Research for Teachers

Leading learning effectively

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Learning leadership is not, of course, solely the province of school leaders. The learning and work of every pupil and teacher is influenced by (and influences) the work of school leaders. Indeed, a review published in 2009, *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why: Best Evidence Synthesis* (see further reading), found that leadership involvement in staff development was the single most important factor affecting student achievement.

Because of the current climate and considerable interest in how practitioners at all levels can be involved in the leadership of learning, we have, for the first time in this TLA research summary, experimented by adding implications for teachers in England as leaders of learning in the main body of the text. We would very much value your comments on this.

Approaches to the leadership of learning are particularly important, so in this month's summary we have tried to set out the broad research terrain and to focus in on detailed evidence about how school leaders set the climate for professionals' learning as a means of enhancing pupil learning. Our study, *Handbook of Instructional Leadership - How Successful Principals Promote Teaching and Learning*, (Blase, J., Corwin Press, 2004, 2nd edition), explores questions such as how can school leaders reduce isolation and encourage collaboration amongst teachers, in a way that will focus attention on learning and diffuse good models of professional practice through their schools? How can they get a positive response from fellow professionals to changes which may need to be made? Above all, what specific things can they do to lead shared learning effectively in their schools?

The researchers asked over 800 teachers from a range of schools across diverse regions of the United States about the characteristics of school principals which they believed had affected them professionally. They analysed the data to highlight positive and negative examples of leaders' behaviour and found evidence of ways in which successful instructional leaders:

- supported reflective practice
- used good mentoring techniques

- encouraged coaching and collegial investigation to deepen whole staff understanding of the learning process.

Although the study specifically investigated teacher responses to school principals, we think that all teachers and leaders of learning in schools - head teachers, deputies, subject co-ordinators, heads of departments, Advanced Skills Teachers and others - will find the results of the study helpful, particularly in the context of the increasing emphasis on distributed leadership in the UK. You may also wish to refer to a GTC commissioned study by Harris & Muijs (2004) on teacher leadership (see further reading).
In order to set these important and detailed, but perception-based findings in the context of a wider evidence base, this summary starts out with a summary of key points on the leadership of learning taken from a literature review on schools as learning organisations. This was chosen because it is systematic and comprehensive and it examines evidence about a range of factors affecting learning, including the role of school managers and the nature of pupil learning.

Cibulka, J., S. Coursey, M. Nakayama, J. Price and S. Stewart. *Schools as Learning Organisations: A Review of the Literature*. ERIC: 2000 (ref. no. ED 449139, published online on the Education Information resources Center (ERIC) website).

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Overview

Why is the issue important?

Effective leadership is a key area of interest for all those involved in, or aspiring to, leadership at subject, department, year, phase or whole school level. It is important that leaders understand how to focus colleagues' attention on learning, ensure a positive response to changes to teaching and diffuse good models of professional practice through their schools.

What did the research show?

For schools to become learning organisations, staff need to become learners too, and their learning is governed by the same principles as that of their students. Effective organisational learning requires sustained collaboration and shared values. Caring professional relationships are key ingredients in establishing a learning environment for all. Effective leadership characteristics were found to be: talking with teachers to promote reflection and promoting teachers' professional growth.

How was this achieved?

Leaders promoted reflection by talking with teachers, and paid attention to learning by visiting classrooms, and soliciting advice/opinions, praising, making suggestions, giving feedback and modelling. Leaders promoted professional growth through emphasising the study of teaching and learning, supporting collaboration, developing coaching relationships, implementing action research and using pupil learning data to inform decision making about teaching.

How was the research designed to be trustworthy?

The US researchers collected questionnaire data from over 800 teachers from primary and secondary schools in a range of geographical and socio-economic locations. The teachers came from a range of disciplines and had varied experience. A separate extensive literature review of over 300 studies explored schools as learning organisations more broadly.

What are the implications?

The research indicated the value of:

- encouraging staff to use and share information about pupil progress to inform their teaching plans
- creating opportunities for staff to work and learn collaboratively and enabling existing knowledge and new insights to be effectively shared amongst staff
- finding time to praise (offering explicit and detailed feedback about what is good) and offering individual teachers advice after listening to the teacher's own reflections
- ensuring more time is spent in meetings in considering learning than carrying out administrative tasks and conveying information.

What do the case studies illustrate?

The case studies show how:

- a member of the leadership team in one school, working with the support of administrative staff, made a range of pupil data more readily available to teaching staff
- middle leaders influence the quality of learning and teaching in classrooms
- a programme of mentoring support used by the leaders of a primary school in special measures helped staff improve teaching and learning
- one teacher managed to involve a growing number of colleagues in action research and the way in which leadership of practitioner research grew into a wider leadership role, and the benefits in terms of professional development and improved teaching and learning that resulted from the process
- teachers from several primary schools used peer observation as part of an action research project, and the benefits they derived as well as some of the obstacles they needed to overcome.

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Study

What did research say about the characteristics of learning organisations?

A wide-ranging literature review by Cibulka and colleagues reported on over 300 studies within different organisations, including schools, to review the current understanding of 'organisational learning' (see further reading). Perhaps the most striking finding of their review is that it indicates the limits of research in this area. Cibulka and colleagues discovered a wide variety of definitions of 'learning organisations' and of the nature of 'organisational learning'. They point to a need for additional research on:

- the nature of individual and group learning as two distinct processes
- the relationship between cognition and behaviour
- the relationship between knowledge and values or attitudes.

Relying on a common sense understanding of the terms, the review looked at what the existing research says about the capacity of schools and other organisations to learn. A small part of their extensive reflections on the literature examined how factors related to policy and leadership affected the process of learning in schools.

Schools as learning organisations

The researchers emphasised the importance of schools developing as learning organisations in order to respond to changes in society and in their pupils' experiences. They highlight too the ways in which teachers' ideas about learning, and therefore teaching, are changing. For example, they suggest that many educators now believe that everyone has an innate capacity to learn and that, in the past, this capacity has often been underestimated, especially amongst particular groups. Teachers' model of learning is shifting from one which focuses on the transmission of skills and knowledge, to one which assumes that learning is a cooperative process between staff and pupils.

Such commentaries on the changes in the landscape of learning imply, in the view of the research team, that in order for schools to improve the quality of learning in their organisations, they need to:

- pay attention to improved student learning, by using all available information about how students learn (see case study 2)
- promote life long, collaborative learning amongst the whole school community, parents and staff as well as students
- make sure that all leaders of learning engage in a continuing, reflective learning process
- create positive conditions for building and sustaining learning through good leadership
- create an ethic of caring amongst the organisation's members.

Like many generic research findings, their researches offer an abstract maybe even idealised picture of excellent practice. They do also, however, explore what the research has to say about how to get there.

How can schools transform themselves into learning organisations?

Learning about how to improve student learning

The researchers suggest that the traditional, didactic model of teaching and learning assumes that teachers are transmitters of knowledge and that skills progression is a linear process. The more recent research that they encountered in relation to teaching and learning is increasingly emphasising a more collaborative view of learning, where children build knowledge through participating actively through exchanges with teachers, other classroom professionals and their fellow students. The focus on content deepens to include a preoccupation with how students learn. In concrete terms, the researchers highlight the benefits of pupils working together and discussing their learning. When lessons were organised this way students understood more and gained responsibility for their learning.

The researchers also highlighted the ways in which learning was affected by individual differences in:

- culture
- gender
- life experiences
- learning styles
- a focus on standards of achievement
- methods of assessing student work.

This review concluded that learning organisations depend on and grow from many teachers being willing to change their teaching methods in response to pupils' needs. To do this, they note, the professional learning of teachers also needs to be collaborative and of a high quality.

Promoting collaborative, life-long learning for all

The study argues that teachers too are learners, whose development depends on the same principles of learning as those needed for their students. Their conclusion is that professional development plans need to be based, not on the concept of 'updating', but on the principle of continuous growth and change. The best professional development comprised collaboration and long-term enquiry with a focus on school goals and student learning. They identified that teachers needed to be expert learners themselves and to master and use a substantial body of knowledge and understanding, including:

- subject expertise
- deep understanding of the principles on which the discipline is based
- knowledge of appropriate methods of teaching and learning
- understanding of the effect of culture on learning
- understanding of children's cognitive development.

