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The Teaching Leaders
Quarterly

What Works?

Towards an evidence-based
education system

Our vision

Teaching Leaders' vision is of a better society: one where life chances are not predetermined by social class, nor shackled by educational disadvantage. In the belief that children's success at school can be driven not by social background but by the quality and kind of education they receive, we want to strengthen the capacity of those who lead teaching and learning closest to the action on the front line of challenging schools: **middle leaders**.

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Welcome

Welcome to the summer edition of the Teaching Leaders Quarterly. This edition focuses on how we can develop an evidence-based education system that creates and improves practice based on 'What Works'. We aim to share the rationale for an evidence-based system, show how schools are strategically implementing this approach and give practical examples from Teaching Leaders Fellows who are using evidence to close the achievement gap.

The first section frames the 'What Works' debate within the context of a wider move towards using evidence to define practice across all public policy areas. Will Cavendish, Executive Director of the Implementation Group, sets out the rationale behind the Cabinet Office's 2013 report, articulating the need for a stronger evidence base, and identifying six organisations which are leading this approach in their policy areas. Kevan Collins, CEO of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), identified by the Cabinet Office as an education 'What Works' centre, then describes how the education sector can use evidence to innovate in a 'disciplined' way to ensure that what we do has an impact on pupil development and achievement.

The second section looks at schools/networks of schools who are contributing to the growing body of evidence and embedding its usage in their daily practice. In September 2012, Challenge Partners launched an EEF-funded evaluation of a project, which promotes the effective transfer of knowledge and 'what works' between schools; in order to close the achievement gap. Mark Goodchild, Managing Director of Challenge Partners, shares the organisation's experience of how to set up a project that encourages real school-to-school collaboration outlining how they are evaluating the project and what they are hoping to prove. Linda Marshall, Head of Bradford Academy, then gives a headteacher perspective on this edition's theme by describing how she has built an evidence and evaluation culture across all her staff and how this has made an impact on culture and achievement within the school and across the Bradford Partnership.

We finish with two practical case studies from Teaching Leaders Fellows on how a 'What Works' approach has helped them to define and evaluate interventions in their areas of responsibility. James Watson (2013 Fellow, North), describes how he used a recent TL/British Council

study visit to identify the key practices used by schools in Washington DC to close the achievement gap and then gone on to implement his findings in his school. Susan Douglas from The British Council supports the case study by explaining how 'Appreciative Inquiry' provides a strong framework for international research. Jess Capstick (2011 Fellow, South) describes how she carried out practise-based enquiry as part of her MA, and the impact it had on her professional development.

This edition is designed to give you ideas on how to start becoming more evidence-based in your own classroom and leadership practice. This year, all 2013 Fellows will rigorously evaluate their Impact Initiatives. In this way Teaching Leaders will be contributing to the evidence base by capturing the learning and key practices, which really work from our community of Fellows. Future Fellows will have access to the graduating cohort's evaluations as well as other MA essays and research that previous cohorts have carried out on our online Leadership Academy.

I hope you have enjoyed reading the Teaching Leaders Quarterly so far this year. It has been a new venture for us and we are grateful to all the writers who have contributed to three thought-provoking editions. The year started by exploring the impact of middle leaders on closing the achievement gap and we will revisit this topic in the new academic year. The next edition will look at the increasingly important role played by middle leaders in the evolving, self-improving school system, and the new skills and practices they will need to develop in order to continue having the greatest impact on their teams and pupils.

Thank you and have a great summer break!

Best wishes,

James



James Toop, Chief Executive, Teaching Leaders.

Follow James on Twitter @jtoop

What works?

Putting evidence at the centre of designing and implementing policy

by Dr Will Cavendish, Cabinet Office Implementation Group

In the 1970s the hard hitting 'Scared Straight' programme was hailed as an effective intervention to reduce youth offending. Based on the plausible hypothesis that by exposing young people to the criminal justice system offending would reduce, the programme was quickly rolled out. Only after roll out was the hypothesis properly tested and robust evaluation proved (through randomised control trials) that the programme actually increased instances of offending. Compared with doing nothing, the programme was found to be more costly.

Why does this matter? 'Scared Straight' is an example of where a novel idea is quickly adopted without good quality and robust evidence. High quality research and evaluation is a core part of good Government and should be used to inform investment decisions across UK Government. In health we are good at using evidence to inform decision making. Through the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) the use of robust evidence to inform health guidance is commonplace in health. NICE was created in 1999 and incredibly this was the first time a body of this kind had ever been established. Now, NICE is internationally recognised and respected for its thorough and detailed analysis of the evidence; it is so well regarded that the Coalition expanded its duties to include social care.

Unfortunately, the use of evidence in other areas of public services is less profound. Given that Government spends £2.1bn on research and development it is disappointing that we don't consistently use the highest quality evidence to inform decision making across public services.

This has to change. In a time of considerable financial constraint high quality evidence is increasingly an essential ingredient to guide wiser spending. We need to ensure that public money is focused smartly on services that we know deliver the best results and real value for money for the taxpayer. On 5 March, the Government did precisely that by launching the What Works Network – a family of organisations which will build upon existing evidence-based policy making and which will provide robust, comprehensive research to guide decision making on around £200bn of public spending.

The What Works Network will consist of two existing centres of excellence – NICE and the Sutton Trust / Educational Endowment Foundation – plus four new independent institutions responsible for gathering, assessing and sharing the most robust evidence to inform policy and service delivery in tackling crime, promoting active and independent ageing, ensuring effective early intervention, and fostering local economic growth.

