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ENHANCING PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS:
THE POWER OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION CENTRES

Iro Konstantinou | *Editor*

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, the significance of partnerships and collaborations cannot be overstated. The ability to connect and work together allows schools to tap into a wealth of knowledge, resources, and innovative practices. This issue delves into the importance of partnerships, highlighting how research and innovation centres (CIRLs) can serve as catalysts for fostering closer ties between educational entities. By sharing resources and promoting professional development, these centres provide a blueprint for creating robust networks that benefit all involved parties.

Visionary Perspectives

The issue begins with Tom Arbuthnott, who shares Eton's compelling vision on partnerships. Eton's commitment to collaboration has laid the groundwork for their successful alliance with Holyport, resulting in the establishment of their respective CIRLs. This partnership has already yielded tangible benefits, forging stronger links between the two schools and setting the stage for future collaborations.

Practical Implementation: Dudley, Oldham and Teesside

Sean Costello provides a practical example of how our partnerships are already thriving in Dudley, Oldham and Teesside. As these partnerships continue to expand, they exemplify the potential for creating an extensive network of institutions committed to collaboration and innovation.

Blueprint for Opening a Research Centre

Drawing inspiration from the partnership between Eton and Holyport, this issue offers a blueprint for opening a research centre. Both schools welcome discussions with those seeking to establish their own centres, exemplifying their commitment to promoting collaboration across the educational landscape.

Theory and Practice: Building Collaborations

The subsequent section of this issue explores the theoretical and practical underpinnings of building collaborations. Frank Hardee and Nick Roberts reflect on the evolution of the Eton-Holyport partnership, highlighting the power of perseverance and commitment, as well as regular communication. Emma Grisewoood sheds light on how technology can bridge educational gaps, promoting connectivity and knowledge exchange. Clare Matheson showcases the thriving Thames Valley Learning Partnership, emphasising the importance of strong operational frameworks. Aaron Bridges discusses the Eton and LAE Leadership Institute for students, showcasing the potential for developing leaders through collaborative initiatives. Additionally, Christina Astin, Margaret Hunnaball, and Mark Lesswell provide examples from various contexts, offering insights into successful partnership models.

Practitioner-Led Examples: The Potential of Research Centres

Following these theoretical and strategic articles, the issue presents a series of practitioner-led examples that illustrate the potential of research centres. These articles delve into various domains, including technology integration, cooperative learning, learning walks, and design and technology. Through these practical examples, authors demonstrate how research and innovation can facilitate collaboration within departments, across schools, and among colleagues. These reflections provide tangible evidence of the transformative power of partnerships and the valuable outcomes they can yield.

Partnerships and collaborations lie at the heart of educational progress. The establishment of research and innovation centres represents a powerful vehicle for enhancing these connections. The journey of Eton and Holyport, alongside the practical examples shared in this issue, showcases the immense potential of research centres to foster collaboration, share resources, and advance professional development. By embracing partnerships, schools can tap into a collective wisdom that surpasses the boundaries of individual institutions, leading to a brighter future for education. We hope this issue will be an inspiration for all those who aspire to open their own research and innovation centres. Let it be a reminder that the power of partnerships can lead to remarkable achievements in education. By embracing the spirit of collaboration, we can create a future where educational institutions thrive and students receive the best possible learning experiences in order to excel personally and academically.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS LIE AT THE HEART OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION CENTRES REPRESENTS A POWERFUL VEHICLE FOR ENHANCING THESE CONNECTIONS.

PARTNERSHIPS: FORGING NEW PATHWAYS

Tom Arbuthnott | *Deputy Head Partnerships, Eton College*

As I spoke, I could see my old housemaster glowering at me from half-way up the table, bringing back vivid memories of being caught engaging in plagiarism in E Block (Year 10), and being forced, as punishment, to sit in his study and copy out the Book of Ecclesiastes. I felt every word I was delivering drip and solidify in the seemingly hostile atmosphere.

It's amazing how certain people can bring out the heebie-jeebies, even as a Deputy Head at Eton and even in my late forties. But there's something about Mr B that brings out my inner awkward teenager.

He was chairing a meeting of one of the London livery companies, and I had been invited to speak about school partnerships, building on my experience both at Eton and in Birmingham. I had trotted through my forty minute presentation and had already fielded a bunch of questions, when Mr B looked at me over his glasses.

"You clearly don't have very much influence with anyone that matters. Did you read the article I wrote on this theme in 2006 when I was chair of the Head Master's conference?" he asked, rather mildly.

"No sir, sorry sir, three bags full, sir," I replied in my head.

What I said out loud, though, was that I hadn't read it but that it sounded very interesting. As indeed it was, when he sent it through the next day.

The article argued that the problem with school partnership was a lack of government funding – that the small pots brought in by New Labour after the end of the Assisted Place programme amounted to very little – and as a result it was unlikely independent schools would be able to work effectively in partnership. It was written eloquently, and I recognised his deft touch with language.

But it was interesting to read the piece from the perspective of 2023 rather than 2006. To my mind, five key things have changed, all of which are relevant to this excellent volume, edited by Iro Konstantinou at our Centre for Innovation and Research in Learning at Eton.

The first is that the state sector has changed out of all recognition. Back then, when I was teaching in a struggling school just next to the Jaguar factory in Castle Bromwich in the West Midlands, there was little co-ordination within the state sector – instead, local authorities ran schools according to local needs, and often rivalries and demographic factors in those areas made life difficult. My school, for example, suffered by being located in the disadvantaged north of the relatively affluent borough of Solihull – meaning that the council (based in the South) appeared to prioritise giving help to other schools. Certainly, Park Hall didn't seem to get much support.

Today much of the state sector is run by a group of multi-academy trusts (MATs), many of which are both highly idealistic and extremely effective. These are groups that often choose to invest in schools and areas in challenging circumstances, and which have the knowhow, developed across a wide range of schools, to make the interventions which really matter to young people. Star, with whom we are working, is one of the best examples of this: but there are many others. These groups will be talking to the government about the power of partnerships after the next election.

The second difference is that independent schools are run by a new generation of headteachers – who are often less paternalistic, and often more cognisant of the local jigsaw of schools into which their institutions fit. Often, these heads see partnerships as strategically essential: they see the need to run schools with the drawbridges down rather than the drawbridges up. This has led to a compendium of excellent practice on the independent sector side, and the development of a thriving cohort of partnerships professionals, who assembled for the first time for the inaugural Schools Together conference at Eton in 2017, and who are now represented in the new Schools Partnerships Alliance, which I chair.

The third difference is that the government has become resolutely less interested. Even in the 2000s, there was talk of the 'chasm' between independent and state schools – and through to Theresa May's government's white paper in 2017, *Schools that Work for Everyone,*

the government-led mobilisation of independent sector resources for the common good was a consistent theme (even if funding for this work declined even further from its Blairite levels). The last few years, though, have seen almost no engagement or interest from the government – under Justine Greening, Westminster adopted a position that independent sector schools needed no government funding, and, unfairly, they applied the same logic to independent/state sector partnerships. This has led to a situation in which independent schools are offering support and reciprocally designed programmes, and where there is significant demand on the state sector side to take it up – but where state schools simply can't engage for lack of resource.

Fourth, it is clear that a number of historic foundations invested in education, including the livery companies and foundations, have moved away from a traditional approach which prioritised the provision of bursaries in independent schools and towards establishing and running MATs, often with school improvement at their heart. Powerful stakeholders, such as the King Edward's Foundation in Birmingham, are asking themselves the question of how their schools of different types can more effectively work together and are providing dynamic innovation in this space.

Finally, it is clear that the next eighteen months represent an inflection point for schools in the independent sector. Rash things will be said under the threat of a new government with plans to change tax status – and there is a danger that cross-sector partnerships become collateral in ill-thought-through politicking. It is unimaginable, to me, that we might be crafting by accident a world in which great schools and great foundations pull up the drawbridge and profess no interest in the British school system: instead, we need to double down, as Eton has done, on really effective partnership work which helps those who need it. We must ruthlessly avoid the idea that partnership working is any form of political defence against the Labour Party's tax plans. It is a good in itself.

I wrote these points in an email to Mr B after our meeting and received a warm, even positive reply. Suddenly, I'm in my forties again. I can cope with anything – especially in the light of the extraordinary things that Eton, my old school, in his absence, is doing in the partnerships space. This volume shows how we are beginning to change the game – but also, how far there still is to go if we are to forge an education system which is genuinely founded on reciprocity, sustainability and making a difference where it matters.

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WE NEED TO DOUBLE DOWN, AS ETON HAS DONE, ON REALLY EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP WORK WHICH HELPS THOSE WHO NEED IT.

A TALE OF TWO RESEARCH AND INNOVATION CENTRES:
REFLECTIONS AND INSIGHTS FROM ETON COLLEGE AND HOLYPORT COLLEGE

Iro Konstantinou | *Head of Research and Impact, Eton College*

In the realm of education, research and innovation centres can play a pivotal role in driving innovation, shaping pedagogy, and fostering a culture of continuous professional development. This article presents two case studies that delve into the experiences of two distinct research centres: Eton CIRL and Holyport CIRL. While both centres share a common purpose of advancing educational research and professional development, they stand at different junctures in their operational timelines.

The first case study explores Eton CIRL, now in its 8th year. It offers a comprehensive analysis of Eton CIRL's past, present, and future endeavours, providing valuable insights into the key learnings acquired during its journey. By examining Eton CIRL's progress, this study uncovers the strategies and approaches that have contributed to its success but also the challenges that needed to be overcome.

On the other hand, Holyport CIRL represents a fresh chapter in the establishment of a research centre. Through the lens of the headmaster, deputy head, and a research-engaged teacher, the second case study showcases the initial thinking and perspectives that guided the setup of Holyport CIRL. These interviews shed light on the motivations, aspirations, and challenges faced during the early stages of creating a research and innovation centre.

The amalgamation of these two case studies offers a unique opportunity to reflect on the value a research and innovation centre can bring to a school. It discusses the operational requirements, the benefits for educational institutions, and a step-by-step approach for schools aiming to establish their own centres. By studying these insights and strategies, schools can gain a deep understanding of how research centres can enrich their educational ecosystem and foster a culture of evidence-based practice while strengthening their partnerships and contributing to new networks.

By exploring the distinctive narratives of Eton CIRL and Holyport CIRL, we aim to inspire and guide schools in their quest to embark on their own journeys, fostering an environment that embraces research-driven approaches to teaching and learning which ultimately enhance student outcomes.

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CENTRE FOR INNOVATION AND RESEARCH IN LEARNING, ETON COLLEGE: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Past

The Tony Little Centre for Innovation and Research in Learning (CIRL) was established at Eton College in 2015. CIRL is a school-based research centre positioned in the middle of a sprawling campus, testament to the school's intention to place innovation and research in teaching and learning at the heart of what teachers do. Its initial conception had several aims, all of which aligned with the teaching and learning policy at the school:

- Reflection: to reflect upon what we do well at Eton in order to refine our understanding of why certain approaches work and how we can develop them.

- Evaluation: to evaluate the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching and learning.

- Research: to appoint a Researcher-in-Residence to support teachers in action research.

- Collaboration: to collaborate with universities and organisations to engage in original research.

- Innovation: to support and pioneer innovative teaching and learning methods.

- Professional development: to promote good teaching and learning practice and measure its impact.

- Supporting personalised learning: to reinforce the importance of learning support in the school.

- Outreach: to share research findings and good practice with partner state and independent schools.

The three teams that were relocated to CIRL were overseen by the Director of CIRL and Teaching and Learning, the Head of Learning Support, and the Director of Digital Education. These three 'strands' of teaching and learning all support different areas of teaching provision; bringing them together gave a renewed emphasis on their interconnected purposes. Soon after CIRL opened, a Researcher-in-Residence was also appointed, tasked with translating research and evidence into meaningful strategies for teachers and encouraging them to engage with and in research themselves.

In 2020, we collected data from teaching staff at Eton on their use of the centre and what they saw as the benefits of an in-situ research facility. We found that for such a centre to work there needs to be a clear direction from senior management and allocated time for staff engagement. Among our colleagues, it was not uncommon for teachers to be sceptical of research which can be too opaque and jargonistic, so they suggested that one of the main roles of

the centre should be to make everything accessible but not simplistic. We also found that a centre for evidence-informed practice can be best utilised for creating partnerships and collaborations with other schools, it can enhance the digital education capacity of teaching staff, and should provide a diversity of resources to cater to the various interests and needs of the teaching body (Konstantinou, 2022).

Present

CIRL is now in its 8th year of operation. What have we learnt and what advice would we give to schools that are thinking of opening their own research centre?

1. Eton College has the resources to allocate a whole building to a research centre, which we acknowledge is not feasible for many schools. Even though the extra space affords more possibilities for events and bringing people together, a single dedicated room can serve the same function. Having a dedicated space is a powerful symbol of the school's commitment to innovation, research engagement, and professional development, and can provide a useful focus for that work; so allocating some space is vital, but this need not be beyond a school's means.

2. A dedicated team with time for this work is also vital. In our case, we have several full time staff whose roles are solely based in CIRL. However, an approach whereby teachers are given some teaching time remission and pay to reflect the added responsibility will also work well. It is important that those 'employed' at the centre are very familiar with the workings of the school, and no one is better at this than the teachers.

3. There needs to be commitment and support by the senior management at the school. Unless the centre is championed by the senior management team, it is unlikely that the teaching staff will see the importance of (re)engaging with research and innovation. However valuable such work is seen to be, it can too easily slip down the list of priorities in the lives of busy teachers. This support might mean resources, but at least as important is that the school leadership believe in the work of the centre and communicate the value of its activities to the teaching staff.

4. It will not always be a smooth-sailing journey. There will be those who are sceptical of the value of education research, of the need for innovation, or of the wisdom of allocating resources to such endeavours. This can at times be disheartening and frustrating. However, those who positively engage will be enough to keep the motivation high and bring others with them. We have found that tapping into individual interests and needs by offering a range of activities and support mechanisms gradually increases engagement.

Future

There is also now a growing team housed in CIRL: Head of Teaching Practice, Head of Digital Teaching and Learning, Head of Teacher Training – roles working closely with teachers 'on the ground' – Head of e-Learning, and Head of Research and Impact. This expanded team reflects the fact that an increasing number of teachers are engaging with the work of CIRL and the demand for resources is also increasing. Eton CIRL's expanding team shows the growing potential and opportunities afforded by having an embedded research centre within a school.

What are Eton's CIRL's next steps?

(Re)emphasising our focus on teaching and learning and the original aim of fostering reflection and evidence-informed professional development. We are fortunate to have abundant resources through the work of CIRL and we are evaluating how these can be used across departments and with individuals. Because developing teachers' practice often works best when it is personalised, we are currently appointing Teaching and Learning Champions who will advocate for teaching and learning coaching, research, professional development, and digital education within their respective departments, and ultimately across the school.

Partnership work is now core to what we do. Increasingly we are working with state schools, creating programmes that they can use, and measuring the impact. Our closest state school partner, Holyport College, now has its own CIRL, and the two centres will work closely on CPD and research. We have created a Leadership Institute with the London Academy of Excellence in Newham, and a course in Academic Resilience with Christ the King: Aquinas Sixth Form College in Brockley. Tom Arbuthnott has provided the school's vision on how Eton will continue to work closely with existing partner and new schools.

A major benefit that a research centre brings is the opportunity to work with educators in other schools. It makes it possible to draw like minded people together from across the world and create communities of practice beyond the school. An example of this is the recently created Research and Evidence Forum, a network of people responsible for professional development and research engagement in their schools. We meet twice a year and hear from speakers on a range of topics; but most importantly, we share practice and identify commonalities in our work.

The whole area of school-based research centres and their impact on pupil outcomes is under-researched. We intend to play our part in generating new knowledge that others can use. We are currently surveying hundreds of teachers across schools on their use of evidence and research. We hope this work will generate useful insights in how research centres, such as CIRL, can be best utilised across contexts.

CENTRE FOR INNOVATION AND RESEARCH IN LEARNING, HOLYPORT COLLEGE: WHY, HOW, WHAT

The below article is a summary of interviews conducted with the Headmaster, Deputy Head Academic, and Head of Religious Education. All these individuals were involved with the thinking behind the creation of CIRL and were asked to reflect on the need and purpose of a research centre. They provide unique perspectives which reflect the school's leadership and strategic direction as well as a teacher's perspective who is actively engaged with the research.

