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Working Together

Helping community leadership work in practice





Working Together: An introduction

We are living and leading in a time of change. It feels exciting. It feels daunting. We all need to connect and work together to achieve the best for children, young people and their families. We would like this publication to be a catalyst to allow us to do just that. We hope that this, and future publications, will open up a national dialogue on how we can seize the opportunity we now have to transform radically the life chances of the children and families we serve as leaders.

This publication is the first in a planned series which draws on the work of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in supporting school leaders to engage more effectively and authentically with their communities, and with other agencies and organisations. It will examine why this approach is important for schools and what this means for future practice. It will in particular look at four themes.

- 1. What leadership do schools need?
- 2. What exactly is collaboration and how do we achieve it?
- 3. How can schools and communities work together?
- 4. How can schools broker a broader definition of standards that will connect the Every Child Matters and standards agendas?

As our work with you develops, future publications will explore these and other areas of enquiry further. They will share some of the learning that is emerging from individuals and teams who are taking part in seminars and programmes and engaging in networks. The publications will share some of the think pieces, activities and tools that are proving to be of value to changing local practice. They will also provide insights into emerging effective and interesting practice.

We are keen that future publications involve you. If you have interesting work to share that you think others would like to know about, please go to www.ncsl.org.uk to register onto the Talk2Learn Leading Beyond your School community site.

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Pause for thought



Who is doing what?



Activity - try this



Web link

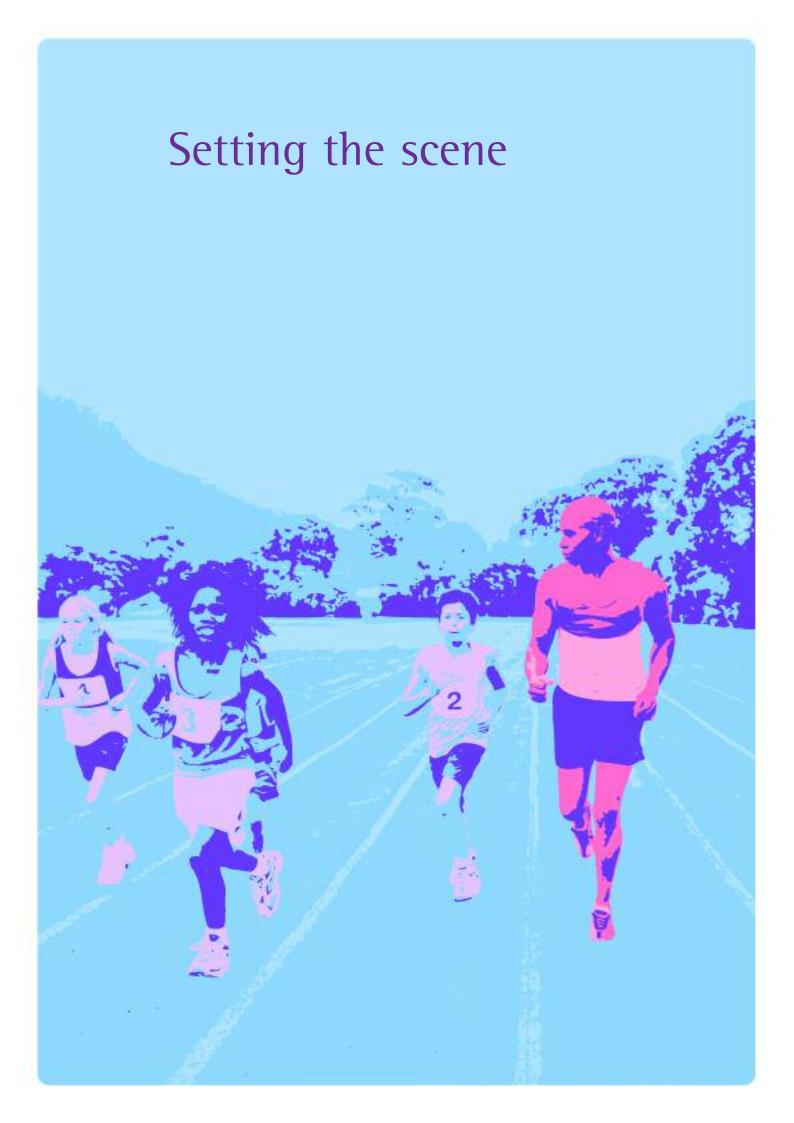


Photocopy this

Using this publication

This publication is written to be used by you. It will allow you to engage in:

- personal reflection what do I think?
- group discussion what do we think?
- group activity which activities and tools would be of most use to us right now?
- reflection on practice what can we learn from this account of practice?



Setting the scene

Every Child Matters, the increase in the number of schools working in networks and clusters, the growth of extended services in and around schools and the development of children's centres are just some of the elements of a fast-changing educational landscape. All these elements have one thing in common: they extend the focus for school leaders to one that is beyond the school as a single, autonomous unit.

For some school leaders, this agenda is no less than a renaissance of why they came into teaching and into schools. They know that they can only make marginal improvements in standards of attainment and achievement by continuing an exclusive focus on teaching and learning in the classroom and on the mainstream curriculum.

They know that schools exist in a social context and they must take this into account if they are to effect true transformation in the lives of the children and young people they teach.

They are committed to an agenda underpinned by social justice and they are not satisfied with a system where the gap between the highest and lowest achieving young people is widening and where poverty and disadvantage still mean that those with the most to gain from education seem to reap so little from it.

They also know that in order to achieve this, they cannot work alone. The young people, families, the community and other agencies and organisations all need to lend a hand collectively. The current National Standards for Headteachers state that:

'Schools exist in a distinctive social context, which has a direct impact on what happens inside the school. School leadership should commit to engaging with the internal and external school community, to secure equity and entitlement. Headteachers collaborate with other schools in order to bring positive benefits to their own and each other's schools. Headteachers should work collaboratively at both strategic and operational levels with parents and carers and across multiple agencies for the well-being of all children. Headteachers should be aware that school improvement and community development are interdependent and that they share responsibility for leadership of the wider educational system.'



You can download this publication at: www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications (search using reference DfES 0083 2004)

Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003), with its focus on five outcomes, provides further demonstration of the interconnectedness between the child, the school, the home and the community.

Better lives for all: Every Child Matters – the five outcomes

Let us not forget that these five outcomes were crafted by young people themselves and are therefore important to them. How important are they to us?

What are we doing in our schools to have a public debate about the outcomes with school staff, young people, other agencies, parents and the community?

How far are these five outcomes recognisable in our day-to-day work? Does every member of the school's core and extended teams know what the outcomes are, how they are contributing as individuals and teams and how that contribution is making a difference?

