

School-to-School Collaboration: Building Collective Capacity through Collaborative Enquiry

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INTRODUCTION

Almost half a century ago, Basil Bernstein (1970) argued that schools could not compensate for all the ills of society. While structural inequalities mean that the relationship between poverty and educational attainment remains as steadfast as ever, there is some evidence that offers a more optimistic perspective. Some schools can, and do, make a difference to outcomes for children from high-poverty settings and support the development of more equitable education systems (Sammons, 2007). There is also increasing evidence to suggest that when schools collaborate with and learn from each other then they can have more impact on outcomes than when they work in isolation (Ainscow, 2016).

This chapter draws on the experience of the School Improvement Partnership Programme (SIPP), a three-year, school-to-school collaborative initiative. The SIPP is designed to use school-to-school collaboration and collaborative enquiry to build

collective capacity to create fairer and higher achieving educational systems. In doing so, the SIPP highlights the importance of evidence and research in giving teachers new and more diverse leadership opportunities, and therefore placing them at the centre of reform efforts. It illuminates the potential for leaders in networks to work collaboratively across schools to address key priorities and highlights the challenge of rethinking roles and responsibilities to enhance professional capital and teacher leadership both within and between schools to enhance collective capacity within the system.

Numerous factors interact to determine children's educational, health and well-being outcomes – and ultimately their life chances. Decades of investment and intervention have delivered some hard-won gains but the correlation between low socio-economic status and restricted life chances remains as seemingly intransigent as ever. Put simply, the odds are stacked against children being able to escape high-poverty settings.

Payne (2008, p. 45) argues that this depressing situation is explained by the 'ahistorical, non-sociological and decontextualized thinking [that] dominates the discourse', which leads to policies based on stronger accountability mechanisms, with better paid, caring teachers committed to lifelong learning. Such policies are doomed to failure because of the simplistic thinking that underpins them.

For others, a more optimistic perspective prevails in which education continues to be viewed as a mechanism to escape poverty traps. There is evidence to suggest ways in which schools and education systems can, and do, make a difference to outcomes and life chances, shifting the odds in favour of success, regardless of children's background (Maden, 2003; National Commission on Education, 1996). It would seem that school improvement remains both technically and socially complex. This chapter offers theoretically sound and practically based suggestions for how this success could be achieved through focusing on building collective capacity through school-to-school collaboration and collaborative enquiry.

TRENDS IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

It is widely accepted that school improvement research, policy and practice is associated with making schools better places for students, teachers and the wider community (Reynolds et al., 1996). More specifically, Hopkins, Ainscow, and West (1994) have argued that school improvement is concerned with enhancing student outcomes by focusing on the teaching and learning process, and by nurturing the conditions necessary to promote positive school cultures. This endeavour involves building the capacity to manage change effectively by developing a critical perspective rather than 'blindly accepting the edicts of centralized policies' (Hopkins et al., 1994, p. 3). In this sense, the school improvement movement has historically tended to

adopt a bottom-up perspective to educational change, although this became less prevalent as proponents moved from the margins to the mainstream, engaged more directly with policy and policy makers and attempted to scale-up improvement efforts.

More recently, Hopkins et al. (2014) reviewed evidence of the effects of reform efforts at school and system levels, articulating five phases of improvement:

- Phase 1 – understanding the organizational culture of the school;
- Phase 2 – action research and research initiatives at the school level;
- Phase 3 – managing change and comprehensive approaches to school reform;
- Phase 4 – building capacity for student learning at the local level and the continuing emphasis on leadership;
- Phase 5 – towards systemic improvement.

With some notable exceptions, most school improvement research, as outlined in Hopkins et al.'s (2014) comprehensive review, has taken place in mature systems, although the appetite for school improvement in some new and emerging contexts is high. I now move on to explore some important key themes contributing to successful improvement.

CHANGE AS A SOCIAL COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

Both research and experience tell us that improvement efforts that neglect the social dimensions of change tend to be limited in their lifespan and success. Put simply, effective school improvement is underpinned by a focus on evidence-based approaches and the generation of positive and sustainable relationships. Unsurprisingly, as more recent improvement efforts have focused on moving to scale, the nature of the local and global relationships required to generate improvement is becoming even more demanding. This situation requires ever more sophisticated

approaches to networking and collaboration, and it is no coincidence that many of the East Asian systems placed near the top of international comparisons have a long tradition of collaborative approaches to teaching and continuing professional development (CPD).

In the Global Fourth Way, Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) defined professional capital as the assets residing within teachers and teaching that yield the optimal quality of teaching and student learning. Professional capital is a trilateral form of capital incorporating human capital, social capital and decisional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). These three forms of capital are interdependent and utilized by educational professionals for the purpose of carrying out the complex and demanding work of teaching and learning.

- Human capital – for an education professional this comprises individual talent, including skills, knowledge, empathy, passion, confidence, charisma and leadership. This form of capital resides within an individual.
- Social capital – spans individuals, existing as relationships or ties between individuals, providing access to resources and leverage for change.
- Decisional capital – is found both within and between individuals as education professionals and communities, individually and collectively, strive to make wise decisions in complex situations.

All three of these forms are dependent on relationships between individuals and communities (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Building human, social and decisional capital simultaneously demands collaboration on a number of different levels, including between teachers and other educators working within schools, school districts and outside agencies within the wider system.

Echoing the ideas that underpin the concept of professional capital, research has also demonstrated that the collective ability of teachers to effect change is influenced by the knowledge, expertise and resources embedded in their social relations and social structures (Daly, 2010; Moolenaar, Slegers, & Daly, 2011; Penuel et al., 2009). The type,

quantity and position of teachers' social relations or social ties are considered as a source of capital. In this context, social network theory helps to develop our understanding about building professional capital because it frames the learning of educational professionals as a flow of information through network ties. The development of both social capital and decisional capital is directly dependent on these social interactions and human capital is also influenced by them.

Hattie's (2009) international review of teaching and learning identified classroom practices that had significant effect sizes on student outcomes; and Day and colleagues' (2011) work into successful leadership has presented increasingly detailed insights into the nature of effective leadership. But it seems that internal school improvement practice is a necessary but inadequate ingredient in tackling the larger relationship between low socio-economic status and poor educational and health and well-being outcomes. A key challenge for within-school improvement continues to be the development of systems and processes that will optimize the quality of learning experience of students while minimizing within-school variations. There is a growing body of initiatives that aims to connect internal school improvement and innovation with other schools and educational settings in order to move ideas and practice around the system through various networks and collaboratives. These initiatives may go some way to addressing the challenge of improving educational practice and outcomes. However, it is also likely to fall short of the wider challenge. Perhaps the most promising signs come from the latest wave of reforms that tie education into broader public service provision through a place-based approach in England (Kerr, Dyson, & Raffo, 2014) and some of the promising endeavours on collective impact in the USA (Henig et al., 2015).

