



SSAT Journal 20

Winter 2022

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Welcome

Sue Williamson
Chief Executive, SSAT



2022 is a year we will never forget. Three prime ministers and six education secretaries – all good material for pub quizzes, but not the stability we need to improve schooling. The Elizabethan era has ended – the death of the Queen, who has been a model of service and continuity, is a significant moment in our history. King Charles III is a champion of young people. The work of the Prince's Trust has done so much to support and transform the lives of many disadvantaged young people. The Prince's Teaching Institute has provided training for teachers and school leaders, as well as summer schools. The King recognises the importance of education in the development of the country. Sadly, I do not always see this with our political leaders. Education was barely mentioned throughout the leadership campaign for the leader of the Conservative Party. I hope that the new Secretary of State, Gillian Keegan, will listen to the profession and work with them to create a schooling system that helps all young people, whatever their context or ability, to lead fulfilled lives.

To do this, we need a workforce that is highly knowledgeable and skilled and is always looking to improve practice. There is a teacher shortage, and this will worsen in 2023, because we have failed to meet training targets. It is critical that we retain our teachers and give them the opportunities to develop their thinking and practice at all stages of their careers. The Journal is one way we promote the work of schools and teachers with varying amounts of experience writing about their work. Big issues are tackled and hopefully trigger thoughts on how things might be done differently in your school.

At SSAT, we want practitioners to be innovative, and willing to share. Feedback can spark further development.

In the last journal, I mentioned that we were including access to free leadership programmes at different leadership stages as part of membership – early, middle and aspiring to headship. I am pleased to say that these programmes have proved very popular. I am critical of the NPQ programmes, as I believe that they seek conformity, and the content is imposed by the DfE. SSAT leadership programmes are designed by school leaders to promote thought and debate. I believe that we would recruit and retain more school leaders and teachers if the profession was properly recognised. The profession should be the curriculum designers and I was angered that the large amount of funding awarded to the Oak Academy implies that teachers are poor curriculum designers. This is not the case, but too often a directive is issued from a Minister, who has little or no experience in curriculum design or pedagogy. We need more than a token teacher or two on advisory groups.

I believe that we are at a significant moment for the profession and for the school system. The rhetoric about being a school-led system must stop and we need this to become reality. More about this next year.

I wish you and your schools a very Happy Christmas and New Year. Thank you for all your wonderful work in 2022.

Sue Williamson

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Mixed ability maths teaching in KS3 in a secondary academy

By Mark Pyle, Warden Park Secondary Academy

At the outset I must be clear about two things: firstly, the research around mixed-ability groupings versus ability streaming/setting in maths is patchy and inconclusive; secondly, it is my belief that it is entirely possible to teach well in either situation. This article therefore is not intended to be ‘tub-thumping’ in favour of mixed-ability. Each maths department should pursue the path they are most convinced by. Neither approach is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’.

That said, my concern, born out of 23 years of teaching maths in a comprehensive school, and something that wider reading on the subject frequently points to, is the possibility that setting or streaming children by ability

in maths groups has a negative impact on students both while at school and beyond. Why is it that adults, for example, frequently seem to bear the scars of school maths and, at the same time, be quite unabashed about it:

“I was no good at maths at school”; “not a maths person”; “never could do maths”; “don’t have a maths brain” etc?

Could it be that a school system that labels you early on and ‘sets’ you accordingly can have a negative and lasting impact on such things as your perception of your own ability; your motivation to improve and succeed; your self-belief; your love of the subject?





On the other hand, while you may have some agreement with those points, you may wonder what the positive arguments are for adopting mixed ability groups. Why adopt a system that goes against the trend and is essentially unproven?

And the answers are fairly simple. To avoid labelling and thereby potentially limiting children; to recognise and allow for the fact that children develop at different rates and times; to promote and facilitate equality of opportunity; to give all students exposure to all the concepts and vocabulary; to allow all students to learn from the approach of the most able students in maths. Also, and I think crucially, to recognise that in any given group of children, most students are at a fairly similar ability level.

We know this from the normal distribution. If we consider a group of children to be equally spaced out in a linear continuum of maths ability (whatever that means exactly) from weakest to strongest, this is a misrepresentation that can deflect our understanding.

Normal distribution reminds us that most students are within a relatively narrow band of ability, with a few noticeably less able and a few noticeably more able than the norm. Furthermore, students change places within this 'order' from one topic to another. It isn't necessarily the case that if John is good at solving equations he will also be good at bearings, for example.

However, if I seem to be arguing for a homogenous maths lesson with all students doing the same thing regardless of ability, I'm not; knowing your students and providing appropriate differentiation is vital, whether in setting or mixed ability. What I am saying is that student ability is not fixed and that it is not a long linear continuum. If it were, you might conclude that the spread of ability in a group is too hard to cater for. The normal distribution corrects this misconception.

So, to the most important question, and the real purpose of the article: how do you teach mixed ability maths classes well? Here are some suggestions and some myths to bust:

- Aim to teach a concept, then set questions/problems of varying difficulty based on that concept. Don't 'overtach' - you don't have to show students how to do everything before they can do it. Getting them to work it out promotes problem-solving; independent thinking; resilient learners.
- Get students to come to the board to explain. It helps the class engage and is great for the explainer too. How often have you seen someone who seems to 'get it' come up to explain and then find their understanding wasn't as secure as they thought?
- 'Think, pair, share' is highly effective to get students discussing ideas. Verbalising thinking is a very important practice for students.
- Once the concept is clear, provide differentiated tasks. Our school uses 1, 2 and 3 chilli tasks. You will also need one or two seriously challenging (but not ridiculous) extension problems.
- Collaboration is essential - but be intentional about this; students don't automatically collaborate well, you need to guide them. 'Dynamic groupwork', where each person in the group has a role, and where you can choose any one of the group members to explain the solution (and the others aren't allowed to 'chip in') is powerful.
- You don't have to pair-up/team-up students of the same ability. It's good when different abilities and approaches mix.
- You don't have to 'pitch it just right' so that 'no one gets stuck'. Being stuck is valuable - training your students to manage being stuck is key.
- Scaffolding for those who are struggling to access a topic is desirable.
- It's not the case that the most able have to 'teach themselves', or that once they've 'got it' they 'just have to go round helping others'. You need to have one or two challenging problems each lesson (based on the lesson concept) for anyone who has 'completed' the work. And remember, if they get stuck on it, that's good. If they're never stuck, that's probably not good!
- Be wary of a mindset that says 'I will aim the lesson at...'. Remember, most students are operating at a fairly similar level. Teach a concept to all, then aim to help any student at whatever level of challenge they need help.
- Lastly, perhaps the golden rule, your aim is to get the students engaged and working hard, making sure they are accessing and improving their own latent ability - we want them to be the critical thinkers and problem solvers of the future. It's not down to you that 'everyone gets everything', nor to 'make everything easy'; it's down to you to push them, challenge them and inspire them to work hard, think hard, be creative and succeed.

And if, after reading those, you think they are just good practice for any maths lesson, whether taught in a mixed-ability or setted context, I would agree with you. Good practice is good practice. My belief, as I mentioned at the start, is that good maths teaching and learning can happen in either context. What I am less sure about is whether the message and practice of setting, which has been the historical norm in most British schools for so many years, is the most helpful backdrop in the 21st century for helping all students to enjoy, succeed and reach their potential in maths.

Our school has chosen to teach years 7 and 8 in mixed ability groupings, then to move to a two-tier system of 'standard' and 'advanced' groups in years 9 to 11. We also have nurture groups in each year, for our weakest 5-10 students, and we have an accelerated maths class that cover GCSE maths in years 9-10, then take an additional maths course in year 11.



Helping state school students gain a place at Oxford and Cambridge University

By Alice Jones, Bentley Wood High School

This academic year (2022) 70% of students going to Oxford University and 68% of students going to Cambridge University will be from the state school sector. Although the number of state-educated students going to Oxbridge has improved in the last few years, since only 6% of students are educated at private schools, these students are still disproportionately represented in the student bodies at the UK's top universities.

I run an Oxbridge programme at a state, all-girls, secondary school in north London where a

high proportion of students are in receipt of pupil premium. It is now my ninth year of running this programme. I have found that there is a magic formula for students to successfully gain a place at Oxford or Cambridge University. This is what it is:

1. GCSEs

The student should have a majority of 7s, 8s and 9s at GCSE. They must have a 9 in the subject they wish to read at university if applicable.

2. A-levels

If the course at the university specifies an A-level as being 'obligatory' or even 'desirable' then the student must have taken these A-levels. (The

most frequent mistake I find students make is that they do not opt for further mathematics A-level when they want to do computer science at Oxbridge. Further mathematics is only 'desirable' according to the computer science websites; but they will not get in without it).

Students should take four AS levels and then three A-levels.

The student should get straight As at AS level (or the internal exam equivalent).

If the student is offered a place, they must meet their offer.



3. Personal statement

The student's personal statement should read like an academic essay based on their extra reading or supra curricular activities relating to their subject (it is assumed from your grades that the student is well informed on material in the curriculum). Obviously there should be no spelling or grammatical errors.

Extra reading or supra curricular activities can include:

- Reading a book from the Oxford or Cambridge course's reading list on the website or from here: [Reading Bank - University College Oxford \(Univ\) - Reading Bank](#).
- Listening to or reading a relevant resource from the [Resource Hub - University College Oxford \(Univ\) - Resources](#) (a personal favourite is the 'In Our Time' podcast: [BBC Radio 4 - In Our Time](#)).
- I would suggest that a personal statement should mention around three to five academic books. The student should have read these cover-to-cover so as not to be caught out at interview.
- Completing the relevant activities on the HE+ website: [HE+ \(myheplus.com\)](#).
- Reading articles from academic magazines aimed at 6th formers e.g. History Today etc.

4. Academic essay competitions

The student should have entered an academic essay competition and ideally gained some recognition for their work (a place on the podium or a merit). This should be mentioned on the personal statement.