Headmaster

Motivation: Investment in Space and People

The idea of investing in a centre like CIRL initially faced some scepticism, particularly concerning the allocation of funds. However, the potential to excite and engage both staff and external stakeholders outweighed any initial hesitations. CIRL became a catalyst for progress by addressing key areas that required attention, thereby aligning with the needs of the school and ensuring strategic goals were met.

Motivation for Teachers: Systems and Structures

Teachers face numerous demands and time constraints, often hindering their ability to devote maximum effort to professional development. By establishing CIRL, the school acknowledges the challenges faced by educators and seeks to create systems and structures that facilitate their growth. Providing teachers with the necessary support allows them to flourish and contribute to student success. These systems are already in place but they are not as formalised as we would like. CIRL will help us systematise them and ensure professional development needs and teaching and learning goals are met.

Initial Reactions and Buy-in

While initial reactions to the establishment of CIRL included concerns about tight budgets, the overall response has been positive. Key stakeholders, such as Adam, Deputy Head Academic, and Laura, CIRL manager, have managed to secure buy-in and commitment to the centre's vision. Speaking as someone with innovative ideas, the implementation of CIRL has provided a platform to ensure that these ideas are effectively executed, leading to positive change.

Governing Body and Sustainability

Establishing a research centre in state schools often poses challenges due to financial constraints. However, by capitalising on the passion and dedication of individuals willing to contribute without significant remuneration,

the centre has been able to operate within its means. Furthermore, as the CIRL network expands, schools can tap into each other for support and create case studies to showcase successful implementations. CIRL's potential as a recruitment tool further enhances its sustainability, attracting individuals passionate about teaching and learning.

Embedding CIRL in School Culture

To ensure the long-term success of CIRL, it must become an integral part of the school's DNA. By cultivating a culture of collegiality, friendliness, and support, as exemplified in Holyport, CIRL seamlessly aligns with the existing school ethos. This facilitates the incorporation of CIRL within the broader school strategy and helps attract like-minded individuals who will contribute to its growth and success.

Challenges and Maintaining Focus

One of the key challenges CIRL faces is the risk of becoming overstretched by accommodating various competing initiatives. Striking a balance between independence and harmonious integration with the school's overall objectives is crucial. The involvement of the current individuals in CIRL mitigates this risk, as they possess a deep understanding of the school culture. However, careful consideration must be given to maintain this harmony when involving new personnel.

Transforming Partnerships and Strategies

CIRL has the potential to transform partnerships between schools, such as the relationship between Holyport and Eton. By leveraging the resources and expertise of renowned institutions like Eton, CIRL can facilitate a more meaningful and transformational partnership. This alliance can enable CIRL to drive positive change, providing staff with opportunities for growth and enhancing their teaching practices with meaningful collaborative projects across the two schools.

Deputy Head Academic

Motivation for Space

Teachers at Holyport work tirelessly to provide quality education to their students. However, finding a physical space within the school environment where they can escape the demands of daily routines and reflect on their practice is essential. CIRL aims to provide our teachers with an environment conducive to collaboration, introspection, and reflective thinking. By offering a dedicated space for teachers to engage in professional growth, CIRL enables them to refocus their efforts on what matters.

Culture of Collegiality and Collaboration

At the heart of CIRL is a culture of collegiality and collaboration. By working together, teachers can share experiences, exchange ideas, and collectively improve their practice. The centre provides an atmosphere where teachers can collaborate with their peers and engage in meaningful discussions. This ethos of collaboration fosters a sense of belonging and shared responsibility towards advancing education. This ethos is important for Holyport and one which CIRL can only enhance.

Strategic Considerations

To ensure the effectiveness of CIRL, it is important to define its scope and responsibilities. Discussions with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) are crucial to determine the areas CIRL will oversee, such as technology integration, reading, professional development, and teacher training. A manager, like Laura, plays a pivotal role in aligning various initiatives and incorporating research-informed practices to drive the centre's objectives.

Staffing and Growth

As the centre expands, consideration should be given to appointing a senior leader who can provide oversight and ensure its sustainable growth. Packaging CIRL under professional learning or teaching and learning departments can facilitate the allocation of resources and personnel. By investing in staff, the school demonstrates a commitment to professional development and creates an environment that nurtures growth and enthusiasm. As CIRL's needs and priorities develop the thinking will evolve and this is why it is important to remain flexible.

Excitement and Potential

The introduction of CIRL instils a renewed sense of excitement and energy among staff members. It reinforces their belief that the school values their professional development and is willing to invest in their growth. Additionally, the possibility of establishing a CIRL network as a membership model opens doors for collaborative partnerships and wider growth opportunities.

Operational Challenges and Future Prospects

Establishing CIRL comes with operational challenges that require thoughtful consideration. Determining priorities for room usage, managing bookings effectively, and avoiding the room becoming just a meeting space are important considerations. Additionally, the possibility of extending the physical space and expanding the team should be carefully evaluated.

Collaboration and Outreach

CIRL presents an opportunity for cross-pollination of ideas with other educational institutions. By engaging with schools like Eton and inviting participation from a diverse range of educators, CIRL can foster collaboration and exchange best practices. This outreach can extend beyond physical interactions through the establishment of an online presence, thereby elevating the profile of CIRL.

Head of Religious Education (completing NPQSL)

Personal Growth and Development

As someone involved with CIRL I have witnessed significant personal growth and development. CIRL has provided a supportive environment where colleagues work collaboratively, and engage in meaningful discussions to support one another. These interactions help individuals prioritise tasks and overcome challenges that arise from juggling various responsibilities.

The Need for Dedicated Space

Teaching is a time-consuming profession that demands constant attention and effort. As such, finding the necessary headspace for innovative thinking and engaging with educational research can be a challenge. The disconnect between academia and teachers often hinders the application of research findings in the classroom. Having a designated research base within the school, like CIRL, bridges this gap and encourages action research that directly informs and improves teaching practice. The availability of dedicated space allows teachers to come together, brainstorm ideas, and collaborate across departments, resulting in cross-curricular teaching approaches and the sharing of expertise.

Connecting Research to Practice

In an ideal scenario, data analysis would inform strategic decision-making at the school. CIRL acts as a platform to evaluate data and develop evidence-based strategies that address the needs of both students and teachers. By connecting research to practice, CIRL ensures that the strategies implemented align with the unique context and challenges faced by the school community. This holistic approach to professional development empowers teachers and improves overall instructional quality.

Enabling Professional Development

CIRL also serves as a hub for professional development opportunities. Educators who have completed their NPQSL, like myself, can share their experiences and facilitate the growth of their colleagues. CIRL provides a supportive environment for engaging in discussions on education issues, collaborating across departments, and exploring cross-curricular teaching methodologies. By providing educators with dedicated time off the regular timetable to engage in CPD within CIRL, the school fosters a culture of continuous learning and growth.

A BLUEPRINT FOR OPENING A RESEARCH CENTRE IN A SCHOOL

10 things a research centre can do to add value to a school

1. Facilitate professional development: Research centres can organise workshops, training, seminars, or online courses to enhance the research skills and knowledge of teaching staff. This promotes professional growth, keeps teachers updated with the latest research methodologies and practices, and contributes to reflective practice.

2. Develop innovative technologies: Research centres can focus on technological advancements by exploring new applications of technology, testing new uses, or making global connections through the possibilities afforded by tech.

3. Establish research networks: Research centres can create networks and collaborations with other research institutions, both nationally and internationally. This allows for knowledge sharing, joint research projects, exchange programmes, and access to a broader range of expertise and resources.

4. Support student research: Research centres can provide opportunities for students to engage in independent research projects. They can offer guidance, mentorship, and access to the resources necessary for conducting research. This helps students develop critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

5. Promote interdisciplinary research: The various departments and disciplines in a school might not regularly come together for collaborative work. Research centres can facilitate interdisciplinary thinking by bringing together teachers from different fields to address questions or issues that require diverse perspectives.

6. Conduct research on pedagogy and education practices: Research centres can focus on investigating effective teaching methods, curriculum development, assessment strategies, and educational policies. This research can inform evidence-based practice and contribute to improving teaching and learning outcomes. Currently this is mainly done in Higher Education institutions, but this kind of work can be very practical and applied to reflect the educational context of each school.

7. Develop educational resources and materials: Research centres can create educational resources such as research digests, blogs, podcasts, research briefs, or other outputs which summarise research and are easy to be used by teachers. These resources can enable teachers to use academic research in their practice, something which can be difficult because of the jargonistic language that many academic publications use.

8. Establish partnerships with local communities: Research centres can become local hubs that bring schools and communities together. This can involve conducting research projects collaboratively, engaging community members in research activities, or providing expertise to support each other.

9. Organise workshops and conferences: Research centres usually have the capacity to host workshops, seminars, and conferences to promote knowledge exchange and collaboration. These events provide platforms for researchers, students, and experts to present their work, discuss ideas, and receive feedback from peers. It is also an excellent opportunity to bring everyone together and strengthen partnerships and collaborations.

10. Be drivers of change. Research centres can serve as powerful drivers of change within a school by fostering a culture of inquiry, innovation, and evidence-based practices. The research conducted in these centres can generate new knowledge, insights, and practical solutions that can address educational or social challenges, for example on wellbeing. Furthermore, collaboration with external partners, such as universities, other schools, and organisations, expands the school's network and brings in fresh perspectives and expertise. The dissemination of research findings, through publications, conferences and partnership, not only enhances the school's reputation but also influences educational policies, teaching practices, and curriculum development. By serving as catalysts for innovation, research centres inspire and empower individuals to think creatively, embrace change, and strive for continuous professional and, often, personal improvement.

7 fundamental elements for a research centre

1. Physical space and facilities: A dedicated physical space is necessary because it acts as a collaboration hub. If there is sufficient budget, investing in state-of-the-art equipment or sleek furniture will add an element of 'wow', but these are not necessary. What is important is designing collaborative spaces, such as open work areas, discussion spaces, or shared project areas, which can encourage interaction and collaboration among colleagues.

2. Research staff and expertise: A research centre requires a team of qualified staff who possess expertise in various disciplines. People who are experts in research, are responsible for professional development, and are adept at the use of technology for teaching and learning, are all crucial. However, the three biggest skills the team need to have are flexibility, open mindedness, and being personable.

3. Funding and resources: Adequate funding is crucial even though most financial resources will most likely be allocated to freeing up staff time. If the team is drawn from the school teaching body then funds need to be allocated to finding replacements or cover. A dedicated person who runs or has oversight of the centre would probably be the biggest expense. This is where networks and partnerships can be crucial since they can help with sharing of resources and pulling together funds for events. Writing from Eton College's perspective, the CIRL team is always delighted to share resources or provide support to our local state schools and wider networks.

4. Collaboration and networks: Research centres thrive on collaborations with internal and external stakeholders. Establishing partnerships with other research institutions, universities, schools and community organisations fosters knowledge sharing, interdisciplinary research, and access to additional resources.

5. Governance and research ethics: A research centre should adhere to ethical standards and research governance protocols. This includes obtaining ethical approvals for research, ensuring data privacy and confidentiality, and promoting responsible conduct of research. This might seem unnecessary when no research is published externally but strong research ethics will result in quality work.

6. Strategic leadership: Clear research goals, objectives, and a strategic plan are essential to guide the research centre's activities. This includes identifying research priorities, thematic areas, and aligning them with the school's vision and mission, especially related to teaching and learning. This is why the researcher(s) should be working closely with those overseeing teaching and learning at the school and senior management.

7. Culture and engagement: Cultivating a research culture within the school involves creating opportunities for staff, students, and researchers to actively engage in research activities and professional dialogue. This can happen organically, to an extent, but without support from the senior leadership this will be much more difficult to accomplish.

A step-by-step guide in creating a research centre

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THE NEXT STAGE OF SCHOOL-BASED PARTNERSHIP WORK IN DUDLEY, OLDHAM AND TEESSIDE

Sean Costello | *Head of Educational Opportunity, Eton College*

In 2022, Star Academies and Eton College announced they are bidding to open three academic sixth form colleges in Dudley, Middlesbrough and Oldham. In order to build connections and networks with various stakeholders in these areas, we started an outreach programme with local schools and other organisations. Forty schools signed up to partner with Eton College and we anticipate this number to rise next year. In order to generate senior leadership support for our bids and offer immediate impact for partner schools we have prioritised building strong and collaborative relationships with existing Years 11-16 schools in each area. Due to this we have already seen excellent results in terms of an appetite and willingness to partner with Eton College.

As we near the end of the academic year it is important to reflect on the last nine months of partnership and outreach work in Dudley, Oldham and Teesside to recognise areas of success and future potential. We have seen a significant growth in our connections, friendships and partners in these communities, partnering with 40 schools predominantly for Years 11-16 but with some high-profile institutions in the 11-18 and FE sectors. Alongside this, we have built a strong stakeholder network of those working in the community, charity and third sector space and increasingly those working in the edu-social-political spheres. Whilst this work has been successful and school leaders are overwhelmingly positive about our burgeoning relationships, it is vital that in the next year we see 'delivery' and 'impact' as our two central objectives and that we ensure these partnerships become fully embedded and integral to improving aspirations and outcomes for young people in these communities.

The landscape of educational partnerships has witnessed significant growth and progress in recent years. As educational institutions, particularly 11-16 schools and other educational providers, increasingly seek to engage in partnerships, it is importasnt to establish robust processes and structures to maximise the potential benefits of such collaborations. Whilst leading 'Education Strategy and Engagement' at the National Citizen Service Trust (NCST) I spearheaded school-based partnership initiatives for five years ensuring our reach exceeded 96% of all schools nationwide. This background in scale building is vital to how we move forward with our partnerships in Dudley, Oldham and Teesside as whilst 'scale' of partnerships is important it must be balanced with appropriate 'depth'. Educational partnerships play a fundamental role in enhancing educational experiences and fostering community engagement and our work could be game changing in this space. However, the effectiveness and impact of such partnerships can vary significantly. This article highlights our plans for the forthcoming months and the importance of building new processes and structures including a 'Best Practice' guide to school-based partnerships and benchmarking what it means to be an engaged partner school.

As a high-level vision for the future of partnership work, it must be emphasised that the importance of creating benchmarks for engagement and driving standards in relationship building is crucial. By leveraging the principles of effective partnership outlined by De Backer and Rinaudo (2019) for McKinsey, we aspire to transform our school partnerships from namesake collaborations to 'partnerships of choice', facilitating mutual learning and value added for as many young people as possible.

McKinsey's research on improving the management of complex business partnerships provides valuable insights applicable to the context of school-based partnerships. Their work identifies key success factors and highlights the importance of establishing robust frameworks, communication channels, and mutually beneficial objectives. I believe there are six principles to developing and enhancing our partnership work in Dudley, Oldham and Teesside in the coming 12 months.

1. Learning from Partnership Failures

While success stories in partnership work are abundant, examining the reasons behind partnership failures provides critical lessons. By analysing the factors missing in failed partnerships, we can identify pitfalls to avoid and enhance the effectiveness of future collaborations. Many of the missing components in failed corporate partnerships are identical to the inhibitors for school and education focused partnerships and it is vital we learn from where failures have taken place or where our own partnerships in Dudley, Oldham and Teesside have not been as strong as they could have been. While pursuing our aspirations, it is crucial to learn from past failures and apply those lessons to our school-based partnerships. By adopting a proactive approach, we can mitigate potential challenges and ensure that our partnerships are built on strong foundations.

2. Developing a 'Best Practice' Guide

Building upon the experiences gained from working closely with schools and informed by McKinsey's research, we aim to develop a comprehensive 'Best Practice' guide to school-based partnerships. This guide will serve as a lodestar, outlining the essential components required for successful partnerships, as well as strategies for mitigating risks and maximising impact. The development of a 'Best Practice' guide to school-based partnerships is an ambitious yet necessary undertaking. Drawing on years of experience, we seek to identify the factors missing in failed partnerships and provide actionable insights for creating effective collaborations. We should see this as both informing our own practice and being thought leaders in this space. Through sharing this knowledge with others we hope to be the catalyst for positive change and elevate the outcomes achieved through school and community partnerships nationally.

In our pursuit of educational partnerships, we have made remarkable strides in embedding ourselves within the fabric and structure of the communities we serve. Our digital learning experiences have emerged as powerful tools for building trust, credibility, and fostering positive reputational associations with our partner schools. As one headteacher astutely observed, our involvement conveys to the local community that their school is on an upward trajectory. The increasing number of educational institutions seeking partnerships with us testifies to the tangible benefits they perceive from such alliances.

