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Booklet 2

Network leadership in action: Sharing leadership in practice



Illustrative accounts of what sharing
leadership looks like in practice

Sharing leadership: snapshots of practice

The purpose of this booklet is to provide insight and inspiration, along with practical ideas and strategies related to addressing a range of issues and challenges associated with sharing leadership in practice in schools and networks.

The vignettes and narratives presented draw upon the findings of an NCSL Leading Practice seminar involving 100 school and network leaders. Those who participated in the seminar did so in order to explore and better understand what the theory of sharing leadership means to them in practice.

An ‘appreciative inquiry’¹ approach was used as a framework for creating narratives and vignettes of practice. This approach looks for, and focuses on, the positives, and seeks to identify and articulate ‘the best of what is’ in current practice. It helps to find strengths and examines what is being done well with a view to finding ways of replicating those conditions.

The ‘discovery’ phase of the enquiry adopts the method of story-telling, firstly through individual writing and then interviews. Participants wrote and discussed an account of shared leadership practice at its best, drawing on their own observations and context. Four strands were proposed:

- 1 the activities/actions of their example of practice
- 2 the values/principles underpinning their example
- 3 the feelings/emotions generated
- 4 the skills/attitudes demonstrated

Analysis of the practice narratives revealed six key themes, detailed below. Each of the subsequent sections of this booklet contains the texts of these narratives, organised around the themes identified, together with a digest of key points arising from the analysis of each.

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¹ For more information on using appreciative inquiry see NCSL, 2005, ‘Two routes to an improvement solution’. In *What are we learning about...? ‘Making mathematics count’ in school networks* available online at www.ncsl.org.uk/wawla or visit either of the websites www.appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu or www.taosinstitute.net

Making a difference: leadership qualities

A number of participants chose to write an appreciative statement of their headteacher.

A hero-maker, not a hero

Effective leaders not only ask questions, but evaluate practice by using the answers. They ask the staff, governors, children and their parents/carers.

All the school community needs to feel valued and fully part of the things that take place in school. Core purposes are written together and owned by everyone.

People know what it is that they are trying to achieve (including the children) and energise themselves every day to achieve their goals.

The environment this creates is empowering and enriches the lives of its children. Staff feel valued for their efforts and children come first. It has become a school displaying leadership at all levels (including the children) and has created a sharing community willing to link with others to share its experiences and success.

We have created an inclusive school where people (including children) want to come each day. There is a health warning in that it is challenging: there are real people issues to solve. But the strength is seeing the cup half full not half empty. The headteacher in all this promotes love and logic and wishes to be seen as a hero-maker, not a hero.

Analysis

Common themes across all the statements are:

- the importance of positive, grounded belief and focus and the ability to transmit these to staff and pupils
- a capacity to think and act whole school while recognising and valuing individuals
- the ability to identify the right people for the jobs and to enthuse, challenge and support them
- being approachable and committed to transparency – and holding people to account
- being skilled at making work enjoyable
- practising self-reflection and engaging in development as a learner

My first head – told by her deputy

An account of the first year working together in a 'neglected school'

Activities and actions

- setting up a new framework and ethos for the school

Skills and attitudes

- good listener
- created a shared vision
- valued other people's ideas – even 'unrealistic' ones
- able to prioritise
- skilful at questioning

Values and principles

- everyone mattered
- everyone's views considered
- good practitioner

Feelings and emotions

- made everyone feel valued, therefore they took ownership
- enjoyed working with her – felt enabled and empowered

A successful head

Activities and actions

- improved the environment for everybody who worked in it
- involved everybody
- enjoyed being there
- children important and respected
- had clear expectations and parameters for staff and children

Skills and attitudes

- developed teaching
- coached – worked alongside
- let staff make mistakes
- motivated the staff – they liked being in school

Values and principles

- honesty
- respect for all
- gave high standards
- strict deadlines

Feelings and emotions

- not frightened to show he was wrong
- showed his emotions
- frustrated he couldn't give energy

Creating or transforming a school's ethos

Four themes were identified in relation to leadership practice focused on creating or transforming school ethos:

- 1 creating and establishing the ethos of an entirely new school
- 2 changing the ethos as an incoming headteacher
- 3 changing the ethos as a headteacher appointed from within the school
- 4 tackling ethos change in a failing school

A new school

A new school building

- good at ICT – our dream of a school of the future
- guessing what skills we would need in five years and what skills teachers need

Shared vision

- research
- what is good practice?
- what resources are needed?
- funding

Clarity of purpose

- single-minded about definition
- open-minded about routes to get there
- shared values and principles – the bottom line was that we wanted the best

The right staff

- chose energetic and enthusiastic leaders, both motivated and ICT focused
- looked at staff strength in ICT – empowering different groups
- time was allocated, but there was a strict time limit
- everybody had to feed back to staff and governors

The approach

- motivation, enthusiasm, persistence
- communication – ownership
- valuing contributions of all
- offering support and challenge

We are still developing the resources, and the vision is almost realised.