The competitions for year 12 students are run throughout the academic year by a variety of universities, but particularly Oxford and Cambridge. Here are a few:

- <https://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/essay-prizes/>
- <https://www.robinson.cam.ac.uk/prospective-students/essay-prize>
- <https://www.cai.cam.ac.uk/access-outreach/resources-and-events/caius-explore>
- <https://www.seh.ox.ac.uk/study/outreach/events-and-competitions/teddy-rocks-maths>
- [\[and-outreach/newnham-essay-prizes/\]\(#\)](https://newn.cam.ac.uk/admissions/access-

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- <https://www.fitz.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate-admissions/opportunities-prospective-applicants/essay-competitions>
- <https://www.oriel.ox.ac.uk/study-us/schools-liaison/rex-nettleford-prize-year-12-students-essays-colonialism-and-its-legacies>
- <https://classicalassociation.org/events/cambridge-branch-ancient-history-and-classical-civilisation-essay-competition-2022/>
- <https://www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/study-here/open-days/filmcomp>
- <https://www.girton.cam.ac.uk/humanities-writing-competition>
- <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/philosophy/events/essay-competition>
- <https://www.quantumonthe-clock.com/>
- <https://www.ceb.cam.ac.uk/events/davidson-inventors-challenge>
- <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/history/essay-competition>

5. Teacher reference

The student's teacher reference must include phrases that show that the student ranks highly in the cohort for each subject. For example: 'In the end of year exam student X ranked number one out of a cohort of 25 students in their biology exam.'

6. Additional test preparation

Many courses at Oxford or Cambridge University require the applicant to sit an additional test. These tests are often marketed as 'aptitude tests' - the idea being that they will show what the student is naturally capable of; students will, in theory, get the same score every time. However, students must practise these tests hundreds of times to familiarise themselves with the questions so that they can reach their maximum potential (which may well be the same every time once they have reached this point).

Not all of the tests work in this way though, some students will just keep on getting better and better the more they do.

It is worth getting multiple teachers to look at these tests and figure out the questions. They are hard and often need a specialist to train up a student to the required level needed.

I would recommend buying a book full of exercises on the tests for the school library and encouraging the student to work through the entire book over the summer holidays between year 12 and year 13. It almost goes without saying that the student should have exhausted all past papers online. In many cases, the student will be rejected based on the score of these tests alone.

7. Interview preparation

Students should be prepared for the interview by their school having organised a few practice interviews. Eloquence matters little, although some students will benefit from joining the debating society (or equivalent public speaking activities run by the school: Speakers for Schools, the Jack Petchey Speak Out Challenge, the Bar Mock Trial etc.) to improve their confidence.

Students should be able to answer the following basic questions:

- Why do you want to study your chosen degree?
- What does your chosen degree explore?
- What are you reading at the moment?

In addition, students should create and answer questions on their own personal statement. For example, if they have mentioned a book, they should ask themselves questions about this book and then try and answer them.

Students should expect questions that are highly specialised. Science and mathematics applicants will get mathematical questions only. They should practise saying their thought process aloud.

There are lots of wacky Oxbridge questions online: <https://www.thatoxfordgirl.com/post/50-real-life-oxford-university-interview-questions>. These can be quite fun for students to have a go at, but fundamentally the interview is establishing 'are you numerate enough' for a science/mathematical degree and 'are you literate enough' for an arts/humanities degree. Preparation therefore is best done by doing extra work and then talking about it.

That is what is required to get into Oxford or Cambridge University. You can explain this to your students, or you can get one of the outreach officers from either university to explain it to

them (I know my students sometimes need an external person to realise something the school have been telling them for years!). Every Oxford or Cambridge college is linked to a certain area of the UK, you can find your linked outreach officer here: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/oxfordforUK> or here: <https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/area-links>. The Outreach opportunities at both universities are fantastic and are free. I would avoid any programme that helps students get into Oxbridge for a fee, no matter how small.

Further challenges

One of the largest challenges I face when encouraging students to apply for top universities is that everyone wants to be a doctor or a lawyer. Of course, this desire among students is completely understandable. Many of my students are from working class, immigrant families who could not possibly imagine embarking on higher education if it does not obviously lead into a stable and high-status career with a decent salary. However, medicine and law are among the most competitive courses at any university, Oxbridge being no exception, so it is unlikely that they are going to get in for these courses.

This was one explanation behind that viral photo a few years ago:

<https://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/london-life/why-a-photo-of-14-young-black-cambridge-students-has-gone-viral-a3529081.html> when in 2015, only 15 black, male undergraduates were accepted into Cambridge University. Many black applicants apply for the most competitive courses like medicine and law and, like most people who apply for those courses, are mainly rejected. This is important to note, but significantly many able students from ethnic minority backgrounds may be put off applying due to preconceived ideas about what the universities are like. This notion is being tackled by the universities themselves and other programmes like the Stormzy scholarship: <https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/fees-and-finance/financial-support/outreach-scholarships/stormzy-scholarship> but it must also be tackled in schools. Bright students must be spotted and expected to apply; students from ethnic minority backgrounds applying to Oxbridge should be normalised.



If students really want to apply for medicine or law, I will support them, but it is important to inform them of other routes into these professions such as completing a humanities or arts or degree and then doing a conversion course into law or completing a science degree and then doing a conversion course into medicine. In addition, students must be educated about how doing an English degree can lead into innumerable well-paid jobs. When I suggest students take a degree at university that does not obviously lead to a direct job (degrees like English, geography, modern languages, classics, chemistry etc. as opposed to law, medicine, architecture, and business studies) they respond by saying 'but I don't want to be a teacher!'. Careers such as public relations, the civil service, human resources, management consultancy etc. need to be explained to ambitious students (and their parents) as do graduate schemes and programmes at top companies. I find that the message needs to be explained over and over again: in assemblies, at careers fairs, in PSHE etc.

It is also worth remembering that there are some courses at Cambridge and Oxford University that are easier (less competitive) to get into. Oxford University are especially transparent about this. Oxford University publishes its admissions statistics here: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/admissions-statistics/undergraduate-admissions-statistics/admissions-statistics/courses>.

Cambridge University, as far as I can tell, does not have an equivalent webpage but it is no secret that courses such as land economy,

Anglo-Saxon and Norse, theology and classics have less applicants than other courses. Both universities will not let a student into this course for the sake of filling up a place, if there is no one good enough, there will be no one on the course, but if students can demonstrate a strong academic performance, admissions tutors may forgive some weaker aspects of a student's application (like their personal statement over-emphasising their Duke of Edinburgh Award rather than their academic reading).

One question I have been asking myself lately is 'am I right to persuade students and parents that the choice of university matters more than the course?' Which is better for a bright and capable student: to read a lesser-known course at Oxbridge or a course that leads directly into a degree but at a less good university? For example, should I help a bright student apply to read Anglo Saxon and Norse at Cambridge University or law at Leicester University? The answer must be it depends on the student, but for the most able students I am leaning towards the Oxbridge route. If a student loves academic work, then they will enjoy their experience at Oxford and Cambridge.

In addition, Oxford and Cambridge universities are trusted brands that have great currency in the job market (top London barrister chambers simply do not consider candidates who have not gone to Oxbridge). Notwithstanding, there was a recent study that indicated that university matters less than degree grade. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/apr/20/degree-grade-matters-more-than-university-reputation-report-finds> This leads me to think that students must apply for degrees they genuinely enjoy and are passionate about, this will ensure that they do well in them. I don't think most students at my school have a genuine passion for law. But barriers must be removed so that students are free to express their genuine passion in Russian and French, theology, land economy, classics or whatever it is. Although some students will genuinely have a strong interest in law, for those that do not we must support and persuade parents that reading a more esoteric subject, particularly at Oxbridge, will lead to a successful career. Suggestions for how to do this, would be welcome.



Transforming learning in the sixth form

*An interview between Alex Galvin, SSAT and Simran Bhadare
and Hannah Fahey, St Mark's Academy*

St Mark's Academy in South London describes itself as a “community of transformation.” This idea of transformation is at the heart of the academy's vision and ethos and is central to the experience of staff and students. Staff and students alike reflect on what it means to be transformed through learning and what it has meant for their personal journeys – the importance of broadening understanding, raising aspirations and opening doors.

The sixth form sees the culmination of students' transformation journeys. In recent years the academy has seen an improvement in results which would be notable in any context, but is all the more impressive given the low prior attainment of many of their students. This summer, the academy achieved their highest ever outcomes in the sixth form. 25% of students achieved A/A* grades at A-level and 57% were awarded A*-B (up from 11% and 25% in 2019 respectively). 50% of students taking vocational courses achieved a Distinction or Distinction* (up from 5% in 2019).

This year, the academy was awarded an ALPS grade 2, placing their sixth form outcomes in the top 10% nationally. Their value-added score is +0.1 in A-level subjects and +0.45 in Applied General subjects. Students at St Mark's are now making almost half a grade more progress than similar students nationally.

Outcomes for disadvantaged students are exceptional. Their student body hasn't changed. What has made the difference?

Simran Kaur Bhadare, Head of Sixth Form and Vice Principal, believes that the academy's vision is central to their success. The focus on “transformation for all” translates into a determination that every student will achieve their potential and a focus on the needs of each individual. Simran describes this as a “holistic approach” – where every student is known; where the ambitions of every student are understood and supported.

Key to this success has been a decision to focus on students' learning as a seven-year journey and ensuring that there is a strong sense of continuity from across all key stages. Approaches to pedagogy, homework, assessment and quality assurance continue into the sixth form. Strong family links are maintained and levels of support remain as high as in younger years. Simran explains that students welcome high expectations around behaviour and attitudes to learning. They find the maintenance of clear boundaries reassuring and feel valued when their teachers expect the best from them.

The academy offers a range of courses, both academic and vocational, and students are carefully supported to select the courses that will best suit them. The curriculum is regularly reviewed and adjusted to ensure



that it is meeting the needs of students – for example core maths has recently been added to cater for enthusiastic mathematicians who would struggle with the A-level course but would like to continue their studies.

Staff have worked hard to ensure that all teachers understand what an A* or a Distinction* looks like, analysing the learning gaps of their students and working out how to address them. The focus on a seven-year learning journey has supported joined-up curriculum planning and a clear understanding of expected progress.

At St Mark's, every member of staff is part of a coaching pair and post-16 teaching is often a focus for development. Further collaborative work across the academy and the multi-academy trust has developed the expertise of teachers and enabled the planning of bespoke CPD where needed. Simran explains that they believe that every teacher can be a successful teacher in the sixth form and ensure that expertise is developed over time through team teaching and coaching. There is an ongoing focus on the progress of all examination groups from years 10 to 13, making sure that students are well supported at every stage of their courses.

