

Factors Influencing the Transfer of Good Practice

Michael Fielding (US),
Sara Bragg (US), John Craig (D),
Ian Cunningham (US), Michael Eraut (US),
Sarah Gillinson (D), Matthew Horne (D),
Carol Robinson (US) and Jo Thorp (US)

University of Sussex & Demos

Research Report
No 615

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ISBN 1 84478 393 6

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Section 1 INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

Policy makers, academics and practitioners tend to agree that spreading good practice from one school to another is important in improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school system. However, they tend to bring to this issue a range of purposes and views. For policy makers, the fundamental challenge is to scale up good work. Often this is about spreading practice that has been pump-primed to areas where it is not funded, without losing the dynamism or authenticity of the original. Indeed, successive government initiatives have assumed that good practice can be identified and transferred, while some more recent initiatives have been designed with a more explicit transfer purpose. Meanwhile, many academics involved in developing and researching ‘good practice’ have a greater sensitivity to the complex variables involved in its transfer to other cultures and contexts.

In the research we discuss below, those practitioners to whom we talked generally welcomed the principle of ‘sharing good practice’ between schools. They often had a strong sense that approaches to teaching and learning that have been developed by and with other practising teachers were to be trusted, that they were more realistic and grounded in professional skills and knowledge than programmes that are prescribed centrally. They were keen to stress that most teachers welcome learning from others where this is constructive and helpful. They used terms like ‘thawing’, ‘glasnost’ and ‘the end of the Cold War’ to describe the current policy context. For many, de-emphasising competition and enabling collaboration between schools marks a return to the key values of education, although for many others it has still not progressed far enough.

Nonetheless, a significant number of practitioners also remarked that collaboration was in its early stages, particularly in relation to secondary-to-secondary work. This poses some obvious difficulties of evaluation, in part because we were not assessing processes that have matured and developed. In addition, its relative newness led to particular excitement and energy being invested in initiatives, which in turn may partly account for their success. It remains to be seen whether impressive achievements can be maintained when this aura rubs off and such work becomes routinised and commonplace. Meanwhile many more experienced practitioners remarked that a range of collaborative work had been a relatively typical feature of their work prior to 1988. There was considerable criticism of the short ‘historical memory’ of policy makers in this respect.

Practitioners also expressed a number of important caveats. Some felt that collaboration was simply a latest policy trend or ‘flavour’, to which they were accordingly obliged to subscribe; even those who endorsed it also admitted that its actual benefits had yet to be proved, that it was a *‘triumph of hope over experience’*. Many noted its difficulties and time-consuming nature, that it would not happen spontaneously but involved skills that had to be developed and learnt, especially in areas where competition had been particularly intense, and that this had concomitant implications for the resources it

required. Finally, although our research participants were usually enthusiastic about sharing practice, they also reported cases of resistance, often from heads. Whether or how such schools should be brought into these processes remains an important issue.

Thus, spreading good practice remains very difficult. It seems that policy makers lack the formal knowledge about how to spread good practice while too few practitioners actually know how to do ‘practice transfer’ effectively. Why is it so hard to achieve? What are the major barriers and disincentives? And how can the evidence from research about effective adult learning be more securely woven into professional practice and decision-making?

1.2 Methodology

Our original aims were ‘to study and report on the factors facilitating or constraining the transfer of good practice between schools at school or individual level. This includes both classroom practices and management or organizational practices’. Our objectives were: to understand more fully the challenges of the transfer of good practice from the standpoint of the *receiver*: to understand more fully the *nature of practice* and its reception: and to understand better the challenges for the *originating* institution offering to transfer some of its good practice. ⁽¹⁾

To meet these aims and objectives we have conducted in-depth qualitative research (combining school visits and telephone interviews) with some of the practitioners who have tried to transfer good practice within current government programmes. In sum, we have gathered data from over 120 practitioners. Our research design fell into a number of categories: institutions (schools), clusters, individual practitioners, and brokers.

We carried out research with 10 Beacon and Leading Edge Partnership schools and 17 schools with which they had worked (the original brief specified 15), mainly in the summer of 2003, during the early stages of the first round of the Leading Edge Partnership Programme. We visited and interviewed two Specialist Schools and four of their partner schools, as specified (in addition, two Leading Edge Partnership schools were also Specialist Schools). We also contacted 9 schools that had ‘abandoned’ or discontinued transfer work.

We researched three clusters of schools within the Excellence in Cities or EAZ programmes, in Liverpool, Manchester and London, as specified in the brief. It was more difficult to collect data from clusters of schools in challenging circumstances (the original brief specified two). Some clusters were the subject of other research and it was felt inappropriate to approach them; in several other cases, we were advised by relevant gatekeepers that such schools did not have the capacity to host research visits. We therefore interviewed a number of heads from schools in challenging circumstances, and tried as far as possible to ensure that we addressed this issue in other areas, such as the excellence clusters. We researched two virtual Education Action Zones, in one case drawing on research previously conducted by Demos.

(1) In our text we refer to ‘originators’ and ‘partner’ (rather than ‘receiver’) schools and teachers. See p. 13 of this Report for a more extended discussion of these matters

In relation to individual practitioners, we interviewed 13 ASTs in the course of the research, three of whom were based in the Beacon schools and excellence clusters. The original brief specified eight. We were able to interview only 10 partners who had worked with ASTs instead of the 14 specified: to compensate, we also interviewed two practitioners who had worked with Best Practice Research Scholars. In relation to BPRS, we originally intended to interview four, but had such a positive response to our inquiries that we eventually interviewed twelve. Twelve heads were interviewed specifically for this phase of the research, but in total, a further 24 were interviewed through the course of the research. The original brief specified 18. We undertook to research up to ten ‘brokers’ but in fact talked to 13, some of whom we encountered during other phases of the research such as the EiC work.

We undertook two in-depth case studies through which we explored in greater detail questions about teachers’ practice and the ‘partner’s’ perspective.

In addition, we collected data from schools that had participated in the ‘Leading Aspect’ programme. The DFES put us in touch with the Leading Aspect team, who sent out a letter on our behalf and 11 schools contacted us by email, letter or phone as a result. Whilst not in the original proposal, this data extended our contact with practitioners and was used partly to enable us to reflect on the issues around accrediting ‘good practice’.

During the course of our research we also held two invitation seminars on 30th June, 2003 and 23rd April, 2004 with colleagues operating at a national level in areas of work including or allied to practice transfer. These events were designed to raise key issues emerging from our research and give us a feel for whether or not they resonated with participants’ perceptions of current work in the field.

1.3 Methodological cautions

We encountered a number of challenges in the process of research, which have implications both for our findings and for policy in this area. For instance, a number of schools refused or ignored our requests to be involved in the research, particularly those in urban areas of high social deprivation. As mentioned above, we were also cautioned against approaching schools in challenging circumstances, which were seen as struggling and overloaded. Our data thus tends to favour schools in more advantageous circumstances. If, as we suspect, there is a tendency for the beneficiaries of policy to be the ones best placed to willingly welcome external evaluation and research interest we need to be aware of dangers of the development of an unintended, self-perpetuating orthodoxy.

In many cases, lead schools within networks acted as ‘gatekeepers’ to others. As a result, it was hard to obtain partner viewpoints, particularly where partnerships may have failed or run into difficulties. Similarly, within schools, we tended to spend more time with senior managers than with classroom teachers. Whilst we valued their time and generosity, the ‘official’ perspectives of senior staff often differed from those of the classroom teachers at whom much policy is ultimately aimed. Despite our efforts, the views of ‘ordinary’ classroom practitioners are under-represented here.

Several schools would not allow us access to teachers unless we could provide cover for the lessons they would miss if they did so. Those schools that seemed to have more ‘slack’ in their system to release staff unsurprisingly turned out to be the better funded, ‘successful’ schools. To rely on schools being able, in effect, to self-fund their involvement in research may mean that findings will tend to be based on a relatively narrow range of schools.

Our report relies heavily on accounts rather than observations of teaching and practice sharing. Such accounts are problematic as a basis for claims about practice transfer for a number of reasons. In the first place they are often subject to idealisation and simplification about process and impact, as was evident in those cases where we were able to contrast versions given by ‘originators’ and ‘receivers’. Moreover, large parts of what teachers do are not accessible through discourse, but will always remain tacit. Even where practitioners are able to articulate aspects of their expertise, the relationship between language and practice is complex. Observation was to be the main research tool that could give us access to different representations of practice, yet it proved difficult to observe lessons as originally intended. Some staff, particularly in partner schools, appeared unused to being observed and to interpret our requests as a desire to judge and assess their work. Moreover, our research schedule gave us little time to develop the kinds of trusting relationships that might have made staff more open and confident in their dealings with us.

1.4 Overview

This research into ‘Factors influencing the Transfer of Good Practice’ is centrally about how teachers learn from each other in ways that affect the daily practice of their work. Our report is divided into five main sections. Following our **Introduction & Overview**, our second section - **Teachers Learning With & From Each Other Over Time** - underscores four elements of practice transfer that seem to us to have special significance. These are, firstly and most importantly, that this kind of teacher learning is a social process that is sustained by *relationships and trust*; secondly, that it is a personal and inter-personal process that has to engage with our sense of who we are, with *teacher and institutional identity*; thirdly, that it requires conditions that provide support for *learner engagement* fostering the willingness to try something out; and, lastly, that the work of transfer has to be sustained over time. It is not a quick fix. It requires a more sophisticated and more patient *understanding of time* than is customarily acknowledged or allowed.

Section 3 Enabling Transfer attends to the prominent practicalities of transfer. *The work of transfer* offers an illustrative framework for understanding the different sorts of activity that teachers engage in under the aegis of practice transfer. *Structures and transfer* identifies four key components in the organisational architecture of collaborative work and the subsequent *People and transfer (1)* and *People and transfer (2)* consider the role of headteachers and other staff in developing and supporting collaborative learning within and between schools and the role of external brokers and networks in that process.

Section 4 The Challenge of Good Practice pays particular attention to what is meant by a professional practice and to the sometimes problematic issue of *What is 'good practice'?* Considering what respondents told us and what relevant research literature has to say about these matters inevitably raised the question *How do we know if 'good practice' is good?* Likewise it also seemed important to address *The challenge of evaluation*, to ask questions about whether practice transfer actually leads to the kind of positives outcomes and capacities its advocates hope for. We then round off this section of our report by briefly picking up on what seemed to us a significant issue to do with encouraging good practice and asking the question Should 'good practice' be accredited?

Our final **Section 5 Research Findings and Recommendations** offers nineteen recommendations arising from our research. We target these at three different audiences:

- School Practitioners
- Local government, other enabling organisations and networks
- Central government policy makers & agencies

The recommendations themselves are grounded in five key areas and include important foci for future research as well as immediate action points. The first of these areas is the central notion of

- Joint practice development

The other four, which provide important touchstones for the successful realisation of joint practice development, are

- Relationships
 - Institutional and teacher identity
 - Learner engagement
- and
- Understanding time

Lastly, **Appendix 1** contains the shortened version of our **Initial Literature Review**. This early document, now inevitably incomplete, served as an orienting device for the conceptual basis of our work and contributed significantly to the emergence of our research design. On the advice of our DfES research project Steering Group it is offered in that spirit and in the hope that readers may find something in it which invites deeper engagement with a literature that continues to grow apace in a number of allied fields.

Section 2

TEACHERS LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER OVER TIME

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2.1 Relationships & trust

Rationalistic models of practice transfer assume that practice content is the main driver of relationships and thus of transfer. However, it needs to be put alongside the responses of our research participants who repeatedly referred to the social, personal and interpersonal dimension of collaboration: *'It's essential that the personal relationships are right'*. A 'relationships model' for practice transfer, where relationships are acknowledged to be the primary encounter from which choices about activity emerge, may be at least as relevant as a content-driven model. If who you collaborate with and how you do it matters as much, if not more, than what you collaborate on, this has important implications for policy.

Relationships have several dimensions:

2.11 Prior relationships

Long-term, prior, relationships were seen by many participants to be enabling. Many examples arose where practice transfer was seen to have been successful because it drew on existing relationships: *'Cold calling doesn't work very well. You need to invest time to develop partnerships. It's about personal contact and time. You need to grow a relationship'* (Deputy Head)

These prior relationships covered a huge range of interconnections and continuities that include individual contacts such as governors, parents, friends, family (husbands / wives / partners / daughters / sons); previous schools where teachers had been colleagues; school clusters; primary / secondary transfer arrangements; subject associations; headteacher associations operating at local and national level; Higher Education links, either through Initial Teacher Education or through broader professional engagement; LEA links, sometimes through support arrangements for NQTs; diocesan links; previous or over-lapping networks and what one respondent described as 'circles in circles'.

A number of factors seem to have been important in making these prior relationships fruitful. Sometimes it had to do with individual personality (e.g. vibrancy, openness, 'a really nice guy' / person), but more often it had to do with professional reputation. Sometimes it had to do with shared values and beliefs (e.g. a similar philosophy about education and of children's importance within it) and sometimes to do with educational and professional solidarity. An interesting example of the latter involved the head of one school contacting the head of another, which had been temporarily put in special measures, to express his disagreement with the judgement and offer support. The partner head appreciated this professional solidarity, contrasting it favourably with another school that only made contact when it needed his school's name on a funding bid. It laid the groundwork for partnership work even though nothing formally began until some time after that.

Whilst the nature of these prior relationships clearly differs in many important respects, what remains constant is their generic capacity to motivate, energise and,

most importantly of all, provide the basis of trust on which the development of subsequent learning and professional exchange is founded.

Some argued that more mature forms of collaborative relationships enable much more creative and profound forms of learning than more fleeting or more superficial encounters. Teachers and particularly headteachers suggested that they were able to take bold or risky decisions when supported by 'friends'. Thus, a senior manager in one of a group of schools that had developed a significant partnership over a number of years felt their work was productive and more challenging *'because we've worked together for three or four years. Now we are in a much more powerful position to say when we don't like what the other schools are saying.'*

In the view of another respondent, the give and take of any successful collaboration rested on the fact that *'You can say what you feel and that is the important thing. This stems out of the group knowing one another and having the ability to compromise and work through problems.'* Such relationships also helped to 'reflect back' what they had learnt, where otherwise it might have been lost. They acted as sounding boards and guardians of how far they had come.

However, there are also some limitations. Long term relationships between schools are subject to breaking up and falling out. They could turn into long term hostilities, as had been the case for example with a number of schools that had adopted GMS: years later, some local schools still refused to cooperate with them. The optimistic corollary of this is that, conversely, relationships that begin negatively or with scepticism can also be turned around and become more positive in time.

It is also possible that such long-term relationships can become less, rather than more, challenging. Practitioners can develop common understandings that are less permeable to critical insights, all the more so because they are shared. One confident Leading Edge Partnership school directed us to a partner school in a neighbouring borough, acknowledging that close-knit LEAs can induce complacency: teachers in the partner school did indeed have a rather different perspective on the first school, although it is questionable how openly they would have communicated this to it. However, encouraging sharing across established communities may help gain fresh perspectives on ways of working.

Whilst the significance of prior relationships does not suggest that establishing new partnerships is doomed to failure, it does indicate that that it will not necessarily be successful simply because collaboration is seen as a good thing to do, and that such arrangements require considerable investment of time, resources and commitment. Those who had been involved in establishing new partnerships had often started from key principles:

'Seven schools sat at a table and declared openness, frankness and honesty as part of their policies, which I feel is crucial, and we've stuck to that, nobody has breached that.' (Headteacher)

They also suggested that doing so successfully usually required: ‘quick wins’, that is, joint endeavours that had fairly immediate results; gestures of goodwill to establish positive and trusting relationships (in many cases, originator schools had the power to offer concrete gifts in the form of money for resources or cover); and meaningful activities:

‘What it’s all about is making your initial collaboration meaningful. It has to be about something that matters to those parties involved. If that works, the effect that you get from that, from that practical experience of collaboration, is the trust. You can then build on that and it develops a momentum of its own.’ (EAZ Director)

2.12 Trusting relationships

Many research participants saw trust as crucial within relationships. Practice transfer potentially puts schools in a precarious opposition: teaching is the lifeblood of a school. If teaching is subjected to heavy criticism, or if practice is ‘poached’ without being reciprocated, the process may undermine rather than improve a school’s position. Trust is therefore necessary for schools to begin collaboration.

Again, trust has several dimensions. For instance, for partner teachers it may be important that an originator is non-threatening, ‘on their side’, and can be trusted to maintain confidentiality. This is linked in turn to questions of who has control of the process, and how admission of weaknesses will be interpreted.

Trust can involve both parties feeling that the process is being taken seriously and that the efforts being made are understood and appreciated. In a number of examples, partners clearly had little investment in a collaborative process, in one case treating occasions when other teachers visited their school to demonstrate lessons as ‘time off’, which led to distrust of the process by originators.

Research participants frequently spoke of the corrosive effects of competition between schools in destroying trust. This was a particular issue where schools were competing for students in the same locality. This might explain, for instance, why there were so many more prominent examples of secondary-primary than secondary-secondary collaboration, and why Specialist Schools appeared to collaborate relatively little with schools in their direct locality and instead worked with other Specialist Schools, often across LEA or catchment area borders.⁽²⁾

However it could also involve competition for ‘recognition’. Very few of those we talked to were hoping to commercialise their practices, instead sharing them for motives other than profit: most would probably agree with the head who argued that good practice ‘*is much better if it is adapted and then given back to you. You get better at your practice because you have to share it, **and** then you get something back*’. Nonetheless, some took part in what might be seen as a government-sponsored market, where developing ‘good practice’ could bring rewards in the form of public

(2) See: D. Penny (2004), ‘Policy Tensions being played out in practice: the Specialist Schools initiative in England’ *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 2 (1)

acknowledgement, status, and invitations on to the ‘conference circuit’, for example. In these cases, schools often demanded that they were acknowledged as originators of particular practices. However, as word spread and other schools adopted them it often became difficult to maintain control of this process and in some cases this risked damaging relationships, trust, or at least, egos.

Some participants suggested that trust could be more easily established in contexts where competition was not an issue, and advocated partnerships at geographical distance. However, we came across few examples where such partnerships were maintained successfully over time. They were resource-heavy, in that those involved generally felt a need to meet face to face at some stages: but this tended to limit the number of individuals who could be spared from a school, and, because the experiences of collaboration could not therefore be widely shared, to limit the impact of the partnership. Technological solutions such as video conferencing were generally admitted to have limited success, being more useful for short administrative meetings than more creative practice-sharing ones where details of body language and expression were all-important. Often successful long-distance collaboration relied on prior relationships, for instance, where individuals had worked together at one time and then moved away.

2.13 Relationships and tacit knowledge

We were frequently told that prior relationships were seen as effective because participants did not have to spend a long time ‘getting to know’ one another. This may be important in terms of the challenge of tacit knowledge in professional learning, as discussed in our Initial Literature Review. Much of what is important and rich in professional knowledge and practice lies beneath the surface of professional awareness and is very hard to access. This may account for why the products of a lengthy and thoughtful process of practice development, such as teaching packs or schemes of work, sometimes appear thin and even meaningless when presented to outsiders who have not been party to the tacit understandings underlying them. However, working within a context of relationships may enable partners to get a feel for what the originator does and takes for granted in the originator context. The partner is then better able to make judgements about what seems promising and how they might engage in similar work in the different context of their own school.

Without such relationships, it may be far harder for teachers to understand where each other is ‘coming from’ and knowledge of the nuances of school cultures needs to be grown at the start of the partnership. Thus, one assistant head of an originator school, whose partnership with another, equally successful, school was eventually abandoned, suggested retrospectively that far more time needed to have been spent on coming to understand the unspoken assumptions underlying how each of them worked. One apparently small example was whether teachers expected students to work on topics in their own time, at home, and to draw on their own resources. The fact that the partner school could rely on students to do this, but the originator school could not, revealed a great deal about the different cultural and material capital of their students, which was not immediately evident when they began working together. She argued that they would have needed to invest time in ‘scaffolding’ and staging the work, with small-scale piloting of approaches first such as observing lessons, talking for longer,

sharing ideas, so that they had a working relationship and ethos within the team that was 'safe'. Even just seeing each others' schools, how classrooms were set up and groupings physically organised, was necessary to make conversations real and to understand what might on the surface have seemed to be minor differences, yet which proved fundamental to their existing approaches.

2.14 It matters who it is: 'The person connection is significant'

'If you think about practice that has really affected you, it's most likely going to be a particular practitioner – doing something definitely, but they are going to be inspiring in themselves ... The person connection is significant ... There is a lot of emphasis on finding resources and strategy and stuff, and you do need definite things to do and definite ways of working, but at the same time, you need people that are convincing in talking about it.' (BPRS teacher.)

Teachers, our research participants repeatedly reminded us, are 'people people'. That is, more than many other kinds of professional, their working lives are deeply bound up with forming relationships, and their satisfaction and success crucially depend on how they do so. This may partly account for the importance many accorded to the 'person connection' in practice transfer. Practices express a person's being, who they are professionally and sometimes personally, and teachers respond strongly to this encounter with people, not just with ideas or interesting practices. Thus, an experienced broker, who works in both commercial and educational circles, reflected that

'The one thing that blinds (people involved in this kind of work) is this feeling that knowledge can only be transferred by people writing papers or people putting it up on the internet and they almost forget the spoken word. Yet I think the spoken word is the most powerful from what I've seen, because that's where you get the real, the people power.'

a point echoed by an assistant head involved in one of the two virtual EAZs we researched who felt that *'the face to face bit, drawing people together is key.'*

What the importance of relationships and trust reminds us of is the particularity of educational realities. Policies encouraging collaboration and the extensive local and national arrangements that invite us to learn with and from others are necessarily couched in terms that potentially apply to any teacher anywhere in England. Once we start to make those aspirations real we move from the abstract and the general to the felt realities of particular people relating to each other in particular situations. The development of certain kinds of relationships and the centrality of trust in the furtherance of professional learning thus has a pre-eminent place in our research findings and in the policy recommendations we offer at the end of this report.

2.2 Teacher and institutional identity in practice transfer

The question of teacher identity, of how teachers see themselves and others in the practice transfer process and the narratives they construct about themselves, turns out to be hugely influential in their approach to collaborative professional learning.

In this section we use the terms ‘originator’ and ‘partner’ to refer to those who share their practice and those who ‘receive’ it, respectively. We would not wish to suggest that this process is always linear or unidirectional. Whilst, despite the intentions of the individuals most concerned, some current processes and structures for developing practice transfer position teachers and schools as originators or receivers of good practice we also came across examples where groups were working to construct more mutual forms of collaboration. Nonetheless, we use the terms ‘originator’ and ‘partner’ here to discuss the identity factors that seem to affect individuals’ willingness to get involved in sharing their practice, or their reluctance to do so. As will be seen, individuals’ accounts of their work are often contradictory to the point of being mutually exclusive, and also often reveal a rather different sense of teacher identity than that which is the ‘ideal subject’ of policy.

2.21 Originators’ sense of self

Schools that felt confident to share their practice in many cases explained this with reference to the ‘hard facts’ of performance table success, positive OfSTED reports and badging in the form of Beacon status. Similarly ASTs often referred to comments made about their work in OfSTED reports and to pupils’ achievements in external exams such as key stage tests and GCSEs, to validate their expertise. This may have been a consequence of the requirement to reify their practice in order to ‘transfer’ it. Many times, interviewees recounted their attainment data in some detail, as if A*-C pass rates in different years were inscribed in their institutional and individual memory:

It is an ‘improving’ school going from 70% to 85% in its SATS scores. (BPRS asked to describe her school)

The first year I came here, the school was in special measures, then we had an OfSTED and we did very well in the department...then in our next OfSTED, we did even better. (AST)

Now that we have over 80% A to Cs we’re thinking more about the other 20%... (Deputy Head of a Leading Edge Partnership School)

Relatively ‘raw’ data legitimated an institutional or individual sense of entitlement to ‘transfer’ good practice. In at least one case, a school that had achieved Beacon status then offered itself as an all-purpose adviser who could respond to *any* aspects of other school’s concerns, implying its expertise was total.

Such data also seemed to authorise a causal narrative, in which it was assumed that it was good practices that had led to the good results. This was the case even though respondents often simultaneously acknowledged that OfSTED requires them to play a game, in terms of self-presentation and, as one respondent put it, *‘preparing very*

thoroughly for SATs’, and that a good OfSTED report was not synonymous with good education. They also recognised that other factors than ‘good practice’ in teaching could be at play in helping schools to achieve high measurable attainment results. These might include the socio-economic profile of student intake, or being a selective school, but might also have been the achievement of a general ‘ethos’ in the school that helped individual practices to take hold and flourish successfully. Nonetheless, the dominant account from originator schools sat very comfortably with the causal narrative and seemed to give a secure and confident identity to the individual staff within them.

