

Too Busy To Learn?

An introduction to collaborative
leadership learning



National College for
School Leadership



It is one of life's great ironies:
schools are in the business of teaching and
learning, yet they are terrible at learning
from each other. If they ever discover how
to do this, their future is assured.



Michael Fullan, 2001

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A Guide to Using the Materials

Too Busy To Learn? is an introductory handbook of interactive materials for collaborative learning among headteachers, principals and advisers. Building on an NCSL pilot programme to develop leadership learning groups, it offers questions, processes and materials to support new collaborative groups as they form, or established groups as they review the focus and purpose of their work together.

The handbook is organised in four sections:

1 The Challenge of Collaborative Learning

Readings and resources to help establish or revisit how learning is central to leadership and to explore how leaders learning together can help improve and transform schools.

2 Exploring the Territory

Five case studies of headteacher groups in England and Wales exploring, in practical ways, how groups form, develop and sustain their work.

3 Development and Review

Review materials to help groups take stock of how they work together, surface expectations and launch, affirm or redirect the work of the group.

4 New Directions

A summary of learning frames, a template for recording action points, references and other general information.

The sections are designed to be used interactively by groups to give a practical focus to discussion or as the basis for personal reflection through 11 learning frames. You can work systematically through the materials or alternatively, simply use those which are most useful.

To make the most of the materials, we suggest that you use them in a collaborative way through facilitated workshops. You can spend as long or as little on each of these as you feel useful – the materials can, however, usefully form the basis of a headteacher residential committed to establishing or reviewing the work of the group.

There is little that is prescriptive here – rather, the materials provide structures and processes to invite you to rethink, redirect, challenge and support.

THE LEADING EDGE SERIES

The Challenge of
Collaborative
Learning

01
part



National College for
School Leadership

part 1

The Challenge of Collaborative Learning

Learning Frame 1

Towards a Shared Understanding

Clearing the Ground

Why Collaborative Learning Matters 1

Why Collaborative Learning Matters 2

The Challenge of Collaborative Learning

This section consists of readings to make the case for collaborative leadership learning. You can read them individually or, with Learning Frame 1, use them as resources to stimulate discussion.

The Challenge of Collaborative Learning

An introduction to key challenges of changing the way we work and learn together (page 8)

Towards a Shared Understanding

A working definition of collaborative leadership learning, a sketch of an effective collaborative learning group and summary characteristics of ineffective and bureaucratic groups (page 9)

Clearing the Ground

An exploration of issues of learning culture and an opportunity to reflect on personal experiences of collaborative learning (page 11)

Why Collaborative Learning Matters 1

A reading from Roland Barth on barriers to learning and why principals need to learn together (page 14)

Why Collaborative Learning Matters 2

A summary of headteacher reflections from an NCSL workshop on the importance of headteacher learning and the barriers we face (page 16)

Learning Frame 1:

The Challenge of Collaborative Learning

- Why does leadership learning matter?
- What are the barriers to school leaders learning together?
- What does good leadership learning look like?

The Challenge of Collaborative Learning

Put a group of heads together in a room and let them talk. Boilers, budgets and buildings all too often come to the fore and heads, aware of image and marketing, understandably talk up their schools' successes and achievements.

Yet sometimes, something different happens. Headteachers come together in regular, self-sustaining groups and talk about learning and research. They feel at ease, develop trust, explore what it is to be a leader, their feelings, perceptions and the impact of their leadership on others. Collaborative leadership learning is about just this – how it develops, how it is sustained, how it can provide the challenge and momentum for powerful learning.

This new emphasis on collaboration, networks and the development of professional learning communities brings a real dilemma for headteachers: how on earth can they find time to model the learning they regard as critically important in their organisations? More particularly, how can they move from mundane headteacher meetings to leadership seminars which sustain and enrich their own professional learning?

Too Busy To Learn? is an exploration of how school leaders and those charged with facilitating networks and partnerships can make it happen. This does not mean it is easy: for some reason sustained leadership learning seems a step too far for many and yet, paradoxically, it is one of the most important things a leader can do.

Towards a Shared Understanding

What do we mean by leadership learning groups?

Leadership learning groups can be defined as primarily headteacher groups where collaborative leadership learning takes place. Commonly known as communities of practice, leadership learning groups consist of groups of professionals working together over a period of time, where, by using clear processes and protocols, they develop common purpose, enhance their own practice, and build shared understandings (Creasy and Williams, 2002).

In practical terms, leadership learning groups are about as far from routine administrative meetings as you can imagine. They consist of headteachers committed to learning collaboratively over a sustained period of time in groups which build trust, provide challenge and maintain a clear focus on learning. Groups typically:

- involve between six and fifteen local headteachers committed to learning together
- organise monthly seminars with an external facilitator, for example through breakfast meetings rotating round each school
- hold an annual residential to build trust and relationships
- provide opportunities for host schools to explore issues, share good practice and enrich thinking
- agree common themes for the group's learning, regularly look at examples of pupils' work and take forward developments together
- use a range of learning processes such as study groups, enquiry processes and problem-based learning
- work flexibly in smaller groups, for example in conducting leadership enquiries through visits to partner schools and peer coaching
- develop a climate of trust, support, "protected dissonance" (Mohr, 1998) and self-directed learning which enables them to grow as leaders

By contrast, the frustrations of local headteacher meetings are well known and regularly described. They include:

- an overloaded agenda driven from outside
- superficial discussion of a succession of items
- an emphasis on information exchange
- hurried or inadequate pre-planning
- a lack of clarity about outcomes
- suspicion and complaint
- hobby horses and club culture
- dominance of the few, passivity of the many
- regular non-attendance
- few opportunities to share knowledge and learn together
- a desire for change, but lack of time and commitment to do anything about it

If these characterise your own experiences, the following pages may help provide materials and processes to change the way you work.

Clearing the Ground

When the first issue of NCSL's leadership magazine, *Ldr*, featured a piece about leadership development, there was an immediate response from both school leaders and LEAs. Both groups agreed that things needed to change.

The article¹ built on Michael Fullan's description of New York District's reform strategy where, under the leadership of Anthony Alvarado, principals worked together to develop dialogue about learning². Fullan's account conveyed a sense of the energy of it all. Principals learnt from each other. They met together to look at students' work and explore learning or instructional issues. There was an affirmation that "good ideas come from talented people working together"³ and a clarity of focus ("it's about instruction and only instruction"). It was a complex and enriching process which included peer support in families of schools, shared visits, regular conferences and partnership with the University of San Diego.

By contrast, meetings for headteachers in LEAs in England are often preoccupied, it seems, not so much with learning, but with the minutiae of administration and funding. Initiatives around learning are often driven from the centre through prescriptive national strategies. "Don't think, simply do", seems to be the message.

Outside initiatives such as David Hopkins' IQEA project and NCSL's Networked Learning Communities, there has been little which affirms that good ideas come from talented people working together, little recognition of the potential and expertise about learning which lies within our schools, little understanding that, if only we can articulate the intuitive and learn from each other, our future is secure. All of this leads to challenging questions:

- If headteachers are not directly involved in learning about learning, then what is their core purpose?
- If LEAs are not leading a debate about how children learn and what makes effective learning, then what business are they in?
- If Networked Learning Communities do not challenge heads to focus on their own learning, then how can they expect others to do so?

The concept of leadership learning brings challenges at several levels. First, it challenges leaders to model themselves as lead learners, to embody and symbolise that learning is both a social and lifelong activity. This means answering the following questions:

- School leaders may plan together to facilitate the shared enquiry and development of others, but how much time do headteachers really spend on their own learning?
- How much energy do they put into creating contexts where they can regularly reflect on the impact of their leadership and develop understanding of themselves as leaders?
- How do they begin to learn together in a world where schools have traditionally been asked to compete?
- How do they move from independence to interdependence?

Second, it challenges LEAs, diocesan education authorities and other partnerships to think through what they can do to energise and, in some cases, work with school leaders for radical change from a deep-rooted culture of unproductive headteachers' meetings.

Third, it challenges co-leaders of networks to do things differently, to recognise the pervasive nature of inherited cultures and learn from good practice.

One of the principles of any sort of learning has to be a commitment to connect with and share your own, personal experience. Sometimes it's just a case of clearing the ground – jettisoning a pile of assumptions, expectations and misunderstandings that simply get in the way. Yet at other times, we all know from our work as teachers that it uncovers a rich and fertile ground which can accelerate development and take learning in surprising and unexpected directions.