Great care is taken to ensure that every student is seen as an individual and that everyone is supported to succeed. Careful monitoring of

progress means that staff can intervene quickly if there is a concern. Students sit two series of mocks, one in November and another in March. Practical support is provided when needed – for example providing folders, support to organise work, one-to-one coaching and Saturday lessons. Recognising that many students have limited experience of travelling, even within London, staff take students to university open days and UCAS fairs. Additional support is provided with applications and interviews. Students have secured places to study medicine and dentistry, as well as being supported to go on and study more niche courses.

When asked what has had the greatest impact on progress in the sixth form at St Mark's, Simran explains that continuity and consistency have been important, driven by the decision to look at learning as a seven-year journey. Staff have found that the academy's evidence-informed approach to pedagogy is also right for their older students and that clear boundaries and support structures are as important for seventeen-year-olds as they are for year 7s. Finally Simran returns to the vision for learning that has been successfully embedded across the school. A belief has been created among students and staff that everyone should and can succeed. The community are rightly proud that they are transforming lives and supporting the success stories of every student, no matter what form that story might take.



Reading our way to diversity

By Antony Nichola, Goffs Churchgate Academy

May 2020 was a defining moment for the world: the injustice of George Floyd's death precipitated protests across the world for racial inequalities at the core of society, inequalities that rested in the very institutions that were supposed to underpin social justice.

It was a period where many realised – somewhat belatedly – that the world was a changed place. The education system woke up and rallied; many of us mobilised defiantly aiming to tackle issues around diversity.

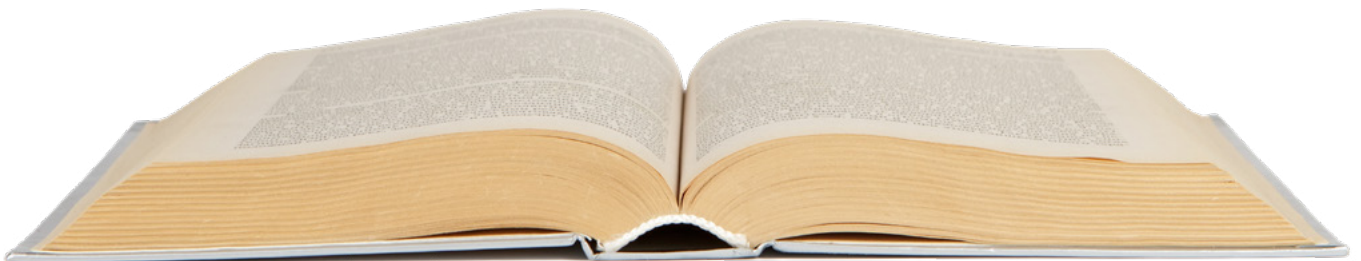
The state of introspection that was required before such changes took place was, however, an uncomfortable position – we had to search deep to know if we were complicit in the institutional racism that was endemic in society.

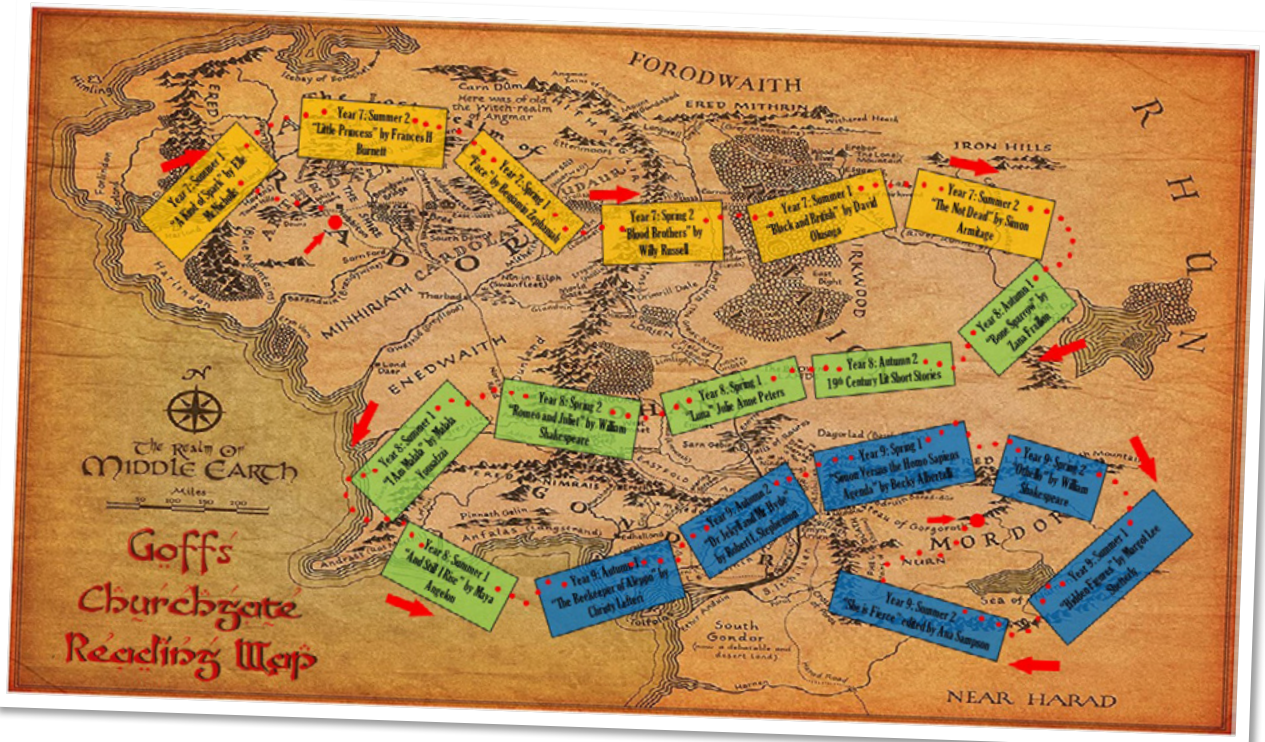
For me, it was an embarrassing moment when, as the Head of English, I reflected on our own KS3 curriculum and found the books we used to educate the next generation had a common trend:

- *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* – white male author.
- *Private Peaceful* – white male author.
- *Alice in Wonderland* – white male author.
- *Of Mice and Men* – white male author.
- *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – white male author (of course).

The list goes on.

Most of our schemes of work came from working with other schools or adapting them from educational establishments, which highlights that the problem was not only within our own English department.





It is no coincidence that AQA themselves recently announced changes to their GCSE syllabus, with options now including Chinonyerem Odimba's *Princess & The Hustler*, Winsome Pinnock's *Leave Taking* and Kit de Waal's *My Name is Leon* after criticism about their lack of diversity.

As educators, we want to stand at the fore and change the lives of children, but to do so we must recognise the problems first. Inequality by exclusion and marginalisation has been rife in education, and it took those tragic events of May 2020 to slowly turn the wheel. It is now our job to make sure it keeps spinning by making changes to ensure all students are being seen, represented, and celebrated.

At the heart of English is reading

One of the challenges was ensuring this new forward-thinking curriculum reflected a wide range of groups. With this, came our 'eureka' moment. The solution was simple: read more books. We did not have to take the typical approach of teaching two, maybe three, books in a year. Why not teach a new book every half term?

The national curriculum is not meant to inhibit us. The requisite to include creative writing does not preclude us from reading while we sharpen our students' skills in writing. It simply means that when we do a creative writing unit, we do it at the same time as reading a book. After all, what better source of inspiration is there for a student's creative writing than the work of a published author?

Books like *A Kind of Spark* give our children inspiration to write, but at the same time gives them the cultural capital to understand the world for the perspective of somebody who is neurodivergent. For non-fiction, we study David Olusoga's *Black and British*. For poetry, we read from the anthology collection *She is Fierce* in conjunction with exploring concepts of feminism. Every book was chosen to either enhance our students' worldview or make them feel seen as individuals.

A brave new curriculum

In order to succeed in our vision, this project had to be treated as more than a token tick job. It required a vision and boldness for our English curriculum – a complete revamp was required.

Getting buy-in from teachers was an important first step, but it was not a difficult one. An open meeting about how best to address diversity was met with enthusiasm despite the extra work that would be required. We were galvanised to make progressive changes, and once the issue was laid bare for all to see, the actual decision to rewrite the entire KS3 schemes of work came from the teachers themselves. We are a small community school, so each teacher agreed to take on three to four schemes of work each, but it was this feeling that they were driving the changes which was crucial to the buy-in.

Once an agreement was in place, mapping the project became the next hurdle. In collaboration with a senior leader link, I put together a series of documents. This included a reading journey which provided the ambition and vision of the project. Our curriculum intent and learning journey was to cross-reference a full coverage of skills against the national curriculum, but then went above and beyond – a sort of ‘national curriculum plus’ model. The assessment outline ensured that every book was mapped against assessment objectives so that, regardless of their class, all students would practise the necessary skills in English and receive formative feedback.

The new schemes of work would need consistency within them, but I did not want to micromanage teachers. Our headteacher granted us a whole day off-timetable so we could conduct a thorough department briefing of the project. Here, we thrashed out our principles for the schemes of work as a group: we all agreed to use the same system of scaffolds to help students structure their responses; we agreed to include Challenge boxes in all PowerPoints to provide alternative stretch tasks and Stuck boxes to provide support; we decided we would have a Free Writing Friday every fortnight to address concerns about a lack of extended writing with the extra emphasis on reading.

As a result of this careful pre-planning, it meant that 18 months later, we had a new KS3 curriculum that would do justice to that vision we had at the very beginning of our journey. The extra £12,000 budget for new books could have been prohibitive, but our senior leadership team shared this vision of inclusivity and were quick to grant the fund. Now, I can proudly say, that by the time all our children reach the age of 16, they have all read a minimum of twenty books while they have been with us. Twenty books that have educated them about the world, twenty books that has given them a view of the world in all its wide and varied glory.

Twenty books where, hopefully, every single one of our students might recognise a little bit of themselves in the author or the characters and feel empowered.

And the beauty of it all, the key ingredient for success, was that we simply had to read more books.



A photograph of a group of school staff and students in a meeting. A man in a red shirt and blue lanyard is smiling and looking down at something in his hands. Several young women in school uniforms are looking at him with interest. The background is a bright, modern school interior with large windows.

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Guiding, listening, responding: what are the characteristics of effective Early Career Teacher mentoring?

