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Towards Ubuntu A learning journey to Cape Town

Networked learning – an international perspective



International Placements for Headteachers (IPH)
Supported by the British Council, NCSL and DfES

Networked Learning Communities

learning from each other

learning with each other

learning on behalf of each other

“ The voyage of discovery lies not in finding new landscapes, but in having new eyes. ”

Marcel Proust

Networked learning communities learning internationally

In over 130 networked learning communities nationwide, schools teachers, pupils and leaders are learning from each other, with each other and, ultimately, on behalf of each other. By engaging in this work in interdependent and mutually supportive ways, groups of schools across the country are working within learning networks and are using the diversity within and across schools as a positive force for knowledge-sharing and innovation.

The National College for School Leadership's (NCSL's) Networked Learning Communities (NLC) programme is committed to learning from international educational research and development. Learning from and with educational researchers, practitioners and school leaders from across the globe is an important part of this work. Through partnership and collaborative working arrangements, we are also seeking to contribute to the generation of understandings about sustainable learning communities that value practitioner and academic knowledge equally.

International Placements for Headteachers (IPH)

In partnership with the British Council and DfES, NCSL offers a unique opportunity for headteachers to gain an international perspective on their work through the International Placements for Headteachers (IPH) scheme. From 2003 to 2004 we piloted an NLC placement programme within the IPH scheme, with a study visit to Cape Town, South Africa.

During the NLC placement programme, headteachers were given the opportunity to learn with and from international colleagues. A distinctive feature of the programme was, however, that this learning was undertaken on behalf of the other schools within their network and the wider Networked Learning Communities programme. With this approach in mind, each participating NLC nominated two headteachers to represent them, with a view to encouraging school-to-school learning through both the placement process and its outcomes. With the participation of ten headteachers, from five NLCs across England, came the additional opportunity for network-to-network learning in the two key areas of focus selected for the placement– pupil learning and leadership learning. In this way, the NLC levels of learning framework, upon which the work of every NLC is based, was used to scaffold the learning experience provided by the placement programme.

The other distinctive feature of the NLC pilot programme was the enquiry-based approach to leadership learning which was adopted by the participating headteachers. In the first instance, this involved two headteachers from each network operating as an enquiry partnership which, during the course of the study visit, was extended to include the headteachers in the host schools in South Africa. Participants selected a focus for their enquiry, based around the broad areas of pupil learning and leadership learning, and used this to structure the school visits undertaken whilst on the placement. An appreciative enquiry stance was adopted in framing the placement visits, whereby the focus was upon the discovery of the best of what is within the educational practices of the host schools.

Towards Ubuntu

“ You are therefore I am. ”

Towards Ubuntu – a learning journey to Cape Town

The accounts presented in this booklet, together with the accompanying video, document the learning journey to Cape Town undertaken by those headteachers who participated in the pilot of the NLC international placement programme. In reflecting upon the learning drawn from this international experience, and with a view to sharing this learning more widely with NLC participants across the programme, the commentary which follows includes contributions from each of the five participating NLCs.

Each of the contributions aims to present an account of the learning which was generated by and drawn from, the placement experience and captured through a series of ‘learning exchange’ seminars which were undertaken prior to, during and following the placement visit. Perspectives from a learning exchange workshop, jointly hosted by the Networked Learning Group and the University of the Western Cape, and involving both visiting NLC headteachers and host headteachers from the schools in Cape Town which we visited, are also shared throughout the document. In sharing this learning, we hope that it will transcend the international context from which it came and provide some valuable transferable learning, which other NLC participants interested in exploring an international dimension to their work, may draw upon to inform their practice within networked learning communities.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our colleagues in Cape Town for their kindness, generosity of spirit and ultimate professionalism in enabling us to take part in a unique learning experience that proved to be the beginning of a learning journey which we hope to continue in the future, and which will continue to inform our thinking and practice in networked learning communities.

With thanks to the headteachers and staff from:

- Lukhanyo Primary School, Hermanus
- Imperial Primary School, Mitchell's Plain
- Hermanus High School, Hermanus
- Spine Road Secondary School, Mitchell's Plain
- Eros School, Bridgetown
- Hermanus Primary School, Hermanus
- Denegeur Primary School, Grabouw
- South Peninsular High School, Deep River
- Hawston High School, Hermanus
- Crestway Secondary School, Retreat
- Hawston Primary School, Hermanus
- Brenda Sonn & team, TIP, The University of the Wetsern Cape
- Lydia Abel & team, SDU, The University of Cape Town



Reflections on a South African learning journey

In March 2004, Christine Bowen, headteacher of Mottram St. Andrew Primary School, and Peter Rubery, headteacher of Fallibroome High School and co-leaders of the Macclesfield Performing Arts Network, visited Cape Town as part of a National College for School Leadership British Council study visit. This account summarises reflections and records outcomes of the enquiry undertaken during the week's visit.

Our UK context

Fallibroome and Mottram St. Andrew serve a largely white middle-class area of north east Cheshire. The networked learning community was established in 2003 and consists of one secondary school and six feeder primaries. The network is pursuing two strands of enquiry in the drive to improve learning:

- 1 use of the performing arts, including teacher and pupil skills development and joint performance
- 2 developing co-operative group work strategies across the transition years, by training teachers and pupils in Kagan Structures¹

The rationale for this focus comes from Charles Desforges' NCSL paper, 'On Teaching and Learning'², which identifies the following major drivers of attainment:

- cognitive and metacognitive activity
- time on task
- the flow of challenging work
- home support

He goes on to advise attention to the following sites of lost learning:

- transitions (between Key Stages)
- assessment (formative rather than summative)
- knowledge application (giving learning a real life context)
- classroom work (moving from rewarding and assessing neatness, effort and good order to acknowledging cognitive and metacognitive activity)

Enquiry questions

Such a clear focus on learning in the Macclesfield NLC prompted specific lines of enquiry for our visit to Cape Town. We were keen to compare our networking structures with an international context, as Desforges argues that:

“ Schools would be even more successful... at promoting achievement if we could all share and use all the knowledge we have about learning. ”

In order to facilitate such an exchange and to acknowledge the limited time available for enquiry, a framework for appreciative enquiry was established with two clear questions grounding our visit:

- 1 What are the most significant barriers to learning in the South African context?
- 2 How is leadership development sustained?