So, take a few minutes to reflect on what collaborative leadership learning means for you from the unique perspective of your own experience. It might be useful to think about key learning moments, when, quite unexpectedly,

you saw things in a powerful new way, which still has a significant impact on your professional life. It may be an image, idea or a quotation you carry in your head when things get tough. Research suggests that collaborative learning, maybe through a process of challenge and reflection which occurs powerfully with professional colleagues, makes for important personal learning (Mohr, 1998).

Now, reflect individually and collectively on your experience of headteacher or senior leader groups (and try to think beyond meetings and development in your own school). These could or should be some of the best times to reflect, share and learn from each other's experience, to make sense of the world together and find words to describe it. Yet our work suggests that, in practice, they are anything but.

Overleaf is a reading from Roland Barth. We invite you to use this as the basis to reflect on the questions in **Learning Frame 1**. When you have done this, you may find it helpful to look at the second reading, which gives a summary of what a group of headteachers told us when we asked them the same questions.

¹ Jackson, D, 2001, "Cancel All Meetings", *Ldr*, Vol 1, December, NCSL

² Fullan, M, 2001, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Jossey-Bass

³ Alvarado, A, 2001, *Seven Organizing Principles of the Reform Strategy*, quoted by Fullan, M, op cit, p 57

Why Collaborative Learning Matters 1

Roland Barth - The Principal and the Profession of Teaching

I have been actively engaged for the past several years in the professional invigoration of the nation's principals. For all the agreement about their importance, surprisingly little is known about their professional development.

In our work at the Principals' Center it is becoming clearer just why it is so difficult for school leaders to become learners. One difficulty is, of course, 'I don't have the time.' For principals, like all of us, this is another way of saying other things are more important and perhaps more comfortable.

A second impediment is principals' experiences as learners. Few come to professional development activities without baggage from the past... Principals resist new learning opportunities because they have been there before and found what's there wanting. Third, for a principal to be a learner is immoral. The purpose of schools is to promote student learning. Taking \$100 from the school budget to join the Principals' Center is tantamount to snatching bread from the mouths of babes. Think of what the school could do with \$100 – teacher aides, books, magic markers. And think of what could be done at school during those two hours of workshop. Principals are public servants whose place is to serve, not to be served – an all too embedded belief in the school culture.

Another obstacle to the principal becoming a learner is that by publicly engaging in learning, principals reveal themselves as flawed. The world out there expects principals to know how to do it. It is inappropriate for the principal to be learner. Learning always begins one rung on the ladder below the teacher. The moral order of the universe places the principal in authority as the knower. Principal as learner is out of place.

Finally, if principals engage in a learning experience and learn something – a new way of thinking about curriculum, a new interpersonal skill, a new idea about improving the school climate – they are then faced with having to do something about it. Principals are rewarded for learning by additional work. It seems to be one of the paradoxes of professional development that it can be both energy and time depleting and energy and time replenishing.

These impediments suggest just how difficult it is for the leader to become learner. Yet, I am convinced that being a learner, a lifelong adult learner, is the most important characteristic of a school leader and of a professional. Learning is not just another on the long list of critical characteristics. The leader as learner belongs at the top of the list. Many of the characteristics, the skills most of us recognise as important for effective principals, are learned skills. A principal can learn how to monitor performance of pupils, to convey high expectations to teachers and pupils, and to professionalise teaching.

Learning is replenishing. We deplore teachers who do more of the same next September as they did this September and last September. I think it is equally unfortunate for the principal. After several years principals tend to switch onto 'automatic pilot' in PTA meetings, teacher evaluation sessions, and parent conferences – a sign of clinical death. Not only do teacher and student suffer, the principal suffers. Learning is an antidote to routinisation.

And the leader as learner is critical because there is a striking connection between learning and collegiality. The most powerful form of learning comes not from listening to the good words of others but from sharing what we know with others. Learning comes more from giving than receiving. Every principal I know is darn good at something. By reflecting on what we do, giving it coherence, and by sharing and articulating our craft knowledge, we make meaning, we learn. The best way, perhaps the only way, schools are going to improve is by school people learning from and helping other school people.

I find the most powerful reason for principals to be learners as well as leaders comes from the extraordinary influence of modelling behaviour. In many schools the more important you are, the further you are removed from learning. But when the leader is learner, when the principal's learning is continuous, sustained, visible and exciting, a crucial and very different message is telegraphed to the community: "This school is a community of learners; learning is its most important characteristic; the principal is a first-class citizen of the community of learners, the head learner."

Barth, R, 1987, "The Principal and the Profession of Teaching". In W, Greenfield, *Instructional Leadership: Concepts, Issues and Controversies*, Allyn and Bacon

Why Collaborative Learning Matters 2

In September 2002 a group of headteachers and advisers/inspectors participated in NCSL workshops to explore why learning for leaders was difficult and why it was important. Here is a summary of their responses.

Barriers to learning together

- “We’re trained for a different age and old habits are difficult to change.”
- “This is longer term and difficult when policy-makers require short-term, target-driven gains.”
- “How can we be sure that this will make a difference?”
- “We take a risk when we reveal our weaknesses and personal openness is really difficult.”
- “I’m head of my school and have to be seen to know the answers.”
- “We suffer from the legacy of the cult of individualism.”
- “This is a reversal of accepted cultural norms.”

Why learning matters

Alice in Wonderland, glass ceilings and mirrors

- “All this reminds me of *Alice in Wonderland* and the room where Alice drinks the liquid and grows and grows until she can barely fit in. So, if we encourage the professional growth and learning of all in our schools but are not prepared to grow ourselves, we’ll simply constrain the people within the organisation.”
- “Leaders who are not learning leaders will act like a glass ceiling on the growth of others.”
- “We have to model leadership learning. The collaborative leadership learning in our schools has to be mirrored by the collaborative learning which takes place between headteachers.”

The white heat of debate

- “Genuine collaboration means sharing and testing our vision in the white heat of debate. This is about challenge.”

Historical baggage

- “Being a head is a lonely business, so leadership learning is also about abandoning our historic and bureaucratic baggage.”
- “There are new rules of engagement now and a shift to interdependence.”
- “It is about heads empowering themselves, initiating learning and acting on what they learn.”
- “In showing that we learn together, we also make a healthy move away from the idea of the all-knowing super head.”

Sharing aspirations, promoting reflection, initiating change

- “Collaborative learning enables us to share dialogue around common issues, to widen our horizons, to make us open to new ideas, and to explore in quite practical ways what we can do to make things happen.”
- “It can help us to reflect on power, influence and the nature of our leadership. It gives us time for reflection, and the excitement of learning together. We may also, through this, become more emotionally intelligent as we learn to apply what we know about how we relate to children and to our interaction with adults.”
- “The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. We have to overcome our traditional isolation. Our learning needs to be tightly focused but we have to recognise the potential of leadership learning groups to provide models for change, to generate excitement and find more creative ways of doing things. We cannot afford not to learn together for the sake of our pupils.”
- “We are professional and professionals learn from each other. We need a shared professional language if we are to reach the really interesting practice we know is out there.”
- “If we stop to tell others about our work, we find the words to describe it and become clearer in our own minds why we are doing it.”

Stepping out of role, thinking deeply

- “The discussion we have needs to be characterised by openness, honesty and uncertainty. It needs to foster reflection and self-awareness. Learning is about making sense. It is a social activity.”
- “We have to be able to bring forward our private selves, step out of social role, explore our aspirations together. I may be able to think deeply but not on my own! After all, none of us is as smart as all of us.”
- “It’s about releasing the leadership potential of leaders at all levels in our schools though a clear and consistent focus on pupils’ entitlement. Long-term development depends on this learning.”

THE LEADING EDGE SERIES

Exploring the
Territory

02

part



National College for
School Leadership

part 2

Case Study 1

Learning Frame 2

Case Study 2

Case Study 3

Case Study 4

Case Study 5

Key Characteristics

International Perspectives

Exploring the Territory

This section consists of cases studies of leadership learning groups in England and Wales, the key characteristics which emerge from them and a summary of international perspectives on effective collaborative leadership learning.

Case Study 1

Primary headteachers engage in collaborative action research for impact on learning in their schools.

Case Study 2

Special school heads develop peer coaching and a focus on learning from an initial commitment to honesty and mutual support.

Case Study 3

Primary, special and secondary school heads engage in change management supported by coaching, consultancy and wider development opportunities for leadership teams.