Some respondents expressed considerable frustration with this mode of identifying good practice. In the words of one LEA broker:

‘We got fed up with the export of crap from Beacon schools ... Because an English Department gets 75% A - Cs that doesn’t mean to say that what they’re doing is particularly interesting or it’s transferable. Indeed, it could actually be rather boring’.*

Some government initiatives such as the Leading Edge Partnership Programme have recently tried to move away from this model, for instance by drawing more on ‘value-added’ data in identifying schools with something to offer and by emphasising the overarching importance of the moral imperative of doing the best we can for all young people. We would expect this to reduce some of the scepticism, but it came too late for our research programme to assess its effect on the identity of teachers within those schools.

Many originating practitioners depicted themselves as being motivated by a desire to go beyond what they saw as the narrowness of the National Curriculum, particularly to inject more creative, child-centred elements into it. Thus, despite what seemed to be a felt need to justify their involvement in practice transfer with reference to results, their identities were not wholly bound up in such discourses. Similarly, some teachers represented themselves as involved in practice transfer from a deep commitment to particular principles, an ethical motivation which went beyond narrowly defined ‘results’. This was marked in relation to those involved in Special Schools or SEN generally, where practitioners often expressed a version the view that *‘improving schools for kids with special needs will improve them for everyone’*.

Some teachers’ impetus to share practice came from being identified with particular educational ‘movements’, such as Thinking Skills, Learning Styles, ALPS, Brain Gym, Emotional Intelligence and so on. Here, confidence was sometimes created by an association with what were perceived to be already established sets of practices, often endorsed by LEAs through their investment in training packages, and by a wider public.

BPRS teachers were slightly less likely to refer to external judgements; the research process required them to explore an area in some depth rather than to prove their credentials and expertise to others. It seemed that the BPRS work contained within it the potential for provoking a reflective, sometimes highly self-critical, mode of professionalism. Again, this was bolstered by being part of an academic ‘community’ that allowed them to think in particular ways.

Some practitioners were deeply uncomfortable about being placed in the position of being seen as a 'better' teacher than their colleagues. Several stated explicitly that they would not claim that their practice could be 'transferred' at all, simply that they made it available for others to find out about. In other cases they tended to refer closely to the area in which they specialised, rather than to compare themselves to other teachers.

Prior to being asked to be an AST I would probably have said that I was ethically opposed to the idea of saying somebody's an advanced skills teacher, it's a pejorative term, a 'super-teacher'. I don't like that label. I think that there are lots of teachers doing a very good job and recognising a small minority within that is a little bit elitist and I'm not very keen on that... I decided in the end it was just like applying for a deputy headship or something like that. (AST)

Some managers speaking for their school similarly emphasised how keen they were to learn from other schools, or focused on the specific expertise held by some teachers at the school, rather than making overall comparisons between schools. In many cases they argued that their achievement was to do better than other schools that had a student intake of the same socio-economic profile. (Interestingly, their partners rarely agreed with this diagnosis, frequently remarking that the originator school's students were much 'easier' or 'nicer' than theirs). As we note below in relation to partners, speaking from a position of strength often allowed these originators to be particularly modest and to identify areas of weakness: they did not need to be defensive.

Both partner schools and originator schools experienced continuous processes of change (through changes in personnel and leadership, external evaluation of the school, or strategies for school improvement). However, it seemed that the most confident originating schools often had significant continuities of staff, especially those senior ones who could 'hold' in place the narrative of the school's history and values.

2.22 Partners' sense of self

In the case of partners, certain identities seemed to enable a willingness to learn. One was where they were acting from a similar position of strength and confidence as were the originators: they were clear that while they were involved in partnership to allow professional development, they did not consider themselves deficient in relation to originator schools. For instance, a Head of Department was able to emphasise the strengths of his school:

People always say, 'oh we're trying to build a positive ethos in the school', but I genuinely think we've got it here. The students want to be here, they want to do well, and they do do well, on the whole. I've been into schools, especially locally, where there's this negativity, not just from the students, but from the staff actually, it's just not here. (HoD, partner school)

It was undoubtedly significant that this school was badged (as a Specialist School) and also newly-built: the teacher had ample support in developing a positive self-identity. In this instance the partnership work was an equal exchange, perhaps fostered by a strong informal relationship between the two individuals involved, and the shifting power relations between them that undermined a sense of fixed hierarchy (the Beacon HoD who worked with the partner HoD had originally done his ITT in the partner school department). The partner teacher involved here described himself

as something of a 'tetchy consumer' when it came to professional development, and spoke warmly of the advantages of Beacon partnership work in these terms:

The one to one basis that I get is fantastic – every need that I have is met personally on a one to one... it is tailored to what I need to know. In efficiency of time it's fantastic ... and I am in control of the process, I tell him before what I need to have covered and he will prepare it in advance.

The version of teacher identity constructed here might be termed 'entrepreneurial', in its confidence, assertiveness, stress on autonomy and control. It also seems to be the 'ideal subject' of much current CPD policy, which is based on this figure of the self-directed professional who both knows what they want and is prepared actively to seek it out.

However, the extent to which this figure actually exists is open to question. Whilst many teachers we spoke to did welcome collaboration and learning from peers, their identities have been constructed very differently, in ways that have implications for the ease with which they might access such sources of support. For instance, during a visit to a rather downbeat primary school to talk to an AST partner in the staff room, other teachers, overhearing the discussion, began to comment informally on how much they loved seeing what other schools were doing. One described how she would visit other schools in the holidays and 'peer through their windows' to try to glean ideas, joking about how this might seem an illicit and suspect activity. This evocative scenario speaks volumes, not only about teachers' lack of a sense of entitlement to peer support, their isolation from other schools, and the absence of formal channels to facilitate better communication, but also about a teacher identity that has been constructed to be diffident and unassuming (both history and gender ideologies playing a role in this). Another BPRS described work in which she had supported some extremely anxious and unconfident teachers, one of whom had contacted her every other day to seek advice and reassurance. Such identities must be reckoned with if new policies are to take hold successfully.

Teachers and senior staff in partner schools were often excessively self-deprecating about their achievements. For instance, one originator school introduced a partner school HoD by emphasising that they hoped to learn from him about how he had achieved his relatively high results. The HoD concerned, however, brushed aside this suggestion and talked only in terms of wanting to learn from the originator school, as if he assumed that they must know better. A further irony was that his school in fact had higher value-added scores than the originator.

Similarly, in cases where ASTs in secondary schools worked with primary schools to develop particular areas such as Key Stage 2 MFL or sports provision, the primary partner teachers communicated that they saw the secondary ASTs as 'experts' in the subject, whilst they were 'beginners' who knew very little and were very grateful for help. In some cases there may have been a gendered dimension to these perceptions, specific to primary-secondary identities, although in another instance, where an AST worked in a primary school and his partners in a secondary, the partners' perception of themselves as 'beginners' and ASTs as 'experts' remained. However, it appeared that admitting 'deficiencies' in the case of primary partners of secondary originators was less painful, because it did not imply inadequacy on the part of the partner, simply that they lacked particular resources and specific expertise.

Interviewees from partner schools often gave rather different accounts of their identities and experiences. Whilst external judgements such as results played a part, they also referred to a much greater extent to the type of students within their catchments. Here, for example, a head teacher associates herself with students from deprived backgrounds, and students with special educational needs.

'Our A-C grades have not always been stunning, far from it. And three years ago we were identified as a school in challenging circumstances. We had a head who ultimately resigned on ill health. I had been deputy in the school for ten years and had been supporting the school through a very difficult time. Not only do we have children who were fairly challenging, from deprived homes, and it is a deprived area, we had low morale amongst the school. We had a very poor perception of the school in the locality, a high proportion of free school meals, a high proportion of students with special needs. Because we're a small school and a very caring school we became the school of choice for parents of children with special needs... So really that's the scenario we came from.' (Head teacher, partner school)

Whether these statements are seen as a case of special pleading or as an account of the genuine difficulties facing particular schools depends partly on the perception and affiliations of the reader. Those who rest more securely on socially accepted forms of evidence do not have to justify themselves in quite the same way. One should ask what sources of a positive self-identity are available to staff within schools in more difficult circumstances.

2.23 Hierarchies and resentments

The competition era did a lot to stultify opportunity for collaborative approaches. It polarised the staff through polarising schools. (Deputy Head, Beacon school)

The identities and narratives of the self that we describe above are not specific to practice transfer activities; they have a wider application and a longer history. How institutional identities rub off on and shape the identities of individuals within them has to do partly with the legacy of the English class system – the notion that those who teach 'better' students are therefore 'better' teachers and indeed people. But it is also possible to argue that the consequence of 'badging' schools (e.g. as Beacon, successful, failing, and so on) and articulating a particular perspective in ways that present starkly contrasting notions of public worth (e.g. 'The best leading the rest') within the wider framework of a competitive education market place is highly significant.

That such hierarchies are real and persistent was evident from a number of examples, of which we give a few here. A teacher in a partner school reflected that

'Right from the start it was discussed in terms of the Beacon thing being a two-way programme. It wasn't we go there and worship the Beacon.... (But) one of the things I wished might have been different, is, it was one way. I don't think anybody ever came here, so there is a certain sense of poor relations there, and yet I think if they had the same mix of kids that we've got, they probably wouldn't do a hugely different job of it.'

Unsurprisingly, there was evidence of resentment from partner schools about being instrumental in getting the money involved in Beacon or special status of some sort in quite cynical ways. Thus, one partner head of a Special School observed that an originator school needed him on board, but was

‘not interested in what we want, just in what they can give us. ... It’s the father and son attitude of “We know what we’re doing. We’re a good school. Here, you have this.”’

Some current policy contexts still seem to construct inequalities and ‘recipient’ identities for partner schools, making mutuality an aspiration that is less often realised than might have been intended. The head of a school in challenging circumstances, who participated in the London Challenge Family of Schools event, reported that schools were grouped according to similarity, based on a range of data. Not only did she disagree with the analysis that led to the grouping, but she also observed that schools were ranked in number, so that those in the most challenging circumstances came at the bottom – *‘so straight away there’s that feeling, oh yeah, it’s graded from top to bottom, straightaway there’s labels on you... a bit like, you’re the dunce of the schools, so go and sit over there’*. This remarkable choice of ordering did indeed suggest an unconscious hierarchy at work. In another case, it transpired that a ‘successful’ school, when invited to work with a failing school, had demanded a considerable sum of money to do so, as if its own reputation would be tainted by their association.

Such divisions and hierarchies between schools cannot be wished away: an LEA broker remarked that getting teachers to work together encountered the same problems as *‘kids from different schools getting on the same school bus’*. Distinctions between the status of institutions and the status of individuals are often blurred. The prevalent ‘badging’ of institutions and individuals often turns out to get in the way of the kinds of learning that collaboration policies advocate and many teachers desire.

2.24 Why inequalities matter

One consequence of the inclination to badge people and institutions in rather stark ways is that, on occasion, partnership work is initiated in response to ‘problems’ in partner practices, identified often on the basis of poor test results. Yet if a teacher feels that their version of events has not been heard, or their specific context not appreciated, they are less likely to accept the ‘solution’, which is offered to them in the form of new practices.

Secondly, allocating significant extra funding to originator schools to develop partnerships not only reinforces their positive sense of identity, it also sometimes contributes to an arrogance and dismissiveness that betrays the intentions behind the scheme. Many staff involved in partnership work were frank about the incentive provided by resources. One head described schools as like ‘addicts’ crawling from one pot of money to the next, in many cases being more interested in the money than in the ideas behind it, and shifting their focus according to those required by each particular policy idea.

Most significantly for the purposes of this research, any policy initiatives that construct ‘originator’ and ‘partner’ identities may actively inhibit development within partner

institutions. As we suggested above, in some cases it seemed that involvement in transfer work may have prevented the partner schools and teachers from articulating their own areas of strength, reinforcing passivity and dependency rather than fostering a positive self-image. Whilst not belittling the help that those who share their practice have given to others, originating schools and individual practitioners within them often admitted that they gained as much or more than those who were the targets of their assistance: the strong were made stronger. The benefits gained were in some cases material, such as (under the Beacon scheme) extra resources, hence greater flexibility, further public recognition, increased capacity to attract and retain good staff, and so on. But even without this, sharing practice is hugely advantageous for the originator. Successful schools do not always know what they are doing right: partner schools, by providing a sounding board against which they test their ideas, help them to diagnose what is working and what is not. Outcomes may include increased self-esteem, commitment to the development of the school as a learning community, enhanced attentiveness to what counts as good practice, and heightened understanding of how good practice transfers internally, not just externally. Whilst partners may benefit from improved practices, if they do not get the chance to become ‘originators’ in their turn they may miss out on these additional benefits.

2.25 Positive directions

Nonetheless, there are signs that recent policy directions, shifts in educational thinking, and indeed the intentions of practitioners, may be addressing the problems that we have identified and working towards models of mutuality and joint problem-solving.

For instance, the Leading Edge Partnership Programme, even within the short span of its emergence, has made very deliberate strides to address these matters. It has developed very different ways of working to its Beacon ancestor, by having no logo or badge, attempting to use more inclusive language and to rethink the basis on which schools became involved by referring to value-added data. The National College for School Leadership Networked Learning Communities initiative operates on the basis of a learner-led, collegial model that is less atomistic and more communal in its intentions and dispositions. Excellence in Cities provided some instances of schools forming partnerships, and some reports from schemes organised under the Leadership Incentive Grant were also promising. The Leading Aspect scheme (discussed in more detail in *Section 4.3* below) offered all schools in the areas where it operated an opportunity to identify practices they did well: it was thus a ‘level entry’ initiative.

To create openness and willingness to learn from each other, it helps that schools engage each other sensitively in conversational mode, rather than being labelled in one way or another. Many practitioners are genuinely committed to mutuality, at least verbally. The insistence of a deputy head in a very successful originator school that *‘we consciously went out of our way to talk about partnerships, to talk about sharing, to talk about working together, learning from each other’* was echoed, though perhaps to a lesser degree, by originators in other instances. Practical experiences can help here. According to one LEA broker, a borough-wide INSET where all schools had to offer some aspects of their practice to others quickly made those involved realise that doing so was not as straightforward as they might initially have assumed.

Shifts in educational thinking may also allow teachers to re-assess their achievements. For instance, one strand of thought argues that refocusing school development priorities to focus on how far schools are meeting the needs of all their students may serve as a ‘moral driver’ that reminds *all* schools how much they have to learn. In these circumstances, schools with a more challenging student body may have much to teach more ‘successful’ schools about dealing with behavioural issues. (Nonetheless, this may still result in a division of labour within collaboration that repeats familiar hierarchies).

Above, we noted that some teachers’ lack of confidence about their practice may stem from the fact that their self-image relates primarily to their caring or pastoral role rather than that of a thrusting, power-dressed careerist. Several primary teachers argued that they and their colleagues felt that recent interest in the affective dimensions of schooling, such as Emotional Intelligence, recognised work they had already been doing for years and provided a positive source of new confidence in their practice. It also helped challenge educational hierarchies because secondary schools were acknowledging that they had something to learn from primary colleagues.

2.26 Contested issues

Some aspects of these findings are more secure than others. Within the data the main areas of disagreement or contestation cluster round the related notions of inequitable status, sense of deficiency, and whether or not learning is best undertaken with those with whom one feels a sense of cultural kinship.

Many informants favoured the view that schools that are far apart in terms of culture, achievement and so on should not work together, that the ‘leap’ is too great, especially for the ‘low achieving’ schools. However, some headteachers felt that their schools could and should learn from those whose status was different or even superior to theirs. Judgements about zones of proximal development (i.e. conditions that stretched, but did not exceed, their capacity to learn from others who were more advanced in some way) should over-ride concerns about cultural similarity. One head of a school in challenging circumstances argued that she found it harder to learn from similar schools, since they were all familiar with or trying the same strategies. She felt a need for fresh input and preferred to work with a mix of schools. She saw this as a ‘healthier combination’ for herself and her staff, and was also keen to ‘raise the sights’ and expectations of her students, which she felt was happening through exchanges and visits to a Beacon school in another borough:

*To me the idea of working with similar schools isn’t where the progress can happen. I want to be allied with schools doing better than me, I want to know why is it that that department in that school is getting such high results, what are they doing that is motivating the children. And those ideas I want to bring back to this school. If you are putting challenge in people’s sights, you’ve got to actually give them examples, here is a school that regardless of the context is doing really well and these are the strategies that they use. They won’t all work in **my** school, but I’d rather have an opportunity to make the judgement. (Head)*

Nonetheless we might observe that this view comes from a highly professional and confident head, of a school that is successful within very difficult circumstances,

whose meetings with other heads can indeed be on a ground of equality. There is some evidence that ‘on the ground’ classroom teachers might find it harder to meet others in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Certainly, classroom teachers frequently expressed a preference for working with schools in similar circumstances and with similar student bodies. The theory of similar schools working together assumes a homology between schools and individual teachers. For the latter it may indeed be important to work with someone closer.

Practice needs to be shared at an incremental level. It’s no good showing somebody who is struggling the best practice; that is a demotivator. It is too far away. (Assistant Head)

As an AST partner said

‘For practice transfer to work you need contact with other schools which have similar problems (in terms of pupils’ behaviour and their lack of commitment to work) with their students. We’ve got similar kids to [the AST] so he understands the lack of motivation they have and the behaviour problems we have to deal with.’ (AST partner and head of Art)

Nonetheless, some who had experience of working with a range of schools expressed pleasure in finding that ‘we have the same highs and lows!’

Another instance suggested the problems of similarly strong and successful schools learning from each other. Two schools attempted to collaborate on a joint cross-curricular initiative, which despite a positive beginning and enthusiasm on both sides, eventually foundered. In this case, the dilemma appeared to be that both had strongly developed but very different ‘cultures’. The originating school was familiar with thematic, cross-curricular approaches focused on learning rather than subject content; encouraged younger or less experienced staff to come forward with new ideas (what they called ‘an “I can” ethos’); and had a flexible timetable that allowed for teacher release. The partner school took a more traditional linear curricular approach and had a less flexible, more hierarchical organisational structure than the originating school. As a consequence, it had to rely on Heads of Department to lead the initiative from the front, many of whom were longstanding members of the staff with established approaches. Moreover, it was selective where the originating school was not, and middle managers seemed to feel that their success would be judged by test scores. They therefore ‘played safe’ and were reluctant to ‘step out of their boxes’ (in the words of the originator) to engage with work that would require considerable changes to their curriculum planning and wrestling with timetable logistics ‘where there was no hard evidence it would improve results’. Ultimately the deputy head suggested that partnership work had been more successful ‘*where there was not an equity of entry*’, (that is, when her school was clearly in the position of ‘leading’ schools whose approaches were not so firmly developed) than where there were two ‘strong practitioners’ both bringing a lot to the process.

2.3 Learner engagement

A third overarching factor which informs almost every aspect of practice transfer and, like the other two, opens up or closes down the possibility of teachers' professional learning, concerns the learner's active role in the process of joint work. Our shorthand for this is 'learner engagement'.

2.31 'Learner-engaged' practice transfer and control of the process

Perhaps the most important single aspect of the transfer process from the partner standpoint is that it should be, if not learner-led, then certainly learner-engaged. Practice transfer is more likely when the recipient of the practice has been involved in the process of agreeing and planning the transfer activity. Parties need a shared purpose and (in the words of many interviewees) to 'own' the activity. This is important for not only initiating, but also sustaining the process, getting the roles right and ensuring there is an effective use of time. It entails a preparedness to learn in order to properly understand the new practice, possibly observing it first in order to get a better idea of its potential, reflecting at appropriate points in order to be able to be proactive in the learning process, and having some awareness of the challenges of the road ahead.

Where teachers have themselves identified gaps in their practice, and actively want to make changes, they often really welcome input from teachers from other schools, especially when their assistance is personalised and customised.

One EAZ supported teacher-led enquiry where teachers were encouraged to develop and share good practice through enquiry groups in which they chose their own areas of interest and the EAZ provided them with the time and resources to develop their work. This deliberately open-ended brief was seen as a strength of this way of working and had led to some imaginative and successful work, for example, looking at the use of sketch books in developing literacy and numeracy skills, zoning the classroom environment to cater for a range of learning styles or developing keyboard skills. The teachers who were involved in this work formed a network group in their own right.

In many cases this raised questions about the stakes involved in learning from others: that is, about the kinds of pressures teachers were under and their role in identifying their learning needs. Where individual teachers were under pressure within the school to improve their performance, on the basis of alleged 'failings' identified by others, the benefits of practice transfer activities were often, unsurprisingly, limited. One AST described a case where she had been 'imposed' by a head on a teacher who had been identified by OfSTED as poor; unsurprisingly the AST found it particularly difficult to transfer any practice effectively with this teacher. Should teachers feel deficient or lacking in any way, they may develop subtle forms of resistance.

In other cases, however, departments or schools could ascertain areas for improvement and share responsibility for new practices without attributing blame to individuals. A common example is where middle managers initially identify their

colleague's development needs. Their success depends how far they are able to bring their colleagues with them. In one school, a new head of faculty in a partner school judged that Year 9 boys were not motivated or achieving. She identified problems with how her colleagues were teaching. Other teachers in the department agreed with her diagnosis and were keen to work with ASTs from other schools to improve. The head of department had successfully brokered transfer of practice activities.

'I think there were several factors [in success]: there was a lot of consultation with the head of department prior to us working with the other teachers and she had a clear idea of what changes she wanted to make. So the ASTs had clear aims and a clear framework of the changes to be made with each of the members of staff they were working with'. (AST)

Sometimes, a third party (LEA, OfSTED or DfES) identifies 'problems' relating to poor practice on the basis of poor test results, low value-added or poor inspection reports. However, for the transfer of good practice to work as a solution to these problems, the teachers in the partner school need to recognise for themselves the 'problems' with their own practice, identify their own learning needs and identify a partner from whom they can learn. In some of the cases we studied, both originator and partner schools paid insufficient attention to helping teachers recognise their own personal development needs. It is also important to ensure the way of working was non-threatening and that it was 'OK to fail'. This is clearly more difficult in contexts of failing schools or 'weak' departments. Here, much depends on the overall school context in which individuals are working, as one head argued:

'You should look at teachers as individuals and see that most teachers WANT to improve, to do better, not to beat their head against a wall. I have seen teachers being able never to have their weaknesses exposed, because they were in departments that were supportive and non-accusatory, because good practice rubbed off on them, and because of the expectations we have of all pupils that they would get on with their work whoever was teaching them. It depends on having the proper support systems in place.'

2.32 Promoting positive experience of 'being a partner'

Learner engagement could also be promoted through a positive experience with originators. For instance, ASTs were generally seen as the friendly professional in the classroom with current knowledge and teaching experience made accessible in an essentially non-threatening way. Also important was a sense of mutuality and trust; mutuality in the sense of a shared grass roots perspective of another practising teacher whom the partner actually sees working in her classroom with her students and, in some instances, sees working in the AST's own school; trust in the sense that, either, colleagues knew of her by reputation or experience or because the sensitivity and collegial respect show by the AST laid foundations for the exercise of trust in the process of professional learning.

Trust also has to do with trust in the expertise of the originator, with the maturity and quality of their work as a classroom practitioner. Whilst this kind of pedagogic expertise is a crucial element in the success of e.g. AST work, expertise as a consultant, as someone who is skilled at working with other teachers, is equally

important. Their capacity to communicate effectively with those with whom they are working must be based on a professional repertoire that enables them to demonstrate and coach in ways which are attuned to the specific needs of those involved. Negotiation is key here and the capacity to differentiate the manner and extent of involvement in accordance with what is felt to be needed by the practitioner and, often her colleagues too. Thus, in one example we encountered, the AST's partner confirmed that

'Of the four ASTs who visited the school, each specialised in different areas. They met with the head of department to discuss how they could work to benefit the department, after this initial meeting each of the ASTs worked with a different member of staff within the department depending on their needs.'

The reference to 'four ASTs' is worth remarking on here. Their joint capacity to respond in a differentiated way to learner need was enhanced in some LEAs (as here) by a deliberate policy of managing ASTs in groups so that the range of skills they possessed could be deployed more effectively.

Skills of transfer most valued by partners included:

- Clear aims and realism about what could be achieved
- Being able to demonstrate the practice being advocated.
- Responsiveness to the requests of partners.
- Empathy with individual partner's circumstances.
- Willingness to engage with partners on a mutual basis.
- Being realistic about what it is possible to achieve in the given time.
- Availability for ongoing contact from partners.
- Being able to provide 'how to' advice at the same time as a broad theoretical or contextual picture of practice they advocate.
- Hands on understanding of being a teacher.

