Leading the Development of Strategies
to Rekindle the Joy of Learning and Build Resilience

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In this article the author accounts for the process of change he led in his workplace during his participation in the HertsCam MEd in Leading Teaching and Learning. The narrative presents the key stages in this process from first identifying a professional concern to the development of a sustainable model which has been adopted school-wide. The discussion focuses not only on the formation of an approach to supporting students' resilience, but also addresses the challenges of leading development work and how these were resolved. The author, Ben Garcia, reveals how the collaborative process increased organisational capacity and led to contextually relevant knowledge creation.

Keywords: resilience, teacher-led development work, knowledge creation, collaboration

Introduction

I am an assistant headteacher at Sir John Lawes School, a large, comprehensive secondary school serving students aged 11-17 years in Hertfordshire. The HertsCam approach to supporting teacher leadership is well-established at our school. The current headteacher, Clare Robins, was one of the first graduates of the HertsCam Master's programme, 1999-2001. The first Teacher Led Development Work (TLDW) group in Hertfordshire was facilitated by Jo Mylles, then an assistant headteacher, at our school in 2004 (Mylles & Frost, 2006). The basic premise in the teacher-led development work methodology is that any member of the staff community, regardless of any formal position they may hold, can be supported in their attempt to lead a development process focused on a specific aspect of practice. Sir John Lawes School had provided a TLDW group annually since 2004, so I became a participant after joining the school in 2007. My experience of participating in the TLDW programme was truly empowering. I went on to become the facilitator of the group, a role which I continue to relish.

Joining a Teacher-Led Master's Programme

In 2016 I welcomed the opportunity to join the HertsCam MEd in Leading Teaching and Learning. The programme had undergone a significant overhaul and had been re-launched in 2015 as a Master's of Education (MEd) programme taught entirely by teachers. One of the members of the MEd team was Jo Mylles, who was the Deputy Headteacher at Sir John Lawes. Unsurprisingly perhaps, I felt very confident that this programme would enable me to focus on my professional concerns and help me to develop my practice as one of the assistant headteachers at my school.

My area of inquiry was my concern about how we can equip students to be resilient learners, motivated by a love for learning in a culture of high-stakes testing. Resilience is a key dimension of character, the ability to tolerate the emotions of learning (Claxton, 1999). My exploratory conversations with colleagues suggested that the 'terrors of performativity' (Ball, 2003) also affect teachers and parents. The aim of my project was to develop a metacognitive programme—a series of lessons to make learners conscious of what they know about learning, including knowledge of their own abilities, the skills required, and the strategies they can employ to improve their success and regulate their approach according to the results they want. I believed this would help learners to become more resilient and better equipped to learn, both cognitively and emotionally. This approach ultimately led to the development of a sustainable programme through which teachers would be empowered to develop their own strategies to re-kindle students' desire to learn.

The design of my project was informed by the teacher-led development work framework which enables teachers to plan and lead projects which improve professional practice and create knowledge (Frost, 2013). The TLDW model guides teachers to be able to lead change sequentially through a number of key steps:

- Step 1: The teacher clarifies their professional values
- Step 2: They identify a concern
- Step 3: They negotiate with colleagues to explore that concern
- Step 4: They design and produce action plan for a development project
- Step 5: They negotiate with colleagues to refine the practicality of the project
- Step 6: Teachers lead projects that draw colleagues, students and their families into collaborative processes
- Step 7: Teachers contribute to knowledge building in their networks and educational systems

I already knew from experience that the TLDW model empowers teachers to become change agents by mobilising their moral purpose. Knowledge creation is more likely to take place within an expanded community (Frost & Roberts, 2006), such as the HertsCam network, which develops capacity for knowledge creation through forums such as network events and teacher leadership journals. I approached this project with confidence, having experienced how it can help to build self-efficacy for the person leading and for colleagues who are drawn into the collaborative process. Teachers who believe in their own capabilities are more likely to be resilient, able to solve problems and learn from experiences. Their increased self-efficacy not only supports leadership, but also the well-being and professionality of collaborators (Bangs & Frost, 2016). In the next section I outline the journey my project took, from my preparation and early collaboration with colleagues and students through to the unexpected turns and challenges which brought me to a new understanding of change leadership. Finally, I reflect on the impact of my work and its legacy.

