

update



Leading Learning through
Action-led Research and Innovation

THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE LAUREL TRUST

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SUMMER'S COMING!



Summer is coming and for many in schools in must feel 'at last!' Our thanks to all teachers and leaders after such a difficult and turbulent year. We hope you all enjoy some well-deserved R&R.

In this final issue of the school year we look back to some of our early research projects and their continued success. We hope you enjoy their articles.

Maggie Roger, Consultant Director, The Laurel Trust

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Five years on... Research still thriving



In 2016, the Rother Teaching School Alliance applied for a Laurel Trust grant to support the development of a research based culture across schools in our alliance for the benefit of pupils and teachers.



Joanne Calladine-Evans is the Teaching School Director for the Rother Teaching School Alliance in East Sussex and Teaching School Council Sub Regional lead for the South East. She has a background in Secondary Education but has worked extensively with NQTs across all phases. Developing teachers through applying research into practice is her passion. Joanne is currently working with the team at the University College of London developing the National Professional Programmes. Joanne is has written and delivered high quality CPD programmes and is a wonderful role model for leaders and teachers. Joanne can be contacted at: joanne@fulcrumlearning.co.uk

One of our early findings from this research was that the 'model has enabled us to begin to develop collaboration and eventually trust at all levels as it simultaneously engages, practitioners, leaders and headteachers.' Five years later we can honestly report that our partnership of 40 primary and secondary schools is a mature partnership and is successful in its collaborative relationships and approach to sharing good practice and maintaining high standards.

The lead school St Richard's chairs the area group of schools within

a Secondary Board and is highly regarded as a leader of professional development. In its own journey towards embedding a research culture the school has completely changed its approach to professional learning and it is the journey that we share with you today.

Where did we start?

In our original model we promoted two research leaders to lead an action research team of ten volunteer teachers. Having recently completed their MA in Leading Research with the University of Sussex, they were keen to establish

an action-learning approach to teacher research that was academically of a high standard and ethically implemented. These early researchers produced their findings in a poster format for sharing with all staff members and presented findings as part of staff and CPD sessions.

How did we move from a team format to a whole school approach?

The professional development lead acting on teacher requests for more departmental time, recognised that this approach for staff development was a stronger platform for building



teacher confidence and improving the quality of teaching and learning in a financially prudent way. The Professional development Lead and Teaching and Learning Lead worked closely together to present a 'big launch' to staff in 2018. The launch demonstrated the value of an evidence based approach to teaching and learning and showed staff how the approach would fit strategically with the revised Teaching and Learning policy and the appraisal process. Staff were encouraged to work in groups of three, now called 'St Richard's Threes' based on a previous model of learning 3s.

How was the new approach different to the previous time it had been tried?

The original learning three approach was implemented in 2015 but it proved hard to get off the ground and some teachers and leaders lacked engagement with it due to the impact on workload. Feedback from staff identified that teachers' workload had increased due to the expectations of observing each other, feedback and planning within their own time, although they did see the benefits of such an approach. In the new iteration all time for researching, planning and feedback have been embedded into meetings and inset day time. Based on staff responses prior to starting St Richard's threes this was paramount to a successful new approach.

How has using this approach to Professional Development changed the way Professional Learning is carried out?

Staff previously regarded in-service training as whole school days with expensive speakers and regular requests for external training, which was expensive and hard to cover with little evidence of impact. Although results were generally of a high standard across the school and we had a staff CPD library, it was rarely used and it felt hard to shift staff away from the perception that training was a nice bonus rather than an integral part of their professional growth. Now collaboration and reading pedagogical materials and research has become 'the norm'. Sharing research and impact in the classroom is done regularly through T&L briefings, videos and staff and departmental meetings and best of all staff increasingly request reading materials or CPD related to their topics.

What impact is this approach having on pupils and staff?

Learning walks by LMT have evidenced approaches such as recall and retrieval and verbal feedback strategies being more commonplace and reacted to positively by pupils. There is much more discussion about research and an openness to sharing ideas across departments. Teachers are now volunteering to lead twilights or parts of meetings on their chosen focuses due to improved staff confidence. Peer observation has

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also developed the confidence at having others in your classroom. The programme includes all staff such as Teaching Assistants and cover supervisors so closer communication between teaching and support staff has been evident.