Originators often emphasised the importance of their current experience of the classroom. However, partners tended to take this for granted and focussed more on qualities such as openness and empathy.

It is worth mentioning that, in some cases, there was a lack of clarity about how to create transfer practices that enabled partner teachers to develop their own capacity to extend and enrich their own ways of working and learning, particularly where teachers work together over a period of time. Some transfer practices could even lead to increased dependency. In one case a teacher in a primary school was observing a PE lesson. Throughout the lesson she remained literally 'on the sidelines', neither supporting nor leading in any section of the lesson. Our theoretical framework for understanding practice transfer suggests that this may be a useful activity when it marks the early stages of a process by the originator. However, this was the final lesson in a sequence of ten, and there was no opportunity for the two teachers even to discuss the lesson. At certain point originators should stage a withdrawal, handing responsibility back to the teacher and supporting them as they take on new work, or in a more mutual model developing modes of work in which practices are shared more equally.

Also key was the evident benefit of the partnership, whether in terms of resources or tangible outcomes. Part of this usually arose by the originator's involvement in planning and teaching within the partner school and particularly the involvement of the

partners in deciding the focus of the work and the kinds of development they felt were important, interesting and achievable. It also appeared important that there was follow up to collaborative work – for instance, ASTs and partners continuing to be in contact with each other after the initial work had been completed, in order that new problems could be discussed as they arose. We repeatedly encountered instances where there was lack of clarity over areas of responsibility – for instance, over who was to follow up a visit. Whilst some kind of formal agreement might be helpful in enabling partner teachers to understand their rights and entitlements, these arrangements are best negotiated between the staff actually involved in the transfer practices.

2.4 Understanding time

The most common response to our questions about obstacles to practice transfer referred to lack of time. Even though most of the teachers we spoke to were generally keen to get involved in the kind of transfer work that runs through this report, they insisted that those advocating practice transfer deal realistically and responsibly with the need to provide time to support it. Learning that is both productive and significant is not a one-off event or something that can be commanded or demanded with a snap of the fingers. Just as it is increasingly common place to create ‘wait time’ for young people to think and reflect and make meaning out of a teacher’s question, so it is equally important that ‘understanding time’ be seen as an indispensable component of good professional learning.

Time here has a number of dimensions:

- The time to create what a practitioner sees as ‘good practice’
- The time to learn to transfer these practices
- The time it takes to learn and adapt a new practice, including building trust and relationships that are conducive to learning from others.

2.41 Creating a ‘good practice’

In the kinds of practice transfer imagined by policymakers, classroom practitioners share their practice with others. However, perhaps precisely because of the semi-voluntaristic way in which teachers come forward to share their work, teachers to whom we spoke frequently identified a very long time scale for doing so. One BPRS described a situation where transfer activities grew from an action research project involving of seven schools linked to the local university. Two teachers in the same school worked together in their own classrooms for three years, until they felt confident enough to recommend the approach to others in their own school. In order to do so, one teacher from another school in the project would then visit a partner to support them in introducing the initiative to the whole school, via INSET. The length of time (and resources) this took may have been part of developing what one teacher had described as its ‘landing gear’, or usability, in the classroom. In another case a teacher had been working on an aspect of her practice for three or four years, yet still responded modestly to the notion of transfer:

'I am reasonably convinced of the value of what I am doing, because I've had enough positive feedback from people I think are thoughtful teachers... (But) I am not in a hurry to spread the word... To make it more accessible to people it needs to be more thought through.' (BPRS teacher)

2.42 Learning to transfer practices

If it took time to develop practices that teachers were confident with, it also took them time to learn how to work with others. One experienced EAZ broker argued that the qualities and capacities of being a good classroom teacher were in some important respects different from the qualities and capacities needed to influence the professional practice of one's peers. Teachers were, in his view, often inarticulate about their own good practice, both in terms of their collegial unwillingness to put themselves forward and being unable to articulate what it is they are good at in ways that enable others to learn from them. He thus provided appropriate support and training, often in coaching and allied forms of professional engagement.

Furthermore, as our example from *Section 2.13* illustrates, learning to transfer practices is not just a one-sided thing that the originator does more or less effectively. It is also a reciprocal process that not only requires negotiation between those involved, but also significant engagement with the professional and student cultures of the participating institutions.

2.43 Learning and adapting a new practice

'Time, that's the biggest barrier, staff not having time to meet or to spend time developing what the ASTs have suggested. Some teachers just have no capacity to take anything else on board. They need to be given time to allow them to do this.' (EiC Broker)

There needs to be a realism about how much time effective practice transfer takes, and this will vary with the complexity of what is transferred. First it needs to be properly prepared for by the partner schools as well as the originating school or person and, of course, much of that preparation is best done jointly. Secondly, it takes time e.g. for observation and other forms of joint work which need to be sustained over time, both in the sense that time needs to be allocated to the processes, not just of working together and being in each others classrooms, but also through the process of making sense of their own learning. Thus, an appreciative AST partner and head of faculty, describing what she felt were effective arrangements for practice transfer remarked

'We were allowed developmental time off teaching so we were given time with the ASTs to talk through what we hoped to gain from the. ... After the ASTs left us we were given time to develop what we'd learnt as a faculty, this time was invaluable.'

Thirdly, time needs to be allocated to teachers adapting their subsequent practice and engaging in its more advanced stages of development, ideally with the intermittent on-going support of the originator.

Time also involves securing the institutional and collegial arrangements, including funding, that accompanies a teacher's decision to try something out. We deal with these in *Section 3.21* following section. ⁽³⁾

(3) Many of the findings emerging from this *Section 2* are highly consonant with the EPPI systematic review *The Impact of collaborative CPD on classroom teaching and learning*. See Cordingley, P. Bell, M., Rundell, B., Evans, D. & Curtis, A. (2003) *The Impact of Collaborative CPD on Classroom Teaching and Learning*: Available on www.eppi.ioe.ac.uk

Section 3

ENABLING TRANSFER

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3.1 The work of transfer

3.11 Characterising approaches to transfer

The processes of practice transfer are processes of teacher learning. This is true of both those said to be sharing good practice, and those taking on new ways of learning. To encourage practice transfer schools have engaged in a range of activities with teachers from their own and other schools. In this section we aim to explore how these different approaches to practice transfer may support teacher learning.

To analyse how different kinds of activities support teachers' learning the following example may be helpful. An AST specialising in music teaching was working with colleagues in a secondary school, following the suggestion of joint work to the partner school from an LEA advisor. The process of the teachers working together was initiated through a meeting to discuss ways forward, in terms of process and content. The teachers in the partner department visited the AST at his school, both to observe his teaching and to gather resources they felt would be helpful. The AST then made several visits to the partner department, to observe the practice of the teachers, to talk with them about how work was progressing, and to support the partner HoD in developing resources for practical work with students and ICT work in music.

From this example we may draw out aspects of the activities framing the learning of the teachers in the partner department. What were they doing that helped in the process of professional development? Firstly, there were opportunities for the AST and the teachers from the partner department to observe and discuss one another's teaching. Their classrooms were opened up in order that they could develop a better feel for the others' practice, and so that the teachers from the partner department could gain an understanding of specific strategies used by the AST to teach lessons in which students are quickly able to experience success in performing music (*experiential learning*). Secondly teachers could reflect on their own and one another's practice; discuss what they were doing well and where improvements could be made; consider what aspects of the AST's practice might be helpful in the context of the partner's classroom; discuss ideas that the teachers in the partner school were most motivated to adopt; and to reflect on strategies that had been tried out, and the differences they were making in the classroom (*reflective learning*). The AST took on the double role of both supporting the music teachers in developing their practice and communicating to the partner department's senior management team the barriers to the development of music teaching, resulting from inappropriate resources. While this work did not directly affect the practice of the teachers it was important in framing the possibilities of their practice (*contextual support for learning*).

3.12 The three approaches in action

The activities through which teachers are learning in this example may be categorised into three themes: experiential learning, reflective learning, and contextual support for learning. With experiential learning the partner is directly involved with the practice being transferred from a more experienced person. With reflective learning, the practice is addressed, but the partner does not directly experience the practice.

Contextual support for learning, however, refers to the activities which play a key role in allowing teachers to work and learn with one another, and facilitates the conditions in which transfer may take place. Drawing on our fieldwork we expand on these themes by giving further examples in the tables below.

Experiential Learning

Co-teaching

- Teachers work alongside one another in the classroom context.

Lesson observations

- These could be observations of modelled lessons for partners to develop a practical understanding of good practice or observation of lessons to suggest next steps in practice development.

Joint planning

- These aspects attend to planning and assessment, important aspects of teachers' practice outside of the classroom.

Practical workshops

- We came across examples in contexts e.g. drama and thinking skills, where the approach of the originator was to ask teachers to participate in the activities they offered as good practice. Here teachers' practical involvement led to the development of new practices in their own classrooms.

Reflective Learning

Meeting to discuss shared problems or issues for development

- For example "we're trying to develop this aspect of our work, what do you do in your school?"

Seminars, theory / idea based CPD training and education

- Such activities were normally a combination of ideas or theories underlying good practice and practical examples of how these ideas can be used in the classroom

Discussing good practice with other teachers

- In formal situations (e.g. shared CPD) 'carousel' type arrangements allowed teachers to tell one another about aspects of their classroom practice they feel positive about. Significantly, exchanges like these were often accompanied by a sharing of resources allowing them to more clearly describe their practice and provide a practical help to other teachers

Attending to affective dimensions of learning

- Some originators suggested that their work was as much about being supportive and enhancing colleagues confidence, as the exchange of technical ideas.

Contextual support for learning

Developing policy

- Through transfer processes teachers described enhancing and developing policy. This was significant in supporting and acknowledging practice internally, and in providing documentation for external inspection.

Sharing resources

- Where originators received funding, not directed to their partners, financial support to develop teaching and learning resources or to buy cover was seen as an indication of openness as well as a practical contribution. In cluster arrangements a central fund to support such initiatives provided immediate and real benefits for teachers who became involved.

Technical support

- In particular supporting partners in ICT.

At the individual level the effects of activities from within each category will depend on the beliefs, values and motivation of teachers. Our research suggests that schools engaging in transfer activities with one another should attend to all three of the dimensions we describe above. However, there were a number of examples in which the level of teacher learning seemed mismatched to the level and type of activity partners had engaged in. For example, teachers described one-off events that ‘spoke to them’ and from which they had made changes to their practice. In doing this they use their own creativity and experience to understand what the ideas they heard would look like in practice, and found ways of developing practice in their existing environment. Conversely, in some negative examples ideas and ways of working included in carefully planned ongoing activities were ‘bounced’ by teachers not motivated to use new practices. Such decisions were often based on teachers’ beliefs and experiences that these practices would not help in their school’s context.

Incorporating experiential, reflective and contextual supporting activities attends to a different aspect of teachers’ practical knowledge. In *Section 2.1* we indicate that many important dimensions of teachers’ practice remain tacit: they are embodied in their actions yet remain difficult and at times impossible to articulate. Experiential activities can begin to engage with this tacit knowledge by allowing teachers to work alongside one another and develop an understanding of good practice, in a practical and physical sense rather than through formalised representations or descriptions of practice. Reflective activities not only enable teachers to develop knowledge of technical and formal aspects of good practice, but also attend to the purposes of any change to practice, to the affective dimensions of changing practice, providing opportunities to review and celebrate progress or for partners and originators to think about areas in which their own practice could be developed. In our fieldwork teachers raised the importance of all of these types of activity and drew on a range of examples of how both had influenced their practice. Our research did not indicate that one of these approaches should be prioritised over the other.

Some teachers reported their participation in processes of practical enquiry located between practical and reflective activities. They were engaged in opening their classrooms to one another, and working together to reconstruct theory about how students' experiences could be enhanced. While such activities displayed aspects of 'action research' they were often not as formal as using the title 'research' might suggest. For some originators whose practice had developed through practical enquiry their role was to support and nurture a practical-critical approach by those they worked with. Where teachers were engaged in these kinds of activities they tended to raise challenges to suggestions of good practice being considered universally applicable. For example, one broker argued that the value teachers could gain from processes of practical enquiry was precisely because such projects could be idiosyncratic. The emphasis here is on teachers developing local ideas of what good practice might mean.

3.13 'Transfer of practice' or 'Joint practice development'?

Where teachers are developing new practices it is rare for them to replicate the good practice of others. In our fieldwork teachers were more likely to describe the extension and refinement of their existing repertoire of practices, through collaborative and affirming work with other teachers. Teachers saw themselves as having 'travelled' or 'grown' in their work. However, both originators and partners were reluctant to label themselves as 'experts'. Teachers' language suggested a developmental process that has to meet a receptivity in the partner in order to take root and one that engages with some embedded values that appeal. The picture that emerges is not of discrete 'blocks' of practice that can be passed from teacher to teacher. Facets of teachers' practices were interrelated and this became apparent where teachers were asked to take on new practices.

Joint Practice Development

This led us, in many cases, to question whether the joint work teachers were involved in should be labelled as 'practice transfer' or whether 'joint practice development' would provide a better description of their work. This is a move that validates the existing practice of teachers who are trying to learn new ways of working, and acknowledges the effort of those who are trying to support them, both in their having developed creative ways of working and the complex task of opening up and sharing practices with others.

'To get to the point where I am, I have been on a long journey - and teachers respond when they are on the same journey'. (BPRS teacher)

'It was very much process based, the journey was important, journeys take time.' (BPRS teacher)

In the case of individual learners it was particularly apparent that new ways of working did not represent a leaving behind of old practice. More frequently an innovation in the teacher's work was adapted to incorporate existing aspects of work, or allowed teachers to expand their repertoire of available approaches. Toward the end

of our research, teachers in our case studies drew on a variety of sources in working out changes they aimed to make within their classrooms. The decisions of the teachers as to which elements of any suggested innovation would be adopted was based on their judgement of what the likely outcomes would be, predicted through a practical working knowledge of the students they work with, and the expectations held of them within their school. One of the teachers we interviewed in this phase of the work was engaged in a LIG cluster where teachers investigated and experimented with different ways of working, and then shared challenges and progress with colleagues. He described the process of developing and changing practice as one of ‘chipping away at things’; the outcomes of the work weren’t specific to the introduction of a single innovation but instead a range of ideas contributed to his existing practice.

Coaching

In our initial literature review we drew attention to ‘coaching’ as a means of teachers developing their practice through the support of colleagues and external agencies. Many of the characteristics of this approach resonate with the features of joint practice development described above. Both exemplify an extended professional relationship between two practitioners involved in experimentation and critical reflection in the classroom. Both exemplify the commonly encountered asymmetry of expertise of those involved. The relationships between teachers engaged in joint development of practice were only rarely symmetrical. One of the teachers usually had some claim to be a better teacher (frequently through external judgements) and was seen as the ‘originator’ from whose expertise the practice of the ‘partner’ could benefit.

Much less frequently we encountered teachers working with colleagues from other schools in the joint development of practice in symmetrical relationships. However, there were some important exceptions, one of which we give below. Certainly, if we consider teachers’ access to peer to peer networks, ‘flat’ relationships are likely to provide opportunities for a far wider spectrum of teachers to articulate and explore their own practice, and to support colleagues in the same process.

‘ICT Innovators’ as a model of ‘joint practice development’

‘ICT Innovators’ is run by an EAZ. It involves a group of about twelve to fifteen teachers from nursery to secondary. They each get a management point for their involvement and one and a half to three hours non contact time per week to support / spread good practice in relation to ICT in their own schools. They hold fortnightly meetings after school and meet for an afternoon once every half term, although they agreed that the afternoon was more successful than the former. At these meetings, they discuss practice, share software and ideas, and so on.

The group gets support from the EAZ: *‘It needs tight management. It doesn’t work well on its own, it needs some maintenance. Any network is really going to demand someone tinkering with it occasionally, they don’t run particularly well on their own.’* (Coordinator)

The teachers already had some commonality:

It's good that we all share the fact that we are typical inner-city schools, about 50% on free school meals. So we are used to not having certain things that other schools take for granted, such as parental support, a place for doing homework, socialisation skills, yet we are still achieving at the same level. We have things in common, we know where children are coming from, yet still get good results. (Secondary teacher)

They rotate meetings so that they have all visited each other's schools and see that there is 'life beyond the four walls of the classroom'. Through this, they began to develop a feel for the contexts in which others were working, and also saw how teachers were putting practices to work (for instance, displays in classrooms gave practical ideas about activities that could be done with technology). Teachers in a nursery were delighted when primary and secondary teachers visited their facilities and were impressed by their work, even adopting some of their approaches. Similarly, Special School teachers had been able to share their innovative practices and develop joint projects with mainstream schools, which had boosted their students' confidence. Such activities had helped to break down traditional hierarchies within education.

Their networking had led to a strong relationship between them so that they could cooperate at a range of levels – from ringing each other up with problems, borrowing resources, 'looking to others for what they need' rather than remaining insular, to activities that benefited the whole community such as a community website designed by children working in a Saturday school they established. The teachers involved were extremely enthusiastic about its benefits for their own practice, for students who were making progress, and for their confidence in working with teachers in their own schools. *I feel very honoured to feel part of it, to meet with so many other people especially the junior side ... It's a great pleasure to network with junior school teachers and talk about literacy. (Secondary teacher)*

They felt that this was a model of joint working that could apply to any issue related to teaching and learning. However, funding was an issue:

'You need a good amount of time to make a project work. This one has two years' guaranteed funding, but it takes you a year to get together, and then it takes you a year to make progress, then just when you feel you might be getting somewhere the funding stops.' (Secondary teacher)

Digging deeper, digging together

Finally, it is important to both acknowledge and formally register our sense that some issues and some approaches to collaborative professional learning seem to be of quite a different order to much of what is considered in this report. For instance, a BPRS researcher was concerned with what she termed the '*profound emotional and ethical difficulties attached to telling friends and former colleagues what they might not want to hear*'. Her research had focused on issues of ethnicity and racism in a primary school, and had analysed the failings of white teachers (primarily, but not only, herself) to address issues of race and ethnicity. 'Good practice' in this area was not, in her view, a matter of quick fixes. It involved careful reflection and introspection about teachers' own standpoints, how their whiteness shapes their teaching and how they '*behave*,

speaking and looking at the world'. Many white teachers feel profoundly uncomfortable and challenged by this. She concluded by suggesting that 'The current emphasis on the bureaucratic and technical aspects of teaching at the expense of wider social and philosophical issues on training courses has left little room for a consideration of the effects of ethnicity and race in education.'

It is clear that this cannot sensibly be considered 'practice transfer'. It is also clear that whilst 'joint practice development' provides a more satisfactory attempt to capture what the teacher aspires to and intends there is a world of difference between (a) jointly developing a practice that requires teachers to dig deep into their cultural and personal identities and (b) jointly developing a practice that, for example, provides a more efficient administration of an existing system. Both are examples of 'joint practice development'; both are legitimate and important; but one requires quite different emotional and intellectual resources, relationships and timescales to the other. This may well be an issue worth researching in more depth as the cumulative knowledge base of practice transfer faces up to the challenges of 21st century education.

3.2 Structures and Transfer

Our data suggests that there are broadly four important factors that touch on the kind of structural supports needed to undertake practice transfer work successfully. These have to do with

- Time
- Communication
- Funding and
- Technology

3.21 Time

In *Section 2.4* we argued for the development of a more sophisticated, more patient notion of 'time' than is generally demonstrated in policy statements or school realities. 'Understanding time' in practice transfer, like 'wait time' in classroom pedagogy, marks out an imperative that conditions both the possibility and the depth of collaborative professional learning. In this *Section 3.21* we attend to the organisational supports and strategies that create quality time for teachers to learn with and from each other over time.

Internal mechanisms for creating time

Schools had a number of ways of creating time for colleagues to get involved in practice transfer. Cover was the most obvious, but was not always an option. Apart from financial reasons there might be few good supply staff available or even enough permanent staff to teach classes on a regular basis.

Heads and senior staff often explored a range of ways of addressing these and associated difficulties. In addition to looking closely at the timetables of all groups of students to check they were not receiving an undue proportion of cover lessons approaches included

- Timetabling colleagues together at certain times in the week
- Timetabling fewer hours per teacher
- Building up relationships with good supply teachers to cover lessons
- Employing more teachers than ‘necessary’
- Timetabling training or practice sharing work outside school hours.

However, at the same time as acknowledging the plethora of tools at their disposal for this task, senior staff also highlighted the inherent tension in releasing teacher time for practice transfer work; the ultimate aim of practice transfer is to improve pupil learning, but taking quality teachers out of lessons may undermine this in the short term. Teaching staff are often reluctant to spend more than a certain amount of time away from their students for precisely this reason.

With this in mind, many headteachers stressed that their role was to introduce maximum regularity into the process to minimise pupil disruption.

‘We would have meetings that start at two thirty and finish at four thirty, so there would be an hour in school time, and an hour in the own time of the teachers. And we found that that was easier to manage in terms of not taking quality teachers out of the classroom: the more you take quality teachers out of the classroom, the worse it is for the students.’

Having said that, there was also an acknowledgement that, as one head teacher pointed out, releasing time without creating the impetus behind practice transfer work, is meaningless.

‘I have decided that giving people more time and resources doesn’t make the transfer of practice happen anyway... I have given them support workers, but their capacity to use them well, their will to do things has meant that these people haven’t used them as effectively as possible.’

The same is true for all these tools – they lack real leverage without desire across the school to maximise opportunities for practice sharing.

Institutional recognition of individuals

Institutional recognition of the importance of providing structural support for collaborative professional learning was sometimes addressed, at least in part, by the incorporation of a practice transfer remit within the responsibilities of key staff in the school. Thus, ASTs have it built in to their professional brief (20% of AST time being concerned with in-house and outreach work on practice transfer related matters). Another form of support, as we shall see in more detail later in *Section 3.32* is by senior staff supporting the deployment of time through the imaginative re-articulation and re-conception of staff roles and / or by providing additional staffing partly or wholly concerned with supporting joint professional learning within and outside the school through things like networks, consortia and other burgeoning mechanisms for lateral work across the education system. Another, also explored in *Section 3.32*, concerns the emerging desire on the part of senior leadership team members to carve out a new role

focussed on the pro-active support and encouragement of colleagues in developing practice transfer work. Finally, we came across a number of instances where individuals had been given short-term incentive points for supporting various kinds of joint professional learning.

External mechanisms for creating time

External mechanisms for creating time are now becoming increasingly common. With the recent resurgence of networking in general and the NCSL Networked Learning Communities in particular, there are a growing number of examples of time being jointly created to enable practice transfer between schools. This is also true of other centrally funded initiatives encouraging collaboration such as LIG and EiC

3.22 Communication

Issues of communication are self-evidently important in any kind of joint work. Within this context they have largely to do how far schools use existing communication systems effectively. As we shall see later in *Section 3.31*, headteachers are not always good at conveying external information through the internal systems of the school. The point here is a wider one and has to do schools' organisational capacity to ensure that useful and important information vital to successful transfer work reaches its intended and most appropriate destination.

It is important that the appropriate level of communication is established and utilised, i.e. that working relationships are supported by direct communication occurring at the level of intended development. Thus, if schools are aiming to bring about a change in management practices then the key relationship is that between managers; likewise, heads of department for departmental level change, and teachers to bring about classroom level change. Where the aim is classroom change and most ongoing contact remains with managers, successful transfer of practice is less likely, yet it does often seem to happen. One interviewee in an originator school claimed much better success through contacting middle managers, adding that HoDs were far more interested in CPD than heads.

In one example, failure to communicate at the appropriate level had clearly derailed the process. For instance, an untrained Individual Needs Assistant in a primary school had received help over six months in supporting a child with severe learning difficulties from an AST in a Special School, who was clearly a highly competent and committed professional. The INA had welcomed the input she was given and found the AST extremely supportive, accessible and easy to talk to, echoing the AST's own perceptions. However, she stressed that she had not been able to make better use of the AST's visits because she had never been informed of their purpose or of when they would be happening, so she could not formulate appropriate questions or set an agenda for what she wanted to learn. It seems that the AST communicated administrative details such as the times of her visits, to the SENCO, who had not passed them on to the INA. Whilst this might be an individual failing on the part of the SENCO, her actions in this respect might relate to more broadly relevant issues. These include: the low status of support staff, leading to a failure to consider their needs or rights; a failure

to take seriously the AST's investment of time; a failure by the SENCO and SLT to define the purpose of the activity and take responsibility for its process and outcomes; a lack of clarity about who (in the originator or partner school) was responsible for ensuring communication with the 'target' of the practice transfer, the INA.

3.23 Funding

In an LEA network meeting for Beacon schools attended by heads and senior teachers it was announced that Beacon funding would cease to be available in the future. Apart from the sense of anger and betrayal that erupted, there was a strong sense that practice transfer work would have to stop. The comments of one of the Beacon heads summed up the situation succinctly:

'We just won't be able to help schools in the same way. I'm not giving up my time to show staff from other schools how they can improve things. I'd rather give the time to my staff, take their classes for them to allow them to develop work for our school.'

