



Preparing schools for the future

Graham Handscomb indicates that preparing for future transformation may involve radical change now!

Keeping schools and their professional communities renewed and replenished is essentially what professional development is all about. Schools are in the business of learning. This carries with it the expectation that they will be vibrant learning institutions which seek to be dynamic and in a sense to re-create themselves for an ever changing and perhaps uncertain future.

A changing world

With the change of Government, the heralding of an era of austerity and the prospect of the most radical changes we have ever seen to how schools are established, organised and run, this feels the right time to take stock. We have the prospect of an educational landscape of Academies and “Free” Schools, the uncertainty of job and economic security, and the continuing challenge of global sustainability. Against this backdrop what are the implications for our work with young people and the professional development of staff?

So this issue of Professional Development Today is devoted to how we prepare schools for the future. Some of the contributions are taken directly from the context of actually creating new or re-developed schools through, for instance, the Building Schools for the Future and Primary Capital Programme initiatives. Although this is likely to be the experience of only a relatively small number of schools (particularly as these programmes are under threat from Government spending cuts), the insights they provide on how to develop staff and transform learning, teaching and curriculum are of great value to everyone seeking to re-energise their educational communities.

Within the pages of this issue you will also discover pieces examining the profound professional development challenge of preparing the youth of today for a sustainable future tomorrow. There are articles which explore how CPD and e-learning go hand in hand to foster critical thinking and promote deeper learning, and other contributions which look at the development of two sections of the workforce who

will be particularly significant in schools of the future – leaders and business managers.

Preparing for the future does not necessarily entail deciding which features of the present will need to be rolled forward. Instead, many of the articles argue for bold, creative action and approaches which are a radical departure from familiar professional development practice.

Preparing for an uncertain tomorrow

The opening article by Richard Gerver is concerned with how we can effectively prepare our children for their futures when they are wreathed in uncertainty. They will need to possess levels of skills and competencies that are way beyond ours and this means we need a significant shift in how we develop staff, our organisations and our profession. For Gerver we “need time to talk, to absorb and create... if creativity is to flourish”. This means fostering a culture of action research which is “fleet of foot”, staffrooms “filled with honesty and constructive conversations” and dynamic school environments which encourage the quality of learning that comes through embracing risk. He ends by providing the example of the Pixar animation company which requires its staff to go off and explore new areas of personal interest through experiences completely different to their working lives. He encourages schools to develop a similar “Pixar philosophy” which looks for “development opportunities beyond the conventional.”

Radical shift

Practitioner Joel Arda then explores the potential of e-learning to enrich both classroom learning and CPD. He strikes a cautionary note about new technologies being seen as a panacea for the future. Instead he sees learning at the heart of technology which can help staff take further responsibility for their professional development needs.

Paul Clarke challenges the very notion of focussing on an idealised transformed future, but rather calls for resolute action now. He questions the whole premise of what he sees as an education based on producing generations of better consumers which will bring about

“ecological genocide”. He fulminates against a society which lionises the industrial ethic and “corrodes the character of individuals.” Similar to Gerver, Clarke calls for a new professional development which generates space to learn, a quality of attentive listening and opportunities for contemplation and retreat which are seen as core learning entitlements.

Jane Reed also sounds a clarion cry for a move from an industrial mindset to a more ecological and sustainable world, and sees sustainable schools as leading the way. The change that is needed is “essentially a question of learning, unlearning and re-learning” with educational professionals being “the direct representatives of tomorrow’s generation.” She concludes by providing questions about what kind of professional learning “will connect people to the importance of a sustainable world for their lives and the future.”

How to transform your school!

The HOW TO section has contributions from the Essex local authority team that is dedicated to developing schools for the future. Abigail Williams describes how they have developed school ICT Change Champions to transform both local education policy and school practice. Through the innovative work of these change champions schools have put in place processes to bring about fundamental and sustained change in teaching and learning.

Alison Gold and Lorraine Laudrum give an account of how they recently came from their own schools to work with others on a transformation programme they have developed. This involved intensive work on visioning, parent and pupil voice sessions and change management. Readers are given a range of valuable tools to be used with their own schools and communities. Above all we are given clear, practical guidance on how to challenge staff to think more radically about the organisation of learning in terms of space.

Joined-up transition

Next, Jane Jones reflects on how cross-phase transition between primary and secondary schools has been a



contentious problem for 50 years. In a year long research project involving 20 language teachers across both phases she aimed to bring about some improved practice for the future. The research focussed on reciprocal visits, exploring perceptions and facilitating joint working. The outcomes included increased common understanding and creating a sustainable programme of teacher learning and development, drawing heavily on peer training.

Future leaders and managers

The reference section begins with an interview with Heath Monk, founder of the Future Leaders programme. It is a forthright and provocative conversation. Monk for instance considers that “whereas school has tended to be about perpetuating traditions of learning, education is really more fundamentally about preparing young people for what comes next.” In tune with the times he calls for more developments like Academies, commenting that “out of what is likely to be a certain amount of creative chaos, some will emerge that will be exceptional.” On Future Leaders he says this competency-based framework searches out the types of things that people are good at,

need to equip themselves with the appropriate development. This starts within the school itself, gaining a deeper understanding of educational issues, together with a wide range of professional programmes provided by the National College and a number of higher education institutions.

The final contributions include first a report on one of the TDA’s regional conferences. Peter Earley reflects on a range of conference contributions, including a joined-up approach to drive forward a coherent national strategy for professional development. This is followed by my review of the recent book by Peter Earley and Vivienne Porritt on effective practices in CPD. In all the clamour of the current debate about new forms of school organisation this publication reminds us that re-modelling and reforming the school estate will count as naught unless we also invest in developing and transforming staff. In these cash stricken times this is a timely message for all school leaders and managers to resist making CPD the easy target of budget cuts and austerity savings.

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and helps them to effect and manage change. In appointing leaders the focus is on “not what someone did last year, but what they could do next year and in the next five years.”

Monk talks about fostering a culture in which the leaders of tomorrow can grow and develop and this is shared by Nikii Messer in her piece on developing School Business Managers. She sees SBMs as increasingly taking on the challenges of professional leadership and considers how they