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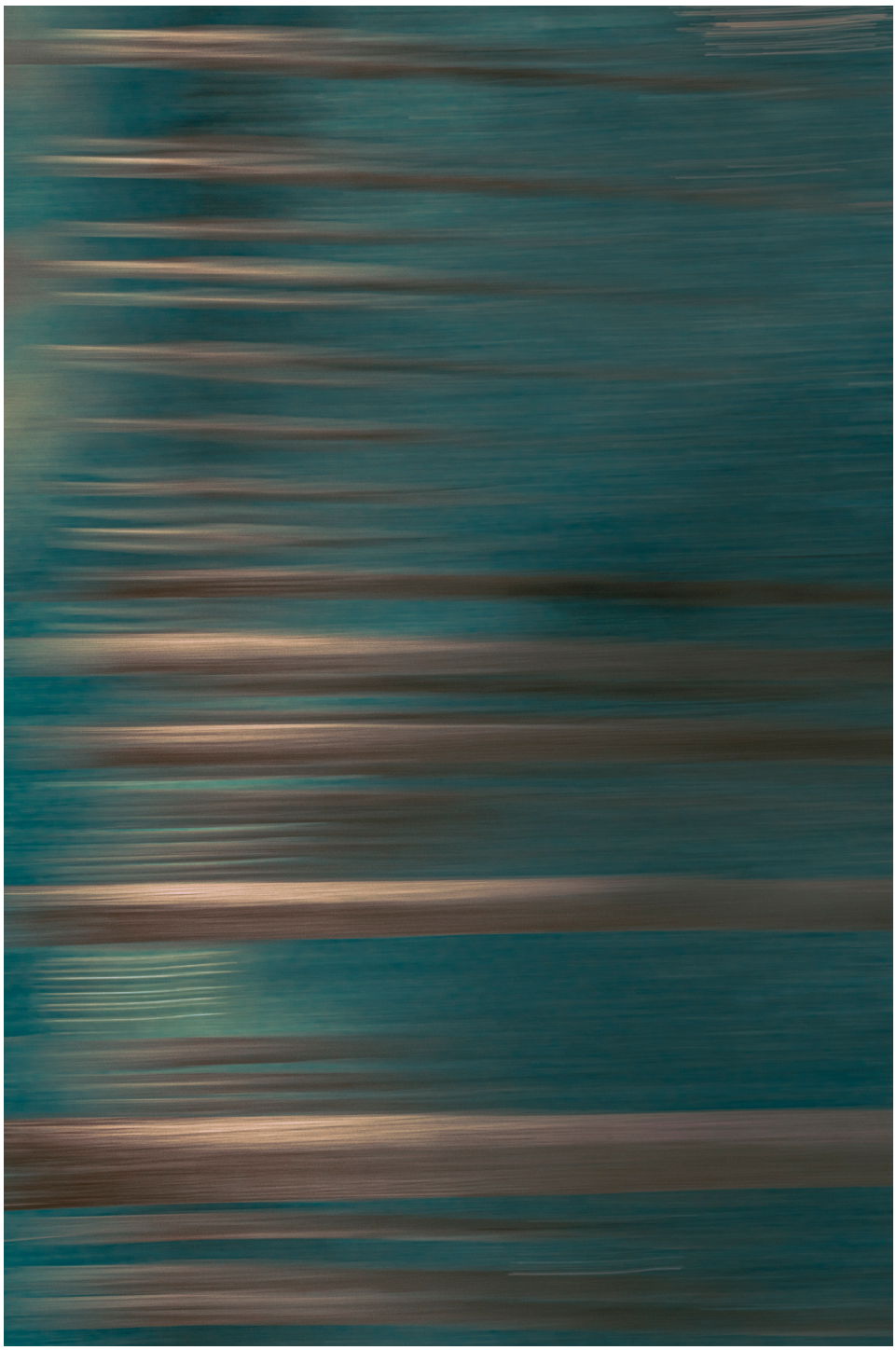
Inclusive Leadership: Collaborating for professional development



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Contents

Introduction

This course will help you to consider different approaches to inclusive leadership and professional development. You will be introduced to concepts and practices for collaborative enquiry and contextually relevant professional development. You will be encouraged to reflect on how these approaches can contribute to inclusive communities of practice within your organisation and how you might support the needs of educators at different stages of their career. You will also examine how inclusive leadership and professional development can foster agency in staff members as well as driving institutional change.

If you haven't already, you might want to consider exploring the related OpenLearn course Inclusive Leadership: Effecting change before starting this course. You might also be interested in the other OpenLearn courses:

- Leadership for inclusion: thinking it through
- Leadership for inclusion: what can you do?

You might also be interested in the Open University Inclusive Practice Leadership and Management Masters pathways.

Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand a range of approaches to inclusive leadership of professional development
- engage with inclusive strategies for leading professional development for educators at different stages in their career
- identify ways in which inclusive professional development can foster individual agency
- consider how inclusive leadership for professional development can support change within an educational institution.

1 Inclusive Leadership and communities of practice

Figure 1

A real difficulty for a course on inclusive leadership and professional development is the lack of an evidence-base which can directly help us. As noted by Waitoller & Artiles in their review of professional development research for inclusive education (2013), the knowledge base is limited and fragmented because of the different ways in which people conceptualise inclusive education and teacher learning.

> 'The act of dismantling exclusion occurs in dynamic, politically charged, and historically contingent contexts. The degree of success of inclusive education, and how success is defined, depends on the work of local actors and their meaning making process situated in historically evolving activity systems. Thus, drawing broad generalizations about the practices, tools, and work of local actors from one program or school to another without regard for the complexities and idiosyncrasies of particular institutional contexts may result in unintended consequences. To understand inclusive education, researchers need to understand locally situated forms of exclusion.'
>
> (Waitoller & Artiles (2013, p. 347)

A similar review (Holmqvist & Lelinge, 2021) facing the same challenge, identified four broad definitions of inclusive education: basic inclusion, classroom inclusion, general inclusion, and content inclusion. They also recognised that these were implemented differently in different social contexts (for example, inclusion may have a focus upon disabilities or have a focus upon wider socioeconomic and cultural perspectives with an aim to foster social justice).

As authors we have to make a choice in how we represent this field. For example, many people would suggest that inclusive leaders of inclusive schools should be calling for professional development that focuses upon categories of need or types of behaviour. However, in this course we choose not to do this. This is because the research base that

would answer such a call is also very limited, rarely tested in meaningful school contexts, and very hard to carry out with fidelity (Rix, 2023). This reminds us that the calls for 'evidence-informed policy' are understandable but not sufficient. The focus cannot simply be about 'what works' but must be part of a debate around 'what matters', with an emphasis upon the importance of context (Stevenson, 2017).

1.1 A collective view?

This course is also premised upon a widespread recognition of the importance of collaborative practices. Much of the inclusive literature talks about forming partnerships amongst key stakeholders as part of a whole school approach, with policies and practices arising from the experience and expertise of all those involved (Ainscow, 2020). This is not to say that collaboration is a miracle cure, nor guaranteed. Perhaps ironically, its limitations are often related to the nature of our institutions. For instance, a study from 6 schools in Denmark (Hansen et al, 2021) showed how collaborative processes did not have any real impact on the development of an inclusive school culture, because people continued to focus upon student's deficits and how to compensate for or treat them. They lacked leadership in collaborative processes and so did not explore and resolve people's different understandings and assumptions. Similarly, a study in Germany (Jurkowski & Mueller, 2018) exploring classroom teachers and special education teachers working together over a year, concluded that cooperation did not change across the year and that they did not appear to affect each other's practice. (From the student perspective their cooperation was increasingly worse.) The researchers concluded that structural conditions were at the root of the problem.