So the first step towards building a learning organisation, conclude the authors, is attending closely to the learning of adults. This interpretation of the evidence includes abandoning established but ineffective "one-shot" continuing professional development (CPD) practices and pursuing instead opportunities:

- for participatory learning; engaging with the purpose of the expertise to be learned
- that are relevant to the individual needs of the individual teacher

- school based activities that relate the needs of the teachers to the needs of the school
- a proper sequencing of knowledge acquisition - investigating why new practices are needed, looking at examples of new practices, learning more about these and being supported in trying them out in their own classrooms.

You may like to find out more about what such CPD looks like by exploring the RfT feature summarising on a recent systematic review into collaborative CPD.

How do better CPD processes link together to form a learning community?

Several studies found that the creation of a professional learning community worked best when it arose from a genuine joint effort to improve learning in the school. Attempts to impose such collaboration as an end in itself usually did not work. Some studies found that large collaborative groups were difficult to sustain but that several small collaborative networks within a school could work well over longer periods of time. Research into the effect of a professional, collaborative community on student learning is in its early stages. The Effective Professional Learning Communities (EPLC) project has developed a model to try to explain how such learning communities in schools are created and sustained and what makes them effective for pupil learning.

What role do school leaders need to play in building such a community?

Studies found that good leaders created positive working conditions and opportunities for learning at all levels in the school. Practitioners might wish to look at a case study examining how several schools have begun to put learning centred leadership into practice. Effective approaches to the creation of a professional learning community were school wide and involved:

- shared values and a sense of mission
- a common agenda of activities fostering interactions amongst staff
- effective collaboration sustained by a clear pattern of caring professional relationships.

The model of leadership uncovered by the research showed a shift in the way leadership was viewed. Instead of regarding leadership as an individual characteristic it was increasingly seen as a dynamic process involving several people. Particularly effective 'transformational leaders' stimulated:

- leadership behaviour skills in interpreting problems
- skills in developing goals collaboration
- anticipating constraints
- seeing obstacles as minor impediments
- a capacity to learn from and build on teachers' and other professionals' perceptions
- openness to new information
- skills in maintaining a smoothly functioning group
- a strongly reflective disposition oriented towards learning from experience.

In the following pages we unpack these leadership characteristics further to explore what you might look for and how it might help to interpret the work of leaders and indeed, to identify who they are, in your school. We do this by focusing in depth on an empirical study, by means of which researchers were able to identify the specific characteristics of highly regarded headteachers in a large sample of American schools.

What aspects of leaders' behaviour affect teachers' attitudes to teaching?

Blase and Blase identified two major themes from their investigation into effective leaders' behaviour: talking with teachers to promote reflection and promoting teachers' professional growth. (In the English context, readers may wish to consider how far these findings might also apply to dialogue with other professionals such as classroom assistants.)

Talking with teachers to promote reflection included:

- paying attention to learning by visiting classrooms
- using enquiry and soliciting advice/opinions
- praising
- making suggestions
- giving feedback
- modelling.

Promoting professional growth included:

- emphasising the study of teaching and learning
- supporting collaboration
- developing coaching relationships
- providing resources to support teacher growth, classroom teaching and student learning
- applying the principles of adult learning, growth and development to staff development programmes
- implementing action research and using pupil learning data to inform decision making about teaching.

The study found that effective leaders of learning used an approach that was conversational, enquiry-oriented, inclusive, and pedagogically sound (see Learning conversations section of this website). In the next sections we look at some of the detail of what this actually meant in practice.

What did leaders do to focus attention on learning?

Despite the pressure of administrative tasks, good leaders were seen as paying attention to and spending time on learning, thus demonstrating that it was important to them. Members of staff noticed what leaders did and where they focused time and attention.

The researchers found that leaders focused teachers' attention on learning in several ways. They:

- modelled learning in classrooms
- were active learners themselves
- focused attention on pupil learning in meetings
- spent more time on learning matters than on day to day administration.

One of the most important of the ways in which leaders were thought to demonstrate that learning was important to them was by visiting classrooms:

'The principal walks around the school, observing how teaching and learning are occurring. By this, we see concern for the students and for what we are doing.'

'My principal is a highly visible principal; he walks in and out of classrooms every day... He is there to see what's going on, but he is also putting himself out there to be called on for help or as a resource.'

Not visiting classrooms was interpreted as lack of interest in teachers, their teaching or their pupils and resulted in feelings of resentment, lower motivation and loss of focus on learning in the classroom:

'She doesn't come into the classroom enough. It makes you feel she doesn't care or have time for you....She comes to you only when asked and it makes you feel you are at the bottom of her list.'

'It makes me angry... I look to her as a leader and she is just not there. I lead myself."

Effective principals also maintained visibility and staff appreciation by visiting classrooms after school hours, patrolling corridors and playgrounds at lesson changes and during breaks and by taking time to attend special events and extra curricular activities and to thank staff for their efforts:

'She is at every concert.'

'Her feedback makes me think that I'm appreciated. I feel lifted in spirit and keep working hard.'

The message from the research was clear. If, due to administrative pressures, leaders spent little time on classroom visits and were not consistently visible around and about the school, they risked not only being uninformed about what was going on in classrooms, but also were very likely to lose the goodwill of their staff.

How did leaders make classroom visits effective?

Teachers can find classroom visits intimidating. The research found that effective leaders overcame this by:

- making visits brief
- noticing and explicitly mentioning good practice
- praising and thanking staff for specific things
- focusing on pupil learning
- avoiding interrupting the flow of learning
- being tactful when addressing learning points.

Typically, visits were informal and brief - three to five minutes long. Teachers found it motivating and helpful when leaders followed up such visits with praise. This included comments about the pupils' work and their relationship with the class teacher, as well as aspects of good teaching.

'After an informal observation, she drops a note in my mailbox about positive things she saw in the classroom or improvements she sees that the students are making.'

'Before she leaves, if she likes what I've done, she comments to me, or praises me and the students.'

'Any observations...would be shared with me at a later time. Most comments were positive: "I like to see the hands-on activity!' or 'The students are working well together in groups!"'

Heads perceived by staff as effective leaders very rarely used these visits to give constructive criticism or any negative feedback. Some leaders did offer purposeful, appropriate, non-threatening suggestions which the teacher could choose to accept or reject. They addressed issues for development privately and with a light touch, often by offering suggestions: "Have you thought about...?"

'She commends me on a teaching strategy and then offers some other ideas in which to extend what I've done.'

Teachers were apt to dislike, and be suspicious of, classroom visits that resulted in negative comments. They deeply resented criticism, which they perceived as being motivated by a need to control, dominate or demonstrate power. Some ineffective principals made clumsy attempts to correct problems they observed:

'My principal drops into class and tells us how to do things. He interrupts and tries to add to our teaching while you are teaching.'

'He'll pull me aside and mention a better way to instruct that lesson. I find it nerve-wracking.'

Not all class visits convey an interest in teaching and learning. Some were seen by teachers as interruptions, especially if the principal used them to speak to the teacher or to the class about other matters. The degree to which the visit focused on the learning in hand was seen to matter. Frequent interruptions provoked deep anger:

'He walks into class at any time and just starts talking to the kids.'

'The frequent interruptions have always been a terrible, unnecessary waste of precious teaching and learning time.'

Effective leaders paid close attention to what their staff did in order to identify and recognise good practice appropriately. They then used praise, partly to motivate teachers and build trust, and partly to make good practice explicit to the teachers so that they were conscious of what they were doing well. They also used classroom visits to find out what was not done so well, but addressed these problems later, in a different context.

How was mentoring used effectively to improve classroom practice?

Effective leaders' focus on praise during informal classroom visits meant they rarely addressed needs for improvement immediately. This job was done during 'the instructional conference', a one to one discussion between the teacher and the school leader that followed classroom observation and was intended to move the practitioner forward. Practitioners may like to read a case study about the effective use of mentoring for school improvement.

Blase and Blase found, unsurprisingly, that teachers were sensitive to criticism and responded best to praise. In the context of the conference, effective leaders could give feedback in a way that was more likely to be accepted. Effective leaders:

- listened first
- listened more than they spoke
- drew out the practitioner by asking open questions that allowed them to reflect on their practice
- focussed on previously agreed, clear and specific aspects of learning and teaching
- emphasised positive points and praised good practice
- were polite and professional
- set manageable goals.

Head teachers seen as effective actively looked for examples of good practice in classroom visits and used the conference to make these explicit to the teacher. They were focused in their feedback and concentrated on important issues and achievable goals. Good leaders also made sure they offered new information in manageable chunks as a response to specific, identified needs.