These independent centres, partly funded by Government and the Economic and Social Research Council, will produce and disseminate evidence to local decision makers, supporting them in investing in services that deliver the best outcomes for citizens and value for money for taxpayers. The centres will also feed into the heart of Government to inform national decision-making, with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Danny Alexander, commenting that What Works “*will further ensure government takes decisions at the Spending Round and future events on the basis of high quality research*”¹.

1 <http://www.reclaimingfutures.org/blog/juvenile-justice-reform-Scared-Straight-Facts-vs-Hype>

Centres are being independently tendered which will ensure the best qualified consortia deliver the core What Works requirements and locks in their independence from Government. It is critical that the centres are independent of Government. However, they must speak truth unto power, and so a new National Adviser is being appointed to champion and support the centres and to advise Ministers on how best to use evidence in the policy and decision making process. Centres will also work with the research and analytical community to improve the capacity to use research and improve the future pipeline of research.

High expectations are rightly placed on school leaders to improve education outcomes for pupils, particularly for more disadvantaged children. School leaders need and want to know how to best improve children's teaching and learning, for example: which homework strategies are most effective, is streaming pupils beneficial or harmful, what type of continued professional development really helps pupil progress? Evidence can play a vital role in helping answer these questions. There is a significant body of education research in the UK, however it is all too often underused by school leaders. Accessing and using evidence in schools is not simplistic; however, the Sutton Trust / Education Endowment Foundation (ST/EEF) are leading the way here in helping school leaders access the best education evidence. Using the best available education evidence, the ST/EEF has produced an excellent online Teaching and Learning Toolkit which distills education evidence into an accessible toolkit which displays the evidence on the efficacy of different interventions. The ST/EEF really listened to school leaders to produce a simple and intelligent tool to assist decision making. As a governor myself, I have

found the Toolkit an extremely effective tool which has made evidence more readily available and improved my understanding on the relative effectiveness of certain education interventions. Encouragingly there is an appetite for using evidence among school leaders, where a third of head teachers reported using the Toolkit to inform their school pupil premium allocations.

Ensuring that good quality evidence is central to designing and implementing a policy is critical across all public services, including education. It is essential that we learn lessons from examples like 'Scared Straight' and build the use of evidence into public services decision making DNA. Our goal for What Works is simple: we want to lead the world by continuing to place high quality evidence at the heart of public services. The What Works Network marks a step change in our evidence generating capabilities, ensuring that decisions at all levels of government can be grounded in the strongest available evidence and aimed at delivering the best possible outcomes for those who have the greatest need. I'm eagerly awaiting the first results from centres and seeing practitioners apply the research findings – in a decade we'll wonder how we managed without them!



Dr Will Cavendish is the Executive Director of the Cabinet Office Implementation Group and has previously worked in education, health and environment departments. He is also a school governor.

Innovating with impact

by Kevan Collins, the Education Endowment Foundation

I have worked in English education for three decades, and believe that our system today is more innovative than ever before. Teachers have always liked to try new approaches and share ideas with colleagues. But today we are seeing an explosion of innovation on an entirely different scale. Schools are using technology, adopting new routes to engage parents and adapting the curriculum in extraordinarily diverse ways. A school in Kent has been built to accommodate classes of 60, with each lesson taught by three teachers working together as a team; children in Wigan are using handheld devices to record their learning and responses to lessons. Across the country in every type of school we are witnessing an explosion of innovation that didn't exist ten years ago let alone in 1982 when I completed training and began teaching in East London.

The importance of innovation in education should not be underestimated. It is essential if we are to find ways to improve quality with less money and to address the biggest challenge we face in education: the stark attainment gap between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers.

However, I fear that for three reasons the type of innovation currently commonplace in the English education system will not bring the changes we need.

The first problem is that innovation often starts from the wrong point, and as a result is much less likely to succeed. The best performing schools – like the top companies, doctors and entrepreneurs – know that innovation shouldn't start with a blank page. Effective innovation begins by exploring how others have attempted to tackle similar problems before. This saves time and vastly increases the chances of success, but is so often overlooked.

A second challenge is ensuring that innovation is properly evaluated to determine whether it created genuine improvement. Improving the status quo is difficult and innovation shouldn't be viewed as a success until it has been demonstrated to have improved outcomes. Buying

an iPad for every pupil may increase engagement, but schools must measure whether that enthusiasm translates into improved outcomes. Furthermore, outcomes should be judged relative to what went before and against what else could have been achieved for a similar cost. If a less innovative small group tuition programme could have delivered the same improvement more cheaply, can the introduction of iPads really be considered a success?

Third, even where an innovation has been evaluated and shown to be effective, spreading and sustaining the change is a huge challenge. Innovations can often begin as the pet project of a department head, or the investigation of a teacher completing a Masters. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this. But all too often successful innovations fail to spread beyond a single classroom or school or sustain beyond a single year. This creates a situation where 24,000 schools are required to solve the same problems in isolation: a tremendous waste of energy and knowledge.

The good news is that these problems are by no means insurmountable and the prize for successfully doing so is great. I think there are three important ingredients of a system which supports the kind of "disciplined innovation" we need.

1. Start from what we know

To enable innovation to start on the front foot we need to make sure that schools have access to high-quality research. Before choosing to redesign the school to house classes of 15 pupils it is useful to know how easily others have found it to increase results by doing something similar. Is this innovation most likely to meet the needs of your pupils or narrow the attainment gap? One resource which attempts to do this has been developed by the charity I work for, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), in collaboration with the Sutton Trust and Durham University. Our Teaching and Learning Toolkit¹ supports schools' decision-making by summarising how successfully (or unsuccessfully)

1 <http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit>

particular strategies have been used to raise attainment in the past. It summarises over 5,500 research studies in 33 areas and contains a huge amount of information and ideas for schools to build on.