Case Study 4

A large group of school leaders engage in leadership learning activities to raise attainment strategically linked with wider development opportunities in their schools.

Case Study 5

Infant, junior, primary and middle school headteachers across a wide geographical area work together with a clear focus on improving teaching and learning through coaching.

Key Characteristics

An analysis of powerful common features emerging from the case studies.

International Perspectives

A practical summary of broader themes.

The five case studies have been developed through dialogue with headteachers, facilitators and others involved in leadership learning groups. You can either read them for personal reflection or use them interactively.

We suggest that you select two or three of the case studies and use them with **Learning Frame 2** to explore the common characteristics of the groups, including shared values, practice and principles. Following your discussion, you may find it helpful to review our analysis of **Key Characteristics** and **International Perspectives**.

Learning Frame 2: Exploring the Territory

What are the common characteristics of leadership learning groups in the case studies?

What are the major points of difference?

What seems to enable them to work well?

What other issues and questions emerge from the case studies?

How do these compare with our own experience of leadership learning groups?

What are the main points of difference/similarity?

Case Study 1

Background

In 1999, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation funded an enquiry-based project for primary school headteachers in an urban area of South Wales. This grew from a fruitful relationship between an experienced school leader and an academic researcher and built on a well-established partnership with the LEA. Eight schools participated on an invitational but centrally co-ordinated basis, and headteachers worked as equal partners. The group was externally facilitated, made effective use of local expertise, was overseen by a steering group which provided critical friendship, and was externally evaluated.

Underlying the project was a belief that “increasing the effectiveness of headteachers would result in more committed, knowledgeable and skilled teachers”. It worked through action research to promote “a culture of openness and collaboration within the school” with considerable emphasis on empowering, guiding, monitoring and evaluating the wider impact on school improvement.

The external evaluator concluded that “the project really had helped heads stand back from their roles and responsibilities to explore their practice in ways they had not experienced before”. It had been a “unique experience” generating “great enthusiasm” and outcomes which were both “impressive and encouraging”.

Process

- **Regular seminars**

The group explored aspects of leadership theory and research methodology through readings and presentations and gave accounts of their action research.

- **School visits**

Headteachers visited each other's schools and developed coaching relationships – also supported by visits from the steering group.

- **Personal reflection**

The project placed considerable emphasis on personal reflective space both through a reflective journal and by recognising the need for thinking space within the school day.

- **Feedback**

The group used 360-degree feedback techniques, produced newsletters and set up a conference to celebrate and share their work.

- **Clear focus**

A clear focus on leadership learning meant, for heads, “developing understanding of themselves as headteachers”. Through this, the group’s work moved from the comparatively safe world of ‘what we are doing in my school project’ to ‘what I think and feel’, ‘how I interact’ and ‘the impact of my actions on staff and pupils’. In the early stages this was an area they found challenging – it was not easy to see, understand and articulate their own leadership roles, but important growth was taking place:

At the core of the improvement was the exploration and development of the ‘intrapersonal’ and the ‘interpersonal’: ie of the ‘inner world’ of values and feelings and the ‘outer world’ of how headteachers relate to staff. For example, several headteachers focused on the issue of delegation. For these headteachers it was through exploring their underlying fears about ‘losing control’ that they began to take the first tentative steps towards what can be described as ‘fundamental’ growth and change. (Maynard, 2001)⁴

Other points of growth were identified as greater openness, reflection, awareness of the aspirations of staff, and a re-conceptualisation of continuing professional development as doors were opened and cultures changed.

Perspectives

From the heads' perspective, development of trust was considered crucial to success. There was "tremendous bonding" and "relationships of trust" which grew to personal friendship. Seminars, which were "unlike anything I'd been involved in before", engaged and sustained the heads' interest. There was a feeling that "people were not on their own" and that learning was unique and personal:

"I'd learnt something about me."

There was a clear recognition that schools and leaders were different:

"I've learnt that the different contexts and cultures in which heads work is the rock on which school improvement is built."

Finally, the project had a sense of a learning journey and provided time both for collaborative learning and individual, reflective space:

"The teachers and leaders grew with their schools."

Issues and questions

This funded project provided a wide range of opportunities for a small group of headteachers. How do you sustain the work of such groups or do collaborative learning groups need to dissolve and reform in new, dynamic ways?

⁴Maynard, (2001), *Chain Reaction: Head Teachers, Teachers and Action Research*, Esmee Fairbairn Final Project Report

Case Study 2

Background

With the establishment of an urban unitary authority, eight headteachers of special schools, who shared similar values, formed a mutual support group. One took the lead, as she was concerned by the number of headteachers of special schools who were leaving the profession as a result of stress in the workplace. (Ten out of eighteen special school headteachers had resigned or retired in the recent past.)

The headteachers in the group shared an understanding of the complexities of their role and agreed that if they were open and honest with each other it would be mutually supportive. The original aims of the group were to:

- provide personal peer support
- ensure continuity of special education in the county, without competition between schools
- establish a united special school voice in the LEA
- consult with each other about leadership and management issues – such as pay, performance and target setting
- support each other professionally to promote strong leadership of learning and teaching

Process

- **Termly meetings and annual residentials**

The first meeting of the group was described as “quite remarkable” as the members of the group established a climate of honesty where individual fears and problems could be shared for the first time. The group now meets for a whole day once a term and holds an annual residential. Speakers are invited to address issues such as The Heart and Art of Headship. In the past, the LEA has paid for all the meetings except the residential. This source of funding has now been reduced and the group is considering ways in which it can continue to fund its activities.

- **External independent facilitator**

The facilitator is paid for by the group. She arranges the meetings and draws up the agenda in response to issues raised by the members. A typical agenda includes:

- personal reflections (10 minutes from each member on their own school)
- critical incidents exercise in triads (professional reflection, with feedback)
- issues for discussion – which are prioritised according to the urgency of the issue

There is no LEA involvement, although representatives of the LEA are sometimes invited to the meetings.

- **Feedback**

Ongoing feedback is an important part of the process and there is regular telephone contact between members of the group.

- **Clear focus**

The focus for the group continues to be related to leadership by the headteacher and the leadership team. As a result, roles within schools have been clarified and staff and governors are encouraged to question and challenge. There is evidence to suggest that leadership teams are taking on a wider role and that headteachers no longer feel that they “have to know everything”. A chair of governors’ and headteachers’ group has been set up in parallel to the original group and this, in turn, influences the work of governing bodies.

- **Self-sustaining and committed membership**

The group is self-sustaining and there is a high level of commitment from the members resulting in almost 100 per cent attendance at the meetings. Despite local disagreements, the group is convinced of the benefits of a collaborative approach, which contributes to its strength and effectiveness. A similar approach is now being applied, across the member schools, to other groups such as subject leaders.

Perspectives

The headteachers identified trust and honesty as essential factors contributing to the success of their group. It was “very heartening to hear others talk about their problems” and realise that “I am not alone”:

“If you are not honest there is no point in doing it.”

By working collaboratively the headteachers brought a different perspective to their own school and contributed to the development of others:

“I bring the outside picture to the vision of the school.”

“I act as a change agent: I can share my knowledge that the same thing is happening in my school.”

There was a greater understanding of their own leadership role and of strategies they could use to fulfil this role. Time for structured reflection away from school (personal time and critical incidents) was seen as an important part of the professional development process:

“It’s a measure of where you are. As a headteacher you can’t see where you are.”

“As the leader in the school you are there to be shot down.”

The group had been formed to help reduce the amount of stress upon the headteachers and still fulfilled this function:

“Someone listened to me.”

“The role of the headteacher is difficult/impossible, so we need to make it manageable. It’s impossible to do this without the support of my colleagues.”

However, the group has evolved from being simply supportive, to being primarily concerned with professional leadership development:

"I am more analytical now, learning from my mistakes."

"You realise you keep on learning. I use a range of leadership styles and question more."

This is attributed to the fact that the group is driven by the needs of its members rather than any external agents. Group norms have been established and "if something is undermining the group, we tackle it." The facilitator has no role in directing the group but "keeps us to task and chips in with advice".

Issues and questions

The funding available to the group is being reduced, raising questions of sustainability in its present form. There is also a general recognition of the importance of nurturing good group dynamics, whilst acknowledging the inevitable tensions that may arise in inducting new members into the existing tightly knit group. Can the group continue to grow and evolve or will it need to dissolve and reform?

