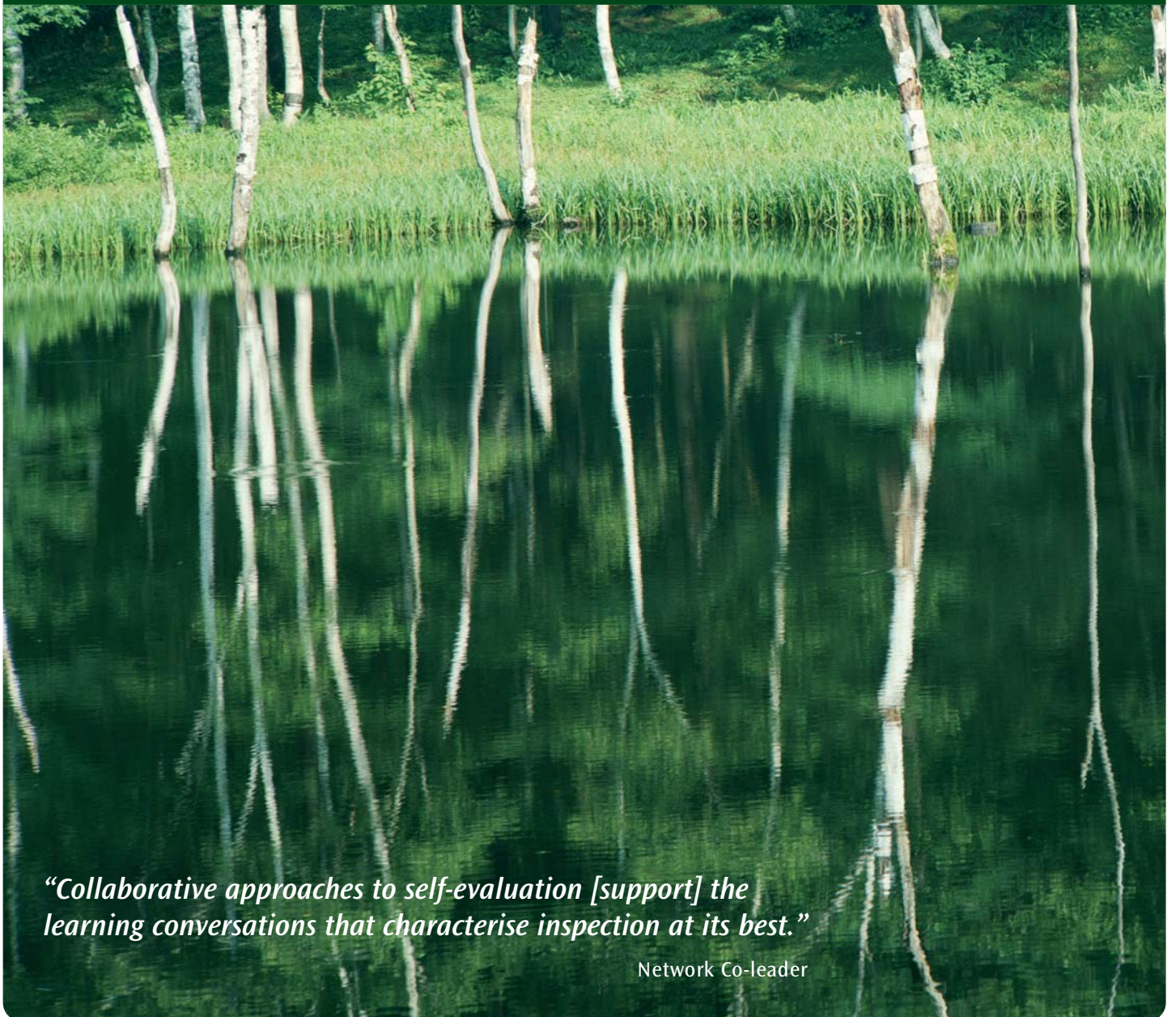


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Network leadership in action:
**Getting started with
Networked School
Self-evaluation**



“Collaborative approaches to self-evaluation [support] the learning conversations that characterise inspection at its best.”

