Cohort 2b Networks

Network Learning Community Case Study:
Inside out - Outside in

General information about the network

Inside out, Outside In is a network in the Gloucester area, composed of seven schools: three infant, two junior and two primary (information about the individual schools can be found in Appendix 1). All of the schools are urban, and have been members of an Education Action Zone, and are now part of a Primary Strategy Learning Network. (In this network as in so many others, different ways of connecting with other schools overlap and merge). The network began some time ago with four schools, but not all of them were, in the words of the co-leaders "as committed as they might have been". The network was eventually relaunched, with the current number of schools, in a process that included asking all staff about their vision for the collaborative work ahead of them.

The focus for the Primary Strategy Network is maths, and this part of the life of the network is led by the maths coordinators of the schools, rather than the head teachers, which is typical of the delegated leadership of Inside Out, Outside In.

In almost all of the infant and primary schools, the achievement of children at entry is below national averages. Overall, the network caters for over 1400 pupils.

Key features of Inside Out, Outside In

- City Curriculum

- Collaboration across phase and across all levels of learners

- Increasing use of networked learning study-visits

City Curriculum

The "City Curriculum" has had a large impact on the teaching in the network and on the learning of pupils. Although this is not the only initiative involved in the network, it is the one most often mentioned in Ofsted reports as having an impact.

The City Curriculum is based on the concept of "deep rather than broad" learning – that is, that pupils will investigate topics thoroughly, across the curriculum, using local resources whenever possible.

> "I walked past a classroom and they were watching a video about life in a river, but they were sitting 100 yards from our own river, and I thought, "That's daft!" *Head teacher*

The network engaged the services of Roger Cole, a consultant who works with the concept of the City Curriculum, at the outset of the project.

The curriculum seeks to engage students across the curriculum – in some ways, it is almost a return to the topic based education of some years ago (something on which some teachers remarked). However, it also includes links with the local community, links which form the basis of some of the positive remarks made by Ofsted inspectors, (because of this emphasis, mentions of the City Curriculum in Ofsted reports will be included below). It also includes within it time for pupil reflection on learning.

The City Curriculum places a great deal of emphasis on creative learning and the arts; the art work observed in the schools and shown during visits was of a very high standard, and linked closely to written work, showing an understanding of the subject matter covered.

The Ofsted reports support head teacher and governor reports of the impact on pupil learning, particularly in terms of the holistic nature of the learning across subjects.

It is significant the lengths to which some of the reports go, in support of the use of the City Curriculum, even when it is clear that the programme is at its early stages: this argues the impact that is being observed from the curriculum.

Further, the Ofsted reports support the links between schools themselves and between schools and the wider community. Head teachers reported other links as well, such as those being put into place for pupil councils. The original bid document speaks of "raising pupil self esteem"; these activities will go some way to that end. Ofsted reports speak of the confidence with which pupils speak, read and deal with visitors.

Other impacts on pupils will be more subtle. The empowerment of teachers, through the collaborative work of the network, will have an effect on pupils, from the obvious (inclusion of teachers from different schools in events) to the less tangible - increased teacher confidence, increased teacher self esteem, etc.

Collaboration across phase and all levels of learners

At the relaunch of the network, the co-leaders brought all staff together, to look at the vision for the network. The outcome of the teachers' meeting was typical, in that they saw the aims of the network as:

- Celebrate our differences and our corporate personal individuality

- Aim to be the best we can be

- Promote excellence and enjoyment

- Share a common desire to improve

- Value everyone

It is significant that pupils were involved in this process, as well: they, too, were asked for their vision of the network.

> Teachers got quite poetic – "a bundle of sticks never breaks" – if one sentence could sum it up, that might be the one *Head Teacher*

It is also typical of this network that the writing of the bid for the PNSLN was given over to the maths coordinators of the schools, rather than taken on by the head teachers. The thinking behind this was that the maths coordinators were the ones who knew the subject "on the ground", and thus knew best what was needed and what would support them and other teachers in their work.

During the case study visits, the interaction and inter-working between teachers in the different schools was obvious, and clearly taken for granted as part of the "way things work". Teachers from different schools were drafted to play parts in a rendition of "Cinderella"; staff from various schools were observed working easily together to produce a CD-ROM of the City Curriculum. (It is significant that this work took place during the school day, so that it was clearly supported by the schools in question).

The collaboration also reaches to pupil level. At the time of the case study visits, not all of the schools in the network had a pupil council – and pupils themselves were undertaking assemblies and visits to support their peers in other schools.

Yet alongside this commitment to working together, there is a spirit of independence among individual schools: the outcome of collaboration is not meant to be uniformity, but rather mutual support and learning. Head teachers were adamant that the support and collaboration did not have the ultimate aim of similarity:

> The network is about support – freedom, trust and responsibility – the freedom to be an individual within the group of schools. While still all under the umbrella that we want that we can be...

> But that wanting to be the best does not exclude other people from being the best as well *Head Teacher*

There was also an awareness of the value of the network in terms of undertaking something as possibly full of risk, and certainly as taxing and demanding as the City Curriculum,

> On our own, we'd just get picked off by whatever monster was coming along, be it Ofsted or the LEA or whatever...