The researchers reported that members of staff followed suggestions when:

- they perceived the suggestion as a valid request for action - not insulting, joking or simply irrelevant
- the suggested action was perceived to be purposeful and appropriate
- the teacher understood and felt they were capable of performing the action.

These three conditions were more likely to apply if staff were given the opportunity to explore an issue thoroughly through discussion.

Leaders seen as effective understood the need to listen carefully and to give the practitioner time to arrive at their own conclusions. They recognised that progress depended on discovering and addressing what was holding specific teachers back, whether this was lack of confidence, understanding, resources, or trust.

Leaders thought to be ineffective who failed to listen to others or discouraged them from expressing their views, missed important information. Moreover, staff found being listened to a positive and motivating experience and being ignored a frustrating and de-motivating one.

Thus, effective leaders used a repertoire of strategies: the 'instructional conference', as described above, that combined more formal observations with agreed foci to ensure that leaders addressed teachers' needs for improvement, and brief, informal visits to classrooms to communicate the value of teaching and learning, to gather knowledge and to motivate teachers and address their need for recognition.

What did the study say about the effects of praise and criticism?

Teachers reported intense reactions to praise or criticism from a principal. They found praise highly motivating, but criticism led to strong, negative emotional and behavioural responses.

Praise

Leaders often gave general praise informally and orally. Specific praise, whether oral or written, was given less frequently, but it was particularly highly valued by teachers.

'Just last night I had a parents' night and she came in for a few minutes. This morning, I had a positive, detailed note praising me for my efforts.'

Leaders also passed on positive comments from others, including parents. The positive emotional impact of praise on teachers and its subsequent and sustaining effect in the classroom is shown by the following quotes:

'Praise motivated me to continue positive behaviour and to work even harder.'

'His strategy made me more positive in the classroom. I spend more time praising and finding the children's strengths.'

Praise was not necessarily followed by suggestions for improvement. If it was, suggestions often followed the pattern: 'I liked x and have you thought about y?'

Praise was given publicly, as well as privately. Teachers mostly found this motivating, although it sometimes led to accusations of undeserved praise or favouritism.

Teachers disliked praise when they felt it to be inappropriate, insincere or manipulative. Some were suspicious of generic pats on the back, especially if they felt that such general praise was an attempt to disguise ignorance: 'I don't know for sure that he is even aware of the content of my course. This isn't true praise.' Many teachers who discussed the unauthentic praise of principals whom they saw as ineffective stated that it was used to motivate them to work harder, but 'in a controlling way', or that principals used the technique to pursue self-serving goals. This led to a loss of trust, increased avoidance and worsened communication between teachers and their leaders. Insincere praise was perilously close to criticism in its negative effects.

Negative criticism

Negative criticism evoked emotional responses ranging from confusion, suspicion and fear, to anger, contempt and hatred. It resulted in changes of behaviour including caution, compliance, avoidance, ignoring, lack of co-operation and even outright rebellion. It had a negative impact on self-esteem that, in extreme cases, could lead to breakdown and teachers leaving the profession. Criticism also affected teaching.

'I begin to think more about what I am doing wrong than what I should do for the students. I am very careful to keep from doing anything wrong. I take no chances and play it safe. It makes me apathetic. It makes me want to leave.'

Some principals criticised individuals publicly. Teachers saw this as an abuse of power. It had profoundly negative effects on the climate of the school. Other principals publicly criticised groups of teachers, often a whole faculty, when the behaviour of individual teachers was at issue. Teacher motivation, self-esteem, morale, trust and especially, respect for the principal all decreased as a result of public group criticism.

'I resent being grouped with teachers who are not fulfilling their responsibilities when I am doing my best to

do so. Those to whom she is addressing her remarks will probably not change until directly addressed, while other teachers will be offended.'

'He is scared to face the problem one-on-one...I lose respect for anyone that uses the scattergun approach when the problem is clearly one or two already-identified individuals.'

The issuing of negative feedback was a dangerous area for leaders. It was clear that effective leaders were careful to give feedback on specific issues to the right person, at the right time, with great tact as part of a learning rather than management communication cycle.

How did leaders model learning and with what effect?

Head teachers who were seen as effective leaders of learning were knowledgeable professionals who had gained the respect of their colleagues. They were able to inspire others by providing models of excellent learning and teaching. (This resonates with the aims of the Advanced Skills Teachers initiative in England.)

Leaders of learning modelled learning in several ways, including:

- demonstrating good practice in their own lessons
- maintaining a whole school focus on pupil learning
- distributing new insights targeted at the particular interests of staff
- encouraging staff to attend workshops, seminars and conferences
- investing in their own professional development.

Some leaders of learning were seen as modelling excellent learning and teaching in their own classes. After watching her principal teach a complicated concept to students, one teacher commented:

'Now when I create lesson plans, I think in terms of how to make a concept understandable to a teenager. I understand that I should present material in digestible parts."

Effective leaders maintained a whole school focus on pupil learning by:

- providing time for the study of learning and teaching
- organising study groups and attending them
- using staff meetings to discuss the effects of instruction and school climate on the learning of the pupils
- providing training in action research
- encouraging teachers to develop instructional goals and objectives and to meet with other teachers to discuss their progress.

Good leaders directed helpful information and relevant suggestions to specific people. This avoided overloading other staff with information that was not useful to them.

'She will say, "I know you are really interested in new techniques and innovations in language arts. I saw these articles and thought you might be interested.'"

Teachers appreciated leaders who encouraged them to attend workshops, seminars and conferences.

'I brought back ideas [from a conference] that were developed into a school wide program. My feelings about this are positive because my efforts are supported, not coerced.'

Leaders who invested in their own professional development used research to make decisions on the basis of good evidence. They were also able to gather new insights, relevant skills and up to date knowledge and used these to inform their staff. They set an example to staff by taking their own learning seriously and by sharing in-service training alongside colleagues.

'One of the most dynamic, full-of-impact strategies that my principal uses is to attend in-services and conferences with us! Whenever and whatever! We know she knows exactly how technology should be used in the classroom. I'm so impressed that she values this shared learning so much!'

How did leaders support teachers' learning and professional growth?

The researchers suggested that the building of a culture of life-long learning through enquiry and collaboration was the most important task facing leaders of learning. This was underlined by their research which showed six powerful aspects of staff development:

- jointly studying the process of teaching and learning
- applying principles of adult learning, growth and development to staff development programmes
- providing resources to support growth and improvement
- using enquiry (e.g. gathering data on student achievement) to drive staff development
- promoting peer coaching
- building a culture of collaboration.

The last two aspects are discussed in the next section, whilst the rest are expanded below.

Studying the process of teaching and learning

Leaders used staff development programmes to encourage innovation and to enable demonstration and practice of new skills. They encouraged staff to think about how new strategies could be implemented.

'Some teachers are terrified to take risks with different teaching strategies. Our principal has encouraged all of us to think about what we're doing, to take risks, to brainstorm and use our planning time more effectively.'

If leaders had a positive attitude to experimentation, this encouraged teachers to learn about and try out various teaching strategies. Such leaders encouraged staff to focus on pupil outcomes and to investigate how new strategies affected students.

Applying principles of adult development

These included choosing a relevant topic for study, or allowing the adult learners to choose their own detailed study focus, offering them a stimulating, supportive environment and allowing them autonomy in how they pursue their learning. The research found that good principals focussed on issues of importance to the teacher. They often provided formal staff development opportunities to address the emerging needs of their teachers. This helped to make CPD meaningful.

'He tries hard to provide us with current information based on our needs.'

Leaders offered teachers opportunities to contribute to the design and content of development programmes and often made attendance optional. Staff valued these policies.

'We are given a lot of opportunities to learn new strategies and new learning techniques at staff development meetings, many of which are optional. Our staff development always supports our major instructional goal, which we all have input .....we have a lot to say in what and how we want to do things.'

Providing resources to support growth and improvement

Successful leaders ensured teachers had access to books and professional journals. Some distributed articles offering relevant new insights to staff. Good leaders provided resources and opportunities for evidence-based input into teachers' CPD and some arranged for experts to lead CPD.

'After one staff development session, the presenter came back and worked directly with teachers over several months. This has been a wonderful help.'