Preparation

Having joined the MEd programme, I spent the first six months laying the groundwork for my project. This involved identifying a concern—how to bolster students' resilience and love of learning—and negotiating with colleagues and students to refine this concern and establish its validity (the first three steps of Hill's (2014) TLDW model). In the fourth step of the TLDW model, an action plan for change emerged. This phase established urgency and assembled a 'guiding coalition' (Kotter, 1996). I created tools and strategies for consultation, collaboration and networking. Those consulted were enabled to be agents rather than victims of change (Fullan, 1993).

To help communicate and elicit feedback, I created a poster which highlighted the idea that humans arguably learn in part by processing symbols, and therefore that visual metaphors might be persuasive (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005). I used an Atlas metaphor—a picture of the Greek god Atlas tasked with carrying the Earth on his back as a burden. This metaphor highlighted my concern about the burden of performativity and the position of students as the chief load-bearers. This performativity culture comes from the pressure students and teachers alike experience when they must focus simply on results. It can lead to a narrowing of the curriculum and a sense that there is no time for the luxury of deeper learning that Hargreaves (2008) describes as essential to lifelong empowerment. I wanted my project to shift the learning focus back to equipping students with the metacognitive tools that would enable their lifelong learning.

I also consulted students beginning with a focus group of GCSE students and extending to all students at the school. As proposed by the student focus group, a suggestion box was used to elicit feedback during assemblies, large scale gatherings of students in which we try to inspire them and celebrate achievements. The assemblies sometimes involve the entire school, but in schools as large as ours they are for specific year groups. Slips of paper were placed on seats and at the end of the assembly students reflected on one question: 'How can we be great learners?' I wanted to see if students would naturally respond around issues of resilience and joy of learning. Students placed their slips in boxes positioned at each exit. This tool was simple and effective. It generated a wide range of responses that helped shape the developing project, unearthing viewpoints that informed the structure of the metacognitive programme discussed above and suggested a differentiated approach for different age groups.

Collaboration

The consultations that followed nurtured collaborative leadership (Woods & Roberts, 2018). This moved the project from step five to six in the TLDW model—use consultation, discussion and negotiation to refine practicalities and to draw colleagues into collaboration (Hill, 2014). I engaged in what Sergiovanni called 'decision staggering' (Sergiovanni, 2001), consulting across a range of stakeholders to achieve goals democratically. This was aided by the meetings with an existing school improvement group (SIG), comprised of volunteer colleagues focusing on teaching and learning issues and senior leadership colleagues. This provided breadth of professional capital and depth of social capital; colleagues contributed a range of experience and shared commitment, and so became my 'guiding coalition' (Kotter, 1996) which made the development collaborative.

In collaboration with a colleague who is responsible for student wellbeing as part of their leadership role, I devised tools for SIG meetings which allowed participants to reflect on student feedback, evaluate ideas from literature and review the strengths and weaknesses of the school's current strategy on developing students' metacognitive skills. The discussion helped me to devise a visual aid of a Venn diagram that showed the connections between learning and wellbeing. Therefore, the SIG drove change through collegiality rather than top-down implementation: the 'peer factor' rather than the 'fear factor' (Woods & Roberts, 2018). The decisions made by the SIG were supported at a senior leadership team conference.

I presented senior leaders with a second iteration along with plans for how this development might be realised. Whilst most colleagues supported our plans to address the link between the development of resilience and joy in learning and its benefits for wellbeing, there was one dissenting voice. It was suggested that both teachers and students would struggle to grasp the concept. This led me to reflect on whether an outlying view should be rejected when the majority concur. Should I just follow the majority view or be wary of 'apparent consensus' (Blase & Anderson, 1995)? Some suggest that the freshest ideas often come from marginal views (Fullan, 1993), and that emotionally intelligent leaders persuade people by helping to solve shared problems (Goleman, 1998). Consequently, I decided to look carefully at this opposing view and advocate to the SIG and the student Learning Leadership Team (LLT).

