

**SCHOOL UNIVERSITY
PARTNERSHIPS : BUILDING
CAPACITY FOR EFFECTIVE
TEACHING AND LEARNING IN
SCHOOLS SERVING DISADVANTAGED
URBAN COMMUNITIES**

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Gothenberg, 2015**

ORGANISERS

- Part 1: The project
- Part 2: What we can learn about partnerships
- Part 3: Positioning the research
- Part 4: Key messages



PART 1: THE PROJECT



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- To apply research-based knowledge and to co-construct new knowledge on the effective leadership of student learning and achievement in a secondary academy and a primary teaching school alliance serving disadvantaged urban communities.
- To achieve this through the sustained engagement of academics with school leaders in school-based participatory research and development groups in one teaching school alliance consisting of seven primary schools and one secondary academy.
- To evaluate and document the knowledge exchange working processes, development of teaching and learning strategies and results.
- To organise an end of project conference of schools serving disadvantaged urban communities in the East Midlands region in order to disseminate these to the wider teaching community.
- To establish a permanent knowledge transfer and exchange network, initially with the participant schools.
- To provide an archive of web based best practice project materials in the form of research informed practice based tools for school leaders which would be accessible to network members.



THE ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE

- Turnaround school leadership research
- Successful leadership
- Effective leadership of classroom teaching and learning
- Variations in teachers' work, lives and effectiveness
- Collaborative school based inquiry



SCHOLARLY INTEREST

- How academic knowledge may be transferred to working contexts of teachers and leaders in schools serving disadvantaged urban communities;
- Understanding the roles of academics as knowledge brokers, critical friends and informed conduits through which the research literature can be identified, shared and applied in school inquiries to support the learning and development of leaders and teachers.
- The significance of principals and teachers as key agents of change in individual schools and school networks.
- Concepts and practices of participation based around trust, capacity building building and sustained dialogue.



THREE QUESTIONS

1. What are the key improvement challenges and issues which face leaders of schools serving urban disadvantaged communities?
2. How can academic knowledge of effective school leadership, teachers' work and lives, effective classroom practice and collaborative inquiry enhance the effectiveness of the leading learning work of head teachers in these schools?
3. What are the policy and practice implications for the work of school leaders in improving teaching and learning in their schools?



PARTNERSHIP AIMS

- To promote the application of the academic knowledge on effective leadership for learning to the work activities of schools serving disadvantaged communities

An element of knowledge exchange...is the management of expectations between the research team and the partners. One of the roles of the research team is to control the scope and keep the research project achievable.

(Anderson and Freebody, 2014: 32)



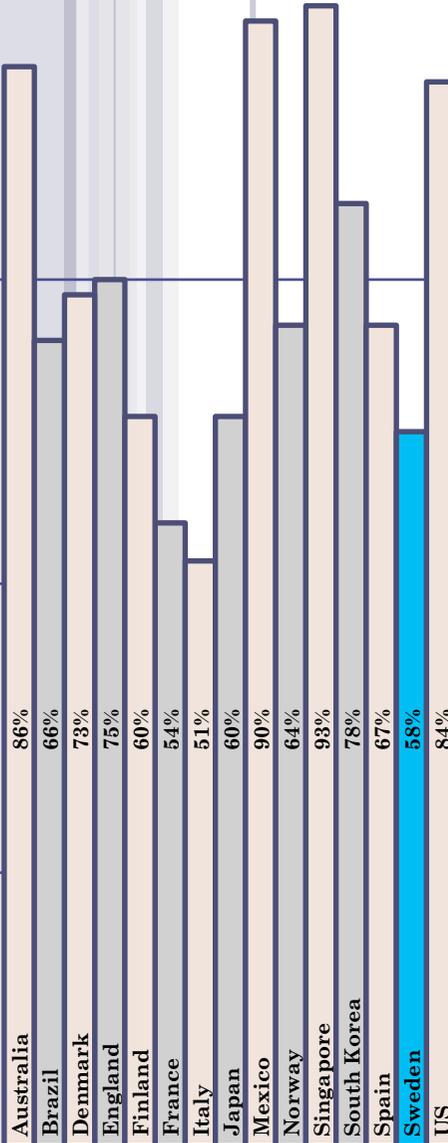
NATIONAL CONTEXT: TOWARDS A SELF-IMPROVING SCHOOL SYSTEM.