Research also highlights the importance of local ownership and leadership by teachers and school leaders, often in the form of collecting and using data appropriately and

working in partnership and collaboration with like-minded professionals and stakeholders. Also highlighted is the value of school-to-school networking, collaborative enquiry and cross-authority partnerships as levers of innovation and education system improvement (Chapman, 2016; Cochran-Smith, 2015; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Moolenaar et al., 2011; Wohlstetter, Smith, & Gallagher, 2013).

Providing opportunities for the development of professional capital not only within and between schools, but also beyond schools suggests a means of reaching 'into the school from the outside' (Ainscow, 2016, p. 2). Only then can schools begin to facilitate partnerships for the purpose of achieving more equitable outcomes and experiences for all students.

Illuminating the emergence of social phenomena that do not exist at the individual level is a key strength of social network theory (Muijs et al., 2011). The process of building professional capital can be examined by tracking the substance and flow of information, advice, problem-solving, material resources, influence and interpretation through social interactions. However, despite the utility of social network theory for providing a lens through which the characteristics of effective collaboration can be examined, there remain a number of limitations to this approach, including the inability of social network theory to sufficiently expose the nature of 'incommensurate yet meaningful relationships' (Ball & Junemann, 2012, p. 13). There may therefore be a need to complement the collection of social network data with other qualitative data regarding social interactions for the purposes of triangulation in order to gather a more complete picture of social interactions.

COLLABORATIVE ENQUIRY AND SCHOOL-TO-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

Research has demonstrated that the most effective school improvements are contextualized

to fit local needs and often play out in different ways in different settings. Over 40 years ago, House (1973, p. 245) warned against ignoring the power of context in the 'primary pursuit of transferable innovation ... different innovations will be more or less useful under widely different specific circumstances'. In the pursuit of local relevance, there is increasing evidence in favour of investment in the use of collaborative enquiry to support professional learning and teacher leadership in schools in a range of contexts (Ainscow, 2016; Ainscow et al., 2012; Chapman, 2008; Chapman et al., 2012; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Earl & Katz, 2006; Hadfield & Chapman, 2009; Kerr et al., 2003).

McKinsey (2007) identified school-to-school collaboration through learning networks, collaborative planning and cross-school CPD as key features of the very best systems. A review of the school effectiveness and equity literature (Sammons, 2007) concluded that studies show that on average the combined school and teacher effect may vary as much as 15–50 per cent. In addition, there is a growing body of research documenting the achievements of collaborative attempts to improve outcomes for schools serving disadvantaged communities (Chapman & Muijs, 2014; Matthews, 2009; Wohlstetter et al., 2013). I argue that there may be a relationship between professional capital and collaborative enquiry-based approaches that promote educational equity.

Many forms of collaborative enquiry involve a cyclical process of identifying challenges, experimenting with innovative practice, monitoring developments and making links to strategic improvement planning in schools and school districts. Other benefits of collaborative enquiry include the flattening of existing hierarchies (Drew, Priestley, & Michael, 2016); the breaking down of barriers to enable greater access to social capital; pooled resources (Lieberman, 2000); mutual support mechanisms; and preventing individuals or groups from taking an inward or myopic viewpoint. Collaborative enquiry

has been highlighted as a valuable vehicle for positive change whether it takes place within a school (Drew et al., 2016; Snow, Martin, & Dismuke, 2015), across schools engaged in partnerships (Ainscow et al., 2016; Chapman & Hadfield, 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2015), or beyond schools, when educational professionals collaborate with like-minded stakeholders (Ainscow, 2016; Chapman et al., 2015).

These three types of collaborative enquiry broadly correspond to the different types of leadership – teacher leadership, middle leadership and system leadership – that are also the subject of this chapter, but here I focus on networked collaborative enquiry between schools and beyond them.

Between Schools

When collaboration extends between schools, the benefits of school-to-school collaboration have included the disruption of ‘deeply held beliefs within schools’ (Ainscow et al., 2012, p. 201) and a greater willingness of educational professionals to take risks and reveal weaknesses or gaps in knowledge (Ainscow, 2016). These school-to-school partnerships are able to cut across boundaries and open up pathways for the exchange of new and innovative knowledge (Ainscow, 2016) as well as mobilizing a wider range of resources and expertise than a single school would be able to access.

Beyond Schools

Beyond-school examples of collaborative enquiry involve partnerships between schools and other public services and agencies. The most effective educational changes leading to school improvements are led and owned by education professionals engaged in collaborative enquiry with other education professionals, and also with like-minded stakeholders (Ainscow et al., 2012; Chapman, 2008, 2015;

Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Earl & Katz, 2006; Hadfield & Chapman, 2009; Kerr et al., 2003). When schools work with other services, agencies and community members or groups, such as health and social care workers and families themselves, an environment can be fostered which is able to promote opportunities for the personal and social development of students and families. These ‘beyond-school’ approaches have been motivated by the complexity and enormity of the equity issues facing families and communities, such as economic realities, underlying socio-economic factors, decision-making at the district level, national policy-making and global processes. Ainscow (2016) summarizes the argument as – looked at in this way, it is clear that there is much that individual schools can do to tackle issues within organizations, and that such actions are likely to have a profound impact on student experiences, and perhaps some influence on inequities arising elsewhere.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership across schools within networks can be categorized in many different ways. Here I outline the research on three of the most commonly used forms of leadership. These are not necessarily distinct categories; individuals may simultaneously operate at several different levels, adopting multiple roles and professional identities.

Teacher Leadership

This concept has emerged from the broader ideas associated with distributed leadership (Spillane, 2015), and from teacher networks and professional learning communities (Lieberman, 2000). In practice, teacher leadership tends to be exercised by teachers who want to remain in classrooms, working with students, but are minded to play a role in

leading change by working with colleagues to support the professional learning of others and creating professional learning communities. Like distributed leadership, teacher leadership challenges assumptions about ‘the nature of leadership, the community within which it occurs and the relationships about power, authority and influence’ (Harris & Muijs, 2005, p. 26). Reporting a study of union learning representatives, Stevenson (2012) takes an alternative position on teacher leadership to argue that an alternative understanding, not rooted in traditional managerialist hierarchies, is required. Stevenson argues that this alternative should not be concerned with ‘vision’ but with establishing a democratic professional voice to lever genuine transformative possibilities. While a body of research on teacher leadership is emerging, there remains a lack of conceptual clarity about the term and its use.