This is but one of many examples from our interviews with headteachers that demonstrated how central is the deployment of financial resources to enabling transfer initiatives to get off the ground and, just as importantly, to sustaining them over a sufficient period of time for them to be productive and worthwhile. In sum, funding is a very significant feature of many current initiatives and a significant motivational factor in practice transfer work

Different ways in which funds were deployed

If we look at the different kinds of activities that money was used to support, four trends seem to emerge. Sometimes money helped fund basic activities that school budgets could not provide. For instance, one school had got involved in a joint scheme in order to be able to send pupils on outings, explaining that it was in an impoverished area where parents could not afford to contribute extra to their children's education. The coordinator then developed work relevant to the initiative around these activities. Whilst this shows how far policy has the power to shape and shift emphasis in schools' activities, the danger in such cases, of course, is that there is no sustainability built into the work that is carried out during the life of the project unless it accords with the values the school already holds.

Secondly, funding helped to enhance the impact of events that would have happened anyway. For instance, a Beacon school was able to support meetings between subject teachers from a cluster of schools that had been taking place for some time. Beacon funding meant that these meetings could become more regular and longer, and that there was an explicit recognition of their value from the school managers who chose to deploy funding in this way.

Thirdly, money was sometimes saved rather than spent by those who benefited from their partner role within developing collaborative work. Thus, there was much appreciation of the fact that, e.g. AST work, saved some schools money because it meant that they did not have to buy in LEA, other consultants, or even specialist staff.

In one primary school the use of a very good local AST meant that they did not need to buy in a music specialist.

Fourthly, resources sometimes seemed to serve a symbolic function. One of the ways Beacon funding was shared, for example, was to allow partner schools cover time that they would not otherwise be able to afford. Interestingly, however, some originator schools commented that legitimate claims made by the partner school for supply cover costs were not always actually made. There are two possible explanations for this; the offer of money as an indicator of goodwill was as important as the receipt of money, or alternatively that the partner schools may not be able to organise themselves to claim for funds to which they are entitled.

Issues of accountability

Nonetheless, it was extremely important that originators who ‘held the purse strings’ were open about resources and how they were being used, not only for reasons of financial propriety, but also because, as we have seen above, resources can be strategically used in a whole range of beneficial ways. In general it was considered important that schools receiving funding were seen to be accountable for what they did with it. The fact that they sometimes diverted funds to bolster staffing gaps clearly meant that they could not be accountable and they were certainly viewed with suspicion by partner schools.

3.24 The role of technology in promoting practice transfer

A number of individuals and institutions placed some hope in electronic means of practice transfer, such as establishing websites to which teachers could go to seek out new ideas, or email lists and virtual forums for discussion of practice. Our analysis of data from the VEAZs and other collaborative arrangements leads us to suggest a number of points in response. One is that this model may be reliant on what we called the ‘entrepreneurial’ ideal type teacher, who is fully in control of what they feel they need and able to seek it out. It may not assist those who have not yet got to the point of identifying their needs with any clarity.

Despite some impressions, a website is not necessarily instantly accessible; negotiating one’s way through it in order to find what one needs is also a skill. In our research we still encountered teachers who were obviously very new to electronic communication and may not yet possess the skills or confidence needed to process the mass of information available on the Internet. In other cases key parts of websites containing information about practice proved to be accessible only by passwords, often held only by senior managers or heads of department. Not only did this limit access in a very obvious way, it also communicated messages about ownership and rights.

Interviewees repeatedly emphasised the importance of the ‘face to face’, or at least of direct verbal communication, which could perhaps be by phone. One respondent suggested that this preference might be specific to the culture of teachers, because their working lives are so bound up in direct, personal interaction. Whilst the emergence of email drew some very positive comments from the apparently still small number of

teachers familiar enough with its use with reliable access to it at school electronic means of communication may be a poor substitute where people are seeking long-term or ongoing developmental work. On the whole, participants argued that technology was appropriate for more instrumental exchanges, e.g. of information, or administrative matters, but ill-suited to more exploratory, open-ended forms of engagement. It could also be a means to continue relationships once they had been established through direct contact.

More conventional means, such as meetings organised, for instance, by the LEA, by subject teachers or by clusters of schools, are unlikely to be displaced because they offer the essential personal element that can help build the trust and prior relationships that nurture partnership work.

3.3 People and transfer (1) Headteachers & staff

3.31 The role of headteachers

Throughout the course of our research it became apparent that a considerable faith was being placed in headteachers as key enablers of collaborative professional learning within and across schools. We report the views of heads below, but note first that a number of our research participants felt that such faith might be misplaced or in need of further qualification. One respondent with many years experience of senior level regional and national work behind him argued that

'the engine for transforming secondary education cannot reside principally with secondary headteachers ... because there aren't enough good ones. ...The thing that's disappointed me most in doing the job and meeting so many secondary heads is just that: I've just been very disappointed.'

This comment was echoed by a headteacher respondent who indicated that within his LEA there was concern *'about the quality of people who want to be heads'* suggesting that *'these are not going to be the saviours of our schools.'*

We came across numerous instances of heads blocking collaborative working arrangements in ways that did not appear to be justified. Sometimes this presented itself as an overt parochialism, often linked to the legacy of the muscular self-managing school that had pulled itself up by its own bootstraps and was resentful of sharing hard won gains with anyone: one Beacon head was reported as saying *'I am not interested in anything that goes on beyond my school gates'*. Sometimes it had to do with a lack of understanding: in a number of examples headteachers would not engage with the practice transfer element of an AST's role, particularly with regard to the outreach work with other schools, thus making a key element of the job virtually impossible. Sometimes it was more to do with a gap between espoused belief and real practice. At other times it was about absence of appropriate skills to support practice transfer and also the capacity to block progress through not passing information on to the appropriate member of staff.

This suggests that serious issues have to be addressed if the ‘transformative’ potential of practice transfer is to fulfil the aspirations many have for it. In the words of one respondent,

‘If heads don’t want to be collaborative they are doing a disservice and it is a barrier. The long term answer is for the will to collaborate and the understanding of collaboration to be on the person specification of heads to be recruited.’ (EAZ director)

In addition, the data that we report below deal with the views of heads as expressed in interviews: as noted in the first section, our research timescale did not allow us to spend long enough in schools to assess how far such views were put into practice.

Nonetheless, the overwhelming response from the headteachers we interviewed about practice transfer was very positive. They argued that heads and senior staff affect the transfer of practice both within and between schools in four key ways:

- By ‘setting the tone’ of the school
- By distributing leadership
- By building networks
- By co-ordinating or facilitating practice transfer

Setting the Tone of the School

Many heads argued that they wished to ‘set the tone’ by creating a culture in which change and innovation would be sought and not feared, in which there would be a willingness to look to others for good ideas, where teachers would believe that their ideas are worth sharing and, finally, have the capacity and desire to put these into practice.

‘I think that if you want things to really work long term rather than short-term projects, I think it has to come from the head. I think it’s incredibly important people see it and read it and hear it. If you want people to be involved, that’s the way it works.’

‘If I wasn’t supporting this initiative, nothing would happen. I am the key person supporting everything... My role is giving it high priority and importance.’

Creating what some head teachers called a ‘learning school’⁽⁴⁾ of this kind involved a number of factors. For instance, heads argued that commitment to and consistently stressing mutual professional learning as a priority was central to instilling a culture of practice sharing. Secondly, building confidence in staff was seen as vital in mobilising that commitment and in creating a desire for and an openness to change at all levels in staff and pupils alike. It involved breaking down staff defensiveness where embracing change is seen purely as an indictment of current practice. This is particularly important in a policy context where examination of practice is often about inspection and judgement rather than admiration and sharing. This also means addressing the key role of self-esteem in learning, instilling in every teacher the belief that they have

(4) See the work of our sister research project *Effective Professional Learning Communities* based at the Universities of Bath and Bristol funded by the DfES, GTC and NCSL. See <http://www.eplc.info/>

practice that is good enough to share. Confidence building cannot just be vocalised: it must be demonstrated over a long period. Respondents suggested, for instance:

'You have to change the culture in order to get people to a point where they will be motivated and work together, doing it professionally rather than being defensive. And that doesn't happen overnight. It's a long thing.'

'It is actually getting them start to see that things can be done differently, and that they can be done better. Getting them to see that without undermining their self esteem was not an easy discussion to have.'

'My role was to build up staff confidence. It was also about trying to build confidence where good things were happening.'

Thirdly, once practice sharing is under way, the role of head teacher largely seems to be to 'practice what they preach'; encouraging and praising those who are doing it and helping those who are open to innovation to make a success of their initiatives. Part of this may include coaching or training.

'You try to lead by example, give people a way that is non threatening then give them an opportunity to take part in a way that is supportive. And then hopefully, people start to translate these things into their own practices and start to try things out.'

In sum, the head teacher provides important moral support (e.g. emphasising and demonstrating teamwork and the celebration of success) and practical support (e.g. providing resources to enable coaching to take place).

'They need to know that if they had a good idea, I would, as far as I possible could, come out with the goods, in terms of resources.'

Finally, however, creating a protective as well as an exciting environment for staff was seen as vital. If sharing practice is to become the norm, mistakes or failures must be accepted as part of the process and indeed should be seen as a positive contribution to the learning process.

'It's making sure that staff have the support, the knowledge, the vision and the desire to move the school forward and that they feel that, if they do try to take on new initiatives, they're not going to be condemned if every one of them isn't successful. They can make mistakes and can still move the school forward... I see that very much as my role as head teacher – I'm the fall guy who's there to make sure that my staff are protected whatever happens and that I take the flak, not them.'

'You have to set out with the idea that 60% of what you do will be proved wrong.'

These four points are particularly important in providing the necessary initial conditions for teachers to take the 'leap of faith' and start sharing practice. Several heads said that this initial investment in building the culture acted as a trigger for longer term change – it persuades people to give innovations a try that often permanently change their attitude to the value of collaboration in the future.

Headteachers stressed that it is important to remember that simply initiating partnership will not be sufficient across the board – some teachers remain resistant and new people are constantly joining the school. Setting that tone and maintaining it was seen both as an ongoing process and as a long-term strategy. Achieving this relies on consistent communication of the same message from the head teacher (as well as the structural change discussed later) and is sometimes bolstered by bold and occasionally tough recruitment decisions.

Longevity of service may be important here. We came across a number of cases of staff (not only heads) who had taught at their current school for between 15 and 25 years and who became guardians of the school's narrative and history. They provided a crucial continuity that helped the school survive high staff turnover elsewhere. It is, of course, hard to legislate for such important figures and it helps to explain the difficulties for schools who constantly struggled with a high turnover of key players in the school. It is worth emphasising that the positive presence of such staff was in striking contrast to the more usual negative overtones in which long-standing staff were described: generally research participants referred to such teachers as if they were automatically assumed to be resistant and incapable of taking on new ideas. We hope this small part of our research findings might prompt a re-examination of such crude generalisations.

Distributing leadership

Entrenching whole school commitment to practice sharing relies on establishing structures to encourage participation at all levels, which in turn was seen as part of developing 'distributed leadership'. This term seems to encompass two separate phenomena. Firstly, it refers to head teachers actively devolving some of the 'driving' role of practice transfer across the school, usually to middle management teams. Heads saw this as vital to building capacity, demonstrating their own commitment to partnership work in school and creating more ambassadors for the concept.

'My leadership team... don't lead the group, they monitor and support it. Instead of saying, "this is what we will do in literacy", this is about them saying, "This is what we need to do to make the improvement."'

Secondly, it refers to distributed project management of practice sharing throughout the school, and to the flexibility within the system for anyone to take the initiative in instigating it. This is not just symbolic. It builds innovative capacity, spreading the risk of practice sharing, and uses information effectively and efficiently. Many heads acknowledged that whilst they may have a broad overview of what is going on in the school, it is individual teachers, not even necessarily department heads, who have a true sense of what might contribute positively to pupils' learning. In this sense, heads' role might be to assist teachers by removing what they might see as barriers to doing so.

Building networks

A number of heads saw their role in building networks, both formal and informal, as pivotal. For the head to lead and shape external networks, and set the tone of a 'learning school' internally, he or she must have a strong personal belief in and experience of the importance of networks. Interestingly, some headteachers had acquired this through working less hierarchical environments outside education. Others had experienced it through initiatives such as the NLC:

'If nothing else, it gives you the courage and the support...I think the Network Learning Community at a personal level gives the opportunity to express ideas, gives you the support, and also makes you recognize that all the people out there are also innovating, and you are not a little lonely person out there on a planet headship. . '

Such heads acknowledged the value of the ideas of their peers, and were willing to be honest about their own. Thus, for one head

'What is really effective is simply being aware of what's going on around you – in your own school and in others, and when problems arise, looking to those people who have had to solve or are solving similar problems. '

For another, networking had sometimes unexpected spin-offs:

'When I stayed with one of the heads up there, who has become a good friend actually...I went there with the focus of looking at ICT, but the idea that was actually brought back and implemented was entirely different. It had to do with a creative arts week at the start of each half term '

With regard to leadership practice one head felt that

'to be a head, you have to be the lead learner. I am continuously learning. I am interested in learning about learning. I am interested in learning about leadership, about myself. I am actively involved in learning. I talk to other leaders and listen to what they say and see how they run their institutions. '

Others concurred, emphasising the cumulative nature or 'trickle effect' of that commitment to ongoing learning and, in some cases, pointed to specific knowledge and practice that had changed the way they now worked.

Finally, trust, support and openness often combined to create a more organic model of practice sharing amongst head teachers. In established networks, heads engage in joint problem solving, feeling able to air their difficulties without undermining their position. Here heads used their expertise to help develop context-specific solutions for their peers.

3.32 Senior staff roles in co-ordinating and facilitating practice transfer

The fourth way in which heads saw themselves affecting practice transfer was one they shared with other senior colleagues in the school. As well as headteachers, deputy and assistant heads, middle managers and ASTs all have significant roles to play in practice transfer, firstly because part of their roles entail promoting professional learning across groups of colleagues within the school and, secondly,

because it is increasingly recognised that if schools are to become and remain learning organisations they have to engage with a rapidly growing knowledge base that lies outside the school itself. The recently introduced ‘collaboration / transformation agenda’ and the increasingly prominent development of networking as a means of professional learning lend further weight and impetus to those desiderata. This is particularly true, of course, for ASTs, whose remit is both to enable and encourage good practice and practice transfer within their own school and, through their outreach work, to support the professional learning of colleagues in schools other than their own.

Nearly all our interviewees stressed the importance of support from senior members of staff in coordinating and facilitating inter-school collaboration. Key roles included:

- Releasing teacher time (examined earlier in *Section 3.21*)
- Bidding for funds
- An overview of classroom practice and brokerage
- Mobilising teaching staff

Depending on a school’s size, sector and sometimes culture, this might be done by heads or by other senior managers.

Bidding for funds

Bidding for the various pots of money attached to collaborative work has become an important part of senior managers’ roles in practice transfer. Funding partly dictates how much teacher release time can be afforded, whether partnership groups can afford to do the sort of informal bonding discussed above, and crucially, whether new initiatives can be put in place. Whilst senior staff acknowledged that their ability to harness this money is vital to the practice transfer process, they also consistently stressed that this should not be the case; the funds were seen as important, bidding for individual pots was not. More than one head teacher suggested that this is either a skill you possess, or you do not. Clearly, it is an area that has the potential to really differentiate between schools on the basis of leadership alone.

Thus, one head stated that

‘I am finding increasingly that this is what my job is; trying to get money out of people who don’t want to give it to me...’

As it turned out, that particular head was quite successful at it, but even when heads were successful they often resented it

‘I do on average three bids a week. There is a knack. However, there is a part of me that thinks that, politically, I shouldn’t be involved in a bid culture.’

The experience of another head was that

‘Bidding and getting funds is one of my biggest drains. I suppose it is for two main reasons: One is that it is a skill that I don’t have. I am not confident nor good at it, and I know it’s going to be days of agony and I get very resentful about having to do that. Education should be funded in a way that allows people to get on and do their jobs. Not spend their time trying to get money to do the job. And unfortunately, this is what is happening.’

In some cases, other senior staff who had a facility and aptitude for fundraising developed those specific skills. In one instance, an interviewee commented that she

was constantly approached by other schools who hoped that they could draw on her expertise in joint funding bids.

Overview of classroom practice and brokerage

Senior managers were often involved directly in observing classroom practice or at least in keeping an overview of the observation materials put together by others. This enabled them, firstly to identify a focus for practice sharing, where ‘holes’ or strengths exist in current work, and, secondly, to create a central ‘good practice’ resource. Many senior staff suggested that identifying a focus for practice transfer gives meaning to a process that otherwise risks being abstract and diffuse. If partnership work is aimed at targeting a problem that the whole school acknowledges, it acts as a motivator, yardstick and evaluation tool – it is clear when it works.

If pockets of good practice are good, sharing within departments is seen to be better. Better still for many respondents is sharing work from across the school with everyone in it because it maximises the chance of good practice being transferred internally. One head maintained an overview of practice and coordinate professional sharing in a number of ways

‘I make sure that one good practice that is happening in one part of the school is spread across the school. A lot of the things we do are transferable.... Also, on weekly basis, I am also involved in an observation program. Whenever I see evidence of good practice, it is written up on weekly basis in our newsletter. If you want to see group work happening, then go there. This means that people can be directed to where expertise sits.’

This also happens with practices senior staff encounter outside their own schools. Many regard it as part of their role *‘To find out what is going on, know who to ring up’*, though one head reflecting ruefully on the observed practices of his fellow heads remarked

‘I am surprised at how few heads do (take opportunities to pick up on practical work of value presented at conferences). They expect gurus! You should take the opportunities that are there and broker for other teachers, give an atmosphere of encouragement and celebrate minor practices.’

Mobilising teaching staff

Senior managers also saw a key role as being actively to mobilise teaching staff through a combination of encouragement and direction. Encouragement for particular teachers to undertake practice sharing work both internally and externally seems consistent with the ‘distributed leadership’ or responsibility discussed earlier. Where senior staff have an overview of teachers and practice across the school she or he can usefully suggest particular individuals who might best contribute and benefit most from the process. However, taking on the project remains very much at the discretion of the teacher.

Whilst not yet formalised, some members of Senior Leadership Teams are beginning to act as internal brokers, putting staff in touch with each other with a view to mutual

learning. They are usually better placed than headteachers to do this, partly because they tend to have more day-to-day contact with staff and partly because they are generally closer to classroom practice. Thus, a deputy head who was keen to extend the teaching repertoire of colleagues in the school, particularly in connection with learning styles and a more varied form of pedagogy, suggested that teachers from subjects that traditionally took a more active approach to teaching and learning work together with those that tended to take a more traditional approach. A deputy head in another school was, in effect, carving out a 'new' role for himself as a talent-scout-cum-broker of good practice both within and outside his school. He appeared to be constantly looking out for good teachers and instances of good practice to fill his mental rolodex, from word of mouth amongst staff and students, or from conferences, seminars and meetings he attended, with a view to developing particular teachers' work or putting people in touch with each other as necessary. His own interpersonal skills appeared to be important in this, as did the length of time he had been in post and the fact that the school was sufficiently well resourced to 'allow' him sufficient time to develop this role. If more horizontal networks between schools and teachers are to be encouraged, it would be worth identifying how such networking might become formalised as part of job descriptions and roles.

Less flexible 'direction' was deployed by senior staff (particularly heads, in this instance) under two sets of circumstances. The first was where teachers were unenthusiastic about the prospect and would not take on practice sharing activity without the weight of direction by the head. Several heads made the point that this early intervention often cancelled the need for it later – the power of the activity itself acted as a motivator for independent action. The second was where time constraints or the immediate importance of an activity demanded quick intervention and action. Several heads commented that they always tried to send staff to events in pairs to maximise learning: another (in a primary school) that she would give staff visiting other schools a clear set of directions for what she wanted them to look at in order to focus the trip.

Earlier in the report we explored the core practice transfer work, both internal and external, of ASTs. All we wish to add here is, firstly, that the wide range of skills to which we drew attention were often not what ASTs were recognised for; secondly, given that these skills cannot reasonably be assumed there must be a significant case for them being part of an ASTs own professional development needs and entitlement. Indeed, some ASTs mentioned to us that it was hard getting further training for themselves. A further problem is that ASTs, particularly in schools in challenging circumstances, are sometimes unable to get involved in outreach work (and indeed are exempt from doing so). Thus, one LIG reported that although it very much wanted to involve ASTs, it had difficulties in doing so.

3.33 Informal contexts for learning

In contrast to the largely management-supported examples we have considered thus far it is important to draw attention to what the research literature increasingly acknowledges as an important feature of professional learning, namely the power and creativity of the informal and the opportunistic. This has, of course, cropped up in a variety of ways in others sections of this report. What we wish to do here is

supplement messages coming through about the planned nature of creative learning organisations in this section with a reminder that much of what teachers learn from each other is accomplished incidentally, both on the job and, as instanced in the example below, away from it too.

'My best friend is an SEN teacher in a London school...I guess I've learnt a lot just from chatting to him really, about his day, and what his kids are like at his school and what strategies they use, it's another informal way of sharing practice. "What would you do in this situation? Well what we did was."
(Learning Support Teacher)

The teacher who made this point also described the limits and frustrations of learning in this way. When seeking ideas to develop one's personal practice, it is only possible to gain access to the practice of a limited network of friends. However, it is a reminder that formal policy based arrangements of practice transfer should not be prioritised over the ongoing efforts of teachers to develop their practice through largely informal networks. It also indicates that many individuals are motivated to learn from others and willing to draw on a variety of sources for this purpose.

3.34 Students

There is small, but growing, evidence that student themselves have a significant role to play in practice transfer. One respondent reported being inspired by an event at which students themselves had presented highly innovative work 'students-as-researchers' at an NCSL conference in Nottingham. In this case, it was particularly impressive because he had met only the students, rather than the teachers.

'it was young people telling us what was good and bad in the classroom, using similar terminology that we might use, they had a real understanding'. (BPRS partner)

He subsequently ran joint INSET on student voice with another school in which students from the originator school came to talk to the staff. What particularly impressed was the fact that

'they were normal, a cross-section of age groups... they talk how the kids here speak, not as though they came from a public schools, so staff could relate to them. They could visualise how it could work here.'

It may well be that this example seemed to be powerful because it embodied and enacted both evidence of practice and theory: that is, where students were involved in disseminating practices, teachers could see for themselves the evidence of impact where it mattered most, i.e. on the students themselves.

3.4 People and transfer (2) External brokers and networks

Brokers need to encourage connectivity, looking at what are the existing pathways between schools and teachers and helping to foster new ones. (EAZ Co-ordinator)

As we have already established it is important for practitioners to enter voluntarily into collaboration and CPD. However, there is usually a need for someone to broker these relationships. Our research has therefore explored how this might happen, by talking to brokers within schools, within EAZs, HEIs, LEAs and in national organisations like NCSL.

Brokering the transfer of practice between schools involved a number of elements and roles

- Knowing about and making information available (brokering practices)
- Putting people in touch (brokering relationships)
- Creating a sense of audience and a sense of community to provide a context for practice sharing (enabling fruitful dialogue)
- Providing resources that could make practice sharing happen (resourcing joint work)
- Being a catalyst

Brokers frequently expressed a strong sense of belief that their work would make a real difference in helping teachers to learn with and from each other and that this would have subsequent benefits for the young people they teach.

3.41 Brokering Practices

Brokers obviously need to be aware of the work that is already going on in their area or network and to understand the links (and histories) between schools and individuals. Organisations that worked closely with schools were most aware of these elements: in many cases this role was filled by LEAs, but also by other organisations such as EAZs and NCSL. The latter sometimes argued that they were freer to form positive relations with schools and individuals because they did not have a statutory or judgemental role in relation to them. Brokers sometimes have to work hard to reassure teachers that what lies behind the invitation to share good practice is not linked to accountability in any way.

'The intention with which you frame your questions needs to be such that they know that you're not there to catch them out or to mark them right or wrong or give them a grade on a scale.' (NCSL NLC Broker)

LEAs however remain crucial as resources for people who want to find out who to go to when they want to develop practices, as they are still expected to have this information and are 'natural' places to which teachers turn. Brokers within LEAs described how they are taking steps to make individual faces / names more accessible as contact points (e.g. through websites).