Leaders managed human resources carefully so as to provide teachers with time and opportunities to think about and discuss learning and teaching. Teachers enabled to work together shared their knowledge and tried out new approaches to classroom matters. The leadership of resources for learning also extends to providing physical resources, such as classroom equipment and books that helped learning.

Using enquiry to connect staff development to the learning of pupils

The researchers showed that good leaders used enquiry as a tool to get staff thinking and to focus improvement initiatives. They ensured their staff understood how to use data on pupil learning to inform their teaching. To find out the effects of new teaching strategies on student learning, teachers needed class and school-based data.

The successful principals described by teachers in this study used some aspects of action research as part of staff development.

'The principal uses surveys to determine our needs. Then we plan in-services to meet needs as indicated by the survey results.'

Nonetheless, the researchers noted that few principals they studied used all of the elements of action research. They quoted recent studies that helped to explain the different elements involved in action research and that outlined its benefits. These are contained within the section on references. Practitioners might also wish to look at a case study that shows how one school used action research. to promote professional development.

How did successful leaders encourage and promote collaboration amongst teachers?

Leaders seen to be effective used a variety of peer based strategies to encourage skill sharing:

- encouraging teachers to visit one another's classrooms to observe teaching and learning - 'He sent teachers to observe my classrooms. This ... inspired me to look for ways to stay on top of current topics.'
- encouraging teachers to make presentations to one another within the school - 'Several teachers have presented staff development workshops.'
- encouraging teachers to make presentations to a wider audience - 'My principal encouraged me to take some of the things I was using in my classroom and to present them at a state-wide conference.'
- using items generated by members of staff as examples - 'She uses activities and lessons I do as examples of good planning and teaching.'
- explicitly identifying effective strategies used by individual teachers and persuading them to reflect further - 'Our principal often notes strategies of teachers that are very effective. She encourages teachers to reflect on such strengths and she them motivates them toward presenting the ideas and strategies to other faculty members.'

All of this was seen as working to improve teaching. Teachers were able to learn from one another in the following areas:

- sharing materials
- shared planning
- how to motivate students
- how to use technology for learning
- how to provide hands-on learning experiences
- how to involve students in classroom decision making
- why certain teaching behaviours had negative effects on students.

Teachers gained confidence from the experience of modelling good teaching for their colleagues. The practice encouraged them to think more about their teaching and to try out new teaching strategies.

'I look for new, innovative methods of teaching language arts skills - ones that require the use of higher order teaching skills.'

The study also found that teachers who had opportunities to discuss and reflect with other teachers were less likely to leave the profession. Practitioners might wish to look at a case study that shows how six primary school used peer observation to promote professional development.

We look at how leaders encourage collaborative learning in the next section.

What did leaders do to build a collaborative learning culture?

The researchers suggested that effective leaders did the following to promote collaborative learning:

- they made a commitment in staff meetings to spend time discussing student outcomes, curriculum and teaching practice, rather than administrative and technical matters
- they included time for collaborative working on the timetable
- they organised study groups and attended them
- in their classroom visits, they privately noted the relative strengths and weaknesses of members of staff with the intention of pairing teachers who could help or complement one another.

Time to talk

One way in which leaders encouraged teachers to think about what they did and about the impact on students' learning was to make sure that staff spent enough time together to talk about classroom matters. Shared time was a scarce resource and planning it was an important part of management. Leaders considered to be effective considered how and when to get the right people together. They set up staff special interest study groups and included learning opportunities in meetings. They enabled one teacher to visit another's classroom to learn from observing good practice. They planned the use of time well and had good systems of communication. In effect, they personalised adult learning.

Building trust

In order to make these carefully planned collaborative learning opportunities work effectively, leaders of learning worked on building positive relationships and promoting an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. Teachers believed that good leaders genuinely cared for their pupils and staff and wanted to do their best for them. As a result, they trusted them sufficiently to be prepared to take the risks necessary for professional growth. Effective leaders of learning had confidence in the ability of others to learn. They encouraged optimism and a 'can-do' approach. They expected and recognised others' professionalism. Ineffective leaders, by contrast, sowed doubt, insecurity, suspicion and pessimism as to the possibility of change.

Building a shared vision

The researchers found that developing a common, shared vision was a different process in each school. Some schools first established good communication and trust, shared governance and then began to forge a shared vision. Others began to develop the vision together as soon as a decision to share the governance of the school was made. In spite of these different approaches, the researchers found that all the schools used similar activities to build a shared vision. These included:

- structured discussion in teams
- work with consultants on various issues
- time off site for staff and leaders to work together.

The researchers found that people who took the initiative to discuss the development of a common vision often did so voluntarily. Their collaboration went deeper than simple coordination and cooperation. Those involved were inspired by common values and beliefs and worked together to achieve their shared goals.

A school vision was usually put into writing and once it had been developed, it became a way to measure progress toward established goals. Vision development was not static; it changed in order to respond to the changing environment of the school.

What else did the study find out about leadership behaviours?

The study found that that a dictatorial, authoritarian orientation on the part of a leader emerged strongly as an ineffective behaviour, whereas successful leaders gave their staff more autonomy.

Leaders with a strong inclination towards control tended to:

- limit teacher involvement in decision making
- tell teachers how they should teach
- manipulate teachers.

These behaviours had negative impacts upon staff and reduced reflectively informed behaviour in the classroom.

'She doesn't listen or give you time to voice your opinion.'

'My principal shoots down all ideas from teachers. I think, 'What can I do to beat the system?' I want what is best for my kids. I feel browbeaten.'

'I conformed because I had to survive. Stress was strong and fear followed me through each day.'

'He uses the 'you will do this' method... I rebel.'

When analysing the data related to the behaviour of leaders who retained a high degree of control, the researchers uncovered a number of instances of what they described as principal mistreatment of staff. This led to further research. (Blase & Blase 2003)

Successful leaders gave their staff the freedom to try new approaches, allowing choice of teaching methods and encouraging independence, flexibility and innovation. This made teachers enthusiastic and motivated them to try out new things. Nevertheless, a few teachers whose leaders allowed a great deal of freedom commented that less effective colleagues might need more careful monitoring.

'Teachers who are doing a good job have the freedom to carry out their plans effectively, [but]...teachers who are not doing a good job are not being properly monitored.'

Getting the balance right

The study findings highlighted the necessity for leaders to balance support and pressure, autonomy and control. Indeed, a number of statements made by different teachers in the study indicated that leaders walked a tightrope in their efforts to improve teaching. Some of the dilemmas which emerged from the study included:

- insufficient time spent in classrooms was perceived as abandonment; too much as snooping
- suggestions for improvement could be perceived as criticism unless they were given in the context of a supportive relationship that focused first on what was working well
- praise could be perceived as insincere if it was not grounded in knowledge; it was felt to be manipulative if the conscious purpose was to make changes in teachers' behaviour
- leaders who gave their staff autonomy and the freedom to use professional discretion with regard to the curriculum and teaching methods took the risk that less conscientious or competent teachers would fail to reach a sufficiently high standard of work.

The researchers suggested that teachers have a role to play in resolving these dilemmas.

How was the evidence for the study collected?

Blase and Blase collected the views of over 800 teachers from schools in South Eastern, Mid West and North West USA which covered both primary and secondary schools in rural, urban and suburban settings. The teachers included males and females with a range of years of experience in teaching and who taught a wide range of subjects. They asked teachers to describe both positive and negative characteristics (e.g. strategies, behaviors, attitudes, and goals) of their instructional leaders which had an effect on their own thoughts or classroom behaviour. 'Instructional leaders' could include headteachers, deputy headteachers, curriculum and subject leaders or others with a leadership role. They analysed the data to highlight the characteristics of principals practising exemplary instructional leadership and its opposite.

Teachers were asked to provide detailed descriptions of any characteristics of their 'instructional leaders' that had an effect on their classroom teaching in terms of:

- the area upon which it had an impact
- the degree of effectiveness of the instructional leader's actions
- their own thoughts about the instructional leader's actions.

The researchers explicitly asked for both positive and negative effects.

The researchers piloted an initial version of the questionnaire and revised it before use with the main sample. They used a cover page to introduce the research, to collect background data on the respondent and to state explicitly that respondents might not feel that their principal positively or negatively influenced their teaching. Participation in the study was voluntary and teachers completed the questionnaire anonymously.