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership has become a popular concept within contemporary leadership circles and, in particular, has been used to argue for developing the leadership capacity of educators (Harris, 2013) and teacher agency supporting school improvement and reform (Spillane, 2015; Spillane & Coldren, 2015). In education, the idea can be traced back to the early papers presented by Peter Gronn in the late 1990s, which argued for distributed leadership as the new unit of analysis (Gronn, 2002), and by Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001), who argued that distributed leadership practice is extended across the social and situational context. Since this early work, distributed leadership has become part of the educational orthodoxy, widely known and enacted in various ways in different schools and systems. There has been much discussion and debate about the various merits, limitations and challenges of the concept. Harris (2013) and Gunter, Hall, and Bragg (2013) have attempted to ‘map’

distributed leadership and knowledge formation into functional (descriptive and normative), critical and socially critical dimensions.

Professional Leadership

Sammons, Mortimore, and Hillman (1995, p. 8) identified ‘professional leadership’ as a key characteristic of effective schools. The elements of professional leadership were summarized as

- being ‘firm and purposeful’
- having ‘a participative approach’
- and being ‘the leading professional’ (1995, p. 8).

More recently, it has been claimed that leadership is second only to teaching and learning in terms of influencing student outcomes (Day et al., 2011). Specifically, a review of the relationship between leadership practice and activity and student outcomes identified that promotion and participation in teacher learning and development had around twice the effect size (0.84) compared to other leadership practices, such as ‘planning, coordinating and evaluating, teaching and curriculum’ (0.42) or ‘establishing goals and expectations’ (0.42). Practices such as ‘resourcing strategically’ (0.31) and ‘ensuring an orderly and supportive environment’ (0.27) were identified as having even smaller effects (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009).

It is helpful to think about leadership as a collective capacity rather than an individual pursuit, where collective responsibility is supported by an appropriate collegial infrastructure that is responsive to the development phase of the organization (Chapman, 2005). In a similar vein, Day et al. (2010) identified five phases of head teacher leadership in each of which successful head teachers use a combination of different strategies:

- Early phase – improving the physical environment; implementing pupil behaviour standards; restructuring the senior leadership team; developing organizational values; and supporting

distributed leadership through performance management.

- Middle phase – wider distribution of leadership and leadership roles; more focused use of data.
- Later phase – personalizing and enriching the curriculum; further distribution of leadership.

However, each of these leadership processes has primarily been analyzed in relation to activity within a single school. Previous work on emerging patterns of school leadership (Chapman et al., 2008) explored leadership practice within, between and beyond schools. This framework, taking a within, between and beyond perspective, has been adapted to offer insights on equity (Dyson et al., 2012), strategies for improvement and change (Chapman, 2015) and, most recently, collaboration (Ainscow, 2016).

THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME

Background

The School Improvement Partnership Programme (SIPP) is a research and development programme that is designed to improve the attainment of children from more disadvantaged backgrounds in Scotland, thereby contributing to the Scottish government's commitment to closing the gap in educational outcomes. The Programme is underpinned by a philosophy that encourages staff to take leadership responsibility for embedding collaborative enquiry in order to learn from each other, experiment with practice and monitor and evaluate practice to close the attainment gap.

The knowledge that underpins this approach has been generated over decades of development and research activity in a diverse range of systems, including those in Hong Kong, Australia, the USA and Canada, and, more recently, South America, Russia and parts of Asia. There is also a strong tradition of this type of work within the United Kingdom.

The Programme, designed and launched in 2013, involves schools, local authorities and others working in partnership, drawing on a range of methods or 'tools', such as collaborative action research, Lesson Study, and instructional rounds, to provide a set of processes that teachers and others can draw on to research and implement change. It combines locally initiated and led practitioner collaborative enquiry in multiple classrooms within schools with a networked, school-to-school collaborative enquiry, frequently crossing local authority boundaries. Collaborative working across schools was externally supported and facilitated by the National School Improvement Agency (Education Scotland), the Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change at the University of Glasgow and school district officers (local authorities). In an attempt to overcome the issues of decontextualization highlighted by Payne (2008), SIPP developed a research-practice partnership, similar in approach to that of Bryk et al. (2015).

Partnership working promotes broader leadership opportunities and professional learning at all levels. The Programme seeks to promote disciplined innovation by fostering a culture of mutual respect, 'co-production' and partnership, rather than replicating traditional hierarchies and ways of working. In this sense, the approach moves beyond the simple sharing of knowledge and ideas to what David Hargreaves (2010) argues is 'joint practice development'.

Seven Core Principles

- Partnership working is promoted across schools and local authorities, with a focus on exploring specific issues relating to educational inequity.
- Action research and evidence are used to identify key challenges, experiment with innovative practices and monitor developments.
- Leadership opportunities are created alongside the professional learning of staff at all levels.
- Reciprocity and mutual benefit to all involved underpin planning and implementation of the Programme.

- Planning for collaboration encompasses the development of arrangements to support long-term collaboration and new approaches to capacity building.
- Strategic improvement planning in schools and local authorities is explicitly linked to SIPP activity.
- Partners are diverse and include schools, local authorities, Education Scotland and other agencies.

The seven core principles provide an overarching framework, offering coherence across the Programme from which systemic lessons can be learned, while retaining the flexibility necessary to meet the needs of local contexts. Importantly, the SIPP seeks to avoid the traps of attempting to identify a ‘magic bullet’, offering predetermined solutions, applying a ‘one size fits all’ philosophy or becoming seduced by Smith’s (2013) notion of charismatic policy.

Design

The SIPP involved eight Partnerships, some of which were made up of two schools working together within the same school district, while others involved several schools and up to three different school districts. In total, 14 different school districts have been involved in the Programme. Most of the schools began with only a very small number of teachers involved and expanded gradually. Initially four of the Partnerships involved secondary schools, two involved primary schools, and two involved both primary and secondary schools. Over the course of time, many Partnerships extended their scope and scale to include additional sectors, such as secondary, primary and early years teachers. The Programme is underpinned by the knowledge that effective school collaboration:

- extends beyond the timeframe of a single school year;
- involves collaborative enquiry;
- invests time in building positive relationships;
- promotes a risk-taking culture;
- accesses external expertise;
- is locally owned and context specific;
- and uses evidence to inform practice and understand impact (Bryk et al., 2015; Chapman, 2008; Rincon-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016).

