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Network leadership in action:

Networked Collaborative Enquiry in practice

Illustrative accounts
of what Networked
Collaborative Enquiry
looks like in practice.

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Networked Collaborative Enquiry: snapshots of practice

The vignettes of practice presented in this booklet draw upon the work of NCSL's Networked Learning Teacher Researcher (NLTR) programme. The programme brought together school leaders to develop and distribute skills in collaborative enquiry methodologies. Participants undertook the role of Network Enquiry Advocates within each of their school networks. Throughout their involvement in this work, an emphasis was placed upon supporting the development of collaborative enquiry in a networked context.

During the NLTR programme, participants were given opportunities to learn from, with and on behalf of each other and to take their learning back into their networks, where they engaged in collaborative enquiry with pupils, teachers, parents and other school leaders.

The programme culminated in a celebration of their achievements, where each enquiry advocate team produced a summary of their collaborative enquiry work and led a learning conversation on this theme. This was undertaken in order to share the new learning which came from their collaborative network enquiries and to access new ideas from others for the future.

The subsequent sections of this booklet contain summary accounts of the experiences of NLTR programme participants in conducting collaborative enquiry in a school network and their learning from that experience.

Each of the snapshots from practice which follow is organised around a key theme and enquiry focus (indicated below) and includes a digest of key points arising from the analysis of each account of Networked Collaborative Enquiry in action.

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Bringing pupil and adult learning together through collaborative enquiry in a network

Key enquiry focus

Boys' under-achievement

Network

Gendernet NLC

Context and focus

Our network includes six primary schools in the Fylde and Preston areas of Lancashire. The overall focus of our network has been to identify reasons which account for the under-achievement of boys and so to develop initiatives and strategies to enable partner schools and those in the wider community to overcome them, mainly in reading and writing.

Our hope was that adult learners would be able to identify successful learning strategies for boys and adopt successful teaching strategies to address issues of under-achievement and disaffection.

Nature and scope

We undertook various enquiry themes across the network including:

- Philosophy for Children
- Talk Partners
- learning and teaching styles
- improving the outdoor environment
- paired and group working

In some schools all classes were involved, in others selected year groups, but in each case teacher researchers from participating schools met with each other to discuss findings.

We also set up specific pupil-to-pupil learning opportunities including two children's conferences where pupils discussed their ideal school and planned literacy and numeracy lessons, which are used by their teachers.



Linked resources

To find out more about Gendernet NLC please visit our website www.gendernet.org.uk or download the short article 'Gendernet NLC', *Nexus*, Autumn 2003, available at www.ncsl.org.uk/nexus

Enquiry outcomes

The two schools involved in the Talk Partners scheme benefited from working closely together to share ideas and information. They observed that the children's verbal contributions had improved and recorded conversations as evidence.

Similar progress was also noted in the Philosophy for Children project where the quality of discussion improved dramatically throughout the project, and many useful and in-depth discussions were observed by the teachers. Improvements in writing were also noted.

Work on different groupings and pairings had mixed results. In Year 4, where mixed gender pairs for writing were used, there was a marked improvement in the boys' attitude, especially with the lower-achieving boys, and progress was made in writing during the project.

Professional development outcomes

We have had the opportunity to meet with informed and enthusiastic colleagues from across the country and to think in greater depth about the role of our networked learning community and share it with others.

We have enjoyed renewed enthusiasm to try new ideas in our classrooms and to encourage other colleagues to do the same.

We have also gained in experience and confidence in terms of presenting information in different formats and to different audiences.

Networked Collaborative Enquiry in focus...



- ✓ Collaborative: pupil and adult learners worked together within the enquiry
- ✓ Networked: every network school was represented in the teacher researcher group
- ✓ Enquiry: barriers to boys' achievement were investigated and explored
- ✓ Impact: there were improvements to the boys' attitudes to learning, and their oral and written skills

Developing a pupil learning focus as a starting point for collaborative enquiry across a network and beyond

Key enquiry focus

Thinking skills

Network

MADCOS NLC

Context and focus

The MADCOS network is in Sefton, in the north west of England, and is made up of 13 primaries and 3 comprehensive secondary schools. All of the schools are located within a three-mile radius and Sefton is a designated Excellence in Cities area. The enquiry project aimed to investigate the impact of thinking skills on pupil learning by answering the question: *“Does understanding how you think help you to become a better learner?”*

Nature and scope

The project involved all Year 6 pupils and their teachers from across the network, who attended training sessions delivered by a specialist thinking skills consultant. For the final training session we asked teachers to nominate Gifted and Talented pupils who would also attend.

- **Pupil learning** – Year 6 pupils learning about how they think.
- **Adult learning** – developing knowledge of thinking skills.
- **School wide** – staff can take this back to train other staff within their own schools through video/DVD.
- **School-to-school learning** – all Year 6 staff in the networked learning community involved.
- **Network-to-network learning** – by using our madcos.com website.
- **Learning internationally** – through enquiry advocates participating in the British Council Teachers International Professional Development (TIPD) scheme.



Linked resources

To find out more about MADCOS NLC please visit our website www.madcoss.com or download the short article ‘Data-driven networking’, *Nexus*, Summer 2004, available at www.ncsl.org.uk/nexus

Enquiry outcomes

- The pupils enjoyed learning about ‘thinking’ regardless of their ability.
- Pupils have become more aware of what kind of learner they are since the introduction of this course.
- The programme has raised pupils’ self-esteem.
- Pupils are now more in control of their own learning.
- The skills gained were transferable either across the curriculum or into life events.

Professional development outcomes

- The training has provided teachers with a range of thinking skills strategies and techniques that they will continue to use to enhance teaching now the course has finished.
- A greater understanding of how the brain works has impacted on teaching styles.
- The programme has enabled teachers to focus on how children learn.
- Teachers are aware of their own learning styles.
- Teachers have gained more empathy for how pupils feel in lessons when put under pressure to respond.