Enquiry methodology

An appreciative enquiry methodology was chosen, since it is designed to look for the positives in an organisation. Those in enquiry roles can focus on what is important to them, examine what is being done well in the enquiry context and find ways of replicating those conditions. The stages of appreciative enquiry include:

- defining the topic for enquiry
- discovering the best of what is
- dreaming of what might be
- designing an ideal future
- delivering and sustaining the changes undertaken²

By examining the barriers to learning and systems of leadership development in Cape Town, we hoped to be able to reflect on our current practices in Macclesfield and make sustainable improvements.

The South African context

In the decade since the end of apartheid, a reasonable question for the government would be, 'What have we accomplished educationally in ten years of democracy?' Following a recent visit, a senior British educationalist's view was:

“ ...probably much more than you could have hoped for and far more than I expected. But God, you still have a mountain to climb. ”

The old divisions are still evident in the language and culture of the education system, with all black schools in the informal settlements referred to as ex-model A schools; the township schools serving the coloured population known as ex-model B; and the mostly all-white schools acknowledged as ex-model C. Racial integration is evident in pockets, but limited by simple economics. The system of differential fees for the three types of schools clearly prevents access across the social divide with the ex-model C schools requiring higher fees and, therefore, limiting access for poorer families to a small number of sponsorship schemes.

A drive to measure outcomes has generated a qualifications framework (NQF) and a qualifications authority (SAQA). The South African Schools Act, which devolved powers and responsibilities to schools, created a sense of ownership but, without systematic funding streams and critically, a reliance on inexperienced principals and governors, no system-wide trend of improvement has emerged.

Through a process familiar to historians of UK educational reform, several versions of a 'National Curriculum' have generated a familiar debate about content versus process and the connections between subject disciplines. However, the key factors still to be addressed are the quality of teacher training and how to ensure home support and the motivation of pupils.

Our experience also revealed that security is a major issue. Armed response signs abound, schools are heavily gated and a custodial feel was hard to escape, particularly in the township schools. As a consequence, classrooms, in the secondary sector at least, were often barren, thefts and break-ins frequent, and opportunities for students and staff to stay after school were limited due to the increased risk of attack on the journey home.

Towards Ubuntu Still a mountain to climb...

Christine Bowen and
Peter Rubery
Macclesfield
Performing Arts NLC

“ The development of an international perspective, to develop transformational learning initiatives, is one thing I will take away from this experience. ”

“ We have shared experiences and generated interesting partnerships. There is power in collaboration at a network and network-to-network level. ”

A further contextual factor was dual language delivery, Afrikaans being the first language of students and staff. This was often impressive to observe; how many lessons in the UK are routinely delivered in a second language outside the MFL curriculum? Equally noticeable was high profile health education with many references to the the AIDS babies and often graphic safe-sex posters and murals evident in prominent positions in and outside school sites.

Enquiry context

Our enquiry involved gathering evidence from visits to:

- a secondary school in an advantaged area (ex-model C, majority white student population)
- the feeder primary school to the above (ex-model C)
- a special school
- a one-day visit to a rural primary school (ex-model A, all black population)
- a two-day visit to secondary school (ex-model B, majority coloured population)
- we also engaged in several seminar sessions with university staff and school principals



During our visits, school leaders, teachers and students went out of their way to provide hospitality and information and warmly welcomed us. Genuine friendships, partnerships and networks evolved with valuable information exchanged by all parties.

Whilst in school evidence was gathered by:

- lesson observation
- interviews with principals
- interviews with teaching staff
- interviews with students



Barriers to learning

With respect to barriers to learning, the following factors were observed:

- a narrow and prescriptive curriculum
- a reliance on summative assessment practices
- teacher recruitment difficulties
- teacher quality and lack of in-service training
- large class sizes
- insufficient capital investment
- under funding of resources
- high security requirements and high expectation of burglary
- dual language delivery
- limited home support
- almost complete lack of cross-pharse liaison
- lack of networks to facilitate information exchange and support
- no co-ordinated admissions process
- no art, music or PE on the formal curriculum (with evidence of extra-curricular activity for a minority)

It is interesting to refer back to the Desforges paper at this point and acknowledge the apparent lack of attention to networks, particularly across the primary-secondary transition, formative assessment practices and systematic policies to encourage home support.

Leadership development

As far as we could ascertain, systematic leadership development was limited to on-the-job growth rather than training. We did, however, witness:

- ‘hero’ style, mainly authoritative leadership by principals
- long service to individual institutions
- deep moral purpose
- high entrepreneurial skills
- hierarchical management structures
- high expectations driving standards

Key learning outcomes

Pupil learning

Our observations confirmed how pupils’ (learners’) ambitions can overcome severe disadvantage and how high expectations clearly impact on student learning. At a time of reform of UK curricular structure, the principles of breadth, balance and a multi-cultural perspective were confirmed. We have to ensure these beliefs are shared within our network.

Leadership learning

Our own sense of moral purpose has been strengthened. Subsequent network-to-network visitations in the UK which we have undertaken have confirmed the power of collaboration. Having respected practitioners appraise our work is vital to further progress.

Organisational learning

The fact that we found little evidence of systematic leadership development or of networked collaboration in South Africa affirmed our determination to sustain such structures in our own schools and partnerships.

Links, next steps, so what?