3. Sharing Knowledge and Collaboration

We recognise the importance of collective learning and collaboration in the field of school and community partnerships. Therefore, we aim to share our 'Best Practice' guide with other organisations working in this space. By fostering knowledge exchange, we can contribute to improving outcomes across the board and further strengthen the impact of school-based partnerships. This sharing of knowledge and collaboration is also vital in our relationships within our partner schools. There are a great many who have expressed keen interest in being involved in research initiatives but the capacity and headroom for this is limited. We need to be proactive and innovative in how we might involve our partner schools in the work we undertake and make sure we learn from their rich experience of education in these settings.

IT MUST BE EMPHASISED THAT THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING BENCHMARKS FOR ENGAGEMENT AND DRIVING STANDARDS IN RELATIONSHIP BUILDING IS CRUCIAL.

THE INCREASING NUMBER OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS SEEKING PARTNERSHIPS WITH US TESTIFIES TO THE TANGIBLE BENEFITS THEY PERCEIVE FROM SUCH ALLIANCES.

4. Measuring impact and engagement

As we enter the second year of these partnerships, it becomes imperative to establish a benchmark for impact and engagement, one that aligns with our strategic aims while also benefiting the wider partnership ecosystem. Our ambition is to develop a method of best practice, driving standards in relationship building and illustrating how to collaborate effectively with a multitude of partners, ensuring continuous value add. Drawing inspiration from McKinsey's four key principles of effective partnership - Establish a clear foundation; Nurture the relationship; Emphasise accountability and metrics; Build a dynamic partnership - we can adapt and apply them within the educational context to enhance collaboration. These will include RAG rating our schools which enable us to establish an understanding of how strong these relationships are and how successful new initiatives might be. It's important to note that RAG ratings are subjective and context-dependent. They should be used as a tool to identify areas of improvement and guide efforts to enhance school partnerships rather than as definitive judgments. Regular evaluation, open communication, and a willingness to adapt and address challenges are crucial for the success of any school partnership but this will enable us to effectively and innovatively prioritise our efforts with these schools.

5. Moving Towards 'Partnerships of Choice'

Our ultimate aspiration is for our school partners to view Eton College as their partner of choice, whereby they actively select us as their preferred collaborative partner. This transformation necessitates the blending together of current outreach offers that exist in our school-based network. Creating synergy between ourselves and university outreach offers, for instance, is the first stepping stone. It is fundamental that we do not lose our mission focus and stay firm with our partner schools and not offer provisions that could be considered school improvement initiatives. Instead, our partnerships should become symbiotic relationships, fostering a dynamic exchange of knowledge and best practice. This will enable us to expand our educational opportunities and share outstanding resources, such as EtonX, with school leaders in new areas.

6. Becoming Brokers of Relationships

One notable trend emerging within these partnerships is schools increasingly relying on us to act as brokers in their relationships with other organisations. This trend presents an opportunity for us to encourage and facilitate the establishment of entire portfolios of practical and value-adding opportunities. By assuming this role, we can empower schools to navigate a complex landscape and expand their network of collaborations, ultimately enriching the educational experience for as many young people as we can.

The development of school-based partnerships in Dudley, Oldham and Teesside holds immense potential for fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and mutual growth. By establishing benchmarks for impact and engagement, striving for partnerships of choice, and assuming the role of relationship brokers, we can create an environment that consistently adds value and drives positive outcomes for all. Through our continued efforts, we can elevate the standards of school engagement and serve as catalysts for innovation and excellence in education.

References

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FOSTERING COLLABORATION BETWEEN STATE AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS: ETON'S PARTNERSHIP WITH THE LONDON ACADEMY OF EXCELLENCE (LAE)

Aaron Bridges | *Master of Biology and Master in Charge of the London Academy Of Excellence Links*

Eton's partnership with London Academy of Excellence has naturally shifted and evolved over the years since LAE was founded, and this academic year has been no different. The changing backdrop against which the Eton-LAE partnership sits has had an impact on the relative merits of the various facets of the relationship. The nature of the partnership is already changing towards a model with more emphasis on true partnership and less on outreach, with the latter having naturally arisen with the opening of LAE and the need for more support in its initial phases. However, this is no longer the case and as such we are moving away from activities which are not true to the partnership ethos described in this issue.

One such example is the move away from providing seconded teachers, something that is a nice luxury when possible, but equally has many limitations in terms of what both parties can gain from the endeavour. During the past five years, there was an English Master from Eton who temporarily joined LAE, and this academic year, we were able to have a Biology teacher from Eton on secondment due to a temporary adjustment in staffing. However, it is important to note that secondment as a collaborative effort incurs significant financial expenses, and it cannot be guaranteed that Eton will be able to offer it consistently in the future. Secondment as a partnership exercise also has limitations in terms of the benefits it can offer to both schools. Its benefits are constrained and fail to extend fully to both educational institutions. The logistical challenges associated with secondment can hinder its effectiveness in achieving extensive mutual benefits. Also, there is the potential of disruption to the continuity of education for students.

A more sustainable model is an expanded role for the Master in Charge of LAE links which needs to grow to facilitate more mutual endeavours, that will enable development and benefit for all parties on both sides of this partnership. On the LAE side of things, partnership responsibilities will be changing for the coming academic year, and exciting plans to reimagine the relationship are already under discussion.

Reflection on existing partnership activities has helped inform their natural evolution in other areas as well. For example, this year's visit to LAE by Etonians involved D block (Year 11) students instead of C block (Year 12) students. This is being trialled as last year LAE were disappointed that no Etonians could attend on the set day for the visit (during which LAE's other partner schools also sent over students), but this was simply impossible due to internal examinations at Eton occupying C block. Indeed, the different ebb and flow of the school year is one of the common barriers to scheduling student-centred partnership activities, with differences existing in term dates and mock exam timings among other logistical challenges. In a similar vein, the structure of the school day and week is very different between the two sites, which is no surprise given that one is a mixed sixth form college and the other is a boarding school catering for boys in Years 9 to 13. The other major stumbling block has been a consequence of geography; just over 40km between campuses as the crow flies may not sound like much, but traversing central London takes time. Thankfully, the Elizabeth line finally finishing has made it far easier to get from one school to the other, and also made it much simpler to meet halfway for off-site events.

What else has been happening between Eton and LAE? Secondment and the Leadership Institute, described below, may have been the core elements of the partnership to date, but a plethora of other temporally less-extensive activities - such as contribution to the mock interview process and the reciprocal student visits - have also happened. Other collaborations have tended to take place on a more ad hoc basis, as and when a need or interest has arisen. Examples of this include liaison between science departments regarding updating laboratory equipment, providing support for a Year 12 student to obtain work experience (in the rather niche area of entomology), and lead teachers sharing good practice relating to PSHE provision. Overall, a broad range of small-scale partnership work has happened over the year, and there is plenty more to look forward to in the future.

Despite the various modifications, the Eton-LAE Leadership Program (ELLI), which is currently in its 5th year, has remained a central undertaking and stands as an exemplary illustration of a genuine school partnership involving students. Despite encountering logistical difficulties, the ELLI model has proven to be effective and can undoubtedly be emulated by other educational institutions. It is worthwhile to dedicate some time to examine the advantages and obstacles we have encountered over the past five years, and to offer guidance for those interested in adapting the model to their own circumstances, thus paving the way for future implementation.

Leadership programmes are instrumental in cultivating students' skills and equipping them for future academic and professional pursuits. The programme consisted of a year-long collaboration where around 60 students in Year 12 (30 from each school) came together to explore notions of leadership. The programme consisted of:

1. Guest speakers
2. Reading and discussing academic texts
3. A group project to be completed over the course of the year and presented at the end
4. A visit to London
5. A residential weekend where students from LAE stayed at Eton and took part in a conference on leadership and presented their work

This article presents the perceived benefits as identified by students. We also offer some key considerations and practical recommendations, drawing from our experience, for those wishing to build such partnerships. We conclude that such programmes are immensely valuable for students but need to be planned carefully to be successful.

Perceived benefits

Teamwork
Students mentioned that the opportunity to work with others is beneficial for them and can equip them with the necessary skills for university and subsequently at work. For some of them who wanted to go into careers of medicine or to work in multinational businesses, they believed the skills of teamwork are vital for them and the programme had a positive benefit for them. However, they also reflected on the challenges that can arise when working with others, especially from different settings, which makes it more difficult to communicate and arrange meetings. As such, not all groups were able to maintain their communication and complete the group project successfully. However, students' comments indicate that this was something that they enjoy doing more generally.

Confidence
Confidence was mentioned mainly by students on Free School Meals. They described how presenting in front of others was useful in developing confidence for public speaking. They also believed that debates and discussions on academic topics were good challenges in outlining their ideas in front of others and having the confidence to do so. LAE students, in particular, felt their confidence increase because they could hold their own in discussions with Eton pupils, who attend a public school with a reputation for high academic standards and preparation for debating and public speaking.

Academic challenge
Students enjoyed reading texts from academic sources. They mentioned that this was good preparation for university

and it enabled them to grapple with concepts they were not familiar with. However, a few students mentioned that the readings were sometimes too difficult, which discouraged them from reading them. They suggested shortening the texts or pointing them to sections which were relevant or accessible. When asked however if they would prefer to read something easier, perhaps from an online source, such as a blog, rather than an academic text they said that this was not their preferred option.

Exchanging ideas and hearing different viewpoints
Exchanging ideas with those from different backgrounds was greatly appreciated by all students. Students from both schools mentioned they mainly talk to their peers and as such they don't get enough opportunities to hear the views of those from different schools or backgrounds. The programme gave them this opportunity. Even though there were certain elements of debate involved, students felt that the discussion was respectful and proved beneficial in understanding different viewpoints. Eton students, in particular, noted that being at Eton, which is a boarding school, really limits their interactions with students from other schools and can feel like 'a bubble'. Therefore, the interactions with LAE students were refreshing and beneficial to their understanding of how others view leadership. Some of the students' thoughts are given in the quotes below.

Understanding leadership
Even though we did not see a statistical difference in the character traits we measured, overall students mentioned they were able to develop a more nuanced understanding of what leadership is. In particular, students commented on the fact that their understanding of the different types of intelligence a leader needs to have was crucial for being able to be a good leader. Hearing from different speakers was also an important element. Students noted that prior to the programme, they mainly associated leadership with someone who is a CEO or in a position of authority, such as politicians. However, the programme showed them that leaders can be people in different positions and walks of life.

Key considerations for those wishing to introduce a Leadership Institute

Content
Students enjoyed the challenge of reading academic texts but they thought some of them were too challenging for their level. Their recommendation was to keep the sources but shorten the amount they had to read. Instead of reading the whole text (some of them were around 20 pages long), they suggested focusing on fewer pages to ensure they had time for better comprehension.

One of the most enjoyable elements was listening to guest speakers. Inviting speakers from diverse backgrounds and experiences is vital to ensure students can relate to them but also that they hear from diverse voices so they can understand how leadership manifests itself in different ways.

The online discussions did not work very well and students said these were the least enjoyable for them. This was due to several reasons: not all students turning cameras on, not everyone having read the articles and as such being quiet during the discussion, technology not always working appropriately, timings being too short and with students turning up late the conversation was not smooth. Although technology can be great for bringing students across geographical locations together, it needs to be used carefully.

Timetabling
Finding times that worked for both schools has proven tricky. This was particularly the case for Eton College, where pupils do not all have a single timetable, and they participate in various co-curricular activities throughout the day. This led to various absences during the year. In cross-sector partnerships, this might be the case for other private or boarding schools. For LAE (and other state schools) it was easier to manage this since students have a more simplified school day structure. Those responsible for timetabling need to consider how best to manage this and how to ensure all students participate fully.

The programme started in November but the residential took place in September, at the beginning of Year 13. This meant that students had other commitments relating to university admissions at the time. A solution for this would be to complete the full programme within the academic year with a residential stay in May.

Partnership and collaboration
As mentioned above, technology has great potential in enabling student collaborations but in our case, we found that it was only useful for guest talks and occasionally for bringing students together. However, there needs to be elements of face-to-face interactions. Students believed the biggest benefits of the partnership was when they came together and had the opportunity to freely talk to each other.

The LAE students visited Eton on several occasions and had the opportunity to see around the campus. The visit was not reciprocated (for logistical reasons); however,

students from both schools felt this was an oversight. It is vital for students to experience each-others settings and this should be a priority for future programmes.

Even though we tried to introduce mentors for the student groups, this initiative was not very successful. Some staff who were mentors left the school, students were not always responding to emails, and some student groups did not have a lot of communication and as such they did not feel the need to communicate with the mentor. A more comprehensive way of how mentors work with students needs to be explored. Even though all students started with the best intentions in attending the programme throughout the year, we found that as other activities and responsibilities took over some students stopped attending. This was particularly prominent among Eton students who do not all have a unified timetable. Ensuring that the partnership activities are a priority needs to be a consistent message which comes from those in positions of authority in the school (e.g. SLT or Heads of Year).

Recommendations
Create a Leadership Institute which is attended by all students. This will resolve some of the issues with timetabling and will ensure that students give it priority which will ultimately strengthen the partnership elements of the programme. If this is not feasible, smaller cohorts of 15-17 from each school is a manageable number to ensure full participation and management of the programme.

Character traits need to be discussed explicitly. In our intervention, we tried to explicitly talk about skills with the hope that students will deduce some of the main ideas from the readings or the speakers. Having explicit reflective discussions about the levels of skills they have and how they can improve will be beneficial for character development.

There needs to be at least two members of staff (one from each school) who are responsible for the programme, ideally in positions of authority (senior leaders or similar). There also needs to be administrative support to ensure the smooth running of activities (zoom logins, trips, booking of speakers, etc.).

Ensure readings are academically challenging but not too challenging since students will not engage if they are not accessible.

Even though online sessions can be great for creating further opportunities for coming together, the core of the programme needs to be face to face to ensure lasting connections are built between students.

The programme needs to be completed within one academic year. Year 12 is a good year for such a programme.

Associated costs might include: trips to visit respective schools, speaker fees (if needed), research support for collecting data (if appropriate), admin and teacher support to deliver the programme.

FROM OUTREACH TO PARTNERSHIP

Nick Roberts | *Head of Italian and Master in Charge of the Holyport Relationship*

When Holyport College opened its gates to Years 7 and 9 in September 2014 with Eton as its sole educational sponsor, the founding headmaster at Holyport was adamant that evidence of the partnership with Eton should immediately be "visible and meaningful", pointing out on many occasions that a day on the Holyport site would not pass without staff, students and visitors somehow being made aware of Eton's influence. The "visible" element of his aspiration was quite straightforward: Eton had a majority on the Holyport governing body, the school crest and uniform had been designed with Eton blue in mind, and from the outset, Holyport students were a regular presence on the Eton campus as they participated in activities in and around Eton as well as the Fives Courts and Rowing Lake. But "meaningful"? When presented with a blank canvas from which to make the partnership into the gold standard for cross-sector engagement, it soon became clear that turning outreach into genuine partnership was going to be rather more of a challenge.

As the governors continued to work on the strategic development of Holyport College with the partnership as just one piece of the jigsaw, a teacher from each school was appointed to meet weekly with a view to discussing the operational elements of the relationship, and in many respects these meetings sowed the seeds for what is now perceived to be an alliance of genuinely effective collaboration. The first challenge was to get together as many as possible of the staff and student bodies in both formal and informal settings, and in spite of the geographical proximity between the two colleges, it quickly became apparent that suitable transport options and a readiness to work around two different timetables would be a limiting factor. Covid, too, put something of a spanner in the works, but as some doors closed, technology meant that one or two more opened, and as it happens much valuable activity took place online whilst physical contact was impossible. Nevertheless a September drinks party for staff, a January quiz night for 150 or so Year 12 students, a February Guest Night for staff and a June barbecue for Year 9 students with hosting duties alternating from year to year have now become the annual starting points for collaboration on both a social and professional level and have in many ways been the catalyst for all kinds of valuable activity (visits for new teachers at each school as part of their induction, clubs and society meetings, teaching observations and collaboration between academic departments, shared resources, joint CCF activity, educational visits and so on).

