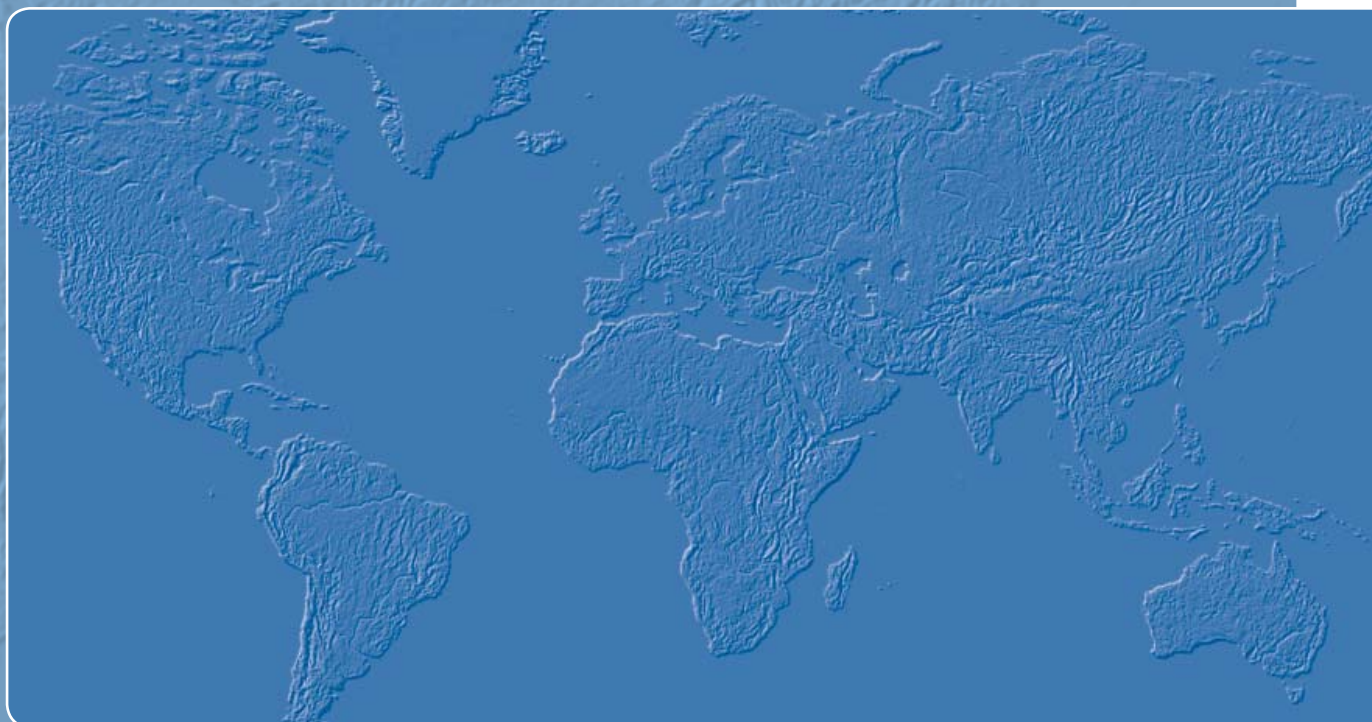


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Learning Internationally Practitioner Perspectives

Networked Learning Communities at the International
Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement



6-9 January 2004
Beurs World Trade Centre
Rotterdam

Networked Learning Communities

learning from each other

learning with each other

learning on behalf of each other

Networked Learning Communities Learning Internationally

“ Being sustainable does not mean that you last forever... sustainability means flexibility. ”

“ Having practitioners brought a different dimension to the discussion – grounding the theory. ”

“ The metaphor of the bridge was very useful. Bridges need to go both ways, sometimes three ways – practice, theory and people... ”

- bridges are not necessarily symmetrical
- tensions hold bridges up
- sometimes they are scary. ”

The National College for School Leadership's (NCSL) Networked Learning Communities (NLC) programme is committed to learning from educational research and development and learning with educational researchers and practitioners internationally. We are also seeking to contribute, through partnership and collaborative working arrangements, to the generation of understandings about sustainable learning communities that value practitioner and academic knowledge equally.