2. Put energy into evaluation

We need to invest time and energy in evaluating innovation. All schools are different and even innovations which build on a clear evidence base may not work in a new context. For this reason it's essential that we evaluate properly. Obtaining a reasonable estimate of a new strategy's impact requires an estimation of what would have happened without the intervention, also known as the "counterfactual". It's important to recognise that there's a price of knowing which cannot be avoided, but also that there are a number of ways of evaluating which don't require huge amounts of additional effort. For single schools, options range from comparing results across a number of years to running two interventions side-by-side and comparing the progress of pupils in each group. The EEF has worked with Durham University to produce a DIY Evaluation Guide² which introduces the key principles of educational evaluation and provides guidance on how to conduct a trial in an individual school or classroom.

At a larger scale experimental methods such as randomised controlled trials provide the most rigorous estimates of an innovation's impact, and create knowledge which improves the quality of the evidence base described above. The EEF has been evaluating new ways of raising the attainment of disadvantaged students since 2011 and over 1,800 schools have volunteered to participate in the 56 investigations we've funded to date. But this activity is just the beginning. We need to encourage more schools to take part in this type of investigation as a matter of course, rather than as a one-off.

Small and large scale evaluations serve different but complementary purposes. A useful comparison might be made with health. In the healthcare sector, large-scale

trials are used to provide doctors with the information they require to make prescriptions. Then, the doctor will evaluate whether or not the treatment is having the expected impact, and if it isn't, they will adjust the treatment or try another approach. Evaluation can give schools the confidence to stop doing things which aren't effective as much as it encourages them to continue applying innovations which work.

3. Focus on making innovation stick

Successful innovation does not end with a positive evaluation report. It ends when the innovation has met its potential to have an impact on learning. This step is often overlooked, but in fact may be the most challenging of all. It requires schools to devote time and energy to ensuring that what is known to work in one classroom is shared with others as part of a culture of collaboration and professional trust. It also means focusing explicitly on implementation and sustainability. We must try to ensure that innovations become embedded in schools rather than being owned by individuals, and that single schools share their experiences with others across the country.

There is no shortage of innovation in schools today. But the history of education is strewn with plausible sounding ideas which turned out to be red herrings, or innovations which worked wonders for a term before disappearing without trace. For this reason I'm convinced it's worth putting in the effort to ensure that innovation builds on what has gone before, is evaluated properly and, if successful, can be sustained and spread. This is innovation for a purpose, rather than for its own sake.



by Kevan Collins, Chief Executive,
the Education Endowment
Foundation.

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² [http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/uploads/pdf/EEF_DIY_Evaluation_Guide_\(2013\).pdf](http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/uploads/pdf/EEF_DIY_Evaluation_Guide_(2013).pdf)

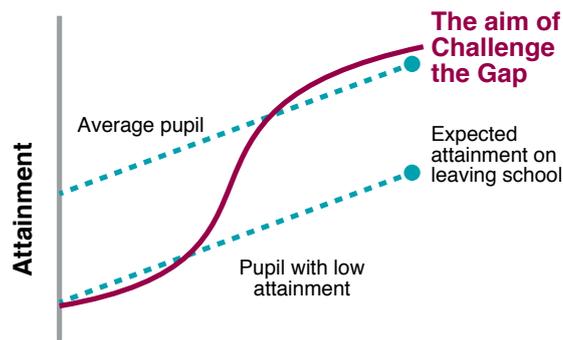
Challenging the gap through school collaboration:

a case study of an EEF-funded project

by Mark Goodchild, Challenge Partners

“We have a moral commitment to ensure that we maximise the life chances of all our students and, through collaborative learning, ensure that each generation of students achieves more than the one before.”

Professor Sir George Berwick, Chief Executive, Challenge Partners



Pupils with low attainment need to make accelerated, not average, progress

Introduction to Challenge the Gap

Despite considerable investment of time, money and effort, the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and the rest remain stubbornly high. Yet there are some schools that have proven that the link between poverty and poor outcomes can be broken.

In 2011 there were 203 secondary schools in England where the proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving five A*-C grades including English and mathematics was at or above the national average for all schools¹. The Challenge the Gap programme aims to dramatically increase that number through the effective transfer of knowledge about what works and the development of new practice by schools working together. It is ambitious in scale and scope, and sits at the heart of the Challenge Partners mission. With the skills, expertise and drive of the Challenge Partners' Facilitation Schools and the financial support of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), Challenge the Gap has the potential to make a substantial contribution to the challenge set out by EEF and Sutton Trust Chairman Sir Peter Lampl.

Challenge the Gap aims to improve the academic performance of FSM pupils through:

- School-to-school learning and collaboration
- A whole-school approach to tackling gaps
- Identifying and developing practitioners with the potential to become specialist leaders in this field
- Developing the tools, knowledge and support to enable this outcome
- Contributing to a system-wide improvement in outcomes for FSM pupils

Challenge the Gap will only be successful if FSM pupils succeed. In other words, they make faster progress in core subjects and do indeed narrow attainment gaps with the non-FSM national cohort. The aim of the Challenge the Gap programme is to enable FSM pupils with low attainment to make *accelerated* progress.

¹ Promoting Social Mobility Through Closing Gaps in Attainment, Robert Hill for ASCL 2013

Building on what works

Challenge the Gap has been developed by building on the evidence and learning from, in particular, four previous highly-effective programmes, and focusing it on the attainment of children from low income families:

Improving Teaching Programme (ITP) and Outstanding Teacher Programme (OTP)

Challenge the Gap is based on the same assumption about the centrality of the quality of teaching to pupil outcomes as ITP and OTP. It draws from these programmes the insights that groups of three are a highly effective unit for joint working and that effective processes enable schools to tailor approaches to their own context. Thus Challenge the Gap links professionals in threes (Trios) and provides effective processes to enable them to develop knowledge and practice together, drawing on research-based content.