The idea of collaboration is at the heart of many calls to overcome the kinds of structural issues experienced in the Danish and German studies, though. For instance, a study in six early childhood and primary settings in Spain and Chile recognised that Leadership practices arise from interactions among members of the school community. They depend upon the context in which they emerge and upon people having common interests. The settings sought collaboration and shared understandings of educational inclusion, with a focus upon the professional development of the community and positive responses to diversity (Gómez-Hurtado et al, 2021).

So let us consider the kinds of professional development that are frequently called for.

Activity 1 A collective view?

20 minutes

Watch the following video:

View at: youtube:c4oYHLFMfGA

Video 1 What are the most effective professional development activities for teachers and school leaders? EduSkills OECD (The Open University is not responsible for external content.)

As you are watching make notes and reflect upon the following questions:

- What types of research and activities are people talking about?

- Why do they value these types of research and activities?
- What is your experience and opinion of these types of approaches?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You probably noted people talking about action research, coaching, peer to peer work, professional learning communities, networks and lesson study, as well as the importance of having collective goals, a reflective attitude and a positive mindset. At the heart of approaches discussed was recognition of the importance of professional development being relevant to the context of the school leader or teacher. It needs to be based upon what people know; a practical activity undertaken in collaborative ways. This echoes many of the ideas behind the notion of *principal professional learning communities*. These are groups of school leaders working together to develop their leadership skills, in order to facilitate and support teachers' learning, creating professional learning communities in their own schools that seek to develop teaching quality and improve students' experiences of learning. By being part of these communities, school leaders have been shown to (Strand & Emstad, 2020):

- enhance their leadership skills,
- be more aware of and confident in their leaderships skills
- build greater collaboration in their settings

1.2 Whose community?

In a study set in 3 South African schools, exploring the work of their school governing body and management team, Setlhodi (2020) drew on the notion of collaborative circles (Farrell, 2001). A collaborative circle is a group of peers, from the same field, who support each other and openly engage in developing a group with a common vision. They critically explore ideas, to enable creative activity that takes their work forward. Setlhodi explored how the two school leadership groups decide on: what needs to be developed and by who, as well as how and when it should happen and what should be prioritised. This collaborative process involved reflecting upon people's attachment to their attitudes and their understanding of the capacity of the school (and the people in it) to respond to change. Consequently, they had to rethink established visions and strategies to create shared purpose, taking collective responsibility for the state of the school, acknowledging their interdependence. This involved a creative process of reflection and the development of new routines that initiated their ideas.

As part of this process, the school leaders had to invite inputs to improve these ideas, whilst ensuring the process was agreeable to those involved and could be sustained. To be effective, the leaders needed to know how to influence people as well as how to inspire and oversee collaborative action. They had to want to improve and feel able to persuade people about a call for action, so as to develop and implement the action plan. This included the formation of circles of influence, so that people volunteered their services to support the proposed plan, creating a web of social teams within the school, that were interactive and able to communicate effectively.

Setlhodi identified the need for courage, consistency, preciseness, and honesty in engaging each other in constructive conversation. People's views needed to be acknowledged, considered, and affirmed. The nature of their conversations needed to be deliberated upon, as did their reception, interpretation, and the degree to which participants were given the chance to fully explain their understandings and views. He suggested that collective action flourishes when people understand what is expected, recognising that less experienced participants may require significant support to be successfully involved in the process. All of this required strong bonds, that encouraged commitment and trust-based relationships.

Another issue raised in Video 1 in Activity 1 was about working with people from outside the immediate school setting, for example visiting another school with a consultant or attending a training programme. Looking across a dozen research and development projects in secondary schools, Schenke et al (2016), talked about projects in which school leaders, teachers, researchers, and advisers took over each other's tasks, and often had a deep level of cross-professional exploration. They suggested that there are four types of cross-professional collaboration that take place in the examination of practice:

- School-directed -with external people as supporters, supervisors, or critical friends,
- School- and researcher-directed – with external partners as co-collaborators, sharing responsibilities,
- School- and adviser-directed – with external advisors in control of achieving goals set by school management,
- Researcher-directed - with external partners following their own commercial or academic interests.

In thinking about these kinds of collaborations, you may also have considered something that has not been mentioned so far (and is the title of this section), communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the following paper, drawing on the work of Richard McDermott, they suggest that a successful community of practice includes people who:

- focus on topics of vital interest to the community members
- are facilitated by a well-respected community member
- create time and encouragement so people can participate properly
- build on the core values of the discipline community
- get key thought leaders involved
- build personal relationships among community members
- contain an active passionate core group
- use forums for thinking together as well as systems for sharing information
- are technically easy to access and contribute to, and
- create real dialogue about cutting edge issues.

This seems to encapsulate many of the issues raised above. So, let's explore this a bit further.

Activity 2 Whose community?

45 minutes

Read Akinyemi, A., Rembe, S., Shumba, J. and Adewumi, T. (2019) 'Collaboration and mutual support as processes established by communities of practice to improve

continuing professional teachers' development in high schools', *Cogent Education*, 6(1), p. 1685446.

Focus on pages 7–16, from the start of Results to the end of Conclusion. As you are reading, think about the following questions and make notes:

- In what ways are the characteristics associated with a successful community of practice in evidence?
- In what ways do the teachers and school leaders participate effectively?
- What ideas and experiences raised in this article challenge your expectations of a successful community of practice?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

At times this paper presents its' findings in a very descriptive manner. It makes it clear that people are working well in their communities of practice. It is clear too that most of them attend regularly, and that they value the outcomes. They talk about mutuality and encouragement for instance. But there is not a lot of evidence about what is happening in this community, and very little to suggest it represents the successful characteristics identified earlier in the paper. There are some concerns that point in the other direction too. For example, they talk about people feeling exposed, humiliated, and worried about workload. They talk about it as an event organised for them, with the outcomes being about gaining skills and knowledge. In contrast, a study in Sweden (Lelinge & Alwall, 2022), highlights the importance of mutual commitment and joint work, as well as sharing experiences and materials. The school principals recognised that providing staff with opportunities to participate actively in school decisions and being supported in professional development increased job satisfaction and self-confidence. By being involved in discussions in collaborative groups, staff also became aware of issues such as power relations that they had previously not considered.

An interesting challenge for members of communities of practice is how those on the margins are brought into the main body of the community. Lave and Wenger refer to this as a process of peripheral participation. People need time to figure out the rules of the community and how to get their voice heard. For instance, a study looking at people joining policy communities (Aydarova et al, 2022), showed how people initially felt that they were observers, learning rules of engagement and tactical strategies to engage with other policymakers. They talked of learning rituals and the importance of tact and respect. It was important for them to have mentors, role models and guides in the group, who not only explained things but helped them get their voices heard. At the heart of this experience was having the confidence and capacity to jump in; only then could the newcomers fully participate in the community of practice and enter the policy conversations.