A central component of recent government-led reforms in England is the development of localised choice within a culture of high stakes accountability through an increasingly diversified and decentralised, 'self-improving' school system.

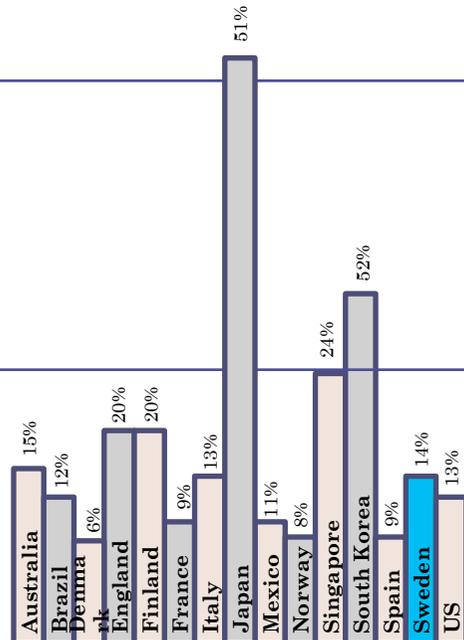


Professional Development Around the World

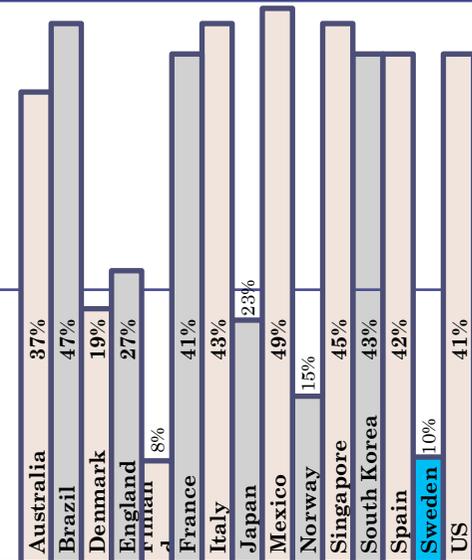
(Source: TES, 5th September, 2014:11)



Proportion of teachers attending courses and workshops in previous years



Proportion of teachers making observation visits to other schools



Proportion of teachers taking part in individual or collaborative research

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCHERS

1. Who does the design and why?
2. Is the work relevant to practice?
3. How can practice knowledge and research inform one another?
4. What are the intended and unintended consequences for leaders of change?
5. Who benefits?
6. What are the roles of university academics?