- We felt privileged to observe high quality teaching and impressive student attitudes to learning. The sense of vocation and determination displayed by principals, often with a maverick style of leadership, was certainly creating academic outcomes comparable with the UK, at least for those in school (drop-out and exclusion rates were difficult to ascertain).
- Despite obvious and substantial barriers to learning and a lack of any observable systematic leadership and management development, heroic leadership by principals and dedicated commitment by teaching staff was clearly creating communities full of purpose, hope and achievement.
- We left feeling a deep sense of awe, a refreshed sense of vocation and a determination to support our new partners, both financially and educationally.
- The experience of visiting South Africa challenged our own perceptions of effective education and will allow us to change mindsets and broaden perspectives in our own communities.
- We have set up a charitable trust fund to support the rural primary school we visited. We have also accessed further British Council funding streams designed to sustain international partnerships and set up reciprocal visits by RSA principals.
- We will use photographs and powerful recollections to inspire our communities to action and reflection and we have committed to formal inter-visitations with neighbouring networks in the north west of England.

It is a simple impression, gained after a brief visit, but South Africa is a country with enormous potential, not least in the qualities of its people. If they could address the barriers to learning we observed (and given our recent experience, we in the UK could help) and create leadership development programmes aligned to NSCL then an even stronger economic, social and educational power will emerge. As Nelson Mandela has said:

“ Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world. ”

References

- ¹ www.kagan.com
- ² Desforges, C. (2002) On Teaching and Learning. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership
- ³ Adamson,J., Samuels,N. & Willoughby, G (2002) Heathside School ‘Changing the Way We Change’, Managing Schools Today, March



The start of a learning journey, from York...

As co-leaders and headteachers from Oldham we took our first tentative steps towards an international placement in Cape Town, South Africa, with a visit to York Minster. Whilst taking in the wonder, splendour and atmosphere of the building, we had the space to begin our reflection on the learning we were about to experience. Over the next two days, supported by colleagues joining us on the placement and facilitators from the National College for School Leadership, we examined, discussed and drew a focus for our enquiry when in South Africa. This focus was aimed at supporting subsequent developments in our networked learning community and our learning as co-leaders and leaders in education.



...to Cape Town

The enquiry tool

The reflective enquiry process we used was based on an appreciative model. We were to experience a journey of questioning and analysis within a positive, reflective framework. This process impacted greatly on our roles on return to our schools.

The appreciative enquiry process identified five stages:

- 1. Defining**...what is the enquiry to focus upon?
- 2. Discovering**...through story telling the best of what is
- 3. Dreaming**...the what if or what might be?
- 4. Designing**...a plan of action for the future
- 5. Delivering**...through implementing and sustaining change

Change – the enquiry focus

Our enquiry was to ask headteachers, staff and pupils in the schools we visited in Cape Town to focus upon an area of identified success in their school or network and evaluate the factors that support changes in pupils' learning. This reflected the processes of change to be undertaken in our NLC following a pupil audit of learning.

Equally, the leadership of sustainable change is difficult, yet the education arena has been landscaped by numerous initiatives requiring significant changes in structures and processes of teaching and learning. In the light of this, the enquiry also sought to isolate factors supporting sustainable change in relation to pupils' learning.

Towards Ubuntu The power of enquiry

Ann Husband and
Darran Lee
Transforming Learning
Together in Oldham NLC

“ This week and my subsequent experiences have reaffirmed the belief – never underestimate the impact practitioners can have upon each other when their hearts and minds are concentrated and engaged in learning. ”

“ During our learning exchange a staff member of our host school stood up and spoke movingly of the impact our international placement had made to her personally...The work we had undertaken and shared in the school had provided her with a vehicle to move herself and the school forward. ”

Context and learning

Our NLC consists of nine schools with a focus on developing an orientation for learning. Following a network audit of pupils’ perceptions of learning, action and enquiry groups have been established to achieve the goal of transforming learning together in our schools. The schools include a range of social, economic, academic and cultural contexts. As headteachers in Oldham, aware of the need to address racial and social divisions in our own context, the significance of our experiences and the eyes through which we were looking grew daily.



In South Africa, we experienced the culture and beautiful scenery, from the drummers of Moya to the breath taking views from Table Mountain, which contrasted favourably with our own context reflected in the cultural heritage in Saddleworth village and the scenic landscapes of Oldham. Similarly, we observed that the divisions in housing and in the monoculture of schools present in Cape Town is also reflected in the Oldham context.

The fact that as school leaders we were living with these issues in our own context supported our use of an appreciative approach to enquiry in the South African context. As a result, we found that we were able to draw out and celebrate the often small, but significant, changes that have supported the development of pupil learning. These shifts in practice were often down to individuals who had captivated a development process and moved forward the learning of those around them. Sharing this learning and networking across schools, for example with a focus on inclusive education, supported greater ownership and depth in the change process.

The key to this leadership for learning was the impact on the learning agenda in indirect ways, with asking questions and challenging the norms supporting a shift in the learning of all.



“ Questions concentrate the mind. When leaders ask questions they send constituents on mental journeys in search of answers⁴ ”

(J. Kouzes and B. Posner, 1995)

These questions supported change and were most powerful when they built on the positives. In the development of a culture of questioning, leaders were fostering an enquiry approach to change.

The use of questioning and its impact on change are at the heart of change in South Africa. The people of this rainbow nation are constantly questioning what had been the norms and challenging themselves to support change at every level.

Messages for enquiry

Contextualisation is critical - It is too easy to accept and not recognise key change. For example, we observed a maths lesson taught to black Key Stage 3 pupils. To us this was no significant issue. But questioning of context demonstrates that this was a change in state policy. During apartheid, black pupils were perceived unable to learn sciences and mathematics and a divided curriculum was put in place.

Evaluation of your own perceptions and experiences is a pre requisite to the enquiry - It is too easy to bring your own views to an enquiry and thus create a fog in the learning process. Our process of learning and development could be quite different and, therefore, the same baselines cannot be used as an evaluative tool.

A focus on the small parts of the jigsaw as well as the larger picture is needed - It is often too easy to focus on large-scale change and miss the small, yet significant, pieces of the picture.

Pulling the individual pieces together, through a process of reflection - Through learning journals, paired discussions and ongoing reflective tools our perceptions and the emerging ideas grew and changed. Building this into the process of enquiry at the planning stage is needed.

Listen to the enquiry - The enquiry developed and took us in new directions. Talking about change in a positive light drew in wider audiences; the taxi driver, shopkeepers, and the homeless boy. This provided new insights and a depth to our understanding.