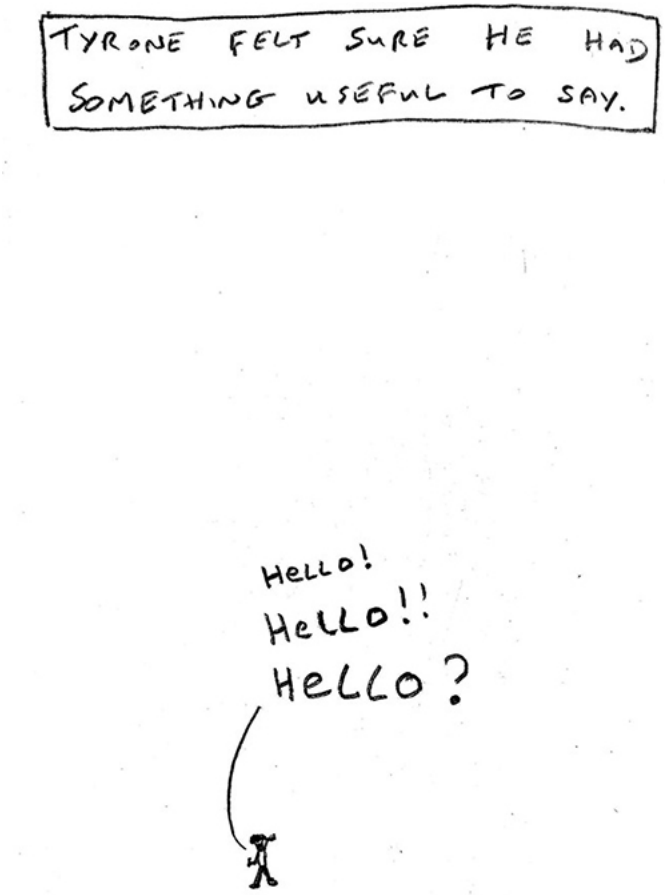


Figure 2 being a part?

2 Inclusive Leadership and collaborative enquiry

Figure 3

In Video 1 in Activity 1, one of the participants said that professional development was helpful ‘As long as we are part of groups that have identified the needs of a school.’ A reason for this is that having agreed the needs of a setting, you can then collectively explore possible ways forward. An aim for many leaders is to make such exploration part of the school’s culture. Miles, Ainscow & Moore (2011) situate a culture in the basic beliefs and assumptions shared by people in an organisation, which operate unconsciously and through which people view themselves and the contexts in which they work. They also suggest that effective, inquiry-based approaches require an element of challenge, involving new thinking and relationships that encourage active connections between people, stimulating risk taking and creative actions. The development of inclusive practices requires social learning within particular cultural contexts. ‘Developing’ people involves providing intellectual stimulation and using information to create a culture of inquiry. This calls for making interruptions to people’s thinking, to challenge existing assumptions and practices.

These ideas are evident in a piece of research looking at two elementary school principals in the United States (DeMatthews, 2021). This work explored how the principals sought to create an effective inclusive school, as well as what they saw as the challenges and necessary change processes. These school leaders saw a need to focus their collaboration, relying upon a group of staff to explore school challenges, to decide on priorities and initial steps as well has how to problem solve specific problems that emerged from chaotic everyday school life. Their first step in establishing their ways of working was to develop routines where staff regularly collaborated. They set up teams of five to seven-people who regularly met and developed plans for change. The principals looked for quick wins and small steps, rather than focussing upon what they viewed as bigger issues. At the heart of their approaches was collaborative inquiry. They recognised that time was needed to develop the structures to enable this, given people’s already busy daily workload and the need to consider multiple variables and perspectives to implement inclusion effectively. This fitted with their understanding of inclusion as an ongoing

process. As a result, they focussed on specific goals to begin with; for instance, in the first-year prioritising how to support marginalised students they felt could be immediately successful in general education classrooms, whilst providing professional development on co-planning and co-teaching. They also encouraged collaborative inquiry as a way to deal with individual issues that emerged, gathering a group to work out what was going on. They sought shorter feedback loops, to explore problems and proposed solutions. They recognised that there was a need for open communications and ensuring people had access to information, and for responses that were both effective and as quick as possible.

So, let's consider some of the ways in which collaborative enquiry can take place in a school.

Activity 3 Better than one?

60 minutes

Read: Harris, A. and Jones, M., (2012) 'Connecting professional learning: Leading effective collaborative enquiry across teaching school alliances', *National College for School Leadership, UK*.

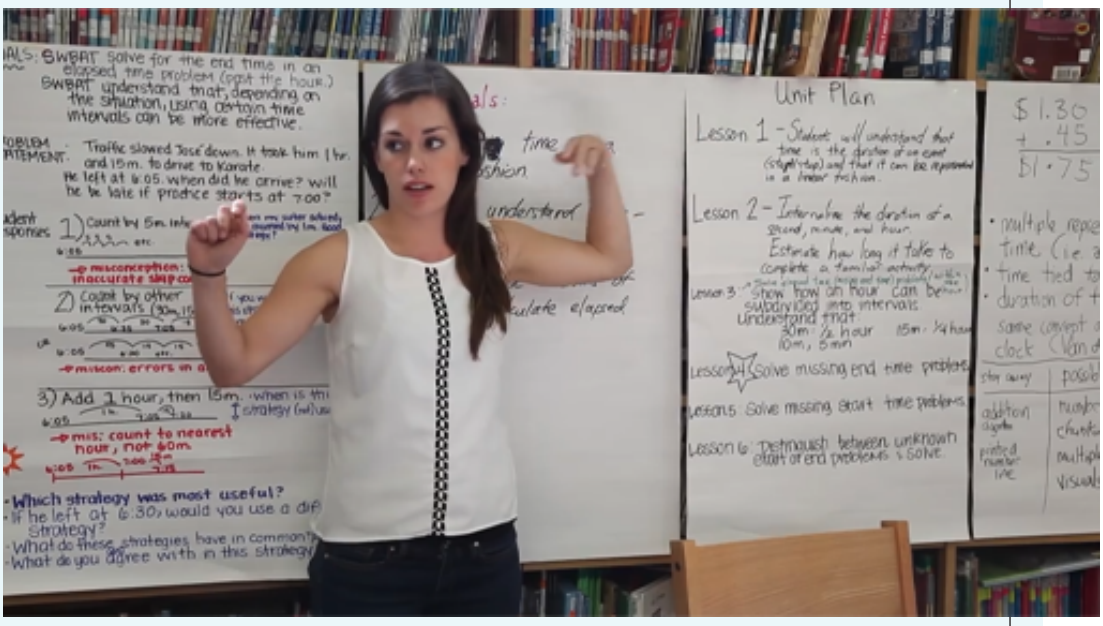
Read the Appendix 1, pp. 38–39. This text outlines four approaches (Learning walks; Instructional rounds; Peer triads; Lesson study). You can find out more about these approaches by searching online if you wish to; there are lots of resources out there, even though they can often give contradictory advice! Included here are some resources. Video 2 includes mention of OFSTED, the school inspection service in England.

Video content is not available in this format.
Video 2 Learning walks: what are they?

Video 3 is a more collaborative approach.

Video content is not available in this format.
Video 3 Learning walks: structured observation for teachers

Video content is not available in this format.
Video 4 Lesson study: a powerful approach to improve teaching



- Text 1: Instructional rounds
- Text 2: Teachers in Triad Teams: Three is not a crowd (The Open University is not responsible for external content.)

Having considered these approaches, study this image of the connect to learn method from the report by Harris and Jones? Ask yourself the following questions?

- Who might be in an enquiry team?
- What sort of data could they use?
- What sort of enquiry methods are you aware of?
- What sort of issues do you think could be explored this way?
- Who would you want to disseminate findings to in a school community?