The questions used were open-ended and broad. No definitions were used to direct data collection. The data collected about individual perceptions and interpretations were analysed to produce descriptive categories, themes and conceptual and theoretical understandings. Two researchers analysed the whole data set and external consultants checked the analysis. Their codings showed a high degree of consistency. The researchers analysed each characteristic to determine its impact on teachers' feelings, thinking and behaviour related to classroom teaching.

The theoretical model upon which the researchers based their work led them to expect people to hold different opinions from one another. The researchers did not measure principals' perceptions or expect them necessarily to be consistent with teachers' perceptions. They did not differentiate between principals or other types of educational leader.

What are the implications of the study?

The study has a number of implications for members of a school community about the nature of learning, the sharing of learning with others, the establishment of trust through genuine care for one another and open and professional communication motivated by a concern to help others learn.

Teachers may like to consider the following questions:

- Do the programmes of study at your school, give students opportunities to develop problem-solving, team-working and communication skills? Do you encourage students to 'see obstacles as minor impediments'?
- To what extent do you focus on what learning is taking place amongst your students, as opposed to what is being taught?
- Might you find it useful to discuss advanced learning skills with colleagues?
- Do you make use of non-contact time to work with colleagues to plan jointly, to observe one another teaching and to share experiences in order to learn from one another?
- If you undertake a further degree, investigate aspects of learning in your classrooms, or attend a course, do you discuss what you have learned with colleagues?
- Is there a helpful focus on pupil learning during class visits? What attitudes do you have to classroom visits? What

have you found useful and what difficulties have arisen? Can you discuss these with the visitor?
- To what extent do you adopt the behaviours identified in this study when supporting the learning of your colleagues?

Leaders, including Advanced Skills Teachers, heads of department, subject coordinators and senior managers, may like to consider the following:

- How easy is it for staff to share and use existing information about pupil progress to inform their teaching plans? Can this information be logged, stored and accessed so that all those responsible for learning can use it?
- What measures can you put in place to overcome the isolation of teachers in their classrooms? What opportunities can be created for staff to work and learn collaboratively? What strategies have you used to overcome the organisational difficulties of creating time for sustained collaborative work to take place?
- To what extent do plans for continuing professional development relate to teachers' individual needs? What is the nature and extent of the existing knowledge base amongst staff on the nature of teaching and learning? Could you use this more to target your contributions to professional learning and to passing on information from beyond the school?
- How can you enable existing knowledge and new insights to be effectively shared amongst staff?
- Do you find enough time to praise and thank colleagues for their work? Do you offer explicit and detailed feedback about what is good? If you need to offer advice, do you do so privately, outside the classroom and address an issue only after listening to the teacher's own reflections on the matter?
- Mentoring and coaching require professional competence and excellent interpersonal skills when carried out by colleagues with greater power. Do those responsible for improving classroom practice have the knowledge, experience and listening skills necessary to support colleagues? Where such skills are only just emerging would adopting the role of co-enquirer help?
- How far does your school reflect a 'culture of caring'?
- How open is your school to new ideas? Do you encourage attendance at conferences and courses and visits to other schools to unearth new possibilities, Could you participate more in such activities alongside your colleagues?
- To what extent is the school vision a shared one? How are new members of staff encouraged to own it?
- How much time in meetings is given to administrative tasks and transmission of information and how much to the consideration of learning? Can the balance be shifted towards learning by using other methods of communicating administrative details?

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Case studies

We have selected the following case studies to illustrate aspects of the leadership of learning which the study highlighted as being important. They were not part of the main study but were selected by the RfT team in order to give more detail about the leadership of learning in classrooms.

How leadership is being extended across small secondary schools

We chose this case study because it shows how several small secondary schools have begun to develop distributed leadership.

Small secondary schools, defined as those with fewer than 700 students on roll, have to do the same jobs as larger ones. They offer the same types of leadership roles but fewer of them and leadership can often be centralised in such schools. This study examined five small secondary schools to find out about the nature of the leadership found there and the practical steps that schools had taken to develop distributed leadership.

How did schools build capacity for improvement?
All the schools studied shared a commitment to embrace change and to aim for continuous improvement. They used a variety of strategies to help them:

- involving more staff in the leadership of the school by establishing an extended leadership team
- supporting and enhancing the role of middle managers as key player in school improvement
- using heads of department and advanced skills teachers to move forward teaching and learning in the school
- nurturing the contribution that teaching assistants and other school support staff made to the learning of students

- establishing school improvement groups with the power to take decisions and make changes
- extending the range of professional development opportunities
  developing rigorous departmental self-evaluation.

What did the study find about the nature of leadership in small schools?
The research found that leadership in small secondary schools had the following characteristics:

- leaders were hands on, accessible and knew what was happening in the school, but the practical workload made it difficult to find time for strategic planning and thinking
- leaders had to balance many different responsibilities and could experience "task overload"
- there were limited finances and resources compared with larger schools
- department teams were small and cohesive, which increased their flexibility and the ability to change, but could lead to isolation and limited professional dialogue
- leaders could have a big influence, but were difficult to replace
- leaders knew the pupils and staff very well and relationships were usually good, but the nature of these relationships were difficult to change
- communication was more personal and informal
- leaders needed to develop a wide knowledge of educational issues, but there were fewer departmental role models for emergent leaders, so professional development was crucial.

The research found that, although the schools visited worked within a variety of contexts, the fundamental approach of the headteacher and leadership teams was very similar.

What were the qualities that made leadership teams effective?
The structure of the leadership teams had all changed in recent years to become small, tightly focused groups. The interviewees felt that the following factors made them effective:

- individual members of the team were knowledgeable and committed
- the team members had complementary skills and experience
- they like working together and had strong relationships
- they listened to one another and debated differences of opinion
- they worked collaboratively and were open and flexible
- everyone was clear about their role within the team
- the team members supported one another.

How far did distributed leadership extend?
Four out of the five schools involved middle manages in the work of the leadership team. Teachers were given opportunities to develop initiatives such as Gifted & Talented and Key Stage 3 within the school. This promoted the professional development of these staff and increased their motivation.

"From a professional development point of view, [the broader leadership team] helps middle managers link with leadership, which is something I had no experience of before."

Middle managers took on extra responsibilities, took decisions and accepted responsibility for delivery. Pastoral and curriculum leaders met regularly to discuss whole school issues. In one school, the deputy head chaired a head of departments' forum, which was a fertile source of ideas for improved teaching and learning.

In some schools, advanced skills teachers were beginning to develop the role of supporting staff to improve standards of teaching and learning.

"One of the approaches is to...provide a model classroom for people within the school to come in and observe my lessons and for me to go out and observe other people."

Heads of department in some schools felt that they focused on issues of teaching and learning, rather than on administration, so that they were the equivalent of advanced skills teachers in their school.

"We give heads of department non-contact time for curriculum development, to monitor their department and to encourage good teaching and learning."

Teaching assistants and other support staff were recognised as taking an active role in helping to raise achievement, particularly in supporting the attainment of pupils with special educational needs. In one school, a school caretaker who spoke French had helped Y11 pupils prepare for oral examinations.

How was the study undertaken?
The researcher, himself a deputy headteacher working in a small secondary school, interviewed 21 colleagues across five small secondary schools. The research aimed to find out about the nature of the leadership and practical steps that the schools had taken to develop distributed leadership. The researcher chose schools in diverse contexts and locations that were all described by OfSTED as having strong or effective leadership.

He asked to interview the headteachers and deputy headteacher in each school and for the headteacher to choose two middle managers who had "demonstrated good leadership both within their department and within the wider school agenda" for further interviews. The questions used at interviews were fairly open in order to allow theory to emerge from the data. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, then analysed for key patterns and shared perspectives.

Reference
Kimber, M. (2002) Does Size Matter? Distributed leadership in small secondary schools. National College for School Leadership.
www.ncsl.org.uk/mediastore/image2/kimber-does-size-matter-full.pdf

The use of assessment and pupil data to raise standards in teaching and learning

We chose this case study because it shows how a member of the leadership team in one school, working with the support of administrative staff, made a range of pupil data more readily available to teaching staff. This, with the training leaders gave to support staff in their understanding of the data, helped to generate a deep understanding of individual pupil progress.

The study took place in a middle deemed primary school (8-12 years) with approximately 700 children on roll. The school wanted to make better use of their assessment data in order to provide evidence that children were making progress in their learning and to discover whether the progress they made was good enough.

