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What are we **learning about...?**

Redbridge brokering learning networks:

How can an LEA encourage
collaboration in leading
professional development
in school networks?

Building collaboration –
LEA brokerage in school networks

Networked Learning Communities

learning from each other

learning with each other

learning on behalf of each other

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Building collaboration – LEA brokerage in school networks

How can an LEA encourage collaboration in leading professional development in school networks?

The case studies and accounts of practice presented within this series, aim to provide concrete examples of the ways in which LEAs are contributing to networking and collaboration between schools and within learning networks. In particular, they provide a practical illustration of how LEAs are going about the practice of 'brokerage' within their work, in bringing together, supporting and sustaining networks of schools.

“ Brokerage describes the act of arranging or negotiating relationships and partnerships. A broker is an intermediary or matchmaker engaged in the ‘acquisition of obligations’ from different parties in a purposeful relationship. ”

LEAs perform many roles and functions in relation to schools. However, we have identified five distinct brokerage roles through which LEAs appear to be able to add greatest value to networks of schools. We have characterised these five roles as 'brokerage' in order to distinguish these functions from traditional LEA roles and ways of working.

Brokerage roles for LEAs

- 1 *Brokering network membership.*
- 2 *Brokering network relationships.*
- 3 *Brokering partnerships beyond the network.*
- 4 *Brokering the network's access to resources.*
- 5 *Brokering knowledge-exchange within and beyond networks.*

The case studies and accounts of practice in this series collectively explore, in divergent ways, and with differing emphases, these different brokerage roles and help to explain what LEA brokerage in school networks looks like in practice. □

How can an LEA encourage collaboration in leading professional development in school networks?

Redbridge NLC is the largest networked learning community in the country. It consists of five network hubs each organised around a specific learning aim.

These aims are:

- Metacognition (subdivided into meta-learning and active learning)
- Assessment for Learning
- Developing use of P-scales
- High pupil mobility
- Active learning

Each of these thematic hubs is a network in its own right, but plays its part in the wider network. The hubs are self-organised, being supported, but not led, by the LEA.

In total, 50+ schools – two thirds of the borough – are involved in these networks. The end result is an evolving partnership aimed specifically and directly at learning, teaching and whole school improvement.

Structures and processes

Redbridge NLC has two co-leaders – a headteacher and an LEA-based senior adviser who co-ordinate and promote the work of the network. They are, in turn, supported by a NCSL facilitator.

Each of the five hubs has two co-leaders who plan, drive and support their own network in liaison with individual school project leaders. Hub networks tend to meet twice each term. There is a dissemination plan for each which includes contributing to annual conferences and to their 'knowledge exchange website' and compiling an evaluation report each year. The hub co-leaders meet six times a year with the network co-leaders and the NCSL facilitator. Additionally, each hub network is supported by an LEA critical friend (with an allocated 15-days link time), and is linked with an HEI centre of excellence. Some of these links are historical; others have been brokered by the partnership, for example, a link between the University of East London and the LEA Metacognition Networks.

The community has started to implement network-wide approaches including:

- making students more responsible for their learning
- questioning, feedback, peer and self-assessment
- replacing closed questions with open ones
- asking classes to work as a team to answer questions

Conferences are used to showcase and disseminate good practice, for example, a recent conference 'Giving our pupils their say', brought together Years 5-9 students and teachers from 14 local schools, with the aim of finding out what would help pupils learn more easily. Each network hub also has a page on the Redbridge NLC website, developed by a Reading University associate employed by the LEA through the Teaching Company Scheme, in conjunction with Knowledge Transfer Partnerships. The website offers spaces for teachers to share practice and artefacts, and is aiming to provide a web page for every member school.

What does the LEA do to broker membership?

Membership of Redbridge NLC is voluntary, and is dependent on the desires, focus and interests of individual schools. However, the LEA identifies schools that it thinks may need the support, or benefit, from the expertise of a specific network.