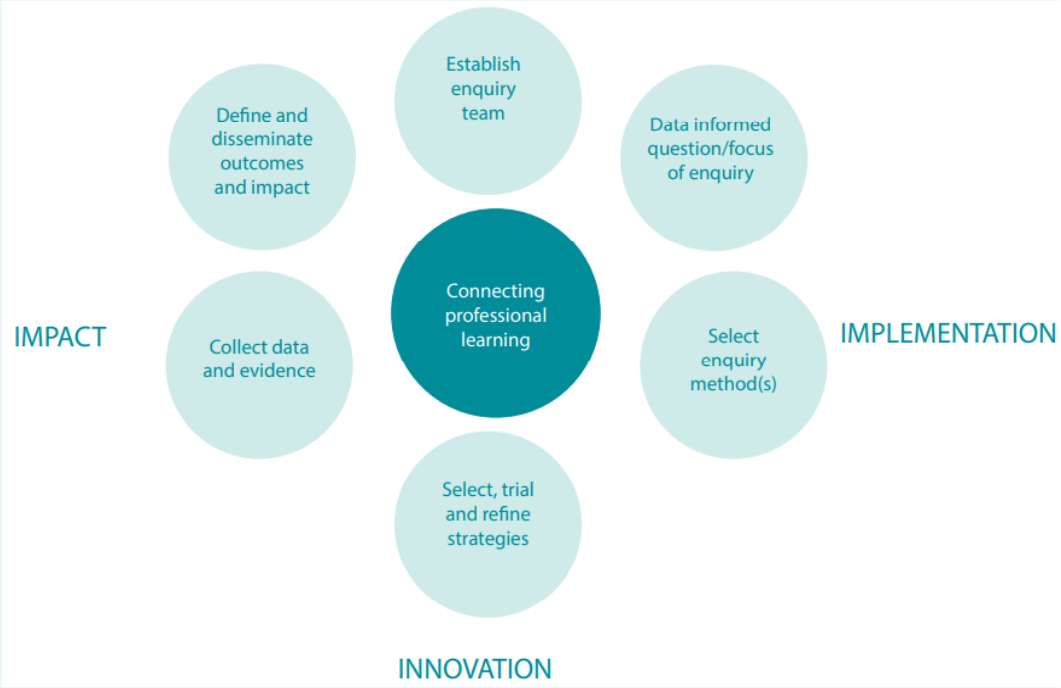


Figure 4 Connect to learn method

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Looking across a range of examples, it is clear that enquiry teams are very often made up of practitioners exploring their own practice, but as the work by Schenke et al (2016) discussed above makes clear, such teams could also include school leaders, researchers, and advisers. It is also commonplace to include administrative staff in such activities, and also learning support staff. Less frequently do people choose to include other staff in the school, such as those involved in maintenance or food preparation, but there is no reason why they should not. They would certainly bring new insights and understandings. Another group worth considering are the young people in the school. We will return to these possible team members in the next activity.

The nature of data is also more variable than you might have felt at first. In many of the online resources explored in developing this activity, data was seen as something hard and fast. It was a target, something that could be measured or had been agreed on as the focus prior to the activity. But data can be understood in many other ways. In the first Learning Walks video listed above, the school leader

talks about a member of staff who has had a mishap. This is an example of an anecdote from someone's life as data. Stories, opinions, ideas, notes, pictures, memories, are all powerful data sources. This is one of the reasons for working with other people; if you have open discussions, you are far more likely to think about things "outside the box". If you narrow your understanding of data, the danger is that the group is just ticking the same box alongside each other.

You may have thought of other formal approaches to collaborative enquiry, but in some ways the formality of the process can get in the way. In searching the internet for example, the course author came across a wide variety of ways to undertake all the activities listed above; however, many of the resources had a very strict method of undertaking the activity. Often these were associated with local standards or frameworks for practice. A more helpful way to think about methods is to view them as a third space (Hulme et al, 2009). Collaborative inquiry can be seen as a *recognised place* in which professionals can put aside the pressures of the workplace for a while, to think through practice. It can be seen as a *navigational space,* that serves to allow them to move between different personal and professional understandings of situations. It can be seen as a *conversational space*, in which competing knowledges and ways of thinking are contested, explored, and translated so a closer understanding can emerge.

2.1 Trying to be collaborative, inclusive and distributed?

In reflecting upon the sorts of issues that can be explored in Activity 3, you probably concluded that the answer is as long as a piece of string! Schools are hugely complex places and spaces. From a research perspective, one could say they are filled with endless variables. This is why many of the methods explored in Activity 3 will suggest a frame for observation or a set of agreed targets to assess against. A simpler way to think of this, perhaps, is simply an agreed question; an issue that those involved feel it is useful to talk about; an itch that needs to be scratched; a need that has been identified by all those involved. This openness also feels appropriate to the issue of disseminating findings. Clearly, the answer is to share them with those who will find them useful and relevant. But it is always worth asking yourself, who decides this? If they are not available to everyone in some way, how can they know if they find them useful and relevant?

So now let's go back to the group who are so often left out of leadership groups and the process of professional collaborative enquiry.

Activity 4 Trying to be collaborative, inclusive and distributed?

45 minutes

Read the following article. Volin, K. C. (2018) 'The challenges and possibilities of including students in middle school leadership: Building and sustaining change', *Journal of Ethical Educational Leadership*, (1), pp.1–9.

Read from the section Researcher (p68) to the end of the article (p74). The following acronyms are used in this extract: School Based Initiatives Team (SBI), Student Leadership Group (SLG), School Advisory Council (SAC)

The researcher in this study is basing her work around values that underpin collaborative, distributed, and inclusive leadership, in that she wants to work with a group to identify a challenge and then empower them to come up with manageable solutions. As you are reading consider the following questions:

- What issues emerge that involve critique, disagreement, difference, and conflict?
- Which parts of the school community become involved in the projects?
- In what ways is this an example of effective or ineffective collaborative leadership and inquiry?
- What experiences have you had that reflect the kinds of challenges evident in this study?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

This reading begins with an act of self-critique, which is informed by involvement as a middle leader within the school on the SBI and with groups external to the school. Having identified issues in her own practice, the author joins a local group engaged in collaborative inquiry and action research. In developing the project, she establishes a group and opens up the possibility of them choosing their focus of activity. Both the identified issues seem meaningful to the SLG, and the disruption they create within the system suggests they are in some ways transformatory. However, the capacity of senior leaders in the school to constrain the change and disrupt the ideas of the young people (and the SBI team) underlines that the leaders have control of the tools of persuasion, compulsion and power. The teacher's reflections upon her own failings in maintaining and supporting the SLG also highlights some of the internal political challenges within the group itself and that she faces in trying to bring about change in her setting.

This tale seems both inspiring and dispiriting. It reflects a number of issues that are evident in relation to student voice and to involving them in the decision making and reflective process of a school. The resistance of teachers and school leaders to the group echoes a common theme in student voice literature that children and young people are seen as lacking competence in some way. Consequently, since adult leaders retain power over the spaces to be heard, they exclude voices that they see as not acceptable, relevant or intelligible. Despite the efforts of the teacher to facilitate leadership amongst the students and facilitate interactions with the staff, the goals and structures of activities are framed by the institution and as a result seem to reinforce existing school power relations and keep the children on the boundaries (Pearce & Wood, 2019). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the students are not really allowed to be members of the community of practice. They are perhaps allowed a temporary position of peripheral participation, as discussed at the end of Section 1.

It seems particularly relevant to reflect on issues of power in this context. Children and young people may seem to be on the extreme edge of this issue when considering professional collaboration and enquiry. But this tale can also be understood as being relevant to those others that are frequently placed on the margins of the school's decision-making processes (e.g.: the support staff, the maintenance staff, the food preparation staff; parents and families). For instance, a study of 5 school principles in the United States (Flores & Kyere, 2021) identified

> how they recognised the power of relationships when engaging with parents, the need to resist deficit thinking about families, and that working with families was an issue of equity. They all believed that without a trusting relationship with parents they lost an opportunity to build on the strengths and resources families brought with them. Leading a community can be understood as both a moral and intellectual activity (Starratt, 2007), engaged in an examination of who we are, and our relationships and responsibilities to the natural, cultural, and social worlds. In this context leadership is about restructuring and re-culturing, it is an authentic practice, involving the development of the people around us, building their capacity to explore new possibilities and support others. It is up to the leader(s) to decide if this includes everyone in that community of enquiry.

So let’s go on to explore the contextual nature of these communities.