Outlined in this leaflet are outcomes of the contributions made by participants in the NLC programme to the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI), 2004. The theme of the Congress was Building Bridges for Sustainable Improvement, where the main focus was upon building bridges between research, practice and policy for the purpose of ensuring sustainable school improvement. The emphasis was upon understanding the associated challenges, rising to them and identifying emerging solutions. This central theme was explored through a number of sub themes:

- teacher professionalism for school improvement
- partnership with the community for school improvement
- external support for school improvement
- balance between innovation and accountability
- leadership for school improvement
- learning and teaching
- schools in challenging situations

The NLC programme made a key contribution to discussion and debate on these issues through three symposia which were co-authored and co-presented with practitioners from Networked Learning Community schools in England, partners from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Innovation Unit, the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) and members of the NCSL Networked Learning Group.

Each symposia was designed to generate interactive and challenging learning exchanges where advocates of both theory and practice could come together to learn from, with and on behalf of both the Networked Learning Communities nationally and the ICSEI community internationally.

In reflecting upon the learning drawn from this international experience and with a view to sharing this learning more widely with NLC participants across the programme, this leaflet outlines the outcomes of our contribution to ICSEI. In particular, it focuses upon the co-authored contributions and perspectives of the 12 practitioners from NLC schools who participated in the Congress.

In each of the three sections of the commentary which follows you will find a summary of the conference papers presented by each of the three groups of NLC practitioners. This is followed by a personal account of the learning drawn from the international experience generated by participation in the ICSEI conference. By sharing this learning, we hope that it will transcend the international context from which it came and provide some transferable learning which other NLC participants may draw upon to inform their practice within Networked Learning Communities.

All papers are available to download on the NCSL website at: www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc

Characteristics of Networked Learning – What are we learning?

Andy Brown & Darren Holmes, Hartlepool NLC, with Jasbir Mann, Networked Learning Group

This paper draws upon the programme-wide enquiry and research activity of the first year of the NLC programme to present emerging theoretical constructs and design principles that characterise successful school-to-school networks. In particular, it seeks to identify transferable principles of practice that might be of benefit to other network-based programmes.

Transferable Learning

Andy Brown, Hartlepool NLC

On returning from the ICSEI conference my staff said to me, “Well, did you learn anything that’s transferable into our school?” I replied, “How long have you got?”

ICSEI 2004 provided an insight for our network on how internationally important collaboration within education is. Having the opportunity to contribute with the DfES and NCSL to an international Think Tank on Networked Learning Communities about our work in Hartlepool, alongside internationally renowned names in the world of education such as Andy Hargreaves, Louise Stoll and Lorna Earl, was something that will continue to demonstrate how potentially powerful networking can be. A question raised by Valerie Hannon (DfES) at this session has already provided profound debate within our network; “How do we know we are not simply recycling poor or average practice?”

Early in the conference I attended a workshop delivered by John MacBeath and Leif Moos on Leadership for Learning. This discussed the Carpe Vitam project, which analysed data of 12 year old pupils from across seven countries. They provided a matrix which would identify, within each school, the development of distributed leadership (also including pupils and parents). I have already planned this as a summer term learning exercise for my staff. When John MacBeath talked about the ‘what’ of leadership he talked about Malcolm Gladwell’s Tipping Point (2000) and ‘The role of a vital few’, where a few exceptional people start off an epidemic. I could relate this to our network and the excitement of work generated by 42 teacher enquirers with up to 20 more wanting to join enquiry groups this term. He then talked about Gladwell’s ‘stickiness factor’ and within Hartlepool that’s where we are at, we need ‘this epidemic to last long enough for it to catch on.’

John MacBeath though, emphasised a comment that I agreed with as we are at the point of extending networks nationally within England; he said, “Watch, don’t copy.” In other words, take some of the ideas, but not the whole, as each context is different.

Andy Hargreaves, in his key-note speech, reminded us all that, “change only happens or is sustained if there is a moral purpose and emotional connection to the people and you.” He also

reinforced networking in stating that, “No school is an island.” Andy also controversially said that, “Some headteachers are closet chiropractors, in that the straighter things are the better they feel”. In the recent climate of ‘Excellence and Enjoyment’ I think all headteachers should, in the words of David Hargreaves, consider “successful failure”, or of Thomas Edison, “You must learn to fail intelligently. One fails forward towards success.” If we don’t try it, how do we know it will not have an impact?