> But together we could espouse a view and see all our schools benefit *Head Teacher*

Networked Learning Study-visits

The network also values and uses the NCSL format of the "networked learning study-visit". Mentioned in interview by head teachers as something they would like to use more, study-visits have now been put in place for head teachers and the maths coordinators of the network (known as a group as Maths8). (See the attached report from co-leader about the use of study-visits.)

There was a suggestion from the co-leaders that the head teachers in the network might use the study-visits in the sense of critical friendship. They were aware that this was not their original function, but felt that judgements from their peers would be very useful to them in terms of self evaluation. However, the co-leaders were clear that this would be possible only because of the solid foundation of trust that had been built up between the head teachers over the life of the network.

This feeling of trust and cooperation goes further down than the head teachers, as shown when teachers were asked to sum up their vision for the network,

Leadership

The co-facilitators in this NLC are using a number of NCSL programmes and techniques to try to spread the concept of distributed leadership and to ensure that all levels of staff are involved in network activities.

> The structure has changed... the leadership by the head, his vision, his enthusiasm has not changed, it's increased. The management structure has changed – the way subjects are led by subject coordinators. [The head teacher] leads them here but all the teachers are allowed to lead their subjects. They can lead – leadership in that way has changed. We don't have a deputy; we had one till last summer. So now we have a flat structure. ...the head has given them [teachers] all a chance (to deputise for him)
> He's got the support of all his governors. *Chair of Governors*

The network places a good deal of emphasis on sharing of facilitation skills through all levels, including pupil level.

It was significant that at the meeting where the network was preparing its bid for the primary national strategy, the work of preparing the bid was left to the maths coordinators. When the work of the day was introduced, the Head Teacher speaking pointed out that in other networks the head teachers were preparing the bids, but that here, as the maths coordinators were the ones with the hands-on experience of the target area (Maths), the network felt that the coordinators were better placed to write the basics of the bid than the head teachers were.

While this represents a devolving of authority and power to the coordinators (cf. the comments from the chair of governors above about practice in a particular school), it was clear during the meeting that the facilitation skills rightly valued by the heads had not been entirely disseminated to those in the coordinators' group. This would suggest that there is

(or at least that there was, at that time) a gap between the stated aims of the network and its practice.

Capacity building and support

The network has an emphasis on learning throughout all levels of the school – pupil and adult, characterised by one head teacher as "proper national college stuff". This emphasis is acted upon in a number of ways: cross school, cross phase meetings for staff, devolvement of responsibility for the writing of the PSN bid to maths coordinators, the freedom which teachers feel to experiment with the City Curriculum, to invite staff from other schools to be part of day time activities, etc.

This emphasis has the dual effect of building capacity and supporting staff.

It builds capacity in devolving leadership roles throughout the schools (including to pupil level). It is significant that the chair of governors of one school pointed out in interview that their school had a very stable teacher population; retention of staff in the area seems to be good. Staff members are able to undertake leadership roles within their own situations.

Mutual support within the network seems to be good, particularly at head teacher level, and beginning to percolate down through to other levels. The network is continuing to use, and adapt, the NCSL concept of the networked learning study-visit for itself, on two fronts. The first is that of head teachers, "visiting" the schools in the network, the second, that of the maths coordinators "Maths8", doing the same. The focus of both sets of visits is, "celebrating good practice"; however, it is clear from report that head teachers are also using the visits as means of self evaluation and as a means of bettering already good practice.

This use of study-visits is an outcome of plans expressed at the time of interview, showing that the network is capable of longer-term planning and putting those plans into place, as well as adapting them to new situations (such as the opportunities presented by the PSN).

Final comments

The Inside Out, Outside In network has proved its flexibility and longevity. The main driving forces for the network are the vision of the head teachers for the network, and, increasingly, the enthusiasm and "buy in" of other members of staff to the collaborative work of the network.

The distinctive features of the network are the emphasis on the City Curriculum (though there is no mention of this curriculum in the Ofsted report for Castle Hill Primary School), the pupil to pupil work undertaken by the pupil councils, the sharing of leadership (evidenced in the work of the Maths8 group of maths coordinators), and the increasing use of the mechanism of study-visits for both celebration of good practice and self evaluation.