What next?

The enquiry process has moved into the leadership and learning in our schools, from appreciative target setting to appreciative lesson observations. The celebration and identification of what is supporting learning and spreading the impact of this has changed the ethos in our schools. There is a greater focus on the small elements of the change process and the importance that key individuals play in supporting a change culture. We have refocused our efforts on distributed leadership in our schools.

We have developed links with our host schools in Cape Town and pupils are now communicating with each other via e-mail and staff are linking with staff across the schools. We are developing the global dimension of our school curriculum by planning units of learning for each age range in literacy which includes a South African focus. We are keeping the learning ongoing through continued visits and exchanges to build an international networked learning process.

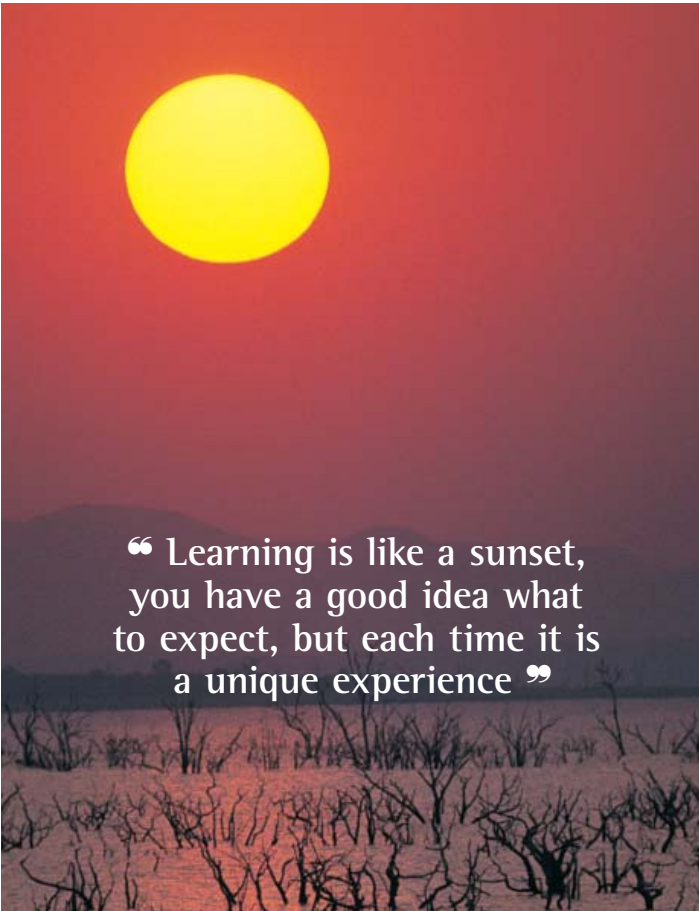
To build our network-to-network learning we are sharing the process and our subsequent connections with each other. These visits to other networks within the NLC programme have already impacted on learning in our network. These learning pathways need to continue to grow.

A final note...

An enquiry approach based upon the positives is a powerful tool for learning. We encourage children in evaluating their learning and that of others’ learning to look at the positives, asking them to identify, ‘What have you done well?’ We ask ourselves, ‘Why are we so negative when we move to self-evaluation?’ Adopting an appreciative stance can help overcome this, by recognising that what is currently working well can readily support areas for future development.

Remember:

- we all make considerable differences to the learning of others; a single question can drive learning into new, challenging and rewarding waters
- the individual pieces are as important as the whole
- learning is a magical experience, take it and let it grow in your heart



“ Learning is like a sunset, you have a good idea what to expect, but each time it is a unique experience ”

Comment from a Year 6 pupil, shared as part of our NLC audit of pupil learning.

References

⁴ Kouzes, J. and Posner, B. (1995) The Leadership Challenge. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass



Defining and refining the focus for enquiry

The Bedfordshire North South Networked Learning Community has taken ICT as its major area of focus. There are nine projects underway across the county looking at how schools can work collaboratively, across the three phase system (primary, middle and secondary schools), to use ICT to create new opportunities for learning, both within and outside school. This led to our appreciative enquiry focus for our visit to Cape Town; ICT, independent learning and their impact on student motivation. Prior to the visit, this was encapsulated as our stated desire to look at factors associated with major shifts in learner attitudes and how these can be used to overcome barriers to learning and achievement gaps:

- self motivation
- achievement
- ICT and independent learning

We were aware that we were in danger of imposing an agenda on our host school that may have been too prescriptive, centred on our own needs and which did not allow us to catch the essence of what school improvement and leadership learning meant in their context. We therefore refined the enquiry focus to that of exploring independent learning and the use of ICT to raise achievement and promote shifts in learner attitudes.

Pursuing the enquiry in South Africa

Our study visit gave us a link with a host school, an ex-model B high school, where we spent two full days. During the visit we also engaged in:

- a visit to an ex-model C high school (formerly recruiting only white children)
- a visit to another ex-model B high school (formerly recruiting only coloured children)
- several seminars with colleagues from the University of the Western Cape
- a visit to Cape Town University's Education Development Unit.
- a half day visit to the Western Cape Education Department



Schools visits

The first visit to a high school revealed that it was situated in an area of high crime. Its principal was a highly politicised individual who was driven by the feeling of moral duty to provide a free education system equally to all. He was keen to see radical changes in the funding of schools and their management. In terms of curriculum, he felt that the current matriculation system did not meet the needs of enough students and he is waiting to see an extension of vocational education routes being opened up. In his time at the school, he has doubled its roll and made it a more secure site. He accepts all children, refusing none on grounds of ability, language, family situation, refugee status or inability to pay the very low school fees. He feels that he is the guardian of his community and believes it is his right and duty to make decisions about individual's futures.