The SIPP aims to encourage staff to take leadership responsibility for embedding collaborative enquiry in order to learn from each other, experiment with practice and monitor and evaluate change. The work of the SIPP Partnerships also aims to promote broader leadership opportunities and professional learning at all levels. The Programme promotes focused innovation by fostering a culture of mutual respect, ‘co-production’ and partnership, rather than replicating traditional hierarchies and ways of working. The benefits of such ways of working, including greater efficacy of teacher collaboration between partnered schools, has been highlighted by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) *Networked Learning Communities* (NLC) programme. Findings from NLC suggested that colleagues, outwith their own schools, might be more likely to take risks, and be more willing to reveal their own weaknesses and gaps in their knowledge than teachers collaborating within their own school (Department for Education and Skills, 2005).

Implementation

The Programme employed a three-phase implementation strategy over three years:

- Phase 1: preparing the ground – creating the conditions by building trust and relationships;
- Phase 2: exploring the evidence – embedding projects into their context;
- Phase 3: testing change – issues of sustainability, including strengthening and deepening connections within and between Partnerships to create a ‘networked improvement community’.

Each Partnership used the key principles to design and develop its own programme of work to tackle educational inequity, supported by a team of university researchers and staff from local authorities and Education Scotland

(the Scottish school improvement agency) working as critical friends. The university research team facilitated regular ‘clinics’ for school and local authority staff to meet either virtually or at the university, a ‘safe space’ in which to problem-solve their concerns, challenges and methodological issues as well as discussing their ideas for development. Individual Partnership projects were also brought together at regular local and national events, which provided a forum for sharing ideas and generally making connections, and reinforcing positive relationships and the trust necessary to build effective partnerships and networks (Hadfield & Chapman, 2009).

Within the SIPP, the precise approach to collaborative enquiry was not prescribed, but was rather negotiated between the schools and the research team to ensure it was fit for purpose. Approaches to collaborative enquiry that proved particularly valuable and popular were instructional rounds (City et al., 2009; Hopkins, 2012) and Lesson Study (Dudley, 2015; Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004; Stepanek et al., 2007).

OUTCOMES

The Impact of the SIPP

Social networking – building relationships between diverse groups and individuals with a shared purpose – is clearly integral to the seven core principles adopted by the SIPP. Growing interest in this area led Robert Owen Centre researchers to map leadership development opportunities for the participants of one of the Partnerships. The aspect of school leadership investigated was leading the distribution of ideas and approaches, particularly tried-and-tested ideas. Within the SIPP Partnerships various people took on the role of sharing teaching and learning approaches. This sociogram was constructed by asking the teachers, head teachers and local authority officers involved in the Programme the following question: *With*

whom have you shared tried-and-tested ideas [relating to effective teaching and learning approaches for the tackling of educational inequity]?

It is evident from this social network map that participation in SIPP collaborative enquiry led to a number of opportunities to develop social capital through conversations about learning and teaching ideas. It is also interesting to note that although the school district staff was supporting both schools, they did not have a key role in bridging knowledge between the schools. Teachers in this Partnership reported that these professionals beyond the school provided support, but that they allowed teachers to take on the leadership. In the words of a teacher from one of the Partnership schools: ‘It was kind of just like a big team in terms of who we were, but we were the leaders.’

Some of the teachers have multiple lines connecting them to other people. Others have only a single line, suggesting their interactions were limited to a single person. Rather than a single individual occupying a central role in the sharing of ideas, a number of individuals are positioned centrally where they appear to be in leadership roles. Headteachers A and B each have prominent positions, but it is evident that the sharing of ideas is also distributed among other teachers. This pattern was confirmed in focus groups and interviews where teachers reported that the leadership roles were not the preserve of head teachers or local authority staff.

The sociogram also highlights the involvement of the local authority officers (represented in black) as sources of support for this Partnership, but not necessarily taking on leadership roles. This involvement was also mentioned in one of the interviews in which a teacher explained the type of support that had been beneficial:

‘So we knew by the end of the first day that we had a focus, but after that the head teachers and the quality improvement managers were very happy to leave us to kind of see where we were going with the next steps.’

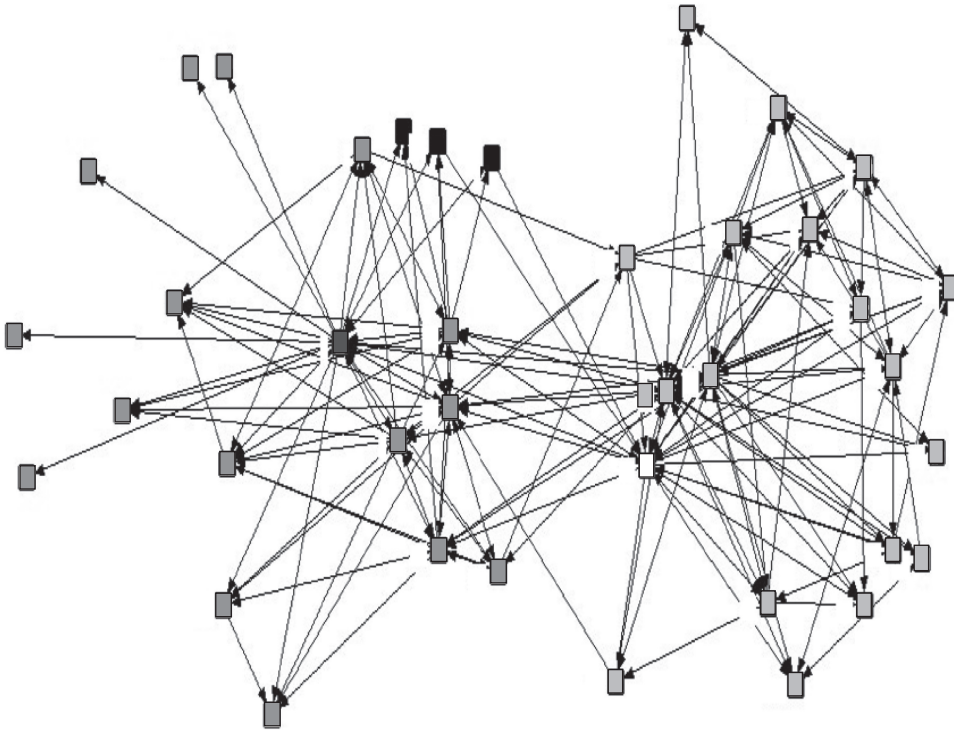


Figure 32.1 A sociogram of Programme participants working with two different Partnership schools

Notes: Light gray squares, teachers from school A; bright gray square, head teacher from school A; white squares, teachers from school B; red square, head teacher from school B; black squares, school district staff

Another teacher reflected:

'People have come in at the right time. ... At certain times we chose, or through discussion with the head teachers or just in our team we highlighted the people that we would need or we had a question that we needed support with and that was when we kind of involved more partners.'