Network Co-leader

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Networked School Self-evaluation

This publication in NCSL's *Network leadership in action* series is a practical development tool designed to provide school and network leaders with ideas to get started with Networked School Self-evaluation (NSSE). This booklet presents a process and four approaches developed within the Networked Learning Communities (NLC) programme. It includes snapshots from practice, both as illustration and to trigger your own thinking.

Using this development tool

The guidance notes which follow first set out some definitions and key characteristics that help to demonstrate the synergy between collaborative school self-evaluation and learning networks (pages 1-2).

Following this, a process and four different approaches to collaborative school self-evaluation in learning networks are described (pages 3-8). Each is illustrated by network narratives of NSSE in action. These are designed to:

- 1 **explore the range of network purposes and contexts to which collaborative school self-evaluation lends itself** – where a series of reflective questions are used to help you to think about what each approach might offer you, your school or your network
- 2 **highlight key points through an analysis of examples from practice** – which suggest significant characteristics that require consideration
- 3 **signpost materials and useful resources that could help to address these issues** – where additional references and resources are indicated that might help you to explore an approach in more depth

Next, there is a network leader's personal reflection on the new process of school self-evaluation (pages 10-11). Finally, there is an annotated version of the SEF (self-evaluation form) that highlights aspects of evidence and collection methods that can usefully be tackled collaboratively (page 12).

What is Networked School Self-evaluation?

The next stage of educational reform calls for new methods to achieve and establish excellence. A renewed emphasis on self-evaluation is seen as a cornerstone of these developments. Self-evaluation can be defined as:

"A process of reflection on practice, made systematic and transparent, with the aim of improving pupil, professional and organisational learning."

MacBeath, 2005

The relationship between schools, DfES Ofsted and local authorities has changed significantly. Arrangements for external inspection and monitoring now start from the schools' self-evaluation. From September 2005, it has been a requirement that schools produce a self-evaluation form (SEF) as the basis for inspection and the single conversation with their school improvement partners. The terms of engagement assume that schools are best placed to identify, evaluate and address their own strengths.

There is no prescribed model of how schools should embark on self-evaluation, although one output clearly must be the SEF. In *Self-evaluation: A guide for school leaders* (NCSL, 2005) John MacBeath draws a distinction between self-evaluation that is engineered solely to meet external requirements, and that which is embedded in the life of the school. He sees the latter as development-led, wide in scope and built into the school's practices and processes. It is this approach that is reflected in examples in this booklet.

One possible model for self-evaluation is based on collective action. The government attaches great importance to learning from effective partnership working. The DfES believes collaborating to share expertise and experiences brings positive benefits not only to the participating schools but to the community through improved cohesion. The *Every Child Matters* (ECM) agenda applies an additional drive to joint enquiry, analysis, planning and action.

Why do school self-evaluation in networks?

NCSL's Networked Learning Communities programme has provided a test-bed for learning about the value of the networked context for addressing self-evaluation. Networks have adopted different starting points: some have taken the structure of the Ofsted SEF as the prompt for their activities, others have used a learning focus of various kinds to inform their self-evaluation and SEF completion.

A series of programme enquiries has shown that networks create the preconditions of openness and trust that are necessary for sharing of data and professional practice. They increase the ability of practitioners to recognise good practice. They can also prepare the school for meaningful external engagement and promote a momentum for change.

This publication draws on the experience of a small number of networks to demonstrate how they have used collaboration to add value to self-evaluation in three key ways by:

- 1 establishing an environment of trust and confidence which is conducive to providing appropriate support and challenge, enabling rigorous peer review and validation
- 2 providing a locality in which the data can be shared and pooled to provide comparative benchmarking information and sites of further study
- 3 acting as a resource for schools to make sense of their self/peer evaluation data to establish priorities, plan strategies and support the implementation of necessary work

The examples show the high level of creativity generated through a network response to the self-evaluation challenge.