3 Inclusive leadership for professional development in context

Figure 5

Learning and professional development are always situated within relationships. These in turn can be part of formal and informal processes. For instance, the study mentioned above (Flores & Kyere, 2021) tells of a school leader who learned the value of getting new parents to laugh early in meetings (so as to break down walls between them and the institution). He had learned this not from formal training, but from watching a principal when he was a young teacher working in an alternative setting. The relationships which school leaders and practitioners find themselves in are not just personal and physical either. They are also closely entwined with the policy context. For example, in Scotland (where professional growth through career-long professional learning is strongly embedded in school systems), school leaders and practitioners are expected to fully engage with social justice principles. These principles are, for instance, strongly in evidence in the Scottish professional standards. As a consequence, in the Scottish context, professional development can be seen as intertwined with social justice for all. Such an expectation is not as simple as it might appear however, since people generally have different understandings of what social justice means (Thomas et al, 2019). It also puts considerable pressure on those school leaders, because to be effective in supporting individuals in their learning and development as professionals, school leaders need to be well connected (Jones, 2017b). To support social justice, therefore, they need to know what opportunities are available and have the resources to support their staff to engage in them.

Resolving such issues is made harder too because so much professional development is a top-down affair where teachers voices are secondary and the goals are decided by others; consider this tale from a professor who had returned to school to work as a teacher:

> ‘Having students record and (re)present their neighborhoods gave him many insights into his students lives. However, when he suggested that practice be shared during a professional development day at his school, administrators shot him down in favor of a focus on the literacy issue du jour’
>
> (Sieben & Johnson, 2018, p109)

As a consequence, individuals can find themselves unable to explore the issues that seem relevant to them and in ways that help them to unravel underlying challenges. It was as a response to this inability to explore relevant issues, that the first Inquiry to Action Groups were set up. (You read about a study that emerged from an Inquiry to Action Group in Activity 4). These were established to allow teachers to make connections between social justice issues and classroom practice, through the sharing of experiences, ideas and readings, alongside the development of plans of action. Contrast the experience of the former professor mentioned above with this one from a teacher at an Inquiry to Action Group:

> ‘There is a genuine concern for each other, for teachers and they can go and discuss something as simple as ‘how was your day,’ to abstract ‘let’s talk about this policy.’ There’s a place for the conversation and it feels authentic as opposed to a generic PD or some cliché workshops. There’s a sense of love I feel in the space which is something I don’t think we get to talk about enough.’
>
> (Kohli et al, 2015, p16)

So, let’s explore how teachers feel when they are involved in one-to-one supportive professional development over an extended period of time. The following reading looks at teachers and student-teachers developing their practice over an extended period.

Activity 5 Shared moments?

45 minutes

Read Lofthouse, R. and Thomas, U. (2017) ‘Concerning collaboration: teachers’ perspectives on working in partnerships to develop teaching practices’, *Professional development in education*, 43(1), pp. 36–56.

Read from Findings p, 10 to the start of Discussion on p. 20. As you are reading think about and make notes about the following issues:

- The relationships between interviewees
- The nature of power between the interviewees and in the practices they discuss
- The feelings that the processes have encouraged
- What lessons from these personal interactions might be applied more widely in a leadership context?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

It was evident that this paper was focussing upon mainly positive experiences, but there were still clear examples of power relations at play, such as those emerging

from student-teaching dyads and teacher & student-teacher dyads. But it was also clear that the process of professional development brought people together, without participants feeling judged. Noticeable by their absence were words such as exposed or humiliated! It was also interesting to see the recognition of risk taking that was being encouraged and supported, which allowed for new ideas to emerge and be explored. Evidently this was facilitated by people not feeling in competition nor formally evaluated, as in previous assessments and observations they had experienced. This removal of top-down control could also be why collaboration emerged when compulsion was removed. Another noticeable observation was of people talking about teaching *whilst* teaching. This suggests that people are relaxed with each other and very open to being flexible and responsive to others in the moment. This is particularly important because, being aware of moments is an essential aspect of inclusive practice. It is through everyday moments that schools impact on the experiences of adults and young people, in academic, physical, social and emotional contexts (Benjamin et al, 2003).

When reading this study, a model called the Leadership for Learning Framework (The Open University is not responsible for external content), came to mind (MacBeath & Dempster, 2008). This has 5 principles and emphasises moral purpose. The principles are not independent of each other, but are interrelated and complementary. They can be summarised as:

1. Everyone is a learner. Learning is context based, involving social, emotional and cognitive processes. Learning enables and arises from leadership.
2. Cultures, physical spaces, social spaces, tools and strategies, and having opportunities to reflect are central to creating favourable learning conditions.
3. Dialogue about leadership should make practices explicit, develop shared understanding, shared values and explore different perspectives
4. Leadership should be shared in the day-to-day flow of activities, drawing upon people's expertise whatever their role or position, allowing all people to be leaders and participants in learning communities.
5. Accountability should feel shared, involving self-evaluation, drawing upon evidence and its relation to the school's core values, with attention paid to sustainability and legacy.

Such a moral, situated set of principles, which recognises the importance of the context, seems a useful reference point for those who are concerned about how top-down processes and hierarchical power structures can negatively impact on people's ability to engage with professional development. It also seems relevant when we are considering such activity beyond the level of individuals and as part of a wider organisational activity.

So, let's explore this a bit more, by reflecting upon these kinds of processes when applied across schools within a local cluster.

Activity 6 Is co-operation about ongoing learning?

45 minutes

Read this chapter about the development of an 8-school co-operative in the UK: Swaffield, S. and Major, L. (2019) 'Inclusive educational leadership to establish a

co-operative school cluster trust? Exploring perspectives and making links with leadership for learning', *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(11), pp. 1149–1163.

Read from *Interviews with headteachers and governors* to the end of the chapter (p1157–p1162) (In this chapter the acronym LfL stands for the Leadership for Learning framework outlined above)

As you are reading make notes about the following questions.

- In what ways is this organisational process, a process of:
  - relationship building
  - learning
  - professional development?
- Can you see the principles from the Leadership for Learning framework in action?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

It seems evident that this process is inextricably linked with the three issues mentioned in the blurb above. It also seemed that the ways in which the leaders set about changing their cultures and ways of working reflected the framework. It began with a unified understanding on behalf of the headteachers and governors. They had been aware that without this trust, their collaboration was potentially fragile and unsustainable, being reliant on a few key people. In setting up the trust, there had been a meeting of all the governors and a mapping of all existing collaborations, followed by a meeting of school leaders and other stakeholders to make their shared values and vision explicit. This included setting up democratic processes in which each school had one vote, so that no single voice could dominate, and they could maintain school identities. They also shared information about pupil enrolment and finances. At the outset the head teachers had a slightly more predominant role to ensure coherence across schools, but more collaborative ways of working developed over time. Whole trust working groups and networks were established and individuals could play a leading role across all schools based on particular areas of expertise or interest, with professional expertise being audited and made available to everyone. This included the expertise of teaching assistants, headteachers, governors and parents. Peer headteacher support had also become part of everyday practice as well as schools sharing bureaucratic tasks. The focus was upon specific needs, as well as joint professional development provision, workshops for governors, and learning days for families and community partners.

In this reading it was clear that the headteachers and governors greatly valued the collaboration between the 8 schools, and they saw the formation of the co-operative trust as an act of leadership that strengthened ways of working. This view of leadership is evident across many school contexts too. For example, a study in 3 secondary schools of Zimbabwe (Muresherwa & Jita, 2021), revealed a shared view of leadership as an equity-focused, collaborative, multidimensional, social activity. Similarly, a large-scale systematic review of research into leadership of sustainable Professional Learning Communities (Olmo-Extremera et al, 2023) concluded that:

- distributed leadership as part of collaborative teaching culture with a focus upon the emotional well-being of a whole community contributes towards school improvement.
- Leadership is not just about the school leader; everyone else in the school can exercise leadership, sharing responsibilities and be involved in horizontal and shared decision-making.
- A collaborative school culture enables teacher leadership and allows for professional networks and interrelationships to develop within or outside the school.
- Collaboration between schools, local institutions and families can support student learning and school functioning.