By Rachael Melvin, Whalley Range 11-18 High School

Mentoring plays an essential role in teacher development and, with the introduction of the Early Career Framework (ECF), the question of how to effectively nurture the development of Early Career Teachers (ECT), has been brought to the forefront. Although there are many definitions of mentoring within the context of teacher development, no one definition is universally agreed upon (Donaldson, 2008; Hughes, 2021). Hayes and Pridham (2019) provide the following definition of mentoring as the 'positive, supportive, facilitation of learning and development' between a person who is more experienced and one who is less experienced. Likewise, Hughes (2021) considers that mentors are 'wise and trusted teachers' who are 'willing to use their time and expertise to develop and guide'. Whilst there are multiple definitions, they all emphasise notions of support, guidance, nurturing development and the transfer of knowledge and expertise.

Personally, I have been fortunate enough to have experienced excellent mentoring earlier in my career both as a trainee teacher and Newly Qualified Teacher. My mentors were encouraging and clear in their feedback, guiding me to reflect upon my own learning. As a result, I was excited to begin the role of mentoring at the beginning of this academic year. Throughout the year, I kept a note of my reflections to ensure that I was

learning from my experiences to continually improve my ability to mentor. In addition to discussing my own reflections, I believe that it is important to understand the perspectives of ECTs: what do they find most helpful and supportive? A DFE (2022) survey concluded that ECTs hoped to receive 'constructive, non-judgemental guidance and support' from their mentors. However, I wanted to understand the views of ECTs in my own school context, so I conducted and reviewed a survey of ECTs at my school.

The thoughts of Early Career Teachers

As the primary stakeholders of mentoring, it is important to give ECTs the space to voice their thoughts and reflections. To gather this in a way that did not significantly add workload to teachers at the end of a busy year, I designed a form for the six ECTs at my school to complete. I ensured the questions were open ended and invited the honest and constructive sharing of thoughts and reflections. Questions required written responses, rather than producing quantitative data, as this allowed clearer insight into their opinions and the survey was anonymous. For next year, it would be beneficial to share the survey at the beginning of the year first but, as I began the project with a different think piece focus, this was not possible. Nevertheless, this meant that the ECTs had nearly a full year's worth of mentoring to draw upon in their reflection. Questions asked about the qualities of an effective mentor and good mentoring, what they have found most supportive,

what effective CPD looks like (including the training on Step Lab) and about workload.

For the question ‘what does good mentoring involve?’ responses emphasised personalised, targeted support and prioritisation of concerns. Answers also included sharing resources and being aware of wellbeing. Interestingly, one respondent commented that having the mentor guide the discussion was important to them, but another respondent felt that being able to guide the discussion their self was more beneficial. These contrasting responses demonstrate the importance of building an effective working relationship, which is supported by responses to the question ‘what are the qualities of a good mentor?’ which overwhelmingly mentioned being a good listener or listening carefully to concerns.

With regard to the question of who should guide the discussion, some respondents commented that they wanted to work on areas that they themselves had highlighted. To some extent this conflicts with the instructional coaching model that mentors are required to follow. These comments align with national evaluations of the

ECF wherein lack of flexibility to respond to the developmental needs of the teacher was identified as a key challenge (DFE, 2022). Schools Week also commented on the government evaluation, highlighting the problems of tailoring to the individual (Whittaker, 2022). Whilst the concept of small, incremental improvements to practice is clearly beneficial, in reality, teachers face an array of complex challenges in the classroom (often all at once) some of which we cannot delay addressing. Furthermore, part of a mentor’s role is to encourage ECTs to reflect on their own practice; this is an essential skill for any teacher and will sustain personal development. Therefore, this process of target setting and addressing areas of development needs to be reciprocal and collaborative, especially as the 15-minute weekly drop ins conducted by mentors only offer insight into a small aspect of the teacher’s practice. This is reflected by Hayes and Pridham (2019) who argued that mentoring is collaborative, grounded in social constructivist theory. Consequently, I believe there needs to be more space for mentees’ own reflection so that they can gain support from their mentor where they need it most.





The way I approached this was to give Emily¹ a chance to reflect on their week and voice any concerns first before beginning the instructional coaching. This ensured that meetings were productive and focused as we could deal with any issues immediately. Responses to the question ‘How do you think mentor meetings could be used most effectively’ shed further light on this. Answers mentioned sharing good practice, subject knowledge and understanding of how to teach certain topics. This aligns with Hayes and Pridham (2019) and Teach First’s comments on what an effective mentor should do: share their strong subject knowledge (Acott, 2022). It is essential that these subject knowledge aspects are incorporated alongside the skills of teaching, such as managing behaviour.

Similar perspectives were presented when the ECTs were asked ‘How have you found the training that you were required to complete on Step Lab?’ Responses commented that it was ‘too prescriptive’ or ‘rigid’ or ‘inflexible’, which mirrors the DFE (2022) survey responses. The use of mostly primary school examples was also mentioned. Furthermore, in the final survey question about workload, some commented

that this training increases workload. This concern was likewise raised by the Association of Headteachers (2021) where 95% said that it increased workload for ECTs. This represents a key challenge for mentors. It is the responsibility of policymakers to respond to these evaluations, but it is our responsibility to do the best we can to support the teacher that we are mentoring. This means that we need to both manage our time effectively so that we can maximise the utility of the instructional coaching model (tailoring this as much as we can within the limits of the framework) whilst also giving space to support with other identified areas for development. Alongside this, we need to support the ECTs in managing their own workload.

When asked about CPD, the teachers commented that sessions on behaviour, assessment for learning and SEND were useful. They found afterschool CPD most beneficial when different members of staff around school shared their experiences, highlighting the value of interacting with a range of colleagues and listening to personal experiences. One thing that some respondents would have liked more of was time to learn from other members of their department.

¹ Pseudonym used

Ultimately, there were some important similarities in responses, which are summarised by the question 'what has supported you the most?'. Being able to talk about concerns was a clear theme (echoed in other responses) and mentees felt that it was beneficial when mentors went beyond the framework of the Step Lab training. Evidently, two strands to the role of a mentor emerge in ECTs reflections. Mentoring is both a formal and informal process: just as with effective teaching, mentors need to be flexible rather than sticking rigidly to a framework and we should engage the teacher in the process of their own development.

My reflections

To combine my reflections with those of the ECTs, it is useful to go back to the beginning of the year. Following two years of Covid disruption, with a new curriculum at key stage three and a new structure to key stage four, despite my enthusiasm for the role, there were lots of things that I was uncertain about. I questioned whether I was skilled and experienced enough to support a new teacher. Additionally, with the Early Career Framework to work within, I knew that I would not be able to rely upon simply imitating the approach of my mentor as the requirements were completely different. However, I dealt with this by drawing upon the support of other colleagues; I found that it was better to have a certain answer to Emily's¹ questions, which sometimes meant being honest that I didn't have the answer.

A key challenge arose at a point in the year when Emily¹ found workload overwhelming, particularly where year 11 planning and assessment was concerned. In my immediate response, I found it difficult to know what to say that would be reassuring. In my first year in teaching, I had a similar experience. I was spending too much time working in the evenings and weekends and it was becoming unmanageable. I dealt with this by prioritising and getting in the habit of saying 'that's enough' where planning was concerned, ensuring that I made plans unrelated to teaching at weekends. However, this happened over several weeks, so I felt that this wouldn't be particularly useful advice in the moment. Instead, we made time for a proper meeting later that day to discuss

how to best move forward. I shared my advice and experiences of teaching year 11 including resources and we planned out the next few year 11 lessons together. Over the following weeks, I dropped into year 11 lessons so that I could give feedback and reassurance.

Evidently, flexibility and responsiveness to needs are essential qualities for mentors to possess. Based on my experiences this year, I feel that the most important things ECTs need support with are subject-based. This is echoed in ECT responses to the survey, as discussed. As each school is different, at the beginning of the year they need support with implementing a curriculum that may be unfamiliar to them and moving beyond the type of planning required on a PGCE to considering medium term planning and how to respond to the needs of a class. Likewise, they need support with exam years, which is understandable given that typically a PGCE does not give as much experience of this as it does with key stage three. Finally, the other requirements of teaching which (understandably) trainee teachers do not gain much experience of such as marking merit attention, particularly early in the year. However, the clear message from both the survey and my own experiences is the value of listening to the early career teacher.



Moving forwards

Mentoring is a privilege that has not only developed my leadership skills, but also improved my own teaching practice. To conclude, I want to consider what changes I believe would further improve ECT mentoring and how these could be practically implemented.

In an ideal world, it would be beneficial to have more structured, protected time for mentors to meet with their ECT as the discussions we had and support I offered was, naturally, not limited to our one hour a week. Nor should it be. Yet, as with many things in teaching, it feels as if time is not always on our side. Nevertheless, there is the potential to use CPD time for the mentor to work with the ECT on subject specific development. Likewise, we should plan in more opportunities for ECTs to observe their mentors. There is a difference between watching someone model a skill in a meeting compared with seeing them perform in front of class and ECTs deserve the chance to be the observer rather than always being the one who is observed.

As reflected in the structure of the ECF, often it is expected that behaviour is the most significant challenge that new teachers face, but this may not always be the case. Furthermore, it is arguably easier to implement the routines and techniques (which can then need to be implemented consistently) to manage behaviour, than it is to manage the new demands of marking and preparing classes for exams. In an ideal world at policy level, it would be beneficial to have a transition period at the end of the school year prior to joining to allow the ECT to become familiar and confident with the curriculum of their new school. As this may not be possible to facilitate, instead I will anticipate that the key things to prioritise with a new teacher will be teaching GCSE content and getting to grips with our curriculum and plan for how to support a new teacher with this. Ultimately, I will approach this role again with renewed confidence, better able to anticipate the challenges that the ECT may face, and better equipped to support them. However, I don't want to forget the value of listening and responding to what the ECT has identified as their most pressing needs.

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The Road Less Travelled – Using training pathways to personalise CPD

By Rosemary Osborne and Julia Knowles, Eltham Hill School

Over the past year at Eltham Hill School, we have focused on a new approach to CPD. We wanted to provide training that was bespoke for all of our staff. Often CPD is delivered in such a way that is seen to be a ‘one off’ and therefore not always embedded within the deep roots of teaching over time. We may base our learning on the synectics of teaching – the fine tuning of techniques and strategies, but as a teaching and learning leadership team, we wanted to create a fundamental shift in the way that we approached deep and sustained change through our training programme.

