthusiasm, including the Head of Year.

In the next tutor meeting I introduced the learning portfolios. I was aware that there may be difficulties with the language of BLP and asked one of the form tutors to give a copy of the portfolio cover to their form. The feedback gained from these students was taken into account and used to produce the final version of the portfolio cover. Subsequently, a tutor meeting was attended by both Val and myself. Val's presence, as a member of the Senior Leadership Team, helped to clarify and reassure the tutor team that BLP is a whole school initiative and not just my project. We also wanted to build trust and assure colleagues that they would be supported as BLP champions. During this meeting learning portfolios were discussed. It was agreed that we would start the portfolios before the whole school introduction of BLP so that students and form tutors became familiar with the 4R's and took their first tentative steps into BLP.

An unexpected outcome of the meeting was that the tutors raised the idea of using the portfolio covers as posters. Displaying them in classrooms offered a uniform approach and made reflection on learning during lessons easier for the students and teachers. The Year 7 tutor team was already thinking ahead and working alongside us. Within six weeks of the portfolio introduction, and after the whole school training in October, the covers were laminated and mounted in every classroom as a reminder of the BLP language.

The initial recruitment of teachers as BLP champions focused on the Year 7 tutor team but we did not wish to exclude interested parties and we needed a representative from each subject as well as a mix of experience and expertise. We decided to ask the Heads of Faculties whose subjects were not already represented to nominate a champion and ask for volunteers to come forward.

We launched BLP to all staff during a professional development day. Val, Caroline and I had met prior to the introduction and planned how to tackle the day. The overall purpose was to raise awareness of BLP, communicate our sense of moral purpose, recruit the remaining champions and consider the practicalities of introducing BLP into lessons. Val's initial introduction clarified the rationale for BLP linked to the overall vision for the school. We felt that Val's position as an Assistant Headteacher was influential. Caroline and I introduced the concepts of BLP and modelled how it could be incorporated into lessons. There had been other recent initiatives so the presentation needed to be relevant, punchy and interesting, giving key information and practical activities. Time was allocated to look at departmental schemes of work and assess where BLP might fit into lessons. We wished to illustrate that BLP did not require radical changes, just a repackaging of tasks or shift in the approach to lessons to begin with.

Interviews with some of the BLP champions a few weeks later indicated that the introduction had been seen as 'inspirational' and as 'being something that is quite straight forward' and not as a threat of 'yet more work'. The interviews also highlighted that the enthusiasm we had shown had actually rubbed off and there was excitement about the prospect of making our students more effective learners. Not everyone was convinced of course. We faced the usual challenge where a few colleagues adopted the 'if it ain't broke don't fix it' attitude. Trying to implement change with those who think like this is always difficult (Williams, 2002) so we decided, initially, to concentrate energy and time on those who were enthusiastic. Another challenge arose when one department head nominated a team member to be a champion because they thought that they would benefit from participating even though they had not previously shown any aptitude for this sort of task.

Training the BLP champions

Once the BLP champions were in place, three training days were organised. The Company was employed due to its experience of tailoring the introduction of BLP to schools. My role was to work with their trainer, Simon, to ensure that our needs were met and momentum was maintained between training sessions. The first of three training days was scheduled for the beginning of January on one of the staff training days already within the calendar.

Maintaining momentum between the introduction in October and the first training session in January was a challenge. It was easier to achieve this with the Year 7 tutors due to their regular contact with their students and their work with the portfolios, but it was not entirely successful with the other teachers involved. Subsequent interviews indicated that apathy had crept in. It was clear to me that a more open and honest approach might have helped. I realised that I should have met with all the BLP champions to discuss the training issues. Maximising dialogue and collegiality is important to support change (Sergiovanni, 2001; Blase and Anderson, 1995).

The first BLP training day served to increase the 'learning dialogue' (MacBeath and Dempster, 2009) and feeling of collegiality between the BLP champions. For the first time all the BLP champions were together, sharing ideas and thoughts, both positive and negative. The concepts introduced previously were reiterated and the day provided a safe arena for open and honest discussion. The idea of the 4R's was developed to include the seventeen 'learning muscles' and led to the posters and the reflection sheets used for the portfolios to be changed to reflect this shift. I thought this change might be confusing but the Year 7 tutors and students felt that the 'learning muscles' made the 4R's less restricting. Soon after this session one of the tutors took the initiative by producing and sharing a power point presentation, introducing the 'learning muscles'.