At the heart of such processes are the same kinds of issues which we explored in Activity 5. It requires people to feel they have a role to play, that their voice is valued and that the nature of the change matters to themselves and those around them.

So, let's move on to consider this issue a bit more deeply, by looking at the role of the individual and how leaders can support them to collectively change their organisation.

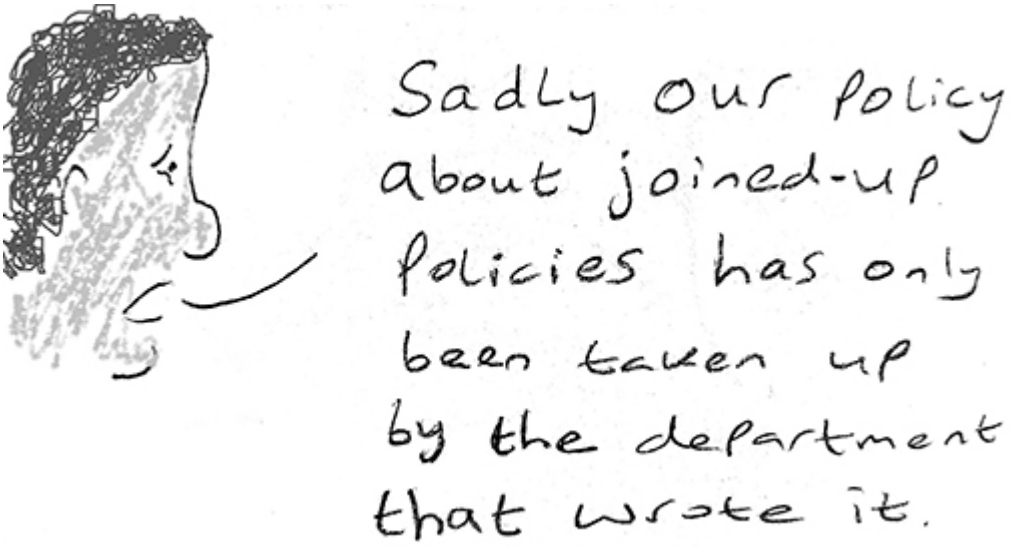


Figure 6 Does it matter?

4 Inclusive Leadership for agency and institutional change

Figure 7

Ryan (2006) suggests that Inclusive leadership involves being an advocate and educator of people, supporting critical consciousness and dialogue, with a focus upon classroom practice and learning. He suggests that it involves seeking to be inclusive in the decisions one makes, the policies and strategies one establishes, and by working across the whole school. This is something which the headteacher in a study about an Elementary school in the United States would probably agree with (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). He saw his role to be about 'growing people'. This required building relationships, encouraging reflection, and providing school-based professional development. He particularly valued the role of mentoring and the individual and collective growth which arose through a focus on topics that mattered to the staff. This included working through university-based professional development seminars. Significantly, he did not see this involvement with outside 'experts' as being about providing answers. He saw it as being about questions, inquiry, reflection and 'being honest with ourselves'. Subsequently, he encouraged teachers to connect their plans to wider school plans. Through such processes he sought to encourage teachers to assume various leadership roles which were not formal but sustained a collaborative culture of learning that focused on improving practice. He was looking to develop more leaders, rather than followers. This required ongoing support, helping people to overcome their natural resistance to change, their frustration at doing something new and being faced with the scepticism of others. He saw it as a moral purpose to improve the lives of people in the school and to buffer people from external pressure.

The challenge is not just about growing the people within the setting, of course. As discussed previously it involves a great many other people and institutions of influence. For instance, a study of 25 schools in Spain (Crisol-Moya et al, 2022) looking at families' views on the actions of school leadership teams, highlighted the need for schools to be open to all families and responsive to their needs. They sought mutual exchange, active

participation, and the feeling of belonging. Even more broadly, an action research study in a secondary school in Cyprus (Charalampous & Papademetriou, 2021), explored the obstacles faced by a leader and how they can transform them into opportunities for creating an inclusive environment. Working with the school leadership team and teaching staff, they not only recognised that the headteacher, the teachers and the carers of pupils were obstacles but so too was the Ministry of Education and Culture. Building upon the school leadership style, they sought to promote a bottom-up change, seeking to shift from a pyramid of hierarchy (Figure 8) to a pyramid of collaboration (Figure 9). They recognised that in cooperation with the headmaster, intermediate leaders could be key players in changing the culture of the school. Exemplifying the effectiveness of this process, across the year of the intervention the staff identified a change in the school environment and greater support for inclusive ways of working. At the heart of this was role played by feedback. So let's explore this a bit more deeply.