Case Study 3

Background

Following a successful bid for Education Action Zone (EAZ) status in 1998, the chief executive of the zone proposed a team building programme involving a residential to hand over ownership of the EAZ to headteachers. The residential was a turning point for the group, which then comprised 15 primary, two secondary and two special school headteachers. During the residential, the headteachers designed a Zone Rocket, which identified the vision and key aims of the zone. They also requested an in-depth leadership programme.

The agreed aims of the leadership programme were to:

- explore leadership in depth in order to develop change leadership and transformational skills at all levels
- share ideas and have common questions answered
- explore innovative ways of leading schools
- support one another
- work to recruit governors
- enable all schools to achieve the Investors in People award

Process

The focus was on “opening up thinking, which leads to action” and to “think beyond day-to-day management”. To support these objectives a menu of interactive activities was available.

- **Coaching and development**
 - Bi-monthly professional management coaching sessions for headteachers run by external management consultants who usually work with business organisations.
 - A six-day Change Leaders programme for leadership teams and a parallel programme for headteachers.

- A team leaders' programme for primary and secondary schools, which takes place over three days and five twilight sessions. One junior school held a Super Learning Day and teachers from other schools visited to see how the work was linked to accelerated learning.

- **Consultancy**

Schools were offered up to seven days organisational development consultancy. This includes an audit of their current position, feedback from stakeholders and is followed up by a strategy development day.

More recently secondary schools have also been offered support/ consultancy on transformational change, emotional intelligence workshops for all headteachers and additional funding for some schools to offer training to leadership teams.

- **Regular workshops**

Through these initiatives, the EAZ invested heavily in building up a group of headteachers who work as a collaborative group. All meet monthly, together with an annual residential meeting and additional strategy events.

- **Facilitation and funding**

The headteachers recognised the need for a facilitator who organises the meetings and brings in high-quality trainers, as well as the importance of additional funding to support the initiative. Headteachers are, however, increasingly willing to contribute funding to maintain the momentum and have agreed to pay membership fees to the group from 2003 onwards. Part of the process has involved training coaches and trainers from within the group and the current Change Leaders programme is co-facilitated by one of the headteachers. The EAZ works in close co-operation with the LEA and the chief executive of the zone has been fully involved in headteacher and governor recruitment.

Perspectives

The leadership programme is credited with making a fundamental change in the competence and confidence of the headteachers in the zone:

"Good headteachers are coming into the zone, there are no unfilled headships."

"It has been about a culture change."

"We have developed a critical mass within the schools and there is the spark to spread it."

"The zone has moved from having 14 schools in serious weaknesses to just one."

"I didn't become a headteacher to manage buildings and budgets, I want to make a difference to young people."

"The level of challenge has made some headteachers reflect on whether they are in the right place."

Headteachers recognise the value of working collaboratively and having structured time to receive constructive feedback and reflect on their practice:

"People come back and reflect on their own institutions."

"It's allowed me to step outside and reflect, I am better at evaluating now. I think out of the box and ask 'What if?'"

"A genuine honesty and trust emerges."

"We can share concerns, raise questions and support one another."

"Sharing common issues has been of value, it's built up trust."

The notion of having a collective agenda that is responsive to the needs of the schools was seen as being crucial to the effectiveness of the group.

A Headteacher and Chair of Governors Day has been held on 'How do you respond as leaders to amalgamating schools?' The introduction of the leadership programme itself was at the request of the headteachers, although the chief executive designed the content.

An ability to understand oneself and others emerged as an essential attribute for an effective leader and a collaborative group member:

"It's not easy to affect headteachers who are close and defensive."

"The leadership team has got rid of lots of emotional baggage; they are now all working on the same thing. It's more enjoyable and upbeat."

One headteacher cited the emotional intelligence training as being the most significant part of the leadership programme and others recognised the important part that it had played in their own professional development and that of the school:

"It helped people work together as a team, they know others have emotional intelligence awareness and it has impacted on relationships and the way people operate."

"Both myself and my literacy co-ordinator are much more enthusiastic. There is more a feeling of looking to the future."

"My way of dealing with staff and parents has improved. I am better at listening and thinking through."

Issues and questions

How does the group support and challenge members who are unwilling or unable to participate in the leadership programme? How is a balance of time achieved between the opportunities and demands of the group and the implementation of ideas, leadership and management of a school?

Case Study 4

Background

This EAZ in the north of England comprises 13 primary schools, two special schools and three secondary schools. Initially the group lacked cohesion: some of the primary schools were suspicious of the secondary schools, some of the secondaries thought the primaries were intransigent and the special schools felt a degree of isolation from the mainstream. For several of the headteachers there was a history of diverse personal and professional views and the majority saw the zone simply as an access to additional funding.

The headteachers' initial expectations had been quite low:

"There was cynicism – yet another government initiative."

"I didn't want anything to do with it at first, then thought it would be a useful honey pot, now I recognise that it has made a profound difference from the bottom up."

The development of leadership and management was seen as central to the purpose of the EAZ and formed an explicit part of the Zone Action Plan. There was a common understanding that one of the aims of the EAZ was to "increase leadership effectiveness in order to raise school performance". A comprehensive programme for the development of leadership was devised to impact on all tiers of management and promote collaborative working across the initiatives.

Process

The leadership programme comprised a number of different strands, designed to interlink and create a productive synergy. Participation was voluntary and the uptake was very high. These included:

- **Facilitated monthly headteacher meetings**

Headteachers had regular opportunities to reflect upon and evaluate the activities in their school. There was a degree of challenge from other headteachers and the director of the zone, who acts as facilitator.

- **Headteachers' five-day residential programme on managing professionals for performance improvement**

Each headteacher received 360-degree feedback from their colleagues in school in a process led by the director and a firm of consultants. They developed a common vocabulary related to their leadership behaviour and shared an understanding of the key variables that impact on school performance.

- **Five-day leadership team residential programme**

Between two and eight members of schools' leadership teams attended. The headteachers joined their leadership teams on the penultimate day and they drew up a leadership team action plan, in addition to the individual action plans drawn up by each participating member. Follow up meetings were held back in school with ongoing monitoring of the impact within and across the zone.

- **Bursaries for National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) candidates**

Over half the schools in the EAZ now have at least one NPQH candidate, totalling 18 across the zone. Two candidates attend the monthly headteacher meetings to outline their individual school improvement project. A small bursary is provided by the EAZ for each candidate and is conditional upon him or her sharing their good practice across the zone. Presentations to the meetings provide an opportunity to practise skills of leadership.

- **Monthly EAZ co-ordinator meetings**

These focus on extending their role beyond the purely administrative to encompass raising attainment. This included learning to motivate and encourage, and meeting representatives from other schools.

- **Learning groups**

These have explored transition, gender and performance and challenging the more able. Membership includes senior leaders, including several headteachers. The meetings are chaired and facilitated by their members and they research and report on good practice to the monthly headteacher meetings.

- **Programme of coaching on emotional intelligence**

In the first phase, headteachers and senior leaders received feedback on their own emotional intelligence competencies. At a follow-up day which has been planned, each participant will prepare to coach a member of his or her school staff. After six months, participants will receive feedback on their coaching. In the future, they may also work as coaches in other zone schools.

Underpinning all the initiatives is a belief that leadership and management impact upon school improvement and that this, in turn, contributes to raising standards.

Perspectives

The external evaluator of the leadership programme concluded that: "Headteachers are very positive about the leadership and management activities provided by the EAZ and also believe that these have contributed to raising achievement in schools." "Most heads commented on the value of working with other zone heads and thought the atmosphere of trust that has grown within the zone to be related to this... Several spoke of the importance of working together rather than competing, in order to produce the best possible level of achievement for children within the zone."

There was general agreement that several other aspects had also contributed to the success of the leadership programme. These included:

- **Increased self-awareness and understanding of the importance of professional relationships to effective leadership**
 - "Knowing how to develop the SMT is key. You can't just assume they will all fit in. They haven't had the same shared experience."
 - "You can't just stick headteachers together. There has to be something that makes us want to work together, a common purpose."
 - "I feel very positive. I developed greater self-awareness and also gathered information on the perception of others."
 - "I now have a staff view and know how to reach them."
 - "There is an enhanced relationship between senior managers."

- **The need for a sustained challenge and sense of shared purpose**

In relation to the headteachers' programme one head said, "Our vulnerability on arrival helped - it was not comfortable but it was important and it made us stop and listen."

"The group was functioning OK before the programme, but suddenly in a very exposed way we were baring our skills."

"We all had to be courageous if we were to make this work. We are now much more working as a group with the same goals."