On the CPD annual feedback, Staff comments included: “Learning 3’s are a great opportunity to collaborate” and “I like the opportunity to research within my teaching area and try to move Teaching and Learning forward in this manner.”

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

The next steps are to ensure through time allocation and engaging content that the enthusiasm for the St Richard’s three cycle 2, which is currently cross-curricular groupings, does not wane into the third cycle which will be departmental with a focus on SEN and links closely to our whole school focus. ●





REACH for inclusion



Graeme Duncan, the CEO of the Right to Succeed writes: Wendy retires this summer, and education will lose one of its most inspirational and compassionate leaders. I feel very privileged to have worked with Wendy over these last 6 years. What she and her team have built at Educational Diversity, Blackpool's Pupil Referral Unit, is stunning. They have created a place for Blackpool's most vulnerable young people where their needs are expertly diagnosed and met. They've realised that the children they receive have often been let down by many of the adults in their lives, and that trust will therefore often take months to build. But once that trust is built, they know they can really make a difference to that child's life. She has also been an incredible voice and advocate for those children in a community that has more disadvantage and multiple deprivation than anywhere else in the country. We all have a lot to learn from what Wendy and her team have achieved at Educational Diversity.

The Background

Over the last few years, much work has been done collaboratively across Blackpool to improve the quality of education provision, raise the outcomes for all learners and reduce the number of young people to be permanently excluded and needing intervention from Blackpool's Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), Educational Diversity. Historically, it could be argued that within the town more generally, there had been a greater focus on the symptoms than on the causal factors around a young person's presenting behaviour.

The PRU, in partnership with Right to Succeed, have been driving the concern that there was a lack of understanding around the primary needs of some learners, which all too often led to a reactive response to their "presenting behaviours", resulting in exclusion.

The PRU has been particularly interested in the national research

relating to speech, language and communication needs and the correlation with behaviour. In 2008, the DfE Berrow Report (2008) and then later the 'Berrow: Ten Years on' report (2018) identified a gap of provision in both identifying and meeting the speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) of young people in schools. It recognised that unmet SLCN can have a direct impact on behaviour in schools. Furthermore, the Timpson Review of School Exclusions (2019) recognised more generally, the need to invest in "the skills and capability [of school staff] to identify needs, address poor behaviour and offer the right support where this is required".

In 2012, a commissioned audit of young people attending the PRU demonstrated that 100% of the KS2 cohort, 97% of KS3 and 86% of KS4 students were found to have SLCN which had previously been either undiagnosed or unmet. This evidence reinforced the widely acknowledged

viewpoint that "children and young people with undetected SLCN may also be at greater risk of exclusion from school" (www.talkingpoint, 2016) as well as affirming "that children excluded from school are likely to have special educational needs, including a high incidence of SLCN" (Ripley and Yuill, 2005, *School British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 75:37-50).

The Reach Project

In light of this direct correlation and the emerging national guidance for schools, Educational Diversity, in partnership with Right to Succeed, secured funding for a research pilot with The Laurel Trust in 2017 called the REACH programme. The purpose of this pilot was to explore if a model of early identification of need, through the use of thorough diagnostic assessments and the implementation of targeted and proven interventions, could reduce the need for exclusion and support colleagues in managing the needs



of these learners more successfully within their mainstream setting.

Although this was a small-scale pilot working across only four schools, the number of young people that were able to demonstrate significant and positive behaviour change following the period of intervention was compelling. As with the figures noted in the PRU in 2012, children involved in the Reach pilot, who had been identified as 'at risk of exclusion', were revealed to have previously unidentified SLCN.