Feedback from the day indicated that, although there was enthusiasm, there was concern that, if the professional development day scheduled for February focused entirely on BLP, the much needed coursework moderation session would have to take place in other marginal time. We listened to these views and then negotiated with The Company to condense the next session into half a day.

Extending BLP further

The February session reviewed progress and extended teachers' thinking about using BLP in their lessons. The idea of 'split-screen teaching' was introduced in which two learning objectives are utilised, one related to the knowledge base of the subject and the other to learning muscles. A positive step was the linking of the seventeen learning muscles and the Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (QCA, 2008) which are integral to the new National Curriculum and therefore to departmental schemes of work.

The training session had greater pace than the last one and both Simon and I detected more positive attitudes. There were still elements of confusion about integrating BLP into lessons and about some of the additional language introduced. The evaluation feedback indicated that additional support was needed. Comments such as 'I would like to discuss more about how to weave BLP into the scheme of work' and 'I think that a meeting is needed to talk about school direction' were made. It was important to maintain momentum and keep the dialogue going so a meeting in which lesson plans and schemes of work were discussed was planned for March.

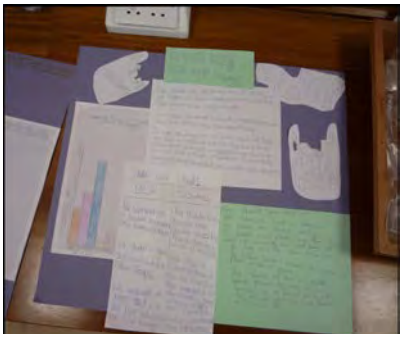
The final push came in April and was again condensed to half a day. The trainer, Simon, appeared to be unsure about the direction of the session. This perception was echoed in the feedback given by the BLP champions:

> *There was too much time going over the same things. I was really looking forward to discussing the best way to implement BLP throughout Birchwood.*
>
> (Training feedback, April)

Although this might seem to be a negative impact, it indicated that the concepts of BLP had been embedded and that the BLP champion meetings were valued as a vehicle for moving forward. Another point highlighted during the training session was that it was not possible for one person to have all the answers. The dimensions of team-work, sharing experiences and taking responsibility had been strengthened and it was clear that the champions were beginning to take ownership of BLP; collegiality was being increased. Ideas about producing a workable set of procedures for new and untrained teachers were also discussed.

Impact on classroom practice

To find evidence of BLP being used in lessons I emailed the BLP champions to find examples of tasks they had created and used. The response was very encouraging. The images below illustrate the kind of creative activity teachers had initiated in their classrooms.





These activities had involved a lot of dialogue which increased understanding and ownership. Within one of the Geography classrooms, poems had been created by Year 7 students which displayed the use of the 'reciprocity' learning muscle by making links with other subjects and being imaginative. In Science, posters were produced during a scientific investigation. At the end of the investigation students were asked to reflect upon and record the learning muscles used. Another extended Science project incorporated the use of a reflection sheet in every lesson to pinpoint which learning muscles had been used. These sorts of activities allowed time in lessons to reflect upon learning.

Interviews with teachers indicated that they were beginning to look at activities through a BLP lens. In my own classroom practice I became more conscious of the skills students can use to reach the lesson's learning objective and have given more opportunity to learn from mistakes. This type of awareness was echoed in interviews with colleagues. The changes were quite subtle; it is clear that the continuous drip-feeding of information, meetings and training have served to increase understanding of the concepts of BLP and how to incorporate it into classroom practice.

Impact on student learning

To try to assess the impact on students' learning I analysed students' learning portfolios, my interviews with students and their video-podcasts. Several themes emerged including the use of the language of BLP, learning dispositions and self-awareness.

Using the language of BLP

The use of a learning language is very important in knowledge building and fundamental to understanding of the learning process (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 1999; Claxton, 2002). Language is

essential within a socio-cultural view of learning (Wertsch, 1985). The video podcasts showed that students were able to recognise if they had been 'resourceful', 'resilient', 'reciprocal' or 'reflective' (Claxton, 2002). It appeared that the language of the 4R's was being used fluently. However, the podcasts were brief and depth of learning was not obvious. I also wondered if the language was being used in a tokenistic way, so I turned to the portfolios to test this further. The students' fortnightly reflections using the template provided showed that most of the students had begun to express their ideas about learning using the learning muscle language, such as *making links* in lessons and *planning* homework tasks. The *planning* learning muscle was also evident in the student interviews.