The London Challenge

Challenge the Gap draws from the highly successful London Challenge school improvement programme which believes that solutions lie within schools and that within all schools, there are exceptional people doing exceptional work. The aim of Challenge the Gap is to build on the strengths of those people, distinctively drawing on non-teaching as well as teaching staff, to create a core group to drive whole-school change.

National Challenge Gifted and Talented Programme

This programme successfully focused leaders and practitioners on the specific needs of potential high-achieving FSM pupils in National Challenge schools, raising the aspirations of staff, pupils and their parents. Challenge the Gap draws from this programme its applications of insights from the international research base, and an understanding of the effectiveness of focusing on a target cohort to develop a whole-school approach.

The National Remodelling Team (NRT)

The NRT developed highly successful change programmes that enabled schools to develop their own solutions when implementing government policy it proved to be a unique collaboration of private sector change management experts and educationalists. Challenge the Gap similarly draws upon many of the change management processes developed and applied in the business world, particularly its use of a core group of people to bring about organisational change.

How Challenge the Gap works

“Collaborative practice is about teachers and school leaders working together to develop effective instructional practices, studying what actually works in a classroom, and doing so with rigorous attention to detail and with a commitment to not only improving one’s own practice but that of others as well.”

Mourshed, M., Chijioke, C., and Barber, M.

Challenge the Gap is a two year programme that is owned by schools and run by schools. Now in its second year, the programme is moving to full regional delivery in clusters of trios led by the founding ‘Facilitation schools’. Here is an outline of how our schools participate in the project:

1. Within the school: identifying the target cohort

At the start of the first year, each school in the trio identifies up to 15 FSM target pupils, sets them challenging targets, clarifies their learning needs, identifies the most appropriate support and interventions and then monitors their subsequent attainment. They draw on external evidence and school data to inform the decisions they make.

As practice is refined and new insights are gained, the programme is expected to rollout more widely within schools to benefit many more pupils – FSM and non-FSM.

a. Using external evidence

Ofsted recently reported effective strategies to close the attainment gap for FSM pupils at three levels of impact: whole-school level, interventions for under-performing pupils and targeted interventions and strategies for pupils eligible for FSM².

These effective strategies are a good expression of some core themes running through the Challenge the Gap programme, and include:

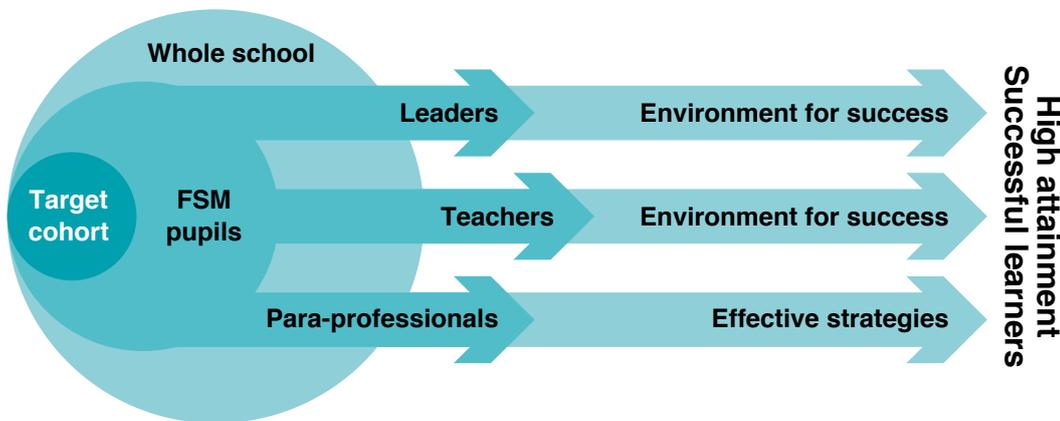
- Using data tracking to analyse both underachievement of individual pupils and school-wide patterns in underachievement
- Setting challenging targets and monitoring progress towards these closely
- Taking a long-term view rather than focusing on “quick wins”, and trying to stop achievement gaps from widening long before the end of a key stage
- Considering a wide range of barriers to pupils’ learning
- Knowing exactly what the desired outcomes are for each aspect of work
- Using research to inform thinking

b. Using school data

The starting point for every school’s programme needs to be an understanding of the target pupils as individuals and an analysis of their needs. FSM pupils, although hard to categorise as a single group, typically lack one or more of the characteristics of successful learners³. Using the Challenge the Gap survey with the target cohort, schools can identify how and where their pupils differ from highly successful learners and develop approaches to address this, surveying pupils termly to track their progress.

2 Ofsted – The Pupil Premium. How schools are spending the funding successfully to maximise achievement. September 2013.

3 Excellent for All: A Gifted and Talented approach to whole school improvement, National Strategies 2010; System Leadership: Does school-to-school support close the gap. Rea et al. NCSL 2011



Thorough analysis of RAISEonline data, combined with information from the school's internal tracking system is used to help identify target pupils who:

- best represent the majority of FSM pupils in school
- are likely to be 'passive, compliant, 'invisible' pupils who have the potential to do 'even better'
- may be currently at risk of under-achieving or coasting
- don't face significant barriers to learning and/or are not currently receiving intervention and support
- are not in an exam year

This group is then monitored and tracked throughout Challenge the Gap to ensure that the programme is improving outcomes.