The school aimed to:

- establish a clear evidence base of children/s prior attainment
- evaluate progress against these starting points as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of their practice
- inform parents accurately about their children's progress
- ease exchange of information between schools, teachers and parents
- set realistic targets for individuals and groups
- champion individual achievement
- achieve consistency of practice

- raise standards in teaching and learning.

First, the teachers decided what information they would record on a central system, rather than keep in their mark-books. They co-ordinated assessments at appropriate times in the year and included standardised tests in reading, mathematics and spelling, QCA national optional tests and records of children's progress in the school's own system of certificates in ICT, multiplication tables, handwriting, spelling, French, public speaking and merit awards. The deputy head and administrative staff were trained in the software used to record the data and entered historical data as far back as possible.

They used Assessment Manager software to generate Individual Assessment and Achievement Profiles (IAAP). The deputy head discussed these with teaching staff during INSET so that they gained a detailed understanding of the progress of individual children before they used each IAAP to report children's progress to parents.

After training in the use of the Individual Assessment and Achievement Profiles and careful examination of their own pupils' profiles, teachers were able to share the information with parents. Parents expressed very positive views on the detailed information they received from staff about their children's progress when they completed questionnaires on the subject. In addition to offering more informative parents' evenings, staff at the school could discern patterns in the data that had an effect on whole school improvement.

When the teachers analysed and compared the performance data for different groups, some interesting patterns emerged. Staff used the findings to inform their decisions about new school initiatives. Some of the issues they discovered and addressed as a result of the pupil data analysis included:

- a programme designed to counteract underachievement by boys in writing, and by girls in reading in Year 6
- a revised school marking policy after the discovery of discrepancies between year groups
- the recognition and tracking of children with slightly low levels of achievement in reading who were then given focused reading support
- the need to moderate pupil work routinely in order to ensure consistent judgements and valid data, and to help raise staff expectations and establish a shared understanding of key skills
- use of the data base to set realistic targets for individuals in all year groups
- use of the data to support pupil transfer from one phase of education to another
- the discovery that participation in extra-curricular activities seemed to have a positive influence on progress.

The study found that the teachers' fears that a data-orientated approach would reduce the focus on individual children were unfounded and that, in fact, the school had become far more focused upon the learning of individual children than was the case before.

By making information on pupil learning more available to staff and by involving the whole staff in data analysis, the school leadership not only developed professional skills amongst the staff but shared an important aspect of the leadership process itself.

Reference

Curtis, A. (2001) Using Assessment and Pupil Data to Raise Standards in Teaching and Learning. Summary produced for the TTA/DfEE Teacher Research Conference 2001, Publication number TPU0578/2-01.

Learning-centred leadership project

We have chosen this study because it set out to explore learning-centred leadership, or how leaders influence the quality of learning and teaching in classrooms. It investigated the characteristics of twenty-one British secondary schools that aimed to focus on learning as their core purpose.

Two themes emerged from the study. Firstly, all leaders in the schools showed an explicit orientation to the learning process. Leadership was distributed across the school and leadership time and energy was mainly focused on various aspects of learning and teaching. Secondly, school leaders believed it was important to develop good relationships characterised by mutual respect in order to promote learning and effective leadership.

What did the study find out about learning-centred leadership?
The researchers categorised their findings under the following headings:

- the focus on learning
- school culture and climate
- school leadership
- middle leadership
- staff and student perceptions
- other outcomes.

The focus on learning
Staff worked to develop a shared understanding of the learning process, to create shared language and expectations and to use relevant and appropriate learning and teaching strategies. Support staff were included in the creation of a learning culture and actively supported it. However, there was only a limited consensus between the schools in the case study about the nature of learning. They shared no overarching definition of learning and made limited attempts to provide a detailed and explicit model of learning. In most schools, learning was expressed in terms of optimising the achievement of every student.

School culture and climate
The school culture and climate was felt to be centrally important in determining the success, sustainability and consistency of initiatives in learning and teaching. School leaders saw creating this, by translating principles and aspirations into practice, as an integral part of their role.

School leadership
Headteachers and the leadership team played an important role in initiating and sustaining change. Staff believed that headteachers' personal values, vision, commitment and energy made the difference to sharing leadership through the school. They often referred to the 'enabling' and 'facilitation' role of the headteacher and members of the leadership team. Researchers often found a clear, explicit, relation between the personal attributes of the school's leaders and the impact and sustainability of learning-centred leadership.

Middle leadership
All the case study schools had redeveloped the status, role and priorities of subject leaders. Many schools had explicitly moved away from making middle managers responsible for administration to making middle leaders responsible for learning and teaching.

"There has been a shift towards the development of teaching and learning and away from administration and bureaucracy."
(Assistant headteacher)

"My core role is thinking about how we teach and what we teach."
(Middle leader)

Middle leaders were trusted and given a good deal of autonomy but there were also rigorous systems of accountability in place.

Staff and student perceptions

Those interviewed by the researchers consistently affirmed the benefits of a focus on learning. Staff and students felt able to work in a positive and supportive environment towards improving levels of achievement.

Students were almost unanimously positive. They felt actively involved in their learning and often commented on the high quality of personal relationships that existed between teachers and pupils.

"Behaving badly is not cool"

"You don't like to let people (teachers) down"

Most of the schools had strategies to develop the leadership potential of students and to increase their involvement in the learning process. There was a tangible culture of hard work and achievement. This was modelled throughout the school by all members of the community. Norms of appropriate behaviour, attitudes and language were well established in all the schools and were mutually reinforced by students, staff and leaders.

Other outcomes
The research process had positive outcomes for those who engaged in it and their schools. The research associates believed that engaging with others enhanced their own professional knowledge and skills. They all subsequently used their experience from the project to develop learning-centred leadership in their own schools.

"[This]....has been the best in service training I've had since becoming a teacher."

"At school it has changed completely how we do most things - we are much more inclusive: all staff are members of leadership teams, and all meetings in the school now have effective learning on the agenda... We are gradually moving away from an emphasis on what is wrong and what needs to improve, to what is working well and how we can all adopt/adapt the practice."

How was the research conducted?
The research focused on middle leaders in 21 secondary schools. Middle leaders were defined as teachers who had taken on management and leadership responsibilities and could include subject leaders, year heads and others with roles related to broader aspects of learning and development. Seven practising teachers worked as participant researchers and each investigated three schools. The study was jointly funded by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation.

The research associates facilitated group discussions at a seminar where the schools attending were asked to articulate with explicit examples how their school led learning and teaching. From this, the researchers identified the twenty-one case studies.

The case-study work was carried out through a combination of interviews with middle leaders, heads, deputy heads, other teachers and pupils and through documentary analysis and observation. The project team used a common framework to ensure consistency when exploring the case study schools. The data collection activity was carried out within the concept of Appreciative Enquiry, which meant that the enquiry looked for good and successful practice to celebrate.

Reference
Patrick K., Madison, L. and Allison C., (2004) Learning-centred leadership project: A study of middle leadership in 21 secondary schools. Summary presented at the NTRP Teacher Research Conference, 2004
www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp/lib/word/Patrick.doc

School improvement through a process of intensive mentoring

We chose this case study because it shows how a programme of mentoring support used by the leaders of a

primary school in special measures helped staff improve teaching and learning. Although the situation of being in special measures is a particular case, the study illustrates positive ways in which the school leaders initiated a supportive mentoring process that could be of use to a wider audience.

This primary school was situated in a large village in the West of England. There were over 300 children on roll. The proportion of children entitled to Free School Meals was about 10 per cent (below average) and the proportion on the register of special needs was 20 per cent (about the national average). An Ofsted inspection that took place at the end of 1999 was critical of many aspects of the school, which was made subject to special measures. The inspection highlighted the following as key issues that the school had to address:

- quality of teaching
- breadth and balance of the curriculum
- use of assessment
- the quality of leadership and management.

The LEA invited a consultant to act as a governor and to support the school's progress in the area of teaching and learning. He helped the school leaders to introduce mentoring support as part of a wider programme of school improvement. Thirteen months after the original Ofsted report, inspectors described the school as being "a rapidly improving school that has notable strengths" and removed it from special measures.