How do we ensure that the five outcomes are seen as interdependent and what can we start to do to impact on these outcomes?

Stay safe: safer routes to school, anti-bullying measures, emotional intelligence development, peer buddy system, child protection processes

Be healthy: healthy schools initiative, out-of-hours fitness and gardening clubs, school meals service, active sports mark, fitness for staff as well

Enjoy and achieve: learning-centred leadership, personalisation, self-belief, out-of-hours programmes, range of learning opportunities involving other partners including arts and sports

Making a contribution: distributed leadership, student leadership, volunteering programmes, empowerment, citizenship

Economic well-being: goal-setting, aim high aspirational programmes, involvement in regeneration and community programmes, social entrepreneurial leadership

The five outcomes – ensuring a multiplier effect

It is the integration of the five outcomes that will enable us to see the links between standards and well-being. We know that children who arrive at school ready to learn because they are not hungry, cold, scared or tired are more likely to make good progress. We also know that children who have self-worth and believe that they can succeed are more likely to do so. How are we assessing the impact of all we do against the five outcomes? Are there any particular interventions that have a multiplier effect on more than one outcome?

For example, a breakfast club that:

- focuses on IT and communication skills (enjoying and achieving)
- serves a healthy breakfast (be healthy)
- involves older students as peer buddies (stay safe)
- publishes and promotes a community newspaper for the area (making a contribution)
- employs local parents and works with a local farmers' market to supply fresh produce (economic well-being)

will demonstrate the integration of all five outcomes and promote a multiplier effect across the local area.

The 'core offer' of extended services to children, young people and families, provides a basis for local collaboration. The core offer, which will be available within or around schools by 2010 includes:

- high quality wraparound childcare
- a varied menu of activities to extend and enrich learning
- parenting support including information sessions for parents, and family learning
- swift and easy referral to a wide range of specialist support services
- providing wider community access to ICT, sports and arts facilities including adult learning.

www.teachernet.gov.uk/extendedschools

Seen from the leaders' perspective - opportunities and challenges

The challenges for school leaders seem to fall into four broad headings.

- 1. Understanding and communicating the changing context and role for schools what do people expect of us and what do we expect of them?
- 2. Changing working practices to support the development of extended services in and around schools we cannot do it all alone
- 3. Personal challenges around the changing role of the headteacher, issues of control and accountability and the importance of ensuring a manageable workload for self and others and of ensuring personal professional development needs are met *I am working in an environment I no longer fully understand, the extent of my authority and influence is no longer bound by my institution*
- 4. A shift towards a community and local strategy for education where educational leadership is exercised by many, and where the role of headteacher is one component who are the educational leaders in this school and community how can we mobilise ourselves to act collectively?

Each of these is significant. These challenges involve working on a much broader agenda, linking standards and well-being, collaborating with a range of agencies, organisations and individuals, and continuing to modernise the workforce to meet the extended role of the school. In addition, school leaders will need to form new relationships with the local authority as it develops into a children's services authority and will need to adapt to new working relationships with the director of children's services who may or may not have a background in education.

A developing role for schools three key areas where schools could make a difference

A recent piece of research by Demos (Craig and O'Leary, 2006), commissioned by NCSL, examined the role that schools could play in this shifting landscape. It claimed that the role of schools is to:

- reshape participation for today's communities
- build the belief that communities can make a difference
- · create new spaces for community life



Download *The Invisible Teacher* publication at: www.demos.co.uk/projects/currentprojects/communityleadership

Reshaping participation

While schools are under pressure to extend their own provision, the real challenge is for them to have the confidence to resist expansion and to support others in providing a range of learning opportunities. Who are the movers and shakers in your area? Which organisations function as civic intermediaries between people's private lives and other public institutions? Who can help to connect the two worlds of the community and the school?

Building the belief that communities can make a difference

What more needs to be done to provide the evidence that communities and schools working together can make a substantial difference to the five outcomes of Every Child Matters and to the life chances of young people, their families and their communities? For example, how does the school get involved in the active neighbourhood and community cohesion work of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)? What is the unique contribution of schools and school leaders to the regeneration process and how does this help consistently to improve the standards of achievement and attainment in a locality? How do a school and its leaders build a sense of hope in a community that can become a force for change?

Creating new spaces for community life

Schools are public spaces. How can these spaces be used to broker and support local investment in the community and generate learning spaces beyond school? How can these public spaces support, through networks, the transition from home to school and from school to work? Who does the school belong to?



Pause for thought
1. How far do you recognise this changing landscape?
2. Is it one you are energised by – or worried about?
3. What role do you play in connecting with and reaching out to others beyond the school boundaries?
4. Do you agree with this developing role for schools?
5. How might it look for you, your school and your community?

Collaboration - better together?



Collaboration - better together?

Why is this important?

"The challenge as a head is to broaden your perspective and accept that you now need to work with other agencies, though it is not what you are accustomed to."

Secondary headteacher

Schools will not meet the complex needs of children and young people by working in isolation. Collaboration with other agencies lies at the heart of the reform agenda detailed in *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003). But collaboration is not easy. Particularly in multi-agency working, it seems to involve tension and difficulty. It is tough to address the practice in different agencies and find the tools and processes to redevelop and re-align them to a common purpose. It is challenging to do this whilst still retaining the key strengths and competencies of each of the agencies and organisations.

The NCSL Multi-agency Team Development Programme, developed in partnership with Castlewood Consulting, is starting to address these issues with teams drawn from across sectors. It has used as the basis of its practice the theory of collaborative advantage (Huxham and Vangen, 2004).

This theory looks at the practice of collaboration from the perspective of individuals.

Two concepts are central to this theory. The first, the notion of *collaborative advantage* captures the synergy argument:

 To gain real advantage from collaboration, something has to be achieved that could not have been achieved by any one of the agencies acting alone.

The second concept, *collaborative inertia*, captures what happens very frequently in practice:

 The output from a collaborative arrangement is negligible, the rate of output is extremely slow, or stories of pain and hard grind are integral to successes achieved.



Who is doing what?

The Blackburn with Darwen team found that as a result of taking part in the multi-agency programme, members are more aware of collaborative advantage. As a result of building the team vision, purpose and shared culture, they have made shifts in three key areas.

- We have had to change from: 'We have ideas and services for you' to: 'What do you need and how can we help?'
- We are aware of the dangers of saying 'Yes' to innovation because we didn't want to lose money, rather than saying 'No' which would have been a better strategic decision.
- We found solutions to problems we didn't know we had, as once we spent time together these became apparent – they were below the surface before.