Linked resources

To find out more about:

- **self-evaluation, leadership and networks**, see MacBeath, J, 2005, 'Models, tools and examples of practice' and 'Background, principles and key learning' in *Self-evaluation: A guide for school leaders*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership. <http://www.ncsl.org.uk/media/93C/D5/self-evaluation-models-tools-and-examples-of-practice.pdf>
- **networked approaches to creating an evaluative culture**, see 'Self-evaluation is at the heart of all decision-making' in *Nexus* magazine, Winter 2006, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership, pp. 43-4, and 'School self-evaluation with a difference' in *Nexus* magazine, Autumn 2005, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership, p. 34. <http://networkedlearning.ncsl.org.uk/collections/nexus/issue-6/nexus-06-34-think-first.pdf>

Approaches to Networked School Self-evaluation

“The underlying process which the school employs to identify its strengths and weaknesses is not prescribed. Schools are free to follow any model which gives them the best insight into their improvement priorities.”

DfES and Ofsted, 2005

Schools working purposefully together in network contexts employ a range of enquiry methods to identify their improvement priorities. Networked School Self-evaluation, then, is another way to describe this kind of enquiry process, which is focussed on creating a developmental agenda within and between participating schools.

Through seeking to create a collaborative improvement agenda, schools have recognised the value of bringing to bear their collective intelligence and experience upon school self-evaluation. A number of approaches have been trialled, each influenced by the way that the

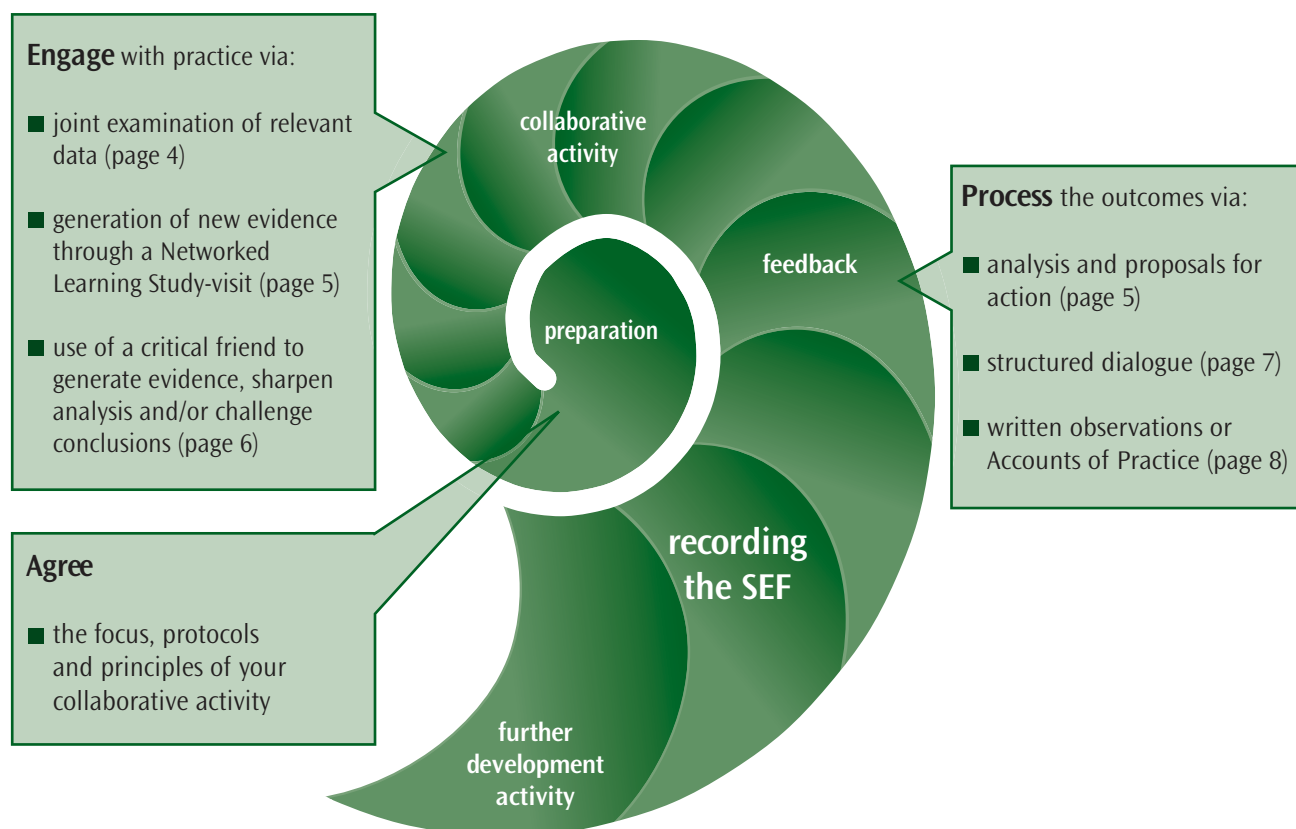
schools commonly interact with each other. There are four approaches explored here including:

- 1 Collaborative use of data
- 2 Networked Learning Study-visits
- 3 Critical friendship
- 4 Accounts of Practice

These approaches have been built upon previous successful joint learning and collaborative enquiry methodologies. They are not mutually exclusive but rather can form elements of an integrated process of networked school self-evaluation.

In the process model below, each stage is designed to be undertaken within a networked context with value provided through the contribution and challenge of multiple and informed perspectives. The process is a formative one and thus it provides more than evidence for the SEF. At best, it offers a developmental agenda with substantive bases for planning and action.

Generating evidence for self-evaluation and a developmental agenda



1 Collaborative use of data

What happens in this approach?

Networks using this approach are building individual school and network capacity through joint action where materials, data and tangible outcomes are shared and debated. Examples have included:

- comparison of methods for audit and self-evaluation
- comparison of methods for gathering data
- assessment of the robustness and validity of evidence
- approaches to filling in the SEF

Learning from practice: Frome NLC

One of the innovative developments of Frome Community Learning Partnership is the 'Frome Panda'. This has grown out of the trust established between schools and headteachers. It is a data tool, managed by a data co-ordinator, that allows the network to track pupils, to highlight areas of need and/or good practice, and to get an overarching sense of what education is like in Frome. As part of self-evaluation, analysis of the Frome Panda has enabled the network to identify 'the real issues'.

Analysis

- Network experiences reflect the necessity for trust, openness and honesty as precursors for any joint activity.
- At least some members need knowledge and skills in methods for data identification, gathering and analysis. This can provide the impetus for joint learning as well as providing the required outputs.
- The approach enables useful benchmarking of judgements.



Linked resources

To find out more about:

- **using both quantitative and qualitative data to inform self-evaluation**, see Crowe, V & Hill, K, 'Using data for self-evaluation' in NCSL, 2006, *What are we learning about...? Sustaining a network of schools*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership. <http://networkedlearning.ncsl.org.uk/collections/what-are-we-learning-about/issue-06-Sustaining-a-network-of-schools/wawla-06-08-using-data-for-self-evaluation.pdf>

Learning from practice: Think First NLC

Think First NLC has been working together on approaches to inspection and the SEF since new arrangements were announced. Initially headteachers met to share examples of materials and evidence they planned to use, including questionnaires for pupils, staff and parents and findings from commissioned research. It was a '*genuine learning exchange*', drawing on the expertise particularly of the headteacher trained as an Ofsted inspector and the headteacher seconded part-time to the local authority to work on self-evaluation.

By the end of the second meeting, there was a shared understanding of the SEF requirements, data range and different methods that might be used to complete it. Headteachers had agreed to colour code sections of the form – green for evidence, red for impact and successful outcomes, and blue for future developments. A third meeting involved all the governors in the network. This has been an important development in demonstrating to governors that each school has more to gain from networking.