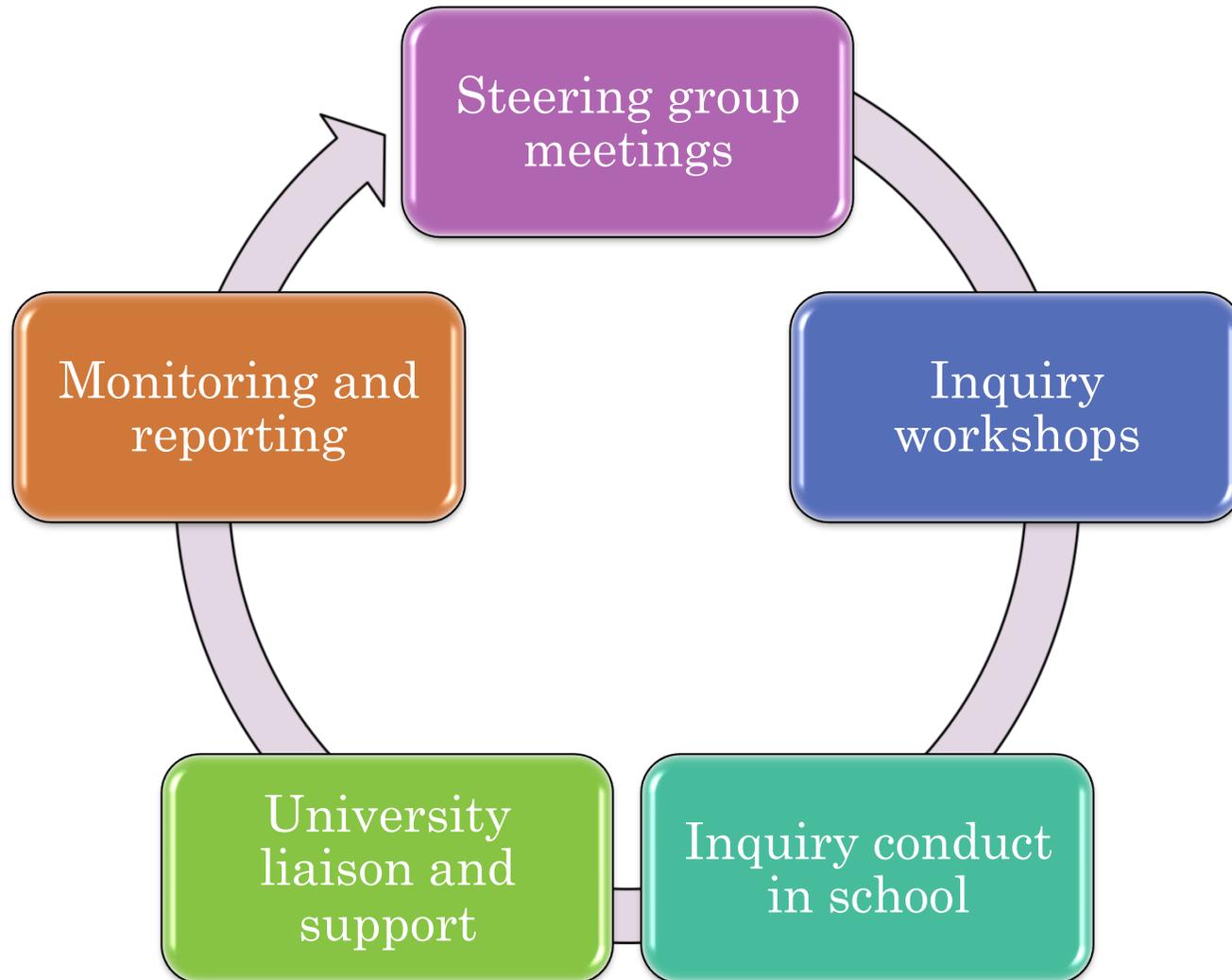
THE PARTNERS

The screenshot shows the website for the School of Education at the University of Nottingham. The header includes navigation links for 'UK Campus', 'China Campus', and 'Malaysia Campus'. A search bar and 'Quicklinks' are visible. The main navigation menu includes 'Home', 'Current Students', 'Study with us', 'International', 'Schools and Partnerships', 'Services for Business', 'Research', 'Alumni', and 'About the University'. The page title is 'School of Education'. A sidebar on the left lists categories like 'Home', 'About the School', 'Study with us', 'Research', 'English Language Support', 'Schools Partnership Gateway', 'Community Engagement', 'Open Days and Events', and 'People'. The main content area features a large banner for 'Ofsted 2014 - Outstanding' with a photo of students and staff. Below this are sections for 'About Us', 'Latest News' (listing awards for Professor Colin Harrison and Professor John Morgan), 'Forthcoming Events' (including an Open Day), and 'SoE Blog' (with links to articles on teacher training and research). Social media links for Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are at the bottom.

The screenshot shows the website for Transform Teaching School Alliance. The header features the 'TRANSFORM' logo and the date 'Sunday, 31 August 2014'. The main navigation menu includes 'Home', 'About Transform', 'Services & Opportunities', 'News', 'Contacts', and 'School Direct'. A large banner image shows children playing with the text 'Working strategically and collaboratively to attract, identify and nurture talent...'. The main content area is titled 'Welcome to Transform Teaching School Alliance'. On the left, a 'Together we Achieve' sidebar lists navigation options. On the right, there are sections for 'Current News Articles' (including 'Schools Direct - Applications for a September 2014 start'), 'TRANSFORM TRUST' logo, 'School Direct Quotes' (with a quote: 'It is good to have flexibility in training'), and 'News' (with a 'NEWS' icon). A 'Booking Now' section at the bottom left features a 'BOOKING' icon.