What do we know?

The team from Blackburn with Darwen and others on the programme were asked to describe the characteristics of their teams when they were working at their best.

They came up with the following:

- empower everyone in the team to think and behave in a different way so as to fulfil their role and take up their leadership appropriately
- create a culture of honesty and understanding in teams and use challenge and conflict in the group to produce different creative options and better outcomes for children
- build clarity about the vision and what holds the team together by understanding the bigger picture so that both individuals and teams know the reasons for the work

- ✓ regularly review the team's performance at two levels, at a task level: 'What are we doing?' and at a process level: 'How are we doing it?'
- use tools such as social network analysis (www.orgnet.com) to inform network development and to understand how people are communicating and with whom
- become reflective practitioners and build in time for each individual to reflect on what they are contributing and what they are learning
- keep focusing on outcomes for children and find good enough ways of delivering them
- ✓ celebrate every success



Pause for thought

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2. What would you add?

3. Which would be your top three? Which characteristics, if you consistently worked at them, would make the most difference to outcomes for children, young people and families?

What has this got to do with standards – enhancing what we do best

A consistent picture from the research on extended schools is beginning to show that where children's well-being and learning are promoted as interdependent, a positive impact on pupils, families, communities and other groups can be seen. The impact can be summarised as follows:

[1] Pupils

- some improvement in attainment, when this has been specifically targeted
- attendance improvement, better behaviour, improved self-esteem
- increased parental support
- enables children to have fun and develop wider interests and new skills
- enhances support for vulnerable children and those at risk
- encourages greater parental involvement in children's learning
- increased opportunity to engage in a range of activities

[2] Families and communities

- improved self-perception
- a reduction in the decline in school numbers and nursery numbers
- an increased focus on the school as a focal point for the community
- improved use of school facilities, particularly in relation to the arts, ICT and sport
- reduced health inequality through greater takeup of school-based health and social care services, such as smoking cessation clubs or midwifery services
- integrated care and education especially beneficial for children from multi-risk families

- extended care provides increased opportunity for parents to return to work
- provides better help to staff and parents to address children's wider needs, such as support from visiting multi-agency teams

[3] Other service providers

- increased access to client groups
- improved perception of police and health workers
- enhanced access to services for staff in school
- enhanced professional development opportunities



Pause for thought

1. Would you have expected this?

2. What seems to be mirrored in your experience?

3. Is there anything you found surprising?

"For me there is no question about it. If I am to raise standards in my school I have to do so much more than improve the quality of what goes on in the classroom. I need to work in partnership with everyone who can make a difference to the lives of the children who come to my school. That means forging alliances and partnerships with local politicians, health workers, community workers, parents - the list is endless. But its only by doing this that I have started to see a difference in the children's readiness and ability to learn. The five ECM outcomes have helped me – Ofsted recognise them and at last I feel that as a school we are being recognised for the good work we are doing."

> Jack Harrison, Head, Biggin Hill Primary School

Getting results - what do we know about what works?

Schools that collaborate deliberately to connect their extended learning and well-being agenda to the raising of standards are seeing the effect. These schools consistently ask the following questions.

- 1. Why are we doing this?
- 2. Who are we doing it with and what is the collaborative advantage?
- 3. Which young people stand to benefit most?
- 4. How will we measure our success in achieving the outcome we anticipate?

Park View Academy, London had identified that their black African and Caribbean boys were underachieving. A partnership was developed with the local supplementary school which had a track record of, and commitment to, challenging stereotypes and negative images of young black boys.

✓ Result: Park View Academy is now one of the country's most improved schools. The percentage of A–C grades at GCSE rose from 15 per cent in 2001 to 39 per cent in 2004 and then to 47 per cent in 2005. The average point score for boys of black Caribbean and African heritage rose from 19 in 2003 to 40 in 2004 and has continued to be above the local and national average.

Source: NCSL, NPQH Module, Leadership of Extended Schools



Going further

Web links:

NCSL, Multi-agency Research: www.ncsl.org.uk/publications

Change for Children: DfES 2005: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/publications

How might we get better at collaboration and partnership?



Activity: Facing our obstacles

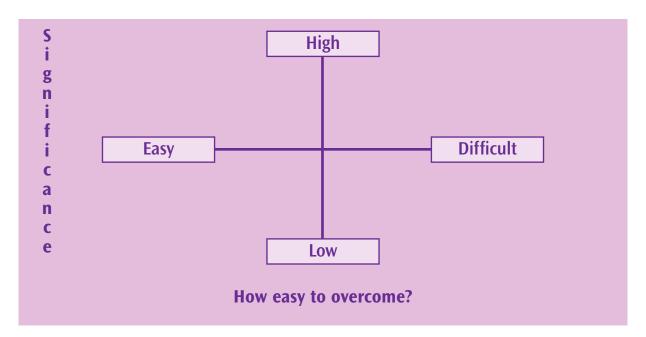
The following obstacles to collaboration were defined by multi-agency teams on the NCSL Multi-agency Team Development Programme. If you are working in a cross-departmental or multi-agency team, this activity invites you to look at these obstacles and ask yourselves the following questions:

- How far do we perceive these as obstacles?
- Which are we able to overcome and how might we do this?

Instructions

The cards on page 17 show 13 identified obstacles.

- cut out the cards
- work on a table with a flip chart
- on the flip chart, draw the following matrix



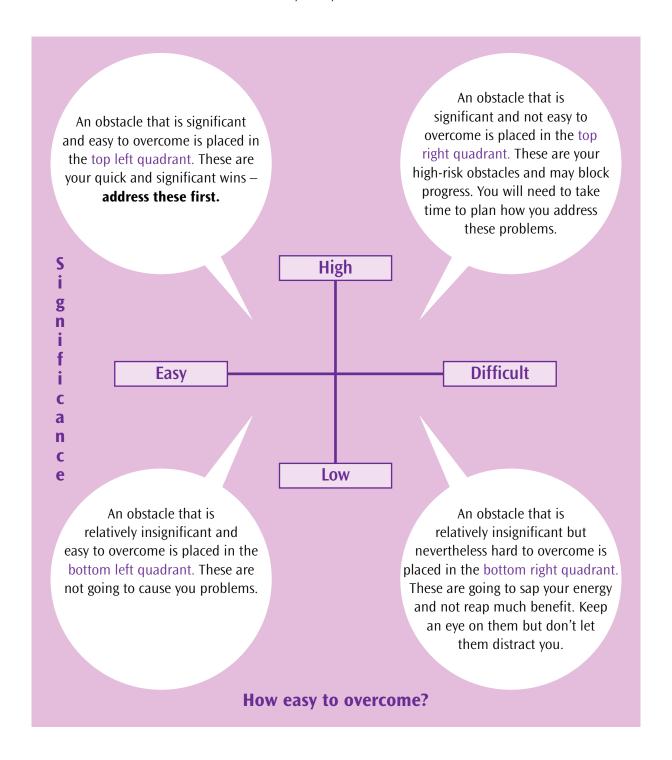
- Through discussion, place the obstacles on the part of the matrix that identifies how significant they are and how easy or hard they will be to overcome
- You may wish to include other obstacles that are specific to your situation – discuss these together and write these obstacles on the matrix too
- Decide together which obstacles you need to tackle first, and which you don't need to worry about so much
- Work together to develop a plan of action to address the most significant obstacles that may not be easy to overcome



Activity: Facing our obstacles

The matrix is designed to provide a focus for discussions by asking the following questions:

- Which obstacles are the most significant and will block progress unless addressed?
- Which obstacles can be dealt with relatively easily?