Where possible, reciprocity and mutual support have been at the top of the agenda when planning new ventures: it is desirable for all non-qualified Eton teachers to be trained, so many have completed their teaching practice at Holyport, and it is anticipated that the creation of a CIRL at Holyport will provide many more opportunities for mutual observation

at both schools; Holyport Oxbridge and early entry university candidates have tapped into Eton's experience, attending, for example, TSA preparation sessions laid on in the Summer term and benefiting from Oxbridge tutorials and interview practice in the Autumn; Holyport does not have a Design department, so Eton lay on DT workshops for Holyport students throughout the year; Holyport heritage MFL speakers can take GCSEs in non-taught languages because members of the Eton MFL department provide support where necessary and conduct the relevant speaking exams; shared Iftar takes place at both schools during Ramadan and the Eton Societies Programme is now open to all Holyport students (and is increasingly well attended).

In spite of the more formal structures now in place, some of the most effective partnership activity has been generated by students at both schools and has grown organically since. Back in 2015, as part of his community engagement commitment, an Eton sixth former set up a Tuesday evening mentoring session for Holyport Year 8s, and although the name has changed from EAP (we felt "Eton Aspirations Project" was misleading and inappropriate) to HEMP ("Holyport-Eton Mentoring Programme"), the project has now become a regular feature of the school year with up to 15 Eton mentors producing their own materials on off-syllabus academic work (Ethics, Philosophy, fun Maths, for example), engaging the gifted and talented Year 8s at Holyport throughout the year and inviting them to Eton at the end of it to give their own presentations in the presence of mentors, staff and parents. A STEM programme involving sixth form mentors at both schools has followed a similar model, a joint Investment Club has been running for several years and both schools' LGBTQ+ committees are also in regular contact.

Partnership activity has not been without its challenges: the Eton Year 9s didn't cover themselves in glory when we hosted a less than satisfactory Environmental Symposium day for Holyport and other partner schools, and there were murmurs of discontent when Holyport students were allowed to attend a talk by a celebrity politician at the expense of their Eton counterparts, but we believe strongly that risks should be taken where necessary, and a sense of mutual trust and understanding allows for such a trial and error approach to new initiatives.

Moving forward, with transport and staffing challenges now more or less resolved and genuine friendships forged between students and staff at Eton and Holyport, we feel there are more opportunities for meaningful collaboration in, for example, Music and Drama and plans for a Fives court on site. The launch of Holyport CIRL, which this issue celebrates, will add even more visibility to what is already an extremely successful partnership - and one which should be celebrated in style as Holyport reaches its 10th anniversary in 2024.

DEDICATED PEOPLE + TOUCHING BASE WEEKLY = RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Frank Hardee | *Master in Charge of the Eton Relationship, Holyport College*

Four and a half years ago the Holyport-Eton Partnership moved to a new stage in its development. It went from one of 'educational sponsorship' (that is the official Free School terminology) to one of an equal partnership based on shared ideas and shared vision. One of the practical upshots of this change of emphasis was the appointment of me, alongside Head of Italian and former Housemaster, Nick Roberts. With the rather grand title of 'Master in charge of the Eton Relationship', to mirror Nick's newly created title of 'Master in charge of the Holyport Relationship' we were both charged with making the partnership flourish from the bottom up. Until that point, the majority of partnership activities had been at a more macro or headline level with direction set from the Governors, The Provost and Fellows, and the two Heads but moving to this new phase of the relationship the direction needed to shift to one where teachers, students and other stakeholders drove the partnership and came up with good ideas to connect the colleges.

With somewhat of a blank canvas to make this new stage happen Nick and I met for the first time to thrash out some ideas. What we thought might be a half-term check-in soon became a weekly meeting and that is what I want to write about in this article, because the weekly meeting has become the backbone of the coordination of all partnership activities. Of course this is made more possible by the fact that Holyport and Eton are merely 15 minutes down the road from each other, which may not be the case for all partnership projects, but the weekly 'check-in' really allows for the flow of ideas and opportunities. I have to admit that sometimes I feel a bit of a fraud as often people ask 'what do you actually do when you go over to Eton weekly?' and I often find myself answering: 'it depends'.

Meeting Nick almost always begins over lunch in the Masters' dining hall (Bekynton) where we will be joined by any number of Eton teachers, many of whom I have gotten to know quite well. Nick may have deliberately set me up with someone who he wants to be connected at Holyport. A few months ago I had lunch with a modern languages teacher who I managed to connect with our Head of Languages which resulted in that teacher doing his state school QTS days here at Holyport - a win-win for the partnership. The other week, I ate lunch with the head of the Islamic Society which helped to foster links and resulted in joint Iftar sessions over the Ramadan period. And only last week I spoke to one of the Latin teachers about whether we could share expertise around marking exam scripts.

APPOINT A DEDICATED PERSON AT EACH SETTING AND GIVE THEM TIME AND SPACE TO COORDINATE AND YOU'LL BE PROVIDING THE CONDITIONS FOR THE PARTNERSHIP TO FLOURISH.

After lunch, the more formal part of the meeting happens, normally in Nick's classroom, whereby we each go through our list of respective things that we have for each other and it's surprising how long these lists are. There's normally 5 or 6 items we independently have for each other and sometimes more. This is a really useful way for us to keep each other in the loop of what is happening 'partnership-wise' that week. Whether that is feedback from the Year 9 environmental conference or how excited Holyport students were to see Bear Grylls last night or more simply that the Art and Design departments have managed to connect over a Key Stage 3 project, having this time to understand how the partnership is developing organically is crucial to its success.

Sometimes there are more 'formal asks' from one side to the other - whether that be in the realm of Eton Teachers coming to Holyport for QTS placements or Holyport asking for logistical support for something, but these tend to be rare. There are then a number of regular 'fixtures' in the Eton Holyport Partnership Calendar such as the Year 12 quiz night, Year 9 BBQ, Holyport Eton Mentorship Programme (HEMP) and the start of year staff drinks event. But the real magic of the partnership is its bottom-up organic nature and the weekly meeting ensures not only that we are on top of this but we can celebrate all the positive collaborations that are going on between both Colleges. In fact, Nick and I are about to write our annual review of the partnership whereby we not only measure and reflect on the targets we set for the partnership the previous year but we celebrate all the wonderful collaborative experiences we have had.

In summary, my advice to other schools that are considering going down the partnership route is that whilst from the outside a weekly check-in meeting may seem like overkill, it really is the 'grease that turns the wheels' and ensures that any partnership activities become more than just a box ticking exercise. Appoint a dedicated person at each setting and give them time and space to coordinate and you'll be providing the conditions for the partnership to flourish.

PARTNERSHIPS IN DESIGN

Oli Cooper | *Master in Design and Technology, Eton College*

The nature of The Design Schools (Eton's Design and Technology department) is a consistently bustling place, with an agile group of staff who provide amazing value far beyond what most individuals often see. This article hopes to serve as a brief case study to share what we do with our partnership schools and reflect on those relationships' educational benefits so that others may be encouraged to build on these beginnings (Yin, 2014, pp.16-24).

The scope of this article as a case study will be confined to the people involved and the activities they do on a regular basis and in more ad-hoc relationships. A human-centric perspective is more useful than any time- or geographically-constrained view because human partnerships have the greatest impact. Reflections on the educational benefits in this context will be framed around the benefits for the students (Harcourt, D., & Sarjeant, J., 2011), even though the benefits for the adults and staff involved are also important. It is with happier, more expert, and more fulfilled teachers, more positive relationships and partnerships result in better education for the students.

The most regular partnership fixtures in the Design Schools' calendar are our afternoons teaching Year 7 students from Holyport College. This summer term, we host three afternoons for Year 7 form groups to experience Design & Technology as part of their KS3 national curriculum provision. The intensive three-hour sessions see the students complete a practical project adapted from our F Block (Year 9) curriculum. Holyport College staff and some of our C Block (Year 12) students support the Holyport College students. The diversity of those supporting the Year 7 students imbues all involved with a sense of community, enabling the Holyport College staff and C Block students to develop their understanding of Design & Technology, too. The staff who mastermind the sessions have experience and expertise across the subject, but we choose to work on a practical project so that the students experience and learn in ways and with tools as different from the rest of their schooling as possible.

Activities which involve mixes of students from different contexts are always extremely enjoyable for the staff involved. Developing familiarity between the staff teaching Design & Technology or similar subjects across our local partnership schools has empowered excellent collaboration. It has meant that we can tailor our partnership activities to have the greatest impact or most positive benefit for those involved. At least yearly, The Design Schools hosts the James Dyson Foundation for a day of rapid idea generation, prototyping, and pitching concepts to Dyson engineering and management. We include Holyport, Windsor Boys' and Girls' Schools, Slough and Eton, Churchmead, and Eden Girls' School to name a few. The Year 12 students work in mixed teams and rapidly feel comfortable collaborating and prototyping with students they have never met before. The resulting excitement through the day immerses the students and enables staff to frequently step back and observe the deep and huge quantity of learning. The logistical complexities of organising such a day with so many stakeholders are vast, but the result is well worth it. With more time, space, and staff, we would happily run these workshops more frequently.

Less formal activities also provide a wealth of opportunities for students and staff to learn with and from one another. Our Engineering and Design Society regularly holds evenings for students preparing for university applications where they can make time to research courses and write their applications in a dedicated space. The value of having students from local schools exploring their futures simultaneously in the same space facilitates some brilliant conversations and sharing of options that the students might not have otherwise considered. Unlike other events, which can take a significant amount of work to organise, utilising the existing timetable and culture of the school - in this case, Eton's Societies programme – means that a big difference can be made for much less energy from the staff.

Having staff comfortable and supported enough to work with each other is perhaps the most subtle and powerful way to engender meaningful partnerships. The relationships that The Design Schools tries to foster with local schools are exemplified in the close work with Holyport's Art department. Whether it is Holyport supporting staff who are new to teaching with experience in the state sector, or collaboration on setting up Design & Technology courses for students in different contexts, the ease with which staff are able to communicate and work together often has a deeper impact than big-ticket events such as factory visits or tours. These activities are difficult to define in the form of a case study, but the key features are frequent and small communications and interactions. The culture of these activities, i.e. the feeling and tone of the interactions and communication, is a true partnership with mutual benefit as a motivator and a sense that each stakeholder gets out what they put in.

In summary, there are many activities which could be duplicated across other contexts, departments, and school groups, but from the perspective of the Design Schools' experience, there are some underlying principles which have made the biggest difference to students' education:

- Involving students of varying ages/levels deepens learning for those more experienced students and can enable a more supportive and varied delivery of any activities.

- Involving groups of students from many schools of different contexts and expecting them to collaborate whilst making the explicit focus of an event more subject-specific has added richness to our partnerships involving sixth-form students.

- Nurturing and facilitating relationships between staff has helped build authentic partnerships where the positive impact for students can be maximised most efficiently because of a better understanding of each other's contexts.

Whilst there is so much more to record, share, and reflect upon regarding the partnerships with The Design Schools, this article begins to scratch the surface of some activities that make a difference. There is space for a much clearer case study of the work we do so that the positive work can be understood and celebrated. Further enquiry into how the positive impact can be built upon would also empower those already making a difference to extend the reach of their work.

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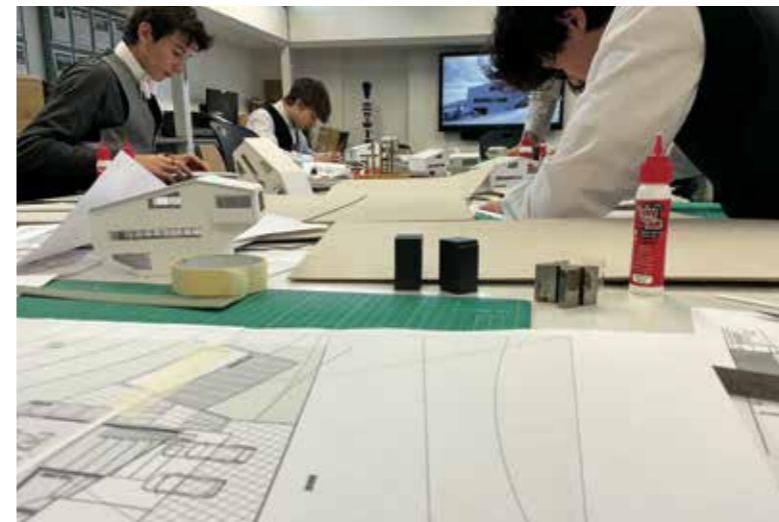
EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF ONLINE LEARNING FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Emma Grisewood | *Head of EtonX Content*

Partnerships between independent and state schools hold immense potential for mutual benefit and educational advancement. In recent years, Eton has witnessed the power of its online learning platform, EtonX, in providing new avenues for fostering such partnerships. By providing resources over a digital platform, Eton is able to remove the physical constraints of proximity and extend access to an enabling programme of courses to a wider group of students nationally and internationally.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic Eton has provided access to the EtonX self-study courses, which cover leadership, communication, career, and academic skills, to all state schools in the UK. By offering these courses to state schools, Eton is demonstrating its commitment to widening participation and helping students from all backgrounds to succeed. Pupils can access the course materials produced by Eton College at their convenience, eliminating geographical barriers and accommodating different timetables. Additionally, the platform offers certification upon course completion, allowing learners to validate their skills and knowledge, thereby enhancing their CVs and improving their career prospects. This initiative has fostered collaboration and goodwill between institutions that would not have previously been able to work together.

In July 2021, a report produced by Dr. Iro Konstantinou, Head of Research and Impact at Eton, on the use of the EtonX self-study courses during the Covid-19 school closures indicated that the EtonX platform had provided students with valuable educational opportunities to build their skills. Research by the EtonX team found that the courses had a lasting impact with schools reporting increased aspiration and academic engagement for pupils who actively engaged with the platform. In addition, the careers focus of the EtonX platform courses serves to fill a widening gap in the provision of careers advice in schools. Youth Employment UK's annual Youth Voice Census 2021 and 2022 has highlighted concerns among young people about being ill equipped with the employability skills required in today's labour market: 'In 2022 just 29.7% of young people rated the career advice they had received in secondary school so far as 'good' or 'excellent'.'

However, as the 2022 Oxford University Press paper 'Using Technology to Motivate Learners' states, technology does not intrinsically motivate pupils and the report on the use of the EtonX courses also revealed that the most engaged pupils tended also to be the most academically high-achieving ones. The Oxford University Press paper highlights the crucial role of the teacher in using technology for learning. Their research finds that the best results for motivating pupils with technology happen when teachers are involved in selecting, adapting, and implementing technology, with support from their institutions.

The staff at the London Academy of Excellence in Stratford provide an excellent example of how this can work in practice with the EtonX self-study courses. They have integrated the EtonX courses into their LAE Diploma and use the data that the EtonX platform provides to understand student performance and check in regularly with pupils on their progress, as well as further embedding learning with follow-up tasks during tutorial time.

The EtonX platform already provides teachers with access to additional resources and support within the EtonX courses, enabling them to navigate unfamiliar topics effectively and adapt the materials to their context. As we start to develop academic curriculum courses in the EtonX platform, the EtonX team is committed to further developing this aspect with opportunities within online courses for CPD and feedback among teachers, fostering a cross-institutional community of educators who can inspire and support one another. Further development of a collaborative CPD approach between partner schools can develop 'support from specialists' which has been highlighted by the Teacher Development Trust as a key design feature of a successful CPD programme.

In conclusion, the report on the use of EtonX courses during school closures showed that 100 per cent of respondents felt that self-study courses would be essential for students even beyond the lockdown period, emphasising their ongoing significance in the education system. By embracing the capabilities of online learning and understanding where it can add value, educational institutions can use it to help create a more inclusive and equitable learning landscape.

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THAMES VALLEY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP'S CROSS-SCHOOL DRAGONS' DEN

Clare Matheson | *Thames Valley Learning Partnership Coordinator*

The Thames Valley Learning Partnership (TVLP), an equal partnership of state and independent secondary-aged schools in Berkshire, was established in 2019. Founded with the belief that educational experience is improved by meaningful and repeated interactions between schools of different types, it has grown to incorporate 11 secondary-aged schools located in the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, and the Borough of Slough. The partnership comprises a range of different educational establishments including independent, state secondary, state boarding, academy, faith and grammar schools, who all collaborate on a range of recurring and one-off events, student competitions, staff networks, projects, courses and actions, including an annual Student Leadership Conference.