A final memory from the week was the visit to D’Acosta School, a challenging, multi-ethnic school in central Rotterdam. The school was, in the words of the headteacher, failing prior to his appointment. He only agreed to the post if he could appoint as his deputy a young male teacher (with only one year’s teaching experience) that he had previously worked with, who shared the same vision. This he did. There has since been a significant investment in leadership at all levels. All six senior teachers had their own new office with modern facilities and almost all teachers had classroom support. Both the principal, Pierre van Rikxoort, and his deputy were very charismatic, visionary leaders. They promoted the school in the media and with high quality literature. I identified with many of these strategies, particularly when Pierre said that it was essential to make strong links with the best teacher training institutions and then invest in teacher training. He said, “It pays dividends not only for the whole school community, but you create leverage in appointing high quality staff.” I have, today, instructed my teacher in charge of international professional development to email Pierre and Hugo to see if their school is interested in being part of our Socrates bid. Maybe then they will see the benefits of networking for long term sustainable school improvement.



Robin Cowen (Penryn NLC) , Hugo (Vice-Principal), Andy Brown (Hartlepool NLC), Pierre Van Rikxoort (Principal D’Acosta School)

Networked Learning an International Perspective

Darren Holmes, Hartlepool NLC



We have known for a while that our networks are important for our staff, our children and the communities we serve. There is, after all, no other real reason to invest so much energy into the NLC enterprise other than a deep felt conviction that it holds the potential to make a real difference to the way children and teachers experience school. When we have the opportunity to work with brilliant practitioners from other networks we get a feeling that what we are engaged in carries a wider, national importance.

During January, at the ICSEI conference in Rotterdam, I connected with a deep sense that networked learning also has an international importance. We are involved in the single largest networked-based improvement programme in the world, but it seems that it's not the sheer scale that catches the eye. During the NLC Think Tank which was held during the conference, it was the interest in the potential for transformation that stood tall.

The conference made the explicit link between developing sustainable structures for improving learning and asking the really tough and incisive questions that challenge our assumptions and alter the way learning is designed and delivered.

“ The Think Tank was really brilliant. We knew that our networks are important; at national events we know it is nationally important and the penny dropped that it is internationally important. ”

“ The idea is sold – advocacy may be the enemy of enquiry. We need to develop the evidence base as we don’t need to be advocates any more. ”

The questions that emerged for me are also tough ones:

- How do we know we are not merely transferring poor or mediocre practice?
- How can we account for the successes we claim?
- If the principle of volunteerism in network membership is crucial, and I think it is, how do we ensure that pupils in schools who have not signed up to working in this powerful way are not disadvantaged? Should we be investing in growing volunteerism?
- How can schools be reconfigured to capture, embed and make good use of the learning that is taking place?

Andy Hargreaves’ keynote speech was notable for the recasting of sustainability. Andy used an ecological metaphor to illustrate some key points. The role of interconnections between schools was made. We are connected to the schools in our localities whether we like it or not; what happens in one school has a direct bearing on what happens in a neighbouring school. An interesting question which arises from this is, does being part of a network give us an instrument to determine and define the impact?

Sustainability differs fundamentally to maintainability. Andy challenged us to sustain the things that are important and to let those ideas that have less relevance or leverage wither on the vine. We should endeavour to, “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Striving for Sustainability; re-designing leadership for learning in NLC

Andy Feeley, Catharine Jeffries, Janet Jones & Claire Taylor, Oldham NLC, with Karen Carter, Networked Learning Group

In accounting for the challenges of supporting sustainable school improvement within a large scale national initiative, this paper examines the generation of a collaborative context for leadership learning and school development within the National College

for School Leadership’s Networked Learning Communities programme. Using illustrative examples from the work of the programme, we explore the rationale for re-designing leadership for learning as a means of supporting sustainable improvement in schools.

By focusing upon the concepts of distributed leadership, learning-centred leadership, and leadership for capacity building, the paper aims to draw together research, practice and policy perspectives in setting out an agenda for discussion, through which emerging issues related to school leadership and leadership development can be addressed. The paper concludes by presenting a reflective account of our learning from the journey and identifies in summary form, what, for us, have emerged as the key characteristics of the re-design of leadership and leadership learning within our networked learning activity.

Leadership and Learning – Sharing Common Issues

Andy Feeley, Oldham NLC

I found it fascinating to listen to keynote speakers such as Tony Townsend who identified common themes and issues from schools around the world. These centred on the way in which teachers engaged and involved pupils in their learning and the extent to which learning was repackaged away from the traditional teacher-centred approaches. It was interesting to see the process of beginning with a quantitative focus (eg national data) and then refining the criteria down to qualitative measures.