For the initial stages of this project, the teaching and learning team led by Victoria Delaney focused on the areas that were coming up from

key observations over time; the priorities of the school and personal requests that staff had made. This was a time of uncertainty and change due to Covid-19 and it was time for a radical rethink of the way we delivered CPD . We wanted to make the project long-term, over at least a year. As a team, we allocated specific times throughout the year to a programme of CPD pathways for individuals. Staff were allocated to lead these pathways. Many of the teachers leading the pathways were looking for innovative ways of working or wanted to develop their training expertise. This was a fantastic opportunity for aspiring leaders to hone their skills. After deciding on the leaders of each pathway, staff were allocated to these pathways. Some of the pathways that were created, staff had to apply to join.





For example, we set up a coaching team whereby a group of staff were trained by our existing coach to build capacity in the school. Through their training, the group also had the opportunity to work with SSAT to gain an additional accreditation. One of the key aspects of this group was that CPD was completely democratised. The fact that we had teaching and non-teaching staff working together created rich discussion and a greater understanding of the challenges that staff face in different roles. Also, as team leader of this group, I aimed to share my own vulnerabilities and core values through the sessions, leading to a high level of trust and understanding over time.

Other staff were encouraged to get involved in groups that they felt they would like to work on in terms of their own personalised CPD. This might have been as a result of a self-supported review, a personal interest, or as an expert in this area of teaching and learning. Again, we were approaching CPD in a way that empowered future leaders and supported deep learning.

Our other pathways included:

1. Assessment for Learning.
2. The science of learning and metacognition.
3. Innovative use of technology and home learning.
4. High attainers.
5. Strategies for SEND students.
6. Oracy strategies.
7. Developing literacy strategies.
8. Active learning strategies.

Within these groups, staff shared good practice, the team leader modelled and advised on strategies, and everyone worked on an individual project. All groups worked towards an action research project over time. It may have been a small-scale project or a larger scale innovation. Also, all team leaders met on a regular basis to share ideas for leading projects and shared good practice. This is part of our overall vision as part of the teaching and learning team. All CPD throughout the year included an element whereby teachers attended a session on their chosen pathway. This is so that the momentum was not lost and there is an expectation that staff continue to work on their chosen focus in between sessions. As staff progressed through the pathway, they were encouraged to share reflections on their learning and actively participated in the sessions. The teaching and learning newsletter is used to share ideas and strategies and also allows staff to reflect on their pedagogy. At the end of the pathways, each member of staff took part in a peer observation programme to observe strategies developed by members of their team.

*“I took the one less travelled
by, And that has made
all the difference.”*

Examples of reflective practice

1. Active learning strategies by Temi Olaleye

It is so important for us as teachers to avoid the assumption that students are learning merely by being present in the room, following what others are doing and saying and writing things down. They need to be in there with us, part of it all, thinking, ready to contribute, processing their ideas, checking their understanding. This means we need to:

- **engineer attention**, don't hope for it. Give students tasks to do that make them connect new ideas to existing ones or simply practise what they've already been taught
- create ongoing **accountability for thinking** and participating through cold calling; make it the norm. Do not let the same students dominate our lessons and leave others as passive observers
- **check for understanding**. Take time to hear what students are thinking – sample the room, get into the corners, find out who is with you and what the misconceptions might be. Listen to contrasting expressions of understanding
- **pair share**. Get everyone talking – make lessons feels dialogic; discursive. There are many ways to do this and regular use of talk partners is a key element.

In our CPD learning community, we have been working together to trial a number of these strategies including 'diamond 9' and use of 'one or two fingers'.

Diamond 9 task: This is an activity that encourages students to prioritise information in order of most important to least important (in a pyramid shape). See figure 1. One teacher used the diamond 9 task in maths with year 11 before their PPE.

One or two fingers is a quick exercise that encourages students to engage with their learning but also helps you as it gives you whole class feedback.

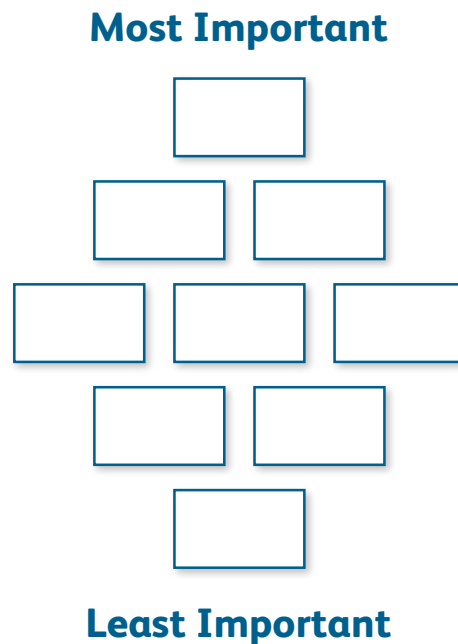


Figure 1: Diamond 9 task

You may ask the class a question and person A may give an answer, you then say 'show me one finger if you agree with person A or two fingers if you disagree'. Depending on the response you can develop with extended questioning and/or gauge whether or not students are struggling with the task.

Feedback included:

- “They were asked to organise their revision topics for December PPE assessment. This helped in refocusing what students need to focus on for their independent learning and also for myself as a class teacher to prioritise what to revise with students in class”.
- Another teacher used this with her class and said, “Students responded really well to one/two fingers. It also worked well with online teaching. Students were instructed to type in Y for yes and N for no and to enter their response at the same time, after counting up to three. The majority of them did as instructed and I was able to assess their learning. It also requires less preparation time as well, very effective”.

2. Improving AfL by Ambili Abraham

“Misunderstandings don’t merely linger but often snowball, becoming more entrenched and gathering further misconception. Recognising and addressing them quickly keeps them from getting worse, and does so at a lower cost”. (Lemov, 2015)

In our AfL CPD learning community we have been focusing on the most effective ways of assessing student knowledge, with the purpose of assessment in mind rather than its nature. We have been looking at how we can use AfL to allow students to self-reflect on their learning and how we can turn these into habits rather than actions. Based on the discussions we have had in our learning community; we have identified four strands of AfL which include:

1. Deep targeted questioning.
2. Taking a snapshot of knowledge and adjusting the lesson.
3. Differentiation and personalised learning.
4. Using assessment to model, using success criteria.

Each member of our community has chosen a specific strand and has planned their research project around it. One teacher is focusing on improving writing skills with her year 8 class by ‘using assessment to model’.

She has split her project into three stages: in stage 1 she will be focusing on ‘vocabulary’. This will be followed by a focus on ‘sentences’ (stage 2) and finally focusing on ‘extended writing’ (stage 3). As part of her project, Alicia has already done a confidence survey with her focus group and is currently implementing stage one.

We recommend you revisit Dylan Wiliam’s Five Brilliant Formative Strategies to help inform your planning.



3. Oracy: building a comfortable environment for talk *by Emily Mensah*

We are all aware of the benefits 'talk' can have in supporting students' learning. From discussions with staff, it is clear that there are brilliant examples of students practising and refining their oracy skills in a wide range of ways. From peer think-pair-share in Jo Whittington's drama classes, to group work used to help students critique theories in one teacher's art classes and the use of presentational skills advocated by the head of year 7 and our student leadership leader in this year's suspenseful selections of form captains and school council representatives.

I am sure we can all agree that some of our students are already excellent speakers. The skill, the confidence, the style seems to come so naturally to them. At the same time there are always a few students in our classes who need us, as leaders of oracy at Eltham Hill School (EHS), to help encourage them to participate in the talk that is occurring in our classrooms. The first step for this is ensuring that all our students feel comfortable and empowered to have their voices heard. Though we all strive to create this for our students, it may take extra clarity between you and your pupils for our social media engrossed generation of young people to feel ready to speak up and join in. At the start of the year, we were introduced to the Three EHS Rules for Oracy. These rules are essential in ensuring that every classroom creates an environment that enables talk for all learners.

RULE 1: One speaker at a time

Everyone deserves to be heard

In most classes, it is you and around 30 other competing voices. It can be difficult for some students to know when to take turns as we usually do during day-to-day conversations. By ensuring that everyone in a class, including us as teachers, adhere to this rule, we create a space where students feel that their voices are heard, appreciated and important.

How can I implement this?

Simply reiterating this rule to students is often powerful enough. You may want to state this at the start of a discussion task to remind them. Or draw their attention to the rules when a class discussion

becomes more animated than expected.

Eventually you'll hope to see them reinforcing this rule to each other. You could also try using an object where only the holder of the object is able to speak until it is passed to the next speaker.

RULE 2: Listen actively

Show that you are listening

This rule is all about teaching students that there is a distinct difference between silently existing in the presence of conversation and actively listening. When we listen actively, we listen to understand, obtain information and learn. Just like any facet of teaching, this needs to be taught, modelled and scaffolded for many of our learners.

How can I implement this?

When planning to include discussion in your lessons, think about how you will encourage students to respond to each other's utterances. Maintain high expectations that students should be able to comment on particular aspects of what has been said. This will allow them to begin to improve the quality of talk in your classrooms. They may show this by capturing ideas in writing or by demonstrating rule three.

RULE 3: Join in!

Voice 21 has a study on how high expectations in regard to listening can be implemented in an MFL classroom. You may find it helpful to see how this can be replicated in your classroom.

Build, challenge, question and create ideas

Rule one and two are the predecessors for rule three. Without the basic understanding of listening and turn taking, rule three simply could not be implemented. So, what does 'join in' actually mean? This is where classroom talk becomes incredibly powerful. When students 'join in' they use their voices, confidence and active listening skills, to comment on what is said in the classroom. They can critique each other, question hypotheses, definitions and arguments and build on analyses and evaluations. This is the crucial part of using talk to facilitate deep learning. It's where you scaffold and teach the skills for students to know how to have discussions and then you step back and watch them develop the learning of each other.

How can I implement this?

The key is to ensure that your students truly feel comfortable to have these discussions where opinions are challenged. Aside from Rules 1 and 2, you may also want to scaffold how students have these discussions using sentence starters and discussion roles. This ensures that students know how to phrase their opposing points in a respectful cooperative manner.

It takes a lot of confidence for students to want to critique each other and present their own ideas. Therefore, it is essential that we build students up to this using exploratory talk strategies. The oracy learning community reflected on how it can be so easy to go straight to presentational talk when encouraging oracy in our classrooms but just like anything in teaching we have to scaffold this to lead our students to our intended end point.