Taking a school over when it's down in the depths

First couple of weeks was spent watching, listening, talking – really important things to do.

The pupils demonstrated bad behaviour and children and teachers were demoralised.

Held round table talks – checking out reality. Coming to an understanding as to what education should be.

- Why do we come to school everyday?
- What does our learning look like for adults and for children?
- What do we want for the children and ourselves?

Came up with a shared values statement – community/school.

- All developments are looked at in terms of our values: integrity check – helps us to define and develop our support.
- Showed decision-making and understanding.
- Alongside this was the shift from focusing on behaviour to looking at relationships and leadership.
- Our highest goal is to pay attention to the happiness of all the people in our leadership community. Happy children learn most effectively.

Changing the ethos as an insider – it's okay to make mistakes

I became head five years ago, after teaching in the school for 20 years. The ethos in the school had been one of autocratic control – staff were frightened to express their opinions.

The aim was to empower staff, use their strengths to make them feel valued. The head teaches a Year 5/6 class full-time to emphasise equality. There is a new senior management team.

Five key staff were identified and given roles relating to strengths and passions – eg a specialist music teacher. They teach and support other staff, share skills and reduce teachers' planning.

- All teachers are given time to plan.
- All staff are encouraged to join the decision-making process.
- Everyone listens and leads.
- The climate has changed to an open ethos: it's okay to make mistakes.
- The smallest achievement is praised.
- New buildings and furniture have been purchased.
- New policies have been formulated.
- There is a new moral purpose.
- We have become a Ugandan school supporter, a teacher taught there for a month.
- Funds have been raised.
- The community began to appreciate its own privileges.

The culture is now one of mutual respect. Everyone is in the same boat, rowing in the same direction. Individuals can rest.

The ethos is 'can do'. If it's important then resources are found.

Tackling a failing school – wanting to make a difference

"Why me? Why am I the head of a failing school?"
I asked my husband. *"Because you wanted to make a difference"*, was the simple reply.

That was the beginning of my attitude change. Instead of negative thinking, positive thinking took over. I needed new staff. I placed an advert which asked for people who liked a challenge, who might be thought to be mad, but who, like me, wanted to make a difference. Three people were appointed: two as leaders and one an NQT. They were all frightened, apprehensive, but positive and up for the fight. Our mission statement was 'Right from the start'. We looked at what we had, where we were and what we needed to do.

All saw the 'big picture' – out of special measures and raised standards. We became a school that is a happy place to be, where learning and teaching is fun. We are where we all wanted to be.

Amongst staff we had to value each other's strengths and support our weaknesses. Skills needed improving. Someone who was well organised volunteered to take over the role of PDC from the person who had been given the role and hated it. ICT skills were improved to aid planning and reduce paperwork.

Teachers began to be favoured. The natural teachers in the school took their place willingly. They then encouraged and supported all staff, from lunchtime supervisors and caretakers to office staff and myself.

Analysis

The accounts all reflected some common strategies:

- The headteacher builds and shares a vision and rationale with the whole school community.
- Everyone is invited to contribute in order to build involvement and ownership.
- There is a need to establish a climate of openness along with a sense of 'no compromise', and with the values and actions which all or most agree are critical.
- Close monitoring occurs, but with support.
- There is a determination to replace staff who will not commit to change.

Developing new collaborative approaches to school leadership

A number of collaborative approaches to developing school leadership were identified, amongst them was the use of a consultant leader approach. The benefits of collaborative leadership were also described.

The benefits of collaborative approaches

A Leading Edge Partnership

Headteachers realised they were not alone.

- We shared issues to identify and opportunities to work together.
- Trust was fostered through honesty – short/medium-term safe activities which had value.
- Communication had structure/ facilitation.
- All felt valued. There was a positive attitude about working together. We could use previous experience to help each other.
- Values were pupil-centred: we can all improve. People saw beyond their school.

An EiC Action Zone

Eleven headteachers work collaboratively, making decisions, sharing skills, resources and learning together to develop the achievements and aspirations of all those involved in working and learning in and around their schools.

All positively believe that working together makes a difference. They learn from and develop each other and also learn nationally and internationally. They embrace learning and empowerment for all through nurturing them within a collaborative and individual learning environment. They value each other's strengths, knowledge and experiences and have developed a caring, trusting, learning relationship with each other.

I am privileged to work with these headteachers, facilitating their leadership both locally and internationally. We all care passionately about the community that we serve, hence our title and motto: 'The Zodiac Zone – Creating Stars of the Future'.

A consultant headteacher

Facilitating sustainable improvement through collaboration via a consultant headteacher.

School graded as underachieving (Ofsted).