Activity: Facing our obstacles

Photocopy this page: Cut out the following obstacles and place them on the grid.

	No time to meet	Organisational culture not supportive
X	Hard to communicate between sessions	Not empowered to do things differently
	Different locations for team members	Uncertain future affecting people's morale
	Organisational agendas causing time drift	Power struggles in team
	No team identity	Managing risks while changing ways of working
	Operational pressures preventing introduction of change	Lack of senior manager support
	Lack of common tools, eg for assessment	

What we know about leading together



What we know about leading together

Delegates from a wide cross-section of services including schools, health, social services, local government and police, attended the national community leadership *Leading Together* conference in March 2005. At this conference, colleagues collaborated to identify the features of successful partnership working, and in particular they considered what leaders need to do to ensure that inter-agency working results in improved outcomes for children and families.

The mind map on the following pages identifies the key issues that leaders need to take account of when *leading together across institutional boundaries*. This is not an exhaustive list, nor a recipe for success; rather it is a collection of important issues that leaders need to consider as we move towards creating and sustaining community leadership in practice.

The key features are as follows:

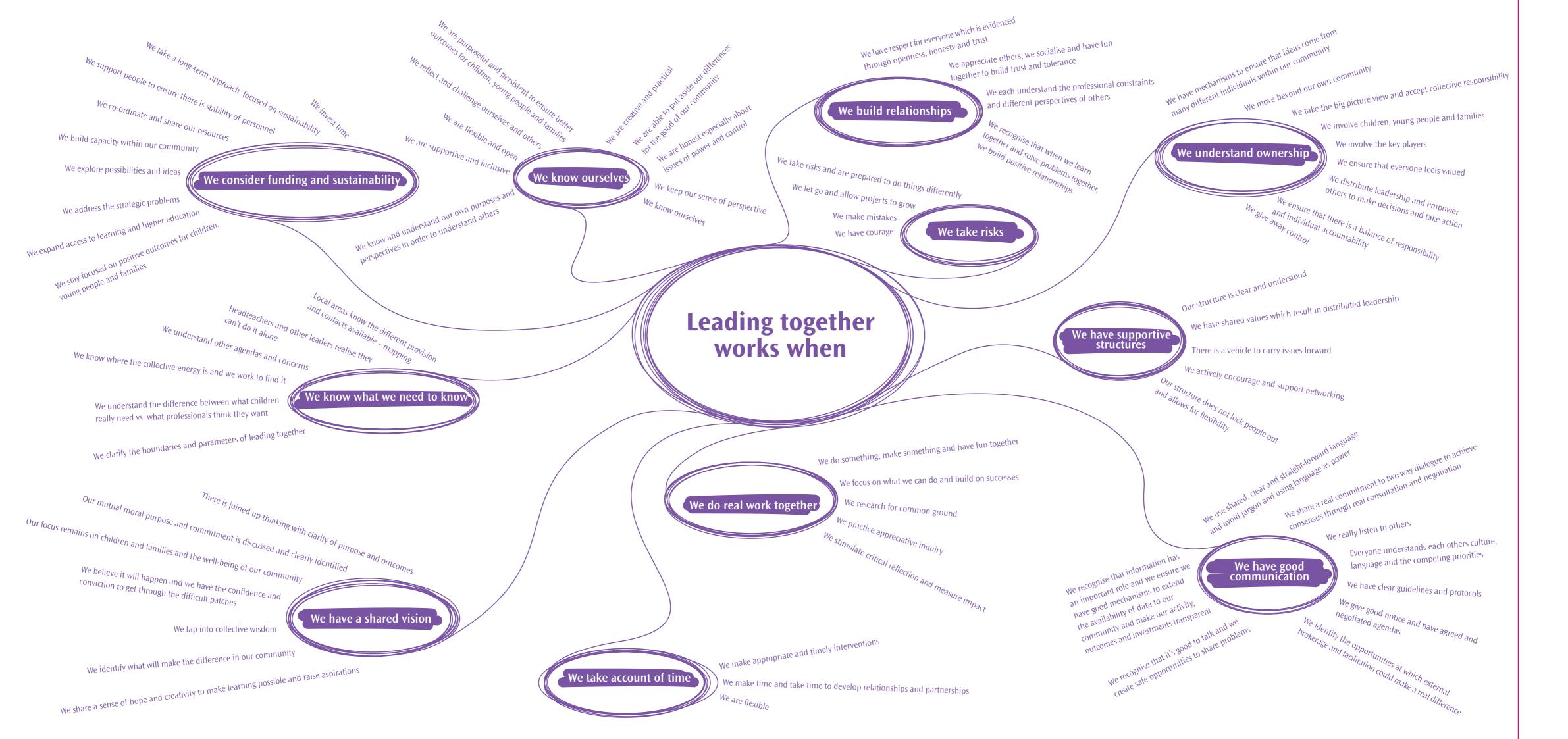
- we know what we need to know
- · we take account of time
- · we have a shared vision
- we do real work together
- · we have good communication
- we have supportive structures
- we build relationships
- we understand ownership
- · we take risks
- we know ourselves
- we consider funding and sustainability

