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Evolution that leads to revolution

*Steve McMullen, Deputy Director
& Frank Norris, Director of the Trust,
The Co-operative Academies Trust*

In 1844, the Rochdale Pioneers Society started a revolution in commerce and education in order to improve living standards in their community. As a reaction against poor provisions, bought from their employers at inflated prices, these visionaries not only opened their own stores – battling the might of their employers on the way – but also gave women members an equal right to vote and saw the importance of education by opening reading rooms above their stores.

Their vision and revolutionary thinking continues to resonate today in commerce, particularly in developing countries, and in education, with co-operative values and principals underpinning many academies.

The Co-operative Academies Trust, which currently has three secondary and four primary academies, is sponsored by The Co-operative Group whose origins lie in the Rochdale Pioneers Society. The links to the Group are seen by the academies as both a unique feature and a significant strength. For the Group, the links to the academies bring a tangible bond to some of the most disadvantaged localities in the north of England and the possibilities of lifting aspirations and life chances through regeneration, just as the original pioneers had done.

BUSINESS SUPPORT

The link between The Co-operative Group and the academies continues to strengthen over time. From the extensive support offered to the secondary academies for work experience, marketing, business development and apprenticeships, to the chance for primary academies to work collaboratively under the guidance of a senior Group executive, the range of opportunities is continuing to grow.

In autumn 2014, prefects from The Co-operative Academy of Manchester visited The Co-operative Group's headquarters to receive leadership and management training provided by senior trainers in the business and senior staff from the academy. This new and exciting venture is to be replicated for all secondary academies during the course of the year.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

From an early stage, the Trust has seen one of its key objectives as enhancing the quality of the governance in each of its academies. Prior to becoming academies, they had all been seen as 'hard to shift' and the attraction and retention of governors was a challenge.

As part of the commitment by the sponsor, senior business colleagues from within The Co-operative Group were identified and placed onto the respective governing bodies. This brought to the academies not only a wealth of experience in business and from the board room, but also a ►



consistent message about what robust 'challenge' looks like.

Importantly, this has not taken place in the manner of a business takeover; on the contrary, there has been a very high degree of empathy and support for existing structures and personnel and the impact of governance has been highlighted in all the Ofsted inspection reports produced since the Trust became involved with the academies. Their contribution is voluntary and the governing bodies of most of the academies now have a senior manager from The Co-operative Group as chair.

BESPOKE TAILORING

Linked to this has been the decision to accept the unique nature of each academy and offer bespoke support from the small centrally-employed team. Rather than take a dogmatic or generic approach towards the development of the Trust, academies are supported as they require, with internal categorisation identifying the level of 'risk' associated with each. From this, the director and his deputy work with academy

leaders to identify issues and source the most appropriate external support quickly and effectively. This collaborative approach has been well received by senior leaders and has led to what were previously considered vulnerable schools achieving 'good' Ofsted outcomes.

After initial fears of being dictated to, academy leaders now feel empowered and are increasingly outward-facing following years of introspection and retreating into protective bunkers.

CUTTING YOUR CLOTH

The considered and reflective approach towards academy development and improvement extends to the vision for the future of the Trust. Since its inception, the Trust's support infrastructure has adapted significantly; commencing with a view that very little would be centralised. With its expansion two years ago into primaries, it became clear that there were certain functions that would have to operate centrally. This structure is developing gradually, shaped by the

knowledge and experience that steady and carefully considered expansion will be a continuing feature.

The Trust is not in a hurry to expand its portfolio but there is a feeling that with experience has come increased credibility both internally and externally. With its roots in the north of England and its history steeped in improving the life chances for those who possess the least in society, there is an understanding that any future academies may be likely to bring significant challenges with them. Consequently, the Trust will continue to offer a degree of flexibility in its approach and operational capacity, particularly if it wishes to maintain its personalised approach to its academies.

EVOLUTIONARY FERVOUR

From a starting point where there was nothing – no prior educational experience, no educationalists and a germ of an idea which linked social responsibility to a hard government line on poor school performance, the Trust has



now established an effective way of working which is supporting academies in raising children's achievement and aspiration.

This success has not been rooted in revolutionary fervour but in considered evolutionary development and there is every intention to continue in this manner. The Trust supports academies in the most challenging of circumstances and understands that regenerating communities takes time and commitment. It is impatient for success but understands that to achieve and embed success can take time.

It's not an approach that will meet with the approval of everyone, but the commitment to dealing with each academy as an individual entity and catering for its particular needs is a strategy that is certainly paying dividends.

It's evolution all the way for the values and principles which were revolutionary in their day.

PORTRAIT - DIRECTOR OF THE TRUST – FRANK NORRIS

Interestingly, this was not a position in which Frank had seen himself when he moved from his role as divisional manager for education and care with Ofsted two years ago.