His office is very hectic. All management issues go directly to him, no matter how much they disrupt whatever he is doing at that moment. Parents drop in without appointments, the caretaker interrupts a sensitive meeting to complain that something is broken, staff ask for advice or a decision, pupils ask to register a concern. Staff absence is an everyday occurrence and classes are either left without teachers or students try to join other classes, often standing outside the door. It was very moving to be approached by two 17 or 18 year old female students who had very few weeks to go before their matriculation exams and were concerned that they were just not being appropriately prepared. Their sense of urgency, frustration and unquestionable belief that their whole future depended on this educational outcome was humbling and moving.

Within the context it was very hard to pursue our original enquiry focus. It is to be noted, however, that the only sustained and focused learning we witnessed in the school was in the ICT rooms. These were of wooden construction, like the majority of the school, but had been made secure by the placing of a lining of bricks inside the two huts. This, coupled with a secure entry cage to capture intruders and an armed response alarm system, safeguarded the computers. ICT definitely represented hope for the future, use of the internet and independent learning packages being seen as potential ways of overcoming staffing difficulties. It was a pleasure to talk to the ICT teacher who, after 20 years of teaching geography, felt that now teaching ICT was finally allowing him to make the sorts of differences, to students that had made him come into teaching.

Towards Ubuntu Towards global citizenship

Sally Ellis and Nigel Hill
Bedfordshire North South
NLC

“ It was a very humbling experience to witness the extreme conditions in which school communities were having to work, but at the same time to experience the dignity and vision of the school leaders. ”

“ Understanding that moral purpose comes from the obligation to provide better learning opportunities for our children. This means finding the courage to change our schools and to focus solely on learning. ”



However, the enquiry methodology allows for changes of direction and foci and so we adopted a more fluid approach - one of looking at how principals manage their individual schools to make a difference to the students and at how the education system was supporting them in the quest. On visiting a second high school, we tried to use it as a way of refining and reshaping the focus to our enquiry further. The principal of the school had a firmly held moral purpose and was clearly making a difference to his pupils by turning his back on the system and was doing whatever he had to do to make his school successful. He had received funds to begin building an impressive performing arts hall, because his school had gained 100 per cent pass at matriculation.

Key questions from our experience

Our experience left us with many questions:

- In the context of such wide-scale social disintegration, how does a morally conscientious principal focus on improving learning?
- How does a principal resolve the conflict between inclusion (national policy) and the needs of the pupils in the school? At what point does one militate against the needs of the other?
- Specifically, how can a principal address the issue of capacity?
 - ☐ capacity in terms of staff who have time for strategic thinking that will enable reflection, evaluation and planning
 - ☐ capacity in terms of training and expertise to ensure a focused strategy and better quality teaching
 - ☐ capacity in terms of intervention, support and resources that will work at the point of social inequality

Another pressing issue is the impact of increasing numbers of refugees often living in informal settlements. They are rejected by most schools in spite of legislation (that is not enforced) to the extent that they are not educated and at extreme risk. Charities like The Ark pick these children up and look after them within a rigid doctrine of Christianity but, again, they are still blocked by most schools when The Ark attempts to place them.

Interactions with university staff

We were warmly welcomed by colleagues at both the University of the Western Cape and Cape Town University who were keen to engage in learning activities to share our experiences and explore our philosophies. Their work was firmly grounded in moving pedagogy forward and the schools development unit had put in place some very interesting programmes to address basic skills in schools. They helped us understand another barrier to success facing their schools - language differences. We had seen schools functioning in the dual languages of English and Afrikaans. Statistics from the university, however, show the bigger picture:

- 95 per cent Afrikaans speakers
- 19.4 per cent English speakers
- 9.5 per cent Xhosa speakers
- 43 per cent of South Africans speak neither English nor Afrikaans
- only 7.5 per cent of English and Afrikaans speakers speak a Black language

This information seems to add an extra dimension to the agenda for change in the new South Africa and is another relevant factor in the dilemma that the two school visits presented of the relative merits of focusing on either individual school leadership and management and organisational change, or on national change at the system level.

Meeting with the education department

We were also fortunate to be invited to attend a team meeting day for the equivalent of our local authority education department. This was very important in helping us to appreciate further, how change was being managed at a local and national level. The mottos evident around the buildings were very familiar: 'Thinking globally, acting locally'; 'None of us is as smart as all of us'; 'Doing things differently, doing things better'. There was also much about the setting-up of key advisors who visited schools to focus on specific issues, which was also reminiscent of the British system.

The department works as four 'pillars': administration, curriculum, Specialised Learner and Educator Support (SLES) and IMG (Institutional Management and Guidance). There has been rapid recruitment to posts in this department, but vacancies exist with the hope of extending the team. We were able to sit on team meetings. It was noticeable that these focused on the number of schools visited and not on measurable outcomes. The members were unable to tell us their specific job descriptions, but seemed to have dual tasks of working as a specialist within one of the pillars, at the same time as being a link professional to a number of schools, each of which would discuss their particular needs with them.

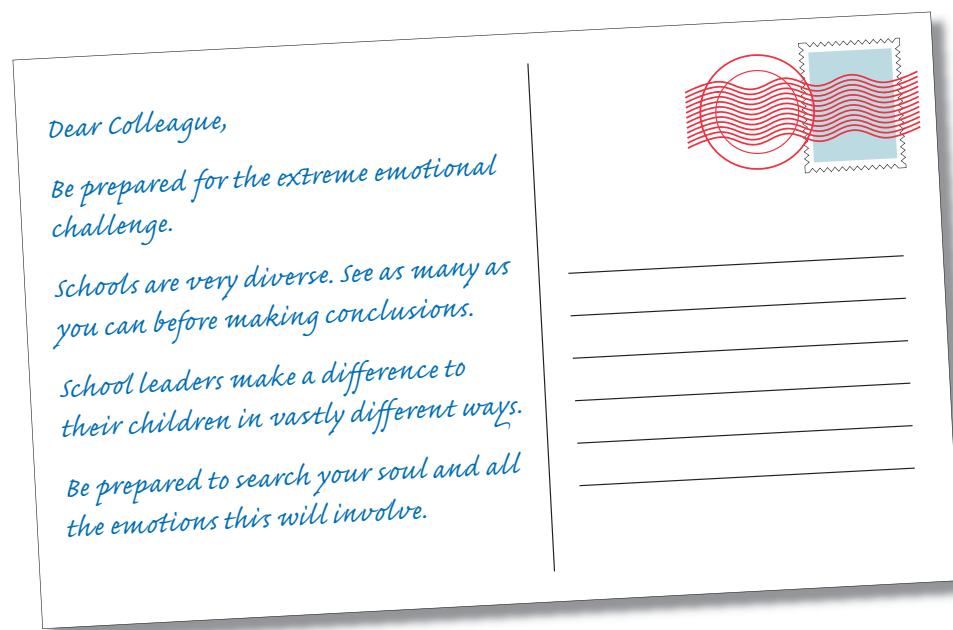
Key learning moments...