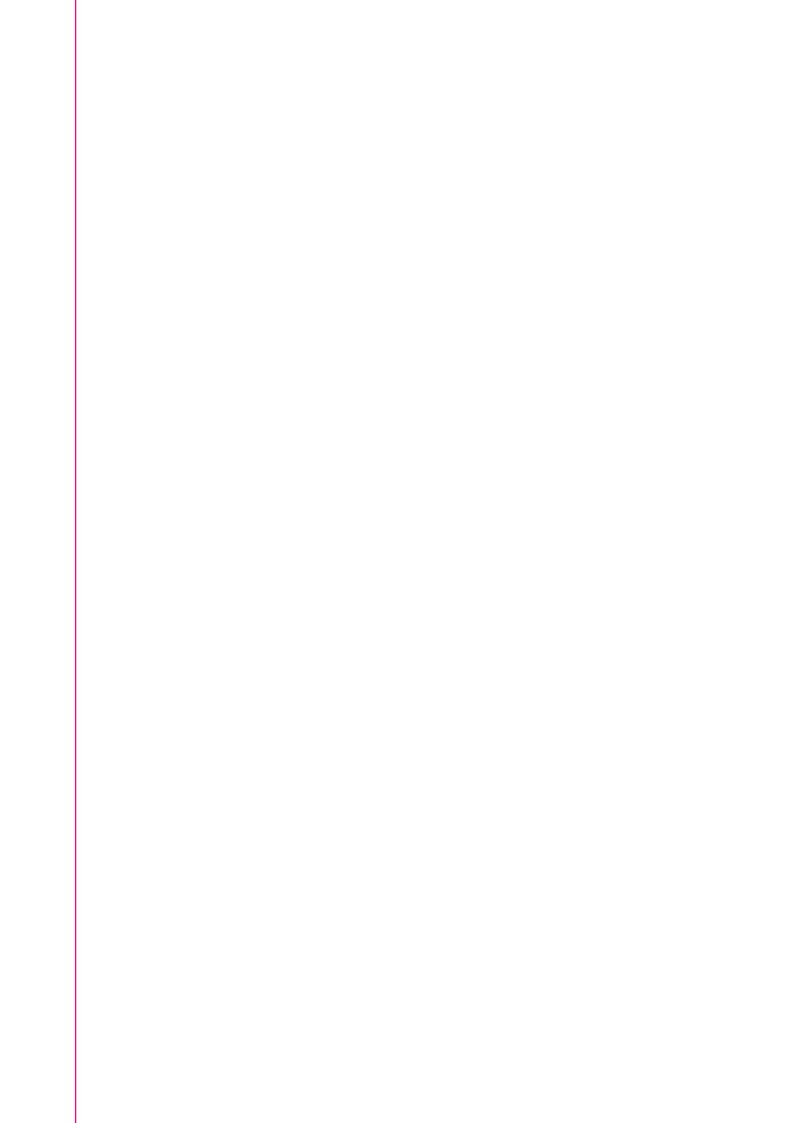
On page 22 there is a list of strategies that some leaders have tried that have worked, and there is also a list of mistakes to be avoided.



There are several ways this mind map could be used. Here are just a few suggestions.

- It can be used as a checklist of things to consider before you undertake partnership working or leadership roles beyond your institution.
- You can adopt it as a review tool to help you identify which features of your leadership are positively supporting partnership working, and what you may need to do to improve the leadership of collaborative working. For each branch on the mind map, you could discuss evidence of how you are implementing these ideas in practice.
- You can use it as a tool for dialogue with others, with colleagues from other agencies and with representatives from your community.
 The mind map could be used to help you to learn from your own successes and mistakes, and you could create your own mind map.





Strategies leaders have tried which work:

- call the agencies and people you have invited the personal touch
- start the process don't wait for someone else
- seek out and learn from non-traditional partners
- learn through trying new ideas
- it's good to bring diverse groups together
- · start small and focus on quick wins
- · be focused, and do two or three things well
- focus on hard-to-reach people
- model action-planning around strategic sustainability
- · focus on action and delivery to change thinking
- establish the vision then orientate teams not vice versa, ie focus on delivery and then make it happen
- schools change and adapt to meet needs.
 Do you know what the needs of the community are?
- create a wide learning network that cuts across existing networks
- find out about the barriers and needs and then address these, eg provide a crèche or translate into the home language
- consider the location carefully, eg community centre

When engaging in community leadership, we should avoid:

- making assumptions
- · imposing a model or idea
- sidelining a particular group
- rushing in doing too much too soon
- competitiveness
- person or professional domination
- jargon
- being blinkered by our own professional values and assumptions
- rigid routines and working practices
- assuming organisational change will affect the quality of provision
- · assuming you know what a community wants
- assuming a school is the place community wants to be
- assuming we know what others want
- not making mistakes
- fear of losing personal power/title/status
- thinking that co-location is the answer to everything
- not engaging the group of people we need most to influence and be influenced by

NCSL would like to thank everyone who attended the 2005 Leading Together community leadership conference for sharing their knowledge and ideas.

What leadership do schools need?



What leadership do schools need?

Times are changing - needs are complex

Our understanding of what constitutes a school and the role of the headteacher is changing. Partnership working and leadership that connects to other schools, organisations and agencies are vital if school leaders are to achieve a balance between the inward and outward facing aspects of their role.

- What happens outside school has a significant impact on what happens in school.
- The influence of parents and the family is more significant than that of the school up to the age of 11 (Desforges, 2003).
- A continued exclusive focus on learning and teaching in the classroom and a focus on improvement at the level of the single organisation will only reap marginal improvement.
- Education is a wider community endeavour and schools are one contributory factor to it.

"As school leaders know, even though learning and teaching is our core business, a child just doesn't bring only their brain to school. Looking after the whole child means addressing every aspect of their emotional, physical and educational being – something schools cannot hope to deliver in isolation."

Steve Munby, Chief Executive, NCSL



Pause for thought

- 1. How does this manifest itself in your own school or locality?
- 2. Do you agree with Steve Munby?



What do we know

From bonding to bridging

Schools are gradually shifting from being institutions that are tightly bonded to institutions that bond and bridge simultaneously.

Organisations that bond are characterised by:

- organisational rituals
- inward-facing behaviour
- independence from others
- deployment of resources focused on the organisation
- a strong sense of belonging

Organisations that bridge are characterised by:

- an outward focus
- an awareness of the locality, ie they know the locality and are known in it
- · being inclusive and invitational
- sharing of resources with others
- a sense of belonging to a neighbourhood and wider community



Pause for thought

1. Where is your school stronger?

2. Where is your school weaker?

3. Where might you focus your attention next?



Who is doing what?

Felicity Thomas: Earlham Early Years Centre

Early Year's Centres and Children's Centres are demonstrating new models of outward focused leadership.

Felicity Thomas, a graduate of NPQICL (National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership), responded to her nursery school becoming a children's centre by opening up the governance to allow parents using other services to have a stake in the centre. She wanted to create something more than 'a nursery with bolt-ons'.