2. Working as a team within a school and across Trios of schools

Challenge the Gap is a programme that will inspire innovation and ambition in staff, pupils and their parents. It is based on evidence from national and international studies of what works. The focused analysis and evaluation of pupils' needs may produce new insights, or may affirm what the school already suspects. However, the programme is designed with the flexibility to enable schools to work with their own current school improvement priorities. By doing so, all staff will be able to contribute to tackling attainment gaps, because it will be linked with their core priorities.

The programme is based on the principle of teamwork within each school and across Trios of schools. By having a team that attends the workshops and then cascades the programme to an in-school team, the impact of change and improvement can be extended across the school, benefiting many more pupils than the target FSM group. Identifying the right team, and meeting regularly is therefore critical to success. Factors which the pilot schools identified to help leaders select the best team include who would value and/or benefit from the opportunity, who has direct contact with the target pupils, who has time/capacity to commit to the programme, and who has skills to lead others and engage successfully with other schools.

All Challenge the Gap schools work together to transfer effective practice and also to innovate and develop new practice to tackle existing challenges. Trio working is about much more than simply sharing 'quick tips' across schools; it is a journey from common goals to partnership working – joint practice development. Although tips may be useful, joint practice development has the potential for a much more far-reaching impact, with individuals learning together, adapting practice for different contexts, and evaluating collectively⁴.

3. Working with other schools – the workshop programme

In order to bring schools together and allow them to share their challenges and successes, schools attend a series of workshops during their first year, which operate at three levels (leaders, teachers and para-professionals). These provide access to research-based content and processes to enable effective Trio working and professional development. This builds the capacity of individuals to lead change from within the system.

Establishing what works: evaluation

The effectiveness of Challenge the Gap is measured in sub-levels of progress by pupils in the target cohort over two years, as well as intermediary outcomes and operational progress. This is achieved using a range of tools including a termly pupil impact tracker into which pupil data is uploaded. The programme is also being evaluated by the University of Manchester, who will track pupil attainment data to GCSE.

Indicators are that it is already having a significant impact with many target pupils making much more rapid progress. A full report of their attainment in the first year will be published in autumn 2013. For insights into how schools have achieved this, see the set of pilot schools' plans on the [Challenge the Gap website](#).



Mark Goodchild,
Managing Director,
Challenge Partners

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Building a research-based culture in a school:

a personal perspective from a headteacher

by Linda Marshall, Bradford Academy

A. Evidence-based practice – a personal perspective

Ten years into my teaching career, I decided I wanted to return to professional studies and began to enquire about an MA. During an informal chat I was asked ‘what are you reading at the moment?’ ‘Postman Pat’s Windy Day’ was my glib response! I left the meeting embarrassed that I hadn’t read a research paper since joining the teaching profession in 1982.

Of course, as a busy teacher, I had ensured that my practice was up-to-date; I went on the right courses, kept up-to-date with the latest materials, syllabi, media etc. However, the reality of life as a full-time teacher, mother and relatively new leader, meant that research and development was far removed from the daily grind of school. After all, how does a busy teacher/leader find time for research?

I decided that I would read about the latest educational theories that would make a difference to the students in my school. I didn’t have the time to do the research myself, but used the research of others to inform my practice; this became a key feature of my professional life from that day onwards, both as a teacher and a leader.

Fast forward to 2002 – I had the opportunity to leave the teaching and work for an Educational Publisher as a full-time trainer and facilitator. This was the epiphanic moment in my educational career. For the next four years, I learned from, and worked with, some of the prominent educational thinkers and researchers at the time. What an honour it was to work and learn amongst practitioners,

and to explore how, as educators, we could use the latest research theories and apply them to our classrooms. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to give each teacher a year out of school, to reflect, research, renew, before returning to school to implement their learning?

In 2007, that’s exactly what I did. I returned to the profession as Vice Principal at Bradford Academy. My brief was to lead on Teaching and Learning, with a focus on establishing a professional learning culture based on research and development. I was determined that research and development would also underpin all professional learning and development at the academy. In other words “Learning is at the heart of the academy both for learners and staff”. (Ofsted 2009)

B. Evidence-based practice – a school perspective

‘When teachers work together in collaborative teams to: clarify what students must learn; gather evidence of student learning; analyse that evidence; identify the most powerful teaching strategies to address any gaps in student learning and deploy them, the subsequent impact can be significant’ (Hattie)

Ofsted returned to the Academy in 2013, and judged us to be a good school with outstanding SMSC. So, how did we use evidence-based practice to transform the school?

Here are some top tips to embed evidence-based practice:

- **Keep it simple.** Use the mission, vision and values of the school as well as its school development plan as the basis for any evidence-based practice.

- **Ensure that the headteacher is the lead learner in the school** and that he/she models the expectations for evidence-based learning. Build research and development into the job description of at least one senior leader in the school so that they keep up to date and disseminate the latest research into leadership and pedagogy as well as statutory responsibilities of the school.
- **Build into the expectations of all adults in the school the responsibility to use evidence as the basis of their practice.** We used the research by John Hattie “Visible Learning: Maximizing impact on learning” to underpin the development of our Visible Learning Community. Using the motif ‘teachers know thy impact’ has shifted the focus of our professional learning to ensure that all adults who work with our students reflect on how they maximise their impact on learner progress. Lesson study has been a key feature of professional learning at the Academy. We are developing this further by embedding the structures outlined in ‘Connecting Professional Learning’¹ This will underpin our Visible Learning Community and enable more colleagues to be involved in joint practice development²
- **Create a Visible Leadership Community**, with strategic senior and middle leaders working together to use evidence to improve their practice. Use existing research from Hattie and the excellent Sutton Trust to review what works. Encourage colleagues to share what they are reading, raise their profile and status by having them report on their recommendations and involve them in subsequent policy changes and evaluation – excellent for getting people on board as well as identifying future leaders.
- **Encourage colleagues to take risks and to experiment** with strategies using ‘empirical creativity’³
- **Ensure all leadership job descriptions and performance management targets raise the importance of evidence-based practice**, and provide time for colleagues to do this. Widen opportunities for colleagues to conduct research (ideally in pairs e.g. by visiting other schools, peer observation and shadowing, research time, Teachmeets etc.) then ensure that colleagues are accountable for implementing their learning and measuring the impact.
- **Ensure that any professional activity, whether it be a training course or a meeting/external network has a research focus.** In other words, only release staff for such events if they can reflect on the following:
 1. What is the essential question that you want to explore as a result of your attendance at this course/meeting?
 2. Why is this question important to the school?
 3. What data have you used to inform your question?
 4. What have you learned as a result of this course/meeting?
 5. What will you do as a result?