Appendix 1. Schools

School	Roll	FSM	Ofsted data, etc.
Calton Infant School	169	15	2001 Ofsted Calton Infant School is a small inner city school situated to the south of the centre of Gloucester. Most pupils come from the immediate locality, an area with some disadvantage and unemployment. ... the school is oversubscribed. .. The attainment of most children when they enter the school is well below what is to be expected nationally, especially in their experience of language. The school makes good use of its partnership with the Gloucester Education Achievement Zone, for example through the provision of a variety of parent education groups. The effectiveness of the school is good. Children in the Foundation Stage are likely to achieve the nationally set goals for the end of the reception year in most areas of learning. However, despite the good progress these children are making from low starting points, many are unlikely to achieve the goals for speaking, reading and writing.
Calton Junior School	224	12	2003 Ofsted Calton Junior is an improving school giving a good standard of education. ... Links with parents and other schools are good and with the community very good. The school is in an Educational Action Zone and consequently pupils' standards on entry to the school are very wide ranging yet the vast majority achieves well. The curriculum is good. The 'City Curriculum' supported through the Educational Action Zone is practical, developing cross-curricular links, relevant to pupils and innovative. As a result curriculum development, including innovation is very good. Shortcomings in the curriculum are the lack of opportunities to use and apply mathematics, the development of independent science enquiry skills and the application of information and communication technology skills across the curriculum..... Planning, teaching methods and resources through the 'City Curriculum' and the increasing use of cross-curricular approaches to enable the application of knowledge, understanding and skills The City Curriculum is part of the initiative instigated by the Educational Action Zone. The National Curriculum is addressed through practically based activities and using as much of 'the city' and the surrounding area as a resource as practicable. This is a recent innovation. Inspection evidence confirms the approach involves pupils more holistically in learning. .... Although the planning of these links is complex teachers are becoming increasingly adept in planning for and exploiting learning opportunities. However, a good example was seen in a 'Tudor day' where pupils were inspired by facts, artefact and stories related by visiting 'Tudors' about their times. These opportunities need to be developed further, and to include information and communication technology as identified below. While the 'City Curriculum' is establishing opportunities for pupils to apply and consolidate the knowledge, understanding and skills learnt in English and mathematics to other parts of the curriculum it is not yet fully exploited. However, it is part of the school improvement plan to do so. Main strengths and weaknesses (as a strength) Curriculum innovation with the 'City Curriculum' The 'City Curriculum' has encouraged a distinctive approach to planning by using the city and surrounding area as a learning resource. Planning is helped by subject co-ordinators' guidance in the

			progression of skills, knowledge and understanding for their subject responsibility. This enables all pupils to achieve well in all subjects and to develop their capabilities. The 'City Curriculum' has encouraged a distinctive approach to planning by using the city and surrounding area as a learning resource.
Castle Hill Primary School	208	15	Ofsted 2004 Castle Hill Primary is an average sized school. It is situated on the eastern side of the city of Gloucester in a socially and economically mixed housing area where, overall, family circumstances are less advantaged than the national average. ….. Their attainment is lower than the average for children of the same age nationally, due to a higher than normal percentage with delayed speech and social development. … The school is currently involved in educational partnerships with local industry, other local schools and initial teacher training institutions. Its premises are also used by the community for a variety of needs, including family support and medical drop-ins. **This is a very effective school** that provides very good value for money for broadly average costs.
Harewood Junior School	313	8	Ofsted 2004 (City Curriculum mentioned 19 times in report – obviously made tremendous impact on inspection team). The school is a part of the Gloucester Education Achievement Zone (EAZ) and has been in the forefront of the introduction of the city curriculum, an initiative associated with the Government's drive to ensure excellence and enjoyment in primary schools. It is also part of the local Leadership Development Strategy. This is a good and improving school. It has a number of really outstanding features. It is a school that has taken the step of making radical and innovative changes to its curriculum, and these are paying great dividends for pupils. These time-consuming innovations have meant that the school has had to prioritise some developments before others, leaving some identified weaknesses still to be improved. These decisions have been absolutely right and reflect very good leadership. However, some lower level things have been unnecessarily ignored and there is some catching up to do on these. Management is not as good as leadership, but the pupils are achieving well and the school provides good value for money. The city curriculum is having a huge and positive impact on the ethos of the school – especially on teaching and learning and the attitudes of pupils, all of which are now very good. The city curriculum and the wholeness it gives to learning is a huge strength. The school is inclusive and a wonderful place to visit. For this reason, both leadership and leadership and management overall are judged to be very good.
Kingsholm C of E Primary School	334	19	Ofsted 2004 This is a **good** and improving school. This is a large primary school. .. Children's overall attainment when they begin school is well below what is expected for their age. The school has recently been awarded a Basic Skills Quality Mark and an Investors in People Award (2004). The school is part of the Gloucester Educational Action Zone and has been in the forefront of the introduction of the City Curriculum, an initiative associated with the government's drive to ensure excellence and enjoyment in learning in primary schools. The city curriculum, introduced two years ago, is having a very positive impact on pupils' desire to learn. It is interesting and relevant to pupils' needs. Teachers and pupils show great enthusiasm for it, resulting in a tangible

			excitement and interest in learning. The impact of this curriculum, which is underpinned by meticulous planning, is very evident in pupils' attitudes, confidence and motivation. While its impact is not as evident in promoting significant rises in the school's test results, current learning in the core subjects is proceeding well. Linked with the current strengths in teaching, this ought to be reflected in future results. A strong association with other local schools gives pupils the opportunity to benefit from specialist sports coaching and French teaching. The Network Learning Community (a group of local schools using the city curriculum) and Education Action Zone (EAZ) provide valuable professional links and training opportunities for staff, which have impacted positively on the learning experiences of pupils. The close contact with other local schools also makes a good contribution to provision for pupils with special educational needs.
Tredworth Infant School	168	25	Ofsted 2004 Tredworth is an average sized community infant school situated close to the center of Gloucester. It serves an area identified as having high social needs. The school belongs to the Gloucester Education Action Zone. ... When children enter the school their attainment is well below that expected for their age. … English is not the first language for over 3 per cent of the pupils, which is higher than in most schools. Over 4 per cent of pupils are refugees or asylum seekers. The proportion of pupils who join or leave the school other than at the usual times of first admission or transfer to junior school is higher than that found nationally. There has been a very high turnover of staff over the last two years, including the appointment of a new headteacher and senior teacher.. Tredworth Infant School provides a **satisfactory** quality of education for its pupils and satisfactory value for money. Links with other schools are satisfactory overall. Good use is being made of the school's links within the Education Action Zone to develop its partnership with other schools, businesses and community groups.