- It was a very humbling experience to witness the extreme conditions in which school communities were having to work, but at the same time to experience the dignity and vision of the school leaders.
- Understanding that moral purpose comes from the obligation to provide better learning opportunities for our children. This means finding the courage to change our schools and to focus solely on learning.
- Having already begun the process of creating the learning school in my own context, the experience of the study visit has given me the motivation, clarified my purpose and provided me with a picture of the cost of failure.
- As school leaders we must create the conditions for change in our schools and encourage others to join this quest. Above all, the headteacher must resist any diversion that will cause distraction from this single-minded pursuit.

Lasting impressions...

- The lasting impressions are of motivated, aspirational learners and educators dedicated to improving life chances within the community.
- Leadership styles vary enormously, but school leadership seems to focus largely on the principal who is the guardian of the school community.
- Financial autonomy can only be gained through entrepreneurial ventures or the reaching of key targets. These can, possibly, be the only ways to influence positively the lot of your school at the moment.
- South Africa is a country that has achieved much in ten years, but where major institutional change may still need to come before equality of access to education is really achieved.
- I have increasingly felt I must view all children as world citizens and continue a link between my school and network in the UK and a link school in South Africa, which will enable us to share each others' life experiences.

Memories of South Africa remain very sharp in a corner of our minds and add an international dimension to our striving to equip our students to be world citizens.



Towards Ubuntu

An emotional learning journey

Rosemary Litawski and
Teresa Storr

Rushden and Higham
Ferrers NLC

“ A learning outcome for me has been to stress the importance of nurturing our own leaders in this climate of increasing shortage. Also, the importance of increasing life chances of our own pupils, developing their empowerment as learners. ”

“ The experience has brought about a recognition of need to challenge negative attitudes in school communities towards learning through increased community involvement. There is also a need to promote risk taking amongst school leaders. ”

Beginning with the background

The Rushden and Higham Ferrers Networked Learning Community was set up in September 2002 with the focus on learning about learning. Prior to the establishment of our NLC, local headteachers met at least twice a year to discuss management issues, only occasionally discussing pupil learning or leadership learning. At this time, there were also some cross-phase support groups in existence. Overall, as a group of schools, we were very united in feeling that the way forward was to work together rather than compete. There are seven schools in our NLC; one secondary (students aged 11–18), four junior (students from 7–11 years old) and 2 infant (aged 3–7). Our schools serve the population of two small adjacent towns, the pupils coming from a mixture of private and local authority housing. We feel that the small size of our group has been a major factor in its success.

In the first year, our NLC learnt about learning styles. For teachers, this meant not only finding about current research and applying it to classroom practice but, more importantly, modelling themselves as continuous learners. Headteachers became lead learners and value working collaboratively to develop leadership learning. For example, pairs of headteachers have started inter-visitations with the aim of sharing good practice with each other through informal discussions. This is now a regular item on the agenda of our NLC Steering Group. We have increased our knowledge of collaborative leadership in both theory and practice. We have taken ownership of our own learning and no longer feel so guilty about giving time and space to our learning as leaders. The principle of collaborative leadership learning is now firmly embedded in our ethos of Rushden and Higham Ferrers Networked Learning Community and continues to help us develop both as a group and as individuals.

International networking

The visit to Cape Town came at a time when we felt that our own network was established enough to be able to provide a good model of how a networked learning community should work, yet would also benefit from learning about strategies for further collaboration. Initially, we intended to focus our enquiry on collaborative leadership and had modelled an appreciative enquiry to ascertain its degree and format in another, totally different, situation.

Only days before we flew out we were chatting with a Professor of educational management about our visit, when he passed a comment that, “the word leadership is not relevant at the moment... they are more concerned with management issues”. We were aware that he has plenty of links to the Republic of South Africa and was, therefore, speaking from first-hand experience. We decided to play it by ear.

Initial impressions

Our initial impressions could be summed up in a word - shock. Many of us were speechless as we passed mile after mile of squatter camps and township dwellings whilst travelling from the airport to the hotel. This was completely unexpected. It was at this point we began to ask ourselves, how did our collaborative leadership enquiry fit with this? The first visit to a school (we went into two different schools) compounded this sense of shock.

First impressions were of:

- serious under funding (up to 80 children in a class, few resources, very old text books)
- persistent problems of inequality (10 years after apartheid ended, schools were still not fully mixed racially)
- teachers struggling with tick-list assessments (yes, even in classes of 75)
- schools that cope regularly with death, due to the AIDS epidemic

But, in spite of this...

- children were very well behaved (1,300 primary children out for break together with no problems)
- teachers were caring
- schools had developed good coping strategies
- principals held true to their vision, against all the odds

By the end of the first day we were again starting to question our research focus and decided that our carefully constructed enquiry was clearly not possible in its original shape. In the spirit of the appreciative enquiry methodology, we refocused on finding out as much as we could about leadership in Cape Town schools.



A learning experience of a lifetime...

We visited five schools in total where the welcome from all staff in all schools was unforgettable – they really made us feel, even for a short time, part of their community. One of the abiding memories we have is the feeling that those in education belong to an international ‘club’, with so much in common.