One teacher summed this up stating:

“...the enquiry has guided my teaching and the learning in my class – so that all learners are involved, getting them to be responsible for their own learning.”

Networked Collaborative Enquiry in focus...



- ✓ Collaborative: involved pupils and adults thinking together about how they learn
- ✓ Networked: all Year 6 pupils and their teachers were involved
- ✓ Enquiry: linked adult continuing professional development (CPD) and classroom practice
- ✓ Impact: the development of greater self-esteem helped pupils take responsibility for their own learning

Lead learners as collaborative enquirers – building leadership capacity in a network

Key enquiry focus

Building learning power through coaching

Network

Opportunity Zone NLC

Context and focus

Opportunity NLC is an Excellence in Cities Action Zone in Bristol consisting of 11 schools – eight primary, one infant, one junior and one secondary. Our network vision statement is 'Every adult a learner, every child an achiever'. This requires that we maintain the collaborative way of working and develop emotional intelligence through pupil learning, adult learning, school-wide learning and school-to-school learning.

Nature and scope

A key teacher from each school took on the role of 'Leading Link'. They became the lead learners for the network and acted as agents of change undertaking collaborative enquiry work within their schools and on behalf of the network as a whole.

Each person with a Leading Link role undertook enquiries which had three core foci:

- Communities of Philosophical Enquiry (COPE)
- Building Learning Power (BLP)
- Behaviour and Learning Improvement Programme (BLIP)

The lead learners led a collaborative enquiry in each school. This was the beginning of collaborative working within the network's schools and was supported through the development of coaching partnerships.



Linked resources

To find out more about Opportunity Zone NLC please download the short article 'A key ingredient; dialogic learning', *Nexus*, Summer 2004, page 8, available at www.ncsl.org.uk/nexus or read the paper 'System thinkers in action; perspectives from practice', available from www.ncsl.org.uk/nexus by clicking on 'Nexus links' for the Autumn 2005 edition.

Enquiry outcomes

During the period of our enquiry an increasing number of pupil coaching partnerships developed.

Also, in-school and school-to-school enquiry team partnerships developed – where sharing of experiences and sharing of new knowledge took place within and across network schools.

Very specifically, we found that there was an improvement in pupil relationships and those pupils involved in the enquiry became more independent learners. Our SATs results also improved during the period of the enquiry programme.

Professional development outcomes

- We developed creative classroom practice.
- We had opportunities to meet and share ideas with practitioners from around the country.
- We worked within a supportive coaching framework with colleagues.
- We engaged in communication with other networks.
- We gave credibility to the enquiry being carried out within the network.
- We gained access to the practice and research of others.
- We developed an understanding of and skills in action research and action enquiry.
- We experienced closer involvement in school management issues.

Networked Collaborative Enquiry in focus...



- ✓ Collaborative: there was a shared investigation of jointly agreed foci
- ✓ Networked: a team of lead learners (leading links), one from each network school, were involved
- ✓ Enquiry: created new knowledge and new connections related to shared enquiry issues
- ✓ Impact: pupil coaching partnerships developed with positive impact upon pupil learning and achievement

Practitioners as action researchers

– leading innovation and improvement in a network

Key enquiry focus

Information and communications technology (ICT)

Network

East Manchester – a leading e-learning network NLC

Context and focus

Our network is located in the east of the city of Manchester and consists of 17 schools including nursery, primary and high schools and one special school.

The main focus of our network has been using ICT to raise the attainment of both adult and pupil learners.

Nature and scope

Our enquiry focused on the use of 'tablet' personal computers (PCs) which were used to draft and redraft pieces of pupil writing, whilst others used laptops. They were used as a means to generate enthusiasm for writing, particularly amongst pupils who were reluctant and lower-ability writers. The tablet PCs were also seen as a benefit for the teacher to use as an easy tool to annotate pupils' work.

Adult learners in the NLC received input from the network about conducting action research into their practice. They were also supported in sharing good practice within their school with others across the network.

The enquiry was facilitated through sharing resources and expertise. Methodologies used included shared observation, modelling and feeding back on practice.



Linked resources

To find out more about East Manchester – a leading e-learning network NLC please visit our website www.nemet.org.uk or download the short article 'From networking to networked learning', *Nexus*, Autumn 2003, available at www.ncsl.org.uk/nexus

Enquiry outcomes

Using tablet PCs with the pupils was seen as a great incentive to learning. The children were keener to use this technology than the laptops. As one network pupil commented; *"I don't like writing but I could write all day on this."*

Also, the use of a tablet PC was much more intuitive than a laptop and, therefore, the pupils were able to get started with their writing tasks straight away.

Converting their handwriting to text forced the children to re-draft their work. They had to re-read their work carefully to make sure the computer had converted their writing correctly.

Professional development outcomes

It was clear that the adult learners became more confident in following action planning, identifying success criteria and using this as a basis for monitoring and evaluating.

They also learned how to share their practice and expertise confidently with others across the network.

Importantly, they had opportunities to work with a wider range of pupils and colleagues, and could therefore learn about the different contexts, ethos and strategies within a variety of schools.

Networked Collaborative Enquiry in focus...



- ✓ Collaborative: there was joint investigation of an innovative approach to planning
- ✓ Networked: network schools shared and selected appropriate enquiry methodologies
- ✓ Enquiry: succeeded in transforming teaching and learning practices through an action research approach
- ✓ Impact: knowledge, skills, confidence and expertise in ICT were increased in both network pupils and adults



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Networked Learning Communities

Learning from each other Learning with each other Learning on behalf of each other