‘This role wasn't on my radar a couple of years ago, but the chance to develop and mould the future of education opportunity in some of the most economically challenging communities was irresistible.’

A believer in evolution rather than revolution, Frank considers it essential that academy chains grow at a measured and manageable rate.

‘Like all new multi-academy trusts, we have had to learn many new things including how to translate between the languages of the educationalist, the accountant and the business executive. Only now, after four years, do we feel that we understand each other more fully with the benefits and synergies beginning to emerge.’

Now we feel in a position to consider adding further academies to our Trust but will maintain our approach of looking at the location and needs of each school and its community before taking the plunge. We will also consider carefully whether there is a willingness to embrace co-operative values and principles.’

Recently, Frank entered the debate on whether multi-academy trusts should undergo their own inspections, in the same way as local authorities. While such a move may concern some providers, Frank feels strongly that trusts should be fully accountable from the centre, outward.



Library lessons: response to reading

*Sarah Masters, Multimedia Research Centre Manager,
Thomas Deacon Academy*

When it comes to developing children, students and people as readers – or even inspiring them to start that journey – there is no magic wand, nor a one-size-fits-all ‘fix’. Thankfully we, and our students, are all different. If our reading habits and interests were identical then there would be multiple copies of just one book on our library shelves – and wouldn’t that be dull.

We should celebrate our differences! And these differences should not only be reflected in the books and resources with which we fill our libraries – as was highlighted by the recent Twitter campaign, [#weneedmorediversebooksUK](#) – but also in the variety of book promotions and reading initiatives that we offer, and in the reading

responses we expect from our students.

A school librarian’s contact with Ofsted inspectors is usually brief at best, but in recent years Ofsted’s interest in developing students as readers, demonstrated in *Moving English forward* (Ofsted, 2012) and *Reading, writing and communication (literacy)* (Ofsted, 2011) and the Reading for Pleasure project led by the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) have at last given school librarians a bandwagon on to which they can jump. School librarians are best placed to steer this bandwagon, and we need to demonstrate clearly, and succinctly, how our school libraries support and promote reading as well as the impact these initiatives have on our students.

The starting point for me is always the students. At Thomas Deacon Academy (TDA) we have 2300 students over four key stages (2-5), and there is our first difference to consider – age. What motivates an 8-year-old to engage with

books and reading is vastly different from the motivation for an 18-year-old. Add in factors of different levels of maturity, speed of development and you have more ‘distinct’ groups. Other differences to consider are gender; social background; pupil premium and free school meal students; cultural; faith-based; gifted and talented; special needs; reading ages; barriers to reading (from dyslexia, to bad reading experiences); a student’s own attitude to reading... the list goes on. Indeed your school may choose to focus on a different ‘group’ of students – perhaps underachievers or those targeted to achieve grade D at GCSE. ➤





There are numerous ways we can group our students, but they will rarely fall neatly into one category, more often falling into several.

By offering a wide range of strategies and initiatives throughout the academic year, and in the longer term, we can maximise the chance of motivating individual students to develop their reading over their school life.

I have recently received some external feedback that I organise too many initiatives for my students. This highlighted the challenge of providing for so many students – not even the twins

amongst them have identical reading needs and interests.

The Multimedia Research Centre (MRC) at TDA offers a plethora of strategies and reading experiences each year – from the well-known initiatives such as D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything And Read) from Harper Collins, the CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Shadowing Scheme from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), Booker Prize Shadowing from the Man Booker Prize Foundation and Bookbuzz from Booktrust, to the tailored pod/vodcasts and the KS3 Reading for Pleasure/Information Literacy programme I have created. In my experience you can never know what might be the spark for an individual student that switches them on to the love of reading, or starts their reading journey.

Some teachers and librarians can have an almost obsessive insistence that, for reading to have had value, students need to constantly review what they have read. This seems to me to create another artificial barrier

to the pleasure of reading. Think about your reading for a moment. When you kick off your shoes at the end of the day, or lie back in bed, or chill out on holiday with a book – do you ‘reflect’ on what you have read? Would you want to write an A4 page review on plot or character development? And do this for every book you read? The chances are that unless you are a professional book reviewer, your reflection will be as simple as thinking about recommending the book to someone you know. So why do we think that our students are different? Why can't they simply enjoy reading a book and then... nothing?