The use of the language of BLP was also evident when three Year 7 students were invited to talk to parents at a 'Parents' BLP Introduction Evening'. These personal testimonies were powerful and included comments such as these.

> *In Science I have also been working with people I wouldn't normally work with. It's meant that I've had to collaborate well and work as a team member.*
>
> (Student 11, Personal Testimony)

> *In the 4R's there is our way of learning from simple things that we do without even thinking about it, like planning my work to things like…noticing what other people do.*
>
> (Student 12, Personal Testimony)

The second comment is particularly interesting as it shows an ownership of BLP that I had not yet imagined. Both comments indicate that the students feel part of a learning community and that learning is a collaborative process.

Evidently students were beginning to get to grips with the language of BLP. Students seemed to be more engaged in lessons now that they had a language with which to discuss their learning process. There was still some way to go with some of the words being misunderstood by both teachers and students, but real progress was evident.

Learning dispositions: the 4R's

As we started to use BLP I noticed that students' dispositions towards learning began to change. Time to reflect on their learning and to learn from mistakes was beginning to pay off in the form of a

change in behaviour. The classification of learning dispositions – *resilience, reciprocity, reflectiveness and resourcefulness* (Gornal *et al.*, 2005) – was useful in the sense making process due to them being split into seventeen learning muscles discussed earlier. Evidence from the 'learning muscle wheel' provided an overview of learning dispositions and gave a before and after view. The results were not very impressive in the early stages but there were encouraging signs from other data sources.

Resilience can be sub-divided into four learning capacities: absorption, managing distractions, noticing and perseverance (Gornal *et al.*, 2005). I had seen greater willingness for students to persevere with redrafting text or redrawing graphs in light of mistakes, possibly reflecting that they were not being judged by their ability to do well (Walker and Dimmock, 2005) and resonating with Black *et al.'s* (2004) ideas of learning from mistakes. My observation was echoed by others.

> *…more tenacity and more determination to just stick with it, more resilience…*
>
> (Teacher E, April 2009)

> *In PE* [Physical Education] *I kept doing things wrong but I didn't give up and then I did very well.*
>
> (Student 8, Portfolio)

'Managing distractions' and 'noticing' were mentioned in the video podcasts, portfolios and in other personal testimonies.

> *… things like using different methods* [of learning] *by noticing what other people do.*
>
> (Student 12, personal testimony)

> *I managed distractions in karate and didn't get any push-ups.*
>
> (Student 8, portfolio)

'Resourcefulness' consists of five learning capacities: questioning, making links, imagining, reasoning and capitalising (Gornal *et al.*, 2005). 'Questioning' featured highly in my data.

> *I have changed a little bit because before I didn't ask any questions…and now I ask more and more!*
>
> (Student Interview 2)

Although more questions were being asked it was not clear whether this was questioning to extend learning or just to clarify the next step in a process. Lesson observations would be needed to clarify this. At least it was clear that students had become more confident to ask questions.

'Capitalising' was not mentioned in the video podcasts, but teachers had noticed subtle changes in student behaviour with a wider range of resources being used to arrive at answers by themselves.

> *If I get stuck I ask my partner to explain it to me.*
>
> (Student 13, Personal Testimony)

> *I went to the library to do some home learning to try and catch up.*
>
> (Student 9, portfolio)

'Reflectiveness', which involves planning, revising, distilling and meta-learning, featured strongly in the data although it was interesting to note considerable confusion about the idea of 'revising' which for many of students was interpreted as rote learning information for examinations. Planning – the ability to visualise the learning goal and plan the learning journey – was more straight-forward and real progress was evident.

> *I'm better at planning my homework project so it's not all rushed.*
>
> (Student interview 2)

'Reciprocity' links with the socio-cultural aspect of learning; it incorporates the learning capacities of interdependence, collaboration, empathy and listening and imitation (Gornal *et al*., 2005). The interviews and portfolios indicated that there had been some impact, albeit small.