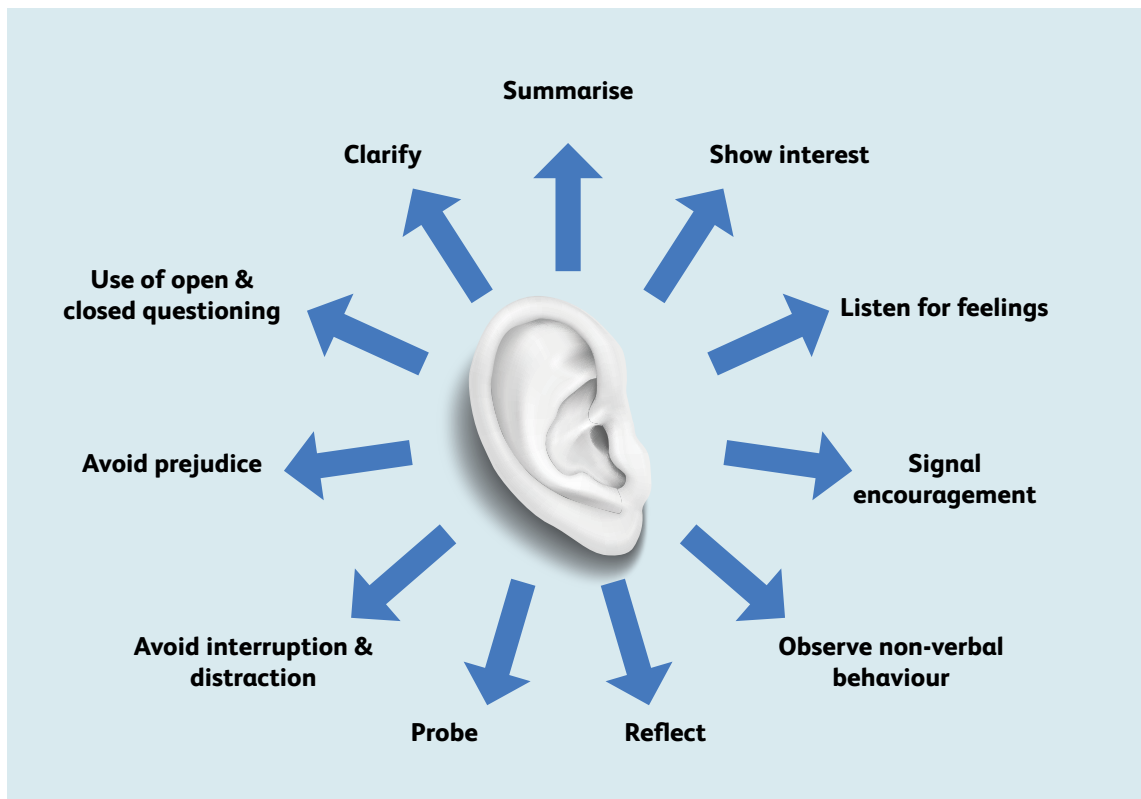
What is exploratory talk?

In exploratory talk everyone's viewpoint is considered, opinions are justified with reasons, and decisions are made together. People engage critically but constructively with each other's ideas.

They invite one another to contribute, asking for explanation, reasons and elaboration. They listen and respond, continuing the discussion until their group can agree on a joint decision.

In summary, before our students will interject in debates and project their voices in an individual presentation, it is important to give them opportunities to develop their talk skills in small group and class discussions. The oracy strategies booklet for term 1 outlines a few activities you may want to try such as concept cartoons and opinion lines which encourage healthy discussion where there are conflicting opinions.

Our roles as teachers is to ensure that students know the secret codes for talk that we know as adults. As always praise is key. When your students demonstrate the skills that you have been teaching them, praise them; award them with merits in order to maintain their motivation. If you would also like to read further on further strategies to help explicitly teach oracy skills in your classroom, then the development of oracy skills in school-aged learners by Cambridge University Press is a great place to start.



4. Using reading age information to differentiate *by James McPhun*

A student's reading and spelling ages should ideally be the same as their chronological age or even higher. If their assessed age is lower this means they will need additional differentiation to help them access your lessons and make progress with their reading. In particular, students with a reading age of less than 8.5 will have particular difficulty in accessing the curriculum. In contrast, those students with reading ages above their chronological ages will require extra challenge.

Strategies to help students with a low reading age

- Actively teach key words and reinforce them in classroom displays.
- Provide definitions of key words for weaker students.
- When approaching unfamiliar words, encourage students to try to work them out within the context of the sentence. Try breaking words into constituent parts (eg. predate – pre (before) date (period of time)).
- It can sometimes be useful for students to think of the meaning of words that they know which sound similar.
- Make dictionaries, thesauruses and glossaries available. Students with very low reading ages will need help with their alphabet or will benefit from providing the beginning of words.
- Regularly revisit key words, provide time to reinforce and develop vocabulary skills. Give them tips on how to remember them.

- Think carefully about the literacy targets that you give for students (generic spelling EBIs may not be helpful, but focused targets that they can work towards over a certain period of time are better). It may be better to choose three or four commonly mis-spelt words.
- Encourage students to do as much reading as possible outside of lessons. Encourage them to use the fantastic resources Mary has in the LRC. This applies to all subjects (if a student is a reluctant reader, but passionate about a certain subject, it might be a way in for them).

Strategies to challenge students with a high reading age

- Provide 'extra-challenge' reading materials.
- Encourage students to use the library to read around the subject area.
- Providing 'extra-reading' lists for SOL's can be a great way to help guide the interests and research of more able students.
- Ensure during verbal responses students are modelling the highest standards of vocabulary usage.

If you would like further information about this way of delivering CPD, please contact:

- vdelaney@elthamhill.greenwich.sch.uk
- rosborne@elthamhill.greenwich.sch.uk





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Why we want our pupils to be ‘bothered!’

By Chris Jones, Bruche Primary School Academy

For years the town my primary school serves, Warrington in Cheshire, has struggled with a drain of talented youngsters leaving for better prospects in other parts of the UK, with London and the South East at the top of their lists. The problem is clear to see from our own straw poll carried out just before the pandemic. Of a small sample of children who left year 6 in 2008, more than two-thirds are now working in the South East in sectors like financial services.

Our school, Bruche Primary, and the trust we belong to – Warrington Primary Academy Trust (WPAT) – is working hard to promote these opportunities and experiences to our pupils.

We have reshaped the WPAT curriculum to support our aims. We want our children to be “bothered” and to be interested in where they live. And we want them to develop the skills and character that they need to succeed in the jobs market in our area. Ultimately, we want the skills we teach our children to stay in Warrington and not be lost to other parts of the UK.

This “botheredness”, as we call it, is crucial. It is built on three key elements:

- Why Warrington?
- Careers pathways
- Humanity

Why Warrington?

Our “Why Warrington” element is something we feel passionate about because it’s about us and our community – it’s unique. Children should learn about the communities they live in, and we do this through many subjects including geography, history, art, PE, English, maths and science.

For example, in history we discuss questions such as:

- What were the key influences in the growth of the town in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries?
- Why and how did Warrington keep re-inventing itself after the rise and falls of industries and trends?
- Why was Warrington chosen for the first IKEA store in the UK?

At the same time, we link this to our career pathways element to discuss the types of jobs Warrington had in the past and the labour market for future growth. This helps to “sell” our town to our children, highlighting the many opportunities for them to stay in Warrington.

Careers pathways

The second key element is planned out progressively from the early years to year 6 and topics include learning about different types of employment and employment skills in year 2, work-life behaviours and gender stereotypes in year 3, and a CV-writing workshop and budgeting and interview skills in year 5 and 6.



This part of the curriculum is linked to companies situated in Warrington so that our children can make a direct link from learning at Bruche to the opportunities available to them in Warrington – now and in the future.

Delivering work experience for our children was going to prove very tricky! The amount of risk assessments and policy that was going to be involved added to the complexities of trips out of school with the Covid-19 restrictions, it was going to make it too difficult to organise. Instead, we decided we were going to use our virtual reality (VR) headsets to facilitate work experiences for our children. Currently we have a range of videos of jobs in the format of 'A day in the life of...' that are loaded onto our VR headsets. These include a day in the life of a Red Arrows pilot, a police officer, a zookeeper, a sports coach, an engineer and many more. We also work closely with national and regional companies who provide us with their own 'A day in the life of...' video experiences that we then upload to our VR headsets. Every child has the opportunity to experience the world of work through virtual reality. Back in July 2022, we were successful in achieving with the Primary Career Quality Mark.

Humanity

As well as being bothered about their local community we want our children to grow their connection and understanding of the world they are growing up in. Our school's work with Chester Zoo enables our children to develop greater understanding of the world in which they live in and will gain secure geographical knowledge in the context of human experience and explore key concepts.

This connection has involved regular visits to the zoo and has included a visit to our school by zoo rangers. The children have learned about the impact of humans on animal populations, including the illegal trade in fur and ivory, and even prompted them to write letters to the prime minister and the late Queen Elizabeth to express their views.

Ultimately, we want this part of their curriculum experience to have a direct impact on the choices their families make in regard to protecting our planet.

Curriculum clarity

In order for the curriculum to have this desired impact on pupils it needed to be carefully sequenced, broad, coherent – and, most importantly, authentic. Being authentic to the area your school serves is really important because it has to be something that your whole school community will buy into.

We made sure that we sat down together with all staff at the beginning of the curriculum design process so that they were involved in deciding the key concepts we wanted to drive through the curriculum, along with the planning of the knowledge and skills across the curriculum.

Giving teachers a holistic view of the curriculum was also important. It used to be that if you taught in year 2, you just needed to be very familiar with the year 2 curriculum. But it was important to us that a year 2 teacher knew what the children have learned in year 1 and also what they were going to learn in year 3 and beyond.

Curriculum development doesn't stop at the point of delivery though. Subject leads monitor curriculum delivery in other classrooms to spot any issues or success stories. By empowering staff to take the lead in researching and recommending alternative research-based approaches, helps us to deliver a high-quality curriculum true to our aims.



SeeAbility – the power of sight testing in special schools

By Tina Harvey, Perseid School

Did you know that children with a learning disability are 28 times more likely than children without a learning disability, to have a serious sight problem? Back in 2013, staff at Perseid did not know that.