When the plan was re-presented to the SIG, there was no criticism and some praised its clarity, but I was not sure that all stakeholders were convinced. It was suggested that consultation might be more authentic if the prompts that were intended to help solicit views were removed. Consequently, when I returned to the LLT, I presented an empty Venn framework and provided a list of possible qualities only after students had suggested their own. This allowed students' views to be elicited in a more unprejudiced, and perhaps more democratic, way.

Further discussion with one of the other assistant heads produced what was a conceptual breakthrough for me. She was interested in creating a single unified framework which would include metacognition, character, and wellbeing and which would support a unified, and more effective approach, to teaching in the classroom. The link between learning and wellbeing had been established earlier. Previous project work at my school indicated that considering both academic and pastoral provision can benefit students' intellectual preparation and self-efficacy (Morton & Rose, 2018). I realised that my aims reflected the school's stated ethos, as represented by the acronym ACE: Achievement, Care and Excellence. One student articulated this:

> *ACE is embedded. Students understand that the school's message is that success is important, but that this isn't just about academic success... it is also important for students to grow up as well-rounded individuals.*

My 'eureka' moment was the next iteration of the framework, where metacognitive qualities were represented through the 'Achievement' circle, wellbeing qualities through the 'Care' circle, character qualities through the 'Excellence' circle, and the intersections represented the connections between them.

This collaborative phase showed how we are not free; we are 'part of the inexorable stream' with others (Berlin, 1996: 43). However, this lack of freedom is to be embraced because it represents the humility that is fundamental to democratic, empowering leadership. If professional knowledge is the property of social context (Frost, 2013), then frequent and wide-ranging consultation that allows for co-construction, decision staggering, collaborative leadership and ethical validation of views is essential to effectively create new knowledge. Clarifying the framework laid the foundations for the next phase of development.

Drift

One of the project's aims was to build a sustainable model where teachers were empowered to develop their own strategies to re-kindle students' desire to learn, but as the project leader I was mindful of the need to retain control to prevent the project drifting from its original objective (Senge, 1990). I was influenced by organisational models of agile working (Kniberg & Ivarsson, 2012), where colleagues work across departments and hierarchies in 'chapters' and 'guilds'. This connected with the way the SIG had been working and the non-positional collaboration of TLDW groups (Frost, 2014). 'Squads' are in place to cohere agile workers to a common purpose; they are 'designed to feel like a mini start-up' (Kniberg & Ivarsson, 2012: 2), tasked with developing, creating, testing and producing a product. Thus, the SIG became a squad, assembled around a common mission, but with the freedom to trial and co-develop with other working groups.

To this end, each collaborator became responsible for piloting and developing strategies, which were shared and evaluated in a later meeting. These activities became micro-projects under the umbrella of the whole-school project, but some developed a more sophisticated life of their own. In particular, one teacher was a participant in the SIG but also in the TLDW group, and her development work was concerned with resilient learning strategies. Her project involved collaboration with curriculum and pastoral teams, the latter leading to the creation of a resilience programme for use in 'tutor time'. In addition to this, three members of these teams also participated in the SIG. Consequently, one TLDW project was influencing three other teams across the school. This seemed to be evidence of the impact of the TLDW approach, where non-positional leadership can send ripples across the system—innovations in the classroom, burgeoning teacher leadership capacity, building professional knowledge via shared accounts and school-wide developments (Frost & Durrant, 2002). This complex approach to knowledge creation resonates with corporate models, where organisational capacity grows through interactions of over-lapping teams, but goes further because individuals are agential, driven by their professional concerns as well as shared goals. By decentralising responsibility and allowing the project to grow in the control of colleagues, the self-efficacy of collaborators increased because they saw themselves as leaders and learners (Hill, 2011). Thus, agendas driven by similar moral purposes were having impact across the organisation.