One of the integral fixtures in the TVLP's annual events programme is the Dragons' Den competition which puts students into mixed school groups to develop an idea which aims to help tackle a local social, economic or environmental cause. Whilst providing an opportunity for these students to become integrally involved in the local community as social ambassadors, it also delivers an excellent opportunity to collaborate with students from differing social, economic and cultural backgrounds. The competition which has resulted in student-led actions and positive press coverage has focused on various areas including food poverty, the environment, crime, and potholes. As well as providing teamwork opportunities which are a fundamental employability skill for these young people, as the event is judged by business & charity leaders, it offers the entrepreneurs an opportunity to engage and learn from executives with real world experience.

The 2022, TVLP Dragons' Den pitches took place at St Joseph's Catholic High School. The event brought together over 100 students from 9 TVLP schools: Beechwood School, Eton College, Herschel Grammar School, Holyport College, Lynch Hill Enterprise Academy, Slough & Eton C of E Business & Enterprise College, St Joseph's Catholic High School, The Windsor Boys' School, and Windsor Girls' School. The TVLP Dragons' Den panel chose two winning pitches. One addressed knife crime and one aimed to help a local homeless charity. Each of these was awarded £100 to put towards making their pitch a reality, with the assistance of the TVLP Coordinator, Clare.

TVLP anti-knife crime pitch

Students from two TVLP schools in Slough, Beechwood School, and Herschel Grammar School, sold anti-knife crime badges to raise money for the youth charity, Together As One (Aik Saath). The students, Sam and Samir, along with a pupil from the Windsor Girls' School, used their £100 prize money to create their own badges, which were designed with the help of local graphic design company, Dunk Design Ltd. They doubled the money they were given by asking students, staff, family and friends to make a voluntary donation for each badge they were given. In total, Sam and Samir raised £207.30, thereby increasing the impact it could have.

Rob Deeks from Together As One commented, "We are enormously grateful to all of the partners involved in this project and Thames Valley Learning Partnership in particular. Both the young people's desire to help their community and their entrepreneurial spirit are to be highly commended – we hope they are really proud of themselves."

Students Theo, Sonny and Tanaya, with Chris Speakman from Windsor Homeless Project, and Clare Matheson, TVLP Coordinator.

Students Sam and Samir, with Together As One youth workers, Ibby, Sanna and Aida, and the TVLP Coordinator, Clare Matheson.

TVLP Windsor Homeless Project pitch

Students from three local TVLP schools (Eton College, Lynch Hill Enterprise Academy, and The Windsor Boys' School) chose to use the £100 prize money they won during their TVLP Dragons' Den pitch to donate items needed by the Windsor Homeless Project at Christmas. On 2nd December 2022, they carried out this plan. Using a charity wish list, Sonny, Theo & Tanaya delivered food & drink to the Windsor Homeless Project & learnt more about the great work this local charity does.

With the weather getting colder, the demand for the charity's services increases, with more people seeking refuge from the bitter wind, rain, snow and ice. The students were told that donations of essential items like tea, coffee and biscuits were regularly needed, with monetary donations to help with the rising cost of lighting and heating also welcome.

Cross-school events that encourage and enable student-led decisions and changes to be made are vital to empowering pupils, and helping them to realise they can make a difference, both now and throughout their lives. The Thames Valley Learning Partnership is there to help achieve this. As the Partnership grows in number and influence, it allows the schools involved to showcase effective frameworks for cross school partnerships, benefiting students from all school types to gain exposure to more diverse environments, people and opportunities.

CROSS-SECTOR SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS – BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS THE DIVIDE

Margaret Hunnaball | *Researcher in Residence, School Partnerships Alliance*

ISSPs and partnership working

When New Labour came into power in 1997, they claimed that the 'educational apartheid created by the public/private education divide diminishes the whole education system' (DFEE, 1997). Independent schools feared losing their charitable status, but in his drive to raise educational standards the then Prime Minister Tony Blair chose 'partnership not confrontation' with them (Peel, 2015, p.8), and charged independent schools with sharing both their facilities and their teachers with local schools (DfEE, 1997). This was not only to help raise standards, but as a contributing factor in independent schools demonstrating public benefit. Twenty years later, the Independent Schools Council (ISC, 2017) reported that 88% of its schools were involved in some form of partnership with schools in the maintained sector. In 2017, Lucas et al (2017), conducted a 'rapid review of ISSP activity and impact', and they defined an ISSP as 'any deliberate collaboration or association of two or more schools, whether formal or informal, short or long-term, wide-ranging or focused'.

While independent state school partnerships are relatively widespread in England, they are under-researched, so my theoretical framing of successful partnership focussed on National Health Service and policing partnerships. These were introduced by New Labour at the same time as ISSPs, feature cross-sector working between public and private organisations, and have been researched more extensively. The literature revealed a number of common features across successful partnerships. Key among these were: shared objectives (Hunter and Perkins, 2014); 'mutual values and trust' (Dhillon 2005, 211); 'transparent lines of communication' (Carnwell and Carson, 2004, 9); commitment (Dhillon, 2005); resources, including all partners using 'their own resources jointly… for mutual benefit' (Powell & Dowling, 2006, 309); and the 'engagement of senior management' (Perkins et al, 2010, 105). Potential barriers to partnership working can be found in 'cultural differences' (Hunter and Perkins, 2014,44), which can result in 'cultural stereotyping between professionals', and also in 'significant disparities in power' (Wildridge et al, 2004, 8), which can not only inhibit the establishing of a partnership, but can destabilise its activities.

The literature shows that partnerships evolve over time, so this study looks at established partnerships, whose structure and processes were more open to scrutiny than those more recently established, which may still be in the early stages. A qualitative study was completed in two phases. In the first phase, I conducted documentary research and semi-structured interviews with headteachers and partnership coordinators. This was followed by observations of partnership activities, semi-structured interviews with staff involved in them, and pupil focus groups. In total, I conducted forty-three semi-structured interviews and five pupil focus groups, with participants from both sectors. The three partnerships which were researched were Leslie Independent State School Partnership (LISSP), a 'hub and spoke' partnership (DfE, 2018), with secondary school 'spokes'; Maxwell Schools' Association (MSA), another 'hub and spoke' partnership, this one with primary school 'spokes'; and Napier Schools Together Group (NSTG), a 'broad area partnership' (DfE, 2018) of secondary schools.

The nature of cross-sector working between schools

The Lucas et al. (2017) definition of ISSPs described partnership in terms of collaboration, but I consider collaboration and partnership to be different things, the first an act and the second a relationship. This reflects the meaning adopted by Carnwell and Carson (2004, p.4) who 'distinguish between what something is (a partnership), and what one does (collaborate or work together in a joined-up way)'.

LISSP and NSTG are partnerships between secondary schools and my data revealed that their participants saw cross-sector working as a relationship. In NSTG, all schools shared a clear mission, made equal financial contributions and were involved in both strategic and operational aspects of the partnership. In LISSP, activities were organised and funded by the independent school, but state partners felt they had influence over the programme on offer. In my third ISSP, MSA, the independent school is secondary, working with local state primary schools. The independent school sets the annual programme, arranges funding and also organises and runs the activities. Its headteacher

acknowledged that their mode was one of collaboration. MSA was the youngest of my ISSPs, and relationships between partners were not as strong as in LISSP or NSTG. This may be explained by Bourne's (2017,41) finding that 'Building strong trusting relationships from scratch or developing existing relationships between independent and state-funded schools takes time'.

One of the aims of my research was to explore the meaning of partnership, as those involved in ISSPs experience it. In LISSP and NSTG there was an emphasis on schools being equal partners. One LISSP state school head described it as 'a partnership of equals', while an NSTG head emphasised that theirs was 'shared partnership… [schools] were doing it together'. In exploring the meaning of partnership, I asked the pupils in my focus groups for their views. Their responses reflected a remarkable understanding of the relationship between schools from the two sectors. The NSTG student leaders built on each other's contributions to collectively generate an insightful interpretation of partnership as:

'the coming together of two or more parties for the mutual benefit of all (Dylan) on an equal footing, so they… receive an equal amount (Kieran) [but where] they give as much as they can, rather than an equal amount (Sasha)'

The students were comfortable with some schools giving more than others, which happened in their partnership through use of facilities or some teachers contributing to activities as part of their school commitments. A working definition of partnerships, as it emerged from the data, is a 'a relationship in which parties work together as equals for mutual benefit'. Furthermore, it was found that the stronger the relationship, the greater the equality and mutuality between partners.

Building bridges through activities

To consider how schools embrace their differences I shall consider some of the activities that I encountered in my fieldwork. Independent schools typically have superior facilities, teachers with expertise in shortage subjects and, additionally, they do not have to follow the National Curriculum. In my study, I encountered activities that drew directly on these differences.

In some activities independent schools shared their facilities and resources with state school pupils. LISSP organised a Spring Play, where partner schools each prepared an act, which were then drawn together in a production held in the independent school's theatre. State school coordinator, Mia, emphasised the impact the play had on the local community, 'those scheduled rehearsals where everybody's together

I think there is something so powerful about that because you realise it's not just about you and it's not just about your school'. Mia's headteacher, Sharon, told me that 'being able to go into a theatre… that is really important and that is part of their [pupils'] aspiration'. The Spring Play was also described as 'a huge highlight of the year' for the independent school.

MSA ran a science day for Year 5 girls from local state primary schools, held in the independent school's science laboratories, with its sixth formers acting as mentors. Primary staff participants spoke positively about being given access to 'brilliant labs' and equipment. Sharing facilities does not always involve the independent schools acting as hosts, though; the NSTG summer school I observed was hosted by a partner state school with modern buildings and sophisticated IT facilities. The summer school coordinator told me that spreading events around the schools was important because it 'demonstrates to parents, to students, to staff that it is a partnership and the state schools and the independent are actually working together'.

In LISSP, I encountered a three-year programme for first generation university applicants, who were given experiences aimed at enriching their cultural capital and raising their university aspirations. This was delivered through activities such as workshops and theatre trips, alongside university visits and support with applications. One state school coordinator claimed that 'the programme gives great opportunities for students that otherwise might not have the chances to develop cultural capital and really gain in depth knowledge of university life'.

The activities that most built bridges were those with more overtly two-way exchanges of expertise. In NSTG masterclasses, state and independent school teachers worked collaboratively to plan and deliver courses. In LISSP, one of the state school headteachers led a leadership skills development course, with sessions for teachers from all partner schools. Leaders from schools in both sectors were involved in delivering sessions on the course. In this partnership, I also found shared governance with the head of a partner state school on the independent school's governing body and independent school governors in two state partner schools.

WHILE CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS CHALLENGE THE LIMITS OF EACH SECTOR'S BOUNDARIES, THEY DO NOT, AND CANNOT, MITIGATE THE INEQUALITIES BETWEEN THEM.

Challenges of ISSPs working

While the meaning of partnership working focussed on equality and relationships, cross-sector working was not without its challenges. Wildridge et al (2004) warned that power disparities could be barriers to effective partnership working, and in LISSP and MSA, the balance of power was clearly with the independent schools. In LISSP, strong relationships and trust enabled this differential to be known, understood, and accepted by state partners. The MSA partnership was still emerging, with relationships less well formed, and there was some lingering mistrust from primary partners about the independent school's motives for offering them free activities. These outreach activities could be regarded as patronage, or a form of bestowing opportunity to the less advantaged, seen by Kenway and Fahey (2015, 95) as a 'gift economy'. While primary partners filled places on MSA activities, they were not prepared to enter into formal partnership with the independent secondary school.

Another challenge came from differences in political ideology. Peel (2015, 4) claimed that independent schools polarise opinion, 'extolled for their standards of excellence on one hand and reviled for their social exclusiveness on the other'. One head told me that some state heads were hesitant about joining NSTG 'from a philosophical and political point of view'. This was recognised in the partnership's third-year self-evaluation, which claimed that some teachers 'harboured suspicions or even antipathy to professionals in another sector', but went on to assert that they had 'confronted those feelings and seen them superseded by understanding, appreciation and respect'. While this seems persuasive, it must be noted that this was an internal evaluation, more likely to be positive in its tone. The head attributed those headteachers putting aside their political views, to the partnership being 'educational not political'.

Reflection

While private education divides the main UK political parties, cross-sector partnerships have received support from successive governments since their introduction. They allow pupils in both sectors to cross borders, each gaining glimpses of the world of the other, before safely returning to their own. While cross-sector partnerships challenge the limits of each sector's boundaries, they do not, and cannot, mitigate the inequalities between them. Across my three ISSPs, I met teachers and headteachers from both sectors who pragmatically set aside their personal politics to enable their pupils and teachers to benefit from joint activities. Through nurturing relationships and offering activities that bring mutual benefit, cross-sector partnerships are helping to build bridges across the divide.

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SHARED LAWNMOWERS

Christina Astin | *Education Consultant and Associate of The School Partnerships Alliance*

When I was appointed to the newly-created role of Head of Partnerships, at the King's School in Canterbury, in 2014 some colleagues wondered if it had something to do with marriage guidance counselling! Partnerships are still a relatively new concept for some independent schools. Many are charities and look to fulfil their status through bursaries and outreach yet need to survive as businesses. Partnerships are different from outreach: co-designing educational projects with other schools can enable everyone to thrive; education is not a zero-sum game but a social endeavour which lifts the whole community. Since 2016 when the Schools Together Group (now the School Partnerships Alliance) was established, the principles of effective partnership (mutual, impactful, sustainable and addressing disadvantage) have been embraced by many schools and regional partnerships.

Neighbours in terraced houses sometimes club together to buy a jointly-owned lawnmower and share the job of mowing a small patch of lawn. One neighbour might contribute more money, another might take on a greater share of the mowing if their stripes are straighter. Where resources are constrained (and that is certainly true in education) why wouldn't we look to our neighbours to share the education of the children in our community? Everyone benefits ultimately, especially those that are more disadvantaged or under-represented. As David Carter, former National Schools Commissioner, said: "Collaboration is the oxygen of the education system".

We forget at our peril, however, that state schools have been collaborating with each other through local authorities and now multi-academy trusts for decades. Independent schools too have been engines of the community (the 'public' responsibility of the ancient public schools) yet educate only 7% of the nation's children. The language of cooperation has been slow to shift from independent schools being called on to "help" state schools, to acknowledging that both sectors can learn from each other through mutually beneficial partnerships.

It's not easy to form trusting cross-sector relationships when independent schools are on the one hand busy trying to justify their charitable status and on the other looking to set up partnerships for mutual benefit, thus suggesting they want to get something back. Big academy sponsorship projects with wide benefit are one thing; a small rural prep school trying to convince a neighbouring primary that they wish to partner when their financial accounts clearly indicate that they need to recruit more pupils is quite another. Suspicions and stereotypes persist.

Right now, all schools are battling challenges on a number of fronts: a growing children's mental health crisis, worries about teacher retention and budgets, concerns about AI and its impact on assessment and curriculum. This is surely the right time – more than ever - to get those shared lawnmowers out. In an effort to help more independent schools co-design effective partnerships with their state school colleagues, I have written a Partnerships WorkBook – a manual of shared lawnmower ownership, if you like. The WorkBook, designed for independent schools (prep, senior or all-through) who would like to work more closely with state schools, especially those in their local neighbourhood, helps to disentangle motives, prioritise resources, address needs and put impact centre stage. Building a clear and sustainable strategy for partnerships with state schools which should withstand scrutiny, helps to address the previous scattergun portfolio approach of partnership projects, accumulated from years of goodwill and personal passions.

I am optimistic that with the help of the WorkBook and the efforts of the School Partnerships Alliance and others, we will see more schools move along the continuum from an outreach or transactional model to one based on reciprocal professional collaborations where projects are co-designed for the benefit of all. Such partnerships are usually more sustainable and they demonstrate greater impact on young people. And that is what education is all about. If not marriage.

THE LANGUAGE OF COOPERATION HAS BEEN SLOW TO SHIFT FROM INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS BEING CALLED ON TO "HELP" STATE SCHOOLS, TO ACKNOWLEDGING THAT BOTH SECTORS CAN LEARN FROM EACH OTHER THROUGH MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL PARTNERSHIPS.

A CASE STUDY OF RESEARCH-ENGAGED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT ACROSS AN ACADEMY TRUST

Mark Leswell | *Research Lead, Swale Academies Trust*

In recent years, professional development (PD) has experienced significant evolution, spurred by methodological gaps in preceding effective PD reviews (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2020). Effective PD for teachers is vital for improving teacher quality, and given the substantial investment in PD, it is crucial for school leaders to understand the characteristics of effective PD that contribute to improved teaching and learning (Hill et al., 2013), and the mechanisms that increase the likelihood of effective professional development (Sims et al., 2021).