COMPONENTS OF THE ONE YEAR PROCESS



EXAMPLES OF SCHOOL INQUIRIES

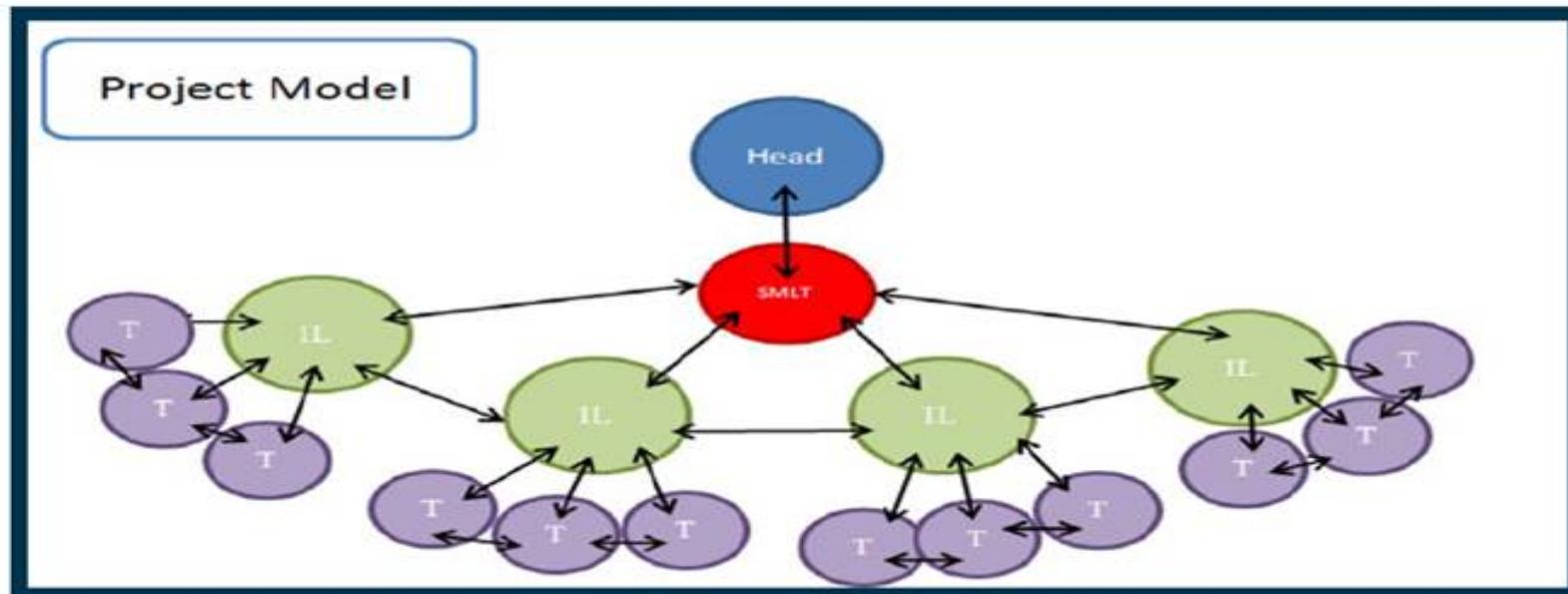
Example foci:

- Risk taking in classrooms
- Developing leadership and understanding teacher resilience.
- Catering for the particular needs of pupils (gifted and talented, looked after children).
- Adopting more 'social' models of learning & encouraging greater learner independence.
- Reflecting on personal growth and development against models of leader career phases (systemic)
- Reviewing and developing the working practices of the senior leadership team.



EXAMPLES OF SCHOOL INQUIRIES

The project was led and managed by a member of the Senior Management and Leadership team (SMLT) who managed the whole process and fed back to the head teacher. Each phase across the school was led by an Inquiry Leader (IL) and involved three class teachers (T).



The model provided leadership opportunities at a variety of school levels. The senior leader had an opportunity to lead a whole school development project, the middle leaders could develop their leadership skills through becoming inquiry leaders and receiving focused support from the senior leader, and class teachers had the opportunity for designing an inquiry and seeing the impact on their pupils.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

- **co-constructed bespoke** leadership training materials which provided research and practice informed cases of leadership strategies for the improvement of teaching and learning in schools serving disadvantaged urban communities;
- **narratives** of the perceptions of headteachers of ways in which knowledge transfer and exchange projects work.
- **better understanding** of the impact of new academic knowledge, how and why leaders of schools which serve socioeconomically disadvantaged urban communities make decisions, how they manage these and how their interventions influence the quality of teaching and learning in their schools – including measurable student academic outcomes
- **knowledge** of university roles in knowledge exchange partnerships

See: www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/kten

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/research/crelm/projects/kten/inquiryreports.aspx>