A key theme from Andy Hargreaves was leadership succession, the extent to which capacity is embedded by headteachers within a school and to explore what remains when they leave the learning organisation. Looking at the history of the organisation, which was used to explain and shape the present and future, approached this. Much of this can be directly related to the learning networks we operate in.

“If we do not learn the lessons of the past we are condemned to repeat it.”

Lasting impressions:

- Being able to talk and listen to other professionals including the ‘policy makers’ and key theoreticians.
- Spending time in an environment which was not fraught with crisis management and lack of reflection time.
- Having the opportunity to absorb and reflect deeply on ideas and practice.

“ Giving people the opportunity to reflect and interrogate and articulate values and beliefs which helps us to move forward. ”

- The excitement that the presence and ideas of teachers and headteachers caused in the NLC Think Tank session.

Key connections:

- The central theme of ‘Building Bridges for Sustainable Improvement’ - I particularly liked the observation that bridges require an amount of tension to hold them up.
- The advice from the Think Tank group will be built into the work of the network, eg using simple criteria to demonstrate improvement.
- The importance of transforming leadership away from a task-centred culture in order to build the capacity of the organisation and the people within it, at all levels, including pupils.



The Power of Networking, The Power of Networked Learning

Janet Jones, Oldham NLC



We were delighted to be offered the opportunity by NCSL to co-write a paper and to co-present at ICSEI in January 2004. It was our first experience of attending an international event, and the discovery that educationalists and practitioners from around the globe were interested in talking with us about our pilot project for collaborative, networked learning was unexpectedly exhilarating. Especially as we had only prepared ourselves for being professionally overwhelmed in such a world class field. We are grateful to the team from NCSL who facilitated our involvement and gave us the confidence and reassurance to network with colleagues from schools and universities in other countries – links which I am sure will go on to produce even more extended thinking and learning.

Reflections on the week are many and varied but one or two stick in the mind. I attended a seminar presented by Sandra Dean from Toronto, Canada, and was surprised to be informed by her that, having listened to our presentation, she had been planning to seek me out to see if there might be an opportunity for us to assist her in setting up a pilot study for her ‘Together we Light the Way’ project in the UK. She had sensed an affinity by listening to us talk about the work in and out of our school in the network and had wanted to give me details of her project work in Canada and in Trinidad and Tobago. Her project is based on the notion that schools should be safe and caring communities where cultures of respect are established by decreasing risk factors and increasing protective factors. Her programme is supported by four ‘pillars’:

- academic
- respect
- teamwork
- leadership

Like us, she believes that there is a strong positive correlation between academic achievement and school safety.

It was interesting for me to learn how Sandra Dean, a headteacher, had moved on from transforming the work of her own school to developing a programme which is now helping many schools in challenging circumstances create “safe and caring learning communities that help ‘at risk’ children succeed in education and in life”. It is my intention to keep in touch with Sandra and find out the degree to which involvement with her project might help us develop and extend our work with mainstream colleagues in Oldham schools as they strive to become more inclusive of children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties.

As a practitioner, I was encouraged to hear several researchers during the week, including Andy Hargreaves, question the ‘moral purpose’ of education today. When everything you do in your professional life has an impact on the life of a young person, this is a question you ask yourself constantly. Andy Hargreaves, in his article ‘Educational Change Over Time? The sustainability and non-sustainability of three decades of secondary school change and continuity’, talks about five change forces:

- 1 waves of reform
- 2 leadership style and succession
- 3 student and community demographics
- 4 teacher generations
- 5 school interrelations

Of particular interest to me were his observations, based on his study, ‘Change Over Time’, about the emotional impact of leadership succession and the need to involve the whole staff in moving the school to its next phase of development in order to sustain improvement. Hargreaves states that school leadership remains a “common force for bringing about short term change but, because of its succession rates and problems, mainly fails to fulfil its capacity to secure sustainable improvement.” At our school, we have been committed to shared or distributed leadership for at least two years, but I left Rotterdam with a renewed and heightened sense of the need to further refine and develop systems in order to embed our emerging practice to avoid dependence on particular individuals.

There were many phrases from many speakers which struck a chord during the week but none more so than one used by David Jackson (NCSL) during a Think Tank on networked learning. During the discussion he talked about “professional generosity” and, in doing so, introduced me to vocabulary which succinctly describes the underpinning concept of learning and growing together.

Conversations with colleagues from other NLCs in England, and with colleagues from around the world taught me that there is a genuine thirst for contact and relationship building within the educational world. Networked learning is real, it is out there and its potential is enormous at a local, national and international level. We were involved in the breaking down of traditional barriers and caught our first convincing glimpse of a world where collective responsibility for the education of children is growing in an atmosphere of co-operation and collaboration.