Our ‘base’ school, which we took as the focus for our enquiry, had an interesting history. During apartheid the government declared it an area for whites only and, over some years, bulldozed the homes of the coloured population that lived there. Amazingly, the school was left and the coloured community fought successfully to keep it open for their children. Today, it stands amidst some very smart housing but, as happened during apartheid, all its children are transported in by bus every day. No local children attend the school. There were no white children on roll, the vast majority of pupils were from what was formerly termed the coloured community with a few of black African descent.

We came across this legacy of apartheid daily. Schools that serve the black African and coloured areas are badly under-resourced. The frustration of it all made us want to shout, “When will it change?”

We:

- had conversations with a wide variety of staff
- observed lessons
- spoke with students
- observed a school’s council meeting
- took part in assemblies

There was immediate evidence of a funding problem:

- large classes (40+)
- labs with no gas or water
- students with no teacher
- a library with old books
- the imminent removal of a deputy principal because of cut backs
- building a hall took over ten years, funded by the school only

Some things surprised us:

- the very political assemblies
- sharing financial details with the student council
- a computer suite that was underused, in part because of students’ reluctance
- regular SMT meetings that were frequently cancelled
- disregard for local authority inspectors – “We don’t allow them in”
- the principal had never taught in another school
- he maintained an exceptionally high profile in his school
- Saturday morning detention (even for not bringing the correct text book)

But it worked-there was so much to celebrate:

- high standards of achievement (nearly 100 per cent of students passed their matriculation)
- well behaved and highly motivated students
- extremely positive relationships between staff and students
- students were involved in the running of the school
- the principal provided a strong and clear direction for the school, focused on student achievement

The over-riding impression was that staff and students felt really proud to be there.

Learning about leadership

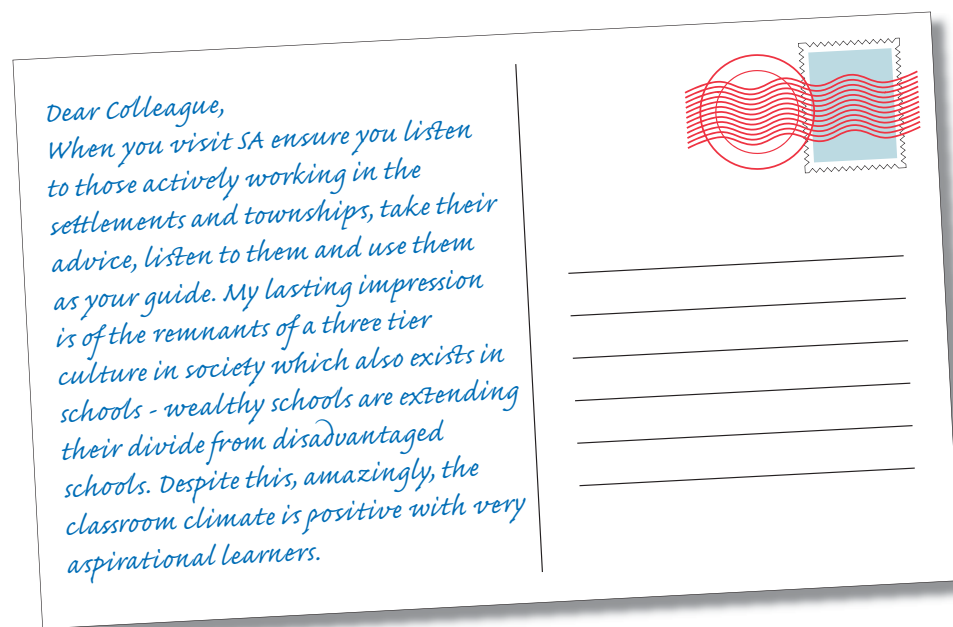
It is difficult in such a short time to pick out the factors that make a school successful, but the vision and single-mindedness of the principal has a very positive effect. In one of the schools we visited, many staff spoke to us of the impact of the school principal, both on them and on their students. He encouraged the students, at the assemblies we observed, to get involved in the wider political agenda of education in Western Cape, telling them “it is for your children and grandchildren”. Although the principal was focused on student achievement, as measured in exam success, he understood the purpose of education in much broader terms, aiming “to broaden their horizons – develop their humanity”. There were some similarities in leadership style in another secondary school we visited, where we observed a clear direction for the school, a vision aimed “to raise awareness about political issues and make students aware of human rights”, and a principal willing to take risks in their leadership of the school.

The key learning points about leadership which we drew from this experience of comparing and contrasting the leadership styles which we observed in the schools in Cape Town, were:

- the importance of the headteacher keeping an eye on learning, where the key responsibility of the headteacher is to increase the life chances of pupils
- headteachers must use their role as gatekeepers of learning and be prepared to take risks, to set their own agenda according to the real needs of their students - appreciate your autonomy
- successful leaders can be home grown - this is particularly relevant in our current climate of shortage of primary heads and deputies in the UK
- pupils learning in challenging circumstances can be highly motivated

In the schools which we visited in South Africa we found strong evidence of leadership. In fact, it appeared to be the management systems which many school principals felt were letting them down – budget, resources, support time and so on. It was effective system level structures which seemed to be lacking, as opposed to effective leadership. Michael Fullan, at his UK and Ireland workshop tour, said that “leaders need the qualities of enthusiasm, hope, and energy”. In the schools we visited in Cape Town, against all the odds, we found these qualities in abundance.





“ There ain't no dark 'til something shines...”

(Townes Van Zandt, 1979)

The study visit to Cape Town, South Africa, in the spring of 2004 was an un-missable experience that provided an opportunity to engage in huge amounts of high quality, high leverage learning on behalf of all the colleagues within our network.

The focus and rationale for the enquiry

Prior to the visit we carefully constructed a clear enquiry focus for our visit using an appreciative stance. We were challenged to ensure that this focus had a clear and compelling link to the work we were engaged within the Hartlepool Networked Learning Community. We finally decided to explore the nature of leadership in challenging circumstances. In particular, we wanted to discover more about what leaders did, day-in day-out, to ensure that the focus of the school was relentlessly on learning. In the process of engaging with this question, we also uncovered further questions about what exactly constitutes challenging circumstances, the centrality of issues surrounding moral purpose and school leadership, and the potential for schools to lever community-wide or societal change.