Social workers, health visitors and community workers are an integral part of the centre. She created a single team by tapping into people's sense of passion about their work. Questions such as 'what do we hold dear, what are we the guardians of, what don't we want to let go?' – all offered a starting point for building the vision.

One of the things Felicity has learned as a Head is that she can't do it all.

'Trusting other professionals to do their job is part of what I do. I listen, co-ordinate and try to understand. It's not easy, but it's very exhilarating'.

LDR: Children take centre stage. November 2006



Going further

Web links:

ECM: Why it matters to leaders. Download this publication at www.ncsl.org.uk/ecm Demos Paper: Taking the wide view. Download this publication at: www.demos.co.uk/projects/recentprojects/takingthewideview/

How might I explore this further?



Activity: 4 levels of leadership

The following three levels of leadership (adapted from *Educational Leadership and The Community*, Gelsthorpe and West-Burnham, 2003) can be viewed as staging points in the journey from more traditional forms of leadership to the leadership characteristics that will be required in schools of the future. Leaders will move between these levels depending on the needs of the school. Headteachers have spoken of the need to 'breathe in' and 'breathe out' depending on their needs and focus. At times, it is appropriate that the school focuses inward, and at other times takes an outward focus as a means of regenerating and refocusing the school on its future priorities.

Step 1: Where are we now?

Look at each of the level descriptors and think about which are most like you and least like you. Can you think of examples that demonstrate how you enact this leadership in practice?

Level 1: Focusing inward

- Leadership is focused on school improvement and management.
- Leadership is distributed through the senior leadership team and into the rest of the organisation.
- Parents are involved by invitation.
- The curriculum is restricted to that defined by the national curriculum.
- There is functional engagement with other agencies and schools.
- Resources are used exclusively for the benefit of the school.
- The teacher's role is limited to effective teaching and learning.
- School success is measured on narrow academic criteria.

Each of these levels addresses a different aspect of leadership:

- the focus of leadership and the role of the school
- the extent to which leadership is distributed
- the relationship with parents and families
- the curriculum its scale and scope
- relationships with other agencies
- use of resources
- role of teachers and other adults in the school
- definitions of success

Step 2: How do we know?

Discuss these leadership levels with colleagues (eg your leadership team, staff in schools, governors etc). Do you have a shared understanding of current leadership practice?

What evidence or real life examples can you draw upon to validate your judgements?

Level 2: Beginning an outward focus

- Leadership has involvement with community initiatives.
- Leadership is distributed through an extended senior leadership team, which includes representation from other agencies.
- Active contributions are sought from parents.
- An inclusive curriculum involves a range of other agencies in curriculum development.
- There is positive co-operation with other agencies and schools.
- There is controlled access to school facilities for the community.
- Teachers are engaged with parents and community initiatives.
- School success measures include a broader range of criteria.

Leaders who have done this activity in the past have generated the following characteristics for level 4:

- communities of learners teachers, students and families together
- community-centred learning school as a contributor
- parents and community governance
- personalised and negotiated curriculum

- a local curriculum linked to a local learning guarantee for children and young people growing up in an area
- federations of partners
- leadership shared non-hierarchical
- school supports the capacity of the community to do it for themselves
- school as a capacity-building and local leadership and skills development agency

Step 3: Level 4 leadership

What would you like to call level 4 leadership? What words would be used to describe it? How might each aspect look at level 4? Generate your ideas on Post-it notes. Share with others and choose your top five.

Complete the empty box.

Level 3: An outward focus

- Leadership is focused on community renewal and social activism in addition to attainment.
- Leadership resides within extended teams located in and focused on leading across a locality.
- Families are seen as partners in education.
- There is a fully negotiated and relevant curriculum.
- There is full integration with other agencies and schools.
- School is a community resource.
- Teachers are social educators.
- The school is a centre for social and economic entrepreneurship.
- School success is linked to measures of improvement in the locality as well as a broad range of measures of achievement for students.

Level 4:

Step 4: Seeing the future in the present

Ask yourselves: 'Where do we see emerging elements of level 4 leadership today? Where can we see the future in the present?'
How can you build on existing practice to develop leadership for the future?



How do schools engage their communities?

How do schools engage their communities?

Why is this important?

For a growing number of schools, further significant improvement will only come about if they begin to focus, not only on the quality of learning and teaching in the classroom but also on the social context in which children live. In other words, improving communities means improving schools and vice versa.

Recent research undertaken by DEMOS for NCSL has stressed that this interdependant development will only happen when the public themselves lend a hand. (Craig & O'Leary, 2006)

The NCSL 'Better Together' seminar series on building community conversations has explored the power of conversation as the best way of building personal agency, trust and high-quality relationships.

One of the schools who shared their story with us at the seminars and the subsequent talk2learn Hotseat was *Bognor Regis School* in West Sussex where community partnership was an absolutely essential part of successful efforts to pull the 1600-student *Bognor Regis Community College* out of special measures.

You can read more about the school in the March 2006 issue of Ldr.

The school's leadership team began by talking to the local authority, health authority and the Quality and Skills Council about their key priorities for the area's development. It also entered into dialogue with parents, residents associations and business support groups to listen to what they felt the community needed.

As a result, the college has been able to identify, and attract investment for a new skills centre addressing the chronic shortage of opportunities for people going into the construction and care industries. While still in its infancy, the centre is already recording much higher completion of course and return rates post 16.

'If there's one thing we have learned it is that there is no point waiting for people to come to you or drawing up a list of what you, the school, thinks people need. You need to go out into the community and really listen to what people tell you - it makes it all so much more real and gives you a much clearer idea of where to go next'.

Headteacher John Morrison

to engage in these
community conversations right
now. They shouldn't hold back imagining
that there is a new strategy around the
corner that's going to take them to a new place.
Start by engaging the community in something
that's fun – where they can just get a chance to
meet each other and enjoy each others company.
Then move on to having open conversations where
the questions are about discovering what connects
you rather than what divides you – what's great
about living here – what're your three wishes
for this community?' then you can move
on to 'so what can we do together?'

George Otero – Better Together November 2005



What do we know?

Community conversations and dialogue

The seminar series: 'Better Together: the power of community conversation' with George Otero of the Center for Relationalearning (at: www.relationalearning.com) and John West-Burnham has enhanced our understanding of the importance of dialogue as a tool for building community.

We all engage in three different kinds of conversation.

Instructional conversations

We know something and we want others to know it too.

Generally the focus is on achieving compliance.

The parameters of the conversation are clear and the outcome is pre-determined.

Learning conversations

The focus is set but the outcomes are not yet known.

The conversation explores various outcomes and generally comes to an agreement.

Community conversations

This type of conversation is a vehicle to allow everyone to express and share the diverse views they hold.