Historically, Redbridge LEA was central to the establishment of the Redbridge NLC, which occurred while the LEA was in the process of major change after an adverse LEA inspection report. Although standards at KS4 were high and there were pockets of excellent enquiry-led practice by advisers and others, LEA/school relations had broken down; competition between schools was intense and intensifying, and data was protected by individual schools.

Paradoxically, this combination of circumstances created a window of opportunity for LEA facilitation of the growth of networking.

This facilitation encompassed a range of activities and responded to a range of circumstances.

- **Local schools voted for an LEA 'focused on teaching and learning'** which would 'build a learning community'.
- **A culture of networking was already emerging** for example, the LEA had an established networked literacy forum; a group of five primary schools was working with the London Institute for Education on developing intelligent schools; and, two secondaries and two primaries joined the Learning How to Learn in Classrooms, Schools and Networks Assessment for Learning project with Cambridge and Kings College, with a second learning network of 20 schools forming to learn from these four.
- **The LEA organised a conference** (supported by NCSL) to consult schools about forming a networked learning community, where local schools were asked and agreed to share their data (which took place the following day) and committed to sharing and developing practice together.
- **The LEA developed their Educational Development Plan** making networking and collaboration top priority alongside simultaneously developing their submission for an NLC.
- **Council members agreed to a post for teaching and learning** within the newly restructured School Improvement Service to lead on networking and best practice from the LEA side.

Brokering membership thus involved a sensitive mix of reading and responding to patterns emerging from schools and identifying opportunities, and encouraging commitment and enabling dialogue.

What does the LEA do to broker relationships?

The LEA would not consider that it brokered relationships either between schools, or individuals. Rather, these evolve from membership of the network, moderated, if at all, by the hub co-leaders. It does, however, provide a springboard.

The evolution of the networked learning community has sprung from the initial LEA-organised conference, where schools were asked publicly and collectively whether they were:

- committed to sharing and developing practice together
- prepared to share data immediately and henceforth

Following this, the agreement and commitment from the schools was secured. They all agreed and the LEA then ensured that the process started in practical and public ways the following day.

This facilitated commitment to challenging networking goals and provided a context in which relationships could move beyond surface of comfortable agendas.

For example:

- The network has made getting second year funding *dependent* on each school taking part in a 'learning walk' (ie a disciplined process of self-evaluation, based upon sharing good practice).
- Some hubs are carrying out a series of research lessons (lessons planned collaboratively by two or more research partners with the aim of solving a pedagogic problem, taking forward innovative practice or refining further ideas in development).
- The network has also set up formal coaching opportunities for colleagues wishing to learn about such networked practices.

Relationships have also moved beyond mutual self interest. For example, the LEA has encouraged the networks to share its responsibilities for school improvement by supporting some of the most challenged schools (eg those in special measures).

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How can an LEA encourage collaboration in leading professional development in school networks?

The LEA also provides opportunities for more arms-length relationships eg the NLC website, hosted by the LEA. This offers spaces for teachers to share practice and aims to provide a web page for every member school. The networks have now started regular capture of classroom practice, intending that both practice and artefacts be easily searched for and found online.

The LEA role in brokering relationships has kick-started a process that involved support and collaboration rather than competition.

What does the LEA do to broker resources?

From the outset, the LEA encouraged networking to focus around well-evidenced pupil learning approaches. The NLC co-leadership deliberately linked network submissions for shares of the funding to clearly defined common expectations of practice, common enquiry and transfer methods, and a commitment to share artefacts and outcomes on the NLC website.

The partnership encourages the networks to focus upon all six levels of learning – pupil, adult, leadership, school-wide, school-to-school and network-to-network. They must show evidence of a commitment to, and activity within, all these levels to get funding.

With LEA encouragement, the NLC rather than the LEA, takes a proactive role in brokering resources eg the NLC reserves contingency funding to support schools in cases where it decides one would benefit from the support of a specific network.

What the LEA has learned: do's and don'ts in brokerage

Do...