One LEA was particularly aware of the need to promote new practices through more practitioner involvement in CPD, collaborative learning and action research. Since it was a large LEA, schools in one part of the county often did not know what was

happening elsewhere. One part of the LEA's solution to brokering was to establish a website that would contain information on three strands:

- available training (including ASTs, not just courses)
- networking, and
- support for research

Schools paid to join the scheme and for this would receive guaranteed training for CPD coordinators, whom the LEA saw as key in spreading ideas about good practice. They also offered collaborative learning for headteachers. Secondly, it appointed a part-time Development Officer, whose role was to seek up-to-date information that could be put on the website, offer research services for schools and individuals, about sources of funding, ASTs with relevant skills, and so on. The LEA also developed dialogic spaces in which teachers, headteachers and heads of department could put forward their areas of expertise and the LEA could help put others in contact with them. They had asked schools to describe the networks in which they were already involved and hoped (from the bewildering mass of information they received in response) to map the major networks in a form that was publicly accessible.

This LEA's approach was therefore to assist rather than dictate processes and provide input. The LEA emphasised that its aim was to be aware of what is going on, and then build an entitlement so that practitioners would lead change according to their self-defined needs:

'What we need to be doing is providing a service and opportunities for schools...such as, working with an AST over a year, not just one day...but equally, if the AST is not what is wanted or they don't get on, they should be able to look somewhere else. As brokers we should have something else available.'
(LEA Advisor)

We should however point out that this model presupposes practitioners with a high degree of awareness of their need. Further, many LEAs also found themselves disadvantaged in the field of practice transfer, firstly, because with significant financial cut backs their services had often been pared down to minimal levels and this inevitably affected their capacity to engage in supporting practice transfer to any significant extent and, secondly, because, unlike e.g. LEPP, LIG, Specialist Schools, and other arrangements that had money set aside for outreach and brokering work, they had to charge for their services.

3.42 Brokering Relationships

Brokering is more than being a conduit of information. It involves applying experience and insight, for instance, about the complex and various contexts in which people work and having a feel for the individuals that might work well together. Brokers need to have a good knowledge not only of what is going on in their area and who the good people are, but also who has some of the skills necessary to share their practice successfully. In the vast majority of cases those skills only existed in an undeveloped form and many brokers were heavily involved in developing capacity in practice transfer. For instance, one EAZ supported the development of coaching skills. Teachers in schools were given opportunities to become coaches and were given the opportunity to explore a learning agenda through specialisms such as

accelerated learning, or brain based learning. They were first encouraged to develop skills within their own classroom, and then go on to support the work of their colleagues. The aim was to provide tiers of support, where coaches were helped to develop their own practice, and then given support in developing the skills that would help them to work collaboratively with other teachers. The group of 56 coaches was managed and met regularly.

In other cases brokers also argued that they needed to go beyond the content of practice and instead develop a process and people based approach to brokering.

'I try and look and see beyond the content and say 'How could they possibly link up with each other and support each other in some way?'. If there are people who I think would get on very well together, even if they're not working on the same thing, if I see something in just the way they talk or the language they use which says to me that there's something here where they could support each other or make something bigger than what they're doing at the moment, I often put them in touch with each other and say, 'This person thinks along the same lines as you. They're working on a different topic, but you might be interested just to chat with them.' (NCSL NLC Broker)

These examples are an important reminder of the fact that whilst brokering requires a set of skills, it requires sophisticated judgement, well-developed political skills and also a set of personal and inter-personal qualities and capacities. Those mentioned in the data include being approachable, flexible, responsive and patient; also how to bring out the best in people and build their confidence in their own ability, and provide a psychological (and sometimes more literal) safety blanket for the process of exploratory collaborative learning. As with so much of the work in practice transfer, the skills and capacities of the broker have a lot to do with the capacity, not only to listen in a genuinely attentive manner to what people say they want and need, but also to do so in an enabling and encouraging way so that teachers are motivated and more able to articulate what is often difficult to express.

At the heart of good brokering there seems to lie a sound knowledge of and feel for learning, in particular how adults learn, both as individuals and within the context of collaborative work with others. Thus, many of the factors with which we are now familiar come into play here. For instance it was emphasised that

'There is a need to be positive. This comes from a recognition that how people feel about themselves is closely tied to their work. In helping teachers to share their work in different contexts their feelings of self-worth need to be addressed.' (EAZ broker)

Brokers argued that it was important that the process is learner-engaged, with the broker being open-minded, not dictating the agenda, and being able to hold the balance between the *'shove'* to encourage different schools and individuals to work with one another and the need to give people the space to work for themselves, and make connections independently. The consolidation of this learner-engaged approach also seemed to aid the development of trust, thus enabling the broker to be constructively challenging.

3.43 Enabling fruitful dialogue

Larger organisations or networks can play a positive role in creating a sense of a wider community of which individual schools and teachers are a part and providing a sense of an audience for those who want to share their practice (by supporting forums in which they might do so). In this way they stimulate exchange and transfer of practice by helping teachers feel it is worthwhile doing so, that they will be heard, that they know where to go if they have something to contribute. In our research, LEAs often played this role by creating, for instance, regular meetings for head teachers or groups of teachers united by a common interest in a particular approach (such as Thinking Skills) or by the subject they taught. Increasingly, however, such roles are also being taken on by other organisations such as Specialist Schools (establishing networks of language teachers, for example).

The work of HEIs emerged very positively in this respect. They were able to offer a strong sense of academic community and a regional capacity to bring committed teachers together, something that many participants clearly found inspirational. Teachers also suggested that they became more confident in their practice through being able to develop a good conceptual grasp of whatever issues were being worked on, combining practical enquiry and academic research with a clear theoretical framework within grounded teacher research. Teachers could also benefit in other ways, for instance, through contact with postgraduate students carrying out research in their schools or classrooms, who could act as a support and stimulator in many ways. On occasion HEIs worked with LEAs: for instance, one South Midlands LEA works with an internationally known university to encourage teachers who undertake postgraduate qualifications to become involved in research groups that foster the capacity to share practices.

Some groups were united more by espousal of particular philosophies than by geographical location. For instance, one VEAZ was drawn together by a commitment to Emotional Intelligence. The work of the NCSL, which sometimes involved university staff, was also spoken of very highly indeed. The Networked Learning Communities initiative was cited on a number of occasions, and in one EAZ we visited was seen as having '*made a real difference*', as, for example, in the headteacher meetings which '*changed from "work" to learning opportunities.*' (EAZ Co-ordinator). In another EAZ it was seen less favourably, with the agreed focus of an NLC network requiring an unhelpful degree of homogeneity. The NLC in particular and the NCSL more generally were both seen to be particularly good at providing very high quality events from which participants gained a great deal. They also had the capacity to give the bigger picture in a convincing and clear way, often at a national level. NCSL NLC provided the most pre-eminent example of networking we came across and was regarded very positively. Its encouragement of local networks, but also those that spanned a wide geographical area was seen to be significant. The local sometimes had too much bad history or persistent competition to make practice transfer possible. Its links to the national and international context were also seen as very important.

Many people belonged to more than one network and often a network's capacity to lead to further fruitful contacts was an attractive part of their appeal. And just as local formal networks have always been part of how schools have learnt with and from

each other, so informal networking remains significant. In a number of instances these led to significant international contacts that offered opportunities to learn from others e.g. new developments in Melbourne, Australia and the Coalition of Essential Schools in the USA.

It is also worth noting that subject specific email lists appear to be one instance where electronic communication appears successful. For instance, the OCR Examining Board offers a renowned email discussion list for Media Studies teachers. It exists partly to address queries about aspects of the syllabus and examining process, and therefore resources a number of individuals to respond to these. However, teachers increasingly use it for general and voluntary exchanges of ideas, schemes of work and so on. Here, the fact that teachers are following the same syllabus in what is still a relatively new subject appears to construct a sense of community and commonality. It is also open to anyone who wishes to join, whereas other such networks are often accessible only via a password.

3.44 Resourcing joint work

Brokers can support and sustain practice transfer by resourcing it. This in turn depends on their resources. We have dealt with this briefly in *Section 3.21* of this report. The only caveat we would add at this point is that the ephemeral nature of many funding sources can lead to a huge amount of time being devoted to chasing funding sources. Even when this is successful it is not necessarily a good thing leading to a moneyed incoherence that can dissipate energies and fragment the focus of purposeful work at both school and LEA level.

3.45 Being a catalyst

Brokers have the capacity to foster new forms of collaboration between schools. Their success in doing so may depend on their history and reputation, and on their skills in doing so. As one of our respondents suggested

'the whole business of collaboration works on doing things that work, doing it by doing it, and building up trust and strong relationships as a result of that. You change people's practices by changing their beliefs, and you change people's beliefs by changing their experience. So by introducing new ways of working, which wouldn't have happened had we not been here, by us being a catalyst' (EAZ Director)

One example which rests significantly on the catalytic and organisational capacity of the co-ordinator comes from a Midlands LiG group. Acknowledging that 'there is still a fair way to go on collaboration' as a 'broad church' cluster with a range of schools, it is currently focusing on sharing and comparing practice in the three core subjects, English, Maths and Science. Initially the Cluster Coordinator talked to the three key heads in each school, looked at strategies, did an audit, and came up with a Good Practice guide that recognised how much was already going on. The heads then developed 'get togethers' for teachers from these subjects in the form of twilight conferences in a local hotel providing a buffet before the formal meeting 5-7pm. There are two 'get togethers' each term. The first is on a common theme determined

by the heads, such as 'achievement at KS4' or 'maintaining momentum from Y8 to Y9', or 'HoDs' role in evaluation and monitoring'. The second is decided by the subject teachers themselves: topics have included, for instance, 'catering for the visual-auditory-kinaesthetic learner', 'open / closed question strategies in Maths', 'tackling common mistakes in English'. The meetings have 10-15 minutes' input from each school, teachers share resources/ posters, and the whole event is very classroom-focused. The group also organise exchange visits between schools.

Section 4
THE CHALLENGE OF GOOD PRACTICE

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4.1 What is ‘good practice’?

Beneath this apparently simple question, which was central to our inquiry, lie several different types of discourse. These cluster around three sub-questions:

- What do we mean by “practice” in these different conversations?
- What counts as “good” practice?
- What evidence or provenance should we look for when searching for, or deciding to try, a practice that is new to us?

4.11 What do we mean by practice?

The scope and scale of a practice will depend on both its focus and the number of people involved. At minimum it could refer to just one part of one teacher’s repertoire. In contrast, a conversation focussed on examination results might define practice as “all the work done by one department during Key Stage 4”. School policies for homework, bullying or communication with parents would extend to a much larger group of people, but occupy a smaller proportion of their time.

In the context of a transfer between two individual teachers, the focus of the practice being transferred could be:

- A new addition to a teacher’s repertoire,
- A principle (e.g. equality) or a general concept (e.g. constructivism), which is capable of being interpreted in a wide variety of ways,
- A set of skills developed over time, such as learning to learn, critical thinking or learning in groups, or
- A cluster of activities and/or learning materials, which constitutes the main body of the curriculum for a particular subject.

However, if we look at the practice development process, we note that a key factor in a teachers’ learning is their meta-practice of improvement -- the way they think about, evaluate or seek to improve their practice. This also includes how they learn from experience and talking to other people, their awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, their ability and disposition to address aspects of their practice in need of improvement, their disposition to expand their repertoire by seeking and trying out new practices and ideas, and their management of their time to make room for a developmental dimension to their work.

There are clear advantages to engaging in mutual support and joint activities, in which two or more teachers are engaged with an identical or similar practice development challenge; and some of the new practices mentioned above demand continuity over three or more years. Thus practice development for groups of teachers within a department may be more effective in the long run, even though it is sometimes tactically wise to start with a small group of volunteers then seek to expand it. There is also a meta-practice at department level, which needs to include:

- How the department / team supports the practice development of individual teachers
- How the department / team finds out about, assesses and develops new departmental practices
- How the department / team connects with and contributes to practice evaluation and development at school level.

The same logic applies at school level. Schools, which are members of partnerships, consortia or networks, also have opportunities both to share practices at school level and to broker opportunities for sharing practices or joint development work at the level of departments or individual teachers. Primary schools do not have departments as such, because most teachers teach most subjects. Learning coordinators have a key leadership role, but their initiatives have to be much more co-ordinated and collectively prioritised than those of secondary school departments to protect individual teachers from being over-committed to too many separate developments.

Some people and departments have developed their meta-practice through a combination of insight and experience; but this critical area of expertise has not received the same level of research attention as classroom practices, nor does it figure significantly in the professional development programme of the average school. Expertise in the work of transfer is exceedingly thin, and we have already explained how difficult it is for researchers to access and study this work (see *Section 1.3*). Perhaps the transfer of this meta-practice should be treated as more urgent than the transfer of practice itself.

4.12 What counts as good practice?

The easiest starting point for this discussion is the total practice of one teacher with one class. Teachers are used to making judgements about pieces of practice they observe, even though these excerpts are incomplete and their judgements may differ from those made by some other teachers. When reporting back to colleagues, such judgements may be accompanied by descriptions of those aspects of the practice they deem most relevant to their own context and comments on the students' motivation and learning. There may also be some evidence from examination results or OfSTED reports. The teacher being observed in a potential transfer context may offer a practice development narrative that describes how aspects of practice deemed significant by that teacher were initiated and further developed through classroom experience. Judgements about the observed relationships with students and the values embedded in the practice may also feature. If, unusually, research evidence is cited by the practitioner concerned, the teacher audience will be interested only if they perceive that evidence to be both relevant to their own contexts and from what they regard as a trustworthy source.

In the context of transfer, the same criteria can be applied to the “whole practice” of both the receiving teacher and the originating teacher; but in both cases consideration has to be given to the maturity of that practice. Usually, the practice of the originating teacher will have been developed over some time and tuned to that particular class; but the practice of the receiving / partner teacher is likely to be judged by the teacher

herself, as well as by others, before there has been time for it to have been fully developed.

However, making valid judgements about a “practice” that is probably being only partially transferred is still more problematic. Is it a concept, a set of key features of the originator’s practice, a set of skills, or a package incorporating all of those aspects? Not only does the abstraction of some decontextualised representation of a practice seem inauthentic to some teachers, whose first instinct when considering a new practice is to investigate the context and compare it with their own; but it can only be judged with the aid of large scale research that looks at the impact of that decontextualised practice across a wide range of settings. As research into curriculum implementation has shown, the variation between schools claiming to use the same practice can be considerable. What purports to be the new practice is often influenced more by the school context than by adherence to the key factors said to define that practice. The concept of a common decontextualised practice may be nothing more than a delusion. Research into simple hypotheses involving practice variables that can be defined with precision might avoid this problem, but would not necessarily be conclusive. So it is usually more productive to use a “conditional hypothesis” that investigates the conditions under which the practice is most likely or least likely to have a positive impact.

4.2 How do we know if ‘good practice’ is good?

4.21 The credibility of judgement

The first response of policy makers to the question of credibility is to look for independent evidence of practice outcomes such as national examinations and standardised tests or inspection reports. The examinations and tests are probably the most important, because they have a strong influence on OfSTED reports and there is no reverse influence. People may debate whether the examinations and tests measure the intended range of outcomes, but that was not the focus of our project. What does concern us are two more technical questions:

- What learning is covered by these examinations?
- To what body of practice should the results be attributed?

The more appropriate value added data make the answer to the first question very clear. The examinations and tests provide value added data that purports to measure all the learning in a particular subject that occurred in or out of school between two specific dates. Thus it refers to the outcomes of 2, 3 or 4 years of practice in the subject, resulting from the work of all the teachers and others who contributed to that learning including the students themselves. Hence value added data cannot be attributed to imported practices with any degree of confidence unless those practices have significantly influenced the work of several teachers over at least two years; and even then the time gap between the first use of the practice at the beginning of the value added period and the relevant end of period examination is much longer than most people are prepared to wait before making the usual premature judgements.

In contrast, the practice that we saw being shared and transferred between schools was usually a bite-sized chunk rather than a large slice, too small for its contribution to the students' nutritional state to be expected to show. So what kinds of evaluation are appropriate for judging the successful transfer of bite-sized chunks of practice? This depends on the difference between the new practice and the practice that preceded it. What precisely has changed in the classroom? If the content is new, then there will be no examples of previous student work available for comparison.

'The outcomes are ongoing. Because it is so new there aren't any general outcomes. We're just chipping away at things. So you see one class you are working with getting better.' (Teacher, PE)

So the implicit standard may be the quality of work of students in the originating class, which may not be a valid comparison for two reasons: differences in the student population, and the contrast between practices in their first try-out and in their later, mature form. We have to consider the delayed effect of introducing a new practice caused by the time taken by both teachers and students to get used to it and maximise its potential.

If the practice involves teaching similar content in a more challenging way, then the possible benefits may include any of the following changes:

- A larger number of students demonstrate their understanding of the topic
- A significant number of students develop a deeper understanding of the topic
- Students are beginning to develop more critical approaches to texts or experiments
- Students are beginning to learn in a more productive or independent way.

In theory, the first two types of change can be evaluated by comparing outcomes for the topic with those from previous cohorts of students; but this assumes that the new practice incorporates comparable activities to the previous practice in its later stages or final assessment; in many cases the old pattern of assessment might be seen as incompatible with the new practice. The second two types of change are more difficult to evaluate, because their success depends on longer term changes in students approaches to learning. It could trigger more general changes in both teaching and learning that have a long-term effect, or the impact might prove to be only temporary. The problems of measuring such changes might also be beyond the assessment expertise of most teachers.

The notion of 'impact' as a criterion of success is strangely ambiguous. We have heard the word criticised as technicist, yet it also captures an important motivational dimension of teaching and learning appreciated by those in the Arts. The two quotations below from an AST and a recipient of ASTs' support illustrate this very clearly. Although the AST attributes the students' motivation to the activities he is now sharing with other teachers, his infectious enthusiasm is also part of the story. While the delighted recipient of AST transfer services cites improvements in test results, he clearly attributes them to the motivating and challenging properties of the new practices being transferred, and their impact on students previously perceived as problematic.

I want people to get in using these activities because they're good, they work, they engage the students, they get the students' understanding so much better and they enthuse about them ... (and) teachers enjoy them. I've had teachers ... (who) like a very much teacher/pupil, 'I'm the teacher, I'm giving you the information' type role...who are very traditional, come back to me and say 'I've tried this activity and it was brilliant, it really worked well, the kids were out of their seats but they were working, it was really good'. My view is If I can get someone into using these activities because the activities work and they're enjoyable, from that then I think they will go from there to try other activities and once they're sort of doing a number of activities, then they will take a wider interest in the activities.... After a bit you gradually shift, and then they will start thinking about the theory behind it. (AST)

The level of academic achievement has risen as a result of learning new practices from the ASTs. We saw how other could do it differently, how they could motivate and challenge pupils learning beyond their capabilities, we have seen a great improvement in the number of pupils achieving level 5 or above, it has risen from 32% in 2001 to 48% now (2002-2003 academic year)... The kids felt encouraged and motivated, set three are learning things we didn't think they could learn. This was a result of the motivation and the belief by (name of AST) that they could do this.... The poor attitude and behaviour of some of the year nine and eleven students has largely disappeared now as they are more motivated. (AST Partner)

In these examples, the students' motivation appears to be enhancing that of their teachers. We also know that teacher enthusiasm can positively affect their students. Whichever sparks first, it requires both to sustain successful learning over time. Good practice depends both on sustaining motivation and on a more analytic monitoring capability that spots areas of student inattention or difficulty and adopts a problem solving approach to improving student learning. Thus on the one hand teachers may become increasingly motivated as they engage with new practices and begin to realise their potential, and this motivation may itself have a positive impact on students' motivation; while on the other hand one could argue, from a long-term teacher development perspective, that teachers' professional growth depends on them engaging with change under conditions where:

- They see the relevance of the change to their aspirations for improving the learning of the students concerned; and
- The magnitude of the change(s) with which they are engaged is sufficient to sustain a continuing challenge to improve their practice, but not so large as to swamp them with more change than they can handle without reducing the quality of their current classroom practice.

Both approaches to practice development require a school culture and management style of the kind described by some of the headteachers we interviewed. Engaging in the sharing and transfer of practice may be one of the best ways of developing such a culture, one that is easier to pace and develop incrementally than attempting a more radical upheaval. In this context transfer of practice is seen as part of a wider school development strategy, rather than a goal in its own right. It can also be seen as just part of a growing sharing relationship within partnerships and consortia that have yet

to develop their full potential. Once more there is a need to consider a longer timescale than is currently common.

4.22 Provenance

Let us now turn to the issue of provenance. Potential importers of new practices from other schools and teachers are influenced by their trust in the current users and by the provenance of the practice itself. Innovative practices we noted at school level included both those that were evidence based and those that were currently fashionable. A good example of an evidence-based practice is assessment for learning. The strongest relevant evidence is that assessment has been consistently shown by decades of research to have a dominating influence on teaching and learning, increased by the high stakes outcomes being used as indicators of quality at school level as well as at student level. This influence effectively trumps other aspects of any curriculum. The principle that we should cease to fight this “problem” and seek to use assessment to enhance learning in a manner that motivates learners at all levels is not new; but school-wide adoption of this principle has been rare, and there are also some arguments about how far this can be developed within the current examination and testing system. It is clearly an innovation that requires a great deal of careful planning, experiment and formative evaluation. The evidence for the success of any particular practice based on this principle is limited but not discouraging. However, it does not come close to the mass of evidence supporting the general principle. The provenance for any particular school practice will partly depend on how the school has developed its own version of assessment for learning, whether potential transferees are impressed by that strategy and the extent to which the development process itself has made good use of formative evaluation.

The provenance for “learning styles” is very different. The principle is that teaching should take into account the different ways in which students learn. The existence of different ways of learning and their varied use by different students is not contested; but the nature of these different ways of learning is not necessarily well represented by the most used psychological constructs nor well captured by the most used questionnaires. Which types of knowledge are in the learners’ minds when completing their questionnaires, presumably those associated with the school context where they are located at the time? Would this generalise to learning in a leisure, work or family context? Moreover, the most appropriate response to the questionnaire data is highly contested. There is no strong research evidence to support a particular kind of practice. Perhaps the most worrying aspect of this innovation is the apparently unquestioned assumption that it is good practice to use a student’s “preferred learning style” to optimise short term learning outcomes. In the world outside school, people have to learn in many different ways and could be disadvantaged by having such an inflexible approach to learning. There is considerable evidence from research into workplace learning that people are much more aware of formal school-type learning than other kinds of learning (Eraut 2004) ⁽⁵⁾, and that this inhibits the sharing of

(5) Eraut, M. (2004) ‘Informal Learning in the Workplace’ *Studies in Continuing Education* 26 (2), 247-274.

occupational practices. We would argue that it would be more beneficial to teach students to use a wide range of learning approaches and to learn to decide which combinations are most appropriate for each learning context.

4.3 The Challenge of Evaluation

The picture emerging from our data suggests that there is very little formal evaluation of practices being transferred by either the originator or the partner. This does not, of course, mean that practice transfer has been unsuccessful: it just means that the formal evidence, which enables schools to answer questions about its success, is virtually absent.

Why is this the case? Schools gave us a range of answers to this question. For some it had to do with the sheer pressure that current policy context puts schools under. There were two different manifestations of this. One had to do with the plethora of initiatives and requirements schools felt obliged to respond to. Thus the head of one of our ‘abandoning’ schools indicated that the initial work was not so much abandoned as not followed up, because the pressure of internal and external initiatives meant that he simply did not have the time to pursue it.

The other had to do with the perceived climate of hyper-accountability, which meant that particular sensitivities came into play that needed careful consideration. This came through strongly from a number of schools and is worth considering in a little more detail. This has not only caused considerable resentment but has made people nervous about how evaluation or other data might be used.

‘We fill in forms about how often we fill forms in. It can be very damaging [to relationships with partner schools]. You have to be very careful too in using the data. It has to be used sensitively. You can get data off somebody which they feel they are giving in a positive way and then it could be used negatively against them.’

This is not just to do with the vulnerability that collecting data brings: it is also to do with how the very collection of that data, for example by the originator school, could in many circumstances *‘alter the relationships [between the schools] into a power thing’* (Deputy headteacher, Leading Edge Partnership School). An allied point about the consequences of a fear-laden policy context was made by the head of the same, highly successful Leading Edge Partnership school who felt that people were being *‘over cautious’*, even in supportive and innovative initiatives.

Other reasons given for lack of hard evaluation evidence had to do with views about

- its inherent difficulty; *‘It is hard to quantify if it has made a difference’* (Assistant headteacher, Leading Edge Partnership school);
- its elusiveness; *‘Figures don’t necessarily tell you everything ... There are so many stories to tell you can’t put your finger on it. You’re always tweaking and changing things.’* (Head of department, PE);
- and the amount of time it would take to do it properly; *‘Questionnaires have limited value. They are not a route to seeing how effective a practice is. Only*

seeing someone regularly over six months would do that. (Assistant headteacher, Leading Edge Partnership school).