Collaborative Enquiry

The increase in participants' social capital through their involvement in collaborative enquiry was supported by survey data, which indicated that 100 per cent of respondents experienced an increase in their collaborative working across the Partnership. This collaborative working included the use of systematic enquiry and evidence gathering to inform

practice and monitor developments, according to over 80 per cent of respondents.

Survey evidence indicates that the SIPP activities contributed to growing partnership and networking among school staff involved in the initiative. Focusing on survey results between the first (February 2014) and fourth (June 2015) waves, we can see that the following activities tended to increase for the second wave or were maintained at a high level. For example, collaborative working across the Partnership, increased from 64 per cent in the first survey to 100 per cent in the fourth survey.

The interview and focus group evidence also revealed the importance of building effective working relationships between teachers from different schools and/or authorities as well as across related professions. Partnership teams stated that this

collaborative working was now beginning to demonstrate a positive impact on students' outcomes and aspirations. Most believed that these networks and their impact would be sustainable and reflected in their planning.

Practitioners in one Partnership commented: 'It is great to be able to share experiences and work together.' Teachers also commonly noted that being able to observe others' teaching was extremely useful for improving their practice. Teachers saw the increased opportunity for networking as a key benefit of the SIPP:

'Networking with colleagues from other schools and authorities ... has broken down barriers and encouraged excellent opportunities for professional dialogue.'

'The most successful development in my school is the positive attitude developed towards collaborating with colleagues in other schools within and outwith the authority. This is a terrific foundation for a sustainable partnership and attitude.'

'Partnership working has been extremely beneficial as a CLD [Community Learning Development] worker in maximizing resources when working with young people.'

The collaborative partnerships meant that teachers were able to engage in professional learning, build confidence and develop leadership capacity.

As the Programme matured, there was growing teacher engagement with the collaborative enquiry process. This increase is highlighted in successive surveys showing very substantial growth (32%) in the numbers of respondents using systematic enquiry and evidence gathering to inform practice and monitor developments. Similarly, there was a substantial increase (28%) in the percentage of respondents who reported increased teachers' reflective practice and self-evaluation.

While positive relationships provide the basis for developing trust and empowering teachers to take a lead, research-based, shared professional knowledge is the key to ensuring both effective learning processes and whole-school improvement. School improvement is

much more likely to emerge as a result of collective capacity building than it is through the application of a series of 'external' accountability measures. For improvement to take place there needs to be a focus on the development of teachers' knowledge, skills and commitment and for the process to be inspired by distributed, instructional and enquiry-minded leadership (Mincu, 2013). The Programme has facilitated greater professional dialogue, collegiality and networking between teachers involved in the Partnerships. This has helped drive the work of the Partnerships and led to the sharing of ideas and practice pertinent to specific project aims as well as to broader teaching and learning, in some cases beyond the scope of the Programme.

Building Leadership Capacity

The Programme promoted leadership opportunities for those involved. It is interesting to note that they remained prominent throughout and the underpinning conditions improved as trust and relationships developed. It may be that these opportunities would not have been sustained if collegiality and opportunities for sharing had not increased.

Early reports that the SIPP initiative had begun to support leadership development opportunities were subsequently borne out by changes to survey feedback to the point where the overwhelming majority of respondents indicated a positive response. For example, 88 per cent of respondents in wave four also indicated that involvement with the SIPP had resulted in the creation of leadership opportunities and professional learning of staff at all levels. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) had reported this at the wave one stage.

There were many specific examples of leadership involvement. In Partnership 1, many teachers were afforded the opportunity to take on leadership roles by leading or participating in the nine development groups and/or the wider Partnership group. In addition, a number of staff presented their work and disseminated good practice at a residential conference.

Partnership 5 head teachers and teachers from participating high schools organized a conference to share good practice. Two hundred and thirty staff participated in the conference's 24 workshops. The leadership of this Partnership was shared among a group of head teachers, deputy head teachers, and teachers, who took on the roles of workshop presenters, conference organizers, working group leaders and personal support programme leaders.

The capacity building principles and practices promoted by the Programme, including the development of research and evaluation skills, made a significant contribution to supporting the development of teacher leadership. The Programme injected new ideas and ways of working into classrooms and schools. These ideas and practices were adopted by a cadre of teachers who led change from their classrooms, in their schools and to other schools within their local authority, and in some cases across local authorities. For example, in one Partnership, teachers reported that their SIPP experience, particularly leading collaborative enquiry activity, provided evidence to support their professional updating and leadership development. Teachers in this Partnership organized themselves into working groups to develop a Personal Support Programme and Visible Learning Programme for targeted pupils that was supported by the local education authority psychology service. Reflecting on this process, one senior manager in the local authority emphasized the role of the SIPP as a catalyst for promoting teacher leadership in the context of school improvement and tackling raising attainment.

'A variety of staff have taken leadership opportunities. For example, a teacher in her first year of teaching at [high school] is leading a group for the SIPP partnership, and a number of middle leaders have been given the chance to work at a strategic level between schools. The SIPP work has contributed to inspiring a number of teachers to join the [local authority] first steps to leadership programme and career-long professional learning opportunities.'

Teacher leaders have developed a wide repertoire of knowledge and skills, ranging from

research methods, data use and understanding to project planning and management and opportunities to practise leadership and management tasks. These might not have been possible without involvement in the Programme. In effect, this development is a small but important step in building leadership capacity within the system, which in the past has sometimes been patchy or non-existent. In addition to developing an expanded repertoire of knowledge and skills, teacher leaders received higher levels of exposure to a diverse range of professionals.