- **Help** with analysis of local needs: this is an important lea role.
- **Support** the breaking-down of competitive practices.
- **Plan** for networked learning as a central part of the edp/sep/compact which will help to align the work of the networks, the schools and the lea - think about future lea structures and plans with networked learning in mind.
- **Create** leadership and co-ordination posts by targeting matched funding efficiently - the lea started by focusing on one senior colleague and felt that this produced much better results than if it were parcelling the personnel resource out amongst several colleagues.
- **Be on the look-out** for win-win connections and capacity creating opportunities to link key school improvement and cpd work with the aspirations and work of the network - this was found to work well in areas such as intervention.
- **Give a platform** for the network to share its work (eg website, conferences).
- **Find opportunities** for people operating in new network leadership roles to interact with lea work
- **Get into the habit** of thinking 'networks' before 'structures'.

Don't...

- Be tempted to try to intervene in the network – even when parts of the network seem to expect this. Instead help find ways of helping the network to challenge itself appropriately – and challenge the LEA.

What the LEA has learned – impact

This partnership is having a positive effect on:

- recruitment and retention of staff
- quality of teaching and learning
- speed of school improvement

Schools in the NLC add high value to pupil learning and a profile of improvement in outcomes ahead of national trends, despite already high standards.

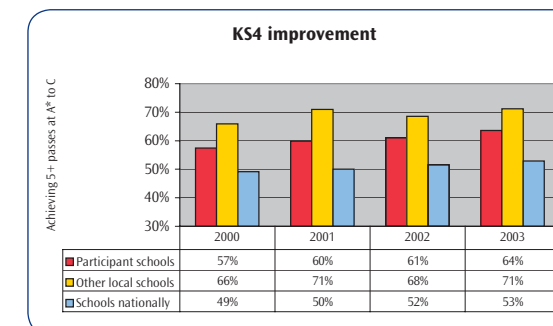


Chart 1 demonstrates a consistent improvement ahead of the national rate of improvement and a consistent narrowing of the gap with higher attaining schools.

“ You become very focused on what you're teaching and you're always asking the pupils what they've learnt, so you start teaching to their needs. ”

Year 5 class teacher and co-ordinator for personalised learning

“ Sharing practice in a structured way has given us a lot of support and strength, and having the opportunity to observe each others lessons and exchange work has been fantastic. ”

Headteacher

“ It's wonderful for our teachers' morale. It has made them proud of their profession. ”

Headteacher and NLC co-leader

“ The network has made a huge difference to us. We can discuss what really happens in classrooms. ”

Headteacher

“ Rather than try to solve problems alone, teachers are able to design lesson plans together and then observe each other's lessons to see what works. ”

NCSL project manager

“ If teachers mark your work it does not always mean as much, but when your mate points out spelling mistakes or makes comments, you really notice. ”

Year 11 student

What next?

The current biggest LEA initiative – the development of its children's trust pilot – has given the networks a strong role in the single education plan and the DfES compact.

The website is expanding: each school will have its own page to share and disseminate research-focus and practice and outcomes in a variety of electronic formats. The partnership is also hoping to develop the regional network-to-network partnerships with NLCs in other London boroughs.

The LEA is also focused upon:

- **Building on established practices** in order to increase the synergy between the NLC and LEA's work in eg building networks locally beyond schools into the community, employers, and other providers of learning.
- **Ensuring that the impetus of the networks** is not threatened by the loss of NCSL funding in the next year.
- **Maintaining the development of the website**, either on its own or in collaboration with the end of funding for the current developer.
- **Making greater use of both the practice and artefacts** generated by the network.
- **Ensuring that the network and the partnership** do not become dependent on a few personalities whose loss would jeopardise the NLC/LEA partnership and its growing achievements. □

What are we learning about...?

The 'What are we learning about...?' series is designed to make public the learning that has emerged from NLCs in the last two years.

The first six titles in the series will focus on:

What are we learning about...?

- **LEA involvement in school networks**
- Establishing a network of schools
- The impact of school networks
- Professional development within school networks
- Leadership within school networks
- Sustaining a network of schools

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