Which characteristics of the leader of the programme helped to make the mentoring process a positive experience for staff?
The deputy head, who led this work, taught alongside colleagues and her competent practice and the positive nature of her interactions with children enabled her to obtain the respect of the staff and made them more willing to trust her judgements. In addition, colleagues recognised she had other helpful skills and qualities that supported the effectiveness of the mentoring process, including:

- the ability to identify positive aspects of a lesson and to analyse why it was successful
- the ability to give sound advice and identify accurately areas for improvement; perceptiveness, confidence and decisiveness
- excellent communication skills, including the ability to ask open questions and listen
- skills in providing feedback
- the ability to make colleagues feel valued
- the ability to draw ideas from others
- a sensitive approach that prevented colleagues from feeling judged.

It was important that the deputy head herself was supported in leading this initiative. She gained confidence and experience in mentoring by first completing a professional development cycle with a colleague who was positive towards the process. She later extended her support to other teachers so that each teacher experienced mentoring support for about half a term every year.

What was the contribution of other school leaders?
Initially, the recently appointed deputy head was trained as a mentor and was supported in this role by an adviser from the LEA. The adviser observed lessons alongside her and they reached joint judgements of teaching quality based on Ofsted criteria. Later, members of the senior management team, who had themselves been through the professional development cycle, had opportunities to mentor others. The acting head supported the deputy head in the role of mentor by:

- organising regular discussions with her
- sharing his expertise in lesson observation, evidence from his own observations and other forms of monitoring and providing feedback

- offering moral and practical support when she encountered difficulties, such as when a member of staff showed serious weaknesses and denied the need to change.

What was the nature of the mentoring process that was introduced?
The deputy headteacher worked with the consultant to develop and introduce a system of mentoring that they called professional development cycles. Certain aspects of this professional development programme were constrained by the specific requirements of being in special measures, but it included:

- a recorded, collaborative discussion during which the mentor and teacher discussed the process, reflected on the teacher's current practice and agreed a focus for observation
- lesson observation on the agreed focus
- same day feedback using evidence from the observations, reflective evaluation of the lesson by the teacher and action planning
- time for the teacher to be supported by measures such as in-service activities, observation of other staff, team teaching, collaborative planning and for him/her to try out new activities in the classroom
- further reflective discussion, observation and support.

How did the staff view the mentoring process and other aspects of school improvement?
Morale in the school had been low following the Ofsted inspection. A number of measures helped the school to turn itself around, including mentoring.

Initially, some teachers felt threatened by the idea of being observed and others were reluctant to believe that their teaching needed improvement, but the head and deputy head made the mentoring process as supportive as possible and encouraged teachers to feel ownership of the project.

They gradually built more open and trusting relationships between members of staff. The professional and interpersonal skills of the deputy head and the new head teacher were vital to the success of the programme of mentoring. As time went by, the staff became more positive about the process.

"I still don't like being watched but I'm happy for it to continue - it's no longer an ordeal - I benefit and the school does - it keeps you fresh."

Other aspects of the school also changed:

- teachers were more likely to ask openly for support
- there were improvements to teachers' confidence
- the number of professional conversations increased
- teachers began keeping their own records of ongoing professional development.

The following views expressed by the staff were evidence of the more positive ethos in the school:

"There's an 'I can do this well, you can do this well' attitude."
"It's really friendly; teachers are excited to share."

Reference
Ritchie, R., (2001) School improvement in the context of a primary school in special measures. Paper presented to British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Leeds, 13-15 September 2001.

Getting staff involved in action research

We chose this case study because it shows how one teacher managed to involve a growing number of

colleagues in action research and the way in which leadership of practitioner research grew into a wider leadership role. It also highlighted the benefits in terms of professional development and improved teaching and learning that resulted from the process.

In September 1998, St Thomas More RC High School started working with five other schools and the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne to encourage staff to engage with and in research. The school is a Catholic 11-18 comprehensive with pupils from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The schools had three aims:

- to introduce Thinking Skills across the curriculum
- to examine the process through which this occurred
- to explore how staff involvement in research changed over the course of time.

What did the project involve?
The initial phase of the project involved six members of staff from St Thomas More. They made part of a consortium of six schools that shared a common focus of 'questioning'. This helped them to collaborate. Teachers benefited from shared discussions about background reading and classroom observations. The research involved simple strategies of data gathering, such as counting the number of open and closed questions asked by the teacher and students or the length of pupil responses. Lesson and video observation stimulated helpful discussions. The project also provided a medium for planning and for reading other research about the ways questioning has been used. This background reading helped to explain some of the findings in the classroom.

The lead researcher in the school, who was also the head of geography, was keen to explore how teachers felt about the process of teaching Thinking Skills and their developing understanding. She asked participating staff to keep reflective diaries during the project. These enabled her to find out how she could support them. Four of the teachers involved were sufficiently motivated by their findings to continue their participation in the project the following year.

Having sampled what engaging in research involved, teachers were able to make an informed decision as to whether to continue and their enthusiasm for the project enabled the lead researcher to gain wider support for the project within the school. The first full year of the project involved nine teachers in four departments who focused on developing Thinking Skills strategies. Pupils kept a learning log which helped teachers analyse how pupils perceived the experience and the impact it had on them. Teachers continued to keep reflective diaries which they passed on to department heads. The latter provided a synopsis of their findings as part of their own diaries, which they passed on to the lead researcher. The diaries highlighted that three residential weekends were times of marked change in teachers' thinking, understanding and generation of ideas.

In the second full year of the project, the research was widened to include three staff from two new departments. The focus on Thinking Skills was continued, as were pupil and staff learning logs. One member of staff used pupil learning logs as the focus for his M.Ed dissertation. Pupil interviews took place and there was greater analysis of teacher videos. Three of the original group of staff trained as coaches in teaching Thinking Skills, which enabled an additional three departments to join the project the following year. The number of staff actively engaged in the project eventually grew to twenty-five in seven departments.

Findings about the research process
As the teachers reflected on the process of research, they discovered that:

- their initial research proposals tended to be too ambitious - in order to manage the process of research and analysis, the focus needed to be very small
- a shared focus for investigation across different schools was valuable because this promoted discussion, enabled the sharing of expertise across schools and generated a larger body of knowledge and understanding about research
- use of similar methodology across different schools allowed greater analysis of the effectiveness of particular

techniques

- the process of integrating newcomers to the project was helped by teacher coaching
- extended study for Masters degrees by core members of the research group helped to improve expertise in research methodology for the whole group
- the opportunity to disseminate the research findings within the school and further afield during conferences enhanced the sense of ownership and value felt by those involved
- the larger group meetings offered a valuable opportunity for ideas generation, but it was only in small groups that long lasting, sustainable change took place.

The effect of this extended action research project on staff was profound. Some teachers who initially refused to be videoed were able to talk openly about how their practice had changed, saying they never knew they still had so much to learn after 20 years of teaching. Younger staff admitted to completely changing their teaching. Two staff thought that they would probably have left teaching if they had not enjoyed such a stimulating strand to their career development.

Reference

McGrane, J. (2001) How can research be effectively implemented in a school? The role of the school in developing research into teaching thinking skills. Summary produced for the TTA/DfEE Teacher Research Conference, 2001. Publication number TPU0572/2-01.

How teachers used peer observation to promote CPD

We chose this case study because it showed how teachers from several primary schools used peer observation as part of an action research project. It showed the benefits derived from using peer observation and some of the obstacles that needed to be overcome. The project gained momentum and sustainability when the researchers alerted headteachers to the positive effects of the work of the young teachers who worked within the project and the heads became involved in facilitating and supporting it.

The project was started by the Leeds School Based Research Consortium, a partnership between Leeds Local Education Authority, the School of Education at the University of Leeds and six Leeds primary schools. The consortium had two aims. The first aim was to help teachers develop as professionals, extending their skills and improving their practice. The second was to generate evidence about effective teaching methods that could inform the wider profession. The schools were all involved in action research on numeracy, especially mental and oral work in mathematics.

The six schools differed from one another in terms of size and the socio-economic circumstances of their pupils. Each of the schools focused on different aspects of teaching effectiveness in mathematics. All of them used peer observation - observation by teachers of one another's teaching - as part of the research. About thirty teachers from both Key Stages 1 and 2 were involved.

What is "peer observation"?

Different people mean different things by "peer observation". In this study, the phrase refers to the observation by teachers of each other.

The practitioners agreed to follow these guidelines:

- everyone who observes is also observed
- the system used by a teacher when observing is also used on that teacher when they are being observed
- all the teachers who have been involved in the observations take part in the discussion and analysis in both roles - as the observer and as the observed.