"It has not just been about the money. She (the director) is not soft and challenges everyone."

- **The key role of the facilitator**

"Leadership experience is on a continuum because she keeps it spinning."

"[The facilitator] focuses thinking and deals with individual schools."

"It has come together better than I thought it would. It used to be a mismatch of self-glory and vision. (She) gelled it and discussed it with us – reframed and helped us to understand what we wanted."

Issues and questions

How can the group ensure that headteachers newly appointed into EAZ schools will be able to integrate into a well-established group with a high degree of shared learning and experience?

How can leadership learning be sustained as a priority at the end of the five years of the EAZ?

How do we balance involvement in development initiatives that may require a significant number of the leadership team to be out of school at any one time with the need for high profile and sustained presence within school?

Case Study 5

Background

When 14 schools from four different education authorities obtained grant maintained status, they all realised that, in the words of one of the headteachers, they “were on a massive learning curve and feeling pretty isolated”. They approached their LEA which provided an adviser/inspector to draw together the separate schools into a group and facilitate their needs.

When grant maintained schools were disestablished, 15 schools decided to remain together, fund the facilitation of the group from their school budgets and develop their own title and identity. They were a group of infant, first, primary and middle schools ranging in size from 155 to 644 pupils on roll. They served different communities, including Muslim, rural and stockbroker belt.

In 1999, the group submitted a bid to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for additional funding to support a fixed-term programme for leadership development under the Heads You Win initiative. The group had moved beyond the “price of bins type meetings” and began to use the development of monitoring and classroom observation skills as a means of extending leadership and management and raising standards.

The one-year project aimed “to develop the skills of the headteachers in evaluating classroom practice and in providing constructive feedback, with performance targets for improving teaching”.

Process

Within the Heads You Win project, the following processes emerged:

- **External facilitation**

Existing external facilitator offered advice and expertise and assigned a trained adviser/inspector to each headteacher.

- **Self-evaluation**

Headteachers completed a self-evaluation sheet about their existing skills in monitoring and evaluation and were observed by the inspectors to establish a baseline of heads’ strengths and weaknesses.

- **Regular workshops and conferences**

Termly group sessions were held plus a two-day residential on issues such as effective teaching and learning, teachers' planning, interaction in the classroom and evaluating attainment and progress.

- **Focus on pupils' learning**

The 15 schools became training venues for heads to observe teachers objectively. Headteachers practised their observation skills and received internet and email training.

There were paired evaluations of classroom practice by heads coached by the inspectors and feedback was given to teachers. Headteachers were trained to scrutinise pupils' work and evaluated the term's work and planned future action.

The next two terms followed a similar pattern: a two-day residential conference, opportunities for headteachers to practise skills in their own schools, paired observations of teaching and learning with feedback to the teachers and communication between the headteachers using emails, a conference site and the telephone.

The final term involved paired observations and feedback to staff in two other schools and a final assessment of each headteachers' progress with suggestions for future steps.

The heads now use the same coaching style to train team leaders in classroom observation, monitoring, evaluation and feedback. One school is undertaking staff development, which is utilising the core of the heads in the group linked with an NPQH school improvement project.

Following the Heads You Win project, some schools have joined the group for a particular issue and, on the agreement of the whole group, a small number of new headteachers have been invited to join.

Perspectives

The learning group has been described by one of its members as “organic”, generating a strong feeling from the headteachers that it was important enough “to give up time and energy to, because it meets our needs”. Two headteachers also commented on the way in which a climate of “mutual trust and respect” enabled members to “support and positively criticise each other” as they are a “hard-edged group – very direct with one another”. The external evaluator for the Heads You Win project concluded that the learning group is “a cohesive group of high quality professionals (who) support and challenge one another, placing great trust in each other, honouring commitments to the project, to one another and to their schools”.

The importance of an effective facilitator was emphasised. The role was described as “essential” by one headteacher, despite the length of time that the group has been in existence. The steering group carries out regular administrative work, but the facilitator “asks questions, interjects and is quite strict”. He is also responsible for engaging trainers and coaches for the group.

As a group, they only felt able to undertake the Heads You Win project “because the funding was realistic and meant that they could participate without their schools suffering”. The financial support being available over a period of a year was cited by participants as “vital to giving depth to their development” (external evaluator’s report).

Some headteachers also spoke of the value of visiting each other’s schools, despite the fact that they found it difficult to be objective when giving feedback to a teacher in a different school.

Issues and questions

This is a long-established group with a gradually ageing core membership. How will new members be integrated? Will the group survive?

How might the quality of the learning diminish if funding were to be reduced?

Does the role of the facilitator change and evolve as the heads grow in competence and confidence?

Learning from the Studies

Viewed together, the case studies generate quite powerful messages about what we need to do to create and sustain vibrant leadership learning groups. These are summarised in the next section.

To use them interactively, use or adapt **Learning Frame 3**.

Finally, **International Perspectives** concludes this section and provides a broader summary of broader international thinking on how to create conditions for and expectations of collaborative leadership learning.

Learning Frame 3: Key Characteristics

Where do the **Key Characteristics** confirm our thinking?
What additional ideas are here?

Now, as a group, identify one statement which you feel is particularly difficult to achieve. Imagine a leadership learning group where this is fully in place.

What exactly does this look like in practice?
What needs to occur to enable this to happen?

Key Characteristics

Background

- Groups were formed by individuals opting in.
- Groups varied in size from 8 to 20 members. Fifteen is considered the optimum maximum size for an effective group.
- All groups had access to external funding in their initial stages and some chose to maintain the group by making contributions from school finances.
- Headteachers were equal partners within the group.
- The make-up of groups (cross phase or phase specific, local or wide geographical area) did not appear to be a determinant of group effectiveness. The major contributory factor was the commitment of the members to “make it work”.
- Frequently the groups had formed as mutual support groups, but had evolved into leadership learning communities.

Process

- A climate of trust, respect and openness was seen as an essential prerequisite.
- The members decided the general focus of the groups’ agendas.
- External facilitation. Facilitators were selected because of their experience, expertise and skills. They were useful in introducing new ideas and challenging leaders, causing some to reflect on whether they were in the right place.
- High importance was attached to the relevance of the agenda, processes and learning in relation to each individual’s school context.
- Learning together and from one another was integral to the way in which the groups worked.
- Development of ICT skills to enhance communication within the group was important.
- An annual residential meeting and regular meetings were viewed as fundamental.
- Some other successful strategies used by different groups included an internet community, learning logs and school visits.
- All the groups had developed an experiential, cyclical, learning process, which included elements of reflection, sharing, feedback, coaching and challenge.

International Perspectives

To be in an authentic relationship means that we provide long-term support for one another, challenging one another to improve and to question our current perceptions, and to learn together. Attention to relationship is critical.

Leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively (Lambert, 1998)⁵.

International research offers a broader perspective on collaborative learning, offered in summary form here.

If collaborative leadership learning activities are to be effective and meaningful, headteachers need to:

- Establish regular and frequent seminars. Make learning a priority and take personal responsibility for it. Allocate and protect time for learning and informed reflection. Identify and be explicit about your shared values and common purposes.
- Focus on learning about learning and nothing else. Make this your shared core purpose. Recognise the symbolism of head as lead learner. After all, if you don't learn, why should anybody else?
- Recognise that leadership learning requires structure, leadership and skilled external facilitation. People need to commit to long-term participation through offering resources to make it happen.
- You don't create a culture of trust and shared values, then begin to work together. You develop a collaborative culture by working together, through external facilitation and a relentless focus on instructional issues.
- In the early stages, win hearts and minds by surfacing immediate perceptions. After all, people come from different contexts, with different experiences and needs. Ensure that each seminar is affirmative and makes you feel good about the job you do rather than bad about what you don't. The challenge will grow from this.
- Make it relevant. Meet in schools where you can, and agree your programme as a group. Look together at children's work, your own work and research on a regular basis to learn to derive theory from practice. Visit each other's schools using agreed approaches and develop longer-term coaching relationships.

- Build accountability to yourselves, to the group and to the people in your school. Always ask what difference it makes. This will help to sustain your work as a group.
- Strive for deep learning, reach beyond shallow exchanges of information. Establish protocols about trust, confidentiality, about how to listen and value outside voices, how to question and how to challenge. Recognise that this is a journey, provide space for personal reflection and learn the value of giving and receiving meaningful feedback.
- Get into the habit of using pre-readings, study groups, enquiry and other well researched learning processes to enable you to construct knowledge together and apply it in the context of your own school

10. Make your learning seminars events that nobody can afford to miss.

When leaders meet regularly and reinforce changes in their thinking by using evidence from their practice, the possibility of real change increases (Mohr, 1998)⁶.