The problem with this ‘nil-response’ is that it does not



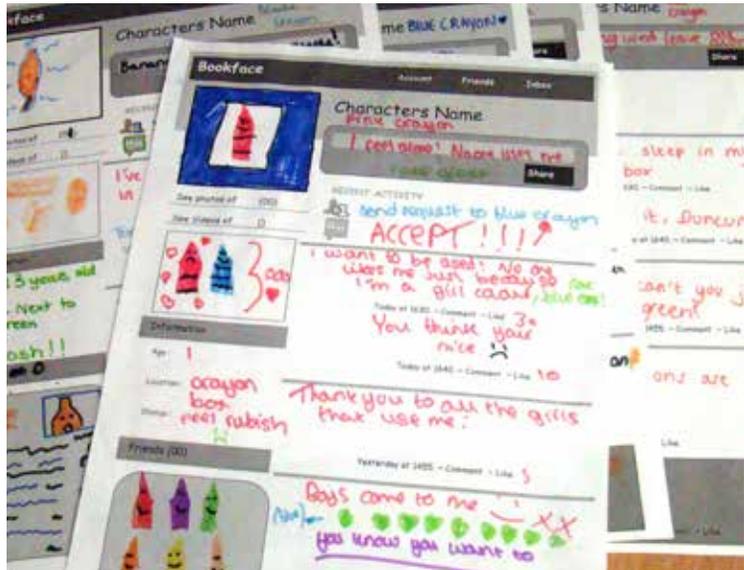
provide any 'evidence', and evidence of engagement, impact and progress is often heavily sought in schools.

So I give my students different ways to respond and reflect on their reading. Sometimes they are directed to a task, sometimes there is free choice, sometimes there is nothing at all!

These responses could be a tweet or a blog – yes, so these fall into the written response category, but I have kept the actual writing to a minimum and leaned towards more creative responses.

Here are some tools that I have used with students:

- » creating a book block
- » Bookface (from Teaching Tools, digitaldisruption.co.uk/bookface)
- » Fakebook characters (from ClassTools.net)
- » book bags
- » book marks
- » Twitter reviews
- » Instagram review, where the picture tells the story (instagram.com)



- » book maps
- » book Top Trumps
- » videos – Microsoft Photo Story (from Softonic.microsoft-photo-story.en.softonic.com) and Animoto (from animoto.com)
- » mini books
- » Movie Poster (from bighugelabs.com/poster.php)
- » cast lists and music scores
- » I am also trialling 'book pumpkins' where students are challenged to turn a pumpkin into a book character for Halloween.

Students still need to reflect on what they have read, consider characters and plot, for example, but by making these reading responses varied, creative and sometimes even a little 'wacky' the task becomes fun, and tactile. I am able to engage more students in their process of reflecting about their own reading and in sharing that response with others. So then I have interesting evidence, rather than a ream of standard written book reviews.

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System leadership and collaborative working in action

*Tom Knott, Head of Leadership, SSAT
& Alan Yellup OBE, Executive Head & CEO,
Wakefield City Academies Trust*

System leaders are defined broadly as school leaders with responsibilities covering more than one school, working beyond their own school to support the wider system. They are becoming more common in our education system, with a growing number of heads taking a more formal responsibility for supporting other schools via academy sponsorship, or as the leader of an academy chain.

System leaders do far more than working across multiple schools. They are the leaders of school and academy groups who not only have ultimate accountability for other schools but also the ability to formally intervene where necessary.

Tom Knott

The origins of collaborative working in action - Wakefield City Academies Trust

Alan Yellup OBE, Wakefield City Academies Trust

The seeds of system leadership and its potential to drive school improvement were sown in the early days of my headship at Eastmoor High school in Wakefield. A school located in the centre of a large, tough and uncompromising estate a mile from the city centre, bearing all the hallmarks of social and educational deprivation. Students entered the school

at age 11 with very low levels of prior attainment, and even lower levels of aspiration, to be educated in a building barely fit for purpose by teachers who felt that performance levels in examinations simply reflected the poor quality intake and social anomie. With 12% 5 A-C GCSE passes staff believed they were doing as well as could be reasonably expected, especially as 25% of students spoke English as a second language. Those few parents who harboured aspirations for their child's education sent them elsewhere resulting in falling rolls with spare capacity hovering around 35%. We fared badly against almost all key performance indicators and would have been placed in special measures had it existed at that time.

Help, support and advice was sparse, usually provided by local authority advisers – long since removed from the classroom, who appeared with the same frequency as the equinox – twice yearly. Support from within the profession was rare with the inception of age-weighted pupil unit funding and published league tables. There was little incentive to support schools that might eventually attract students from your school and be in direct competition.

The interregnum

I set about changing the culture and ethos from 'can't do to can do' and introduced comparative data to highlight similar schools with far superior performance outcomes. The curriculum was overhauled, testing introduced, senior leaders became visible, classrooms were opened up to share good practice and student groupings and pastoral care systems ►

radically reshaped. Exorcising the past was further accomplished by improving the image through changing the school name and uniform.

Thus Wakefield City High School was born. At this stage it was a question of self-help founded on the following principles:

- » optimism and perseverance
- » determination to never settle for anything second best
- » calculated risk taking
- » ensuring everyone matters in a school EPM (every person matters) – not ECM
- » building self-confidence
- » removing fear and heavy-handed top down accountability
- » making learning enjoyable as well as stretching
- » having fun and treating each other with respect.