Appendix 2. Interviews/visits undertaken:

Attended breakfast meeting of head teachers

Interview with head teachers of Calton Junior and Kingsholme

Attended meeting with all head teachers and all maths coordinators, as they prepared bid for Primary Strategy Network

Interview with two teachers, Calton Infants

Attended meeting of teachers from across the network as they prepared presentation on The City Curriculum

Interview with Chair of Governors, Calton Junior

Appendix 3. Other Documents

Environment

Inside Out, Inside In, Network Learning Community

We have agreed the following definitions as part of our shared philosophy

We believe that the school environment has a great impact upon our children's learning. We are committed to creating an organised and stimulating environment where the enjoyment of teaching and learning takes place. High quality displays with strong visual impact support learning and celebrate children's achievement.

- Tidy, well organised, respected environment
- Well maintained buildings and grounds – involvement of children, parents and community
- Clear labelling around school
- Uncluttered, tidy classrooms
- Welcoming
- Calm
- Good quality resources, well labelled, easily accessible, well maintained
- High expectations – involving children in taking responsibility for their environment – belongings, PE Kit, classroom equipment, library. Litter collecting.
- School Council involvement in bringing about change in indoor and outdoor environments (and Eco-Schools scheme)
- Explicit theme – creating the right environment to match the theme

- Consistency across school continuity between classes
- Structured routine – a whole school approach

- Role play areas

- A clear display policy
- Attention to details e.g. double mounting, choice of backing to match theme
- Interactive displays   - of work and artefacts with questions
                              - reflecting all areas of school life.
                              - with children's work as the focus.
                              - celebrating children's achievements
                              - cross curricular links
                              - high quality work
- Objectives displayed

- Supportive network between all members of the school community

- Effective use of behaviour / sanctions system
- Behaviour expectations clearly displayed

Inside Out, Inside In, Network Learning Community
Learning
We have agreed the following definitions as part of our shared philosophy

We recognise that children learn best through a variety of learning styles (visual, auditory and kinaesthetic), and purposeful and experiential opportunities. This takes place when children are motivated, challenged and actively involved in their own learning.

- Experiential / Cross curricular – thematic opportunities
- Visits / field trips / visitors
- Skills used and applied to all areas of the curriculum
- Purposeful learning
- Contextualised learning
- Progressive, building on previous learning
- Fun
- Key events during theme (introductory, continuation, celebration)
- Key questions (created and displayed)
- Mindmaps (whole class, individual)
- Independent researchers at school and at home
- Exploring artefacts, websites, IWB, firsthand experiences – hands on experiences
- Outdoor environment used which has a range of stimuli
- Child friendly targets, displayed and discussed
- Children involved in evaluating own achievements. Critical buddies, work partners
- Questioning – range of styles
- Opportunities for independence
- Implication of VAK in planning / practice
- Differentiated planning / appropriately pitched – challenging
- Children given opportunities to work independently, in pairs, small groups, buddies, friendship groups
- Older children working with younger children – cross age-groups
- Interactive whiteboards / ICT / Webcams / digital cameras
- Creating environments
- Interactive displays, including artefacts
- Brain breaks / brain gym being undertaken and different types displayed
- Role play zone / drama
- Talk for Learning

Creativity

We have agreed the following definitions as part of our shared philosophy

Creativity enriches all aspects of our children's curriculum, thinking and learning. It inspires the children to be curious, imaginative and take risks in order to achieve their full potential.

Examples

- Interactive displays

    – celebrating success!

    – with questions and artefacts

    – high standards in presentation of work (in all subject areas)

    – Work has aesthetic quality – draws you to look at it

- A range of teaching styles and groupings
- Investigate learning approaches

- Planning to include clear and purposeful cross curricular links
- Expression of theme through art, dance, DT etc
- Creative arts incorporated into the school day e.g. art, music, dance, DT etc
- Art work that reflects learning in other subjects
- Drama – to explore other curriculum areas – speaking and listening, history (visitors)

- Planning to be flexible to allow for children to drive some of their own learning
- Differentiation – SEN/Gifted & Talented
- Visiting artists / storytellers / musicians etc. linked to subject plans.
- Educational visits out of school

- Emphasis on quality not quantity
- Teachers thinking creatively – planning and teaching
- Time invested to do things well
- Children being allowed to communicate ideas through a range of creative mediums
- First hand experience leading learning
- Development of key questions throughout theme

- Key event creating curiosity about the theme
- Well resourced to cater for an enriched curriculum
- ICT used in multimedia presentations

The experience so far - an account of practice.