We are a London school for pupils aged 3–19 with severe and profound learning difficulties, including those with an additional diagnosis of autism. We knew that a significant number of our pupils had specific eye conditions or wore spectacles, but had little more detailed information. Apart from the very good termly input from the local authority's peripatetic VI team for those pupils already diagnosed with a visual impairment, little additional expertise or vision screening was made available.

It was with great interest therefore, that we responded to an approach from the charity SeeAbility regarding the possibility of joining an 'opt-in' school-based eye care service.

It was explained to us that the eye care service being offered would provide an annual full sight test appointment for each pupil in the school, taking place at the school with feedback from the optometrist direct to teachers and with full parental involvement, and dispensing glasses on the premises if needed.

As a school we felt that the aims of the eye care initiative were in accord with the school's mission to 'Blaze a trail in outstanding

holistic education'. We also saw this as an opportunity for greater family support – as all appointments would be carried out on the school premises thus avoiding hospital-based appointments and all the attendant challenges these present for children and families.

We are proud that Perseid was the first school to commit to being involved in the study, with a further ten schools in London, Manchester and Durham joining the programme. The intention of SeeAbility from the outset was to use the findings from the screening service in the 11 schools to determine whether a sight testing programme would be appropriate for pupils with learning disabilities attending special schools. The article written by members of the excellent team supporting the pupils at Perseid School (Findings from an opt-in eye examination service in English special schools. Is vision screening effective for this population? Lisa A. Donaldson, Marek Karas, Donna O'Brien, J. Margaret Woodhouse; 2019), gives further fascinating detail, showing that at least half of children in special schools have a sight problem and yet only one in ten children had ever been to a 'high street' optician for a sight test, and so many were simply missing out on the glasses they needed.

It will come as no surprise to those readers working in schools such as Perseid that the findings of the review confirmed the enormous benefit to our pupils: "almost all children with a learning disability can have an eye examination if



the correct preparation is made” (Donaldson et al 2019). As we know, there is always a way to reach/communicate with/engage pupils with additional needs and the team allocated to Perseid are exemplary at this. It is not unusual, for example, to find the optometrist busy carrying out the test in corridors, in the playground or lunch hall, rather than the conventional assessment room. The team are skilled and ingenious in their ability to work with children with very significant special needs and, through close dialogue with teachers, support staff and parents, pupils’ preferred toys, communication methods, interests and attention spans can be shared to optimise the interaction with the optometrists.

Because the team visit regularly, relationships are built and pupils are able to feel confident with the team as they are used to seeing them around. The sharing of information between the SeeAbility team and class staff leads to increased awareness and understanding on both sides. Teachers and support staff have access to the eye team and benefit from being able to ask a quick question or check something out.

Every eye care visit is recorded by the team with a report for the parents/carers and school which is used to evidence visual needs and abilities within the EHCP – vital information that was hitherto rarely included. Subsequently, we are able to incorporate those needs into our

teaching plans. Practically, spectacles are also dispensed at school via the team and it is easy to obtain replacements or repairs. Pupils are able to choose their preferred frames from the wide selection the dispensing optician brings.

Management of the team’s visits is straightforward and non-burdensome for the school. A named member of the SeeAbility admin team liaises with a named member of the school admin team. All permissions, reports etc are dealt with by SeeAbility. Where necessary, SeeAbility liaise with the peripatetic VI team and / or the hospital consultant to ensure appropriate exchange of information. The school and SeeAbility liaise at the start of each academic year to book in clinic dates and by managing this strategically in this way, the school is able to give the right priority in the school calendar and when allocating rooms, to this important service.

In the early days, it was a shock to us to discover the number of pupils who had untreated visual conditions or undiagnosed visual needs. There is no question that SeeAbility’s sight testing service to the school has improved our pupils’ access to learning in an absolutely profound way. This was recognised in November 2019 when both partner schools and SeeAbility won the prestigious Nasen Provision of the Year Award. Because we have seen first-hand the benefits, we have been delighted to support SeeAbility with publicity and

information sharing. To that end, we hosted a visit in October last year from HRH the Countess of Wessex in her role as Global Ambassador for the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness.

What do parents think? The statistics from the summer 2022 London-wide parental review available through the SeeAbility website (www.seeability.org) speak for themselves:

- 92% of parents are happy with the eye care service*
- 93% would recommend our service to other parents*
- 4 in 5 parents now understand more about what their child can see*
- 28% of parents had already seen a difference in their child's learning and behaviour as a result of wearing glasses*

(*Of those that did not strongly agree or agree, none disagreed)

So many of the parents whose children are seen at Perseid say this is exactly the sort of service that makes their child's life that bit easier, with accessing eye care being one less challenge to overcome.

"I am so happy that you are seeing our children in school, the whole experience was so much calmer. I have been struggling to get my son's eyes tested for a few years. He has autism and used to attend hospital but found the whole experience very stressful and traumatic (particularly the eyedrops). The lady we saw was so patient and because he was in his school environment he was calm too. I cannot praise this enough."

What next for SeeAbility?

Since 2019 SeeAbility has been part of an NHS England working group developing a programme of eye care for all special schools. NHS England is currently funding the service – called the 'Special Schools Eye Care Service' in 78 special schools not just in London but in the North of England too and is going to be running an evaluation in the coming months.

In SeeAbility's view it is absolutely crucial that NHS England are fully committed to establishing a national service, given there is a lot of change in the health system at the moment and more to come from 2023.

And whilst we await the outcomes of the evaluation, the charity hopes that NHS England will be mindful of how hospital eye clinics are now grappling with long waiting lists and the Department of Education's special educational needs reforms are focussed on early intervention.

Bringing eye care to special schools is cost-effective on both fronts but of course, fundamentally is about bringing children who most need it an equal right to sight. And who can argue with that?

How to get involved

Although this is now in a period of evaluation, if you would like to express interest in learning more about the NHS service you can contact the NHS on this email: england.specialschoolseyecareservice@nhs.net

And for more background read more on SeeAbility's website here which also has links to some films on the service: <https://www.seeability.org/eye-care/special-school-eye-care-services>



Educating, empowering and promoting positive behaviours

By Bronagh McGreevy, St Louis Grammar School

The introduction of the Addressing Bullying in Schools legislation has made schools sit up and take note. This has come at a crucial time, particularly after the impact of various periods of lockdown which has fostered an ever-developing society of young people who are becoming even more dependent on online communication.

As a result, we and other schools are witnessing a dramatic increase in young people opting to socialise online as opposed to more traditional methods. Whilst this may be the norm now, it does have some worrying consequences. Young people use social media and apps like WhatsApp which at the touch of a button can add or remove a friend from the group they felt part of. Unfortunately, the online exchange of cruel words is thought to be less hurtful than if it were to be said face-to-face. Sadly, this is simply not true. Even more worrying, is the fact that these words can be sent with a few simple touches on a mobile phone.

We feel a whole school approach to anti-bullying is important. A pupil-led approach with pupils who are passionate about inspiring others to act in a kind manner. We also need to protect young people who could be accused of bullying behaviour. We have the power to prevent their actions and mistakes by educating, empowering, and promoting.

Student leaders

Our newly appointed head girls/boys introduced a new role within the prefect team called 'anti-bullying prefects.' They chose two head prefects who they knew would have empathy, be great listeners and role models for kind behaviour. We asked the year 14 student body to decide if they would like to become part of this team so that we would have enthusiastic and passionate pupils leading the initiative. These students can be easily identified by their unique and specially designed anti-bullying badge and posters with their faces and names are displayed around the school. Aligned with this, we enlisted year 8-13 pupils and merged them with this prefect team to take part in anti-bullying training provided by The Diana Award organisation. As a result, we had a fully trained group of anti-bullying ambassadors (one girl and boy from each year group). The groups have worked hard to achieve their Online Safety Badge and Student Wellbeing Badges which were also awarded by the Diana Award. These achievements were highlighted in the school newsletter, social media, and website so that all stakeholders would see the work achieved and to inspire the next intake of anti-bullying ambassadors.

Safe space

The pupils have a dedicated safe space to report bullying behaviours to their peers. This is in response to research by Ofsted which reports that young people are more likely to share concerns with their peers than with adults.



As a result, our two head prefects produced a rota so that a male and female ambassador is present at break time in our new creative arts building. This was decided so that all pupils knew there was a space for them to go and report/talk/discuss issues surrounding bullying behaviours. We understand that it is sometimes quite intimidating to approach a member of staff so we felt that if our anti-bullying ambassadors had a visible presence then we would likely see a rise in pupils wanting to discuss issues.

Empowering and educating

We choose to educate the staff and pupils on bullying behaviours and why it is not kind or right to bully anyone. The anti-bullying ambassadors organised material such as, photos of the anti-bullying prefects, who they are, where the anti-bullying safe space is and highlighted 'One Kind Word' for anti-bullying week. The presentation was shown to every single pupil and staff member. We then chose to educate the whole school community on cyberbullying behaviours. The anti-bullying ambassadors included information on issues such as what cyberbullying is, cyberbullying and the law, what to do if someone is being cyberbullied. We chose this action to make sure that all pupils understood how to keep themselves safe on social media and online platforms. We also decided to highlight Internet Safety Day. The theme was 'All fun and games? Exploring respect and relationships online.' Some of our ambassadors met with the digital leader prefects to educate them on the information that should be included, and they worked as a group to create a presentation for the whole school.

Poster campaign

Anti-bullying ambassadors created posters to highlight that bullying behaviour is wrong.

We choose this action as we felt we needed a visible presence to remind students and staff. The poster campaign was a success as every corridor in the school has a poster. We feel this has been an effective way of reaching the entire student population.

Student wellbeing evaluation

As part of our strategy, we also developed and offer a whole school student wellbeing evaluation every six weeks. We chose this action as we feel pupils are willing to complete online questionnaires to show how they are feeling more easily than face to face discussion. Sometimes it is hard for students to pluck up the courage to speak to an adult and so if a questionnaire is provided and time is allocated to complete this. We can analyse answers to see if students need support and help and encouragingly bullying behaviours have been reported using the evaluation.

Based on the answers provided by students, heads of year carry out pastoral check-ins with pupils to see how they are and to provide the necessary support.