My concern was that this dispersed leadership might allow the project's focus to drift. After all, if this model of leadership cultivates moral purpose, it is natural that teacher-leaders would want to develop their own professional concerns. This made me question whether colleagues' developments were illuminating the project and developing valuable new lines of action or diverting the project from its original goal. Fullan (2001) suggests that the best way to manage change is to let it happen rather than try to control it. Woods and Roberts (2018) suggest that plans should be provisional and open to feedback rather than linear paths to follow. Both these views on change agentry suggest that a drift of the focus is natural, even essential, to the

process of change; allowing drift is a way of enabling authorship and therefore of enabling innovation to more effectively embed in the school's fabric (Mylles, 2017). Therefore, on reflection, it seems that this kind of leadership increases knowledge flow, widens responsibility, and builds motivation. The SIG enabled individual initiatives to become a shared responsibility, which fostered collective accountability (Humphreys, 2014). The clarity of the SIG as an established school structure ensured that teachers had the autonomy to trial their own developments, but that these were deliberated strategically and focused on the central project.

Challenge

Following this process of trialling and feedback, a draft template for the final product was created. However, to get to this point, I had to face significant challenges. For example, the student voice feedback indicated that an effective programme would need embedding in classroom practice, which proved difficult to achieve.

Throughout the trialling phase, the student leadership team members were consulted as regularly as the SIG. The students were passionate about embedding the new programme in lessons and the everyday life of the school, rather than what they saw as more superficial and less effective strategies such as termly target setting. The LLT appeared to grasp this more reliably than the SIG; but perhaps students were enabled by a perspective free from the responsibility to implement. Or perhaps the teachers instinctively wanted to avoid an approach that would be too challenging. I knew they needed to look beyond the easy 'we need a bigger hammer' solution (Senge, 1990). One student in particular reminded the teachers of the professional concern that had inspired the project: the need to re-kindle the joy of learning for students taking examinations. He explained how this kind of programme would

> *…mean more when the work is more difficult… it would not only increase motivation but also awareness of the learning qualities, which creates a virtuous circle.*

By establishing a metacognitive programme for the youngest students, we hoped to build resilience year by year to sustain older students through their examinations and beyond, into their adult life. This resonated with reading about what had made development work successful in the past. To maximise the impact of change, it might be best to avoid the quick fix, but rather engage with others (Frost et al., 2018) and reflect on their feedback deeply enough to create something strategic and significant.

In response to this, tools were created which would enable collaborators to innovate strategies that would embed the programme in the day-to-day life of the school whilst achieving the right balance between cognitive ease, where we are more relaxed and superficial but also more intuitive and creative in our thinking, and cognitive strain, where we are less likely to be comfortable in our thinking but benefit from increased effort and vigilance (Kahnemann, 2011). This afforded collaborators the freedom to be intuitive with ideas, the structure and stimulus to innovate creatively, and the rigour to devise accurate and appropriate strategies. The tools scaffolded a call for action in seven areas: marketing the concept; target setting; tutor sessions; lessons and the curriculum; training students; training teachers; training the community. The rationale for these subheadings was influenced by priorities that arose from consultation, now with greater emphasis on finding solutions. Consequently, by the end of this first SIG meeting of the summer term, I had a plan of action and a range of strategies.

Reconciliation

Following the leadership challenges faced in the spring, the summer term was spent refining and finalising the project. This meant widening consultation to ensure that the designed outcome did not suffer from limited critical perspectives. Perhaps the collaborators were the individuals who needed external validation to understand the significance of the changes they were leading. Consequently, this leadership phase was characterised by further consultation and networking; the knowledge created was made visible to wider audiences (Woods & Roberts, 2018), to glean different approaches and perspectives. Therefore, the project's draft outcomes were articulated to colleagues and students within the school, senior leaders across the cluster of schools and teachers within the HertsCam network. This networking phase was successful in maximising the project's impact and represented the final stages of leadership models that had influenced the project design. The final steps of TLDW drew additional stakeholders into the collaborative process and built knowledge across networks (Hill, 2014). Furthermore, by considering ways to communicate the project, it had been refined into a more coherent five-part plan. However, this also made the project vulnerable to recommendations that were perhaps too late to implement. The leadership dilemma was to decide whether to dismiss new challenges or to reconcile them.