"Our discussions as a network have helped us to refine our thinking and become much more disciplined about the differences between assertion and evidence that we are genuinely raising standards. Not only do we now have a clearer idea of how to manage inspection preparation, we have also developed confidence in our understanding of key issues within our schools."

Pause for thought...?

What value would this approach to NSSE offer your school / learning community?

What current processes might support the development of an evaluative culture throughout your learning community?



2 Networked Learning Study-visits

What happens in this approach?

“Networked Learning Study-visits (NLSv) are a series of organised and highly structured collaborative enquiry steps into the classrooms of a school by colleagues from that and other network schools, in order to identify evidence of progress and areas for development.”

NCSL, 2006

Networked Learning Study-visits lends itself well as a method for self-evaluation that can contribute both to formative and summative assessments. Steps in the process – *agreeing a focus, establishing a team, planning and preparation, visiting the classroom(s), following up and looking forward* – are closely inter-related. The focus selected should reflect strategic priorities and this, in turn, will suggest appropriate team composition and the best process. For example, if student voice is currently missing from a network's self-evaluation approach and the focus of the NLSv is to be the effectiveness of a particular learning methodology, one visit team might be made up from school pupils. It is also useful to 'plan back up', that is, if the outcome has to be evidence for the SEF, this should be in the forefront whilst *agreeing a focus*.

Learning from practice: Gung Ho! NLC

Gung Ho! NLC has developed a sophisticated infrastructure to support study visits through several years of practice. Visits have served as a crucial dimension of relationship creation and have helped build a broad network knowledge base about each other's schools. At first those involved were predominantly headteachers, but now visits include governors and parents as well as pupils.

Gung Ho! has now developed its own networked model for school self-evaluation. At an 'accounts of practice' day, each headteacher identifies the problem with the greatest priority in their own school and the methods they have already employed to solve it (*agreeing a focus*). There is a fixed period of time for the presentation, which is accompanied by support materials and data, followed by questions to an agreed protocol. At the end of the day, each headteacher leaves the meeting with six names (mastermind group) assigned to their problem: one of their own staff and a staff member from each of the other five schools who have expertise related to the problem (*establishing a team*). Headteachers commit two days for each group member (*planning and preparation*).

Each school hosts a 'mastermind' group 'inter-visit' to look at the issue. In the morning, members – generally pairs – investigate through data, policy, books, classes, pupils etc (*visiting the classroom(s)*). In the afternoon, they generate a plan that covers strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and actions that can be resourced by the school and those where the network can contribute. At the end of the day the plan is presented to the headteacher. The mastermind group then helps create the necessary materials and identifies where best practice is on show (*following up*). Over the subsequent two terms, action, evaluation and review take place with NLSv as a further part of the process. SEFs are completed by all six heads working together during a Network Action Day (*looking forward*). Inspectors so far have been impressed by the development influence of this approach.

“Members of staff can work in one school, in one classroom for many years and yet never have walked around the school looking at one issue within a whole school context.”

Co-leader, Gung Ho! NLC



Linked resources

To find out more about:

- **planning and implementing Networked Learning Study-visits**, see NCSL, 2006, *Getting started with Networked Learning Study-visits*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership.

<http://networkedlearning.ncsl.org.uk/collections/network-leadership-in-action/getting-started-with-networked-learning-study-visits-book-1.pdf>

Pause for thought...?

How could you interpret the NLSv protocol to evaluate the development of your learning community?



3 Critical friendship

What happens in this approach?

"It is through dialogue that teachers and school leaders deepen their understanding... The support and challenge of a critical friend is often essential to steer the process, to remind people of the ground rules."

MacBeath, 2005

To provide critical friends, some schools are approaching individuals who are external to the school or the network, others are identifying their own staff and training them in relevant skills.