Core beliefs for principals' learning (Mohr, 1998)⁶

- Principals' learning is personal yet takes place most effectively whilst working in groups.
- Principals foster more powerful staff and student learning by focusing on their own learning.
- While we honour principals' thinking and voices, we want to push principals to move beyond their assumptions.
- Focused reflection takes time away from 'doing the work' and yet is essential.
- It takes strong leadership in order to have truly democratic learning.
- Rigorous planning is necessary for flexible and responsive implementation.
- New learning depends on protected dissonance. Providing a safe setting within which to stretch makes all the difference.

Nancy Mohr

⁵ Lambert, L, 1998, *Building Leadership Capacity*, ASCD

⁶ Mohr, N, 1998, *Creating Effective Study Groups for Principals' Educational Leadership*, ASCD

THE LEADING EDGE SERIES

Development
and Review

03

part



National College for
School Leadership

part 3

Models and Membership

Ownership and Facilitation

Principles of Learning

Creating a Climate for Learning

Aims and Expectations

Processes of Learning

Development and Sustainability

Impact on Learning

Development and Review

This section offers learning frames to help you to identify the shape, nature, strengths and challenges of your own leadership learning group. We believe that these all have a part to play in developing or extending a successful leadership learning group.

Models and Membership	Implications of group composition
Ownership and Facilitation	How the group is facilitated and directs its own work
Principles of Learning	How we work together
Creating a Climate for Learning	Openness, trust and challenge
Aims and Expectations	The core purpose of our group
Processes of Learning	A repertoire of learning processes available
Development and Sustainability	Strategic development and review
Impact on Learning	How this makes a difference

Over the following pages, each of these is explored to enable you to review your work. You may wish to work through them in sequence or draw selectively from them.

Models and Membership

There are at least three models for leadership learning groups:

- A cohort model where a group, such as newly appointed headteachers, are linked by a perceived common need and come together for development work over a fixed period of time
- An extending model where an initial headteacher group sustains and enriches its work by progressive integration of leadership teams and a range of development activities
- A role-determined model where a group of headteachers meet and learn together because of their role over an indefinite period; those attending change over time as new heads take up post

Learning Frame 4: Models and Membership

Which model (or combination of models) best describes the way we work?

What additional strengths and weaknesses are inherent in the model we have adopted/intend to adopt?

Do we need to change this in any way?

Model	Potential Strengths	Inherent Weaknesses
Cohort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared and defined purpose and structure • Common experience and need across different contexts • Clear expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homogeneity of group may limit range of experience • New groups will need to be launched if learning is to be sustained
Extending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The potential to connect learning at several levels within and between schools • Stimulus to wider dialogue and debate around leadership and learning • A good model of distributed leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex inter-relationships may lead to loss of clarity over the group's core purpose
Role-determined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good practice is embedded • An established culture of trust provides a network of support and challenge for all • Changing group composition brings new perceptions which stimulate debate and learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture and working practices often determined years before • Identification of shared purpose and principles obscured by time and tradition • Difficult for new members to challenge • Loss of momentum • Diverse needs, expectations and perceptions
Single phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar contexts enable groups to explore shared priorities and thinking in quite practical ways • Inter-LEA groups may draw on different perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with similar backgrounds and experiences think in similar ways
Cross phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbolises a shared moral purpose in supporting lifelong learning • Models important partnerships • Heterogeneous groups bring different perceptions, challenge and stimulus • Shared learning with special schools reflects inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared focus on areas of common development may be difficult

Ownership and Facilitation

All our work on effective leadership learning groups points to two fundamentally important elements. These are peer ownership and skilled external facilitation.

Headteacher ownership

Headteacher groups must be owned and directed by the heads themselves if their learning is to be relevant, responsive and dynamic. Headteachers often contribute to the funding of their leadership learning group and so demonstrate directly their own investment in learning.

Skilled external facilitation

External facilitation:

- ensures equal voice
- brings challenge, pace and accountability
- provides access to a rich variety of learning styles
- organises and negotiates content and process

As our understanding of professional learning grows, we are increasingly aware of the need for high quality facilitation. This involves a role for a consultant leader, an academic, adviser or consultant involving:

- highly developed interpersonal and intrapersonal skills
- high order communication skills including a capacity to challenge, synthesise and frame problems
- a secure grasp of current thinking in education and leadership
- a practical knowledge of the principles and processes of professional learning

Learning Frame 5: Ownership and Facilitation

What action do we need to take to ensure that heads own leadership learning groups?

What role is left for LEAs, diocesan education authorities, network co-leaders and co-ordinators when heads themselves need to initiate and sustain them?

Are our arrangements for skilled external facilitation fully in place?

Principles of Learning

Leaders need to visit other schools, to see practice that is actually the kind of practice they want to implement.

Collaborative leadership learning is based on a model of professional learning which is derived from three fundamental principles:

- recognition and respect of existing knowledge as the basis for creating new knowledge through professional interaction
- use of theory to inform the analysis of practice and practice to inform theory
- development of personal understanding which informs enhanced professional practice

A key feature of collaborative leadership learning is the importance attached to knowledge creation. The model assumes three types of knowledge:

- knowledge which is public, ie theoretical models and other peoples' understanding
- personal knowledge, the individual's own understanding
- knowledge which is created through interaction between individuals

The leadership learning activities suggested are intended to extend and develop each of these components, but place greatest emphasis on the importance of interaction as the basis of creating understanding and so enhancing the development of professional knowledge and leadership effectiveness.

Learning Frame 6: Principles of Learning

What are the explicit or implicit principles of learning underpinning our leadership learning group?

Do we need a shared statement of the principles and processes that underpin our work as a leadership learning group?

Creating a Climate for Learning

If leaders begin sharing ideas about issues they see as really important, the sharing itself creates a learning culture.

There are many elements involved in creating a climate for professional learning, particularly where this involves principals and headteachers from different schools. As we have already suggested, trust emerges through a process of people working together and the right climate begins to form through headteacher ownership and external facilitation. There are, however, other important elements including:

- regular, purposeful meetings
- launch and annual residential workshops
- wider opportunities to work together (seeing Learning Processes)
- clarity about core purposes and aims
- established protocols which promote openness, trust and confidentiality
- recognition of the importance of challenge and 'protected dissonance'

Leadership learning groups often use an agreed structure for seminars which reflect core aims and purposes. Examples of these are:

- a clear learning focus for each seminar
- a protocol where heads listen to a presentation about developing an aspect of pupil learning and respond only by asking further questions
- a commitment to regular coaching triads within leadership learning groups where participants take turns to articulate issues whilst others question and challenge them to reframe the issues and generate further possibilities for action
- a commitment to end each seminar with a short period of shared evaluation and reflection

Learning Frame 7: Creating a Climate for Learning

Have we done enough to develop a climate for learning?

Do we need to air these issues in the learning group to make our assumptions explicit?

Do our seminars need or have a consistent structure which promotes genuine collaboration, mutual support and reflection?

What else do we need to do?

Aims and Expectations

The core aim of leadership learning must be simple and clear – heads have to model themselves as lead learners in learning schools and, in turn, their learning must make a difference both to the professional learning of staff and, fundamentally, to the learning of pupils. After all, if leadership learning is not, at its heart, about improving and enriching the education of children in our schools, then it will founder and fail. Nobody will spend time in meetings which have no impact and, if they do so, it will be out of a misplaced sense of duty.

The success of collaborative leadership learning, in this way, depends on all participants accepting responsibility and acknowledging that the investment made by them is done so on behalf of the pupils of their school.

- Leaders should have a genuine desire to learn more about themselves as leaders and the work of leading a school.
- They must show a continuing commitment to working collaboratively with others on that learning.
- All leaders are expected to learn with, learn from, and contribute to the learning of, others.
- They are expected to draw on their experience as leaders and to relate that to a wider evidence base, through reading, reflection and active learning processes.
- Leaders should devise their own ways of synthesising and recording learning.
- Leaders are expected to engage in school-based enquiry as part of their learning and leadership practice and to participate in the range of activities which underpin collaborative leadership learning.
- Leaders should commit to working collaboratively, to engage in the sharing of knowledge, enquiry, problem-framing and problem-solving and the development of new understandings.
- By engaging in this process they will, over time, develop as a community of practice, learning for themselves and on behalf of others.