This article presents a review of a large-scale PD programme at Swale Academies Trust, created and led by a Research Lead. The programme integrates teacher motivation research, evidence-based PD, insights from engaging teachers with academic knowledge, and flexible working suggestions to advance the understanding of effective PD at scale. With teacher vacancies in February half-term 93% higher than pre-Covid and teacher recruitment in 2023/24 likely to be significantly below target (Worth, 2023), and research indicating job satisfaction among teachers in England being the worst out of English-speaking OECD countries (OECD, 2018), an in-depth understanding of teacher motivational research and how this translates to keeping teachers both within a school and within the profession has never been more important. Blending insight from Self-Determination Theory (SDT) with PD planning could be a promising approach to address this issue.

Enhancing teacher motivation through SDT

SDT suggests that motivation is boosted when psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This programme fosters autonomy by providing teachers with choice in their professional development, aligning with Schools as Learning Organisations literature (Kools et al., 2020). Our approach is to trust teachers to understand their strengths and limitations and then be guided by insights from research evidence to improve their teaching. Our approach polls teachers on student challenges, which inform PD pathways built on research evidence. Following a 'threshold concept', professional learning continues via optional, evidence-based dimensions related to each challenge. We also nurture teacher competence by implementing instructional coaching and foster relatedness through termly, cross-curricular teacher learning communities (TLCs).

Instructional coaching and teacher development

Our modified instructional coaching model combines insights from Jim Knight's Coaching Cycle (Knight, 2018) and Sims et al.'s (2021) Insight, Goals, Techniques, and Practice (IGTP) model. While it is unclear whether instructional coaching is the most effective form of teacher development, it is likely that this approach can help create new habits for teachers.

Teacher effectiveness research suggests that, on average, teachers show the greatest improvements in the first few years, and then improvements slow significantly (Kraft & Papay, 2014), likely due to habit formation (Hobbiss et al., 2021). Instructional coaching offers a form of deliberate practice needed to alter the habits of teachers who are more established in their routines and are more expert in pedagogy. To enhance the effectiveness of instructional coaching, we align our system with Sims et al.'s (2021) IGTP model. This model, influencing the EEF's Guidance on Professional Development, proposes 14 mechanisms to maximise PD impact. By efficiently and effectively targeting these mechanisms across our programme, we aim to maximise the likelihood of improving teacher quality across the trust, whilst maintaining an ethos of professional trust and psychological safety.

Maximising research utilisation in schools

Despite decades of educational policy attempting to improve research engagement in England, engagement is currently insufficient. Although a substantial increase is seen in school leaders consulting the EEF Toolkit for decision-making (from 11% in 2012 to 69% in 2021) (Higgins et al., 2022), driven largely by policy requirements to document research use in Pupil Premium expenditure decisions (DfE, 2022), there is uncertainty over how effectively this research is being employed (Gorard et al., 2020). Pegram et al.'s (2022) study found that merely 30% of programmes (n = 243) and interventions had evidence in support, 3% had evidence showing a harmful impact, and more concerningly, no noticeable change in practice was seen in schools a year after being presented with these findings. The implementation of an internal professional learning platform is a proposed solution to amplify research usage and the potential impact of effective professional development.

A comprehensive professional learning platform

The absence of a clear professional knowledge base makes teaching practice difficult to transfer (Schleicher, 2018). Whilst some attempts have been made to address this, including the EEF's Teachers Toolkit, this 'passive' approach to information transfer is unclear in its impact (Gorard et al., 2020). To address this, a professional learning platform was created, meticulously based on insights from research on effective PD, motivational literature, and instructional design. The platform, at its heart, aims to transfer academic knowledge to teachers and leaders, through video research presentations, quizzes, video strategies and worked examples, academic readings, and evidence-informed discussions. Worked examples, in particular, are likely supportive for procedural knowledge transfer (Sweller, 2006) and learning skills (Sepp et al., 2019) and appear effective in teaching, at least for newer teachers (Sims et al., 2023).

Therefore, these videos are embedded throughout the platform. Khong et al. (2023) recently identified teachers' preference for video professional learning, supporting this approach.

This programme attempts to engage teachers with research evidence in a more 'active' environment and allows teachers to engage with as much research, in as many areas, as they wish. Ofsted's recent review of professional development highlighted both that some teachers had experienced lower-quality sessions remotely during Covid and that a considerable proportion of their professional development since was not of sufficient quality (Ofsted, 2023). This platform directly combats these concerns by having all instructional materials created and recorded by the Research Lead, boosting credibility, consistency, and fidelity of the research summaries, whilst ensuring that the key mechanisms of effective PD are integrated into sessions. A further benefit of this approach is the potential for a more flexible approach to PD.

A flexible working approach to PD

The NFER (Worth, 2023) highlighted the significant challenges that remote working is bringing to the education sector, emphasising that 44% of similar graduates (to teachers) worked remotely in 2021/22 and that remote working will increasingly become a retention concern. Despite this and previous calls for increased flexible working within education, it remains less clear how to effectively implement this due to the nature of teaching and school leadership. Our initial approach has been to offer a more flexible approach to PD, where teachers and leaders engage in professional learning when it suits their work-life balance best. Early evaluations are overwhelmingly positive and show that both teachers and leaders prefer the professional trust and autonomy provided by this approach.

Conclusion

We believe that our approach to professional development, which combines the principles of SDT, evidence-based PD practices, research on academic knowledge utilisation, and a flexible working model, holds significant potential for improving teacher research engagement, motivation, job satisfaction, and ultimately, student outcomes. Initial evidence is overwhelmingly positive from teachers and leaders, but we acknowledge that ongoing reflection, a mixed methods approach to evaluation, and subsequent refinements will lead to more effective, long-term PD at Swale Academies Trust.

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TO EXPLORE THE IMPACT OF A TALENT MANAGEMENT MODEL UPON SUPPORTING TALENTED EMPLOYEES WITHIN A SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Talent in the public sector can be defined "as an individual who possesses those competencies, knowledge and values that reflect the public sector's core principles, which enable him/her to use their exceptional abilities to serve the public for the common good" (Kravariti & Johnston, 2019, 6). Talent management can be defined as "the implementation of key procedures to ensure public sector employees possess the competencies, knowledge and core values in order to address complex contemporary challenges and fulfil public sector strategic objectives for the common good" (Kravariti & Johnston, 2019, 7).

Talent management involves more than simply focusing on staffing positions and potential areas of recruitment. Identifying talent, growing leadership talent pools, developing leadership potential and retaining high-quality leaders for now and the future has become a prerequisite for organisations trying to secure stability, long term success, effective succession, supporting career progression, future proofing hard-to-recruit positions, stimulating growth and developing diverse teams. (Waheed & Zaim, 2015), Troth & Gyetvey, 2014, Rhodes and Brundrett, 2012, Ready & Conger, 2007, Silzer et. al, 2010, Holcombe et. al, 2021).

Organisations often have standard processes for identifying talent and these range from formal, structured processes to informal and relaxed (Silzer & Church 2010). Waheed and Zaim (2015) pooled employees into groups labelled: Rising Stars, Stars, Iceberg and Backbone. The Star segment is the talent pool where future leaders or competent employees were placed based upon high performance and qualification. Maleab and Chanaron (2010) found current performance and future potential to be a strong predictor of leadership potential.

Effective leadership is the key to school improvement but many schools fail to manage their talent effectively (Tomsett & Utterly, 2020). This is an area which requires further research. There is an opportunity to assess the impact that a range of developmental activities have upon future leaders' progression within schools (Silzer & Church, 2010).

Study Design

The aim of this study was to explore what impact a talent management model would have upon supporting a selected sample of secondary school teachers in developing their leadership potential. Founded in 2014, Holyport College has been on a journey of rapid growth. As the school has reached capacity, staff turnover has been very low. However, given recruitment challenges and competition within the public sector (Tomsett & Utterly, 2020), a more strategic approach to talent management will enable leaders to identify talented staff and provide them with a

leadership pathway to develop this (Rhodes and Brundrett, 2012). This is not only more cost effective but will reduce staff turnover, encouraging growth from within the organisation and future proofing important leadership positions. The following three core objectives were set as the principle guides for the study:

1. Initiate a talent management model to develop an understanding of what talent exists within the teachers employed at the school.

2. Implement a range of development activities which are focused upon growing future leaders.

3. Assess what impact the range of development activities had on employee's knowledge, behaviour, skills and aspirations.

A mixed-methods approach was used to generate both qualitative and quantitative data equally. An initial audit of the teachers was carried out in order to identify the talent within the school. Waheed and Zaim (2015) found that their talent management model was an effective system to identify talent when assessing performance and qualifications. The research (Silzer & Church 2010, Ohunakin, F. et al. 2020, Fashho Musallam, N. & Samara, E. 2021) also makes clear links between predicting leadership potential by assessing an employee's knowledge, behaviours and skills. For the purpose of this study an adapted range of statements were used to assess teacher talent, using a 5 point Likert scale (Johns, 2010). All teachers were asked to record their perceived level of knowledge, skills, behaviours and leadership aspirations. Data from the audit was used to construct a performance-potential matrix (Figure 1). The high and low measures were calculated based upon a mean score for each data set. To avoid bias the figures were calculated after the audit had been completed.
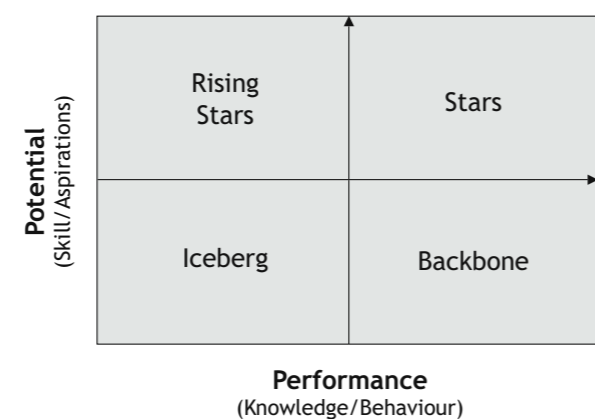

Figure 1, Adapted performance-potential matrix (Waheed & Zaim, 2015, 1208)

Silzer and Church (2010) found that the size of high-potential groups typically fell between 5% and 20% of the overall salaried employee population. For this study the sample group was made up of approximately 5-10 rising star and star teachers. They formed the focus for this study and experienced development activities (DA) within a leadership pathway to accelerate their potential (Silzer and Church, 2010). These activities were similar in design but tailored to suit the various areas of leadership, for example academic or pastoral. The leadership pathway consisted of externally provided training, coaching and special work assignments related to their role. Following a DA each member of the sample group was asked to complete a reflective survey. Findings from these determined the impact of the DAs on their leadership development. A final audit allowed a direct comparison with the audit completed at the start of the study where patterns and correlations between the data were explored. This was followed by one-to-one interviews where teachers were asked to discuss their experiences which enabled a descriptive analysis when assessing the impact of the different activities.

What were the key learnings for us?

The exclusive TM approach adopted within this study had a significant impact upon the motivation, satisfaction and confidence of all participants.

• Removing lengthy written applications and stressful interview processes commonly associated with the inclusive approaches to talent management may remove the barriers of gender, ethnicity, race, age and disability to advancement and success in leadership positions.

• By combining human resource management with performance management processes, it may be possible for the school to offer every teacher an individualised, self-selected or exclusive career professional development opportunity, which is more likely to help retain talented staff.

• Leaders may need to utilise the talent they have within the organisation and design training that is delivered internally. This will have the additional benefits of being cheaper to run, specifically focused upon the school's needs, and opportunities are created for future leaders to share their knowledge.

• There is a delicate balance to strike between online training and ensuring it allows developing leaders the opportunities for interaction, discussion and reflection which is so vital for this type of training.

• Whilst outsourcing training brought expertise, aspirant leaders still needed support, validation and opportunities to share their new learning with leaders or mentors within the school.

• By making this a priority, talents will not only be supported through various external resources but will also be fully endorsed by the organisational culture and values.

• Prioritising a talented employee's time to facilitate knowledge transfer activities such as leadership workshops, networking activities or dedicated leadership discussion groups would enable talented employees to contextualise and apply their knowledge to their role and setting.

• Leadership development is significantly improved when like-minded professionals come together and share experiences, engaging in reflective collaborative activities in a process of continuous learning, recognising that leadership development is a group process.

• Successful mentoring ensured aspirant leaders felt supported, and relationships were built upon trust and openness. This also provided satisfaction and career development as well personal and emotional support.

• Strong emotions of feeling valued, appreciated, invested in or being rewarded are all achieved when colleagues are recognised and invited onto training courses. This generates commitment and loyalty which increases an intention to stay within an organisation.

• Having a talent manager, or someone who takes ownership of the pathway, may be a more effective way of managing and supporting multiple leaders through various training courses which is hard to track.

Recommendations

The following recommendations could be used to inform the planning, creation and implementation of a whole school career professional development strategy at the school.

1. Ownership and responsibility

The school could look to employ a talent manager who works in collaboration with the leader responsible for career professional development across the school. They would be responsible for supporting and sustaining the implementation and organisation of talent management across the school.

2. Integrated talent management

Integrate performance management processes alongside a talent management model to triage talent of all staff. Make the development of everyone a priority, including and supporting them in the process of selecting their own career development decisions.

3. Learning pathways

Leadership development focusing upon a small percentage of staff and a wider variety of training pathways may ensure employees have a clear understanding of their progression within the organisation which could drive commitment and loyalty.

4. Relationships matter

Careful consideration should be given to the compatibility of the people involved in mentoring as this relationship is vital to the successful development of talented employees. Senior leaders should also ensure that they commit their time, energy and interest in the progression of employees as this validates their commitment to the school. Learning communities could also be promoted, as they provide employees opportunities to share, support and reflect upon their learning and progress with like-minded peers.

5. Protect time

Senior leaders should do all they can to protect time within timetables to ensure employees have enough of it to carry out development activities involved within training courses. By doing this, a senior leader would send a clear message to employees that the development of their staff is a priority and time will be allocated to ensure they get the most of their training.

6. Listen to feedback

Leaders should take regular feedback from employees to assess their experiences of training programmes, the schools support of them and quality of the programme. This will enable the organisation to ensure they are meeting the needs of a workforce who are increasingly hard to recruit and retain.

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AUTOMATING LEARNING WALK RECORDS

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Motivation

At Holyport College we have put in place a collegiate approach to staff development in the sphere of teaching and learning. Although INSET provided by external providers and those within the organisation with specialist knowledge play a key part in the improvement of a teacher's ability to deliver high quality lessons, we believe there is also a wealth of knowledge and experience within any staff room that can be exploited to the benefit of the organisation as a whole. The collegiate approach that Holyport College espouses aims to harness the experience of those with long teaching careers, the insights that come from teachers that have recently arrived from other educational institutions, and the 'up-to-date' training that those just starting their careers have received during their PGCE (or equivalent) qualifications.

Method

Holyport College bases its Teaching and Learning Strategy around 7 icons each of which represents one of the key aspects of outstanding classroom practice: independence, questioning, feedback, creativity, collaboration, scaffolding, and reading. These icons are widely used in the college and feature heavily in both lesson planning and the Learning Walks that regularly take place. These Learning Walks are non-judgemental and provide a record of what has been seen and give the 'observer' a chance to give feedback to the member of staff delivering the lesson. The learning walks are not exclusively 'top-down'; peer-to-peer learning walks are recommended (they are mandated for those in ECT programmes). In recent years Holyport College has begun to use Sherrington and Caviglioli's WalkThrus to further develop the teaching and learning capabilities of the teaching staff. During INSET days staff have been grouped according to the areas they particularly wish to focus on in order to plan and discuss how these might be implemented in their classrooms. Learning Walks then play an important role within those groups, serving to give staff opportunities to observe various strategies in action and to give feedback to others within the group.

Digital automation of learning walk feedback

Given that Learning Walks play such a vital role in the collegiate approach to staff development at Holyport College it was essential that the outcomes of these Learning Walks were recorded and fed back to the relevant staff. A record of the frequency and focus of these visits was also essential if the senior leadership were to have any idea of how well this strategy was working within the staff body. A system was therefore designed that would provide data to all of the stakeholders whilst being as straightforward for the users as possible.

Data about Learning Walks is collected via an online form which asks for some basic information regarding the staff involved and the date/time/class and then gives staff the opportunity to record what they have seen by ticking boxes associated with the icons described above. The form then gives the observer the opportunity to give written or verbal feedback on what they have seen of each of the icons. This includes the opportunity for positive feedback (WWW) and suggestions for how practice could be improved (EBI).