Wider Impact:

Upscaling the Initial Research

Resulting from this, Right to Succeed wanted to explore whether there was a similar picture more broadly in Blackpool as well as in other parts of the country. With this in mind, a successful bid for funding from the National Lottery Community Fund was awarded in 2018 for a three-year programme focusing on 30 schools across three different regions (Blackpool, Doncaster and North Belfast). As with the first pilot, the focus was on supporting mainstream schools to better identify and support the needs of young people at risk of exclusion. However, this time there was an increased emphasis on influencing whole-school policy and practice, as well as strengthening

collaboration between schools and local services. It became clear very early that a localised approach would be required, recognising that individual communities and schools differ greatly. So by using a place-based approach, the different areas were supported to develop bespoke plans, based on local understanding and using the EEF School's Guide to Implementation.

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Successes in Blackpool

By really taking time to identify the needs of individual cohorts within schools, and then later looking at bigger picture trends within the schools and the local community, carefully considered plans were designed and implemented to tackle the issues identified. Although similar themes were threaded through each area relating to links between behaviour and learning, speech, language and communication needs, mental health, social and emotional development, and the impact of trauma and adversity, each area had a slightly different focus for their programmes. In Blackpool, we:

- Embedded the evidence-based model of Spirals of Inquiry; coaching middle and senior leaders to identify and understand the needs of their learners and carefully plan targeted strategies and interventions to address them. This placed pupil voice at the heart of planning and delivery and built on

the whole-town approach of using GL Assessment data to identify and track progress.

- Formed a strong partnership with Nurture UK, using the Boxall Profile across most schools as an assessment of social and emotional skills. Five schools, including the PRU are actively working to achieve a National Nurturing School Award.
- Supported the town-wide strategic drive on trauma-informed care by collaborating with local organisations and leading a small pilot to introduce this approach to three schools.

Future Sustainability

As the Reach Programme draws to an end, extensive work has been taking place to support schools to consider their learning and to plan for sustainability of the 'best bits'. Some of the activities that schools are planning to continue or develop include:

- Upscaling and standardising assessments of vulnerable cohorts. E.g. Some secondary schools are analysing Y7 data after term 1 with a view to identifying students who would benefit from specific, targeted interventions to build their confidence and promote positive engagement.
- Continuation of nurture groups, widening their availability for other students across a school, ensuring Boxall Profiles are used to identify the focus of activities.
- Assessment for becoming a National Nurturing School.
- Embedding GL Assessments and ensuring the data obtained is used purposefully to inform whole-school practice.
- Staff training: Speech, language and communication (Elklan, Secondary Talk); Understanding trauma and adversity - classroom approaches; Mental Health First Aid; Emotion coaches; Boxall Profiles; Whole-school audits and action plans to develop more trauma-informed cultures.

Later the REACH project was successfully implemented in Manchester. ●



Building girls' self-esteem and confidence through sport



Natalie Jackson is the co-founder and Director of social enterprise company Totally Runable Ltd and non-profit See Sporty Be Sporty CIC, and a former law firm director and solicitor. Together with her co-Directors, Olympians Emily Freeman and Jenny Meadows, and their team, she works with primary schools to help them measure and close the Gender Sport Gap.

Natalie can be contacted at: nat@totallyrunable.com.

The Project

In 2017 we worked with the Laurel Trust across four primary schools within Astrea Academy Trust (then Reach4). Our aim was to take a snapshot of attitudes of girls and female school staff towards physical activity and to establish whether those attitudes could be changed. The project had a focus on addressing gender stereotypes and building confidence through courses combining physical activity and mindset awareness.

The findings

In the target schools, findings of previous research indicating an awareness of gender stereotypes and emergence of lack of confidence in sport in girls from age 7 were reflected. Female staff also showed a lack of confidence in their own physical abilities.

We found that courses mixing physical, running-based, activities with mindset awareness improved the confidence of both pupils and staff in physical activity, with

consequential positive impact on participation and in other areas of girls' and staff members' lives. Schools benefitted from increased staff knowledge and confidence, stronger staff and pupil relationships, staff leadership and role modelling.