Not quite Winston Churchill's 'blood, sweat and tears', but not far removed.

The first two Ofsted inspections delivered judgements of giving very good value for money and of a rapidly improving school. Examination results improved from 12% to 38% 5 A-C (English and maths not yet KPIs). It would have been easy to sit back, become complacent and assume our task was complete. However the momentum proved unstoppable. Success really does breed success and with the introduction of value added we began to attract attention locally and nationally and became first a beacon school and subsequently a Leading Edge school.

Being a beacon school convinced me of the huge potential of system leadership, the value of collaborative practice, and the frailty of the espoused effective leadership style of the day. A visiting underperforming school, seeking out good practice, shared with us their science provision. This we adopted, with greatly enhanced results the following year. All schools irrespective of ranking or status have an exemplar worth sharing.

The journey to outstanding

Involvement with the SSAT as a consultant head fostered my belief in the 'by schools for schools'

philosophy, and crystallised my views on leadership for sustained improvement. From every challenging school we visited to share our experience of raising standards, we brought back something to enhance our own practice which sustained our trend of year on year improvement and led us to 'outstanding'.

The approach of:

- » working with and supporting
- » building confidence and self-esteem
- » using active practitioners to share best practice
- » developing strategies to improve teaching and learning
- » providing opportunities for networking

gave encouragement to hundreds of schools that felt beleaguered by Ofsted categories or by local authority labels of 'causing concern' – often by both simultaneously. Labels which demotivated students, staff and communities alike. Projects such as Raising Achievement, Transforming Learning (RATL) provided the perfect antidote to an approach of thinly veiled threat and coercion, and demonstrated an alternative framework in which standards were raised with dignity. Significant numbers of previously disillusioned staff remained in the profession and took their schools on journeys from the bottom to the top Ofsted judgement categories.

Wakefield City High School thrived in this environment of:

- » conferences led by nationally- and internationally-renowned educationalists delivering the very best of current research and practice
- » networking opportunities
- » skilled practitioners demonstrating practice from across the nation
- » developing cutting edge data analysis tools and databases to enable accurate tracking of students' progress and attainment and provide benchmarks against similar schools.

In 2005, Wakefield City High School gained the first of three consecutive outstanding Ofsted judgements, the latest of which was in March 2013 with grade 1s across all four judgement categories. The offer, as an outstanding school, to be fast-tracked to academy status was seized immediately, not as an act of



independence, but to continue to work with the local authority in equal partnership. Performance data was shared with the LA and we successfully bid for teaching school status on behalf of LA primary and secondary schools.

During this period school-to-school support proliferated with over 250 schools supported on short- and medium-term contracts. Work focused on support for the core subjects, MFL and leadership at middle and senior level.

System leadership: multi-academy trust and national teaching school development

Our contribution to system leadership therefore began from the moment we were granted beacon school status and was firmly embedded through invitations to be involved in a range of national school improvement initiatives. These have included initiatives by the government, such as SIP, the National Challenge programmes, national leader of education (NLE), local leader of education (LLE), national leader of governance (NLG), and the national support school, teaching school and multi-academy trust developments; by SSAT (RATL and Spectrum); by Tribal (the short-lived Inspirational Schools Programme), and currently Whole Education. I have worked as a consultant head for SSAT and Tribal, a school improvement partner, a National Challenge adviser and a NLE. Colleagues at senior and middle level worked in schools, demonstrated practice first-hand during visits to Wakefield City Academy, and presented at conferences. In so doing, they have gained invaluable professional development

themselves. Our chair of governors operates as a NLG.

The formation of Wakefield City Academies Trust (WCAT) and development of the teaching school alliance provided the opportunity to establish a new leadership structure in which two co-headteachers were appointed. I now operate as the executive head and CEO of WCAT, while Marie Hunter and Suzanne Austwick are responsible for leading the academy. Marie is also an NLE having steered the academy through the 2013 outstanding Ofsted inspection and Suzanne is in the process of becoming NLE accredited through day-to-day leadership of the Wakefield Regional Teaching School Alliance.

The MAT already comprises 14 primary and secondary schools while the teaching school alliance has a membership of over 40 schools and 40 specialist leaders of education (SLE) operating at primary and secondary level. Both these initiatives have allowed us to share our experiences of effecting significant school improvement and in the most challenging of circumstances. It has also enabled us to further develop our talented staff, and bring in new staff and introduce them to an alternative approach to school improvement.

SSAT's two-year leadership programme for new and prospective executive headteachers is designed and led by leading exec heads and CEOs and launches on 26-27 March.

For more details, visit www.ssatuk.co.uk/leadership.