One important outcome related to this increased engagement was that, as evaluative approaches became more sophisticated and higher quality data was gathered, capacity was being built within the Partnerships. This development necessitated further additional support to enable Partnerships to undertake more complex analyses and better synthesize evidence to gain deeper insights. This process involved teacher leaders working with a range of professionals, including university researchers, inspectors and educational psychologists to draw on a range of analytical expertise from different backgrounds and then lead local workshops within their Partnerships to share the new knowledge and insights gained from external sources. The evidence from the Programme is that the use of collaborative enquiry can be an enabler for teacher leadership in both formal roles as designated 'research leaders' or 'data leaders' or, more informally, working collaboratively as part of a team with colleagues on issues of mutual interest. Teachers also learned from one another. It was particularly evident that teachers who had undertaken 'M level' postgraduate courses were able to lead with confidence and authority. This evidence highlights the important role that 'M level' learning has in promoting teacher leadership.

In their reports, the Partnerships referred to their improved capacity and expertise regarding the use of data and evaluation approaches, and in some cases, this went

beyond the teaching workforce. For example, one Partnership reported that the CLD staff:

'have increased knowledge in gathering and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data to evidence impact, identify themes and address community needs'.

Another partnership reported that:

'Teachers and head teachers have had the opportunity to lead discussions and evaluations, and learn skills in data collection and analysis.'

Practitioners' increased knowledge and experience of context-specific methods of assessment and data collection supported the generation and use of a more diverse use of data collection tools and analytical techniques. For example, teachers designed and analyzed pupil surveys for secondary pupils to determine key issues regarding attendance; they designed and analyzed surveys for educational professionals regarding staff knowledge and attitudes; teachers modified pupil attitudinal surveys and this was in addition to accessing and using a number of pre-existing data collection tools and undertaking a range of qualitative methods, including interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders.

It was not only teachers who benefited from leadership opportunities to take on new roles and responsibilities, but also SFLAs (support for learning assistants) and CLD workers. For example, SFLAs took on teaching roles in the Programme by planning lessons, delivering lessons, and participating in shadow observations, benefitting professionally from these opportunities, but also investing their own time after hours to voluntarily contribute to lesson planning.

'School D stated that the SflA was always "super organized" which saved a lot of time as she ensured that time was used wisely and resources were also prepared for both staff and pupils.'

In this Partnership, CLD workers also said that they benefited from the opportunity to take on new roles and responsibilities. By learning new reading strategies, they were able to share these strategies with parents and

with pupils through the homework club. The CLD workers also said that they gained a better understanding of the issues teachers face in their work and the report from this Partnership stated that CLD workers:

'are more confident in working collaboratively across disciplines and locality' and 'have shared skills and specialisms to enhance family learning and literacy provision'.

Middle leaders

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has suggested that local authorities should work more closely in partnership on issues of improving educational equity and building capacity through professional learning. It asserts that this way of working can be achieved by strengthening the middle tier: the 'middle' can be reinforced through fostering the mutual support and learning across local authorities, together with schools and networks of schools (OECD, 2015).

The SIPP Partnerships are 'proof of concept' that disciplined collaborative enquiry provides a sensible way forward, avoiding a 'one size fits all' approach to change. The programme has played an important role in creating the conditions that might support the development of a nationwide Networked Improvement Community through the establishment of Regional Improvement Collaboratives. The SIPP has promoted leadership development and provided opportunities for teachers to develop greater responsibility as part of their 'partnership team', leading the work of the Partnership within and across schools. This process has included taking responsibility for leading developing interventions and projects, liaising with other professionals within the Partnership and beyond and advising and supporting efforts in other Partnerships. For example, one primary teacher worked with local authority, secondary and primary colleagues in another Partnership to develop Lesson Study as an approach to support their work.

Staff across the Partnerships took on a number of diverse and varied leadership roles including: developing project plans, organizing collaborative enquiry, organizing and delivering parent engagement activity, leading and participating in Lesson Study cycles, writing reports, facilitating and video-recording pupil focus groups, creating pupil assessments, collecting data, analyzing data, involving various experts and researching, introducing and instructing staff in new pedagogies, leading a wide range of continuing professional development opportunities for colleagues and presenting at local and national events.

Leadership across schools

Perhaps, the most significant dimension of teacher leadership development has been the opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles beyond their own classrooms and schools. The opportunities have involved teachers leading collaborative professional development within and across schools. Put simply, the SIPP has developed a network of early and mid-career teachers who are leading a range of initiatives at relatively early stages of their careers, in some cases across local authority boundaries. The leadership experience they have gained within this Programme will place them in a position to develop into the next generation of system leaders. In the words of a local authority senior education manager.

‘Local authorities have to understand they cannot drive improvement ... unless the school has clear vision, effective leadership in terms of what they need to do in terms of raising attainment ... SIPP has worked with schools collaboratively and given schools the power. ... It is the younger staff in the schools who have really seized the opportunities and it's started to permeate upwards.’

In one Partnership, head teachers reported that, through their involvement in the SIPP, their schools were now in a position to share innovative approaches and develop leadership in other schools. One head teacher said, ‘We felt we had something to give’. Teachers in this

Partnership also reported benefits from professional learning and leadership opportunities:

‘...leading our own professional development in order to develop an enhanced understanding of the core curricular area of numeracy, opportunities to lead our core group within the partnership at different times – taking charge of distributing responsibilities, leading CPD activities within home school, leading development at an authority level, opportunities for developing confidence, opportunities to observe in our own and other authorities with a view to sharing our observations with our own partnership group, building a larger network of colleagues.’

LEARNING FROM THE PAST TO LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Current Progress

After three years of development and implementation, the evidence suggests that SIPP has had an impact in the following areas:

- Fostering collaborative working to tackle educational inequality.
- Developing capacity at school and local authority levels to effect positive change, including enhancing leadership opportunities at all levels.
- Building teachers’ knowledge, confidence and skills to challenge inequity.
- Improving teachers’ understanding of evaluation and practitioner enquiry.
- Increasing learners’ aspirations and achievement.

The SIPP has increased the sharing of ideas and professional learning across individual Partnerships, across the wider Programme and at times into national and international research and policy areas. The OECD (2015) review of school improvement in Scotland identified the SIPP as an important lever for change, describing the Programme as a ‘powerful national network focused on tackling educational inequity’ (OECD, 2015, p. 77). The review also noted the important work done by Education Scotland in collaborating with local authorities and university researchers to support these Partnerships and the commitment to professional learning at all levels within the system.