Our report **Don't be a Girl about it: stereotypes, confidence and mindset in physical activity** (available in full at www.totallyrunable.com) concluded that further work around gender



and perceptions in physical activity for both boys and girls would undoubtedly be required if the positive impact of girls-specific projects was to last, and equality in physical activity for children in schools was to be fully pursued. We made three core recommendations for schools where similar circumstances existed;

1. Culture change in schools to normalise physical activity for all, irrespective of gender

2. Further research into the impact of gender on PE, sport and physical activity

3. Short term projects working to increase girls' confidence in PE, sport and physical activity

The Dissemination and Impact

Since 2017 we have continued to disseminate our findings and developed our work to support primary schools in measuring and closing the Gender Sport Gap.

We have focused particularly on recommendations 1 and 3, using the workshops and courses piloted in this project as foundations for various short-term projects working to increase girls' confidence in PE, sport and physical activity, including workshops and longer courses for both pupils and staff. We have also developed workshops for boys addressing gender stereotypes in sport and their impact on boys in primary school.

Building on that work, we have developed a matrix which facilitates

measurement of the key metrics within primary schools that form part of a Gender Sport Gap; any measurable difference between children who identify as girls and children who identify as boys in confidence, performance or participation in PE, sport and physical activity. This has been an iterative process and one which continues, working with over 50 primary schools across the North of England.

Our relationship with the schools within which we worked on this project has continued, working with staff and pupils in all four schools each year since, and with Astrea Academy Trust since 2017, developing and supporting PE Coordinators and Headteachers in their PE, Sport and Physical Activity strategy, through our "Astrea Active" project.

Further research into the impact of gender on PE, sport and physical activity is undoubtedly still required, and we intend to play our part in that research. In 2018 we disseminated findings from a year-long project looking at photographs of sport in 9 UK national newspapers. We found that only 2.9% of photographs of people playing sport in newspapers showed women playing sport. In order to redress the gender imbalance for

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primary school pupils in available sporting role models we released a set of posters of inspiring young female role models in early 2021, with an accompanying podcast series interviewing international athletes including Hannah Cockroft, Jeanette Kwakye and Bethany England. To date these posters have been provided free to over 2000 primary schools, thanks to funding via a non-profit company, See Sporty Be Sporty CIC, which we founded in the first lockdown of 2020. We hope to do more of this research with further collaboration between Totally Runnable Ltd and See Sporty Be Sporty CIC.

Our Laurel Trust funded project proved an immediate learning experience for ourselves, the pupils, staff and schools within which we worked. It has since been an important foundation for the continued work we and our schools are doing, in what remains a key issue of equity facing a generation of pupils, and particularly girls. ●





Decisive collaboration generates professional curiosity

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Sara Gmitrowicz is the Executive Headteacher of Harrison Primary School which is home to the Pioneer Teacher School Alliance and Accounting Officer for the Fareham and Gosport SCITT. She is an inspirational leader committed to developing teacher autonomy, developing teacher confidence, preserving well-being and growing future leaders. Sara praises the many inspirational teachers and leaders with whom she has worked for over ten years and believes that the pupils who prove the most challenging are the ones who teach us most. She passionately believes in collaborative working within her own school but much more widely across her network and in enabling all children to fulfil their potential and remove the barriers to success. Harrison is located in an area of disadvantage and Sara strives to make all her pupils and teachers 'life long learners with open minds'. Sara can be contacted at: headteacher@harrison.hants.sch.uk

Essentially, all schools generate good practice that is worth sharing; the daily conundrum faced by leaders and teachers is how to adapt teaching to meet the needs of all learners. All classrooms conceal elements of innovative practice that could be the solution to another school's challenges; opportunities to share, discuss and debate best practice must be found - for the benefit of all learners; not just those within our own classrooms.

How it all started

The initial research project was funded by The Laurel Trust after a successful application.

In 2017 Harrison Primary School, Fareham, worked with two other local schools to implement the use of a practitioner-led Lesson Study framework. The initial aim of the project was to engage learners and

teachers in meaningful discussion about how to improve teaching and learning in individual classrooms however the impact of the project was much more far reaching.

The project involved groups of teachers collaboratively planning, teaching, observing and analysing pupils' learning in research 'study lessons'. This model has been proven to innovate and refine pedagogical approaches, leading to sustainable changes in the quality of teaching. The success of the research project reflected widely attributed impact by building teacher knowledge within their own classrooms, across their own schools, and across wider inter-school partnerships, (Dudley, 2011).

