National College for
Teaching & Leadership

Developing research clubs in teaching schools

Case study

Autumn 2014

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Research and innovation project

Building upon the well-established research work of Portswood Primary School the Portswood Teaching School alliance (PTSA) was swift to engage in the research strand of teaching schools. The aim was to promote the use of research as a way of working across the alliance.

Building upon over ten years of research at Portswood, the alliance sought to engage more schools in different ways. Research was disseminated at all opportunities such as through the School Direct (SD) programme, the newly qualified teacher (NQT) programme (which comprised over 70 NQTs), the PTSA second year teacher programme and a range of other alliance programmes and courses. As well as dissemination of current research, the alliance encouraged schools to be involved in research at different levels including practitioner enquiry. Support and guidance was given to teachers including paying supply cover costs for teachers to research relevant issues. A number of projects are published on the PTSA website. They are also used as training materials with their specialist leaders of education (SLEs) and their lead practitioners who carry out school to school support work.

The PTSA developed a research club with the aim being to effectively align all of these initiatives, sometimes through meetings with active researchers and sometimes through projects that the alliance was working on.

The approach to research projects has been at three levels:

1. large scale national projects,

2. work developed and shared across the alliance,

3. small scale action research projects.

1. Large scale national projects

The PTSA is participating in the R&D national themes project being delivered by the National College for Teaching Leadership (NCTL) as part of theme 3: 'How can leaders lead successful teaching school alliances which enable the development of consistently great pedagogy?' In this two year project the PTSA posed the question:

- How can an effective coaching culture be established across different schools within an alliance?

Project outline

The PTSA is using the development of coaching as an important lever for school improvement. The well documented successes of Portswood Primary School in using

coaching for improvements in teaching and learning have been shared across the city for a number of years. Through the national support school work the coaching model has had a significant impact upon standards in supported schools (average rise of 19% at L4 across the three main supported schools). Portswood has provided coaching training for a number of schools and in the past year the creation of coaching roles in Southampton schools has increased rapidly, particularly at assistant head level. The alliance has carried out a number of training sessions this year with requests for follow up work in schools to develop leading coaches. Increasingly these coaches are working together to share expertise. The project tracked the progress of coaching across 15 schools over two years and measured the impact of the work on Southampton schools.

Conclusions

Findings from the project include:

- a range of coaching techniques that impact upon teaching, often rapidly, are attractive to headteachers and are employed extensively with significant effect;
- a tried and tested model acted as a basis for development that was then adapted and innovated in individual settings;
- a variety of ways in which schools could engage meant schools could access coaching support in ways that suited them – training, school to school support, network group and hubs;

Although the project played a part in developing a supportive culture it benefitted from the other successful alliance initiatives that showed success and developed trust.

Fifteen schools have now been trained in coaching with assistant head posts created for coaching. The report outlines the Ofsted and local authority references to the impact of coaching on teaching in the schools as seen here:

'The programme of coaching for teachers is starting to improve the quality of teaching. One significant initiative has been the appointment of a member of staff to act as a coach, supported through the local school alliance, to make possible the professional development of other teachers. The improvement is beginning to have a positive impact.'

Ofsted, March 2012

'The culture of support has grown at a fast pace this year as a result of the deputy headteacher having a full time coaching role. He has spent a great deal of time gathering information about different coaching models and worked with the 'coaching support' network facilitated by the teaching alliance and utilised the information to design a coaching plan, based on individual needs.'

Local authority report, autumn 2013

The PTSA is also involved in the 'Closing the Gap: test and learn' project which uses randomised control trials to measure the impact of different programmes. Involving other schools in the project is seen as a way of encouraging alliance members to actively engage in national level research.

2. Work developed and shared across the alliance

A second layer of research work occurs across schools within the alliance, or is work that has begun in one school and then shared more widely across the alliance. For instance, Shirley Infant School in Southampton researched **effective maths teaching in Year 2**. The school developed a model of maths teaching with one group teacher led, one teaching assistant (TA) led and one independent with a 20 minute rotation. The model is now used as part of the NQT training programme for the alliance where teachers visit to observe teaching. The outcomes were presented to the Southampton University Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course in June 2013 and a paper is also published on the PTSA website.

Moorlands Primary School is being funded to research the formation of a post improving teacher programme (ITP) follow up programme. The school uses the programme to help their teachers develop but was conscious of not losing the momentum of the course. They are looking at providing extra non-contact time with a programme of support to ensure the successes of the original programme are embedded. Findings from this will feed into the ITP course and be shared across the alliance (See Appendix 1).