Introduction and context

'Inside Out, Outside In' is a cohort 2b network. With four further members, the group made a successful bid for PSLN status. Following participation in the Network Leadership programme (and other NCSL courses) we were excited by the possibilities of running networked learning study-visits in our own schools and within our Network.

A meeting was arranged for all teaching staff within the Network and at this session the history, philosophy and protocols of study-visits were introduced. The reaction was generally favourable, although there were concerns around the potentially intrusive nature of visits.

Following this session, head teachers met for further training. This training was led by the co-leaders of the Network, with contributions from other heads who had been involved in the Network Leadership programme.

From the outset, the view of the co-leaders was that study-visits had the potential not only to contribute to an individual school's self-evaluation procedures (with obvious OFSTED SEF implications) but also to be a means of further spreading good practice within the Network. Additionally, the visits could act as a 'gelling' agent for the Network, particularly following its growth into a PSLN. There was also a realisation that the protocols as we had learned them may need modification in order to meet our specific network needs. The potential for using visits as a means of celebrating good practice was a significant extra.

Further to this, a visit was arranged and took place late in the summer term 2005. When network heads met the following September to arrange the network programme for the year, further visits were planned on the basis of one per term. This allowed for some flexibility, so that PSLN study-visits could take place should the opportunity arise. (The PSLN based on Inside Out, Outside In is led by the maths co-ordinators from each of the eight schools. This group is powerful and dynamic, has a very definite identity and is known as 'Numer8'.)

To date, three study-visits have taken place – two 'network' visits, and one 'Numer8'. The 'Numer8' visit followed an additional training / empowerment session led by one of the Network co-leaders. The following comments are drawn from discussions with staff and heads (visitors, visited, lead visitor, host heads) who took part in the visits. Each was asked the same questions – (1) How did you feel? (2) What did you learn?

Comments
*VISITED- **FEELINGS***
- Anxious, nervous about being in such a new thing– it would be silly to deny it – but also excited to be part of something new
- I was a bit apprehensive about being 'visited' by a group of head teachers
- Something about it made me realise it was OK – non-judgemental – not like OFSTED at all, much better in fact!
- It helped me think about what I was doing in relation to the focus

- It was short – over very quickly. The fixed amount of time meant I had to be quite focused in terms of what I was doing and saying. I wanted to make sure that what they saw was worth seeing
- It's good to see a focus on CHILDREN
- I wasn't too worried while it was happening and I found it very positive
- It wasn't set up as an 'observation' and it was clearly part of a 'bigger picture'
- I thought 6 – 7 people in my room would be 'overload', but when it actually happened I wasn't aware of them
- The children 'felt quite privileged' that people were coming to their classroom
- Only having one person asking questions was good
- At first I thought it would be awful, having SO MANY people in my room all at once
- The experience wasn't intrusive
- I did wonder how much they could learn in ten minutes!
- It was over in a flash and I wanted them to stay longer
- It wasn't unnerving, but it wasn't a 'normal' situation
- The protocols were reassuring. Each person had their role
- The experience wasn't as intimidating as I thought it might be
- I was nervous afterwards about what might be said
- I did think 'it can't be easy for the visitors', and although 'enjoy' would be the wrong word, I didn't mind when it was going on
- Hard to be non-judgemental – and judgements do help move things on
- Making sure the visitors have a good experience DOES involve extra thought and time and there is a certain pressure (the visitors were HTs and LAs)
- It was a positive experience, but a bit worrying the night before!

LEARNINGS
- The feedback from the lead visitor and then from HT was very positive
- We were able to use what WASN'T said to show ways of moving our practice forward
- The study-visit gave us lots to talk about, in a very positive way. It showed us our strengths, and where we could move on, and this showed us the scope for development
- It was definitely a positive experience and I would do it again, and would like to be a 'visitor'
- Some schools (for instance, those not used to having many visitors) may not find the study-visit experience so straightforward – schools need to have an 'open' ethos
- It was nice to hear compliments! The feedback from the lead visitor gave a 'bit of a buzz'
- I didn't feel deflated afterwards (not like after OFSTED)
- It was good to know that my good practice was going to help others
- Being involved in a study-visit helped me understand what it was about
- The biggest learning was being part of a new, dynamic aspect of school self-evaluation
- Helps you see the things you don't see yourself

VISITORS - **FEELINGS**
The visitor's group included an LEA Primary Advisor.
- Apprehensive
- You need to feel at ease with your fellow visitors
- The second experience was 'easier' than the first
- I was apprehensive beforehand – I didn't want to let the host school down!

