

How can leaders lead successful teaching school alliances which enable the development of consistently great pedagogy?

Case Study



Schools Involved

Southgate Secondary School

De Bohun Primary School

Lea Valley High School

Chesterfield Primary School

Enfield County School

Lavender Primary School

Section One- The Context

ETA was formed as a wave two teaching school three years ago. Its aim was to look at ways of providing high quality education for students across the primary-secondary transition.

To this end ETSA was set up with two lead schools: Bowes Primary School and Southgate Secondary School. Four other schools were invited to become the core strategic partners: Lavender Primary, Chesterfield Primary, Lea Valley Secondary and Enfield County Secondary.

In the first year of the teaching school it was clear that we had to find a way of working together. Initially heads and deputies led ETSA through meetings that covered the big six and associated issues. This was essentially a top down model and not one that fully engaged the wider cohort of stakeholders in the core schools.

The offer of a research and development project presented an ideal opportunity to look at how innovations within the teaching schools were led and how this impacted on the consistency of pedagogy.

Alongside the needs of the teaching school the schools involved identified a shift in our school population and its characteristics and needs. Until recently Enfield had a stable population. This contains a large number of EAL students, but these were often at stage 3 and 4. The shift being experienced by schools has been to a more transient population and one with far greater literacy needs at EAL level 1 and 2.

The needs of the teaching school and students came together in a desire to build a research project around literacy and leadership

Section two- What did the action research project set out to achieve?

The project aimed to achieve several key objectives-

1. To understand how leadership of pedagogy functioned across schools in different phases (primary and secondary).
2. To understand how leadership of pedagogy functioned across pairs of schools cooperating together.
3. To understand how the teaching school could lead pedagogy across the alliance.
4. To understand how research could impact on schools and the progress and achievement of students.

To achieve this the project was set up with a focus on the development of literacy across the alliance.

The project was structured so that-

1. An audit of where each of the six schools were in terms of literacy was conducted (Objective 1 above).
2. The six schools were asked to work in pairs (one primary and one secondary). The pairs reflected the different social contexts of schools across Enfield and their different Ofsted status (from outstanding to special measures) and their different organisational structures. (Objective 2 above).
3. The three pairs were drawn together for joint meetings to capture progress and issues raised (Objective 3 above).
4. The project was linked to clear impact outcomes within the six schools. (Objective 4 above).

To achieve the above-

1. The ETSA steering group (heads and deputies) committed to the projects. This was seen as an essential pre-requisite for a successful outcome.
2. The scope of the project plans were outlined. On reflection more time should have been given to this stage to establish a greater clarity of purpose.
3. The direction of the project was amended-
 - a. One as information was gathered and understanding deepened.
 - b. As the capacity issues of the six schools become clearer. Capacity was part of our learning culture. We assumed all the schools had the capacity to fully engage, we learnt that understanding a schools capacity to engage is a pre-requisite of effective engagement and outcomes.
4. We identified the key middle/senior leader in each school who would take the project forward. Next to the commitment of the heads effective talent spotting of drivers for research and development is all important. For research and development to succeed we should have spent more time on this aspect.

What did the project do?

1. The project engaged in Action Research (AR) into literacy provision across the primary- secondary transition.
2. Visits occurred between schools. Information was gathered. Student progress was tracked.
3. The findings were reported back to the meetings held with representatives from the six schools.
4. Conclusions were drawn and this formed the basis for planning sessions for a borough wide conference to aid the development of literacy strategies (Spring 2015).
5. The members involved reflected on the projects, its areas of success and challenge.

The ETSA steering group will now plan its future research and development programme based around the lessons learnt from this starter project. The project has been an invaluable learning and training curve for all those involved.