COMMENTS FROM PARTNERS

Academics coming in and being **open and honest** with us when we are describing our project and how things are going. **Questioning** our practice makes us think harder about what we're doing. (School principal)

Coaching, prompting, refining, **questioning**, mentoring, **supporting** have been just a few of the ways the school, the Senior Leader, Inquiry Leaders and myself have been supported through this process by [the University of Nottingham]. This allowed us to **furrow our own path** but be steered gently back on course by helping us and allowing us to **analyse** our own thoughts and ideas. (Head teacher)

The most valuable thing was the feeling of **support**. I'm new to teaching so felt I was taking a big **risk**... I wanted to change the scheme of work... and the HoD was supportive in encouraging me to do this. I also learned a lot from my colleague who is the G&T coordinator. (Early Career teacher)



WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE THE PROJECT ENDED

- The Transform leadership offer has been revised with the creation of a leadership ladder. This is cross-related to the stages of leadership development.
- Gaps at specific stages were identified. This has led to the creation of Transform Leaders of Education (TLEs) and Developing Leaders of Education DLEs).
- A leadership register has been compiled connecting heads with their preferred phases (they signed up) this has allowed us to identify shared networks and gaps. Furthermore we have created bespoke networks as a means of individualized matchmaking.
- We recognized the need to extend the academically identified 'stages' to phases and beyond stage 7.
- We applied and were successful for the National College LLE designation pilot project.
- We have created a peer led health check across Transform, piloted by the TLEs.



PART 2: WHAT WE CAN LEARN ABOUT PARTNERSHIPS



1. INTERVENTIONS WITH INTEGRITY

Interventions themselves are contested spaces, filled with tensions and [...potential...] resistance from a range of stakeholders. Supporting and engaging more diverse stakeholder engagement in defining the focus of research and development will require researchers...to rethink the nature of educational interventions. In contrast to closed or top-down notions of designed collaborations, the approaches to interventions...are systems that are subject to revision, disruptions, and contradictions.

(Gutierrez and Pennel, 2014: 20)



2.FLEXIBILITY

Schools are sometimes unpredictable places for researchers. Plans that you have made to meet a teacher or a group of students are routinely derailed by emergencies, changes in schedules and misunderstandings...Unfortunately, for researchers this is the nature of education research sites.

Teachers often work in very stressful situations and if research exacerbates the stress researchers will see deterioration in any goodwill that they had built up... In essence, the best approach is to understand your context and negotiate with the school every step of the way...

(Anderson and Freebody, 2014: 111)



3. RESEARCH AS ADVOCACY: CRITICAL FRIENDSHIPS

....a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work.

(Costa and Kallick, 1993: 50)



4. FACTORS WHICH UNDERPIN SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION:

1. Time - to engage and collaborate
2. Workload – empathy
3. Unanticipated events - adaptivity
4. Group dynamics – reciprocity
5. Trust - relational
6. Sustained interactivity
7. Commitment to the person and the task
8. A capacity for resilience



5. CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Trustworthiness – persistence guided subjectivity – imagination and creativity – the ability to manage problems

Passion – a key driver in the continuing ‘energetic pursuit of meaning in the face of obstacles’ (*Anderson and Freebody, 2014: 19*)

Commitment - an enduring belief that working together with integrity is likely to result in better outcomes than working alone

Rigour - a determination to ensure that what is planned, what is done and how what is done is evaluated, is systematic

Relevance – the practitioners agenda first



SIX CORE PRINCIPLES OF IMPROVEMENT: HOW ACADEMIC RESEARCH CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

1. Be problem focused and user centred: it is not the researcher's responsibility to solve problems of practice
2. Attend to variability: what works, for whom, under what conditions
3. See the system: what is actually producing the outcomes we observe
4. Enhance practitioners' abilities to measure progress qualitatively and quantitatively: are we truly improving anything?
5. Learn through disciplined inquiry: how can we learn faster to achieve and sustain the outcomes we seek
6. Organise as networks: how can we combine our efforts to make real improvement

(After Tony Bryk, 2015, AERA)



PART 3: POSITIONING THE RESEARCH

**‘Theory without practice is meaningless,
practice without theory is blind’**

(Pestalozzi, after Kant)



UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THEORY: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE RESEARCHER AND THE RESEARCHED

3 forms of research:

- i) Explanatory (causal explanation)
- ii) Understanding (interpretive understanding)
- iii) Emancipatory (political)

Interpretive research(contributing to reflections on learning)=deepening and broadening understandings of everyday interpretations and experiences (Giddens, 1976)

Critical theory (fundamental distrust in first person experiences)=exposing how hidden power structures influence and distort such interpretations and experiences(Habermas,1973)' (Biesta et al, 2011::231)



DESIGN-BASED IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH?