Generally, critical friendship is contributing to self-evaluation as part of a mixed methodology, most often as part of a study visit of some sort.

There are three variations:

- The critical friend is part of a larger group of network staff.
- The critical friend is a member of a pair and probably from another network school.
- The critical friend undertakes the visit independently to observe and gather data.

Common to all of these is the rigorous use of frameworks and protocols, such as NLSv or the Accounts of Practice approach. The particular responsibility of the critical friend is to prompt and manage a learning dialogue. This can be triggered through a written account and/or a structured conversation.

John MacBeath provides a useful profile of a critical friend, based on research from an international project.

The critical friend **will**:

- ✓ learn (about school culture and goals)
- ✓ demonstrate positive regard for, and sensitivity towards, the school and its community
- ✓ help to identify issues and make creative suggestions to help the school to become better at what it does
- ✓ offer sources of evidence and expertise
- ✓ work collaboratively in exploring alternative approaches
- ✓ encourage collegiality, including the sharing of ideas among teachers and schools
- ✓ offer a thoughtful critical perspective on learning, culture or leadership as appropriate
- ✓ be honest, accessible, flexible, discrete, friendly, patient, communicative, and accountable to schools

The critical friend **will not**:

- ✗ assume a directive role
- ✗ offer solutions or quick fixes
- ✗ rush to judgement, make assumptions or judge without substantial evidence
- ✗ pretend to know the schools better than those in the school
- ✗ have hidden agendas or impose own agenda
- ✗ undermine the authority of others
- ✗ use school data without consent
- ✗ compare invidiously with other schools
- ✗ cause problems

(MacBeath, 2005)

Learning from practice: CHILL NLC

The Co-leaders of CHILL NLC believe that their common self-evaluation process is a strength of the network. Initially, each school was paired with a trained critical friend (another headteacher) to undertake enquiry as part of self-evaluation. This training has now been opened up to other staff and to date more than 60 per cent have undertaken it.

The process has five stages:

- 1 Planning** – This involves a number of teachers from different schools including trained critical friends. A focus, project outline and procedures are agreed and any additional training undertaken.
- 2 Research** – Pairs spend a day in each other's schools using a range of activities to collect evidence and generate discussion.
- 3 Turning conclusions to strategy** – Evidence is shared and evaluated.
- 4 Outcomes** – These are reported by pairs of teachers to different audiences.
- 5 Reviewing and evaluating** – The headteachers pull together the outcomes and use them as a basis for further action and planning, including use in the SEF.

"We'd like everybody to go through this process (critical friendship training)... It's about being a reflective practitioner and asking the right sort of questions."

Co-leader, CHILL NLC

Analysis

- Staff need training, practice and feedback on their skills to become effective critical friends.
- The process for, and output from, critical friend activity must be articulated at the outset.
- School self-evaluation would benefit from all staff being trained as reflective practitioners.



Linked resources

To find out more about:

- **how critical friendship can support school self-evaluation**, see 'Processes and protocols for Self-evaluation' at www.chillnetwork.org.uk, or Swaffield, S and MacBeath, J, 2005, 'School self-evaluation and the role of a critical friend', *Cambridge Journal of Education* 35 (2) 239 - 252.

Pause for thought...?

What value would this approach to NSSE offer your school and/or network?

What processes do you have in place to identify and develop critical friends? How adequate are these?



4 Accounts of Practice

What happens in this approach?

'Accounts of Practice' has been developed at Manchester University. It is a peer approach which provides schools within a network with the means by which they may create space and time for their own senior management teams, whole staff teams and network group to engage in collaborative, practical and reflective school self-evaluation, and establish the next steps for improvement. The materials provided are a basis for reflection and enquiry, and support a three stage process:

1 Developing and enhancing peer self-evaluation skills and knowledge

The first stage involves collaborative reflection by leadership team members in small cross-school groups, led by a skilled facilitator. This discussion is supported and structured by

- *Accounts of Practice* (there are ten) which reflect a primary, secondary and special school experience. Every Account of Practice is unique and there are key themes evident in each.
- *Focused Texts*. For each Account of Practice there are two supporting focused texts that relate to issues identified within the accounts.