The context of the enquiry

We approached the enquiry at a variety of levels. Firstly, we were keen to engage in personal learning that would be relevant to our own school-based leadership. Secondly, we reflected on elements of school organisational learning. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, was what we were able to learn about network leadership. In reality and with clear hindsight, the many strands to our learning became entwined and interlinked.

The Hartlepool Networked Learning Community is based in the north east of England and serves a largely disadvantaged community that has suffered the sharp end of economic decline in the past three decades. Schools are considered challenging but there is optimism that focusing on learning can provide a viable platform for regional renewal. Those involved in the network see it very much in this context.

The range of the schools and the importance of context

We visited a range of schools in the vicinity of Cape Town, mainly located in the township areas, and we witnessed a range of practices many of which were recognisable in form to ones in existence in our own system in the UK, and quite a few that were not. We were struck in most schools by the intense moral purpose of the school principals and their colleagues. They saw themselves and their work as being a key determinant in how the South African society is recovering from the trauma of apartheid and beginning to address the huge disparities in wealth and power of the still isolated communities.

Generally speaking, school leaders were optimistic about the future of the country and of their schools. They fostered and nurtured this optimism through maintaining their focus on the place they felt their influence was to be felt most keenly - on the learners in their own schools. This view of changing communities from within schools, through developing learning and pushing the limits of learners' aspirations for the future, was a common one.

Reflecting on this has a bearing on the nature and purposes of the networks we are involved in. Do we develop networks because we have a vested interest in enhancing the lives of all the children in our community, or do we want to engage in a process of collaboration that will help us to develop practices that will be of benefit to the children in our schools? Does it matter so long as schools in a locality improve?



Towards Ubuntu There ain't no dark 'til something shines...

Andy Brown and
Darren Holmes
Hartlepool NLC

“ I have had the opportunity to see at first-hand three very contrasting schools with two types of leadership. All were rooted in a vision of creating a more powerful and fruitful future for learners. ”

“ Contrasting styles of leadership developed from aspirational views of what is their 'moral purpose' – some headteachers mentioned they needed to change the climate and build capacity to change life chances for everyone in the community. One headteacher wanted his pupils to change the world... ”



Leadership and moral purpose

The school leaders we encountered carried great conviction into their work. They were politicised through their involvement with the anti-apartheid struggle. This moral purpose permeated their work with their colleagues, pupils and wider communities usually in a visible way. They had a clear idea, not only of what they must do, but of why they must do it. It was about improving learning, raising attainment, enhancing self-esteem and building aspirations. It was also unequivocally about wealth creation, generation of equity and laying strong foundations for social justice. It was clearly about national regeneration.

The notion of moral purpose has become part of our leadership lexicon. We all recognise that it is a central element of who we are and what we stand for as school leaders. We say it drives our work and gets us through the dark days when things look vulnerable and outcomes are uncertain. But moral purpose is not value free and ultimately it goes back to the fundamental aims of what we want to achieve through our work.

- How often do we think about these issues and how many opportunities do we have to articulate our thinking?
- Do our networks carry a collaborative moral purpose?
- How does our involvement in networks look alongside Michael Fullan's hierarchy of imperatives for school leaders' actions?

The concept of the challenging school?

Despite the great deal of optimism that most educators carry into their work, the conditions they encounter in schools and communities are far from ideal. Class sizes, learning resources and the very fabric of school buildings would be considered unacceptable in our own schooling system. The townships themselves may appear bleak places where poverty and its related problems are engrained and endemic. Yet, despite this, educators remained stoically positive and were determined to do the best they could under the circumstances they operated under. We have much to learn about the resourcefulness educators demonstrate in their attempt to create a positive and rich emotional climate for learning.

We arrived in southern Africa with a clear perception of our schools. We left wondering if our schools were quite as challenging as we originally thought. When we say we work in challenging circumstances what exactly do we mean?



Learning for our network

The learning that we engaged in seemed pivotal at the time. We were sure that our perceptions of our own system and own schools would never be the same again. The key to high leverage learning is the extent to which this altered state impacts upon the practice of leadership.

We have been mindful to use our experience to promote further personal learning and engaged those within our schools and wider networked learning community to consider the issues that we raised. This engagement has found most resonance around the issue of moral purpose and especially the impact of collaborative approaches to its development and influence. In this respect, we have been drawn towards consideration of aspects of the knowledge base. Fullan⁵ suggests that simply working to generate learning in our schools, though essential and laudable, does not go nearly far enough:

“ ...the moral imperative will never amount to much unless school leaders take it on the road. Sticking to one's neck of the woods guarantees that the moral imperative will never exist in more than a very small percentage of schools. ”

(p.47)

There are obvious resonances here with network involvement and the act of co-leadership.

Learning for the programme

On reflection there are a number of tentative learnings that appear relevant to the programme as a whole. The key elements of this learning surround issues of:

- the moral purpose of school leadership and of network co-leadership
- the power of context to shape processes and outcomes

The enquiry process itself was a key part of the learning we engaged in. The appreciative stance is a powerful one if completed with rigour and honesty. We learned that this could be adapted as a school improvement mechanism of tremendous influence.

Ultimately, any experience such as this which engages the emotions to the same degree that it engages the intellect, is about the linkages made within and between people. We were able to use the visit to strengthen our network-to-network connections in England, building the compelling reasons to connect that are so essential to the meaningful and productive work in this arena.

We have also extended the reach of our work internationally and are planning to establish opportunities for other leaders at all levels from within our networked learning community to visit Cape Town. In parallel with this, we are exploring ways of facilitating and funding our South African colleagues to visit us in Hartlepool.

References

⁵ Fullan, M. (2003) The Moral Imperative of School Leadership, Corwin Press, USA

Please note that a full narrative and analysis of the Hartlepool Networked Learning Community placement to Cape Town is available. If you would like a copy mailing to you please contact Darren Holmes (darren.holmes@nscl.org.uk)

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