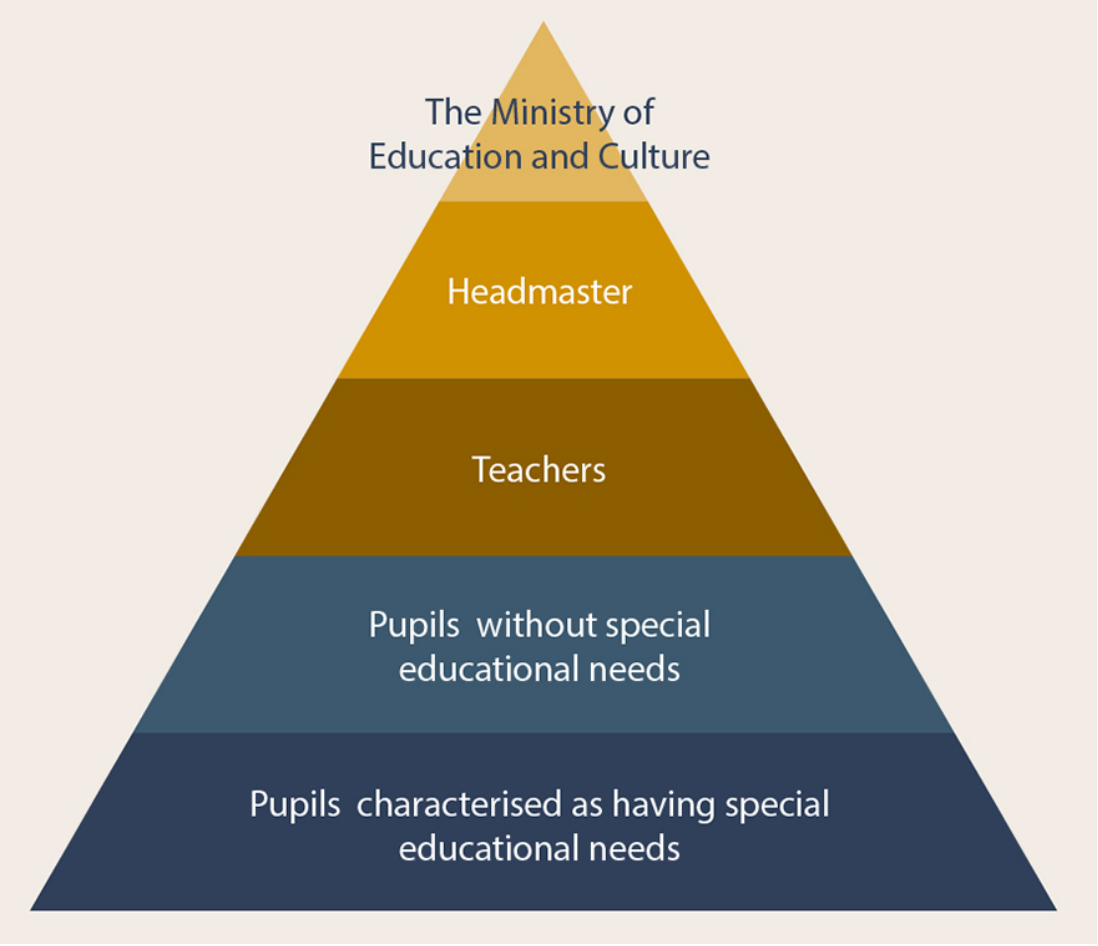


Figure 8 Obstacles in pyramid of hierarchy

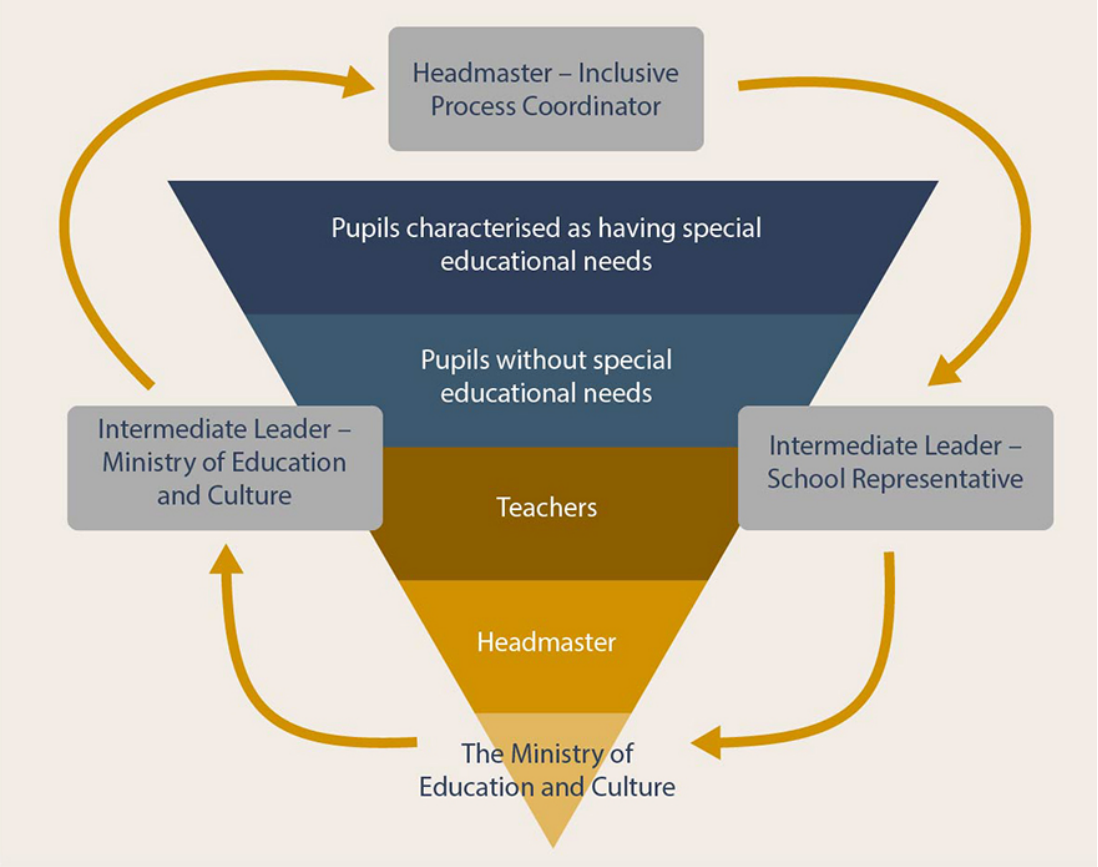


Figure 9 Obstacles in pyramid of collaboration

Activity 7 Round and round we go?

45 minutes

Read about Feedback loops: Schenke, W., van Driel, J., Geijsel, F. & Volman, M. (2017) 'Closing the feedback loop: a productive interplay between practice-based research and school development through cross-professional collaboration in secondary education', *Professional Development in Education*, 43(5), pp. 860–880.

This study explores interplay between practice-based research and school development in 19 projects undertaken in Dutch secondary schools. **Read from Results on p866 to the end of Conclusion and Discussion on p875.** As you are reading ask yourself the following questions in relation to your own personal and professional experiences.

- What effective examples have you of
  a. productive interplay?
  b. short-term feedback loops?
  c. long-term feedback loops?
- What made these examples effective?
- What barriers were part of these examples?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

When reflecting on this activity the course author recalled a vignette from a study in Singapore Primary Schools. This seemed to exemplify both productive and unproductive interplay:

> Janet had been working as a teacher for fifteen years. She recalled an incident in her previous school when she was a novice teacher. She commented on the professional relationship with her mentor: 'My previous mentor was trying to guide me, but at the same time she was restricting me. When I proposed something, her first reaction would be "no" and then she would list down problems I would face if I enacted the idea'. Janet proposed an idea to support students with lived experiences. However, her formal mentor was hesitant in supporting the idea. The initiative was delayed until her head of department heard about it and encouraged her to proceed with implementation. The school principal endorsed her proposal. Janet's colleagues helped to promote the idea with their students and to organise learning trips (part of this initiative) and the initiative was finally commenced with students' interests.
>
> (Nguyen & Ng, 2020 p. 645–6)

The same study included a model of the collaboration evident across the four schools which enabled the implementation of change (see Figure 10). Teachers tended to begin the collaboration process to implement Initiatives by **sharing** resources, practices, or strategies. This paved the way for them to focus on challenges and how they could enable the initiative. Through the collective process, they continued to resolve emerging issues, with the aim of **improving** the effectiveness of what they were trying to achieve. As they became more certain about the potential effectiveness of their change, they began **spreading** the idea to more teachers. Throughout this process though, the teachers had required **affective support**. For example, teachers reported increased workload and feeling discouraged when things did not go as hoped. Some talked about feeling isolated if only a few of them were involved in an initiative. They recognised therefore the importance of supporting peers emotionally throughout the collaboration process. This was not a complex form of support though. It could be as simple as mutual verbal encouragement and discussing the possible benefits of their work. Such support not only reduced a possible sense of isolation but also helped them to stay motivated.

Figure 10 Process of teacher collaboration for implementation of change. (Nguyen & Ng, 2020)

4.1 A matter of internal politics?

Another paper which recognised the emotional work of change is Lindle et al, (2017). In their study of 17 Principals and District leaders in the United States, they talked about how emotions of leadership emerged as an influence upon the way in which professional development was experienced and undertaken. Issues such as budgets and state funding, local and national policy debates had a long-lasting effect on the participants, leaving many feeling both under-valued and under attack. In another study from Australia (Jones, 2017a) Female head teachers, described the gendered expectations around school leadership, and talked about how these overlapped with other assumptions around issues such as race, age, and family life.

> 'The biggest cost is your stress levels- your immediate home life, family...social circle, you don't have time for them…it's so easy to get sucked into a vortex of work.'
>
> (Jones, 2017a, p. 917)

Against such a background, these head teachers consistently constructed themselves as trying to be empathetic and supportive, seeking to enable the career progression of their staff.

Clearly the emotional work of leading, collaborating and personal development cannot be underestimated. So let us conclude by considering this a bit more deeply.

Activity 8 A matter of internal politics?

45 minutes

The following paper reports on three teachers collaborating as they investigate a program in the school of modern languages (FML) of a public university in Mexico.

Read Keranen, N. and Encinas Prudencio, F. (2014) 'Teacher collaboration praxis: Conflicts, borders, and ideologies from a micropolitical perspective', *Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development*, 16(2), pp. 37–47.