For the most part, there were few objections difficult to reconcile. For example, a group of teachers at a HertsCam network event suggested creative activities as a way of improving wellbeing, and it was not problematic to include these in plans for tutor sessions. When students questioned the clarity and relevance of some of the qualities, their advice about which qualities would be most relevant for each year group was promptly sought. Both these interventions helped achieve a reconciliation of views that might otherwise have resisted the project. In fact, if we accepted that successful change is a process rather than an event (Fullan, 2001), then it was important to redefine resistance as guidance. However, there were some challenges that required more deliberate reconciliation. For example, we had been introduced to a plausible argument that school character and resilience programmes are likely to do more harm than good (Didau & Rose, 2016). This argument suggested that superficial efforts to improve wellbeing were more likely to create a culture of dependency and increase emotional barriers to learning, suggesting that character and resilience programmes might be ineffectual and pathologise aspects of the human condition which are universal and commonplace. This called into question the rationale for the project and cast doubt on its potential effectiveness. Yet Fullan (2001) suggests that moral purpose is a product of values and emotion, and therefore that effective innovation, driven by moral purpose, will inevitably call our beliefs into question. Reflecting on this was reassuring—the view was not at odds with the school's vision to encourage student independence. Furthermore, the aim of this triangulation was to help students learn more freely rather than dwell on deficits of character. Didau and Rose's evidence (2016) suggested that character and resilience programmes can work effectively when developing self-efficacy, the ability to control one's destiny, rather than blaming external factors. This resonated with student feedback, which suggested that the programme had the potential to provide students with tools to control their learning, for example, by building on qualities such as balance, determination and reflectiveness. If leading change is a quest for sense rather than fixed answers (Sergiovanni, 2001), then these late challenges to the programme's rationale helped refine its aims and discover practical solutions that would appeal to teachers and students.

Impact and Legacy

By the summer, the project was ready to be launched and was to be called 'Lawes for Learning', a title co-constructed with senior leaders, the LLT and SIG, which presented the programme as a set of guidelines to help individuals take ownership of their learning holistically. The preposition was intended to communicate the school's investment in promoting and supporting qualities that formed the bedrock of the programme. By this point, the team of collaborators had developed a design that represented growth and reflected the school logo of wheatsheaves, alongside a digital handbook that gave definitions and examples for each quality, explained the purpose of the programme, and presented a comprehensive delivery plan.

By engaging with the collaborative process described above: consulting, negotiating, reflecting, evaluating and deliberating with a range of teachers and students (Frost et al., 2018), I ensured that the effectiveness of 'Lawes for Learning' was more likely. Teacher-led development projects are necessarily collaborative and thus more likely to have transformative effects on the school's professional culture (Frost et al., 2018). This was shown through the apparent impact I believe the project had on collaborators. The consultative tools used with the SIG enabled participants to engage and reflect, but also to lead by trialling strategies and spreading the values of the project. In some cases, this collaborative process appeared to result in the creation of products that became part of the programme. In other cases, collaborations resulted in increased engagement. In this sense, the project's impact resulted from cultivating moral purpose in collaborators, who then used their influence to allow it flourish (Fullan, 2001). Perhaps, at this stage, the impact of the project is more inspirational than procedural (Kotter, 1996); given that these improvements resulted from anchoring new approaches in the culture of the school by empowering colleagues to take action and consolidating gains through collaborative processes.