6. How will you measure impact?
7. How will your learning be disseminated to others?

This promotes a wider use of evidence-based practice and is also more time efficient.

- **Develop a talent management strategy that recognises the value of evidence-based practice at all levels in the school** and then provide opportunities for colleagues who have a real interest to research. We are establishing a research and development group, made up of lead practitioners but open to colleagues at all levels. Make sure that any new entrants to the profession are schooled in the use of evidence-based practice.
- **Connect with your local HE provider/Teaching School Alliance** to raise the profile of evidence-based practice. Provide opportunities for colleagues to gain professional qualifications e.g. HLTA, Foundation Degrees, MAs as well as professional qualifications through NCTL.
- **Where possible, involve students as co-researchers in the school.** At Bradford Academy, we use student teams to provide feedback on their learning and to work with colleagues to inform their practice.

C. Evidence-Based Practice – a system perspective

‘What is collaboration? A systematic process in which we work together, interdependently, to analyse and impact professional practice in order to improve our individual and collective results’

(DuFour, DuFour and Eaker, 2002)

The growth of Teaching School Alliances, wider opportunities for professional learning and increasing numbers of collaborative partnerships have created the potential for deep collaboration and a greater implementation of evidence based practice to improve outcomes for learners at a system level.

In recognising that it ‘takes a whole community to raise a child’ The Bradford Academy has been involved in a number of collaborations (local, cross-phase and NCTL-run) which have had a significant impact on the quality of the education that we provide.

There has never been a better time, as an educator, to teach in Bradford. Yes, Bradford! The centre of town is being filled by shops and cafes, the football team has been promoted, and we have the Bradford Partnership. Described by Steve Munby as ‘a great example of powerful and courageous collaboration’, it is a formal partnership of 28 local secondary schools, whose collective moral purpose is to ensure “the best possible deal for Bradford youngsters and to the raising of standards and elimination of underperformance in our schools”.

¹ ‘Connecting Professional Learning’ Alma Harris and Michelle Jones (2012)

² ‘Leading a self-improving school System’ David Hargreaves 2011

³ ‘Great by Choice’ by Jim Collins and Morten T. Hansen. [Read an excerpt here](#)

Key features of the partnership include:

- **Bi-annual peer reviews** to provide objective feedback to schools on their performance – these reviews are frequently used by Ofsted to provide evidence of external validation as well as informing self-evaluation and school improvement planning. Reviews involve a peer headteacher as well as representatives from the Bradford Partnership and HMI to ensure consistency, identify best practice, and establish key priorities across Bradford so that collectively schools improve.
- **Leadership training, through Teaching Leaders' TL Teams programme**, which uses evidence-based practice to underpin the development of English, maths and EBACC leaders across Bradford.
- **Appointments of SLEs**, who work across Bradford schools to support practice, develop leadership and act as facilitators for TL Teams as well as other CPD opportunities.
- **Visible Literacy Conference** where colleagues from all schools, together with representatives from partner primary schools focus on existing research into 'what works' with literacy and use JPD to implement strategies to raise standards of literacy across year 7 students in Bradford.
- **Annual headteacher conference**, where heads use evidence-based practice and research to further develop their deep collaboration.
- **Teach3** – an innovative approach to recruitment, retention and talent management for colleagues choosing to begin their teaching career in Bradford.

As the Bradford Partnership ends its second year, the impact is already impressive. For the first time in many years, no school in Bradford is in a category, and whilst there is a distance to travel to close the gap on national attainment figures, the gap is closing, schools are improving and there is a real 'buzz' and excitement about being an educator in Bradford.

Evidence Based Practice – a summary

Using evidence-based practice saves time, creates focus, provides opportunities for professional learning and collaboration and ultimately leads to better outcomes for learners. Schools are no longer separate units, but have opportunities through the wealth of networks and collaborations to work creatively to embed strategies based on robust research and development. Our system can only improve if we embrace this brave new world, provide real time and focus and create a profession which is reflective, re-energised and makes a difference to our students.



Linda Marshall is All Through Principal at Bradford Academy.

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The middle leader as a researcher: applying international principles to a UK context

by James Watson, Teaching Leaders Fellow, Colne Park High School

In March of this year I visited Washington DC with the Department for Education, the British Council and 11 other middle leaders who are part of the Teaching Leaders Fellows programme. The purpose of the visit was to investigate how schools in DC are closing the achievement gap. The Appreciative Inquiry model, which Susan Douglas, our British Council facilitator introduced us to, provided the research framework for the visit. The Appreciative Inquiry model encourages researchers to look at the principles behind a successful organisation or project - the 'positive core' that drives people within an organisation forward. Following the visit I wrote a report about the key principles we had witnessed in the US around the 5 themes of: Ethos and Aspiration, Accountability, Staff, Core Skills and Time.