Read from Results (p. 42) to the end of conclusion (p. 45). As you are reading reflect upon a collaborative experience you have had in a workplace. Make notes in response to the following questions:

- How did you feel about yourself?
- How did you feel about others?
- How did these feelings enable or restrict your collaboration and achieving its goals?
- What other challenges did you find in working with others?
- How were you supported to deal with these issues?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

On reading this article it is striking how the first point of reference is self doubt. The notion of 'imposter syndrome', is far more prevalent than many of us might recognise. At the heart of imposter syndrome is an irony though; often, we feel we are the only ones experiencing it. It was helpful to see too that the act of being part

of a professional development process can leave people feeling as if they are falling behind and exposed. You may also have recognised the response of these teachers and their wish to be seen to be making a contribution, which could be linked to this sense of not being good enough. At the same time, it was clear that there was an openness to their relationships and a willingness to change, as well as a mutual respect and acceptance of their contrasting approaches to an issue. This seemed a particularly important point; despite their tendency to compromise, these three professionals did not feel they were abandoning their creativity and control. It would appear, that at the heart of it all they still felt that they had agency.

It is interesting to consider these findings in relation to other studies. Philpott & Oates (2017), for instance, in their study of Scottish professional learning communities suggest that people need to explicitly articulate and be willing to critique their assumptions. They also benefit from detailed information on issues and from having a diversity of voices present. This includes moving beyond expert notions of knowledge towards discussions of such things as purposes, values, identities or relationships. These researchers recognise too that the process of professional development should be a proactive space for agency. It should serve to enable people to play an active part in the development and application of their professional learning and the space in which it occurs. Part of this process is to give people more time to work collaboratively with facilitators and critical friends to enhance their agency in the longer term. This underlines that the process of professional development is also a process of change for a person's identity, as a leader, a practitioner and as a member of a wide variety of communities.

The issue of time and working with mentors was also acknowledged in an Australian study at a secondary school (Sharp, Jarvis & McMillan, 2020). Here the school leaders provided structural and administrative assistance to professional development, amending timetables to support collaborative planning. Practice development however was mostly driven by staff at middle management level, who facilitated changes in understandings and practices by discussing issues in departments meetings. It was also facilitated by working with a project lead acting as mentor. This mentor role proved more valuable for some staff compared to voluntary training sessions, because it was ongoing, practical, context specific and frequently part of informal everyday discussions. It was recognised that schools had to develop their own expertise, not simply relying upon external advisors, and create their own opportunities for professional conversations.

The reading in Activity 8 and the studies mentioned in the comment have not been directly about school leadership. However, they raise a variety of issues (and possible solutions) that seem to be relevant to the experience of collaborative development across contexts. Which brings us back to where this course started, and the need to form partnerships amongst key stakeholders as part of a whole school approach, with policies and practices arising from the experience and expertise of all those involved.

Hopefully, this course has made it very clear that at the heart of this collaborative process are openness, flexibility, authenticity, criticality, and agency. Hopefully it has also made clear that this is not a simple process. In developing our practices and systems, we are invariably faced by a need to have difficult conversations. These are not difficult because people have to listen to each other (see Figure 4.2), but because they are about our attitudes, beliefs, underlying values, and the ways in which we organise our lives and our institutions. The challenge for School leaders is to find ways to support people to have

these conversations as part of their day to day working lives; and to do so in ways that do not feel top-down but emerge from the community they are intended to serve. This is where the kinds of professional development opportunities discussed in the previous sections may be of some use. What do you think?

Figure 11 So what shall we talk about?

Conclusion

During this course you have explored a range of challenges that leaders face in developing communities of practice through collaborative enquiry. You have considered the contextual nature of such development and importance of agency for all those involved. You have considered the wide range of voices who can be part of the professional development process that leads to institutional and personal change. There have been a variety of approaches and strategies shared with you, along with discussions of the challenges and opportunities that can arise. It seems appropriate though to end with the thoughts of a head teacher, one working in a large early-years setting in Ghana. Not only did he recognise the importance of school leaders leading by example, but also that leading change requires leading as part of the community.

> The school is in the community; we need them for our work. Schools are for communities. If we're to achieve our [inclusive education] goals for children, we need parents and others…we must work together, share ideas…We [the school] depend on the community or the other way round.
>
> (Ackah-Jnr, 2022 p16)

If you haven't already, you might want to consider exploring the related OpenLearn course Inclusive Leadership: Effecting change. You might also be interested in the other OpenLearn courses:

- Leadership for inclusion: thinking it through
- Leadership for inclusion: what can you do?

You might also be interested in the Open University Inclusive Practice Leadership and Management Masters pathways.

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Readings

Activity 2 Reading: Adeola Folasade Akinyemi, Symphorosa Rembe, Jenny Shumba & Toyin Mary Adewumi | (2019) Collaboration and mutual support as processes established by communities of practice to improve continuing professional teachers' development in high schools, Cogent Education, 6:1, 1685446, DOI: 10.1080/2331186X.2019.1685446 https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2019.1685446

Activity 3 Reading: Alma Harris and Michelle Jones (pp 38/39) in Connecting professional learning: leading effective collaborative enquiry across teaching school alliances. National College for School Leadership
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Activity 4 Reading: THE CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES OF INCLUDING STUDENTS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: BUILDING AND SUSTAINING CHANGE Katherine Cohen Volin special Issue 1 Journal of Ethical Education Leadership 2018 https://jecel.scholasticahq.com/article/37375.pdf
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Activity 6 Reading: Swaffield, S. and Major, L., 2019. Inclusive educational leadership to establish a co-operative school cluster trust? Exploring perspectives and making links with leadership for learning. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 23(11), pp.1149-1163.
https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/items/62e30f51-65bb-4390-be19-2d00a9c0194d

Activity 7 Reading: Wouter Schenke, Jan H. van Driel, Femke P. Geijsel & Monique L.L. Volman (2017) Closing the feedback loop: a productive interplay between practice-based research and school development through cross-professional collaboration in secondary education, Professional Development in Education, 43:5, 860-880, DOI: 10.1080/19415257.2016.1258654

Activity 8 Reading: Keranen, N., & Encinas Prudencio, F. (2014). Teacher collaboration praxis: Conflicts, borders, and ideologies from a micropolitical perspective. PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development, 16(2), 37-47. http://dx.doi.org/10.15446/profile.v16n2.39994

Figures

Figure 2: being a part? courtesy Jonathan Rix

Figure 4: Connect to learn method page 13 in https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335719/Connecting-professional-learning-leading-effective-collaborative-enquiry-across-teaching-school-alliances.pdf

Figure 6: Does it matter? courtesy: Jonathan Rix

Figures 8/9: Obstacles in pyramid of in Charalampous, C.A. and Papademetriou, C. D., 2021. Intermediate inverted leadership: The inclusive leader's model. International Journal of Leadership in Education, 24(3), pp.349-370. DOI: 10.1080/13603124.2019.1623925

Figure 10: Process of teacher collaboration for implementation of change. (Nguyen & Ng, 2020) adapted from Nguyen & Ng, 2020 Teacher collaboration for change: Sharing, improving, and spreading. Professional Development in Education, 46(4), pp.638-651.

Figure 11: You ignored the Elephant in the Room, so I traded him in: Cartoonist: Bannerman/Xunise/Konar/Lawton/Patrinos/Piro Cartoonstock.com

Videos

Activity 3 Video 2: Learning walks: what are they? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2jY6D0VcEsCourtesy: **opogo.com**

Activity 3 Video 3: Learning walks: structured observation for teachers

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUTIIOfma90Edutopia https://www.edutopia.org/

Activity 3 Video 4: Lesson study: a powerful approach to improve teaching https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMiRIRro86Ecourtesy: Lesson Study Alliance https://www.lsalliance.org/

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