In particular, the SIPP has built capacity by creating nodes of expertise within the teaching profession and local authorities across the system. It has provided an opportunity to create a new, agile middle tier with a cadre of differentiated expertise that can work across local authority boundaries. This regional resource could be located within inter-authority hubs and has the potential to offer a set of arrangements which, with national coordination from key stakeholders, could serve as a coherent professional learning/capacity building resource for in-service professional learning to support the ultimate implementation of national education policy.

Enablers and Barriers

The experience of the SIPP, including some variations in degrees of success between Partnerships, has highlighted key enablers and barriers to successful networked collaboration. Some of these were already familiar from other, similar programmes – but they bear repetition. Others are more specific to the design and implementation of the SIPP but may yet be of relevance to other initiatives in diverse settings. Some key findings are shown in Table 32.1.

While the barriers identified in Table 32.1 can lead to significant difficulty, the experience of the SIPP is that they may also create opportunities, for example by encouraging:

- local authorities and school leaders to become more agile and creative in the arrangements and ways of working that underpin their activity. This approach can go on to influence thinking and developmental plans more widely across the participating local authorities.
- teams to look for creative solutions – to think and plan further ahead and share tasks.

Next Steps

We now have clear evidence of what successful Partnerships look like. Successful Partnerships:

- maintain a clear focus on closing the attainment gap;
- develop approaches that are tailored and context-specific;
- promote the meaningful use of data and evidence from numerous sources to inform practice and understand impact through a strong commitment to Collaborative Action Research (CAR) across partnerships;
- provide structured opportunities for collaboration, including investing in time and space to build positive relationships;
- quickly establish a group of committed practitioners, supported by school and local authority leaders, to drive the activity/project. This group is able to engage other staff and expand the influence of the Programme to affect behaviours more widely across schools and partnerships;
- have a clear focus on literacy, numeracy and parental engagement;
- gather support for improvement by exploring the potential for broader partnerships, including those with Further Education (FE), CLD, employability services, etc., in order to tackle educational inequity. This approach allows Partnerships to have capacity and expertise to work with and empower families and communities to allow them to actively participate in measures to promote learning. This is key to making a difference to learners' attainment and wider achievement;
- embed the collaborative projects/approaches in school and local planning;
- are locally owned and led and have a commitment to developing empowered leadership at all levels;
- establish an equitable partnership within and between schools, involving teachers, learners, families and other relevant stakeholders and organizations;
- draw on external expertise where necessary, including colleagues from universities and other partner services;
- promote a risk-taking culture;
- use frameworks for change, not prescription, and allow high levels of autonomy;
- invest in professional dialogue and networks to build the 'infrastructure' needed for CAR and change.

Moving forward, the SIPP has highlighted the need to promote more broadly-based partnerships, for example with College, CLD, employability service, and voluntary

Table 32.1 Key enablers and barriers to successful networked collaboration

<i>Enablers</i>	<i>Barriers</i>
<p>Advance preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows initial agreement of what works, for whom and in what context. • Enables relationship-building and growth of trust in the early stages. • Facilitates professional dialogue, agreement of common values. 	Poor communication, poor teamwork and coordination, poorly defined aims.
<p>Committed practitioners who want to build new working relationships and take on leadership responsibilities for personal and professional satisfaction (not monetary reward). Teacher leaders supported by school and local authority leaders, drive forward projects with pace and focus, engage other staff and expand the influence of the programme to affect behaviours more widely across schools and partnerships.</p>	Practical barriers – time constraints, teacher cover, personnel changes, resources.
<p>Dialogue and interactions with local authority staff, senior education officers and inspectors from Education Scotland, educational psychologists, community development workers and others. These</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • give access to a range of insights and perspectives on issues that enrich teachers' professional experience and understanding of the complexity of tackling the attainment gap; • may offer 'intermediary' services, e.g., where committed local managers (school/local authority) have good local knowledge and power to sanction action. 	Shifting local and national policy priorities and changes in resources and staffing locally present a challenge to the pace of progress and sustainability of activity.
<p>Interactions with university staff. Successful enquiry generates increasingly sophisticated demand for statistical and analytical skills development.</p>	Scale of activity, e.g., number of schools involved and distance between them, distance from university research support.
<p>Frequent and targeted whole-programme events organized by non-school partners, e.g., universities. These give relevant staff time for planning/discussion.</p>	Lack of access to additional support from other specialist services, e.g., psychological services.
<p>Using a range of approaches, including Lesson Study, instructional rounds, improvement science and collaborative action research. This strategy allows a particular approach to be matched to the specific aim, nature of enquiry questions and the local context being researched and developed.</p>	
<p>Teachers with advanced qualifications. Master's degree education enables teachers to apply their knowledge and expertise to support others' learning.</p>	
<p>Teacher ownership of improvement. Best when supported by local/district authorities who communicate developments and foster professional dialogue.</p>	

and community groups in order to tackle inequality across a wider front. Relevant research (e.g., Carter-Wall & Whitfield, 2012; Chapman et al., 2011; Egan, 2013) has also shown that measures to tackle educational inequity and the attainment gap need to look beyond learning and teaching to address:

- pupil well-being;
- enrichment experiences;
- engaging parents and families in their children's learning;
- strengthening links with communities.

Parental and family engagement is the most important factor, outside of schools, in influencing the achievement of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, multi-agency working is key to partnership working to tackle educational inequity, e.g., in supporting school–family links, out-of-hours learning and mentoring interventions. There needs to be further coordinated work that links the full range of assets available both within and also externally to the community to achieve collective impact (Henig et al., 2015).

Commentary

We need to move on from the mindset of a linear, phased perspective on the development of school improvement (Hopkins et al., 2014), and develop a forward-looking holistic approach to improving the life chances of children. This approach requires deeper understanding not only about school-level improvement processes but, as I have highlighted in this chapter, it is also about building collective capacity through school-to-school collaboration and collaborative enquiry. Furthermore, perhaps most importantly, we need to determine the most effective approaches to link schools into other public services and agencies. We need to shift the emphasis from within-school, to between-school and beyond-school improvement if we are to optimize improvement efforts in educational systems.

This shift in emphasis is complicated by the challenge of working across organizational, geographical and professional boundaries and also by the fact that as we move from within- to between- and beyond-school improvement the knowledge base associated with effective improvement strategies becomes less secure. Put simply, we can be more confident about what needs to be done within schools, but we become less so as we move to between-school improvements, and even less so as we move into the territory of beyond-school improvement. Therefore, the focus of future research and experimentation must be the successful structures and processes associated with between- and beyond-school improvement.

