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Research Associate Summary Report

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Leadership, literacy and the creative arts:

The role of leadership in the development of teaching literacy
through the creative arts

Summer 2006

The project

The development of creative approaches to children's learning has been well represented in recent years both in terms of publications, for example *Creativity: find it, promote it* (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), 2003) and strategic initiatives such as the work of Creative Partnerships.¹

This research project investigated how leadership has made an impact on the introduction of teaching and learning materials that link the teaching of literacy to the creative arts (Matthews and Matthews, undated). These had been in use at my present school for the last two years and are based on a series of novels, collected short stories, playscripts and poetry anthologies. These texts promote cross-curricular work, particularly in music, art, dance and drama.

The materials are closely related to *Creativity: find it, promote it* (QCA, 2003) in that creativity is being promoted through:

- setting a clear purpose for pupils' work
- being clear about freedoms and constraints
- firing pupils' imagination through their learning and experiences
- providing an opportunity for schools to work together
- establishing criteria for success
- regularly reviewing work in progress
- providing opportunities to celebrate achievements

The research investigated how these materials and approaches towards their use had been led in three different settings. It did this by exploring the following questions.

- What role has leadership played in the introduction and development of the materials' use?
- What differing levels of leadership were evident?
- How was the work being sustained and developed further?

From this, implications can be offered for leaders wishing to develop similar work in their schools. These are listed at the report's conclusion.

¹ Creative Partnerships is a government-funded body which works in collaboration with schools to develop creativity in learning and to encourage participation in high-quality cultural activities. Source: www.creative-partnerships.com.

Methods

Research was undertaken in three different settings, which formed case studies. The following three summary statements are expanded upon in the full report.

Case study 1: North West Education Action Zone, Rotherham

This comprised 10 primary schools working together with principal leadership from the education action zone (EAZ) consultants for literacy and creativity. The materials were introduced across all schools in Year 4 to help address the EAZ's targets for raising standards in writing. An independent consultant was employed to analyse both qualitative and quantitative data.

Case study 2: Networked learning community, Leicester

This comprised a group of schools working together with the aim of improving standards in oracy. The materials were introduced at a launch day at the University of Leicester. The project was led by two lead headteachers and involved trialling with a range of year groups across the networked learning community. Data collection focused on the work of one of the headteacher co-leaders.

Case study 3: Junior school, Derby

The school was aiming to raise standards in reading and writing and was also looking to broaden the curriculum. Leadership at this school was initially provided by the headteacher and deputy headteacher.

Data sources

My main source of data came from structured interviews with leaders in all three cases, that is, with headteachers, consultants, other senior leaders and key subject leaders. I also interviewed other participating teachers.

I attended a number of meetings including project launch days, training days and network meetings. I also studied end-of-project reports, and the report of an independent educational consultant attached to Rotherham EAZ.

Case study outcomes

A number of positive outcomes were apparent across the case studies. These outcomes included the following.

- There was significant raising of attainment, particularly in writing. An analysis of writing progress across schools in case study 1 saw 76 per cent of boys and 62 per cent of girls make progress by one or two national curriculum sub-levels across the one-term project.
- More innovative curriculum design and mapping was used, including links to subject areas such as history and geography.
- Better planning for sustainability took place. The project was developed across other year groups, and there was further development of materials for future use. One school used the project as a basis for developing a new performing and creative arts centre.

Leadership

These outcomes were achieved through a range of leadership strategies as follows.

- In all cases, a distributed approach in which individuals were identified to help lead and implement developments was used. This ensured that the reach of these developments was extended across the school.
- In the case of the EAZ, consultants took a leading role which included:
 - carrying out an audit of staff development needs and subsequently organising external specialists in areas such as dance, drama, music and literature to work alongside teachers to increase knowledge, skills and understanding. In two cases, the headteacher took the lead in ensuring this occurred
 - the creation and promotion of professional development opportunities, for example, team teaching, use of specialists for demonstration lessons and support for newly qualified teachers
 - meeting regularly with Year 4 teachers before, during and after the project to ensure direction was maintained and that monitoring and evaluation of the project was embedded
- evaluating the project's success through evaluation of pupil outcomes, including pupil voice via end-of-project questionnaires and group interviews, and reporting these to headteachers
- development work with key teachers and/or literacy co-ordinators to ensure that once the consultants had left the project, these personnel were equipped to extend the work across the school and provide leadership, ie building capacity
- The headteachers' role was one either of direct involvement in planning and evaluation or support for the developments such as resource provision, including time.
- In the case of the networked learning community, the headteacher took a key role in the following ways, the first four of which were within their own school:
 - delivering exemplar lessons
 - identifying those teachers who would become key players in extending the project across the school
 - creating a school-based team comprising these individuals to lead the development comprising themselves, the literacy co-ordinator, the deputy headteacher and the arts co-ordinator. The team decided upon the self-evaluation strategy to be taken, to include pupil performance outcomes and the involvement of governors. It also determined how teachers across the school would access observation opportunities. The literacy co-ordinator and deputy head also provided support in planning for teachers
 - drawing up and providing governors with support and guidance so they could carry out their monitoring role. A group of governors met with the headteacher fortnightly to monitor progress and, as it was a key focus area for the school, carry out planned classroom observations leading to a progress report
 - co-leading the network and establishing joint training and development activities as part of this

- In the individual school, a team approach was also developed. This comprised the headteacher, deputy headteacher and literacy co-ordinator. The deputy and literacy co-ordinator:
 - trialled the work in one year group with monitoring and evaluation of pupil outcomes
 - redesigned the school's curriculum map
 - led a series of staff meetings as training events

The team ensured subject leaders were provided with time to link the materials to their subject areas, and to carry out joint planning.

Conclusion and implications for others

Differing forms of leadership in the three case studies had a key impact on the success and sustainability of the project.

The following list outlines some of the implications for school leaders that may lie behind the success of any future projects of a similar nature.

- Leaders can show through modelling, monitoring and dialogue that they value creativity and expect it to lie at the heart of all teaching and learning.
- Teachers should be given the message from senior leaders that their innovation and experimentation are important factors in developing creativity as this develops confidence.
- Collaboration within and between schools can bring success. Encouraging teachers to share experiences has significant potential to increase commitment and the potential for success.
- Leaders should strive to create opportunities for pupils to work with external providers who promote creative opportunities.
- Carefully planned evaluation is very important. The use of an independent consultant for this evaluation can be beneficial, providing objectivity and addressing school-based staff's time constraints.
- Evaluation should be closely linked to sustainability and further development.

- Leaders have a key role to play in identifying and celebrating success, particularly in rewarding pupils' creativity and involving parents and governors in celebrating success.
- Aim to provide a stimulating environment. Make sure pupils have the resources and space to be creative. Create shared resources across schools.
- Be creative in the management of curriculum time so that sustained periods of time can be devoted to particular pieces of work.
- Encourage teachers and children to become their own researchers, for example using action research projects across and between schools.

References

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