The final phase of the TLDW process is to transform knowledge into practice (Frost, 2013). Despite the inspirational capital the project was cultivating and despite the collaborative process, perhaps my leadership was too 'tortoise-like' (Fullan, 2001). Fullan suggests that leading change involves slow learning over time, allowing ideas to resound as part of the process of development and enabling consultations to reflect on prior developments in order to adapt, but perhaps my consultative and collaborative process dwelt on the debates around the concern rather than efficiently maximising the impact of developments. The action necessary to bring about improvements in professional practice should be 'deliberate' (Frost et al., 2018), and this adjective seems to condense this leadership quandary depending on whether the project has been led through dreaming or doing. Dreamers deliberate in that they ponder and are cautious, but doers are deliberative in that they act purposefully. The implication is that TLDW involves both. Fullan (2001) suggests that slow learning over time is more an indication of disposition than the time it takes to lead, seeing the bigger picture and being patient with collaborative processes.

The vision of this development work was to create a programme that would change minds and culture. I could have planned to push change earlier, but the final phase of the collaborative process was needed to refine the project, evaluate trials, and reconcile the opinions of stakeholders. My experience suggests that the project had greater impact because it was launched after one year dedicated to making sure the project was set up in a way that would make it effective. This suggests that we cannot underestimate the value of change through patient, organised, social learning (Fullan, 2001). When the project was finally launched, the investment placed in leading through collaboration and consultation with others ensured that it

did not take long for 'Lawes for Learning' to become an embedded and effective part of the school's provision. Although in its early stages and with further development to surely come there is a vibrancy and enthusiasm for the work that suggests it will be sustained and benefit many students.

Perhaps the appropriate analogy here is that of the hedgehog and the fox (Kahneman, 2011) rather than the hare and the tortoise (Senge, 1990; Fullan, 2001). This analogy refers to the fox as the complex thinker, appreciating the manifold factors which contribute to solving issues and the unpredictability of potential outcomes, while the hedgehog is the single-minded leader who maintains focus on the thing which is important for survival. Yet the hedgehog may fall foul of impulsivity; their actions might be rash rather than deliberate. This suggests that we lead best when we appreciate that reality emerges from the interactions of many agents and forces. There are two learning points here: firstly, that we should celebrate a process that is wary of impulsive action and explores the many factors and opinions affecting the ultimate success of a project; secondly, that a slower approach does not necessarily mean procrastination, but rather purposeful deliberation.

In this way, the legacy of the project seems much more sustainable. With my collaborators, I created an action plan for the second year of the project, which subsequently became one of the school's priorities for the coming academic year. I used existing school structures such as the SIG, LLT, and senior leader meetings to maximise influence, thereby achieving indelible leadership (Fullan, 2016), which would not be deleted, even if my leadership were to cease. 'Lawes for Learning' qualities were linked to the school's rewards system, promoted through assemblies, introduced to new students during induction week, developed through staff training opportunities and teacher-led development work projects, and evaluated through learning walks and student voice. A 'Lawes for Learning' guidebook was created to guide teachers and governors, and support materials were produced to help pastoral teams create short courses for use in tutor time. Widespread integration of the project into school structures achieved a transformation in the culture, because 'Lawes for Learning' is becoming part of the way things are done at the school (Deal & Kennedy, 1983) effecting change in cost effective ways.

Conclusion

My project is far from complete, but perhaps this makes it effective; the development work continues and leadership strengthens when it builds towards next steps rather than seeking an end point. This experience suggests that deep and coherent change is more likely to emerge from patient leadership (Fullan, 2001); successful knowledge creation results from trust in collaborative processes and effective deliberation requires reflectiveness as well as purposeful decision-making. This kind of social learning has proven significant to the project's sustained effectiveness so far. Through development work, professional knowledge became the property of social context (Frost, 2013), taking shape through the sharing of ideas and experiences in collaborative teams. Allowing others to take control of a project became a key affordance, where the project leader had created conditions for sharing. Resolving paradoxes like this proved to be challenging but essential for successful change agentry: being a dreamer, allowing reasoned procrastination to collect higher quality knowledge (Sergiovanni, 2001), but also a doer, ensuring we are active agents of change; being a learner, a leader and developing leadership in others.

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