- A focus on existing problems of practice from multiple stakeholders' perspectives
- A commitment to iterative, collaborative design
- A concern with developing theory related to both classroom learning and implementation through systematic inquiry
- A concern with developing capacity for sustaining change in systems

(Penuel et al; 2011:322)



CHALLENGING EXISTING KNOWLEDGE POLARISATIONS

- Theory versus practice
- The theoretical versus the empirical
- The theoretical versus the useful

‘ theory is generally deployed...to make things visible or intelligible that are not immediately observable...by trying to make plausible why people act as they act or do what they do’. (Biesta et al; 2011: 227)



CORE VALUES

The following interrelated core values, guiding the practices and processes associated with these partnerships, emerged from the literature.

Thoughtfulness	Before entering into a collaborative research relationship, all parties should think through just what type and degree of collaboration is desirable, bearing in mind their own expectations, strengths and limitations .
Realism	The project must match the capabilities, interests and available facilities of those involved; the interests and plans of partners .
Selectiveness	Approaches to encouraging user involvement in research should be selected critically and systematically (particularly in community settings) taking into account the diversity of approaches that abound. The approach used can mean the difference between passive community input and active community involvement and enablement).
Commitment	All parties must be committed to the partnership. This is supported by transparent understanding of mutual responsibilities, and is evidence in the provision of a supportive, nurturing environment by all parties.
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CORE VALUES (CONT)

Time and Negotiation	Building and maintaining partnerships takes time and negotiation.
Mutual goals	Establish a common set of mutually agreed goals, which consolidates the partnership and supports an active role by all partners.
Mutual benefit	Ensure each partner sees tangible benefits from participation .
Recognition of diversity	Acknowledge that data and findings can be understood and interpreted in different ways, reflecting the diversity of stakeholders who have different structural positions, accountabilities and sensibilities. It requires acknowledgement and honouring of different partners' 'agendas' and recognition of goals and administrative differences.
Flexibility	Partnerships may need to be flexible, particularly around proprietary rights, intellectual property and/or dissemination .
Reflection and evaluation	There needs to be ongoing analysis, reflection and evaluation of the partnership.

(Source: Journal Watch, April 2004: 6)

PART 4: KEY MESSAGES



10 KEY MESSAGES

- The learning worlds of academics and school practitioners are very different. The worlds of the practitioners are characterised by 'busyness' and multiple social interactions whereas the worlds of academics are characterised by the demands of knowledge production
- Academically derived knowledge needs to be expressed in terms which are perceived to be meaningful by the practitioner recipients
- To influence it must be able to become integrated with the personal and practical and contextual knowledge of school practitioners



- New academic knowledge in itself is unlikely to have lasting influence without the closely associated credibility and trustworthiness of the academic partner
- Head teachers and their staff are unlikely to invest in acquiring academically generated knowledge without confidence in this credibility
- Because head teachers themselves are likely to have different dispositions towards the value of research, be in different phases of their own development and be managing different sets of challenges in their schools, credibility and trust needs to be earned by partner academics

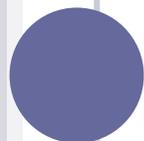
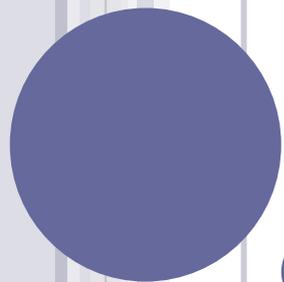


- To influence successfully, academics themselves, therefore, need particular sets of technical and human relating qualities and skills
- Knowledge transfer and exchange partnerships need, therefore, to be understood as being developmental over time and likely to require shifts in cultural mind sets
- Knowledge of processes of social influence and the capability to apply these is, therefore, essential to academics who wish to engage in these partnerships



- The success of academic-practitioner partnership work rests upon the nature, forms and quality of the collaboration. We have learnt through this project that the quality and depth of collaboration is built over time, **earned** rather than given, that it requires an on-going commitment from all parties, that the **level of participant commitment may vary over time** according to anticipated and unanticipated events at school level which require urgent attention of the head teacher and which, on occasion, may result in temporary negative effects on the head teacher's own well-being. In such circumstances, it is the **practitioners' work imperatives that are likely to take precedence over the partnership**. Collaboration needs to be seen, therefore, as a process that may be subject to fluctuation and that requires a **capacity for resilience** in all partners.