In this conversation, keeping people engaged is more important than achieving a quick outcome.

Generally the focus is agreed by the group and the outcome is not preordained.

These conversations exist with no prescribed agenda, with nothing necessarily to do as a result of the get-together — a deeper understanding of each other's hopes and fears and an understanding that the agenda is set by the group might be enough in the early stages.

A community conversation can be characterised by some of the following questions.

- What's great about living and working here?
- How many of us believe or want ...
- What do we think about ...
- How are we feeling about ...
- Is this conversation going anywhere? Where might it go?
- Something that won't go away for me is ... What do others think about that?

The purpose of a community conversation is to keep people thinking and talking. These questions can help this to happen.

- Can you tell us more to help us to understand your concerns?
- How is what you are saying the same as what 'X' said earlier?
- How do you know that? What have you seen or heard?
- Are we seeing connections between what people have been saying for the last 10 minutes?

Under the right conditions purposeful conversation can do the following:

- generate new knowledge
- · enhance shared understanding
- renew hope
- stimulate collective action



Pause for thought

1.	Think about the conversations you have had recently:
	• in the classroom
	• in the staffroom
	• in meetings
	• at home
	• in the community
2.	Which were instructional, which were learning and which were community?

To move to community conversations takes time and practice.

Ask for feedback.

- When did I open up the conversation?
- When did I close it down?
- I felt anxious when X mentioned Y. What stopped me sharing that?
- Did I listen well?
- How did I show I was open and interested in what others were saying?



Who is doing what?

Kay Lindley, Headteacher, Victoria Primary School, Keighley

Kay wanted to spend a day bringing together everyone who has an impact on the lives of the children who come to Victoria Primary School. She invited the school staff, local parents, the local imams, the police, the health sector, social services, voluntary and community groups and the local authority. One summer day in July 2005, over 80 people gathered in the school hall and started to work together.

Step 1: Who are we?

'Getting to know you' – what's in a name?

Step 2: Looking inward

Groups with similar roles and responsibilities sat together and asked:

What do we do for children?

What do we think the other groups most need to hear?

Step 3: Looking outward

Pairs from each role-specific group then visited other groups to find out more about each other's work, asking:

What's your focus?

How do you work?

Which children do you work most closely with?

Step 4: Thinking collectively

Role-specific groups then reconvened to share what they had found out from each other. They then asked themselves:

Given what we have heard, what more could we do for children, and who could help us?'

Role-specific groups then went to other tables to ask individuals to join them and to ask:

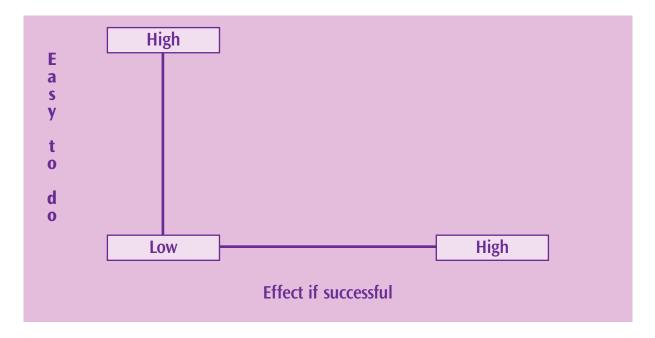
How could we work together to achieve X?

Step 5: Taking action Prioritisation exercise (see page 33)

The whole group then worked on a prioritisation exercise.

The group created a giant wall map that showed how easy the actions were and their effect if the work was successful.

Prioritisation Exercise



"It was amazing seeing everyone gather in one room like that and the process worked really well. People were confident in who they were and what they had to offer and felt it was OK to ask for help and advice from other groups. There was a really optimistic feel at the end of the event and a genuine desire to make it work".

Kay Lindley, Headteacher, Victoria Primary School



Who is doing what?

George Green's School, London 'The writing on the wall - your shout'

In 2004, George Green's School worked with NCSL and Rezolv to engage 362 stakeholders in a community engagement process to provide greater understanding of present success to help shape leading-edge best practice.

They took part in a participative community audit to establish an informed basis to decide how to enlarge and increase the effectiveness of their community focus. George Green's reflected its inclusive ethos by naming the event 'The writing on the wall – your shout'.

Step 1

All were invited to participate.

A raffle was used as an incentive.

Three walls were covered in brown paper.

Each wall posed a question:

- What does every child need?
- What do we already have in our community for children?
- What do children need at each stage of development?

Step 2

Participants had different coloured Post-it notes to designate different groups.

Groups worked together and in pairs to come up with responses.

The atmosphere was lively and informal.

Step 3

The outcomes were analysed and fed back to the participants. Common areas of focus and gaps were identified.

Why did it work?

- The exercise revealed areas of concern and gaps from a practical stakeholder perspective.
- The engagement of participants captured a snapshot of felt needs and perceptions at the time of the exercise.
- The informal nature of the activity allowed everyone to participate.
- Different walls engaged people differently, for example parents and students preferred the first two walls and questions and were able to focus on these.

The writing on the wall provided George Green's School with a number of important insights to further leverage advantage for its students.

A process is now being developed that will:

- Build leadership capacity within the school as a community
- Establish broader participation with the local community
- Secure a shared commitment across feeder schools, other professionals and community leaders to an educational entitlement
- Create a collaborative culture, enabling agencies to deliver seamless provision for children at risk





To find out more about the outcome of this exercise go to George Green's case study on the website at: www.ncsl.org.uk/communityleadershipnetwork

How might I explore this further?



Activity: Circular response: a tool for supporting community conversation

This activity emphasises the importance of:

- listening to others
- acknowledging their contribution
- · connecting ideas and contributions

This activity could be used in many different contexts including a staff, governors' or parents' meeting, or with colleagues from other services and with pupils.

Before speaking, the speaker must summarise what the previous speaker has said to his or her satisfaction. Gather in a circle and agree a topic for debate (see over the page for some ideas to start your discussion).

Everyone has up to three minutes to speak and must be allowed to speak on the topic uninterrupted.

The process continues until everyone has had a chance to speak.

Only after everyone has spoken may general, uninterrupted discussion begin.

As with all dialogue activities, it is OK to pass and not take part.

The speaker may then proceed by making additional comments.

This activity was one of the most popular at the Better Together seminar series. It elicited the following response:

"I realise
now I never really listen to
what people say — I am so busy trying
to think about what I am going to say
whenever there is a break in the debate.
This exercise allowed me to really listen, and to try to
understand what the person was saying in order that I
could summarise it. It also make me think more about
what I was going to say — how could I say it in a way
which would make it easier for the person next to
me to summarise it. I was much more aware of
the connectedness of our thinking —
it really took the debate to a
richer level."