2 Using peer self-evaluation: developing accounts of practice in context

Two colleagues from within the network visit a host school to observe using the **Framework for Reviewing Practice** as a guide. This is a tool for framing discussion and guiding participants in developing their own accounts of practice in context. There are eight overlapping themes (each underpinned by a series of questions):

- understanding context
- the physical environment
- structures and systems
- imperatives
- support and team work
- cultural change
- leadership behaviour
- sustainability

3 Applying peer self-evaluation: reflection on account of practice in context

In the third stage, the account of practice is used as a basis for discussion in participants' own learning community. The aim is to:

- provide judgements of quality of performance
- provide data and evidence base for SEF
- inform next steps for improvement



Linked resources

To find out more about:

- **Accounts of Practice methodology**, see www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit

"The development of social capital means that open and honest discussions can take place. The Accounts of Practice were used as self-evaluation evidence in my last inspection and two of the headteachers spoke to the inspection team. The work of the network was quoted as a strength of the school."

Headteacher, Tameside NLC

Analysis

- An essential first step is to articulate individual school needs as the basis for generating a shared agenda.
- A collaborative approach optimises both individual and collective expertise.
- The approach releases tacit knowledge.
- A remit to identify weaknesses has proved to increase the rigour of the critique.
- The expectation of following through on outcomes is explicit from the start.
- The SEF is only one outcome.

Pause for thought...?

What value would this leader-focused approach to NSSE offer your school / learning community?

What processes do you have in place that might be further developed to underpin this approach?



“*The relationship between inspection and self-evaluation has been two-way: schools have learned from an inspectorial approach to monitoring and evaluation, and inspectors have learned from the increasingly sophisticated insights schools have of themselves.*”

David Bell HMCI, Ofsted
November 2004

Networked School Self-evaluation and Ofsted

The new OFSTED framework was piloted during the academic year 2004/5 and a number of schools in the NLC programme were involved. In the following extract Andy Rehling, of Mayfield School and Redbridge NLC, reflects on his experience of the pilot and the contribution of the network to his school's self-evaluation and inspection outcome.

Spring 2004

The inspection took place in Spring 2004 in my second year of headship at Mayfield School. The previous year I had spent restructuring the senior leadership team and re-focussing our energies on children, teaching and learning. The whole local authority is a NLC composed of smaller themed communities; the school was part of a network which concentrated on Assessment for Learning (AfL). The Heads' collaborative group was a particularly important source of support and inspiration which helped to move us as a group from a defensive and competitive ethos to one where schools were prepared to talk about issues and share ideas.

Innovation

This was particularly valuable to me because I had inherited a school which had serious deficiencies in curriculum provision, teaching, learning and behaviour. Through the network my staff were able, not just to visit other schools, but also to host visits from others. The main objective was to provide opportunities for professional discussion, exposure to good practice, build trust and create a climate where staff questioned their own practice, took risks and began to innovate. Access to the network of schools created its own momentum so that pressure for change came from staff themselves and was therefore more powerful than if I had directed them. They began to construct their own models of good practice.

A good example is our 'Behaviour for Learning Manifesto' which we developed through collaboration. My Heads of Year contacted other HOYs in the NLC and shared experiences, followed evidence trails, looked at exceptional practice then constructed our own model which has continual self-evaluation at its core as well as support and has transformed our pastoral mindset. These activities formed the backdrop to our pilot inspection in Summer 2004 and were reflected extensively in our SEF.

Impact

The opportunity to be in an Assessment for Learning (AFL) network with primary as well as secondary schools has been particularly educative. As a result of seeing what our children are capable of in Key Stage 2, we have radically rethought what we're offering in Years 7 & 8. Primary teachers now connect with us for the first two terms of Year 7 through joint teaching on projects. They confronted us on 'our poor practice' by comparison with theirs! Access to effective teaching is no longer a lottery for children. The experience of being in a network has provided teachers with an opportunity to construct a different reality for themselves as practitioners.