When this form is submitted the data is converted into a document and is emailed to both the member of staff on the Learning Walk and to the one who has been visited. A copy of this document is also retained in a shared folder. Because the data from the Learning Walk initially comes in spreadsheet form, a dashboard was built for the senior leadership team to give them visibility of how many learning walks are taking place, how long they last, who is carrying them out and, which of the icons have been observed the most often during lessons at the College.

THE BENEFITS

Culture of collegiate development

At Holyport College we have become a school where members of staff are encouraged to regularly 'pop-in' to the lessons of others and to give feedback on what they see. Staff know that when this happens they are not being judged, instead they are contributing to the development of the practice of one of their colleagues. In return they will receive feedback that will help them to develop theirs. Where a visit has been arranged staff often plan lessons more carefully than normal or experiment with techniques that are outside of their everyday practice. This then helps them to develop their practice and provides them with lessons and techniques that can be reused or replicated going forward. This collaborative culture encourages all staff to become better teachers and to develop and learn together.

Data

The fact that this is an automated process allows information from Learning Walks to be quantified, analysed and acted upon. It is more usual for this kind of strategy to happen informally and without any central record of what has occurred and this, although providing great benefit to the individuals involved, does not benefit the whole. Since this automated system has been implemented at the College over 320 Learning Walks have been recorded comprising over 4,500 minutes. Because the dashboard offers a breakdown of which icons (see above) have been seen most regularly the Head Master has been able to set weekly and termly priorities for the teaching staff based on data from Learning Walks. It has also been possible to analyse the 'icon profile' of different subjects and year groups enabling Heads of Department to work with their teams to ensure students receive a rounded learning experience.

Data from Learning Walks also serves to inform the SLT of those staff who are seen teaching regularly and those who are rarely visited. Ensuring that all staff are visited periodically ensures that everyone receives feedback on their teaching practice and also provides a layer of quality assurance for the Teaching and Learning that goes on in the College.

The Next Steps

We would like to take steps to determine the impact that this collegiate approach to staff development is having on the practice of individual teachers and on the teaching and learning within the college as a whole. One proposal involves looking more deeply into the quality of the written feedback being given as well as its quantity. Auditing this feedback and rating its quality is not likely to be something that can be automated. In addition to this it may be possible to ask individual members of staff what impact this process has had by inserting a question into the College's appraisal documentation. Asking 'what changes have you made to your teaching practice as a result of the feedback you have received in the past year?' ensures staff revisit and reflect on their feedback as well as informing Heads of Department of the development of their teams.

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PEDAGOGY OF THE COLLECTIVE SELF: THE EFFECT OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING

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Competition and individualism dominated traditional and transmissive classroom pedagogies until the mid-20th century. These styles were (and in some cases still are) prevalent among all age groups, from elementary to tertiary levels (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). Contrary to competition and individualism, cooperation is relatively modern and stimulative. Elements of cooperation are evident in the Socratic Method (c. 470 B.C.) which famously engaged others in conversations with the aim of broadening ideas (Delic and Bećirović, 2016). However, cooperative learning (CL) was not formally used as a pedagogy in formal educational settings until the mid-1960s.

Kurt Koffka, proposed that "groups were dynamic wholes in which the interdependence among members' goals could vary" (Johnson & Johnson, 2011, p. 44). Kurt Lewin, basing his theory on Koffka's notion, emphasised that tension arises to achieve desired goals which motivates individual behaviour. Morton Deutsch built upon these philosophies and theorised the social interdependence theory which suggests that the accomplishment of each individual's goals is affected by the actions of others (Johnson & Johnson, 2018).

Social interdependence branches into three – positive, negative and no interdependence. Positive interdependence is when group members can achieve their goals only if each individual of the team achieves their own goals as well. This results in cooperation as opposed to negative interdependence and no interdependence which result in competition and individualism, respectively (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). Therefore, a classroom that employs CL as its primary pedagogy will not only teach students to depend on each other but also ensure collective success, which is accomplished when all learners succeed. Whilst this may seem problematic on an individual-level, it inevitably creates an inclusive environment and ensures no learner is left behind.

Cooperative Learning Strategies

As a teacher of English, I am mindful of the skills and values students learn from the content/texts they read. Critical thinking, creativity and empathy are just a few of them. Pedagogical practices are as crucial to teaching language and literature as texts are, especially in secondary school – a stage in which adolescent learners often develop their ideas and perspectives more critically. In addition to subject knowledge, the method should allow learners to negotiate meaning with their peers, develop different perspectives and resolve conflict. Among the many pedagogical practices that can be employed, CL is perhaps the most suitable pedagogy that would engage learners with the text/content and each other. CL includes strategies such as literature circles, networking, and think-pair-share.

1. Literature Circles

Literature circles have become a prominent practice in language and literature teaching. Shelton-Strong (2012) identifies this learner-led activity to encourage learner autonomy. Most discussion topics come from learners and meetings tend to be open spaces for natural conversation. However, the teacher plays an active role in this pedagogy as they evaluate the activity as much as learners self-evaluate their engagements. Literature circles also enhance language learning, build self-confidence and create enthusiasm for reading. This is particularly helpful to instil a love for the subject in learners before they reach GCSE classes. Unfortunately, time constraints in exam-level classes often stifle natural conversation.

2. Networking

Li (2017) identifies networking as a successful CL practice to teach literature. After successfully grouping students with peers they haven't worked with previously, she observed over a semester how networking among group members increased learners' interest in the subject and instilled important skills and values. For instance, not reading the prescribed text for study stood at 41.11% before intervention. It dropped to 5.11% after networking was introduced. Likewise, lack of discussion and engagement regarding the text with peers that stood at 56.16% dropped to 6.16%. Li (2017) identified a rise in interest for the subject as a result of grouping learners and encouraging them to work together to read and discuss texts. However, it is essential to group learners according to strength and ability. Similar to Literature Circles, teacher intervention is essential for networking to be successfully implemented and to ensure every learner plays an active role.

3. Think-Pair-Share

As illustrated by the above methods, an important element of CL is the ability to think reflectively and engage in discussion with peers regarding the topic at hand. Think-pair-share reflects on a question/text and allows learners to think both independently and collectively about it to develop a deeper understanding of the concept. Outcomes of using this strategy are automatic correction, clarity and rise in learners' confidence (Ugwu, 2019). When using this method, I employ big paper activities (tables, diagrams, etc. printed on A3 paper) to link learners' collaborative thoughts before sharing them with the rest of the class. This not only helps retain their learning, but provides a sense of importance and permanence to collective thoughts and ideas.

These methods depend on dialogic inquiry which inculcates a probing and investigative attitude. It challenges habitual thinking and enhances individual development – positioning discussion-led lessons as stimulative (Ingerslev, 2018). In conversation and inquiry, "the 'truth' of the text is… inevitably negotiated rather than 'given'" and will help learners to "build confidence and skill in developing an interpretation of their own which is based on sound analysis" (Gill & Illesca, 2011, 23). Learners are empowered through dialogic inquiry, and their views are enlarged through encouragement to question. By responding to peer and teacher questions, and engaging with different perspectives, learners receive a wider understanding of life beyond the classroom.

Why Bother?

CL is an inclusive pedagogical practice. As a result of cooperation and the goal to achieve success collectively (over short or long periods of time), learner differences such as ethnicity and ability are disregarded and/or ignored in close encounters with peers. Social values such as improved mixed-race relations and empathy are enhanced by cooperation (Arato, 2013). Moreover, due to collaboration, personal accountability, conflict resolution, effective sharing of resources and information (promotive interaction), and periodic reflection on collective progress known as group processing also improve (Johnson & Johnson, 2011).

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) identifies one's values as guiding principles in decision making in both private and public lives. Moreover, the above-mentioned skills and values are considered essential in work environments and will be even more so in the near future (OECD, 2019). Johnson and Johnson (2014) identify skills enhanced through cooperation useful in addressing 21st century challenges such as the increase of global interdependence, the increase of democracies, the need for creative entrepreneurs and the importance of interpersonal skills. Hence, teaching such values at a young age will help develop and equip future generations.

These vital skills and values can be enhanced in the classroom through CL, which will help convert classrooms into microcosms of democracy. "A democracy is, after all, first and foremost a cooperative system in which citizens work together to reach mutual goals and determine their future" (Johnson & Johnson, 2014, p. 847). Therefore, by learning in cooperation, adolescents will not only develop skills needed for future work environments, but will enhance values necessary for life and community.

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IMPLEMENTING A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO TIER 2 VOCABULARY IN THE CLASSROOM

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Understanding tiered vocabulary

As Visser puts it 'reading well is at the heart of academic success' and this philosophy paired with the intrinsic value of reading in shaping inquisitive and creative minds led to both a desire and a need to develop reading and comprehension at Holyport College. Further discussions and research led to the tiered vocabulary approach as a means to improve comprehension; after all, 'the relationship between vocabulary learning and reading comprehension is a reciprocal one' (Reynolds, EEF 2022). Tiered vocabulary (coined by Beck, McKeown and Kucan in 2002) categorises words into three sub-tiers: tier 1 is comprised of high frequency words that typically form one's spoken language; tier 2 includes words that are common in the written form and therefore most likely to be acquired via reading; and finally, tier 3 refers to subject specific terminology.

Whilst tier 3 vocabulary is typically foregrounded in the implementation of a curriculum, it is often assumed that tier 2, which is instrumental to one's ability to fully engage with and comprehend an academically rigorous curriculum, is already cemented in a student's understanding.

The paradox remains: students are exposed to increasingly academic ideas, concepts and vocabulary (tier 3), and yet are reading less, resulting in a tier 2 deficit. Although significant efforts are made to engender a love of reading through incentives such as the Headmaster's Book Club, the Reading Aloud Curriculum in form time and the publication of wider reading lists, far greater time is spent reading in lessons, thus affirming the importance of developing a whole school approach to tier 2 vocabulary.

The vision

At Holyport College, we recognised the impact that high quality vocabulary instruction and a sustained focus on tier 2 vocabulary could have on our students' understanding and by extension their attainment given that there is a 'significant correlation between reading ability and GCSE grades across all subjects' (GL Assessment, 2020). At a professional development session in January, the three key principles that would underpin the successful implementation of the vocabulary project were introduced:

• To continue with frequent exposure to high quality, authentic and academic texts

• To identify and explicitly teach tier 2 vocabulary, and support students in deciphering the denotation of a word in the context of a subject and/or text

• To model how new vocabulary can be used effectively both verbally (oracy) and in writing (craftsmanship)

Practical strategies

It is also worth considering the extent to which students can truly access and comprehend the content and wider reading material in our respective curriculums. E. D. Hirsch maintains that one needs to be familiar with 95% of the words in a text to fully comprehend it. Furthermore, Didau asserts that this 'leads inexorably to the Matthew Effect: the greater your vocabulary the easier you'll find it to read and the more vocabulary you'll acquire'. With this in mind, it is important to explore what practical measures could be taken to increase student vocabulary in the classroom at a time where they are arguably reading less. Significantly, it is estimated that up to 20 interactions with new vocabulary are required before a struggling reader can convert a word to long-term memory, highlighting the importance of increased exposure to tier 2 and its important role in activating and consolidating tier 3 vocabulary.

Here are some practical strategies we adopted to support students, including struggling readers, so that all can immerse themselves in what our curriculum has to offer:

• The Frayer Model (1969), a framework that seeks to clarify the meaning and key characteristics of a word by comparing it to non-examples, was adapted to focus more heavily on tier 2 words, thus building comprehension with the potential to modify this for wider threshold concepts

• Pre-teaching tier 2 vocabulary to develop reading comprehension and increase exposure; ChatGPT would be of benefit here as it can identify key vocabulary in an extract/text and provide definitions

• Building on prior knowledge and modelling how to use the prefix, suffix or root word to decode meaning (morphology); for instance, the prefix 'mono' and its associated meaning of one would aid students' comprehension of the terms 'monosyllabic' or 'monologue'

Assessing students' understanding of Tier 2 vocabulary

In preparation for summative assessments in English, the tier 2 vocabulary that is identified at the beginning of a unit is formatively assessed via a multiple choice quiz.

Assessing tier 2 vocabulary in this way allows for immediate feedback for both the teacher and student, giving learners the correct answer in the event of an error; all data is collected centrally so that future lessons and schemes of learning can be modified. This strategy was particularly advantageous with Year 8 whereby 62% of students could not define the tier 2 word 'reconciliation'. The self-marking nature allows for timely feedback in guiding students to consider how the term reconciliation can be applied to the set text *Much Ado About Nothing* before modelling how one might use the term to formulate a thesis. Notably, some students used this term in their examined responses suggesting that once tier 2 vocabulary has been understood, it can be applied in a similar context.

Comparatively, the Geography department assessed students' understanding of tier 2 vocabulary by sharing up to 10 keywords and definitions as revision before asking students to define five of these in the examination. Whilst assessing in this way adds to the marking load, it does offer a unique insight into whether students can define tier 2 words in the context of a subject in their own words; 50% of year 9 students were able to define three or more tier 2 words in their Geography examination at Easter. Perhaps, there is scope to better facilitate students' revision of vocabulary in subsequent examinations and to continue the conversation on how best to embed the key principles and practical strategies more effectively into the curriculum and assessment framework.

Conclusion

As Webb (2022) rightfully declares, 'reading begets vocabulary begets oracy begets writing begets reading'. Ultimately, the journey to implement tiered vocabulary in the classroom is about establishing a language-rich environment in which students can access the curriculum, express themselves with clarity and eloquence, and amongst the joy of reading become life-long readers. Reading is undeniably its own gift – one made sweeter by the academic success that accompanies it.

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RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: AN ACTION-RESEARCH INVESTIGATION INTO THE CONSTRUCTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A PRACTITIONER-DESIGNED ENGAGEMENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

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Modern education relies on a range of digital tools and technologies, one of the most popular being the Learning Management System (LMS) (Selwyn, 2016). These systems can be highly costly pieces of technology for educational institutions to adopt and implement, and are often designed and produced by independent companies before being made accessible to learning institutions via a subscription model (Al-Nuaimi and Al-Emran, 2021). LMSs, though variable in their design, centre around similar functionalities. They act as repositories of multi-modal educational media, as portals for the submission of assessments and the tracking of student data, and can harbour collaborative features in the form of forums and bulletin boards (Selwyn, 2016). Since the conception of the traditional LMS, designers have synthesised a range of sub-types, one being the Engagement Management System (EMS), which has become increasingly prevalent in recent literature (something which is outside the scope of this piece).

An EMS has most of the same features as an LMS, though it goes a step further by seeking to improve the engagement students have with their studies by incorporating elements of gamification into its course design. Gamification has become something of a buzz-word in the literature, a catch-all term for any feature, mechanic or design choice that could have been borrowed from a gaming setting (Dicheva et al, 2015). Examples of such elements might include:

- Points, Badges, Leaderboards (often referred to as PBL in the literature, not to be confused with Problem Based Learning!)
- Narrative – the use of realistic or unrealistic story and plot points to drive a course forwards.
- Aesthetic – whereby an EMS can be stylistically designed around popular themes to promote engagement (for example, fantasy or science-fiction).

Research Design

In line with much of the literature on Engagement Management Systems and gamification in education, this was a multimodal investigation which generated both quantitative and qualitative data (Kalogiannakis et al, 2021; Manzano-Leon et al, 2021; Swacha 2021). As this investigation seeks to understand how several elements of gamification can tie together to comprise a coherent engagement management system, this investigation used an action research methodology. Details of the research process are outlined in the infographic below.

Overview of the structure of the research project.

As this is an action research investigation, findings from the analysis stage would be fed back into a second design stage to improve the EMS and restart the cycle of research.

Findings

This project set out to answer two distinct questions. Is it feasible for teachers to design their own engagement management systems? And, when implemented, do those systems improve outcomes for students?

In answer to the first question, this project showed that it is possible for teachers to design their own engagement management systems rather than having to use those offered by third parties and ed-tech designers. It was advantageous that it was possible to design an EMS within the digital ecosystem my school uses. Students were already familiar with using OneNote, therefore they already knew how to navigate the program and did not need to spend as long developing a familiarity with a new EMS. Having creative freedom over the aesthetic, architecture and the narrative was beneficial too, both from the perspective of reflecting on my own practice and what I wanted to achieve, as well as for being able to develop a system I could encourage students to buy into as it complemented my teaching style. To have employed a third-party system, as well as having the barrier of cost, would have also imposed creative limitations that might have diminished investment and engagement from both the students and the teacher involved.