Online reporting tool

We chose this action as we felt we needed an easy way for students to report bullying behaviour online. We organised an 'online worry box' that is available to all students on the school website. They can use this at any time and the message will go straight to the relevant head of year and head of pastoral care. The online worry box allows the child to put in writing how they are feeling, and it is followed up instantly. Parents are contacted and support is put in place. We promote the worry box on Teams/Google Classroom and to parents.



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Distributed leadership, school improvement and change, in special education

Dr Carolyn Davis, University of Birmingham Ed D Thesis

Distributed leadership – towards a definition?

Distributed leadership (DL) is notoriously difficult to define with little agreement as to its meaning (Bennett et al., 2003) and is closely related to other types of leadership such as collaborative, shared, distributive and democratic leadership (Oduro, 2004). Bennett et al. (2003, p.7) however, identified three points of agreement within the literature which provide a useful starting point:

1. **‘Leadership as an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals.’**
2. **‘Openness of the boundaries of leadership’.**
3. **‘Varieties of expertise are distributed across the many, not the few.’**

Background and rationale

Whilst the literature around DL is immense, with some 720,000 articles written between 2002 and 2013 (Tian, Risku and Collin, 2016), there is limited research focused on DL in special education. A search of the literature highlighted that most of the studies came from outside England and focused on areas closely related to DL such as collaborative practice, and professional learning communities, rather than DL itself. This provided a powerful rationale to explore the nature of DL in English special school settings.

The doctoral thesis, ‘Change and school development: An exploration of school leaders’ perceptions and experience of distributed leadership in three special school settings’, concentrated on school development and change. A notable aspect of the research was the impact of the increasing number of pupils with complex learning difficulties and disabilities (CLDD).

Research design

Relationships are significant within DL, thus it was decided to undertake research which focused on the perceptions and experiences of leaders and adopted an interpretivist approach. The research took the form of three special school case studies and was made up of three phases:

- **Phase 1: Sampling**

The project was presented to teachers at a staff meeting at the end of which they were invited to complete a single question recruitment questionnaire. They were asked to identify three individuals they would go to for professional advice. This was used to generate a sample of two senior leaders, two middle leaders and two teacher leaders, in addition to the headteacher. Consideration was given to including support staff and multi-disciplinary teams in the research, because of their central role in special schools, but this was not possible within the confines of time and word limits. Nevertheless, these offer areas for future research.



- **Phase 2: Interviews**

Those individuals who were nominated most frequently were invited to take part in a semi-structured interview. 20 interviews were undertaken, across the three schools. Questions were developed from a review of the literature.

- **Phase 3: Meeting observations**

Data was triangulated through the observation of meetings. Each participant was observed in a meeting, with ten such observations being made.

Key findings

Data was analysed using the constant comparative method (Thomas, 2013) which identified key themes.

1. DL was manifested differently in each school

DL was perceived as a multi-faceted phenomenon which underpinned the way the three schools operated (Bennett et al., 2003; Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2007). However, there were significant differences in the nature, extent, and mechanisms of distribution between the schools.

Three types of distribution were identified:

Firstly, formal hierarchical distribution which shared many of the characteristics of MacBeath's (2005) formal distribution, with an emphasis on accountability and performance. However, hierarchical structures did not pose a barrier to DL, as contended by Hatcher (2005), Ritchie and Woods (2007), and Klein et al. (2018) and were used to develop cultures of teamwork and increase teacher empowerment.

Secondly, co-ordinated distribution, displayed characteristics of MacBeath's (2005) incremental distribution being focused on development and transformation. It also reflected evidence of embedded distribution (Richie and Woods, 2007), high levels of collaborative leadership (Telford, 1996), democratic and communal authority (Woods, 2016), and empowerment with deeply co-ordinated practice (Harris, 2009a) whilst maintaining a clear hierarchy.

Thirdly, organic distribution in which the school had a flat staffing structure and closely resembled Telford's (1996) collaborative leadership, MacBeath's (2005) cultural distribution, Ritchie and Woods' (2007) embedded distribution, and Harris' (2009a) autonomous distribution.

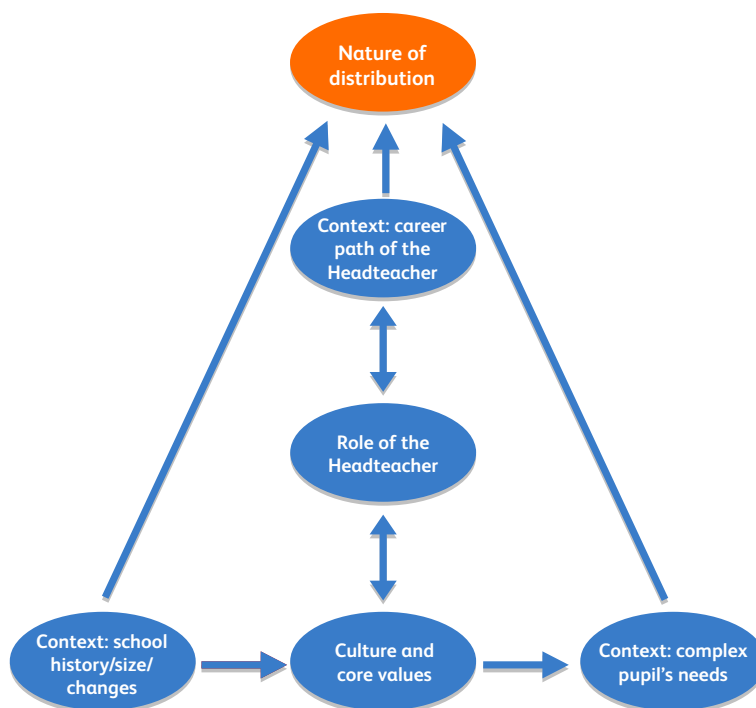


Figure 1: A conceptual framework: principal factors determining the nature of distributed leadership in sample schools.

2. Four themes underpinned differences of distribution.

These differences in distribution reflected the interaction of four themes, conceptualised in Figure 1.

- **School context: the career stage of the headteacher and leaders and school background.**

School context, which included the career path of the headteacher and other leaders, alongside ongoing change impacted on the nature of distribution. Thus, at a simplistic level, where headteachers and senior leaders were new to post, or the school, and high levels of change were taking place, DL had a more formal dimension. By contrast where headteachers, leaders and cultures were firmly established, processes were more informal. Context was therefore central.

- **The role of the headteacher.**

The headteacher was perceived in all schools to be key to the way that leadership was distributed (Leithwood et al., 2006; Hallinger and Heck, 2009; Harris, 2009b). Headteachers retained responsibility for the identification of moral purpose, vision, direction setting and did not distribute all

areas of leadership (Murphy et al., 2009). They acted as a catalyst, co-ordinated, empowered, supported, and developed leadership in others, whilst reserving the right to say 'no', maintained a high degree of control and determined the extent of distribution. Their role was therefore critical.

- **School culture.**

All three case studies had all-pervasive, strong, positive cultures, based on close relationships, which were commonly described as 'families' by participants. These were built on teamwork, collaboration, including collaborative inquiry as part of a professional learning community, and professional relationships, and focused on the need to meet complex pupil needs, which had a powerful unifying and motivating influence on staff. These cultures were developed by the headteacher (Schein, 1985) and senior leaders (Murphy et al., 2009), but were also shaped by middle and teacher leaders in their daily work (Telford, 1996).

- **Complex pupil needs.**

A fourth factor, which ran across the above themes and was critical in determining the nature of DL, was the challenge of meeting the needs of the growing number of pupils with CLDD. Thus, pupil needs were the

prime driver of school improvement in all schools, and underpinned moral purpose, core values and school culture. It was argued that the need to find new strategies for these pupils, for whom tried and tested approaches no longer worked (Champion, 2005), underpinned collaborative approaches and teacher leadership. Similarly, the need for leadership to be built on a firm understanding of pupil needs supported in-house leadership development and internal leadership appointments. It was suggested that DL provided the 'organisational circuitry' (Harris 2009a, p.253) to meet complex pupil needs in the special school context, and that teacher leadership had a particular prominence.

3. Positive and negative outcomes of distributed leadership.

An overview of the impact of DL in securing school improvement is shown in Figure 2 below. The findings focused on two areas: impact on leadership, and impact on teaching and learning. Overall, participants perceived DL to have a largely positive impact on school improvement, through building leadership capacity, motivating teachers, reducing staff turnover, and improving teaching and learning

by the creation and sharing of new knowledge. Some negative outcomes were identified such as increased workload, particularly for class-based staff, and a lack of clarity of roles, leading to inconsistency and inefficiency, although this was tolerated because of close relationships.

Most participants also, felt that DL impacted positively on pupil outcomes, although they recognised that, whole school data had not been analysed to support or negate this claim. Additionally, several contended that it was not possible to isolate the impact of DL from other factors. Nevertheless, convincing arguments were made for links between DL and individual progress where leaders in formal and informal roles had trained staff, having attended specialist external specialist courses, in strategies which underpinned positive progress measured through Individual Educational Plans (IEPs), and lesson observations. Individual teacher-led initiatives also supported individual progress. Finally, collaborative inquiry was shown to support individual engagement and learning (Harris and Lambert, 2003).

Figure 2: Summary of impact of distributed leadership on school improvement.

Outcomes of distributed leadership in securing school improvement		
Positive Leadership Outcomes	Negative Leadership Outcomes	Impact on teaching and learning
1. Increased motivation. 2. Improved feelings of self-worth. 3. Supportive relationships with colleagues and senior leaders. 4. Improved staff retention. 5. Increased work capacity. 6. Increased leadership capacity. 7. Increased knowledge capacity to meet complex student needs.	1. Increased workload. 2. Lack of clarity of roles.	1. New strategies and knowledge developed to meet complex needs through teacher collaboration, multidisciplinary collaboration, and collaborative inquiry. 2. Links between individual pupil progress and actions of formal/informal leaders. 3. Assessment data did not support whole school links between DL and pupil outcomes. 4. Impossible to isolate impact of DL on pupil outcomes from other factors.



Future research

At the beginning of the research the generic aim was to find out more about DL in special education. In the end it provided a privileged insight, not only into this, but also into DL in different settings within special education and the impact that individual contexts had on this. Additionally, it suggested significant areas for future research, with rich opportunities for development within special education policy and practice through sharing between schools.

About the author

Carolyn Davis is a recently retired teacher and leader, with 25 years' experience in special education. Carolyn's doctoral research focused on distributed leadership in special school settings, and the article outlines key findings and implications for practice.

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