LEARNINGS

- It was hard to be non-judgemental
- It's easy to think we know it all, but doing two visits opened my eyes to the wealth of good practice 'out there'
- It's an effective model – supportive of school self-evaluation
- Focusing on one element enables deep delving into whatever the focus might be. Talking to children is very powerful
- It's good to get the opportunity to get an 'inside look' at another school
- The model is big enough to encompass a range of people – such as governors
- Not making judgements is hard!
- What I saw (successes) helped me realise what was successful at my own school – celebration going both ways
- I felt I got better at phrasing questions and comments as the visits progressed
- The visit was good for my own development as a HT.
- Good to get many perspectives on a classroom in a short time as different people have a clear focus on a specific aspect
- Good to have a clear focus on 'learning'
- Good to identify patterns in a school
- Useful for head teachers to look at professional development
- The questions are very important, if they are to be constructive
- Useful for head teacher to form hypothesis regarding learning at the school
- Useful for governors to see first hand learning in classrooms
- Could be looked at as a means of formative assessment in order to plan the next INSET or professional development
- It's difficult to take off the 'advisor/inspector/head teacher' hat and avoid making judgements based on one's own prejudices

LEAD VISITOR – *FEELINGS*

- I was happy to 'lead' the visits, mostly because it's easier to tell others not to make judgemental comments than it is to come up with one!
- It's quite hard to 'keep an eye' on everything, including the time, in order to make sure all runs to the planned schedule
- Feedback has been the most pleasant part so far – it's good to see teachers affirmed by what one says

LEARNINGS

- I felt privileged to see an amazing wealth of talent from the teachers involved, and I took back ideas that will impact in my own school
- I think study-visits can do what we want them to (see earlier comments) and can even be extended easily and with powerful effect – to include governors, children, and even parents

HOST HEADS – FEELINGS

I was keen to host a study-visit because I wanted evaluation of [the focus], and thought a visit would be a good way to do it. I felt it was a good focus for other Network schools to see, and was pleased a Link Advisor was involved. I deliberately chose the strongest staff (with regard to the focus) to be visited because I wanted to give them some praise, recognition and affirmation – and to celebrate their achievement. We had worked at the

focus before the study-visit. We wanted to establish *internal* visits, and doing a Network study-visit kick-started the whole process.

I felt pleased it was successful – it DID celebrate the hard work of the teachers, showed our school achievements in this area, and confirmed the next steps. I felt very proud of my school and the staff.

The protocols – particularly not making judgements – perhaps it's hard to celebrate without making judgements?

I felt well organised, and was confident it would run well. I felt confident about what would be seen and how the visit would be conducted.

LEARNINGS

I learnt that what we've been implementing as a school is making a difference and raising standards. The fact that I've got some strong and talented teachers was confirmed. The idea that study-visits could be a good self-evaluation tool was confirmed. I have ideas about the 'ideal' number of visitors – maximum probably 6.

I greatly valued the role of LEAD VISITOR; it meant that I could be 'silent' and 'detached' and look at my own school with new eyes.

It's a very useful addition to the self-evaluation procedures we already have – and could become the MAJOR vehicle, in the school, for self-evaluation (with a clear focus). It's been a springboard for further 'visiting', and a widening of the stakeholders involved.

What we got from the visit prompted 'one of the best' professional discussions our senior leadership team has ever had.

Conclusions

Before setting out the conclusions, I ought to add that the process of producing this account has brought me into contact with some quite extraordinary people – teachers in our schools. I was left with a very strong impression of a group of serious and dedicated professionals passionate to engage in debate and dialogue that would improve their practice. This made my task an absolute delight!

Already the original protocols need to change – appended is the original training document we used, with amendments in italics. These amendments need to be agreed by the heads group and by Numer8.

Within our group, it is clear that no host head teacher is going to use a networked learning study-visit as a means of exposing any poor practice that might exist within their school – quite the opposite! Highlighting good and outstanding practice is a better means of promoting such practice across schools, and this each of the host heads has done with powerful effect. Linking this with the difficulty visitors had in phrasing non-judgemental comments, it would appear that some flexibility with regard to this protocol is in order.

Host heads very carefully chose the focus, and as silent visitors showed great diplomacy and restraint during the corridor de-briefs. This is important; otherwise

visitors could feel 'pushed' into making particular comments and the study-visit lose impact as a consequence.

Host heads also used the information from the study-visit in quite ingenious ways – one head choosing to focus on what the visitors DIDN'T comment very much on as the means of advancing school practice ("we expected them to comment on this – they didn't. Why not? How do we make this a more obvious aspect of our school's practice?")

Each set of visitors found themselves on a fairly steep learning curve – the head teachers in particular. This is understandable – in our own schools, we are accustomed to making judgements about what we see and what goes on. However, the visitors were able to rise to the challenge and not only found the process 'interesting and enjoyable' but also found it provided a good and useful focus on their own school practice. In this respect, the co-leaders hope that study-visits would enable the spread of good practice has so far been realised.

For the network, something of the 'gelling' potential has been realised too. As with anything in school, there is great temptation at certain times to say 'we can't do this now, let's postpone and do it another time' – one of the most fruitful of the three study-visits was born out of just such a circumstance. It looked at first like the planned visit was going to be a very small affair – and it was almost postponed. However, in the event it proved seminal in moving on our thinking about the protocols, and enabled the involvement of a School Governor (in his view, the visit enabled him to see the school in a way he never had before – good learning for everyone).

It wouldn't be right or proper to formulate any conclusions that didn't include the children – watching them work, looking at what they do; talking to them has been the most exciting aspect of the study-visit experience so far. All visitors emphasised the sense of privilege they felt at being able to spend time in another school, and their involvement with the children was a large part of this – we saw many 'magic moments'. All visitors likewise felt a great sense of admiration for the schools that were willing to be at the front of the queue for hosting a study-visit.