Activities and actions

- peer coaching of headteacher and throughout school
- focus on confidentiality – friendship development
- agreed not to focus on SATs results, but on teacher self-evaluation
- training on peer coaching
- lesson observation and feedback
- developed a 'peer conversation' about lessons taught – built into staff meetings
- conducted learning survey with pupils – encouraged reflective practitioners
- focus: getting professionals to 'talk'

Skills and attitudes

- coaching
- listening skills
- dialogue to create new thinking
- openness
- headteacher being non-hierarchical
- headteacher's self-belief and consultant's belief

Values and principles

- learning at heart – modelling being a learner

Feelings and emotions

- school owned this approach – not local authority-driven
- staff valued
- sense of moving on
- headteacher empowered

Ofsted came back and graded good with good capacity for improvement.

Analysis

In the accounts on this theme the key factors emerging were:

- mutual respect, trust and valuing of each other
- openness to learning from each other
- rigorous self-evaluation that enables strengths to be drawn upon and areas for development to be addressed

Challenging and nurturing new leaders

Examples of growing new leaders featured in several of the accounts of sharing leadership.

Developing an emerging leader

The teacher was working as a networked learning facilitator and her potential was recognised. She was offered professional development related to leadership:

- networking
- sharing good practice
- a range of methodologies

This increased her confidence so that now she:

- is leading staff meetings
- has spoken at a conference
- sees herself as a leader
- feels equipped
- has higher self-esteem

Collaborative support structures are now in place and principles and processes underpin activities. There is a recognition of potential leadership in all.

A new extended school manager

Parents in the school were unhappy about changes over two years to their class of children (currently Year 3). In Year 1 they had had a consistent teacher. In Year 2, one term only and then supply. In Year 3, they had one term then the teacher was seconded. Parents were intelligent, involved and regular complainers. Parents threatened to petition against these changes.

An extended school manager was appointed, previously a Year 1 teacher.

Actions

- liaised with these parents
- formed a parent council
- tracked and shared progress/attainment of their children
- developed a policy with the Council related to parent information

Outcomes

- a very supportive team of parents
- key skills and development of parent partnership and relationship

A new foundation co-ordinator

The well-respected foundation co-ordinator left through ill-health at very short notice. A very young teacher already in school was asked to take on this role. She established herself through making the curriculum more exciting. This was potentially difficult as the team were grieving for their old co-ordinator. They hatched chickens and ducklings which engaged the whole school.

Actions

- built her team
- was a good leader who made things happen
- made extra work count
- raised her profile

Feelings

- awe and wonder
- hope
- energy
- enthusiasm

Values

- fun
- children at heart
- respect for all
- focus on present and future

A new science co-ordinator

Developing a School Improvement Plan (SIP) priority area – science – with a new science co-ordinator:

- The science co-ordinator was paired with an experienced deputy head, developing coaching style leadership.
- The SLT and science co-ordinator presented proposals related to school self evaluation, the 'whole picture' to staff.
- A supportive structure was provided for the co-ordinator to work in over a period of time (time out of class, consulting, sampling).
- The co-ordinator was empowered to present findings to staff and governors. Action plans followed.
- A shared project with science co-ordinators, led to opportunities for leadership for the co-ordinator.
- Outcomes include improved self- confidence, leadership skills, raising standards in science.

Analysis

The key point emerging was the judicious combination of planned support – leadership development, networking, coaching – along with the opportunities to be self-directing and to perform.

Leading a curriculum initiative or new approach

This section presents three strategies for leading an initiative: enlisting the talents of an individual; using the power of a team (in-school and across school); and nurturing all staff as leaders.

Acquisition of Artsmark Gold Award 2004-2005

Activities and actions

The school has always been keen on the aesthetic side of the curriculum, having had good SATs results (and basic skills award) for some time. The excellence and enjoyment agenda was welcomed as an opportunity to have the non-academic curriculum area recognised. The staff decided to apply for, and work towards Artsmark.

One teacher, the part-time music and support teacher, decided to take on the role of co-ordinator for this, and agreed that this formed one of her three performance management tasks.

The completion of a 63-page application one year later detailed the culmination of extra experiences for the children in all areas of National Curriculum music and art as well as considerable, meaningful cross-curricular work in history, PE, English, ICT and D&T. It covered staff learning, community involvement, visits, visitors and reporting, assessment, and accountability. The outcome was a gold award.

Skills and attitudes

The teacher inspired colleagues first of all, then children, parents and governors by her infectiously positive attitude. She had the organisational skills to make things happen, from the practical (recorder festivals, visiting artists, visits to theatres and galleries) to the theoretical (policy re-writing, press releases, governor reports).

Values and principles

An aesthetic curriculum is as valuable as the core curriculum and academic work.