Upon my return to school I used the evidence I had gathered to present my findings to the Senior Leadership Team and my own department. Our school is focusing this year on making the next step in its development from 'Good' to 'Outstanding' and the findings were received positively. Of particular interest and relevance to the school was the evidence that I presented about aspirations, expectations and school ethos. The last Ofsted report commented that Colne Park High School was 'characterised by a drive to raise aspirations and bring out the best in each student'. The principles established by the Appreciative Inquiry research from Washington DC were one source of inspiration for developing the school's policies in this area. Since the visit I have presented these findings to the whole school and a working group has been set up around the theme of aspirations and how we push our students to the 'next level'.

The visit to the US sparked my interest in the theme of raising aspirations. I am currently undertaking a Master's Degree and this provided me with the ideal platform to investigate the theme further. I decided to carry out a case study into aspirations to understand the current research around the subject and help to develop the school's policy. This case study approach allowed me to

test out the findings of the Appreciative Inquiry principles in my own school context. The case study format was particularly appropriate for this sort of research as it deals with research in one school, at one particular time and around one issue.

I conducted a number of staff and pupil surveys as part of the case study assignment, as well as doing my own reading around the subject. The findings of the research were informative, confirming some received opinions around aspirations but also shedding light on new areas. For example, it confirmed that our pupils already held high aspirations for themselves and wanted to continue into further and higher education. Perhaps the most interesting finding was that our pupils felt their own determination to succeed, alongside clear guidance on how to achieve the highest grades, was the most crucial factor in achieving their ambitions.

The principles I observed in DC and the research that I've carried out subsequently are currently being used to inform the school's strategy for this area of development. Having both international and local input has not only allowed me to share my own research on the subject but also allowed the whole staff team to have input into this new direction for the school, both through meetings and new working groups. This has enabled the school to develop its policies collaboratively around, as the Appreciative Inquiry model states, a 'positive core' rather than a 'top-down' approach. In the future, we hope that this research will contribute towards positive outcomes for the pupils at Colne Park High School.



James Watson, Teaching Leaders Fellow (2012) and Progress Leader at Colne Park High School, Lancashire.

Why Appreciative Inquiry?

I have been incredibly fortunate in my career to have been involved in a number of international study visits with leaders at all levels in UK schools and have always come away from these having learnt as much about myself as a practitioner and the UK system as I have about the system I have been visiting.

One interesting feature of the groups I have worked with is the tendency to be tempted to make direct comparisons when viewing the education system of another country, or even another school within the same country. As practitioners, we are so involved in our current context, so keen to learn and so short on time that our natural instinct when we see new practice is to judge it quickly based on whether it would work or not with 'our kids'. However borrowing from another country is not that dichotomous. If we adopt a yes/no approach to judging other people's practice then we miss so much of the rich experience that other schools/countries have already worked through.

As a result of this very human instinct to problem solve and 'transplant' (or not transplant) ideas to one's own context, I have started to spend more time with groups before an international visits to ensure that they approach the experience with a fresh mind set. We want them to make the most of their time in another country and to ask the right questions, which will allow them to reflect on practice in their own schools, envisage changes based on the principles they've seen elsewhere and then be confident about trialling them in their own context. The Appreciative Inquiry model works well to support this.

Much has been written on how Appreciative Inquiry works but here are a few guiding principles:

- Each organisation has strengths, Appreciative Inquiry discovers and celebrates those strengths
- Appreciative Inquiry is based on positive growth not negative deficit
- *How* the learning process is conducted is of critical importance
- Appreciative Inquiry is collaborative and inclusive
- Appreciative Inquiry is based on unconditionally positive questioning

Before a visit, I speak to groups about how we will ask questions when we go into schools, how we might run our daily debriefs and how they will put what they find out into practice when they return to their schools. Appreciative Inquiry helps provide a structure for this process. It suggests a cycle of positive questioning and implementation which, by virtue of a being a cycle, is constantly open to refinements.

1. Appreciating: acknowledging and describing success and good practice
2. Identifying the principles underpinning success

3. Envisioning: imagining alternative scenarios that might be informed by these principles
4. Co-constructing: designing new strategies based on them
5. Implementation
6. Sustaining: celebration and adaptation

On my visit with Teaching Leaders, I noticed that middle leaders have an additional challenge when they return to their schools full of ideas to test and evaluate in their own contexts. Not only do they need to convince those who they manage but they also need to convince those who manage them that testing and evaluating their ideas is worth the time and effort. Appreciative Inquiry helps this process because any new ideas come from identified successful practice. The 'researcher' is also using the language of principles to start the conversation with their manager rather than embarking on an explanation of a practice that sounds foreign and impracticable in the school context. Taking the rest of the team through their 'theory of change' model brings others along with them on the journey, demonstrating a logical flow and ensuring that all parties are equally bought into the research and its KPIs.

"Even when you know what research and published advice tells you, no one can prescribe exactly how to apply what you have learned to your particular school and all the unique problems, opportunities and peculiarities it contains. Your own organisation has its own special combination of personalities and prehistories. There is no one answer to the question of how one brings about change in specific situations. You can get ideas, directions, insights and lines of thought, but you can never know exactly how to proceed. You have to beat the path by walking it". Fullen

Appreciative Inquiry is hard work as it requires adopting a new way of seeing things and can seem counter-intuitive – but it's worth it. Using it successfully will mean the group comes back reinvigorated, having done a great deal of work to process what they're seeing whilst actually in the country. Making the application and research process on their return much easier and more sustainable.