Head teachers (and Numer8) expressed keenness to undertake visits in their own schools – and realised the potential to involve children and governors in these individual school experiences.

Clearly an important factor is the degree of professional trust that must exist between all parties involved. It would be seriously counter-productive to 'visit' a teacher who was at all unwilling to be part of the experience. The 'visitors' do need to show a proper regard for the teachers into whose rooms they are 'visiting'. The lead visitor needs to maintain a constant overview, and be prepared to move the visitors out should any adverse situation arise. The manner and conduct of

the visitors can have a powerful impact on the visited, and we're NOT trying to be OFSTED inspectors!

It became clear also that the 'visited' (for lack of a better expression) wanted to be more involved in the de-brief and feedback sessions. The Numer8 group felt that there was scope for teachers to have time to talk to the relevant visitor for a few minutes AFTER the session (it wasn't always easy for visitors to engage teachers during some of the lessons). However, this 'additional exchange' should not last more than ten minutes or the study-visit would lose some of its directness and become 'flabby' – one of the strengths of the approach is its speed and vigour.

It is also clear that many teachers feel apprehensive about people coming into their classrooms – even in schools with experience of lots of visitors. The study-visit is different – for one thing, there are lots of people all at once! The need for visitors to show sensitivity has already been hinted at. It would seem likely that doing more visits would help reduce any anxiety staff might feel – as it becomes clear that the experience is a positive one, and that visitors are not inspectors. In this respect, it would be good for visitors to share their feelings with the visited – certainly, if the visited felt a degree of anxiety, so did the visitors! If the visited felt they might be judged and found wanting, so did the visitors! It's important to emphasise the 'mutuality' of the study-visit experience for all concerned.

Each study-visit has had a strong celebratory aspect. With regard to 'non-judgemental comments', the difficulty faced by ALL visitors so far has been to try to AVOID saying 'that was brilliant' (or similar comments). In this respect, our protocols need to move to recognise the following
- no host head is going to use a study-visit to expose 'weaker' aspects of their schools
- host heads will invariably use the visit to highlight good practice and thus ensure its more rapid dissemination through their schools
- if there is to be a celebratory aspect to visits, then only the best should be seen and shared
- visits should only happen where ALL participants feel secure (whilst recognising the anxieties some will inevitably feel – both visitors and visited)
- 'complete impartiality' is impossible, and quite probably undesirable in the context of a study-visit that seeks to confirm, affirm, celebrate and share best practice in a school. If visitors feel 'privileged' to see 'good stuff', the teachers should know!
- there is a considerable responsibility on host schools to ensure that they plan the study-visit carefully in order to get the most from the experience
- visits should be part of something ongoing in the school, and not one-off occasions

Whilst acknowledging that it's nice to be 'patted', there was a fair degree of unanimity (especially amongst the 'Numer8' group) that we (the visitors) need to pose THE QUESTIONS (and sometimes quite 'hard' ones, albeit 'non-judgemental') in order to enable reflection on practice and consequent development. THE QUESTIONS left with the school are the 'vital legacy' of the visit. Some visitors were more readily able than others to formulate challenging yet constructive questions. The development of this skill is vital to the long-term impact of study-visits. Celebration and affirmation notwithstanding, schools need pointers to the way ahead and if visits become too 'cosy' they will not be seen as an important or even significant part of school self-evaluation. Happily, feedback would indicate that confidence and facility with regard to framing questions grows quickly. It would seem likely that questioning skills would develop as more opportunities for study-visits are arranged.

Consensus is an important part of the way our network operates, and the re-drafted protocols should be circulated and discussed fully before being put into operation. Indeed, the Network (and Numer8) might want to use this document (and their own views and thoughts) to further clarify thinking and possibly look at the idea of undertaking MORE visits (involving more staff) than was originally planned.

Finally, any other groups reading this account shouldn't change / start doing study-visits on the basis of our experience – our ideas and experiences are born out of a lot of time talking together to develop the mutual trust we enjoy, and 'our' approach to study-visits might not work in other settings. As a network, we spent a lot of time developing a 'network vision and values' statement, and this involved teachers, TAs and governors, and a lot of trust and understanding was generated as a result. Some of our experiences will travel, but not all of them. The important thing is to own the idea and make it yours – then it works for you, rather than you being worked by it. The best summary might be to

- keep a clear focus – what you're doing, why you're doing it, what you hope to get from it (in global terms) as well as keeping a clear focus when making a study-visit
- be discrete and sensitive – and remember everyone feels anxious to a greater or lesser extent!

December 2005
(Written by Geoff Gait-Carr)

APPENDIX – NETWORKED LEARNING STUDY-VISIT TRAINING DOCUMENTS AND PROTOCOLS

Objectives

By the end of this training study-visit you will …
- Know how to conduct a networked learning *training* study-visit in your network or school
- Have the resources to introduce this methodology to others in your school or network

The purposes of our Networked Learning Study-visits are to:
- Support professional development and learn how to translate it into practice
- Identify effective or interesting practice within our collaborative learning community
- Help learning to travel school-wide and school to school
- *Affirm and celebrate good practice in our schools*

The power of the 'snapshot' views of classrooms is enhanced by the recursive nature of the study-visit – *it is part of an ongoing process in the school*. It's important to note that a visit that isn't 'bookended' by the sharing of learning or by further professional development is not a study-visit.