Feelings/emotions

Quantifiable data is the easy aspect of research and accountability. The Artsmark work led by this teacher showed qualitatively that the learning was worthwhile. This was verified anecdotally (parents/governors/children) and, incidentally, evidenced in responses to a parental questionnaire (about a different aspect of school) in which children's and parents' appreciation of the school's aesthetic curriculum, and non-curriculum opportunities, was stated.

Leadership by young staff members

Two young teachers take on Investors in People and lead staff meetings. They:

- made a presentation and set out a time-line and targets
- brought in three other young teachers to talk about their good practice
- formed a new team
- developed young staff as leaders
- demonstrated the potential of young staff
- exemplified informal networks

The outcome was better than they had dreamed.

Their leadership challenged expectations, acknowledged everyone's good practice and demonstrated high levels of trust.

Year teams address writing skills

The aim was to improve writing skills, especially Year 2/Year 3 transition, motivation, empowering, bonding with staff and children.

Action

- objective for success made clear
- assessed groups – books/work and expectations differentiated
- strands of NLS matched to Y2/Y3
- planned very carefully
- 77 children and 8 staff, of which 5 were SSAs
- strong leadership

Skills

- confidence built through modelling by the leading teacher
- lots of work with SSAs to value role
- children's individual learning needs taken into account
- weekly celebration of success

Outcomes

- it was hard to move staff, but once they saw the children's enthusiasm they wanted to expand and add to it
- children loved it
- staff and children want to continue
- local authority valued results

Co-ordinators working across schools

Activities and actions

- Gifted and talented (G&T) co-ordinators appointed, trained staff and arrived at definition
- examples of activities for all pupils to extend thinking
- 'Challenge Day' – staff to see and track pupils
- headteacher took a backseat – staff didn't feel obligated to check back
- G&T co-ordinators – very organised, empathetic towards other staff, building on existing good practice
- involved all staff at all levels

Values and principles

- moral purpose and shared vision
- broadening out of curriculum, after narrowing
- shared understanding and commitment
- enjoyment
- everyone valued for efforts prior to, and on, the day

Outcomes

The enjoyment for pupils and staff on Challenge Day – smiles for all – and the impact of day on future learning and teaching.

Analysis

The greatest number of accounts focused on this theme. Recurring aspects were:

- the importance of those given responsibility being trusted to achieve the task
- the power of inspiration coupled with sharp focus and sound planning
- the positive energy transmitted through a shared approach to an issue
- the need for effective project management to maintain direction and keep people and activities on track
- the importance of communication between those involved and beyond – in order to lay foundations for long-term change

Creating an inclusion team to develop inclusion policies

Activities and actions

- ensured all staff were aware of targets
- shared discussions – staff meetings
- built staff confidence (praise/encouragement/raised self-esteem)
- sub-divided and regrouped staff

Skills and attitudes

- approachability – listening ear
- clear vision
- positive and open-minded
- collaboration/negotiation

Values and principles

- all staff have equal ownership as stakeholders
- meeting the diverse needs of every member of the school community
- linked to SDP/national and local strategy and complies with Ofsted guidelines

All teaching staff as leaders of change

The aim was to improve homework. Staff read, researched and followed guidelines from NPQH. All members of the community were involved. Staff, parents and pupils were surveyed. We analysed returns. Parents' (over 100) and pupils' views came first, with feedback to parents. Positive themes and big negative themes were picked out.

The maths Year 5 department undertook action research looking at the effect of homework on learning (six sets – three stayed the same and three changed). This was linked to pupils remembering a range of topics. The three sets with changed homework improved test results.

Outcomes

- professional development
- changed homework timetable so balance for pupils not teachers
- homework planners – printed homework timetable to parents and pupils – primary pupils informed before transfer
- no more than 30 minutes per task
- led to a lot of staff above as learners

Supporting pupil leadership

Although there is just this one account of pupils as leaders, many vignettes emphasised the centrality of pupils.

Changing behaviour from within


We are a large primary school near an RAF base with lots of behaviour issues and a high degree of autism.

- The head's creation was a focus group of invited children to encourage them to articulate their behaviour.
- All the children had behaviour issues. Incidents were discussed with children and alternative ways of dealing with situations identified.
- Adults involved included learning assistants and playground supervisors in order to try and spread understanding and encourage empathy.
- Inclusion was the underlying aim, by building trust and ensuring that adults understood where the children were coming from.
- Self-esteem was developed and relationships were strengthened between adults and children, and between children and children.
- All adults and children learned from the experience.
- There were opportunities for children to air their own frustrations and distress as well as that of others.
- Feelings of pride were engendered by being initiated into the group.
- There was an observable difference in behaviour. Incidents were recorded as a monitoring tool.

Analysis

In this, and many of the other accounts of sharing leadership, pupils feature as:

- valued commentators on issues
- contributors to research
- co-constructors of learning
- evaluators of new approaches
- partners in building a school ethos



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