As previously noted, the knowledge that underpins this approach has been generated over decades of development and research activity and can be found in a diverse range of systems, including those in Hong Kong, Australia, the USA and Canada, and, more recently, South America, Russia and parts of Asia. Research has demonstrated that the most effective school improvements are

also locally owned and led by teachers and school leaders, collecting and using data appropriately, conducting enquiry, and working in partnership and collaboration with like-minded professionals and stakeholders (Ainscow et al., 2012; Chapman, 2008, 2012, 2015; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Earl & Katz, 2006; Hadfield & Chapman, 2009; Kerr et al., 2003).

While collaborative enquiry-driven initiatives like the SIPP have an important role to play in delivering specific outcomes and acting as vehicles for meaningful professional learning, their real value may lie in their leverage for handing greater responsibility, decision-making, ownership and, perhaps most crucially, power over to teachers. Lawrence Stenhouse's words on this issue are just as relevant now as they were over a third of a century ago:

Only the pursuit of research directly applied to the curriculum and teaching puts the teacher in the power position; for he [sic] is in possession of the only valid laboratory, the classroom. (Stenhouse, 1980, p. 44)

Stenhouse (1980) reminds us that it is teachers who change classrooms, not policies or protocols. Initiatives based on networking and collaboration, such as SIPP, provide a positive context that places teachers at the centre of educational change and empowers them to lead the change at a time when so many policies place them at the margins, with little power or control. If schools are to play their full role in tackling educational inequities in an authentic way, we must place teachers and teacher leadership at the centre of reforms and provide the power and resources to undertake the task in hand within their own schools, in collaboration with other schools and in partnership with the communities and families they serve. This move to further empower teachers provides us with a significant opportunity to both raise the bar and close the gap in educational outcomes for all of our children.

To close the gap in educational outcomes that results from disadvantage, we need to better understand the mechanisms, structures and processes needed to build professional capital across a range of service providers. Moving from thinking about building teachers' professional capital or educator's professional capital to what is required and how to optimize the support for building professional capital across the public services in more detail will open up new possibilities for supporting the holistic development of children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

Richer rewards will be gained from building collective capacity between schools through school-to-school collaboration. As this chapter has demonstrated, there is emerging evidence from a range of school-based networks to suggest that network-based collaborative enquiry-driven approaches, underpinned by the intelligent use of performance and contextual data, can improve not just the leadership experiences and opportunities available to teachers, but also, crucially, the learning outcomes for students.

The opportunities for teacher leaders to work with other educationalists and professionals is a positive and undervalued aspect of teacher leaders' work. The SIPP provided some opportunities for this to occur but more needs to be done if we are to develop a seamless holistic approach to our children's education that moves beyond professional silos to create an inter-professional 'community of inquiry within a community of social practice' where there is a shared language, both literally and figuratively, in terms of values, knowledge and procedures (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985, p. 34).

Stretching the focus from 'within-schools' to 'between-schools' will strengthen this collective capacity for better outcomes, but it is no panacea. We need to develop our approaches to 'beyond-school' improvement. There are interesting examples of this type of working in some systems and it would seem there are lessons to be learned

from the work of the Harlem Children's Zone in the United States: this project offers some promising ideas that have translated into positive outcomes on the ground. Place-based approaches, taking school-to-school collaboration to the next level by connecting schools to their communities and neighbourhoods, are experiencing a revival in many systems. For example, in the UK, Save the Children's 'Children's Communities' have gained traction, there are examples of similar efforts in Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland (see <https://childrensneighbourhoodsscotland.com>), a research and developmental collaboration between the University of Glasgow and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, is using the principles of collective impact to prototype a Scottish placed-based approach in the East End of Glasgow.

Stretching from within- to between- and beyond-school improvement is difficult and complex, requiring a fundamental rethinking of roles and relationships within the system. Continuing as we have done until now will simply extend the problem identified by Payne (2008), leading to an exponential decontextualization, failure of implementation and replication of educational inequity. We need a significant cultural shift in how we construct our professional identities and perceive our positions within the education system if the social and educational changes we want are to become a reality. We will have to rethink not only with whom we work, but also how and where we work, blurring institutional boundaries. I argue that the key priorities for supporting the cultural shift that is required to optimize educational improvement can be distilled into three areas:

A renewed focus on professional development. This focus is the key to constructing a new genre of education professional. This new professional will grow from a linkage of initial pre- and in-service education in a way that challenges assumptions about traditional roles

and responsibilities and has a profound effect on how new and established education professionals view themselves and understand their work. Most importantly, these new professionals will be well placed to challenge established cultural norms within the system.

A commitment to ownership of 'what works and why'. This area revitalizes professionalism and reinforces the appetite for change. Newly empowered education professionals will have freedom to invest in a range of evidence-based, localized experiments, monitoring their impact and using findings to inform refinements that promote locally-owned models of practice, which are tailored to specific contexts and are more likely to meet the needs of all students.

A dedication to joined-up public service provision. This area is a prerequisite for optimizing educational outcomes for all students. Traditionally, we have focused on within-school improvement, which has delivered limited returns. At best, it has increased schools' capacity to manage change for the longer term, while, at worst, it has tactically ratcheted up test scores at the expense of capacity building. Improving learning levels is crucial and within-school approaches rightfully have a place in an improvement agenda. However, it is becoming clear that the pursuit of within-school approaches alone will generate lower and lower returns for the energy invested. Mobilizing elements of public services to provide a coordinated framework for within-, between- and beyond-school improvement will have the effect of challenging inequities that the educational system cannot deal with in isolation.

Our findings highlight the potential for disciplined collaborative enquiry to be a key lever for change within, between and beyond schools. While our current experience of working in this area reveals an evidence base that is strongest for within-school improvement, the true potential for networked collaboration beyond schools is just beginning to emerge. The knowledge base about 'what works' and 'why' decreases as one moves away from classrooms and individual school settings, but the potential for improvement increases as the focus shifts towards collaborative improvement efforts between schools

and beyond them. For this reason, policy makers should invest even more heavily in developing research and development interventions between schools and beyond schools as holistic, place-based approaches designed to generate collective impact (Henig et al., 2015) on children's lives. As we look forward, this approach is an important area for future development and there are encouraging signs that policy makers are beginning to acknowledge some of the improvements and gains made through these collaborative approaches.

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