These perceptions of the inherent difficulty of evaluations of transferred practices that meet the ever-increasing external demands for “robust” evidence are in total accord with the views of evaluation experts. In *Section 4.21* we noted that formal evaluation systems in schools, based on tests and examinations, can only be legitimately applied to judgements of value added by the large slices of practice, involving several teachers, that constitute a school’s provision for a subject between two successive external measurements of achievement. This information is important for monitoring the long-term progress of students, even though the scope of such measurements is necessarily limited. However, it does not enable a statistical wizard to attribute value added data to any particular school-related causal factors. *‘There are a number of things which are not necessarily easy to put your finger on and say “This change in GCSE results is a direct result of this activity”’* (Senior person in VEAZ)

Honing in on possible causal factors within the school depends on the ability of the relevant teaching staff, possibly with some advice from trusted “connoisseurs”, to collect many different kinds of evidence, to consult the research literature, and to construct plausible causal theories. The evidence needed for this purpose is rather different from that collected for internal accountability (Pawson & Tilley, 1996) (6); and the theories have to be subjected to further scrutiny, not least by sharing and discussing them with students and eliciting the students’ own theories relating to factors affecting their learning. This approach was only encountered when teachers became Best Practice Research Scholars or undertook higher degrees; because otherwise it was very difficult to generate the time and commitment required to access the necessary expertise and conduct and report on the evaluation.

At this point it is important to look at research and theorising outside education in order to understand why these problems are not specific to schooling, but are typical of most areas of human activity. The period after the second world war was characterised by increasingly ambitious claims for social science research, which have gradually been replaced by more modest goals. These centred around a dominant paradigm, which conceptualised decision-making as a choice between a clearly defined set of options on the basis of strong evidence. Thus decision-making was defined as a purely analytical activity, even though the related process of problem-solving was often seen as involving creativity as well as analysis. This approach was particularly influential in business, where decision-making came to be viewed mainly in financial terms, because that was where the experts promised to provide the most reliable evidence and the most plausible reasoning. In the intervening fifty years critics of this model have pointed out that this approach oversimplified complex situations and that strong evidence was only rarely available on some important aspects of the decision context. The decision-making model itself, however, remained unchallenged until the 1980s, when the parallel development of computer based “expert systems” by cognitive scientists finally prompted a series of research studies to investigate how recognised experts actually made their decisions.

(6) Pawson R. and Tilley N. (1997) *Realistic Evaluation*, London, Sage.

It soon became clear that experts did not use the paradigmatic model; and several alternative models were developed to interpret these new findings, some more relevant to some contexts than others. However, there was general agreement that the salient features of most “naturalistic” decision-making settings included:

- Problems are ill-structured
- Information is incomplete, ambiguous, or changing
- Goals are shifting, ill-defined or competing
- Decisions occur in multiple event-feedback loops
- Time constraints exist
- Stakes are high
- Many participants contribute to the decisions
- The decision-maker must balance personal choice with organisational norms and goals (Orasanu and Connelly 1993, pp19-20) ⁽⁷⁾.

Both politicians and the teachers we interviewed would have little difficulty in recognising this scenario.

Once these contextual parameters had been identified, it became easier to understand why the decision-making processes observed in naturalistic settings were so different from those advocated by the old paradigm. In particular:

- Experts frequently generate and evaluate a single option rather than analyse multiple options concurrently
- Experts are distinguished from novices mainly by their situation assessment abilities, not their general reasoning skills
- Because most naturalistic decision problems are ill-structured, decision makers choose an option that is good enough, without continually striving for the best.
- Reasoning and acting are interleaved, rather than segregated (Weick 1983) ⁽⁸⁾
- Instead of analysing all facets of a situation, making a decision, and then acting, it appears that in complex realistic situations people think a little, act a little, and then evaluate the outcomes and think and act some more (Connelly and Wagner 1988 p19) ⁽⁹⁾

The implications for knowledge use are that (1) the relationship between knowledge and decision-making is rarely simple, (2) good decision-making is critically dependent on how the decision is framed by the decision-makers in the light of their situational understanding and therefore (3) the balance is tilted more towards the personal knowledge of the decision-maker and less towards the codified knowledge management system than might be implied by classical decision-making theory.

(7) Oranasu, J. & Connolly, T. (1993) ‘The reinvention of decision-making’ in G.A.Klein et al *Decision Making in Action: Models and Methods*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

(8) Weick, K. E. (1983) ‘Managerial thought in the context of action’ in S. Srivastva (Ed) *The Executive Mind*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

(9) Connolly, T. and Wagner, W. G. (1988) ‘Decision cycles’ in R. L. Cardy, S. M. Puffer and M. M. Newman (Eds) *Advances in Information Processing in Organisations Vol 3*, pp 183-205. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

The problem for many teachers is that the evaluations they are required to do for school accountability purposes do not contribute to the decisions they make when seeking to improve their practice. For this latter purpose they found informal evaluative conversation more useful than formalised paper based evaluation. For example:

'You are always evaluating but you don't have to write it down, you don't have to write two booklets to show what you've done ... We're not against evaluation, it's just the ways and process. It could be more verbal and less formal.'

It is often easier and more productive to engage in "narrative evaluations" that leads directly into discussions about what to do next. Thus one teacher from a case study school described a dialogue-based process of evaluation about her trial of a new approach to the modern foreign languages curriculum at Key Stage 3.

'I was supposed to be evaluating it constantly and writing a journal and everything ... I wrote the schemes of work for each module and that was enough really, and then the thought of sitting down and doing the evaluation was all a bit too much really ... I said to X, "I haven't done a single thing. I haven't written anything in my journal." He just said, "Don't worry about that. You sit down and talk to me, and I'll write what you're saying, over a cup of tea" ... Getting that all down on paper, I couldn't have done it without him ... He got it all written down; what I said he wrote down. And through that I realised I'd learned a lot.' (Learning Support Teacher)

The school's performance management structure was designed to allow staff to act as 'critical friends' to one another, and this provided a context in which teachers were able to record and formalise the learning they had experienced when introducing changes into their teaching.

Our earlier account of the incremental nature of most naturalistic decision-making is particularly relevant to teachers contemplating transfer. Their process is more likely to be a series of small decisions to find out more, or to engage in some direct experience to get the feel of the new practice, than a singular decision to adopt another teacher's practice wholesale or go for a pre-planned adaptation without testing things out first. Thus the affective dimension of transfer revealed by the importance of relationships is accompanied by a gradual process of engagement with the new practice through developing some understanding of what it is like to teach that way, how best to involve one's students and what kind of a difference might it make to the motivation and achievement of one's class, particularly for those members of it who are a current source of concern.

'When there's something new we chat about it and then try it out, and see what the student response is.' (HOD partner school)

The metaphor of 'courtship', used in our second policy seminar to describe the relationship between the teachers from the originating and partner schools, could equally well be applied to the partner teacher's courtship of the new practice and even, perhaps, to the receiving teacher having to renew her courtship of her class.

If one accepts this rather different framing of the transfer opportunities then the kinds of evidence that affect a receiving teacher's ongoing decision-making are likely to be of the following kind:

- The teacher begins to feel that she can learn the new practice.
- The teacher becomes confident that the originating teacher can offer support for this learning in a flexible way that suits her personal approach.
- The teacher feels that the new practice is compatible with the kind of relationship she seeks to develop with her students.
- The teacher notices that the new practice attracts a high level of student participation, first in the originating school, then in her own class.
- The teacher notices that students are motivated by the new practice.
- The teacher sees ways in which she could adapt the practice to more closely fit the needs of her class.
- The teacher sees evidence of students learning important aspects of the curriculum.
- The teacher sees how the practice might help her to respond to the needs of challenging students in her class.
- The teacher finds ways of fine-tuning the new practice to the needs of her class, as she becomes more used to it.
- The teacher feels that, once she has become accustomed to the new practice, it will not be significantly more demanding of her time and effort

We would suggest that future evaluations of transfer work involving chunks of practice should be directed towards refining and improving these natural evaluation processes, so that better decisions are made and more is learned about the transfer process itself.

To draw these first three sections of *The Challenge of Good Practice* to a close we provide a *Decision-making guide for joint development of new practices* (Figure 1 below) which summarises the stages through which teachers and schools might usefully go in order to address many of the issues explored in *Sections 4.1 – 4.3* of this report.

Figure 1

**Decision-making guide for
joint development of new practices**

Stage 1
School policy

- Does the area of practice concerned relate to learner needs identified as priorities by the school or department?
- Does the area of practice relate to CPD needs identified by individual teachers, curriculum areas or departments?

Stage 2
Intelligence gathering

- What are the principal features of the practice to be developed?
- What are the anticipated benefits for students?
- Who is likely to be involved in the development process?
- Who needs to be consulted?
- Who are the current users of this practice, or of some of its main features?
- Can they be visited?
- Are they prepared to cooperate in its development in your school?

Stage evaluation

- The teachers begin to feel that they can learn the new practice.
- The teachers feels that the new practice is compatible with the kind of relationship they seek to develop with their students
- While observing relevant practice in another school/classroom, the teachers notice a high level of student participation and motivation.
- After this observation and discussion with the teacher observed, the teachers become confident that (1) their own students would also benefit, and (2) the teacher they observed could support their own practice development in a flexible way that suited their personal approaches and classroom conditions.

Stage 3
Planning

- Do you want to start with:
 - A pilot project,
 - A phased plan that leaves later decisions open until you have acquired more information and experience, or
 - An overall plan that assumes that you will proceed unless you encounter major unanticipated problems?
- How long do you think it will take for you to take each phase to the stage where you feel that either you are ready to proceed further or that anticipated benefits for students are beginning to show?
- What additional time do you think you will require?
- How do you think that your students will adapt to this new practice?
- What do you see as the main threats to the success of your project?
- How might you deal with them?
- How much support will you need at each stage?
- What will be the cost of any travel or materials?
- Produce an outline plan for your project and it with the other relevant parties.

Stage evaluation

- The teachers involved feel confident in their project plan, and in the support they expect to receive from their co-developers and their school colleagues.

Stage 4
Early Experience

- Are my students motivated by this new approach?
- Is there a good level of student participation?
- Are my students learning important aspects of the curriculum?
- Does this new practice help me to respond to the needs of challenging students in my class?
- Can I adapt or fine-tune my practice to more closely fit the needs of my class?
- After I have got used to this new practice and settled it down, will it be significantly more demanding of my time and effort?

Stage evaluation

- Project colleagues visit each other's classrooms and give each other feedback.
- School colleagues outside the project visit and offer comments.

4.4 Should 'good practice' be accredited?

During the course of our research it was frequently suggested, by policy makers rather than by teachers, that good practice might be validated in some way. Some people felt that a 'user warranty' would ensure that the practice being transferred was good, that the partner would not be wasting their time investing effort to adopt or adapt it, and that therefore the resources put into promoting practice transfer could be seen to be spent wisely and transparently.

The problem with this approach is that it is inherently unsound. One has to ask precisely what is being warranted. Is it one teacher's practice on a particular day, or a much larger chunk? What kind of evidence is to be expected, and who will pay for the collection of such evidence? Still more important is the delusion that the practice transferred will be equivalent to the whole practice of the originating teacher, and that any warranty will necessarily transfer to other teachers and other contexts. It would require an expensive research project to sort out that problem.

However both our findings and the above analysis have already pointed to some of the dilemmas involved in developing formal 'validation' schemes. A specific example of an attempt to identify and accredit good practice is the Leading Aspect scheme. ⁽¹⁰⁾

(10) See also the GTC Teacher Learning Academy scheme. This is an enquiry based model progressively constructed out of a portfolio of evidence. See <http://www.gtc.org.uk/gtcinfo/tla.asp> for further information

We were contacted by a number of schools that had received Leading Aspect awards and we are basing these comments on their, not necessarily representative, views. Any school can apply for a Leading Aspect award, provided it can afford £500 to do so, and the school itself identifies elements of its work that it considers worthy of an award. In this way, the scheme acknowledges the findings of work on internal variance, which recognises that even schools that are generally considered to be poor performers have pockets of good practice within them. An accreditor visits and assesses whether this perception is correct or whether the school should only be deemed 'working towards' the award, in other words, there is no failure. The award involves a certificate and entry on the LA website.

It is worth noting that whilst the schools were happy with the LA process, this was because they had generally identified work that was part of their development plans, and the application process had therefore been beneficial in enhancing the school's capacity for self-review. Some commented that they had not found the assessment particularly rigorous. Since they were primarily interested in the benefits of the process rather than the outcomes, this was not a problem for them, but it did mean that they did not see this as a model that would produce reliable data for other schools. In turn this suggests that establishing more rigorous schemes formally to accredit good practice might risk becoming hugely bureaucratic and costly, and thereby lose the prime benefit of school self-evaluation.

Interestingly, some schools had received awards for work that ran counter to current definitions of good policy, if not good practice. For instance, one primary school did not use classroom assistants and instead used its budget to employ additional trained teachers who team-taught in the school. The school staff and SMT identified considerable benefits from doing so, but acknowledged they were out of step with current practice. Again, this might pose dilemmas for a more formal and centralised accrediting scheme

Many schools contacted us to say that they had received no interest in their work after achieving the award. This might be due partly to the fact that the scheme is in its infancy, but it did point to other problems. The fact that, unlike the Beacon scheme, achieving an award did not bring financial recompense proved to be a stumbling block when it came to sharing good practice with other schools. If they were asked to share it, they had to do so in effect at their own expense unless the other school could pay, and some schools were clearly less geared up to running mini-consultancies than others. Further, one school found that it had only shared practice with a school with which it had personal links. This shows once more the importance of prior relationships in practice sharing. It seems that schools are relatively unlikely to contact schools 'cold' except in particular circumstances (for instance, this did happen in the case of Special Schools). Merely putting a description of a practice on a website might not be enough to inspire other schools to get in touch.

It might be possible to give OfSTED a remit to identify (rather than more formally validating) good practice in schools. However, inspectors are unlikely to see innovative practice under the current regime, where teachers often claim they opt for 'safe' practices when being inspected. Programmes like Leading Edge Partnership are currently too small-scale to have a wide enough reach in identifying and spreading good practice. However, LEA advisors already seem to be able to observe practices

that seem good and worth recommending to others, at least in those authorities where they exist in sufficient numbers and where their remit allows them sufficient space to engage in developmental work. Moreover, in their roles as 'brokers' they can act as a bridge to spread such practice, and can use their knowledge of schools 'from the inside' to identify people within other schools who might particularly respond to practices. For this reason, some LEA brokers very much welcomed a shift to a role of supporting school self-review rather than a more inspectorial and judgemental role. One LEA has begun to identify what it terms 'interesting practice': that is, work they are not in a position to validate but which they feel other schools might like to know about. One of the most compelling features of this arrangement and others like it is the central space for professionals' skilled judgements.

I think we should give more trust to let people try out, without being steered endlessly by consultants and by DFES booklets etc, etc... I suppose this is making a plea for switching back to acceptance that some of the things teachers do intuitively, which they don't get the opportunity to share in tightly run, agenda-led meetings. They are the things that make the difference in the classroom... (Primary Head VEAZ)

Section 5

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Section 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final chapter of our report we offer nineteen recommendations arising from our research. We target these at three different audiences:

- School Practitioners
- Local government, other enabling organisations and networks
- Central government policy makers & agencies

The recommendations themselves are grounded in five key areas and include important foci for future research as well as immediate action points. The first of these areas is the central notion of

- Joint practice development

The other four, which provide important touchstones for the successful realisation of joint practice development, are

- Relationships
- Institutional and teacher identity
- Learner engagement

and

- Understanding time

5.1 Joint practice development

Notions of ‘knowledge transfer’ and ‘practice transfer’ seemed to have very little currency or validity amongst teachers with whom we spoke. Whilst the notion of ‘transfer’ may well have a place in collaborative professional learning, there is a need for a more satisfactory term that captures the kinds of collaborative practice that seem most relevant to the professional contexts of schools learning with and from each other. This is not just a minor linguistic point: it is essentially a suggestion that a shift in language should mirror an important conceptual re-alignment.

Joint practice development

A ‘transfer’ model seems to be associated with delivery of ‘validated’ packages of pre-formed practice seen by others to be good for the recipient. We suggest ‘joint practice development’ which explicitly articulates a more learner-centred approach and provides a better description both of what teachers aspired to and what they actually achieved together. This change in terminology validates the existing practice of teachers who are trying to learn new ways of working and acknowledges the effort of those who are trying to support them. It also underscores the necessity of mutual engagement which lies at the heart of the complex task of opening up and sharing practices with others.

Successful transfer of practices, not just ideas, usually requires joint practice development, so it is best to plan for this from the beginning. Often the roles are different, but our evidence suggests that all partners learn a great deal. Joint practice

development within or across schools can also be viewed as an extremely important dimension of CPD.

Before exploring the four touchstones of joint practice development in more detail below we draw attention here to two things: firstly, to an important agent of cross-institutional learning and, secondly, to an over-arching contextual matter that significantly conditions what is possible at a systemic level.

Brokering

The first of these - brokering practices and capacity between teachers and schools - emerged as a key element in the development of collaborative professional learning. However, despite its promise, existing provision appears patchy and the notion of brokerage seems conceptually under-developed and empirically of uneven quality.

Lowering the stakes, raising aspiration and achievement

The second matter – the shaping of national education policy context – is clearly a systemic issue of great consequence. There was substantial support amongst teachers for a more overt commitment on the part of this government to collaboration and joint learning between schools, both of which were seen as agents of higher achievement and a better education for young people. The perception arising from the research was that those arrangements and wider policy contexts that encouraged competition and, more specifically, those arrangements that raised professional stakes too highly should be addressed. The needs of students were not seen to be well served by such regimes. Furthermore, staff and schools will not take risks if the consequences of doing so are likely to adversely affect their identity, their jobs, the continued well-being of the schools in which they teach and the young people whom they serve.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	<i>Local government, enabling organisations, networks</i>
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Recommendation 1

Developing joint practice development capacity across the system

- ⇒ LEAs should demonstrate their belief in the value of certain kinds of collaboration. They should not only consider making joint practice development a way of implementing a range of EDP priorities, but also make joint practice development a priority in its own right. In addition they should work with other LEAs to share their own practice. All of these activities would be of practical as well as symbolic significance.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	<i>Central government policy makers & agencies</i>
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Recommendation 2

Deepening understanding of ‘brokerage’

- ⇒ Further study is required to develop a robust intellectual account of brokerage, that summarises the current state of our empirical knowledge in this domain, and recommends a number of fruitful ways forward.

*Recommendation 3***Lowering the stakes, raising aspiration and achievement**

- ⇒ Those responsible for the wider framework of education policy in England should work towards lowering the stakes and seek less counter-productive ways of raising levels of aspiration and achievement in schools. Steps should be taken to reduce the conflict between policies designed to encourage collaboration and those that militate against it. ‘Joined up’ working both within and between departments will be vital to deliver a consistent message.

5.2 Relationships

The development and / or continuity of certain kinds of trusting relationships are fundamental to the transfer of good practice. They are not a welcome extra or a pleasant accompaniment, but the necessary foundation of the complex, demanding and potentially rewarding process of professional learning across institutional boundaries that this research seeks to understand.

Networks are excellent for distributing and exchanging ideas, and general intelligence seeking. However, transfer of practice is more intrusive than transfer of information or ideas; and therefore more demanding on the quality of the relationships between those involved in the process. Moreover, the difficulty of discussing practice, which has an important tacit dimension, puts limits on the quality of communication without joint observation. This requires the trust of teachers being observed by possible future partners in practice development; and will clearly be helped if both partners play the roles of both observer and observed.

Prior trusting relationships

Substantial evidence suggests prior relationships are very significant in the success of cross-organisational arrangements and learning networks. Even the dominant ‘content based’ models of practice transfer which assume practice ‘content’ as the main driver of joint activity draw strongly on an extensive hinterland of prior relationships and trust. In ‘relationships based’ models which emerged as an important, though less frequent, phenomenon the existence or formation of relationships turned out to be both the initial and continuing basis on which subsequent practical, focussed work was based.

Avoiding prescription

The success of policies designed to spread good practice is determined by the detail of the learning activities and relationships between individual teachers in schools. It is costly, difficult and largely unwise to try to prescribe in detail how these relationships should function – they will be driven by particular local needs and circumstances. However, helping to encourage and support good learning activities and relationships is important for policy.

Challenge

One important difference of view which emerged on a number of occasions, primarily though not exclusively, amongst policy makers and advisers was the question of challenge. Some saw familiarity and continuity of relationships as potentially corrosive of challenge, with close colleagues unwilling to criticise each other; others, including the majority of teacher respondents, saw healthy development and challenge as an outcome, not a casualty, of long term relationships of trust.

Acoustics of policy formulation

Another variation of concern arising from the possibility of too cosy relationships over time appeared to influence what we call ‘the acoustics of policy formulation’. Here the danger is that orthodoxies develop almost unwittingly and the views, wishes and experiences of colleagues who, in the words of one head, are ‘not on the radar screen’ of those in positions of power and influence are not just less visible, but also less audible than they should be.

Different kinds of relationships

Finally, although relationships come through very strongly as one of the key factors in the sustained flourishing of joint practice development the profession currently lacks a sufficiently discriminating account of the nature and potential of different kinds of relationships necessary to support future development.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	<i>Local government, enabling organisations, networks</i>
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Recommendation 4

Extending & initiating joint work

- ⇒ LEAs, other enabling organisations and networks should recognise that whilst they play an important role in brokering and fostering new relationships in the short-term, they should not forcibly or artificially sustain them. They should either
- encourage existing partnerships to grow and develop organically
 - and / or
 - acknowledge that significant amounts of time will have to be invested before the benefits of rich collaboration for significant professional learning become evident. Those involved in new relationships must feel independently engaged in them, rather than simply tolerating imposed connections.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	<i>Local government, enabling organisations, networks</i>
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Recommendation 5

Mapping relationships

- ⇒ LEAs, enabling organisations and networks should consider mapping existing relationships between teachers to identify ‘hubs and holes’ of connectivity. This could be represented using social network analysis software for example and used by LEAs to take a strategic view of networks. Mapping has the potential to achieve two things. The first involves highlighting existing networks or ‘hubs’ allowing brokers to build on prior relationships, maximising the benefits of trust

and openness. The second involves identifying ‘holes’ enabling brokers to utilise opportunities to diversify partnerships and encourage mutual challenge.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	<i>Central government policy makers & agencies</i>
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Recommendation 6

Relationships & practice development

- ⇒ Further intellectual enquiry and empirical research work is required to articulate a typology of relationships that illuminates the different kinds of relationships associated with different kinds of collaborative work, including joint practice development. This typology should be tested in the field to further illuminate whether different kinds of practice require or favour different kinds of relationships. Conceptual and empirical work will also be necessary to identify the required conditions for these relationships to thrive and how they might be fostered.

5.3 Institutional and teacher identity

How teachers see themselves and others in the practice transfer process is hugely influential in their approach to collaborative professional learning. Most, but by no means all, ‘originators’ linked their ‘good practice’ status to performance data and tended to come from schools that were better endowed financially and in a range of other ways. Their professional confidence also meant they were often well-disposed towards the prospect of reciprocal learning with their ‘partner’ colleagues. In contrast, ‘partner’ identity tended to be much more diffident, very often self-deprecating and linked more frequently than their ‘originator’ counterparts to the type of students within their catchments.

‘The Best Get Better’

Within arrangements in place at the time of the research that celebrated those deemed to be more successful than others there is clear evidence that those doing the ‘transferring’ benefited more from the process than their partners. In the resonant words of one respondent, ‘The best get better’ and those in need of help or support sometimes fail to secure the benefits they had hoped for.

Badging

The prevalent ‘badging’ of institutions and individuals often turned out to get in the way of the kinds of learning that collaboration policies advocate and many teachers desire. Any policy initiatives that construct ‘originator’ and ‘partner’ identities may actively inhibit development within partner institutions. Many research participants felt that the ‘Beacon’ model exemplified these difficulties. In contrast the Leading Edge Partnership Programme (LEPP) was seen by some respondents as moving towards a less hierarchical, more productive framework for collaboration.

Different teacher identities

There seems to be, if not a disparity, then a potential tension between many teachers' sense of themselves as learners and the presumptions of those who devise policy and develop local and regional provision to meet those professional development needs. The implicit model underlying the latter seems to be one that presumes teachers are professionally confident, non-pejoratively self-aware, and often highly entrepreneurial in their dispositions and modes of operating. Whilst some teachers embrace this approach to professional learning many others who are just as committed to a range of CPD have quite different dispositions, quite different sets of values and quite other ways of furthering their professional learning in the interests of the young people they serve. The more commonly encountered models of teacher identity are much quieter and more self-effacing in their approach to professional learning. They are often more diffident about accessing public provision of CPD and much less inclined to surf their way across the new technologies to find out what may be available.