Source: Preskill et al, 2000

Discussion starters: eight principles for successful community engagement

The circular response tool can be used for any kind of discussion. The following eight principles for successful community engagement could be useful prompts to start a discussion about leading schools in communities. These discussion starter cards have been adapted from work completed in partnership with NCSL and Rezolv.



Photocopy this page and the following page

How to use these cards

Cut up the cards and distribute amongst your group. Ask each person to speak about the principle on his or her card, and how this relates to current practice. You could similarly choose one card and use this as a stimulus for everyone. You could also devise your own cards.

Focus on process: Schools that most successfully engage with their communities focus on a process of community involvement, which often produces low-cost or no-cost solutions for those most in need.

- Q: What processes do you use to engage with your community or communities?
- Q: How do you ensure that you focus on issues that are important to your community or communities?

Broad representation: Broad community participation is vital. Power struggles can prevail over the best interests of children if leadership is left to institutions elected by only a minority of the community.

- Q: How do you engage with the majority of families in developing the school's community dimension?
- Q: What information do you give parents and the wider community to help them to understand local needs?

Accurate information: Accurate information allows schools to move community regeneration forward. Trends and patterns collated from a variety of sources - health, social services, police, local businesses - reveal opportunities to raise attainment.

- Q: What additional information do you have about your local area and community?
- Q: How do you use this information to focus activity and investment to raise attainment?

Independent leadership: Regardless of context, models of excellent practice seem to have one thing in common: a passionate champion interested only in achieving the very best for children. They are social entrepreneurs who develop leadership in the community.

- Q: Who are the passionate champions in your school, organisation or community?
- Q: How do these social entrepreneurs develop leadership in your community?

Eight principles for successful community engagement



Photocopy this page

See previous page

Investment in people: Investment is required to create professional minds that listen to, understand and respond to local needs. Listening, collaborative people lead impactful community schools and they are open to other good-quality partners leading.

- Q: How do you involve, listen to and understand the children, parents, professionals and other partners in your community?
- Q: How does your organisation model collaboration?

Partners: Abundant resources are available to help children, provided everyone is prepared to put children and the community before professional or personal ambition.

- Q: How do you share resources (financial, people, space) with the voluntary sector, community and other agencies or private organisations to provide improved services for children and families?
- Q: How do you enact collaborative leadership when working in partnership?

Demanding accountability: Children and families require instant access to help at time of need. Clear accountability creates dynamic, responsive and productive community schools. They measure impact, put children and families first and make things happen quickly.

- Q: How accountable are you to the children and families you serve?
- Q: How do you measure impact and gain feedback about the quality of your services?

Focus on children and young people: In successful models, everyone is clear about the priorities that local people class as important. Everyone is open to respond to messages that they least want to hear about existing services.

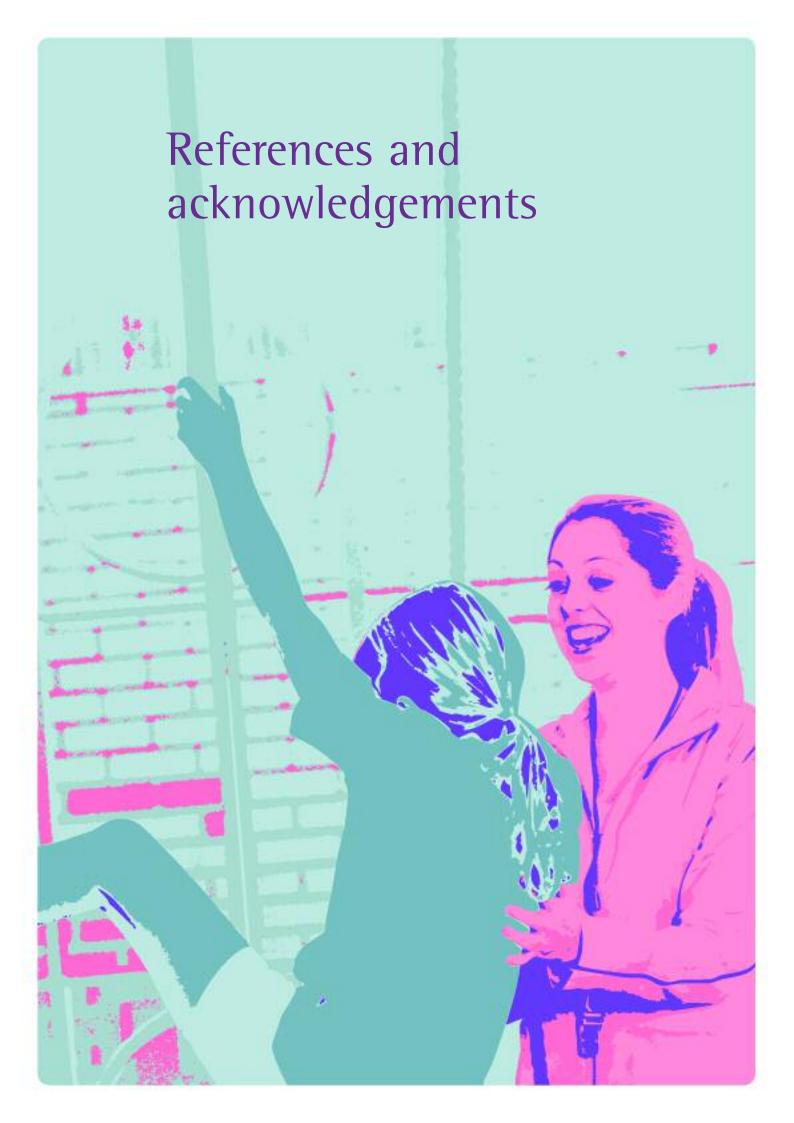
- Q: How do you seek and respond to opinions about existing services?
- Q: How do you ensure a focus on the hard realities facing children and young people?



Going further

Web links:

Craig, J & O'Leary, D, 2006, The Invisible Teacher: How schools can unlock the power of community available at: www.demos.co.uk/projects/currentprojects/communityleadership Further tools used in the community leadership network available at: www.ncsl.org.uk/communityleadershipnetwork



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We would also like to acknowledge the substantial contributions that many of our partners are making to the development of the knowledge, learning and tools as a part of the development of community leadership and these publications.

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www.relationalearning.com/publications.html

Organisations:

The following organisations have been part of the development of the NCSL community leadership strategy. We thank them for their contribution to this publication and the ongoing work of the strategy in local schools and communities.

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