I left Rotterdam knowing that this was just the beginning of a challenging but thrilling journey of relationship building within schools, across schools and across countries. I intend to use my recently energised commitment to encourage other headteachers to embrace the concept of networked learning so that together we can investigate ways of developing sustainable school improvement based on distributed leadership and productive and trusting professional relationships.

“ There is a real hunger for building relations. It is fascinating that you want to build networks – it is something that happens with people you meet. It has been great. ”

Learning – A Commonality of Purpose Across the Globe

Claire Taylor, Oldham NLC



When I found out I had been invited to contribute to the ICSEI conference in Rotterdam, I was both proud and nervous. My lasting impressions however, are completely different to those anticipated feelings. I was, and remain, very impressed with the size and organisation of the conference, the setting, the hospitality and the warmth of the Dutch people. I felt privileged to be a part of a unified meeting of educators from 49 countries world-wide and simultaneously discovered that I was of interest to these people too. Personally I found this to be the most beneficial part of the conference – the opportunity to meet with and talk to people who had a connection to the education of children world-wide. This was truly networking at its best and we made many valuable connections over the week that I hope will result in lasting professional partnerships.

I was amazed at the commonality of purpose between educators both in this country and abroad and I realised that although we think we are working within a school, within an LEA and within a country, we are really a part of a global organisation that strives for continuous improvement for the next generation. Going to Rotterdam made me feel that all practitioners should (at least once in their career) have the opportunity to meet colleagues from different countries to talk about children, as most teachers are rarely given the opportunity to leave the classroom, never mind the country.

I also came away with the reassuring message that the content of the curriculum (contrary to recent Government advice) is much less the key to what we should be trying to teach children than the need to develop as life long learners who have a strong sense of their own moral purpose and that of others. This was a belief that I personally subscribed to before the conference but it was particularly satisfying to hear it being validated on such a global stage.

Key connections 1:

- Relationships are crucial to the ultimate success and sustainability of networks at all levels and these are initially very difficult to establish which can result in frustration.
- Not all educators are at the same level of learning within their own school, network or region and, whilst this is okay, we have a role in sharing our own good practice with others. The term ‘professional generosity’ was one I learnt in Rotterdam which I feel affirms the role of networks.
- Practitioner views (who were largely outnumbered by academics at the conference) are regarded as vital at both national and international levels.

I enjoyed the Think Tank, led by David Jackson, in which educators, practitioners, academics and policy makers debated the sustainability and validity of network learning communities. However, it did feel like there was an enormous gap between the language used by the academics and that used by the practitioners. Academics were invited to speak by means of personal address. In contrast we were invited to comment as a whole. I did, however, enjoy the pace and range of the debate and came away acknowledging that the views of practitioners are crucial to the process of informing government policy-making which was quite liberating and empowering.

The highlight of the conference for me was the school visit. Along with my colleagues, I visited The D’Acosta School and was shown a very warm welcome. I remain impressed by the discipline and attitude of both the students and staff. I have always wanted to examine the practice of colleagues internationally and was expecting to be challenged and stimulated. Relationships within the school reflect the society outside – they were warm, responsible and sociable. This was a direct contrast to the schools in the UK where we are engaging more and more with initiatives designed to reduce truancy, vandalism and persistent physical attacks on teachers.

The teachers at D’Acosta demonstrated an obvious rapport with their students and this was reciprocated in the responses they received from the children. I was astounded by the basic nature of the resources available to the school; there was little in the way of display interactive or other, the play-ground was tiny and the teaching technology was limited. However, we were greeted with a well designed PowerPoint presentation and a senior management team who had an obvious pride in their learning establishment. The way that the school was funded per pupil led to small class sizes and streamlined processes, which resulted in children being placed in the educational establishment most suited to their needs. However, I was shocked at the openly competitive relationships between local schools which this system seemed to promote.

Key connections 2:

- Innovative ideas and moral purpose are key elements of networks and ownership of these fundamental principles are vital to the sustainability of NLCs.
- It seems widely agreed through discussion that although networks should be formed through a process of invitation, not all schools join networks for the sole purpose of raising achievement in pupil learning - there are many reasons which motivate people to want to be part of a network.
- Attending an international conference offers the opportunity of making further network connections both here and abroad which can only make education a more linked, cohesive affair where we all learn from one another. In our NLC we made connections with Hartlepool and Cheshire Networked Learning Communities in the UK and with Canada, Australia and Rotterdam internationally.