Section 3 - Impact on capability of teachers and learning of pupils

Impact on teachers

1. Teachers at middle-leader level have led a project that will lead to changes in the approach schools take to literacy.
2. Those involved have learnt valuable lessons-
 - a. Don't rush into a project without reflecting on what you want to achieve and how you intend to go about achieving their objectives.
 - b. The support of heads empowers middle leaders to actively engage in pedagogy is core and essential and needs to reflect the moral purposes of the schools.
 - c. That you need to have the capacity to see AR activities through to their conclusion. This is an issue both about time and the priority given to AR.
 - d. Understanding the different cultures of schools, and their organisational structures is just as important as their approach to pedagogy.
 - e. The importance of flexibility. It is important that the project doesn't see itself as bound by the first thoughts.
 - f. That AR practitioners need to understand the priorities for development within each school. AR needs to have relevance and resonance within schools.
3. The real impact on teachers will come through the dissemination phase of the AR project. There is no point in doing AR if it doesn't reach a wider audience. In this project we have decided on a dissemination model that is across all the secondary and primary schools in the authority through a conference organised for next spring. The aim will be to bring the AR to a wider audience, to share information gleaned, and to plan the next stage. All too often any AR projects that have occurred have not led to long-term sustained impact. This we aim to avoid in this project.
4. The final impact is that we want staff to understand AR is not a luxury, an extra, but a core activity of learning professionals.

Impact on Students

1. The impact on students is that-
 - a. We see students leaving the primary schools with enhanced literacy skills.
 - b. We see students entering the secondary school continue to develop their literacy skills (To this end we have used the LILAC literacy programme within secondary schools to enhance staff understanding of literacy development (15 staff in each cohort in each school being trained).
 - c. That we see the literacy skills of 6th form students develop (again we have teacher focus on this area).

- d. All of the above we believe will lead to improved exam results and literacy for life levels.

Section Four - Impact on alliance and alliance partners

1. The initial impact was on the 6 core partners in this action research. The impact has been variable-
 - a. The impact on Enfield County and Lavender can be seen in the context of growing cooperation between the two schools.
 - b. The impact on Southgate and De Bohun can be seen in the journey De Bohun has made from special measures. Southgate supported the school across a raft of interventions. This AR project fitted into the wider context of development.
 - c. The impact on Chesterfield and Lea Valley is still to be evaluated, it has been slowed by personnel changes at Lea Valley.
2. The wider impact, if we consider all schools in Enfield to be our partners, will come through the proposed conference.

What has the project taught our core group of six schools?

1. We have begun to work closely together. A cooperative rather than competitive model has been established.
2. The project has correctly focus on an area of both concern and development within the schools.
3. It has begun to develop the alliances competencies (using the Hargreaves model). In terms of high social capital, evaluation and challenge and distributing leadership to middle leaders.
4. The ability of teachers to analyse and innovate has been demonstrated.
5. The teaching school has continued to develop and unify. This project hasn't achieved this on its own , but it has enable a greater understanding and community of approach to be enhance and applied in a practical way.

Section 5 - Teaching school alliance leadership learning

1. The alliance has learnt that AD demands time and commitment. At times other priorities have taken precedence. We still need to enhance the role of AR within our work and the priorities of the schools it services.
2. Key challenges were about-
 - a. Where does the time come from? Even when we release staff the time to write up notes and plans still depends on the good-will of staff. The increasing focus on teacher workloads suggests that a voluntary commitment to AR has its limits.

- b. Within schools staff is not always as stable as we could wish. At several points changes to key staff involved slowed the progress of the AR. This is unavoidable but challenging.
 - c. How we make sure we don't draw general conclusions but clear points for action that are followed through.
 - d. How we make sure this is the start of AR within the schools concerned rather than a one-off. Education is littered with interesting projects that have failed to have a long-term impact. This is also true of the impact on students. It will be years before we see the true impact of our focus on the pedagogy of literacy, but it is important that we continue to capture this impact.
3. The key messages are-
- a. AR will thrive if you talent spot the right middle-leaders to lead it. They will both make an impact and enhance their personal skills.
 - b. AR is all about distributed leadership and giving staff autonomy with accountability and the clear support of heads.
 - c. AR must involve those who are going to lead it at an early stage. It cannot be a top-down model.
 - d. Not being afraid to change direction if the original approach doesn't feel right. Not succeeding in AR is just as illuminating as success.
 - e. Spend whatever time is needed before you start AR in terms of the terms of reference and the methodology that will be employed. Schools have a tendency to find quick fixes, the antithesis of good AR.
4. To succeed AR needs-
- a. The staff involved to have credibility.
 - b. The staff involved to see AR as the precursor of staff training and interventions with students.
 - c. To be part and parcel of the moral purpose of the institutions involved.