> *I was in PE with XXX and XXX and I worked as a team and we won the basketball.*
>
> (Student 10, portfolio)

Examples of 'empathy' and 'listening' could also be found, although for some the listening muscle was one that was identified as needing to be exercised.

> *I need to build more learning power by listening more in class to get a better level.*
>
> (Student 10, portfolio)

There were only a few examples of 'interdependence' although the comment below indicates an awareness of this.

> *I flex my interdependence learning muscle in Maths quite a lot. It means I normally work on my own but if I get stuck then I ask my partner to explain it to me.*
>
> (Student 13, personal testimony)

Evidence for some of these learning capacities seemed weak. I wondered if this could be because capacities such as 'absorption' and 'meta-learning' are difficult to measure. It is also possible that some capacities could be dependent on age and ability, taking time to develop. Perhaps the main problem is simply the problem of understanding encountered earlier with 'revision'. Most of these concepts are open to interpretation and students are not always able to articulate how their dispositions are developing.

Overall I concluded that evidence for improvements in learning dispositions is not conclusive but there is evidence of changes in the right direction. It is at least clear that students are becoming more self-aware as learners. Claxton's (2002) central concern is for students to become confident and reflective learners, believing that they can continually improve their habits of learning. This shone through in the interviews with the words 'confidence' and 'reflection' being used numerous times.

> *It can make you more confident and if you are more confident generally you remember more and you are not scared of making mistakes.*
>
> (Student interview 2)

I am confident that there has been an impact on the learning of students. They appear to have adopted the language of BLP and are conducting learning conversations. Student confidence has increased and the need to reflect on learning is recognised by both students and teachers. After only one year it was not possible to say that there had been radical change in the learning dispositions, although there was some evidence that learning capacities are being developed. The dispositions of some students have improved; they appear to be more resilient and tenacious in the face of difficulties. There is a shift towards the language of BLP. There are also students who appreciate that BLP is a tool which helps them to reflect on their learning now and in the future. Evidence from the portfolios and the

student interviews indicates that students are able to say what they have done to learn and what they need to do to improve.

Reflecting on the process of development

We used an external company to help develop BLP which we hoped would increase credibility (Wise and Lovatt, 2001). However, the presenter was viewed by the champions as uninspiring. Nevertheless the meetings I organised had a positive affect, fostering enthusiasm for using BLP. The sessions did enable the champions to acquire knowledge and understanding about BLP and provided opportunity for discourse.

I feel that the BLP champions seeing me as 'one of them' had a positive impact although I found dealing with the resistance from some colleagues challenging. I have learned that being positive, honest and enthusiastic tends to neutralise the negativity. I cannot say that these teachers have been turned around, but perhaps the seeds have been sewn and, through continuing dialogue, they will feel able to become involved.

Over the year my leadership has centred on enabling the champions to understand BLP's concepts and embedding the language used to make learning a central discussion during lessons. I feel that my agency has been enhanced (Frost and Durrant, 2003) and I now have more confidence to take the lead. Even without hierarchical position I have been able to support and inspire the BLP champions. Dialogue and collaboration with a shared moral purpose has increased trust and collaboration (MacBeath, Riley and Kruchov, 1995).

Postscript

Since the first year of the development of BLP, we have extended and embedded the approach across the school as a whole. At the time of writing, every classroom has a BLP display personalised to the faculty or teacher. BLP is an integral part of all lesson plans as a 'split screen objective' – what will be learnt and what learning muscles will be used to enable the students to learn it. The use of BLP is regularly monitored through lesson observations and 'learning walks'. It is built in to our routine documentation such as lesson observation guides and lesson planning proformas. BLP is also part of the induction process for new staff. It plays a key role in the orientation sessions for the new Year 7 students and form groups

are encouraged to design and present a school assembly focused around one or two BLP learning muscles.

As an individual teacher, I find that BLP has become an integral part of my practice which is reflected in the design of my lesson and in the language I use in the classroom. I naturally foreground strategies that promote independent learning and my students have become adept at finding new ways to develop their learning capacity. I no longer lead the BLP 'movement' from the front but remain an active member of the working party, steering the development of BLP in the school. I also find it very satisfying to share our enriched professional knowledge within a local consortium of schools and with colleagues in the HertsCam Network.

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