“ What fantastic relationships we have been able to build here. I enjoyed my school visit. A fantastic opportunity to create new frames for thinking. ”

From Transmission to Collaborative Learning – best evidence in continuing professional development

Hilary Berry & David Ling, Winsford NLC, Mary Hennessy-Jones & John Jones, CHILL NLC, Robin Cowen, Penryn NLC, Anne Hanna, F1 NLC with Philippa Cordingley, CUREE & Jane McGregor, Networked Learning Group

This symposium explored the characteristics of effective collaborative Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers through modelling the use of evidence and research. The work developed from a systematic review of the impact of CPD on teaching and learning conducted through the EPPI-Centre at the University of London.

A group of teachers are testing and interpreting the challenges and recommendations suggested by the findings in relation to the development of their practice in networked learning communities, where practitioners explicitly privilege collaborative learning opportunities such as coaching and collective enquiry.

The symposium offered the opportunity to examine what it means to learn from what is frequently described as best practice, exploring how this may be made available to others to collaboratively learn from.

New Learning – A Glimpse Beyond the Classroom

Anne Hanna, F1 NLC



During the conference I had many positive experiences which had an impact almost as soon as I had come back into the classroom. There were a number of aspects which fulfilled these experiences both on a personal and on a professional level. The central theme of the conference focused on building bridges between research, policy and practice for the purpose of ensuring sustainable school improvement. Through the duration of the conference it was apparent that there was a real emphasis on understanding and also rising to the challenges which emerged. Whilst building a shared knowledge of what was going on in our own communities, it was also an opportunity to explore the emerging solutions within an international forum. It was a unique and invaluable experience to share information on critical issues on an international level. The week was permeated by a constant need to promote dialogue among researchers, policy makers and practitioners.

It was also an opportunity for our own networks to be given a high profile amongst an influential organisation. Continued professional development is central to the strength and vibrancy of the teaching

profession. As teacher expertise grows in a school staff are given greater scope to share their new knowledge nationally and internationally. This is linked to a point one of the keynote speakers made. Fred Korthagen explored the issue of building bridges between theory, practice and the inner person. The feelings of teachers have an impact on themselves as a person, as well as their actions and needs. In my experience of this type of professional development, it has allowed me to articulate the change in my pedagogy as well as boost my self and professional esteem.

My interest in this conference was linked to the concept of ‘new learning’. On many different levels we were exposed to innovative ideas, reflection on our own practice and how this compares to what is happening around the globe. It was a chance to take a glimpse beyond the classroom and be part of something which is at the heart of our profession - sustainability. Although the conference gave us many answers, we left with just as many questions - how can we develop and sustain these connections and ensure we continue to learn from and with them?

ICSEI is already moving forward in acknowledging practitioners around the world and involving them in the process of decision making. This was evident in the International Think Tank.

On a personal level, I feel this was a fantastic opportunity to make connections with people who bring a different perspective to our most pressing school improvement issues. Overall, it was the chance to work together as a global community and with a group of people who care passionately about sustainable school improvement.

“ It was an amazing opportunity for me to be able to talk about what I am doing in the network and on an international level in my third year of teaching. ”

Sustainable School Improvement – Solutions from the NLC Context

Robin Cowen, Penryn NLC



Of all the issues raised by Tony Townsend during his paper “The accountability game: From Rules and Regulations to Real Improvement” I was particularly interested in the issue of sustainability. The evidence seems to suggest that gains in school improvement brought about by a new headteacher, or a headteacher drafted in to rescue a failing school, often do not last beyond the tenure of that headteacher. If you look at Cornwall, and I’m sure many other LEAs, the standard model is that if a school is failing you pluck a successful (and often charismatic) headteacher from their school and put them in charge of the failing school for a period. If the headteacher is experienced and energetic there will undoubtedly be short-term improvements. However, if these can’t be sustained we need to ask why not and what we need to do differently?

It seems to me that the answer must lie in appointing a headteacher who understands the power of distributive leadership and who has the capacity to develop the leadership roles of his staff. If a critical mass of staff have had the training and opportunity to fulfil a school improvement role, then the school is much more likely to sustain and further develop its school improvement agenda. The issue is one of building capacity.