Learning Frame 8: Aims and Expectations

Are we clear about the core aims of our leadership learning group?

What will we do to revisit these?

How can we take time to measure our work against the aims we share?

Processes of Learning

Skilled facilitation includes matching learning to appropriate collaborative processes. Together, these help participants to move beyond social role to explore areas of uncertainty, confront intractable issues and reflect on the impact of their leadership on others. The following sections set out a repertoire of learning processes⁷.

Learning Frame 9: Processes of Learning

What repertoire of learning processes do we use?

Do we need to extend or change these?

Have we got the balance right between processes we can use in our seminars and those which are likely to develop wider professional partnership and dialogue?

⁷ Fuller exploration of these materials and references is available in NCSL's New Visions Programme for Early Headship module on Learning Processes and Protocols (Creasy, 2001) from which this section has been adapted.

Study groups

Headteachers reflect on their own practice through the stimulus of readings, consider problems and figure out what to do about them. The focus is on the critical area of teaching and learning and is structured to ensure that headteachers engage in continuous learning focused on school-wide pupil results and best practices to support higher levels of achievement. Study groups normally have a designated peer or 'outside' facilitator. The facilitator convenes the group, sets the agenda, provides pre-reading when necessary and ensures that members are kept on task.

Work in this area may also often incorporate use of case study materials, usually involving the study of a particular leader, group or institution. By illuminating key themes and issues, case studies generate propositions about development, relationships, practice and its impact. This facilitates comparative review and the identification of alternative and innovative practice.

To find out more

Mohr, N, 1998, "Creating Effective Study Groups for Principals", *Educational Leadership*, ASCD, 55 (7), pp 41-4

Enquiry-based learning

A continuous process of learning and reflection that entails a systematic review of our own practice in order to improve and develop. Rooted in real practice and often collaborative in nature, action enquiry is a study of leadership that provokes perspective shifts and promotes new behaviour and action.

To find out more

Robson, C, 2002, *Real World Research*, Blackwell

Pearce, D, 1991, "Appendix 1: Getting Started - An action manual".
In M, Pedler (ed), *Action Learning in Practice*, 2nd edn, Gower

Kemmis, S & McTaggart, R, 1982, *The Action Research Planner*,
Deakin University Press

Southworth, G & Conner, C, 1999, *Managing Improving Primary Schools: Using Evidence-based Management and Leadership*, Falmer

...about social research and action enquiry methods:

<http://trochim.human.cornell.edu>

www.did.stu.mmu.ac.uk/carn/

www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/ari/p-rholian99.html

Appreciative enquiry

This is a four stage process with potential to value what has been achieved and develop images of future action. In appreciative enquiry, learning groups move through a process where they collaboratively:

- discover
- dream
- design
- deliver

The approach has powerful potential to stimulate innovative thinking and build links between futures perspectives and practical actions.

To find out more

Cooperrider, D L & Srivasta, S, 1998, *An Invitation to Organisational Wisdom and Executive Courage*. In S, Srivasta & Cooperrider, D L (eds), *Organisational Wisdom and Executive Courage*, (1st edn), The New Lexington Press

Watkins, J M & Mohr, B J, 2001, *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination*, Jossey-Bass/Pfeifer

<http://appreciativeenquiry.cwrdu.edu>

www.taosinstitute.net

Problem-based learning

Problem-based learning starts with the presentation of a work-based issue generated by the group or its facilitator. It begins with a problem rather than a concept and seeks to find collaborative solutions to a shared problem.

To find out more

Hallinger, P & Bridges, E, 1997, "Problem-based Leadership Development: Preparing Educational Leaders for Changing Times", *Journal of School Leadership*, 7, pp 592-608

www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/2001levin/levin.html

Peer coaching

Coaching and mentoring are terms often used interchangeably to describe a professional relationship that spans the continuum between challenge and support. The role of the coach/mentor will range from directive target setting through critical friendship to role modelling, according to context and need. For example, a headteacher may receive frequent in-school coaching on critical skills areas such as working with teachers to improve teaching and learning, analysing data and critiquing pupils' work.

To find out more

Barnett, B, 1995, "Developing Reflection and Expertise: Can mentors make the difference?" *Journal of Education*, 5, pp 45-59

Clutterbuck, D, 1998, *Learning Alliances: Tapping into Talent*, Institute of Personnel and Development

Hobson, H/NCSL, 2003, *Mentoring and Coaching for New Leaders* (Literature Review), National College for School Leadership

Southworth, G, Clunie, R & Somerville, D, 1994, *Headteacher Mentoring Insights and Ideas about Headteacher Development*. In H, Bradley, C, Conner & G Southworth (eds), *Developing Teachers, Developing Schools*, Fulton Books

West-Burnham, J, 1993, *Mentoring and Management Development*. In P, Smith & J, West-Burnham (eds), *Mentoring in the Effective School*, Longman

Inter-school visits / Study visits

A structured and focused programme of visits by members of an established group to schools or other organisations in which there is a clear agenda and a protocol to support investigation, data collection, synthesis and application. They are also characterised by engagement with practice and practitioners and strategies for implementation. They may have a local, UK or international focus on institutions or systems.

To find out more

...about principles of intervisitation:

Fullan, M, 2001, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Jossey-Bass

Tuckman, B, 1994, *Conducting Educational Research*, Harcourt Brace College Publishers

...about study visit opportunities, visit:

www2.britishcouncil.org/canada/Canada

www.teachernet.gov.uk/professionaldevelopment/opportunities/internationalprofdevelopment

Peer networks

Headteachers serve as 'critical friends' within a range of groupings, dependent upon the context of the network and the geographical distribution of its members to form a professional network that shares a commitment to action learning and school improvement. It aims to develop its capacity to support learning, promote the development process, and disseminate meaningful outcomes.

To find out more

...about NCSL's Networked Learning Communities:

www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc

Leadership learning walks

Classroom visits by advisors / inspectors and others to:

- support focused, collaborative reviews of learning and teaching
- stimulate dialogue about leadership and learning
- challenge and confirm leaders' perspectives on school improvement
- address individual needs of schools
- provide guidance to headteachers

To find out more

... about work developed by the Pittsburgh Institute for Learning:

www.instituteforlearning.org

Kirkland, I/NCSL, 2003, *The Learning Walk* (NCSL Research Associate Report), National College for School Leadership

Leader conferences

These events bring together headteachers and members of the leadership group from different schools to focus upon standards, perhaps for a particular academic area. During the seminar, data is examined to determine how their schools measure up against agreed standards. Leaders work together to develop a school improvement plan and a year-long professional development plan to support the proposals

To find out more

... about this work in New York District 2:

Fullan, M, 2001, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Jossey-Bass

...about video and other resources from New York District 2 available through Pittsburgh, visit:

www.instituteforlearning.org/publications.html

Diagnostic instruments

These are used to stimulate and support reflection and enable the analysis of personal and organisational effectiveness. Examples include 360-degree appraisals and the Leadership Style Inventory.

To find out more

...about diagnostic instruments:

Elliott, J, 1991, *Action Research for Educational Change*, Open University Press

MacBeath, J & Myers, K, 1999, *Effective School Leaders: How to evaluate and improve your leadership potential*, Financial Times/Prentice Hall

...about the Leadership Style Inventory through a BBC Perspectives on Leadership module:

www.ncsl.org.uk/BBCmodule/ncsl.htm

...about examples of commercial diagnostic instruments:

www.ccl.org/products/products.htm

Informed reflection

This describes the structured critical and analytical review of practice that helps to clarify understanding and inform future action. Reflection is supported by all strategies listed in this section. It is often assisted by the use of a learning journal; a reflective narrative that supports systematic review and planning. Reflection is based upon developing professional, perceptual and self-awareness.

To find out more

... about research on reflection:

Hatton, N & Smith, D, 1995, Facilitating Reflection: Issues and Research. *Forum of Education*, 50 (1), pp 49-65

Paterson, A S F & Moyles, J, 1991, *An Evaluation of Video Stimulated Reflective Dialogue*. Paper presented at BERA, University of Leeds, 13 September 2002

...about protocols for self-reflection and a digest of reflective literature:

www.orst.edu/instruction/ed555/zone1/mezirow.htm

www.ed.gov.databases/ERIC_Digests/ed449120.html

Learning fairs

An opportunity to showcase, reflect and celebrate, which focuses on the successes and challenges of particular developments within schools as colleagues share learning with each other.