The Networked Learning Study-visit Protocols

To ensure that learning remains at the heart of the agenda, visitors are guided by a set of **clear and specific protocols.**

Orientation of school staff
- All staff *involved should* understand the purpose of the study-visit and how the process will occur in their classrooms.
- All staff and children in the school should be informed of the date and time of the visit.
- The FOCUS of the visit should be shared, *and its relationship to CPD within the school made clear.*
- Staff should know what the visitors are looking for, and how they will operate in each room visited.
- Staff should know the names of the visitors.

Orientation of the Visitors
- On the day, all visitors meet to discuss the focus

The Host Head Teacher
- Briefs the visitors about the CPD, and / or school data, which has taken place
- Shares any additional information about the school (e.g. contextual information)
- Discusses what it would be reasonable to expect to see in classrooms, based on previous professional development
- Is a silent observer during the study-visit

A LEAD VISITOR (not the host HT) is identified
- Discussion of strategy for questioning children
- Formats are given out and explained
- Timetable of the visit is shared *(it's important that the timetable is followed closely – teachers will be expecting visitors at the pre-arranged times, and there should be a*

recognition from the visitors that this expectation can generate anxiety even amongst strong and capable teachers)

Classroom Visit

5 – 10 minutes, but definitely no longer than 15 minutes in each room, and visits to 4 / 5 classrooms at most *(there is a limit to the amount the visitors can take in)*.
The visitors gather evidence / snapshots of practice, and will need to record what they find on the sheets provided.
There is a limit to how much one observer can absorb – the tasks need to be shared, as below –

Visits include
- <u>The classroom environment</u> – learning charts on the wall, aids for learning, resources available, classroom layout supporting effective teaching and learning, use of displays)
- <u>Talking with children</u> and posing open ended questions in order to understand their learning
- <u>Looking at children's work</u> (in books, on walls, in portfolios)
- <u>Talking to the teacher</u> (discussion, observation) *(this could take place after the lesson)*

Visitors

- Gather evidence of what is observed
- Must not make judgements *(although the good can be praised)* or assumptions. Comments should be converted to questions (which will then inform future CPD in the school).
- Disrupt learning as little as possible
- Respect the learning community
  - stick to the agreed focus
  - refrain from comparing schools / classes
  - not use the visit as an opportunity to recruit teachers!

As visitors grow in confidence and 'visiting' becomes readily accepted throughout a network, strict adherence to protocols will become less and less of an issue (in particular, making non-judgemental comments. However, the network should make clear what its developing protocols are! Within 'Inside Out, Outside In', certain protocols have been developed and these are
- *No host head will use a study-visit to expose 'weaker' areas (or teachers) in their schools*
- *Visits should only happen where ALL participants feel secure*
- *Visits are about CELEBRATION and AFFIRMATION and the spread of good practice*
- *Visits should be carefully prepared for and planned by the host school, and should be part of ongoing school development*

Corridor de-brief

After each class visit the visitors discuss the evidence they have gathered against the agreed focus:
- What the children were learning
- How the teacher assisted their learning
- How other resources were used to assist learning
- Children's responses to questions
- What work was observed and what the analysis of children's work revealed

The LEAD VISITOR invites each visitor to
- pose a thought-provoking question
- make a [non-judgemental] comment in relation to the evidence gathered

De-brief
After all the classroom visits:
- Review evidence gathered and questions asked
- Look for patterns and trends which may have emerged in a number of classrooms
- Consider observations and use this new knowledge to inform further reflection and development

How? The Lead Visitor asks each visitor to:
- Review their own notes (there should be a short period of quiet time for this)
- Prepare one or more thought-provoking questions designed to guide, encourage and even inspire teachers / Head Teacher. (With experience, visitors will become skilled in posing such questions)
- Write one or two statements about what they observed giving evidence to support their view

Next Steps
Working with the Lead Visitor host HTs summarise what they have learned and determine the next steps for
- Improving the quality of learning and teaching within the school
- Developing their own leadership skills
- Developing the Study-visit as a valuable tool for school improvement

The host HT clarifies the focus for the next steps for learning and teaching by determining:
- One or two learning goals based on the feedback
- Support and resources needed to achieve these
- Success criteria
- Timeline for implementation

These *may* become the focus for the next Networked Learning Study-visit, *or for a 'school-based' visit focusing on developments.*

Feedback to staff and governors
ALL documentation produced as a result of the visit is given to the host school at the end of the visit. The lead visitor will write and thank the host school. If the host HT considers it appropriate, the lead visitor will feedback GENERAL REMARKS to the staff who had visitors in their classrooms.

The host HT
- Feeds back the key observations from the visit to school staff (and governors) at an appropriate meeting
- Celebrates achievement with staff and governors
- Plans the further development needed *(and how this would be evaluated)*
- Sets the date and focus for the next study-visit *(including whether or not this would be a network or a 'school' study-visit).*