I thoroughly enjoyed the relaxed and interactive approach adopted by Fred Korthagen during his paper “Practice, theory and person in the professional development of teachers”. I found with the levels of reflection model which he put forward, that while it didn’t offer anything new, it was expressed in a way that made me think further about the link between the professional and the personal in our role. I am finding it particularly instructive to think about whether there is a conflict within my staff in terms of the professional competencies that are expected and their personal beliefs. Also, when carrying out classroom observations, it is clear that teachers who have the full range of professional competencies may not be as effective as other teachers who have the right personal qualities to really engage with the children.

David Jackson’s “Networked Learning Communities Think Tank” was very interesting but it perhaps raised more issues than it offered ways forward for NLCs. In particular, I was concerned about the gulf in language between researchers and policy makers on the one hand and school practitioners on the other. Some of the key issues raised had to do with accountability (standards), moral purpose or vision, the role of leadership and the proper balance between core requirements and local innovation and flexibility. There were also issues to do with whether NLCs can have a role with failing schools. After listening to the various contributions around these themes I got up to say how our school and network was implementing a model that appears to provide an answer to some of these problems. I’m going to take this opportunity to highlight this model again.

The problems:

- Schools and networks need to demonstrate that development activity and particularly innovations lead to improved standards.
- Schools have to improve their capacity for school improvement by developing the role of leaders throughout the organisation or partnership.
- Schools and networks have to define a vision in sufficient detail that it is absolutely clear what the standards are by which the school’s progress can be measured.
- Schools need to develop robust self-review strategies so that it is possible, at any point, to articulate and demonstrate what the school has achieved and what the next priorities are.
- Schools need to demonstrate that they are meeting national expectations (DfES, Ofsted, NLC, etc) and LEA expectations, as well as defining a vision that goes beyond these requirements.

A possible solution

At Penryn Junior School we have developed a model for school improvement that addresses the above problems as well as a number of the themes arising out of the NLC Think Tank session.

The vision - To secure the link between school improvement activity and standards we have divided school improvement into fifteen areas. For each area of school life there is a one-sentence vision, which is broken down into around a dozen measurable success criteria. Some of these criteria are based on national standards (for example, Ofsted) while others are unique to the school. Brought together, they define the vision or moral purpose behind our school improvement.

Distributed leadership – A school leader who may have a team consisting of other teachers and teaching assistants leads each aspect of school life. Each leader contributed to the vision and is responsible for moving the school towards it. We do not rely on job descriptions – the role of every member of staff is to do whatever it takes to realise each vision. This leads to more flexible and innovative ways of working underpinned by a clear moral purpose.

Self-review – As part of an annual review, each success criteria is audited in the spring and before the new budget is known. We use software designed at the school to record a judgement about the extent to which the standard has been achieved. ►

Moral Purpose Beyond the School Context – Lessons for NLC

Mary Hennessey-Jones & John Jones, CHILL NLC, Hilary Berry & David Ling, Winsford Education Partnership NLC

Action planning – The self-review process highlights what aspects of the vision need to be prioritised for school improvement in the coming financial year. School leaders then make a bid for school improvement funding. There is no set amount of funding for each school team because this can lead to complacency. Bids for funding are analysed ready for the budget and then there is negotiation based on what the budget can afford. This develops leadership skills and a much better sense of value for money and the actual cost of school improvement.

Completing the loop – The action planning process is implemented, monitored and adjusted during the year and becomes the focus for self-review the following year. The effectiveness of the leadership is reviewed as part of the performance management process.

Lessons for Networked Learning Communities

In order for NLCs to justify their funding, and hopefully secure future funding, we do need to articulate what we are and what we are working towards, using clear measurable criteria. We need to do this in a way that defines a core purpose while leaving room for innovative local variations. This done, we are then in a position to measure progress in a way that links accountability, standards and moral purpose.

Much of this work is already in place in terms of the assessment criteria for becoming an NLC and in terms of the baseline work carried out by DEMOS. It would be helpful to bring it all together in an electronic format that schools could use as a school or network improvement tool. We have designed and are using such a format but it could benefit from some NLC research and development. The key feature that makes it work so successfully is that it makes a direct link between the vision, the audit and the action plan. As soon as you split these activities up or treat them too separately you generate problems.