The observational process could vary. For example:

- observation could take place with pairs or with a group in rotation
- notes taken could vary from open observations with no pre-determined structure to observations that count the frequency of pre-agreed teacher behaviours
- the discussion could focus on one observation at a time or involve more people and consider several observations at once.

How did the teachers overcome problems they encountered in peer observation?
The research suggested several strategies to help make peer observation effective. We set out these strategies and the difficulties they aim to overcome below.

Make it easy to begin
The most important purpose of peer observation was to inform the teacher's own work and the most important thing about it was to make a start. It did not need to be part of a structured research project.

Agree a framework for observations
It was important to avoid the danger of being judgemental. The most useful discussions were based on plain accounts of what happened, not on subjective judgements. The Leeds consortium overcame this difficulty in two ways. In the early stages of research, when it was difficult to define the area of enquiry precisely, they asked observers to record observations in whatever format they chose, but to focus on observing just one minute at a time. During later stages of the project, evidence could be collected within pre-agreed observation categories.

Establish a code of conduct regarding the use of observational data
Use of observational data was a particularly difficult area for teachers, whether they played the role of observer or observed. To help them, the schools agreed ground rules such as:

- agreeing to listen carefully to what is being said rather than jumping to conclusions
- supporting observation points with example and cases
- giving undertakings that data collected for the peer observation would not be used in other contexts such as performance management.

Work out a schedule for observations
Careful planning and commitment to the project were necessary to the project's success so that observations could take place as planned and enthusiasm for the project thus maintained. It was not necessary to observe whole lessons; ten minutes was often enough to provide useful information for discussion.

Agree that observations will not be on 'show' lessons
The purpose of observation was to improve practice, so preparing in great detail for a lesson to be observed was unhelpful. This used too much time and the subsequent performance was atypical. Staff needed to trust one another not to be judgemental.

Build participation and trust gradually and by consensus
Schools did not insist that teachers who were anxious and reluctant to take part did so. Early participants shared their positive experiences so that more hesitant colleagues were encouraged to take part.

Agree a focus for observations
By agreeing in advance what will be focused on during observation, the participants ensured that both had an interest in the process.

Ensure all participants take part on equal terms
The process agreed with staff was reciprocal and mutual. It was difficult for headteachers and deputy headteachers to be part of the observation unless they themselves taught and could be observed. Nevertheless,

school leaders had an important part to play in facilitating and supporting the process amongst the teaching staff.

What were the benefits of using peer observation?
The study showed that peer observation benefited both the understanding of participating teachers and the relationships between different members of staff. Peer observation:

- promoted trust and understanding between teachers and enhanced the quality of their working relationships
- offered a shared context for discussion so that teaching conversations were rooted in specific examples and thus became more meaningful
- raised teachers' self-awareness, including their awareness of change and professional growth
- increased teachers' professional self-confidence and self-esteem, insofar as peer teachers respected one another's work and opinions
- promoted the exploration of real classroom issues
- led to the development of new questions to be answered and interests to be pursued.

Reference
Threlfall, J., and Smith, L. (2001) The nature and benefits of Peer Observation. Summary produced for the TTA/DfEE Teacher Research Conference, 7 March 2001.
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Further reading

What else might I enjoy reading?

Blase, J. & Blase, J. (2003) B*reaking the silence: Overcoming the problem of principal mistreatment of teachers*
Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D. & Steinbeck, R., (1999) *Changing Leadership for Changing Times*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Costa, A. L. & Garmston, R.J. (1994) *Cognitive coaching: A foundation for renaissance schools*. Norwood, MA: Christopher Gordon.

Rubin, H. (2002) *Collaborative Leadership: Developing Effective partnerships in communities and schools* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Calhoun, E. F., (1994) *How to Use Action Research in the Self-Renewing School*. Alexandria. VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Harris, A. & Muijs, D. (2004) *Improving Schools through Teacher Leadership*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Argyris, C. & Schon, D. (1996) *Organisational Learning II. Reading*, MA: Addison-Wesley publishing Company.

Miller, L. (1998) 'Redefining teachers, reculturing schools: Connections, commitment and challenges'. In: A. Hargreaves, A. Leiberman, M. Fullan & D. Hopkins (eds.), *International handbook of educational change*, part 1 pp. 529-543. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer.

Bandura, A. (1977) *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Senge, P. M. (1990) *The fifth discipline: the art and practice of the learning organisation*. New York: Currency Doubleday

Cibulka, J., Coursey, S., Nakayama, M., Price J. & Stewart S. (2000) *Schools as Learning Organisations: A Review of the Literature*.

Published online ERIC ref. no. ED 449139 at the link below.
http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_&ERICExtSearch_SearchVal

Blase, J. & Blase, J. (2004) *Handbook of Instructional Leadership: How Successful Principals Promote Teaching and Learning*. 2nd edition.Thousand Oaks CA: Corwin Press.

This is the main study in this RfT.

Online resources

NCSL: Leading Centred Leadership pack
http://forms.ncsl.org.uk/mediastore/image2/learningcentredleadership_web/textonly/lclp_01.htm

TRIPS: Leadership
http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/research/themes/leadership/?digest=all
A project commissioned by the National Association of Headteachers(NAHT) reported findings from twelve case study schools about teachers'perspectives on leadership effectiveness. The Research Informed Practice Site (TRIPS) has a study of this research.

EPPI Centre: The impact of collaborative CPD on teaching and learning
http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=136&language=en-US
The full study. Also the subject of an RfT summary.
Related research

Robinson, V. Hohepa, M. & Lloyd, C. (November 2009) *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why Best Evidence Synthesis*
www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/60169/60170
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Appraisal

Robustness

The research by Cibulka et al. (2000) took the form of an extensive literature review relating to over 300 studies about schools as learning organisations. The review covered a very broad range of material relating to leadership and learning, it provides a context in which the much more tightly focused study by Blase and Blase can be understood. It stressed the point that for schools to become learning organisations, staff need to become learners too, and their learning is governed by the same principles as that of their students. Studies and theoretical papers featured in the research by Cibulka et al. reported the role of sustained collaboration for effective organisational learning and explored how shared values and caring professional relationships can become key ingredients in establishing a learning environment for all. Many studies also highlighted that professional learning was not synonymous with 'updating', but involved instead, a continuous process of learning in the context of changing environments outside the school.

The study by Blase and Blase (2004) explored a relatively little researched area of the relationships between leadership behaviour, teacher professional development and classroom teaching and learning. It was more

concerned with features of instructional leadership that were shared with teachers than with the processes by which instructional leadership was shared. Specifically, the research investigated the impact of leader-teacher interactions on teacher attitudes and on the professional development of teachers. In addition to school principals, the study defined instructional leaders as lead teachers, department heads, curriculum leaders and professional development co-ordinators.

Blase and Blase collected questionnaire data from 809 teachers from schools in a range of geographical and socio-economic locations, and from primary and secondary phases. All the teachers involved in the research were volunteers and were engaged in higher professional studies at universities. They came from a range of disciplines and had varied experience as teachers. The teachers gave detailed descriptions of the impact of their principal's characteristics on their professional lives in an open-ended questionnaire. The researchers found that teachers believe that instructional leaders' characteristics have major cognitive, affective and behavioural effects. The study highlighted three themes that teachers regarded as key elements in effective leadership of teaching and learning: talking with teachers, promoting teachers' professional growth, and encouraging and fostering teacher reflection.

Relevance

The relationship of leadership to teaching and learning is emerging as a key area of interest for all those involved in, or aspiring to, leadership at subject, department, year, phase or whole school level. The study by Blase and Blase concluded with a number of implications for school leaders relating to the building of a professional learning community. The literature review by Cibulka et al. is probably more relevant to those who wish to explore the concept of learning organisations more broadly.

Applicability

The study by Blase and Blase contains descriptions of what teachers value from their leaders, including, written and verbal feedback following observations, praise, openness to ideas, leaders' competence and professional knowledge and the promotion of teachers' own professional development. The rich detail provided by the researchers should enable leaders to reflect on their approach to leadership and help teachers to consider what they might find most valuable in their relationships with leaders.

Writing

Blase and Blase write in a style and language which teachers and leaders will readily engage with. The various features of the study are signposted with informative headings and the text is free of jargon. The literature review by Cibulka et al. is rather demanding as it contains specialist vocabulary and terms derived from non-school learning organisations, such as 'single-loop learning', 'double-loop learning' and 'grafting', covers a very broad canvass and, in connecting disparate strands of thinking, works at quite an abstract level.

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