There are, of course, mixtures and variations on these themes and it is important that neither 'model' is given more prominence or credence than it deserves, particularly as the period within which the research was undertaken (2003-2004) was one in which recruitment practices and working environments began to change considerably. The key point here is to alert schools (who will take control of CPD under the New Relationship with Schools) and others in meso levels of professional provision (e.g. EiC, LEAs, NCSL, LIGs) to the dangers of one presumed or desired model of teacher learner.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	School practitioners
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Recommendation 7 **CPD & teacher identity**

- ⇒ School CPD co-ordinators and senior staff should ensure that both the content and promotion of professional development programmes take account of a wide range of teacher identities. They should not assume that teachers know what they need or that they will go out and get it if they do. Lessons might be taken from inclusive design here which would tell us to develop strategies for engagement that are designed around those least likely to articulate their needs, but which make engagement more appealing and straightforward to all in doing so.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	Central government policy makers & agencies
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Recommendation 8 **Collective badging**

- ⇒ In cases where badging is deemed appropriate, all participants should be part of a collective badging which honours all those involved as in the Leading Edge Partnership Programme (LEPP).

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	<i>Central government policy makers & agencies</i>
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Recommendation 9

Financing the whole partnership

- ⇒ Where partnerships are funded externally, the partnership as a whole should receive the money and be free to allocate it independently amongst partner schools.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	<i>Central government policy makers & agencies</i>
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Recommendation 10

Joint leadership

- ⇒ Both ‘originating’ and ‘partner’ schools should be encouraged to lead school partnerships, with sensitivity to the burden this might place on struggling schools.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	<i>Central government policy makers & agencies</i>
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Recommendation 11

Developing ‘originator’ capacity across the system

- ⇒ All schools should be encouraged to see themselves as both originators and receivers / partners of practice. To this end, money should be made available to ensure that every school can develop and fund at least one AST. This should promote reciprocal relationships where all schools confidently identify and value their own good practice. Furthermore, with ASTs now emerging with responsibility for things like ‘assessment-for-learning’ it is worth considering the creation of ASTs in CPD.

5.4 Learner engagement

Perhaps the most important single aspect of the transfer process from the partner standpoint is that both parties should be mutually engaged for a significant period of time and that the process should be, if not learner-led then ‘learner-engaged’.

Learner engagement

Practice transfer is more likely to be successful when the recipient of the practice has been involved from the beginning in the process of agreeing and planning the transfer activity. This is important for not only initiating, but also sustaining the process, getting the roles right and ensuring there is an effective use of time. Conversely, the role of the originator needs to extend beyond the initial demonstration and briefing to engage in joint planning and as a critical friend or coach.

Shared responsibility

Where individual teachers were under pressure to improve their performance on the basis of alleged ‘failings’ identified by others the benefits of practice transfer activities were often, unsurprisingly, limited. In some of the most productive instances of transfer work, teams / departments or schools identified areas for improvement and shared responsibility for developing new practices without attributing blame to individuals.

How teachers think about, evaluate and seek to improve their practice

A key factor in a teachers’ learning is the way they think about, evaluate and seek to improve their practice - their meta-practice of improvement. This also includes how they learn from experience and talking to other people, their awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, their ability and disposition to address aspects of their practice in need of improvement, their disposition to expand their repertoire by seeking and trying out new practices and ideas, and their management of their time to make room for a developmental dimension to their work. Despite its importance the profession’s knowledge about this process is markedly under-developed.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	School practitioners
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Recommendation 12

Identifying individual priorities

- ⇒ Plans for collaboration should stress the importance of learner engagement. Teachers in partner schools should be encouraged to identify their own priorities as part of their ongoing development as expert practitioners. School managers should take care to ensure the voice of the partner teacher is both heard and respected in this process.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	School practitioners
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Recommendation 13

Taking partner needs seriously

- ⇒ In tandem with this learner-driven needs identification process, ‘originators’ should consider how they will
- Set out clear aims and be realistic about what could be achieved;
 - Be able to demonstrate the practice being advocated;
 - Be responsive to the requests of partners;
 - Empathise with individual partners’ circumstances;
 - Demonstrate willingness to engage with partners on a mutual basis;
 - Be available for ongoing contact;
 - Provide ‘how to’ advice at the same time as a broad theoretical or contextual picture of the practice advocated;
 - Demonstrate hands on understanding of being a teacher.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	<i>School practitioners</i>
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Recommendation 14

CPD & institutional needs analysis

- ⇒ Schools should be enabled to identify their own development priorities. Planning submissions and bidding processes should scaffold a rigorous analysis of development needs by the schools themselves. School Improvement Partners could play a leading role here in supporting schools to prioritise their development needs.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	<i>Central government policy makers & agencies</i>
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Recommendation 15

How teachers think about, evaluate & seek to improve their practice

- ⇒ Expertise in the work of transfer is exceedingly thin and we have drawn attention in *Section 1.3* to the difficulties of researchers accessing and studying it. Studying the transfer of how teachers think about, evaluate & seek to improve their practice - the meta-practice of improvement - is a strong candidate for worthwhile subsequent research.

5.5 Understanding time

The most common response to our questions about obstacles to practice transfer referred to lack of time. Even though most of the teachers we spoke to were generally keen to get involved in transfer work they insisted that those advocating practice transfer deal realistically and responsibly with the need to provide time to support it.

‘Understanding time’

Just as it is increasingly common place to create ‘wait time’ for young people to think and reflect and make meaning out of a teacher’s question, so it is equally important that ‘understanding time’ be seen as an indispensable component of good professional learning.

Time was needed to

- create what practitioners regarded as ‘good practice’
- learn to transfer those practices
- learn and adapt a new practice, often through joint planning, observation and other forms of joint work.

Short-termism of fund chasing

Research identified a tension between the short-termism of fund chasing and the length of time it takes for joint practice development work to reach the stage of sustainability.

Fragmentation of learner experience

There were also limitations to freeing up teacher time for transfer activities. We noted that there do seem to be some inherent limits to practice transfer mechanisms that draw teachers away from their own classes for significant periods of time, adversely affecting continuity and progress of learning. Whilst we further noted a range of ways in which schools sought to counter or ameliorate this fragmentation of learner experience it was also clear that ‘solutions’ of the kind recorded were often adhoc and uncoordinated.

Lack of a sufficiently reflective, discriminating professionalism

Concerns about the quality of some of the ‘good practice’ being offered to schools and about the commercial imperative to sell rather than share what seems to work well find common ground in worries about the lack of a sufficiently reflective, discriminating professionalism. HE institutions and organisations with strong HE links have an important role to play here, not as quality assurors, but as partners in the development of a deeper understanding of overtly educational practice.

The amnesia of the present

Finally, within the context of a longer timeframe, teachers remarked on governments’ capacity to forget the lessons of the past, in particular those which retain a value and a resonance even when other aspects of former policy fall into disrepute or are overtaken by new thinking, different pre-occupations and fresh intentions.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	<i>School practitioners</i>
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Recommendation 16

Creating common time across institutions

- ⇒ Schools should consider re-organising the school day in order to free up teacher time with minimum disruption to students. This report has highlighted a number of ad hoc solutions, but a systematic solution will require co-ordination between collaborating schools. Common timetabling across school networks or LEAs could be important, enabling synchronised release time for teachers from different schools.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	<i>Central government policy makers & agencies</i>
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Recommendation 17

Deepening understanding over time

- ⇒ HEI involvement in the development of a thoughtful, research-engaged joint practice development should be encouraged, with university staff (co) researching and / or (co) developing the sharing of good practice with teachers, funded e.g. through HEFCE funding streams. The National Centre for Languages and a number of Training Schools have already begun to work along these lines. That involvement should be designed in alignment with the recommendations of this report. Priorities should be a product of learner engagement and there should be recognition of the mutual learning benefits of these relationships.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	<i>Central government policy makers & agencies</i>
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Recommendation 18

Addressing the pitfalls of short-termism

- ⇒ Further thought should be given to ways in which those bidding for funds be required to address strategic issues, not just short-term tactical imperatives. Recent developments such as the commitment to three year budgets for schools in the New Relationship with Schools and to four year plans for Specialist Schools are a welcome start.

<i>Recommendation(s) for</i>	<i>Central government policy makers & agencies</i>
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Recommendation 19

Countering the amnesia of the present

- ⇒ Those responsible for contributing towards the formulation of new policy within the DfES should actively ensure that past eras and initiatives are treated respectfully and imaginatively and develop systems that minimise the dangers of too blanket or too swift a dismissal.

5.6 Summary of recommendations according to target audience

Target Audience

School practitioners

<i>Recommendation 7</i>	CPD & teacher identity
<i>Recommendation 12</i>	Identifying individual priorities
<i>Recommendation 13</i>	Taking partner needs seriously
<i>Recommendation 14</i>	CPD & institutional needs analysis
<i>Recommendation 16</i>	Creating common time across institutions

Target Audience

Local government, enabling organisations, networks

<i>Recommendation 1</i>	Developing joint practice development capacity across the system
<i>Recommendation 4</i>	Extending & initiating joint work
<i>Recommendation 5</i>	Mapping relationships

Target Audience

Central government policy makers & agencies

<i>Recommendation 2</i>	Deepen understanding of ‘brokerage’
<i>Recommendation 3</i>	Lowering the stakes
<i>Recommendation 6</i>	Relationships & practice development
<i>Recommendation 8</i>	Collective badging
<i>Recommendation 9</i>	Financing the whole partnership
<i>Recommendation 10</i>	Joint leadership
<i>Recommendation 11</i>	Developing ‘originator’ capacity across the system
<i>Recommendation 15</i>	How teachers think about, evaluate & seek to improve their practice
<i>Recommendation 17</i>	Deepening understanding over time
<i>Recommendation 18</i>	Addressing the pitfalls of short-termism
<i>Recommendation 19</i>	Countering the amnesia of the present

Appendix 1
INITIAL LITERATURE REVIEW (Shortened Version)

**FACTORS INFLUENCING
THE TRANSFER OF GOOD PRACTICE**

Initial Literature Review (*shortened version*)

Michael Fielding, Ian Cunningham, Michael Eraut,
& Jo Thorp (*Sussex University*)
John Craig, Cath Jones, & Matthew Horne (*DEMOS*)

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Introduction

This paper is an Initial Literature Review exploring the central concerns of a DfES Research Project (Ref. JC154/2001/1) on *Factors Influencing the Transfer of Good Practice*. It is intended to identify key concepts and issues to enable the development of some hypotheses and research directions that will inform the early stages of empirical work.

Apart from the well-known literature on curriculum change and organisational change, there are relatively new literatures on communities of practice and the transfer of ideas across networks. There is also a parallel DfES funding project at the Universities of Bath and Bristol, which we are in touch with.

This paper is about the sharing of good practice, and the term 'practice' has several concurrent meanings. The practice of teaching embraces everything teachers do in their role as a teacher. To this must be added a set of activity-based meanings, e.g. the assessment of students' work or group work, (normally described in teaching methods texts). Then there is also a set of content specific meanings, e.g. teaching place value, running a particular experiment (which are described in subject-based text books).

Section A Practice

Practice is, ultimately, what teachers and other school staff do in schools. It includes activities, behaviours and speech. Usually operating within schools are three units of scale in which practice is enacted, each with a different group of people and characteristics: individual classrooms (with a teacher, students and possibly other support staff); a small group of classes (e.g. primary school or secondary department) and a whole school.

Focus on observable practices or learning new practices?

Observable practices

Research on the effectiveness of practice focuses on what is observable. It also assumes a reasonable level of generalisability. In reality, for many practitioners, practices are seen as being the same practice if they meet a relatively small number of common criteria and if other competent practitioners see themselves as capable of learning those common characteristics. These criteria are normally clearly specified in medicine but not in education. Yet educational practices are assumed to be describable even though practitioners rarely describe them in any detail. Even when they are attempted, questions remain over their accuracy. It is notable that educational practices are typically marketed to teachers and heads under simple labels, not as packages or criteria, and are rarely defined in terms of a sequence of procedures (as with health care guidelines or care pathways). The most tightly defined practices in England thus far are probably the

National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy Strategy. Yet even these comprise many possible variations in practice.

Acquiring new practices

In this project we are interested not only in the nature of practice itself but also in the ways in which it is acquired. When one examines transfer as a learning process then the question of what a teacher has to learn in order to competently perform a new practice becomes critical. The focus has to shift from practice as an observable performance to practice as the overt result of experientially acquired understandings and capabilities which remain largely tacit. Understanding the receiving teachers' learning needs and their learning processes is essential for understanding successful or less successful attempts to transfer practice between teachers and between contexts.

Thus we have two representation problems rather than one: *How do we define and represent practice? And how do we represent the understandings and capabilities practitioners require to perform that practice?*

Understandings of types of knowledge and issues for transfer

There are three domains that may be present and relevant (though not always used) in the learning of new practices

- 'codified knowledge',
- 'skills' and
- 'understandings and dispositions that inform decisions'.

Codified knowledge is that which is made explicit but remains underpinned by sets of assumptions. Access to some teachers' personal knowledge of the content of teaching is embedded in teaching resources whilst other knowledge stems from thinking and meaning making of those resources or from interaction with other people using the same or similar resources. Further knowledge can come from previous experiences if students' interest, responses, misconceptions, etc. are noted (see Borko and Putnam 1995).

Skills appear regularly in lists of teacher competences and there is considerable literature about their acquisition in the context of initial teacher training. Skills include the rapid reading of situations, monitoring of group work and developing resources.

Understandings and dispositions of individuals are another set of important factors affecting decision-making. Decision-making includes rapid choices during lessons, especially when handling diversions; more deliberative decisions in preparing or reviewing lessons and pupil progress; and judgements inherent in assessing and reporting progress.

Integrated practice

How do knowledge, skills and understandings interact in real school and classroom life?

The reality of daily life around schools and within lessons is that conditions are constantly changing partly due to student-teacher interactions and student behaviours. All the time, the teacher is both reading the developing situations through a range of senses and causing it to change. Monitoring the situation requires much attention, which cannot then be devoted to deliberative thinking about what to do next. There are often competing priorities. All underpinning capabilities describe above have to be integrated into classroom performance under crowded and often unpredictable conditions.

In order to understand how a teacher thinks in practice, one has to examine how they think in action. This depends upon both the conditions and constraints on the teacher and what s/he has learned to do, with or without stopping to think. Eraut's (2000) model of professional thinking on the job assumes that *time* is the variable that most affects mode of cognition and divides the time continuum into three sections headed 'instant', 'rapid' and 'deliberative'. The research takes its evidence from observations of a 'performance period' or 'episode' (Eraut 1989, 2003); in secondary schools a lesson, in primary the time between two breaks. These terms attempt to describe the practitioner's own distinctions between time spans and are interpreted differently according to the nature of the work. For example, in one context 'rapid' might refer to any period less than a minute while in another it might be 10 minutes or up to half an hour. The critical feature is that the practitioner has little time to think.

Eraut develops this evidence-informed analysis further by considering the inter-relationships between different time spans, types of process and modes of cognition (shown diagrammatically in Figure 1).

The instant/reflex column describes routinised behaviour that, at most, is semi-conscious. The rapid/intuitive column indicates greater awareness of what one is doing, and is often characterised by rapid decision-making within a period of continuous, semi-routinised action. Typically, it involves recognition of situations by comparison with similar situations previously encountered; then responding to them with learned procedures. The deliberative/analytical column is characterised by explicit thinking about one's actions in the past, present and future, possibly accompanied by consultation with others. It involves the conscious use of prior knowledge, sometimes in accustomed ways, sometimes in novel ways or in a more critical manner.

So, some situations lend themselves to the conscious deliberation and consideration of new or adapted practices. In others, there is no time to treat everything as problematic and here much practical knowledge is **tacit**. Tacit knowledge is unshared, non-explicit. It is a type of knowledge that, Eraut (2000) argues, is usually 'thick', i.e. complex, deeply embedded in social

Figure 1

Interactions between Time, Mode of Cognition and Type of Process

Type of Process	Mode of Cognition		
	<i>Instant/Reflex</i>	<i>Rapid/Intuitive</i>	<i>Deliberative/Analytic</i>
Reading of the situation	Pattern recognition	Rapid interpretation	Review involving discussions and/or analysis
Decision-making	Instant response	Intuitive	Deliberative with some analysis or discussion
Overt activity	Routinised action	Routines punctuated by rapid decisions	Planned actions with periodic progress reviews
Metacognitive	Situational awareness	Implicit monitoring Short, reactive reflections	Conscious monitoring of thought and activity. Self-management. Evaluation

contexts and psychology but is articulated to others, that is, made explicit in 'thin' ways, i.e. shallow, simple, linear. The more complex, tacit types of knowledge about teacher's practices are more easily learnt by working alongside a proficient practitioner than by receiving an explicit explanation that somehow fails to communicate the nature of the expertise. In terms of researchers or policy-makers coming to understand tacit knowledge, a range of artefacts may be helpful to build up a picture and on-going relationships with frequent communications may develop the depth of understanding about the reality of a teacher's practice over time.

Adaptability and fidelity in the transfer of practice

The groundbreaking study by the Rand Corporation of the institutionalisation of innovations in US schools indicated that the adoption of innovatory practices depends to some extent on their flexibility. Scope for *mutual adaptation* was shown to be an important attribute of successful innovations. Not only did receiving practitioners need to adapt their practice to the innovation, but the innovation also needed to be adaptable to the new context in which each particular group of potential adopters worked (Berman and McLaughlin 1980).

However, another large study by Miles, Huberman, Crandall and others (the DESSI Project) found that, where there was strong leadership and sufficient support for teachers to master a new practice, it could be transferred with some *fidelity* (i.e. the degree of exactness with which something is copied or reproduced) (Miles and Huberman 1994). The evidence about adaptability and fidelity may be seen to contradict one another but more likely, point to different qualities being relevant in different settings and at different levels of generality.

As well as degrees of fidelity and adaptation, the above raises questions of the significant aspects of practices being transferred and by whom; and the extent to which these features are valued, are common across the profession and support innovation. In this regard, connections are being made to Hord's (1987) methodology for assessing the extent to which a given set of practices has been transferred and Crandall's latest work for the DESSI project.

The role of values in the adoption or rejection of practices

What is the interplay between the technical dimensions and the underpinning values of a practice, and how does this influence the take up (or rejection) of new practices? The technical is important but, with a moral undertaking such as teaching, it can never provide a complete account of a practice or indeed successful transfer. A values-base provides a broader context of deep-seated beliefs and ideals. The important thing may be to see both technical and values dimensions as well as their interplay as dynamic.

To illustrate the above, we can draw upon two contrasting examples of teachers' practice: spelling and 'Students as Researchers'. Spelling has a predominantly technical feel to it, though it may have a moral purpose linked to basic levels of literacy in a modern knowledge economy. 'Students as Researchers' is an approach to teaching that places technical expertise with a complex set of relationships and values that have something important to say about what teachers should or should not be doing as 21st century professionals. The distinction between these types of practice means that they require different sorts of conditions for their successful transfer. The first is likely to make less overt or penetrating use of practice as a professional ideal, whilst the second requires a more expansive, extended notion of professional practice that allows students themselves a leading role in the development of new approaches to teaching and learning.

Section B Three Approaches to the Transfer of Practice

In the first section of this Literature Review we began to clarify some of the key characteristics of practice before going on to consider how a practice might be represented and what might be some of the important considerations in a teacher integrating unfamiliar ways of working into her new practice.

In this section we begin to address issues of transfer and we make a start on that by considering three bodies of literature that have a significant contemporary resonance. The first concerns a centralised process of transfer, the second concerns networks and the third concerns professional learning communities and communities of practice.

A three-fold typology: replication, adaptation and exchange

As a way of trying to get a sound conceptual grip of what are complex literatures, we felt it might be helpful to suggest a three-fold typology within whose framework we might better discover some of the key questions that our empirical work might best address. It seems that there are broadly three forms of practice transfer, which, for the moment, we are calling replication mode, adaptation mode and exchange mode. Each mode picks up different sets of elements of practice and transfer addressed in Section 1 and extends our understanding of their inter-relationships. (These are not the same as those suggested by NFER evaluation of Beacon Schools – dissemination, consultancy and improving together (Rudd et al 2001) – although there are similarities.)

1. In *replication* mode the main concerns are with maintaining fidelity to the original practice. Here the exemplar practice defines the boundaries of the encounter, learning is one way, and compliance is seen as the main issue to be addressed.

2. In the *adaptive* mode the original practice remains central, but the local culture and circumstance of the receiving institution is acknowledged as significant too. Commitment to the underlying purposes of the practice allows some degree of local interpretation that is thought to engender commitment and a greater possibility of sustainability. As with replication, learning is still largely one-way. Sometimes, of course, it does turn out to be two-way, though this does not always happen and it is not part of the stated intentions of the encounter.

3. In *exchange* mode the exemplar practice is, again, the starting point of an encounter, but in this case there is a strong commitment to reciprocity, both of respect and learning and, furthermore, this is stated emphatically and explicitly in the lead up to the work. Whilst the original practice remains central it does not remain static. Strictly speaking this is a 'developmental' model rather than a 'transfer' model: it is, to use Judith Warren Little's felicitous phrase about 'joint work'. The point is not just to transfer good working

practices, but also to make them better through mutual learning. The roles of originating and receiving institution thus become blurred or interchangeable.

1. Replication

Replication approaches to practice transfer most often work through dissemination activities, which seek to transfer practice from a centralised location or organisation and replicate them in schools in a variety of contexts. This is an attractive proposition as centralised administrations, working with schools, may bring about improvements for students in a wide range of settings. However, it is clear that entering into such a process will not provide simple means of transferring practice and realising outcomes as desired in school settings.

Much can be learnt from two particular studies of recent centrally driven processes of transfer, namely the DESSI study (Dissemination Efforts Supporting School Improvements) by Huberman and Miles (1984) and the Evaluation of the National Literacy Strategy (Earl et al 2003).

Huberman and Miles (1984) highlight some of the challenges in constructing a model for bringing about centralised changes. They point to the normative nature of policy documents and the emphasis on craft and science of practice being applied to school improvement, which is in reality a far more elusive task. Delivery is more problematic than recognised, formulas developed by researchers and others are often incompatible, perceptions of school improvement are not agreed. In response, Huberman (1983) suggests that for a practice to be adopted it must have a potentially good fit to the setting in which it will be applied. Further, success in efforts to overcome barriers to getting a practice adopted need following up with infrastructure, institutional support and administrators. Then, practices stabilise and, after this, they can be extended to others, thus widening the number of teachers involved and routinising the practice into training, budget and political cycles. This done, the practice becomes institutionalised.

Similarly to Szulanski & Winter (2002) the findings of work in the DESSI study suggest that unless an effort is maintained to replicate a practice accurately, then the practice will be watered down to fit receiving teachers current modes of work. The result is a form of practice that is disowned by the originating teachers, that is if they still recognise it, and fails to achieve the desired outcomes. Teachers must have commitment to put innovative practices into action or they will not get off the ground. Teacher commitment is likely to develop out of active engagement with a practice and success in outcomes; hence, the practice must be effective in achieving its aims. Who teachers receive the practice from is also important. Teachers are more likely to adopt a practice where training is provided by similar practitioners (Crandall, 1983).

Earl et al's (2003) evaluation of the National Numeracy and Literacy Strategies highlight some similar points to the DESSI study. For example, teachers are experiencing success in incorporating the key elements of the

NLS within lessons and the student attainment data suggests developments in outcomes for children. The vision of the strategies is maintained while flexibility to respond to top down (national-led) and bottom up (teacher-led) demands is incorporated into practice. There was a strong implementation of the strategies key features through accountability measures that was delivered in combination with extensive support (e.g. very widespread training).

Despite considerable successes, a number of challenges are raised in the mode of operation adopted to implement the NLS and that arise from the DESSI project:

- *Depth of capacity building* – Beyond the structure and format of the Literacy Hour, ‘evidence is mixed about the extent to which teaching has actually changed’ (Earl et al 2003 p.133) in anything other than a superficial sense. Technical aspects have altered but underlying principles and a richer pedagogical approach appears to have been less well developed.
- *Dependence on centralised resources and energy* – Strategies are at risk if support is removed. The key issue is around the degree to which practices have become embedded in the culture of a school or across the profession.
- *Initiative and problem-solving skills* – The development by practitioners and school leaders of initiative and problem-solving skills need to cohere with (on-going) changes in pedagogical principles. This remains a challenge, especially in practitioners feeling ownership of practices whilst fidelity to the key ideas is retained.

These three challenges raise questions for continued professional development.