“ The tension between central direction and local creativity – this may be another area where NLCs can make a difference and give more impetus to local initiative and collaboration. Creating the context for that dynamic is one of the few hopes for the system. ”



Key points of the conference for us came from Andy Hargreaves and Fred Korthagen with learning opportunities to take back to our networks. From Andy Hargreaves we were particularly interested in the links between the “lack of moral purpose” in education and the production of cognitively empty results. There is an accountability that we all feel, in being part of a Networked Learning Community, that requires us to carry responsibility to other schools and learners and which involves us in a moral purpose beyond our own school’s community. His suggestion that we appeal to the power of history in order to avoid repeating mistakes gave us cause to evaluate our work at many levels; within school, between schools, between networks and communities and in all our contacts. His suggestion that resistance in people working in schools can be unrecognised strength in the form of historical reflection, gives us another reason to use the collaborative process of self-evaluation through critical friendships. Because resistant colleagues or schools are setting their own agendas there is less resistance.

“ The connections are now more meaningful and relevant. It gives you a focus and that is what I will take back. The NLC Think Tank was energised, we felt that we were valued. Learning by both talking and being listened to is something I will always remember. ”



In terms of our reflection on Andy Hargreaves’ messages we ask ourselves three questions:

- 1 How many groundhog days do networks need to have or should they allow themselves to have?
- 2 Whose responsibility is succession leadership in our networks and how are we going to learn about it?
- 3 Are we being wary enough of the dangers of standardisation when we are really committed to diversity?

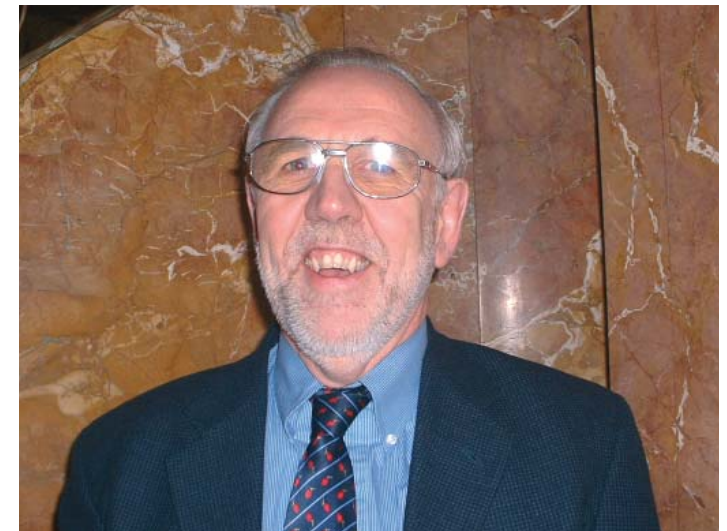
There are messages here for the policy makers. This was evident during the Think Tank session when the idea of nationalising networks arose.

From Fred Korthagen’s presentation, we took to heart the call for teachers’ professional development needs to consider personal qualities as well as, or indeed instead of, competences. Our network has long held high the importance of values rather than knowledge and this model of ‘personhood’ or ‘teacherhood’ rang bells for us. He followed on with another key point about reflection that was familiar and comfortable to us, but the ideas of learning to reflect and guided reinvention were structures we liked and we hope to embed into our schools’ dialogues.

Fred’s matrix of conscious to non-conscious and rational to non-rational actions and decisions made by teachers was useful in explaining and exploring how and why we sometimes keep repeating both successful and unsuccessful interactions with pupils. Taking this idea further, there is a similar matrix for children’s responses and the two matrices together produce 16 possible outcomes.

We wonder if the understanding, or even the awareness of this model could be helpful to both teacher and pupil. Can we learn to avoid some quadrants in the matrix? Can pupils learn to avoid some quadrants? Why should they be any less able to than adults? Indeed, they may be better able to.

“ I like the challenge. We need to engage the networks in sharing the evidence. We need the criticality. ”



He talked about the ‘person’ bridging theory and practice. The idea that in order for theory and practice to both have relevant and important meaning there needs to be an emotional quality to them both. The intervention of an organic being that thinks, wants, feels and does may be a necessary element in bringing theory and practice together.

We thought about:

- the school, as an organic being, bridging theory and practice
- our networked learning community as a bridge between theory and practice

This issue links clearly to another theme of the conference which was the links between research and practice and the overall theme of the conference which was ‘bridges’. We see parallels between the two speakers’ messages and the aims and purposes of NLCs. Now we need to reflect on what we can do better as a result of being in Rotterdam and enjoying the privilege of learning together in such florally advantaged surroundings.

“ A key outcome has been the professional relationships we have built and the benefits this will have for our NLC. Listening to other practitioners and the comments that other people made led me to reflect on our network and so I went back with a list of points for our work. ”

Learning Internationally

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