Leadership development plans

Each headteacher creates an individual professional leadership development plan. The network of heads sets up a school evaluation team comprising three members. Each year, two of the heads receive a summative evaluation and meet at the third head's school for at least 90 minutes to talk in detail about that headteacher's growth. Heads can demonstrate what they have done by providing artefacts, creating a portfolio, doing a walk-through of their buildings -- whatever they believe is relevant to their professional development plan. This process is carried out with all members of the 'evaluation team'.

E-learning

This is the generic term for electronic and virtual developmental strategies. Examples include net-based enquiry, e-learning communities, e-study groups and e-mentoring.

To find out more

McFarlane, A, Bradburn, A & McMahon, A /NCSL, 2003, *E-Learning for Leadership: Emerging indicators of effective practice*, National College for School Leadership

Porter, I, 1997, *Creating the Virtual Classroom: Distance Learning with the Internet*, John Wiley and Sons

www.baol.co.uk

www.elearners.com/services/faq/q1.asp

To access video footage and transcripts of NCSL's e-learning launch conference (autumn 2002):

www.ncsl.org.uk/index.cfm?pageid=college-makingthefuture-elearningconf

Development and Sustainability

Just as schools need new leaders, so leadership learning groups need periodically to be relaunched or reformed. Beyond that, sustainability is about:

- developing links beyond headteacher level to encourage multi-level learning partnerships between schools through activities such as learning fairs
- keeping a clear focus on pupils' learning
- developing a range of activities such as peer coaching and school visits which sustain and develop links beyond the seminars
- using and developing opportunities for e-learning and conferencing

Learning Frame 10: Development and Sustainability

At this time, is sustainability an issue?

Do we need to plan or instigate further development of the leadership learning group?

Impact on Learning

Leadership learning groups require considerable investment of resources. Whilst leadership learning is vitally important, there is a strong need for accountability to yourself, to your colleagues and to pupils in your school.

Learning Frame 11: Impact on Learning

How and when will we measure the impact of our leadership learning group:

In the LEA/diocesan authority/network?

In the leadership learning group?

On professional and pupil learning in our schools?

THE LEADING EDGE SERIES

New Directions

04

part



National College for
School Leadership

part 4

Exploring the Territory
Development and Review

New Directions

This publication has been written to raise questions and inform thinking. As a support for dialogue, it is designed to empower groups through renewed commitment and shared purpose.

In this section we have brought together all Learning Frames used in this document, organised under the earlier headings of **Exploring the Territory** and **Development and Review**.

Finally, the major areas of exploration are presented in tabular form. You may find this useful in synthesising group discussions to show consensus and points for action.

Collaborative leadership learning is currently an important area for development in NCSL. We are now working with over 20 pilot headteacher groups across England to extend our understanding of effective collaborative learning and to support groups in their development. To find out more about this work, please visit www.ncsl.org.uk/leadershiplearning. In 2004, we plan to publish further materials and tools to help support the practical business of group workshops; you can find further details of this on the website.

If you found this publication helpful or provocative, if you have good practice to report or would like to know more about our work, please email us at research@ncsl.org.uk. NCSL is committed to learning. We always welcome and value your comments on our work.

Learning Frames: Exploring the Territory

1: The Challenge of Collaborative Learning

- Why does leadership learning matter?
- What are the barriers to school leaders learning together?
- What does good leadership learning look like?

2: Exploring the Territory

- What are the common characteristics of leadership learning groups in the case studies?
- What are the major points of difference?
- What seems to enable them to work well?
- What other issues and questions emerge from the case studies?
- How do these compare with our own experience of leadership learning groups?
- What are the main points of difference/similarity?

3: Key Characteristics

- Where do the Key Characteristics confirm our thinking?
- What additional ideas are here?
- Now, as a group, identify one statement which you feel is particularly difficult to achieve. Imagine a leadership learning group where this is fully in place.
- What exactly does this look like in practice?
- What needs to occur to enable this to happen?

4: Models and Membership

Which model (or combination of models) best describes the way we work?

What additional strengths and weaknesses are inherent in the model we have adopted/intend to adopt?

Do we need to change this in any way?

5: Ownership and Facilitation

What action do we need to take to ensure that heads own leadership learning groups?

What role is left for LEAs, diocesan education authorities, network co-leaders and co-ordinators when heads themselves need to initiate and sustain them?

Are our arrangements for skilled external facilitation fully in place?

6: Principles of Learning

What are the explicit or implicit principles of learning which underpin our leadership learning group?

Do we need a shared statement of the principles and processes which underpins our work as a leadership learning group?

Learning Frames: Development and Review

7: Creating a Climate for Learning

Have we done enough to develop a climate for learning?

Do we need to air these issues in the learning group to make our assumptions explicit?

Do our seminars need or have a consistent structure which promotes genuine collaboration, mutual support and reflection?

What else do we need to do?

8: Aims and Expectations

Are we clear about the core aims of our leadership learning group?

What will we do to revisit these?

How can we take time to measure our work against the aims we share?

9: Processes of Learning

What repertoire of learning processes do we use?

Do we need to extend or change these?

Have we got the balance right between processes we can use in our seminars and those which are likely to develop wider professional partnership and dialogue?

10: Development and Sustainability

At this time, is sustainability an issue?

Do we need to plan or instigate further development of the leadership learning group?

11: Impact on Learning

How and when will we measure the impact of our leadership learning group:

In the LEA/diocesan authority/network

In the leadership learning group?

On professional and pupil learning in our schools?

Action Points

This is a summary of potential areas for debate, action and agreement following shared process of review. You can use this as a checklist or, alternatively, to help shape an action-planning process.

Aspect	Key Developments
Setting Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual and collective commitment following shared process of review
Models and Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confirmation of model or agreement over new model to be used:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cohort/extending/role-determinedSingle/cross phaseLEA/inter-LEA/otherImplications for recruitment
Ownership and Facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peer initiation and arrangements for negotiation of agenda• Funding arrangements• Skilled external facilitation in place, including clarity of role
Principles of Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agreement about learning from, with and on behalf of others
Creating a Climate for Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commitment to regular seminars• Annual residential• Agreed structure for seminars and other protocols
Aims and Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaborative development of shared statements
Processes of Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agreed repertoire of learning processes for seminars• Developing/wider opportunities for development and professional alliances
Development and Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clarity about processes to review and steer the development of the leadership learning group and/or exit strategy
Impact on Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agreement about how leaders will evaluate impact

Agreed Action

Good Practice and Feedback

If you are involved in a successful leadership learning group or in the process of formation, review or development, send us an account of your work (details can be found at www.ncsl.org.uk/leadershiplearning). By logging on you can also find out about good practice and other NCSL initiatives.

If you find these materials helpful or have suggestions as to how we might further develop work on leadership learning groups, we would be delighted to hear from you at research@ncsl.org.uk

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- Ann McGarvey Adviser, North Yorkshire LEA
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Written by Chris Williams

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NCSL Leading Edge Series

The Leading Edge series is designed to explore current and significant aspects of leadership, draw on good practice nationally, and bring together successful school leaders to generate new understandings. It offers a dynamic forum for school leaders to engage in professional dialogue, discussion and debate, through seminars that allow and encourage an active exchange of perspectives drawn from leading edge research and practice.

The series provides opportunities for school leaders to learn from and with each other, to offer challenge and to bring together research and good practice.

Leading Edge Seminars: The Principles

The solutions to our problems lie within ourselves. The best practice in our schools has the potential to generate solutions to problems we all face, if only we can find ways of telling our stories of leadership and articulating what we do in a shared professional language.

We learn from and with leading practitioners

We must enrich the dialogue between school leaders and academics to

- bring together research and practitioner perspectives
- connect theory with practice and practice with theory

We must strive to

- extend what we know about aspects of leadership
- identify new learning, issues and themes for further case study and research
- use innovative and energising ways of creating wider impact on schools

Too Busy To Learn? is an introductory handbook of interactive materials for collaborative learning for headteachers, principals and advisers. Building on an NCSL pilot programme to develop leadership learning groups, it offers questions, processes and materials to support new collaborative groups as they form, or established groups as they review the focus and purpose of their work together.

The materials are about local learning groups where headteachers learn from and with each other, share good practice, provide mutual challenge and support and redefine administrative meetings as new and powerful learning opportunities.

National College for
School Leadership
Triumph Road
Nottingham NG8 1DH

t: 0870 001 1155
f: 0115 872 2001

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