The second line of enquiry was more difficult to measure, as positive outcomes for students can be defined in many ways, hence the use of a mixed-methods approach to thoroughly investigate what the participants gained from the system. In a purely quantitative context, there appeared to be no significant improvement in academic attainment, and no loss of progress either. If an EMS was designed purely to improve grades, this endeavour would seem as useful as any traditional approach to teaching.

However, the focus groups highlighted a range of improved outcomes that are typically tougher to capture. These ranged from improved organisation and better engagement owing to the aesthetic, through to less academic stress and potential improvements in student mental health. This is quite encouraging as it frames EMSs as being more holistically beneficial for students as they progress through an educational course, rather than measuring success as the grade achieved at the end of the course.

While I am happy to conclude that EMSs can feasibly be designed by practising teachers, and they can improve a range of outcomes for students, this investigation raised many avenues for future enquiry. Perhaps the most significant was how best to employ narrative as a gamified element within an EMS. The participants overwhelmingly reported that an obvious narrative, and one they could be a part of, would have engaged them more thoroughly. Some even worried that a narrative could be so compelling that it might tip the scales and remove the focus from academic attainment.

In keeping with the action-research methodology that informed this investigation, the next step for further research would be to incorporate the feedback from participants and the reflections from the reflexive journal into an updated, second draft of the EMS ready to be used by a future cohort. The cyclical nature of action-research would allow the system to be refined in such a way that it may yet be possible to see measurable improvements in academic attainment, or new and unexpected improvements to student outcomes which are trickier to observe and measure. Given the space to do so, it would also be interesting to see if, through the redrafting process, it was possible to develop a framework of best-practice for teachers who are intent on designing and implementing their own EMSs in their practice.

IS IT FEASIBLE FOR TEACHERS TO DESIGN THEIR OWN ENGAGEMENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS?

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PRIORITISING PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIP IN A TAILORED APPROACH TO THE EARLY CAREER TEACHER PROGRAMME AT HOLYPORT COLLEGE

Amy Aston | *Head of MFL & Lead Practitioner (ITTCo), Holyport College (with the ECT perspective from*
Francesca Marshall-Stochmal | *Teacher of Biology, Holyport College)*

Introduction

In 2021, The Department for Education (DfE) rolled out changes to statutory teacher induction across England. The NQT programme changed from a one-year programme to a two-year ECT programme, in order to give new teachers more support and help to improve teacher recruitment and retention and teacher development opportunities. The "Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy; Supporting teachers to make a difference" which accompanied the changes highlighted that "Not enough early career teachers receive the high quality support they need to build the foundation for a successful career." (DfE, 2019). This led to the development and introduction of the new Early Career Framework (DfE 2019), which aims to address the following four barriers:

- "The wider context in which headteachers operate can create pressure that leads to excessive workload that distracts teachers from teaching
- Not enough early career teachers receive the high quality support they need to build the foundation for a successful career
- A career in teaching does not always adapt to the expertise and lives of teachers
- The process to become a teacher is too complicated and burdensome" (DfE 2019)

Approach

Underpinned by the Early Careers Framework (DfE 2019), which focuses upon the 5 key areas of behaviour management, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, and professional behaviours, the new ECT programme outlines three different approaches which a school can use to deliver the programme (DfE 2022):

- A funded provider led programme (all resources provided and training sessions run by externals)
- Schools deliver their own training using DfE accredited materials
- Schools design and deliver their own 2 year induction programme based on the Early Careers Framework

At Holyport College, the Assistant Head in charge of Teaching and Learning and the Lead Practitioner (ITTCo) reviewed the three options and chose the first option, a funded provider-led programme. However, it rapidly became apparent that the material was too generic and not relevant enough to the context of Holyport College. As a result, we decided to change from using a funded provider-led programme to delivering our own training using DfE accredited materials. Improving the Early Careers Teacher (ECT) programme at Holyport College also became the key focus for the Lead Practitioner's NPQLTD (National Professional Qualification for Leading Teacher Development) implementation programme. The move allowed the college to be more specific in its delivery, for example, one of the topics in module 1 is 'supporting the most vulnerable children' – in our ECT training session we discussed what this looks like in Holyport College, focusing on specific groups of our students such as students with additional needs and Care Experienced Children and how we support them as a College. This move additionally allowed for a more targeted approach to accommodate the varying backgrounds and training experience of those on the ECT programme. In the first year of delivery, Holyport College had 5 ECTs - all ranging in experience and training, some primarily online, some in person. With pupils at the forefront, it was important to ensure that all ECTs were delivering high-quality teaching to our students focusing on growth mindset [Dweck] and other teaching approaches such as the Pygmalion effect [Rosenshal et al].

Another key way the programme was adapted at Holyport College was to include a series of SLT delivered training sessions. As a trial, in Year 1, members of the Senior Leadership Team were selected to deliver a specific ECT session, based on their individual expertise. Feedback from the ECTs was that these were very effective. As this was a trial, the focus was on a small group of staff first of all, after which delivery and implementation could be extended to a much larger group of leaders. Ahead of the second year of implementation, the plan was explained to all SLT and Middle Leaders. This outlined the thinking behind the ECT sessions, how the trial sessions had gone, and the positive feedback from the ECTs. Leaders were then asked to choose one session that they would deliver, and it was reinforced how valuable this would be for the ECTs. Receiving specific training from a number of experienced teachers not only provided the ECTs with access to a wider range of professionals within the organisation, but also introduced them to a variety of teaching methods and approaches. One of the clear focuses throughout the Lead Practitioner's NPQLTD surrounded implementation and staff-buy in, so to help with this and reduce the workload of those delivering training, the UCL accredited materials were sent to all leaders as a starting point so they did not have to make their resources from scratch. Many did however choose to develop these further and make them bespoke to Holyport College.

Developing a more bespoke and personalised approach to the ECT programme, also allows for the training objectives to be integrally linked to the college's overall development plan and its specific approach to all staff CPD. In Holyport's case, this allowed for a shared annual focus between the ECTs (Year 1 and 2) on a specific topic from the WalkThrus books (Caviglioli and Sherrington), which were being followed as a collaborative professional development programme for the College. A supportive professional environment is vital when designing professional development and should include the following: order and discipline, peer collaboration, principal leadership, school culture and teacher evaluation (Podolsky, 2016, & Kraft & Papay, 2014). It is imperative that the ECT programme should fit within this environment not as a stand-alone feature outside of it.

ECT Perspective

"As someone who completed their teacher training during the height of the pandemic, I very much welcomed the introduction of the 2 – year ECT programme. While I feel fortunate with the experiences and support I had during my training year, I am aware that not all trainees' experiences are the same and therefore the additional year with a dedicated mentor will be even more beneficial. I have learnt throughout the first few years of my teaching career that this is a profession where you are constantly faced with new challenges. Knowing that you have a mentor to go to on a weekly basis provides a level of support which is fundamental for a teacher when they are first finding their feet in a classroom of their own.

I must admit, I was not looking forward to the compulsory weekly training sessions provided as part of the ECT programme, as they initially seemed to be very similar to the weekly professional development sessions we had just completed in our teacher training year. Additionally, it seemed very time consuming to attend in person sessions, outside of our work place, and on top of an increasing workload and responsibilities. Therefore, I was excited that our customised Holyport ECT programme allowed us to follow the new ECF-based training, with the flexibility of these sessions being held on site and within our working hours. I do, however, believe that collaboration is vitally important and perhaps to further support our programme, it could be beneficial to meet on a termly basis with other ECTs in the catchment area for an in-person session.

As a whole, the ECF-based training has allowed me the opportunity to develop the skills I learnt in my training year, while continuing to learn new strategies for my practice. The various components involved in the programme have ensured that I am reflective on my practice and remain open to new ideas shared by others. I feel I have significantly benefited from the programme, and in particular, our tailored programme that has adapted the sessions to be interactive and relatable to us and our professional experience.

Next Steps / Conclusion

Entering our third year of the ECT implementation, we are happy with the changes we made in Year 2 which were driven by a values-led bespoke approach and the concepts surrounding self-determination theory [Ryan & Deci]. With a focus on improving ECT competence, autonomy and relatedness, the graduating ECTs have found their intrinsic motivation has increased which has been proven to improve teacher retention and development.

Moving forwards, our priorities will focus on:

• Reviewing the impact of our bespoke approach

• Formalising the programme delivery to ensure that the training is underpinned by the core Holyport College ethos and values

• Formalising the involvement of middle and senior leaders in developing the ECT programme

• Increasing interactions with other external ECTs

• Developing a retention focused programme for ECTs going into their third year, including providing lesson plans and materials and continued mentoring from more experienced teachers, to retain the young talent recruited

• Providing opportunities for ECT 3s to become experts in a particular field

In conclusion, whilst with good intentions the ECF was introduced to increase recruitment and retention, leaders have to be mindful of the impact this new programme has on the workload and mental health of all involved. Holyport College are proud of the way the programme has prioritised placing people and relationships above the onerous prescribed learning content of the initial framework.

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THE APPLICATION OF COGNITIVE SCIENCE STRATEGIES TO A DEPARTMENTAL CURRICULUM REVIEW AT HOLYPORT COLLEGE: SOME REFLECTIONS

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Cognitive science is the interdisciplinary study of mind and intelligence, integrating expertise from diverse academic fields which include, but are not limited to, philosophy, psychology, artificial intelligence, neuroscience, linguistics, and anthropology. As educators, one of the most important questions we regularly reflect upon is how pupils learn. If we have a full grasp of how pupils process and retain information, we can ensure that our approach to teaching takes cognisance of these with a view to ascertaining that learning objectives or goals are achieved. Unsurprisingly, cognitive science of learning not only features in teacher training programmes but also in teachers' CPD. One of the several publications I engaged with on my National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership (NPQSL) course with the University College London (UCL) is titled, *The Science of Learning*.

EDUCATORS SHOULD HELP PUPILS TO LEARN NEW IDEAS BY REFERENCE TO IDEAS THEY ALREADY KNOW.

The Science of Learning is a 10-page document (which comes highly recommended to all adults involved in teaching and learning in schools and colleges as well as parents and carers of children in schools and colleges. It begins by systematically taking the reader through how pupils learn new ideas or concepts. It maintains that educators should help pupils to learn new ideas by reference to ideas they already know. In other words, pupils should begin from the known to the unknown. The paper proceeds by exploring how pupils can grasp and retain a new body of knowledge by examining the psychological processes of how learners transfer information from working memory (where it is consciously processed) to long-term memory (where it can be stored and retrieved later). The authors further maintained that one of the best ways of learning new ideas or concepts is by applying newly learned concept(s) to real life problems. The practical application of the newly acquired body of knowledge not only helps to cement pupils' knowledge and understanding, it also reinforces the relevance of the subject in everyday life.

Further, the paper invites readers to reflect on two important questions. First, what motivates pupils to want to learn? Secondly, what are the common misconceptions about how pupils think and learn? Regarding the former, the authors maintained that 'self-determined motivation (a consequence of values or pure interest) leads to better long term outcomes than controlled motivation (a consequence of reward/ punishment or perceptions of self-worth).' (p. 7) For us as teachers, one of the challenges we face is how to make the most difficult and sometimes the most boring aspects of the curriculum both interesting and stimulating so that our pupils can be self-motivated to want to learn. Concerning the latter, the authors maintained as follows: 'students do not have different "learning styles";' 'humans do not use only 10% of their brains;' 'people are not preferentially "right-brained" or "left-brained" in the use of their brains;' 'novices and experts cannot think in all the same ways;' and 'cognitive development does not progress via a fixed progression of age-related stages.' (p. 8) Some readers may find the first claim about learning style somewhat controversial. During my teacher training, for example, the mantra was, different students have different "learning styles", as teachers you must adapt teaching and learning materials to suit the varied learning styles of your pupils. This claim is traditionally deployed to justify differentiated teaching and differentiated learning materials or resources.

Two of the claims made in the aforementioned article resonated with, and underpinned, two fundamental curriculum decisions made within the religious studies department at Holyport College. First, teachers should help pupils learn new ideas by reference to previous knowledge. In other words, educators should take pupils on a learning journey from the known to the unknown. Bransford, Brown and Cocking (2000) emphasised the need for educators to build on pupils' existing knowledge, maintaining that "all learning involves transfer from previous experiences." (p. 69) This, for example, has huge implications for delivering the OCR A-Level Religious Studies. The syllabus begins with Ancient Philosophical Influences, focusing on Plato and Aristotle, and features philosophical ideas that pupils have not previously encountered at KS3 and KS4. Clearly, the lack of existing knowledge does not mean that pupils cannot fully engage with new ideas. However, the transition from GCSE RS to A-Level RS via Plato and Aristotle as well as Soul, Mind and Body or The Metaphysics of Mind (a topic which fuses philosophy and psychology) meant that, from the onset, a number of pupils fail to make connections between the subject at these two levels. Resultantly, every year, a sizable number of pupils dropped the subject,

when reducing from 4 to 3 A-Levels. This academic year (2022/2023), however, the RS department chose not to follow the sequence of the A-Level as outlined in the syllabus and in prescribed textbooks. Instead, and in order to build on pupils' existing knowledge, we started with The Nature/Attributes of God (a topic they have fully engaged with at KS3 and KS4). Pupils recognised the massive leap from GCSE to A-Level and were fascinated by the various scholarly views. However, they thoroughly enjoyed it because new ideas were built on existing knowledge. Studying God's attributes made the pupils raise the age-old question: "if God is simultaneously omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent, why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?" My response was "that's the next topic." Seamlessly, we moved on to examine The Problem of Evil. They loved it! From there, we proceeded to study Religious Language and Religious Experience. At that stage (months into their Sixth Form studies), my Year 12 pupils were intellectually more prepared and matured to begin to engage with Plato and Aristotle, Metaphysics of Mind, etc. And, in contrast to previous years, only two students dropped the subject: a first since Holyport College opened its Sixth Form in 2017.

The second claim in the paper which underpinned fundamental curriculum decisions made within the religious studies department at Holyport College is that 'cognitive development does not progress via a fixed progression of age-related stages.'. There was a rethinking of the KS3 curriculum. This was modified and approved by the Board of Governors. Year 9 curriculum now features two strands/branches of philosophy (philosophy of religion and moral philosophy). This enables our Year 9 students to engage with the scholarly ideas of Aquinas, Paley, Socrates, Glaucon, Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Darwin, Dawkins, Bentham, Mill, Peter Singer, Fletcher, etc. Our Year 9 students loved it and did well in the assessments. This shows that Year 9 pupils can engage with scholarly ideas associated with these thinkers, if the contents are suitably adapted for their age, and they don't have to wait until Sixth Form before encountering ancient and modern philosophers for the first time. Besides, and for the first time since the College opened in 2014, over fifty Year 9 pupils chose Religious Studies as one of their GCSE options.

I WOULD LIKE TO CHALLENGE ALL PRACTITIONERS TO FAMILIARISE THEMSELVES WITH COGNITIVE SCIENCE OF LEARNING, AND AS A CONSEQUENCE, TO FIND WAYS TO IMPROVE THEIR CURRICULUM CONTENTS AND TEACHING PRACTICE.

The RS curriculum re-mapping at Holyport College resonates with Hailikari, et al. (2008) who – in consonance with the Science of Learning – not only recommended that 'students' prior knowledge should be taken into consideration in instructional design and curriculum planning, but also maintained that 'prior knowledge from previous courses significantly influenced student achievement.' It is hoped that this exposure to philosophers and philosophical ideas at an earlier point in our pupils' academic careers will provide them with a more solid foundation to build upon at KS4 and KS5, enabling them to not only learn new materials by reference to previous knowledge but also excel in their GCSE and A-Level RS.

As aforementioned, the article, *The Science of Learning,* drawing on cognitive science, provides an overview on how pupils learn and highlights practical implications for the classroom. It is an essential read for all education professionals, especially early career teachers (ECTs). In this commentary, I have only reflected on a couple of the outlined principles and how these could be deployed to inform curriculum review. However, I would like to challenge all practitioners to familiarise themselves with cognitive science of learning, and as a consequence, to find ways to improve their curriculum contents and teaching practice. Motivating educators to consider and improve their everyday teaching practice in schools can only serve to benefit pupils on the receiving end of best practice.

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