A further challenge that exists is that of power relations, especially when local responses are required to attempts to transfer practice across many sites using universal modes of transfer and content. Tensions between professionals working at different spatial levels (e.g. teachers, national policy-makers) are more likely to result if different modes of transfer are not attempted.

2. Adaptation

The very well known and previously mentioned Rand Corporation study provided groundbreaking work on the institutionalisation of innovations in US schools. The main findings suggested that flexibility was a key component in the adoption of innovatory practices. Scope for *mutual adaptation* was shown to be an important attribute of successful innovations. Not only did receiving practitioners need to adapt their practice to the innovation, but the innovation also needed to be adaptable to the new context in which each particular group of potential adopters worked (Berman & McLaughlin 1980).

3. Exchange

Networks

In networks participants have the opportunity to connect with a range of others and through this come into contact with wide ranging professional experience and learning; at the same time other members of a network provide a mutually supportive 'cushion' in the process of learning.

Posch (1994) uses the term network to indicate a

'structure in which elements are identified and related to (connected with) each other to allow exchange processes between them (influencing, learning, moving, transporting messages etc). The relationship can be one of time (e.g. sequences of activities) or one of space (e.g. places of activity); it can be a relationship between concepts or theories, or one between persons or objects' (p. 63).

Posch characterises the difference between two types of network and the theoretical basis upon which they are founded. The typologies he examines are hierarchical networks and dynamic networks.

He suggests that *hierarchical networks* are founded on a philosophical background of technical rationality and offers three assumptions entwined with this approach (based on Schon, 1983): first, there are general solutions to practical problems; second, these solutions can be developed outside practical situations and; third, the solutions can be transferred into practitioners' actions and solve practical problems. For Posch,

'Consequences of these assumptions are the separation of theory and practice, of knowledge and action, of means and ends, and the emergence of two hierarchies: the hierarchy of knowledge and the hierarchy of credibility'. (p. 65)

He adds, the hierarchy of knowledge is manifest in a research-development-dissemination model of innovation. The typical ways in which such innovations reach practitioners are information leaflets, training courses, administrative incentives and pressures. Through these tools a hierarchical network serves to bring about efficient implementation of knowledge and regulations, and to facilitate and control their use by teachers.

Dynamic networks are suggested as an alternative model, and Posch uses four characteristics to define their difference from hierarchical networks.

1. The connections between participants/elements in a network are *symmetric* – on a horizontal level rather than in a vertical hierarchy. Any participant/element are sources of messages and a variety of messages

are transported. The total advantage of exchanges is distributed evenly among the participants/elements. The symmetric relationship makes exchange processes, understandings of each other and meta-reflection on the network's development possible.

2. The connections between participants/elements are characterised by *exchange processes* (e.g. comparing, influencing, learning). They are not pre-specified routes and their duration can vary.
3. The connections are not safe guarded by pre-defined rules but are defined and charged by *shared interests*. There is always possibility for more connections, ways of working and content to be added. Relationships can develop quite spontaneously, so not necessarily through formal negotiation.
4. Networks can perform multiple functions and any one connection activity can support (or hinder) multiple messages. They are *multi-dimensional*. As a result there is open access to potentially unlimited learning processes. In contrast to hierarchical systems, new connections can be formed without having to give up the existing ones. (Adapted from Fischer-Kowalski 1991.)

Posch writes that, in sum, 'The essential feature of dynamic networks is the autonomous and flexible establishment of relationships to assist responsible action in the face of complexity and uncertainty'. (p. 68)

If we use this model to help us conceptualise contexts for the transfer of practice we might align dynamic networks with the view that knowledge is constructed within a given context of practice and is derived from the particulars of that situation. Dynamic networks, as their name suggests, will shift to accommodate new problems or innovations as they arise: problem solving or innovation is not confined within a fixed structure.

Networks in the US and Europe

Much research and practice flowing from network initiatives in UK schools is very new. The National College for School Leadership's programme called Networked Learning Communities is pioneering this work in England (see Jackson 2003) and has been encountered too late for inclusion here. There is, however, evidence from US and European school networks.

Anne Lieberman has provided a number of accounts of networks in the USA over the last decade (Lieberman and McLaughlin 1992, Lieberman and Grolnik 1996 and 1999, Lieberman 1996, Lieberman & Wood 2002). Each account highlights not only the infrastructure of networks but also how social network processes are connected to the ease of transfer of practice.

To define networks Lieberman and Grolnik (1999) refer to Parker (1977), and give five 'key ingredients' of a network organised for educational improvement:

- A strong sense of commitment to the innovation
- A sense of shared purpose
- A mixture of information sharing and psychological support
- An effective facilitator
- Voluntary participation and equal treatment

Additionally Parker argued that members 'have a sense of being part of a special group or movement' (p. 7). These conditions gather around the idea that networks do not have their own purpose, they exist so that (and through the sense that) actors have a shared intention in outcome. Another important suggestion is that 'teachers, as professionals, know about education as few others do and that the field of education needs to capitalize on this knowledge' (Duckworth, 1997).

Lieberman and Wood (2002) explore the connection between teachers' participation in networks and the transfer of practice between these learning settings and the classroom. They focus on the National Writing Project as 'arguably the most successful teacher network in the USA' (p. 317). They describe both the summer workshops attended by teachers and the experiences of teachers in applying these. One of the students tracked back to the classroom gave an insight about conditions under which transfer had taken place:

"I found that the experience and support passed on by other teachers was much more valuable to me than any workbook, step by step method that had promised to be the quick fix...The writing project gives you some alternatives and the courage to try them... you talk to people who've actually tried these alternatives and they've worked". Finally she claimed that "the support and validation as a professional" comes from being part of a community of professionals, and it gives teachers courage to invent and/or tailor innovative approaches to meet their students needs. (p. 327)

Lieberman and Wood also describe some of the conditions under which networks bring about powerful learning experiences in practice.

- Network teachers have numerous opportunities to recognise, articulate and share their own tacit knowledge with each other.
- Networks have the flexibility to organise activities first, then develop the structures to support those activities.
- Networks tend to foster problem posing and questioning over prescriptive and pre-packaged answers.
- Networks provide multiple opportunities for members to learn and take leadership roles.
- Networks promote collaboration among members.
- Networks, coalitions or partnerships that last long enough to create ongoing learning communities and norms of learning and collaboration replace the existing transmission of knowledge model (which assumes that knowledge can be created in one institution and disseminated to another). (p. 333)

What these points indicate is the particular type of network Lieberman and Wood are talking about. This is one that links the concept of networks to the

suggestion that communities are ways in which teachers may come together and learn from one another.

In Europe, Duckworth (1997) and Veugelers and Zijlstra (1996) describe networks of teachers facilitated by higher education institutions (HEIs). They focus on a space in which practitioners may come together and share experiences, reflect on practice and produce educational materials. Veugelers and Zijlstra give an example of how the network they are involved with facilitating has led to the transfer of practice and how schools have shared in the development of practice.

Three years ago, one of the schools in our network developed a planning format to give students a clearer idea about teachers expectations, ways to achieve their goals, and in what time frame. Impressed with this format, other schools modified the document to meet their needs. Two years later, the first school examined the changes and the experiences of the other teachers and, as a result, adapted some of the changes for their students. (pp. 76-77)

It is notable that that the relationship between the members of the network is *interchangeable*, in this extract schools *act as both the receivers and transmitters* of ideas for practice. The receiving schools *adapted the format* and put it into action in a way that met their needs. Furthermore, teachers took part in a *mutual process of review and adaptation* once the practice had been in place for some time. Small teams within each school form 'consultative and development groups' that organise events such as workshops for other staff as well as approximately half-termly meetings with those in other schools who have interests on similar themes. In contrast to Posch, Veugelers and Zijlstra argue that a spirit of give-and-take is needed, with an atmosphere of mutual confidence. Therefore, networks must develop gradually and assurance that addresses teachers feelings threatened in such open and potentially challenging situations are important.

Learning Communities

We now turn to look at some of the key characteristics of professional learning communities that seem to be significant in the transfer of practice.

McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) argue that 'Strong professional communities establish distinctive expectations for teachers' work and interactions with students' (p.10) and this helps explain differences in how teachers perceived and worked with students and subject matter in classrooms. The implication is that some practices will be shared: Louis and Marks (1998) term this the 'deprivatisation of practice'. Key characteristics of this 'deprivatisation' are openness, trust, genuine reflection and collaboration focussed on student learning. Learning communities may be distinguished from other school settings by a collective stance on learning in the context of shared work and responsibilities (McLaughlin and Talbert, p. 63). Teachers sharing their work

and collaboratively seeking to develop innovative practice are seen as powerful ways of improving learning experiences for students.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) seek to define learning by teachers in communities by evaluating three different conceptions of teacher knowledge. They set out to problematise the position that 'teachers who *know* more teach better' (p. 249 *Italics theirs*). They evaluate three types of teacher knowledge played out in learning:

- knowledge-*for*-practice - This assumes that teachers can use formal knowledge and theory (including codified wisdom of practice), e.g. the evidence based practice movement.
- knowledge-*in*-practice - This is 'what very competent teachers know as it is expressed or embedded in the artistry of practice, *in* teachers reflections on practice, *in* practical inquiries, and/or *in* teachers' narrative accounts of practice.' Here, teaching itself is largely defined as 'a spontaneous craft situated and constructed in response to the particularities of every day life in schools and classrooms'. For transfer of practice to occur, 'teachers need opportunities to enhance, make explicit, and articulate the tacit knowledge embedded in experience and in the wise action of very competent professionals' (pp. 262-263).
- knowledge-*of*-practice - teachers learn through generating locally relevant knowledge of practice by working within the context of *enquiry* communities. In this way they can theorize and construct their work and connect it to larger social, cultural and political issues. (p. 250).

We can begin to see the importance of this to the transfer of practice by looking to the examples given of the three stances. Within the knowledge-*for*-practice tradition empirically verified best practices transcend the context of individual schools and require minimal translation by teachers. Teacher learning is based on accurately and consistently using these practices in the classroom. In initiatives characterised by a knowledge-*in*-practice approach expert teachers take the role of 'mentors', 'master teachers' or 'coaches'. These teachers with a developed sense of artistry in practice guide those who are less experienced as they participate in problems of practice. These guides are seen as able to reflect on practice and are knowledgeable about how to take part in learning situations. This approach may see teachers learning from each other as well as being guided in questioning assumptions that underlie their practice by a facilitative outsider. Practice may be learned by the less experienced from the more experienced, and from a process of reflection. The learning of practice in the knowledge-*of*-practice approach is characterised by spaces where teachers direct their own learning in ways congruent with their professional lives. Knowledge is constructed collaboratively, in structures such as networks (Lieberman and Grolnick, 1996; McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993). Sites where teachers or other practitioners take part in research or participate in communities of enquiry are seen as rich exemplars of this model. Practice is co-constructed by participants within the contexts of their work.

In examining processes of transfer of practice more closely, it is the point of connection between knowledge retrieval and action that warrants careful analysis. Eraut (2001) evaluates conditions that might foster learning in the workplace and emphasises the organisation of a suitable microclimate for each work setting, characteristics of which include:

- A blame-free culture which provides mutual support
- Learning from experiences, positive and negative, at both group and individual level
- Encouraging and talking about learning
- Trying to make full use of the knowledge resources of its members
- Locating and using relevant knowledge from outside the group
- Enhancing and extending understandings and capabilities of both the group as a whole and its individual members.

Communities of practice

Communities of practice has grown as a concept to describe places where individuals come together to jointly construct practices and develop social identity through adopting these practices. Wenger (1998) talks of communities of practice not being groups or networks but, rather, about being together, living meaningfully and developing a satisfying identity. Features include mutual engagement and the emergence of a 'logic of practice' from seemingly tacit and individual actions.

Communities of practice have recently been seen as more complex than, perhaps their advocates suggest. Both Eraut and Knight all point to the individual's unique identities remaining quite strong alongside social ones. More critically, communities of practice have also been attacked as new and ideal forms of tacit indoctrination in which people form overt ideologies without reflection and critique (Gee et al 1996). If learning practices are situated in specific social and cultural dimensions, how can the transfer of practice move between communities? Further, the forming of collegiate relationships for instrumental ends has its dangers, especially if existing relations need displacing or revision first: Little (1990) reminds us that 'closely bound groups are instruments both for promoting change and for conserving the present'. Similarly, Eraut (2000) uses the term 'deceptive discourse' to describe types of talk between group members that attempt to exclude and obfuscate, and Hargreaves (1994) warns against 'contrived collegiality'.

Additional to these potential problems with social learning of new practices there are a whole set of issues clustering round tacit and craft knowledge and the challenge of knowledge transfer. Craft knowledge is often idiosyncratic, non-theorised and so difficult to articulate (Kennedy 2002). Conveying what we know to another person is problematic because, as Polanyi (1966 p.5) says, 'we can know more than we can tell' and so much knowledge remains

tacit. Improvements to practice in such settings tends to be through ‘tinkering’ rather than systematic analysis (Huberman 1983). Craft knowledge is developed from experience.

Yet, the strength of communities remains. The individual’s tacit knowledge operates in a dynamic relationship with practices shared within the community. Reinforcing this are social effects that help sustained commitment to improving practice and the structural effects of sharing, explaining and re-considering “intuitive” practices (see Knight 2002).

In finishing this section, the key point to make is that networks and communities are not the same thing, just as collaboration, collegiality and community are not the same thing (Fielding 1999). These are not just academic points: if we are to understand the psychological and professional conditions that enable transfer then we have to be more rigorous and more careful in the terminology we use to describe different modes of professional interaction. The literature on teacher culture from scholars such as Andy Hargreaves (Hargreaves 1994) and Judith Warren Little (Little 1990), to name but two of the most eminent writers in this field, is both indicative of the importance of making certain distinctions and the difficulty of getting it right. It may well be that one of the things to emerge from this research is a clearer understanding of what those distinctions are and how significant (or not) their orientations are in helping us understand and enable practice transfer.

Section C School-to-school transfer of practice

In considering the transfer of practice from one school to another, or from one group of schools to another group, factors relevant to the ‘receiving’ school can be seen as different from the ‘originating’ school. Literature examined so far indicates that the position of the receiving school is fundamentally important, if anything, more important than the originating institution. Yet, the distinction between receiving and originating is somewhat misleading because the two are intrinsically connected. Cunningham, for example, argues that ‘if the learner’s goals, mind set and other personal characteristics are central then it is the so-called receiver who needs to be in the driving seat’. Further, implied in this distinction is a unidirectional flow, which may mask different contributions able to be made by different participants. Nevertheless, several useful points do emerge through such a division and these are discussed below.

The receiving school

For the receiving school, learning and relationships are inter-twined in certain ways. First, the receiving school ‘pulling’ in new practices is better than them being ‘pushed’ in by others, i.e. demand driven (O’Dell and Grayson 1998 p.173). At the heart of this is motivation to learn:

'Ultimately successful transfer of best practices comes back to a personal and organisational willingness and desire to learn. A vibrant sense of curiosity and a deep respect and desire for learning from others are the real keys' (ibid.).

Second, professional learning is often, though not always, a deeply social process. O'Dell and Grayson (1998 p.173) observed that 'relationships seem to precede and be required for meaningful transfer', and this is a matter of psychological receptiveness and addressing issues of transferring tacit knowledge. Certain types of practice seem to require a rich, dialogic set of arrangements if they are to be successful. Third, there is an affective dimension to practice transfer. Goleman et al's (2002) work argues for the necessity of allowing time and encouraging access to feelings and values. One main implication of the above is that unlearning is required, yet the needs entailed in unlearning and re-learning in new ways in practice have been consistently underestimated. A second major implication is that 'active reception' through an active approach to meeting one's own learning needs is required.

In *actively* receiving new practices, the ability to recognise, absorb and assimilate new external information is the overarching requirement identified by a range of authors (e.g. Cohen and Levinthal 1990, Soo et al 2002). This has been termed 'absorptive capacity'. A receiving school is only likely to learn if the act of reception is couched within a process of actively seeking learning. Fear-free creativity and social infrastructure may be needed to support the generation or process of construction of meaning, hence the term 'generative capacity' may be more apt. Two more technical and specific aspects to active reception are also highlighted in the literature: clarity of goals, which inform and animate the learning process (e.g. Butterfield, Slocum and Nelson 1993) and 'knowing what to do next' as well as the content of a change (i.e. 'how-to' knowledge). In the former, Yamnill and McLean (2001) refer to the importance of the extent of self-management by the individual and the setting of goals by the individual over people having goals set for them. The latter highlights the matter of accessible good practice being 'out there' as being only 50% of the issue. The key question is what happens next, for the remaining 50%. As Soo et al (2002) says, the key issue is 'to make sure that those who need access to sources of know how get it and are capable of understanding what to do with it once they get their hands on it'.

Barriers to transfer and a framework for removing them

Knowing 'what to do next', after accessing information, is easier said than done. Optimum conditions for transfer are difficult to realise, despite very positive messages from research. Many barriers to transfer have already been addressed in previous sections. However, it is crucially important to be clear

what they are and how to remove them (O'Dell and Grayson 1998 p.163) so that teachers can engage and generate new, meaningful practices.

Cunningham (2002) points out that research suggests eight different kinds of barrier to transfer in work contexts. Of the eight he identifies, seven seem particularly pertinent to the context of schools learning from each other:

- the person's manager
- the general culture of the organisation e.g. one where people are discouraged from trying something new
- technology e.g. less than user friendly computer software
- resources .e.g. there is no money to try out a new way of working
- the work team – peers can be a bigger influence than the manager in blocking new learning
- professional barriers e.g. a nurse learning a new approach that the consultant will not let her use because of assumed professional roles
- fear of feeling foolish e.g. where a person learns a new technique but fears the response of others

To this list can be added administrative support to underpin teachers' work.

The originating school

Any school considering transfer of its practice to another institution needs to reflect on what we know about the success or otherwise of transfer processes.

An important source on transfer is the work of Detterman (1993) for whom 'transfer is the degree to which a behaviour will be repeated in a new situation'. This behaviourist and individualistic view is echoed in the influential work of Szulanski (1994). Detterman also developed one version of a 'typology of transfer', key features of which include:

- *Near* transfer (almost identical situations e.g. learning to use Office on a PC at someone else's desk, with you then using the same software and hard ware at your desk) versus *far* transfer (non-identical situations e.g. learning to speak a languages such as German and hoping this will help you to learn a dissimilar language like Japanese)
- *Deep* versus *surface* structure as they affect transfer (e.g. the surface structure of car dash boards transfer to different makes of car, but not to aeroplanes where the deep structure behind the display units are very different)
- *Specific* versus *non-specific* (or general) transfer.

Detterman argues that far, deep and general transfer is almost unknown and that we should be going for near, surface and specific transfer. This is corroborated in the business world by the work of Cunningham who argues that the difficulty with 'much of the discussion about transferable skills is that there is an attempt to create far transfer of deep structure whereas we know we are on much safer ground when using near transfer of surface structure' (Cunningham 2002). This, however, goes against much of the early sections

of this paper, which support notions of professional learning for teachers as complex and deeply embedded social processes.

Sticky knowledge

An alternative way of conceptualising transfer comes from the knowledge management literature in general and the communities of practice literature in particular and concerns the 'sticky' nature of the knowledge which organisations produce. Thus Hewlett Packard in the USA developed a very effective set of processes for identifying best practices, but encountered great difficulty in moving them around the corporation (Brown & Duguid 2002). The 'flow' of good ideas and imaginative, effective practices that emerge within organizations is not always free or smooth. As already discussed, knowledge produced in one locality has embedded in it a substantial tacit dimension (Brown and Duguid 2002).

In making knowledge less sticky, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) advocate a 'knowledge conversation' which takes place through four steps: (1) socialisation (2) externalisation (3) combination and (4) internalization. Hargreaves (1999) provides one of the best-known introductions of this work to the educational field. Brown & Duguid's recent (2002) work alerts us to the difficulties of applying these four steps in organizations such as schools that have vertical hierarchies and so where layers of differentiated status and activity have to be cut through if access to good new practices and ideas is to be gained. Brown and Duguid also identify what they call 'warrants'. They argue that particular communities develop their own screening processes to help them decide what is worth attending to and what is not, what counts as evidence and what does not. 'Warrants' are 'the endorsements for knowledge that encourage people to rely on it and hence make it actionable' (Brown & Duguid 2002) and are, they assure us, 'particularly important in situations in which people confront increasing amounts of information, ideas, and beliefs'. They add that it is the locally embedded nature of these practices and warrants that can make knowledge extremely 'sticky' (Ibid). Their conclusions are that 'It takes organisational work to develop local knowledge for broader use' and that the 'know-how, know-what and warrants embedded in practice are divisions we feel we need to understand but are highly inter-twined in different ways in different places'.

This paper has highlighted many challenges associated with major progress in transferring best practice. Brown & Duguid are adept at helping us to understand some of the issues facing us: they are less helpful in pointing a way forward. This can be seen as representing a realistic assessment of the state of our current knowledge. There are evident limitations to current understandings, yet ways forward have been indicated in this paper.

One possible implication of this is that our 'exchange' typology seems best suited of the three posited to develop that less viscous knowledge. Through encouraging dialogue and exploration in a rich and engaged manner, it may, with the help of the Receiving School, begin to develop some meta-understandings of the very process it wishes to engage in. An originating

school learns how to become a good originating school by having the right kinds of encounter; it cannot make the tacit explicit in any other way. It needs to encourage its Receiving School to go on asking, to probe more deeply.

Translators, Boundary Practices & Brokers

For transferring practice successfully, Brown and Duguit (2002) recommend appointing an 'organisational translator' - someone 'who can frame the interests of one community in terms of another community's perspective'. Such people are, unsurprisingly, rare. However, as we become more attuned to what is needed such people will begin to emerge. Brown & Duguid also suggest using 'boundary objects' as possible ways 'of forging links among communities, bringing them, intentionally or unintentionally into negotiation'. These are 'objects of interest to each community involved, but viewed or used differently by each of them' (Brown & Duguid 2002). Wenger's six strategies for encouraging the sharing of practices are similar. He argues that a range of encounters like one-to-one conversation, immersion, delegations, boundary practices, overlaps and peripheries be employed to facilitate the kind of learning we are trying so hard to name and develop. A significant feature of the Lieberman & Grolnick (1996) paper, of UK research such as that of Rudduck et al (2000) and, to a much lesser extent, that of Rudd et al (2001) points to the importance of both internal and external brokers or coordinators. See also the IQEA (Improving the Quality of Education for All) approach to school improvement in the UK.

Section D On the possibility of a fourth domain

We end on a brief, bright, exploratory note. In Section B of our Literature Review we posited a three-fold framework for analyzing transfer practices - the replication, adaption, and exchange modes. Whilst writing the report, one of the authors pursued an additional line of thought. By virtue of its emergent status this section is necessarily quite short.

'Practice Creation' is an extension of the thinking and practice that sustains the 'exchange' mode but it differs from it by moving beyond the agenda of the originating school and, indeed, the receiving school. In the exchange mode the agenda is introduced by the originating school and then discussed with the receiving school. The two, or more, schools then pursue the shared focus in a variety of ways that suit their shared needs. Each learns from and contributes towards the learning of the other. The shared practice develops and extends itself over time through mutual interplay and reflection.

If a fourth mode was added, - 'practice creation' - that reciprocity is extended and deepened. It differs from exchange mode because there is no originating school and no receiving school. There are just two (or more) schools. They meet because they wish to have a dialogue with one another. Their respect

and delight in each other's company, in each other's disposition towards the world, lead them through a structured but emergent way of working to create new practices that are inspired by and energised by their dialogic encounters. The focus of their work may be the same, but it does not have to be. Indeed, more often than not it differs. This is an essentially communal way of working, which delights in, values, and depends upon difference. Its values base is that of mutually conditioning freedom and equality – the constitutive principles of community; its dispositions are ones of respect and, eventually care.

Examples in schools can be found in the MSO (Mutual Support & Observation) work developed by Fielding in the mid 1980s (Fielding 1989) and in the international schools partnership IADAS with its roots a decade earlier (Fielding 1995). Examples in business can be found in the action learning work of Revans (Revans 1980). See also Webber & Fielding (2003) for examples within education) and developed by Cunningham as self-managed learning groups (Cunningham 1999). Recent international writing in the business world by Nonaka et al (2002) is the latest example based on similar sorts of principles.

These modes of engagement offer quite different approaches to practice transfer; indeed, they go beyond it to the new domain of practice creation. Insofar as they are successful (and there is a huge literature on action learning) they hold out the possibility of a radical break with the binary opposition of giving and receiving. In its stead they develop a symbiotic unity of both. They may be worth pursuing.

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Produced by the Department for Education and Skills

ISBN 1 84478 393 6
Ref No: RR615
www.dfes.go.uk/research