3. Small scale action research projects

The PTSA funds small scale action research projects that originate from teacher interest and school relevance. For instance, one project asked: 'How did the Year 1 phonic screening test impact upon teaching in two primary schools?' Through interviews, observations and questionnaires the impact of the screening was measured. The important teaching methods needed have been established and are now applied effectively across the school leading to significant improvement in results.

The findings were presented at professional development meetings and the teaching methods now embedded. Other current projects include:

- 'Think Pink, Brilliant Blue' – 'How can assessment for learning (AfL) be adapted to ensure effective teaching of Year 1 pupils? (See Appendix 2).

- 'How can Manga novels be used to engage reluctant Year 5 boys in writing?

To aid this process a proforma has been created that acts as both a bid for funding and a research brief format. Schools and individual teachers use the form to bid and if successful are given support and funding (See Appendix 3).

The future

As we move towards a more evidence based profession the PTSA continues to seek more ways to engage teachers in research, both through active participation as well as through dissemination.

Sustainability

Funding remains a challenge to the expansion of school-based enquiry as does the capacity to support more projects. For the first three years the PTSA ran the research club through half termly meetings but by the third year it was clear that this was demanding of time and what teacher/researchers really wanted was individual support for their projects. Meetings were therefore discontinued but research projects still flourished into the fourth year of the alliance. Outlets for dissemination continue to be on ITT courses, through their SD programme and through other programmes the PTSA delivers such as NQTs, Second Year teachers and other courses ensuring the reach across the alliance is wide. The alliance actively seeks out funding for research projects and uses this to support research across the alliance and this is the primary source for funding with schools still reluctant to commit their own budgets to research. When a school does request research support they pay for the time of the Director of Teaching and Learning for the PTSA at the alliance agreed rate but this does not generate extra income.

Links to higher education institutes (HEIs)

PTSA are establishing deeper links with their partners from Southampton University and the University of Winchester as the work moves forward. In June of each year PTSA researchers share their work with Southampton PGCE students at a research day held at the university. Teachers on the second year teacher programme have the option of taking masters credits with Winchester University and the whole programme has a 'reflective practitioner' influence with teachers developing their own area of enquiry to follow through the year. Support is also given by the alliance to teachers working on Masters with one teacher recently completing hers successfully and another progressing well. In both cases their work has been shared in alliance schools.

Developing national networks

Working with Southampton University, the PTSA is developing a framework to support practitioner research and hopes to develop a network of action research projects more widely. It is likely that closer links with HEIs will be needed in the future given this area is so vital to effective teaching and learning and that there are so many other competing teaching school initiatives.

Appendix 1: Overview of PTSA research projects

Teacher	School	Research title	Outline	Impact/ dissemination
Abi Saunders	St. Mary's Primary School Weston Park Primary School	Is there best classroom practice for supporting English as an additional language (EAL) learners in the primary classroom?	Examination of current literature and how it applies to a case study in an inner city primary school. Findings suggest the importance of limiting withdrawal time in favour of more immersion to aid language acquisition.	The paper informed provision at the school and the partner schools. The outcomes were presented to the Southampton University PGCE course in June 2013. The work will now be used for initial teacher training (ITT) opportunities. Paper published on PTSA website.
Rick Page	Shirley Infants School	How effective is a three-way rotation in Year 2 maths?	The school developed a model of maths teaching with one group being teacher led, one TA led and one independent with a 20 minute rotation.	The model is now used as part of the NQT training programme for the alliance where teachers visit to observe teaching. The outcomes were presented to the Southampton University PGCE course in June 2013. The work will now be used for ITT opportunities. Paper published on PTSA website.

Teacher	School	Research title	Outline	Impact/ dissemination
Natalie Rogers	St. Mary's Primary School	How did the Year 1 phonic screening test impact upon teaching in two primary schools?	Through interviews, observations and questionnaires, the impact of the screening was measured. The important teaching methods needed have been established and are now applied effectively across the school leading to significant improvement in results.	Findings presented at professional development meetings and teaching methods now embedded. Paper published on PTSA website.
Laura Fessey	Portswood Primary School	'Think Pink, Brilliant Blue' – how can AfL be adapted to ensure effective teaching of Year 1 pupils.	Building upon successful AfL, teaching is being innovated with the use of blue and pink highlighters to provide feedback. Work scrutiny, pupil interviews and teacher questionnaires have suggested that pupils' learning has been accelerated.	Method now being used across the infant department and in supported schools. A number of teachers from across the alliance have observed the feedback during observation visits. PTSA 2nd year teacher programme teachers are visiting for observation of technique.