THANK YOU

FINAL EXAMPLE: SYSTEM INFLUENCE



LEADING LEARNING IN SCHOOLS IN URBAN CHALLENGING CONTEXTS

Project focus

To examine the stages of headship put forward by researchers, testing these theories against Transform leaders' experiences. Specifically:

- Are the proposed stage theories relevant to the current leadership landscape?
- How can the Transform Teaching School Alliance best match its entitlement offer to leaders at different stages, thus enabling a more bespoke, personalized career plan approach to leadership CPD?
- How can Transform ensure the sustainability of leadership capacity given the changing leadership structures and reduction of senior leaders applying for headship?





Rebecca Meredith, Executive Head teacher



WHAT WE DID

- I started rather reluctantly (my research methods involved a very superficial internet search) by looking at academic texts (even buying some recommended books!) I also reviewed the National College leadership provision levels to identify models of the stages of leadership that I could test against both personal experience and that of colleagues in Transform, the basis of which would be used to develop Transform professional development activities. Initially I found a six stage model of leadership (Weinding 1999) based on the number of years' experience a head teacher has had, further categorized into sequential events. For example, 5 – 7 years was viewed as a period of consolidation: unplanned, externally initiated change causing turbulence. Brighouse (2007) talked about four stages of headship whilst Ingates (2010) also proposed a six- stage model. I also referred to the Leadership and Management maturity grid created by Professor Qing Gu from the University of Nottingham. This research generated many notes but no real symmetry or cohesion. As a pragmatist and visual learner, I transferred the information initially to a flipchart, assembled into a visual representation, which led to it organically growing into a comparative grid. The grid took on an original life of its own enabling me to transpose the Transform leadership offer against the researched stages. This immediately highlighted some gaps in Transform's leadership provision.



PROJECT RATIONALE

- Head teachers rarely and reluctantly consider their own CPD needs, often putting all other staff before themselves. The Transform heads I approached generally felt they had reached the pinnacle of their careers and weren't overly confident what came next, the most obvious choice being a move to a bigger school. It was unanimously agreed that there is no visual career map for heads or senior leaders and in the current changing educational climate this gave way to unease and uncertainty. It also promoted discussion relating to what will be expected of future leaders and what will the nature of leadership be – in essence what values, knowledge and skills do we want Transform leaders to exhibit and can these be planned for?



LEADERSHIP LEARNING

- Validation
- The initial findings were shared with Transform heads at a Leadership Away Day at the National College. They were simply asked to place themselves at the stage most appropriate to them. This checking and validation exercise allowed me to rationalize my findings and further personalize them to Transform's context and ideologies. At another leadership gathering, heads offered an opinion on the values most appropriate for each stage and at a further event, plotted monumental leadership events on a timeline and whether these events affecting them positively or negatively.



NEW KNOWLEDGE GAINED

- Transform's heads were much less negative about the stages of their headship seeing the latter stages as a new challenge and not as being frustrated, disengaged or nostalgic.
- They are not stages but phases of leadership.
- The head's timelines were very similar with matching negative and positive experience.
- Other unexpected by-products from the inquiry project were:
 - engagement and enthusiasm of heads acknowledging personal stages
 - the possibility to dream of doing something different and building the concept to an end point



UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP ROLE

- Professor Christopher Day facilitated my inquiry, not by telling me how to do it, but by suggesting reading, acting as a critical friend and messing with my head! Initially, I didn't understand or appreciate how research could benefit Transform's leadership offer. However, through Chris's persistence I have been academically stretched and mentally challenged.



NEXT STEPS

- The inquiry project is much like a snowball rushing downhill gaining in size and speed. In the future, I aim to focus on investigating values in leadership: how can we identify those values common to Transform leadership and how we use these to grow our own leaders of the future? Also building leadership capacity: how can Transform continue to challenge and motivate phase 8 Heads? All this packaged tightly in an improved and organically evolving Transform leadership offer.

