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What are we
learning about...?

LEA involvement in school networks

Network
mystery game

A development tool designed for use by small
groups to surface some of the key learning
about the establishment of networks and the
role that the LEA can play in this.

Networked Learning Communities

| learning from each other | learning with each other | learning on behalf of each other |

Network mystery game

Why did the Frickley Learning Collaborative fail?

Guidance notes

What is it for?

This mystery exercise is designed for use by small groups of between four and eight people. It aims to surface some of the key learning about the establishment of networks and the role that the LEA can play in this. Specifically it may prove useful to scaffold some discussion about the new tensions and possibilities that networks can create between schools and LEAs.

What is involved?

The mystery consists of a number of statements about a hypothetical network of schools. The network has failed to meet the expectations of those involved and interest in it has waned. Network leaders tell a tale of declining engagement. The impact of the network on learning and teaching is difficult to discern. Somewhere within the statements lies a story of the factors that led to this scenario.

How does it work?

There is no blueprint for organising a session using mysteries. This outline offers but one model that could be used or adapted to suit your own purposes and context. Alternatively, you may wish to use the materials to further your own learning in your own way.

The mystery game: step-by-step

1 The group agrees who will read the statements out loud for consideration by all. There is no discussion at this point, but the group may wish to make notes and record their thoughts and responses to each one.

2 The statements are read once more. The group tries to place the statements in categories. There is no limit on the number of categories at this stage. You create your own agreed categories together.

3 The group reviews the categories and attempts to label each one. Each statement is then reviewed so that agreement is made about the meaning of the statement and the category to which it best belongs.

4 The group attempts to assemble a narrative of the network that they are able to share with a larger group.

5 The groups tell their stories. It's helpful to have a facilitator who can work with the groups to draw out the three most problematic factors in Frickley's story and the three factors around which the network could be developed.

Follow up…

Offer a copy of *What are we learning about…? Establishing a network of schools* (NCSL, 2004) to each group. Participants should reflect on the mystery in the light of this text. Protocols for using texts can be found in the publication *The Power of Protocols* (McDonald et al, 2003). ☐

References

National College for School Leadership, 2004, *What are we learning about…? Establishing a network of schools*, NCSL

McDonald, J, Mohr, N, Dichter, A, & McDonald, E, 2003, *The Power of Protocols: an educators guide to better practice,* New York, Teachers College Press

Statement card template

Photocopy this page and cut out the cards.

1 The LEA selected the schools according to their relative performance in public tests and examinations.	**2** Josephine became one of the co-leaders because she is the head of the most successful school. She was proud of her school's Beacon status.
3 The LEA was clear that the network should be funded from schools' own CPD budgets.	**4** St Geoff's and St Arthur's are close to each other. They serve relatively affluent areas.
5 The locality has falling rolls.	**6** The network was being created in a busy period. The schools were in the process of dealing with workforce reform and creating extended services.
7 Biko Road School serves a very challenging area. Its priority is raising standards in English and mathematics.	**8** The network decided to focus on improving drama. Michael (co-leader) is interested in becoming an LEA adviser.

Statement card template

Photocopy these pages and cut out the cards.

9 Lilac Grove School had an excellent OFSTED inspection recently.	**10** The headteacher of St Arthur's has been on sick leave for the past three months.
11 The schools have a history of informal collaboration.	**12** The co-leaders decided that they needed to buy in a facilitator for their work. They spent £1,000 for two days facilitation.
13 The Chief Education Officer thinks that the network is interesting, but she has no great hopes that it will make an impact on pupils.	**14** The LEA link adviser feels threatened by the network despite the enthusiasm of his colleagues.
15 Most of the schools have experienced working collaboratively through either the Beacon Schools initiative, the EAZ or through AST input.	**16** The headteachers are delighted to be working together because they are good friends who see each other socially.

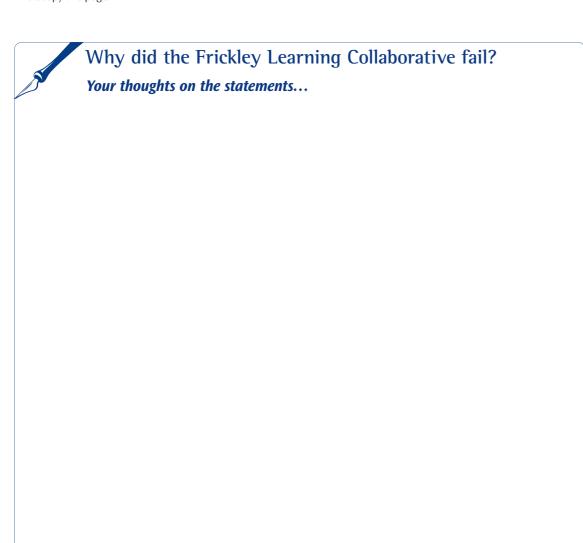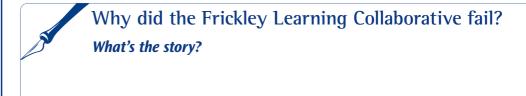|	
17 The network leaders are very practically orientated. They are not interested in engaging with research and don't have time for learning together themselves.	**18** The network had a launch event that all the professionals from each school attended.
19 Pupils from each of the schools have had no opportunity to meet and learn together.	**20** Two of the headteachers are primary consultant leaders. The PSM was keen to ensure that they became the co-leaders, so that others could learn from them.
21 The free school meals percentage in the schools ranges from seven to 67 per cent.	**22** The network is trying to raise funds to purchase more interactive whiteboards.
23 William Tell High School re-tests all pupils in October and sets its groupings on the basis of this data.	**24** The network has developed an interesting link to a network in the West Midlands.

Notes template

Photocopy this page.

> ### Why did the Frickley Learning Collaborative fail?
> *Your thoughts on the statements…*

Narrative template

Photocopy this page.

> ### Why did the Frickley Learning Collaborative fail?
> *What's the story?*

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

To order a copy of this publication, please
email **nlc@ncsl.org.uk** quoting the
reference **WAWLA/Mystery game**

NCSL National College for School Leadership