Susan Douglas, Senior Adviser Schools at the British Council and CEO Eden Academy

Practice based enquiry and the importance of interrogating terminology

by Jess Capstick, Walthamstow Academy

Having recently completed my Masters in Teaching at the Institute of Education, University of London, I am all the more aware of the importance and impact of action research and evidence-based practice. Throughout my years spent studying at the Institute of Education (firstly studying my PGCE and then the MTeach) I undertook a number of action research projects; the most rewarding by far was my Practice Based Enquiry (PBE), my final MTeach module, which incorporated a six week research period, followed by data analysis and subsequently the composition of a 10,000 word report on the topic I was researching.

The focus of my PBE was 'How effective are intervention groups in boosting academic achievement in English at Key Stage 3?' 'Intervention' was a term which intrigued me at the time; I had recently left my first teaching job to become the Year 9 Director of Learning at my second school and intervention had gone from being something I was expected to do for my classes to something I was expected to implement for my year group. The only problem was that I was unable to find a universally agreed definition for the term intervention, neither could I find recommendations for the most effective way an intervention could be implemented for our students.

One of the most important aspects of successful practice based enquiry in schools for teachers is that what you are researching and evaluating has to relate directly to your daily practice. It has to be something which complements your daily practice in school, not something which will become extra, time consuming work. As Year 9 Director of Learning and an English teacher, I decided to research the effectiveness of a year 9 English intervention programme which my colleague and I chose to implement to ensure certain students on the level 4/5 borderline achieved level 5 in English by the end of year 9.

The Institute of Education expected a definite structure to the PBE which comprised of:

- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Methodology
- Methods
- Findings (Data Analysis)
- Discussion and Conclusion

My colleague and I began by designing a six week intervention programme for 20 students, selected based on their National Curriculum levels and my knowledge of them as their Year Director of Learning. We met three times a week during school hours for 25-40 minutes at a time and focused on improving aspects of their Reading and Writing skills, basing our work on the National Curriculum Assessment Foci in English.

Once the basic outline of the programme was decided upon, I began the Literature Review. As intervention is considered a 'key feature' of the much wider-ranging 'pedagogy of personalised learning' (DCSF-0084, 2008, p.5) I chose to research both terms with interesting results. It transpired that 'personalised learning' had many different definitions. David Miliband described it as a 'vision' and a 'route to excellence and equity' in 2003; the Teaching and Learning Research Programme defined it as a 'big idea' in education in 2004; the Department for Education called it a 'culture' in 2006, and DCSF documentation in 2008 described it as a 'pedagogy'. What a number of writers subsequently discussed was

that the term 'personalised learning' had been introduced by government ministers; schools and academics then had to define the term and introduce it in education with little unified understanding of what the term actually meant.

What was once considered a Labour 'buzzword' in 2003 is an expectation and a necessity today. It has moved from being a whole school movement to an expectation of individual teachers within a short period of time without a clear understanding of what it is by all who are expected to implement it and with little evaluative data to support it. For me, the most interesting part of the Literature Review phase was the realisation that teachers should actually take the opportunity to review the literature behind education 'buzzwords' and proposals more often. Although my scepticism of the term 'personalised learning' deepened somewhat, I found the practical advice on how to implement 'intervention' in schools extremely useful and it enabled me to refine the structure of the Year 9 English intervention and my data collection phase.

I decided to embark on Mixed Methods Research, a research approach which uses both quantitative and qualitative data. At this point, one book which helped me in choosing my research methods and designing my data analysis (and which I personally think every teacher should own) was 'The Good Research Guide' by Martyn Denscombe. Denscombe leads the small-scale social researcher through their action research from design to evaluation in a professional, intelligent yet accessible manner. The one aspect of my PBE which Denscombe thoroughly prepared me for was the length of time it would take me to code, categorise and analyse my data. It was a lengthy process, but because it related directly to my role in school and my daily practice it was enjoyable. It further emphasised the fact that when researching your own practice, you have to choose something which directly relates to, and will enhance, the work you are already doing in school.

Rather than summarising the findings of my PBE, which would not be relevant for the varied readership of Teaching Leaders Quarterly (for those interested it is available in the Institute of Education library), I will instead summarise what I learnt from my research, which affects my daily practice. Firstly: it is always important to investigate hot topics and 'buzzwords' in education for yourself and work out where they have come from and how to make them work for your school. These 'buzzwords' are easily dismissed by teachers

who often feel somewhat beleaguered by constant changes/ demands by the government. My personal advice is: don't dismiss them without researching them first. The main outcome of my PBE was that I learnt that intervention is really useful when implemented effectively in schools – something I did not anticipate that I would ever say when I first started my research.

Secondly, when the government announce new initiatives and they are introduced in schools, ensure that all staff and students have a common understanding of what the key terms mean. During my interviews I encountered a student who thought that intervention meant 'extra assemblies' (and therefore didn't want to attend) and staff who generally assumed that intervention meant 'extra lessons' rather than focused intervention in lessons (and sometimes during a short-term series of extra sessions) which builds specific skills of carefully selected students in order for them to progress in a subject.

Finally, I learnt the true value of Evidence-Based Practice in education. The power of teachers investigating their own field of expertise should not be ignored or dismissed: we are the people who engage with our students every day and our research and findings are some of the most relevant and practical advice you can read and act upon. It is also authentic and will be immediately respected by teachers; the many journals, books and research by education theorists are undoubtedly useful but I sometimes wonder: do they have exercise books, assessments and mock exams to mark? Strategic action plans to write? FFT 'D' grades to meet? Staff teams to build in school? Teachers as researchers inherently build these concerns into their own research.

Most importantly, evidence-based practice ensures that teachers remain learners, which can only benefit our practice, particularly when we are encouraging students to find ways to learn more efficiently. When we are engaged and excited by what we are doing in our classrooms and schools, our students will be too – and what can be better than that?



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Our mission

To address educational disadvantage by growing a movement of outstanding middle leaders in schools in challenging contexts.