Inspection

During the inspection the role of the network was frequently discussed with the team and demonstrated our focus on accountability through self-evaluation. Involvement in the NLC gave me confidence in my assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses. I knew about the range of practice elsewhere and could benchmark my school from a strong evidence base: where the school was now, where it might move to and how to get there. The facilitation of the NLC was robust and this held me in good stead for the professional exchanges with inspectors, particularly in demonstrating the school's capacity to improve.

Despite extensive discussions about our positive collaboration with the NLC, the OFSTED inspection is still about one institution. The reality of the new shorter inspection report is that there is no space within its tight constraints for an exposition of the impact of collaborative processes on a school's improvement. But I know it made all the difference in our school. Collaborative approaches to self-evaluation engender confidence in staff to participate as equals in the learning conversations that characterise inspection at its best.

The self-evaluation form: opportunities for collaboration

The sections of the SEF	Examples of evidence that might be gathered in a network context	Networked methods of self-evaluation
1 Characteristics of your school <i>What are the main characteristics of your school?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ data related to the locality ■ evidence of the distinctive nature of a networked school ■ comparative data that has helped to identify specific contextual aids and barriers, for example from research and enquiry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ collaborative use of data focused on locality and contextual issues ■ networked Learning Study-visits (NLS-v) by pupils from other schools to identify distinctive school characteristics ■ enquiry into contextual issues
2 Views of learners, parents/carers and other stakeholders <i>What are the views of learners, parents/carers and other stakeholders and how do you know?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ views of learners and parents on network-related activity ■ the views of stakeholders associated with the network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ sharing survey tools and techniques ■ comparison of output quality from surveys ■ comparison of methods for the dissemination of views to determine their effectiveness ■ use of a critical friend to evaluate effectiveness of actions taken as a result of feedback
3 Achievement and standards <i>How well do learners achieve?</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ benchmarking standards and trends against network schools ■ use of Headteacher group to share and debate key priorities and identify any network-wide solutions
4 Personal development and well-being <i>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learner?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ data on learners' contributions to network-wide activities such as pupil voice conferences, joint enquiry activities, joint career and work-related learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ enquiries into personal development and well-being ■ NLS-v by pupils and/or staff focusing on health, feeling safe, enjoyment and economic well-being ■ use of Headteacher group to share and debate key priorities and identify any network-wide solutions
5 The quality of provision <i>Your evaluation of the quality of provision should take account of the impact on the standards achieved and the personal development and well-being of learners</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ data on network-wide teaching and learning enquiry and development initiatives, eg AfL, Gifted and Talented, literacy, numeracy, Thinking Skills, Creativity, Personalised Learning, In-school Variation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ enquiry into teaching and learning issues ■ NLS-v by staff and/or pupils focusing on teaching and learning issues, eg underachievement, pedagogy, learning styles ■ use of Headteacher group to share and debate key priorities and identify any network-wide solutions
6 Leadership and management <i>Your evaluation of leadership and management should take account of their impact in terms of the outcomes for learners and the quality of provision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ evidence of the value of shared leadership forums at all levels ■ data on growing leaders and their skills through network activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ shared on-going monitoring and evaluation of data to assess effectiveness of joint initiatives ■ NLS-v by Headteacher group focusing on leadership and management issues ■ use of a critical friend to surface issues ■ comparison of leadership and management practice
7 Overall effectiveness and efficiency <i>How effective and efficient is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of the learner and why?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ mapping of network activities and their success in growing new leaders ■ evidence of impact of network activities on standards, capacity building and continuous improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ use of Headteacher group to share and debate key priorities and identify any network-wide solutions ■ use of a critical friend to surface issues

For more information about networked learning communities visit:

<http://networkedlearning.ncsl.org.uk>

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