This more collaborative approach enabled triads of professionals to work developmentally together in a structured, informal way that was

both powerful and empowering, leading to improved success in the classroom and stimulating a culture of enquiry across their schools.

Building Trust and Collective Accountability

A key driver to the successful implementation of the Lesson Study model was the need to build an underlying enabling ethos based on trust, honesty and equity whereby practitioners were willing to openly discuss the impact of their own teaching on pupils' learning. This newly established ethos of shared responsibility, empowerment and collective accountability proved to be fundamental to ongoing collaboration and stimulation of new opportunities.

Equally, whilst school leadership is often deemed to be a 'lonely place', the leadership teams in the initial research project recognised the significance of practitioner-

led improvement of teaching as a powerful instrument of change. This project became the catalyst for change across the region as a significantly larger group of school leaders identified the potential impact of joint professional working in order to empower their teams and stimulate improvements in both leaders' and teachers' confidence and efficacy.

Following the successful implementation of the Lesson Study model across the original group of schools three new projects were born. Having recognised the importance of taking an evidence-based approach to professional collaboration, leaders have remained committed to joint working. Emerging evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation, 2020, concluded that by 'working together in a structured way towards actions and outcomes, teachers and schools can improve faster and more sustainably'.

Successes and Sharing our Research

Firstly, a new innovative opportunity for schools to work together to bring about school improvement was launched; a structured model of peer review has been implemented by two newly formed groups of schools over the past two years, comprising twelve schools, including the original three. As with Lesson Study this latest project focused on actions; teachers, subject leads and leaders worked together to identify and address areas for improvement. This new initiative went one step further as it also involved school leaders working together to provide insightful, impartial evidence as catalysts for action planning, changes in pedagogical thinking and direct stimuli for innovation in teaching approaches, (National Association of Head teachers, 2019). There is parity with the original Lesson Study project; the structure of the peer review model provided a rigorous and objective format for practitioners and leaders to work together to build trust and normalcy around receiving constructive feedback.

At Harrison Primary enquiry questions focused on the extent to which



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there was a shared understanding of excellent pedagogical practice in mathematics and the extent to which teaching supported fluency in Number. Findings identified the need for improved teacher and pupil modelling to communicate and support conceptual understanding and the need to further embed a concrete-pictorial-abstract approach. Both would contribute to improved pupil mastery and outcomes; 93% pupils attained age related expectations at the end of Key Stages 1&2 in July 2018 and similar results were achieved in 2019 (89% and 99% respectively).

As a group of leaders our collective desire to achieve inclusive schools has enabled us to appreciate that those children who challenge us the most teach us the most. The onset of the Coronavirus pandemic has not deterred these events from continuing. Furthermore, the well-established professional relationship between leaders has led to greater mutual trust and more willingness to support one another when dealing with recent challenges and planning future collaborative projects.

“As a group of leaders our collective desire to achieve inclusive schools has enabled us to appreciate that those children who challenge us the most teach us the most.”

Lesson Study remains an integral part of the annual cycle for improvement of high quality teaching and learning in the original three schools and

as we leave lockdown new cycles of peer review are currently being planned for the autumn term.

Additionally, discussions between school leaders identified a common need for more specific professional development related to effective provision for children with special educational needs, leading to a series of oversubscribed leadership conferences and seminars. The schools' shared vision for all children to be happy, successful learners became the overriding motivator for hosting and attending these events; subsequent leadership seminars have been facilitated by local school leaders across our established network of schools. The establishment of a more honest and open culture between the schools is a direct result of collaborative learning; leaders have been able to listen to, and respond to feedback effectively, in a non-threatening environment leading to pedagogical improvement and success.

Pioneer Teaching School has also been a conduit for school-to-school professional development across a wide area, with responsibility for leadership conferences and with regular briefings at termly headteacher meetings. The Lesson Study projects has been widely shared across and beyond the locality and has stimulated interest and engagement from primary schools. The overriding challenges is to create genuine and effective models that lead to school improvement and Lesson Study is a proven vehicle for leading improvements in teaching and learning. ●