Teacher	School	Research title	Outline	Impact/ dissemination
Hannah Sands	St. Mary's Primary School	How can dialogic teaching support children's development of conceptual understanding in science?	The study highlights the value of using dialogic teaching to support scientific understanding in the primary school, enhanced through a language prompt sheet. Dialogic teaching can also be used to develop higher order thinking, particularly reasoning and justification.	Findings presented at professional development meetings. Author is now a part of PTSA curriculum group advising on science in the new curriculum where findings will be applied.

Paper has been published on PTSA website. |
| Group | All | A professional development meeting (PDM) resource has been created | The PDM explains research and how it relates to teaching and gives practical examples. It then models how an enquiry project could be developed in school with more practical examples. | Meeting delivered at four schools and has led to new school-based enquiry projects including a 'developing effective guided reading task in year 2' and 'Using Manga graphic novels to engage Year 5 boys in reading'. Both of these have also now been linked to the 2nd year teacher programme in the alliance. |

Appendix 2: Research and innovation project - draft

Name: Laura Fessey   School: Portswood Primary School

Focus area for research: Feedback in Year 1

Research question: **'Does the use of 'Think Pink, Brilliant Blue' improve pupil's responses to marking and self-assessment in Year 1?'**

What data justified this research project?

Whilst pupil response is well developed in Year 1, and the marking system that utilises symbols has been effective in developing pupil response, the three-way traffic light system is at times inaccurate. With the school's aim of innovating teaching to ensure that successful strategies are built upon, the project was conceived to trial a system of feedback involving marking in blue to identify what the child had done well and pink to show the child they needed to think about their work and improve something.

What interventions were made?

The use of 'Think Pink, Brilliant Blue' involves teachers marking with blue when the child is achieving the success criteria and pink when the child needs to stop and think about what they have done in order to improve their work. The vibrancy of the luminous highlighter makes it visually clear when and where the pupil has been successful and when they need to think more about their work.

The second element is the pupils using blue and pink to self-assess their work in order to avoid the right/wrong/in between system of traffic lighting and to indicate areas that they feel they would like more practice in.

What was the baseline?

Year 1 books and progress from previous years provides a baseline particularly in one class where the outstanding teacher has two years of experience in the year group.

What data was collected?

- pupil books
- questionnaires with teachers and TAs
- semi-structured interview with teachers
- pupil interview
- tracking of pupil progress

Initial Findings

Pupils

There was evidence from the books that the pupils were responding to the marking. Pupil interviews revealed pupils understood the system and how it worked. The pupils were able to show examples of where the teacher had put a pink highlight and the pupil had then improved their work. They liked the system and said, 'It shows me what I am doing well and what I need to get better'.

While pupils displayed a positive attitude to the system for some pupils there was a feeling that pink meant 'wrong'. In this sense there was a danger of just thinking 'blue good/pink bad' and that the aim of encouraging the child to reflect was being lost. There was also the potential for the pink lowering self-esteem, much as the traditional red pen can do.

Teachers

Teachers reported that the initiative ensured their marking was more focused. The visual distinction between success and areas to develop was clear to both teacher and pupil. The teachers felt more efficient in following up their initial pink highlighting because the visual nature ensured they could quickly return to see if the pupil had responded/improved their work. The use of the term 'think' also encouraged the pupils to reflect upon their learning and linked to learner profiles in the school. When used effectively the pink highlight alerted the pupil to there being an issue but deliberately did not always show exactly what the issue was. For instance, if the child had missed a full stop putting the highlight at the end of the sentence merely showed the pupil what to do. By putting a highlight next to the sentence means the pupil had to think about what needed improving in the sentence.

Pupil progress has been outstanding over the term with the quality of writing extremely high for Year 1 autumn term.

Next steps

- Teachers to continue to emphasise pink means thinking about your work and improving it, not merely that it is wrong.
- Recommendations to the senior leadership team.
- Researcher to present findings at phase meeting.
- Year 2 to further trial methods in maths initially.
- Review April 2014.

Appendix 3: Research and innovation project – linked to second year teacher programme

Name: School:

Focus area for research:

Research question:

What data do you have to justify this research project?
What interventions will you make?
What is your baseline?
What data will you collect?
When will you review your initial findings?
What help do you require?

Appendix 3: Research and innovation project – linked to second year teacher programme

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