

# The role of Leadership with the COACH programme.

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*A literature review of current educational papers and articles on leadership*

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The strategic aim of the present government to raise attainment and close the gap, needs the multi-faceted approach which has been outlined in the National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government, 2016). The NIF recognises the value of leadership 'leadership is recognised as one of the most important aspects of the success of any school' (Scottish Government, 2016, pp 10). Scottish Government are clear about the impact that good leadership can have on school improvement and it clarifies this includes staff at 'all levels' (Scottish Government, 2016, pp 10). As part of the framework the government states it will gather evidence on professional development opportunities at Masters level and the percentage of teachers completing professional update. This evidence will then be used to further inform the Standards for CLPL and Leadership and Management. This is an important element of the NIF, as opportunities to access policy and professional development, through a variety of means including courses, research, networks or further education, is a key component to bringing about school improvement through teacher leadership. Donaldson highlighted this in his report Teaching Scotland's Future, 'A culture of initiative and collegiality within which learning is always the prime focus embodies the kind of distributive leadership which is the hallmark of our most dynamic and effective schools' (Scottish Government, 2010, pp16). The inspectorate toolkit, How Good is our School 4, also endorses the collaborative nature of successful leadership with a Level 5 illustration within Leadership and Management of staff, 'Our staff feel empowered and motivated to take decisions and lead aspects of school improvement' (Education Scotland, 2015, pp26). The General Teaching Council for Scotland's, Standards for Leadership and Management, therefore acknowledges this role of a middle leader; '3.2.2 Middle leaders establish and use strategies to identify individual and team professional learning needs to support the school's improvement agenda' (GTCS, 2016). Many middle leaders are often responsible for the in-service programme, probationer support and CPD managers within their establishments. Having the skill to recognise what best meets the needs of the staff within

your establishment is critical to ensuring continuous development, offering opportunities for teachers to network, collaborate and lead initiatives. Donaldson made reference to a statement in the OECD report of 2009, "Effective school leadership makes an important contribution to the development of other teachers in a school" (Scottish Government, 2010, pp16) yet again highlighting this important role middle leaders have in bringing about school improvement.

Following the publication of his report 'Developing Teacher Leadership' (Kelly, 2016) Kelly indicated that 'Middle leaders are key drivers in ensuring positive outcomes for all learners. Through working collaboratively with school leaders, members of their teams and partners, they devise and contribute to the school's vision and values, ensuring that the strategic direction of the school is communicated effectively with all stakeholders' (SCEL, 2016a). In the document 'Creating a Smarter Scotland' the Scottish Government state 'Excellent learning and teaching is key to raising attainment and closing the gap in attainment between those in our most and least deprived areas' (Scottish Government 2015, foreword). The evidence from the 2016 report on the National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government, 2016a), offers these findings on the target of teacher professionalism;

- There is a greater willingness to try new approaches to professional learning.
- Teachers are engaging in a range of professional learning opportunities; professional dialogue being highlighted as an important professional learning activity.
- There is a greater focus on the impact of professional learning on pupil outcomes.

(Scottish Government, 2016a, pp 39)

Busher, early on in his book *Understanding Educational Leadership* (2006, pp32) suggests that the role middle leaders play in creating subject and pastoral policy based upon their direct practice in the classroom, is also key to effective school improvement. He believes leaders need to ensure that government policy is made meaningful and relates clearly to the construction of teaching practices to support and enhance children's learning. A middle leader therefore is required to have both the understanding of education policy and practical application of quality learning and teaching. As part of a collaborative, Hammersley-Fletcher (2007) suggest that the middle leader position can sometimes be expected to lead his/her peers with subject knowledge, although this is less common in a primary setting (Hammersley, pp425). Within a Local Authority level role, we are required to implement and support programmes of development within educational establishments

across the authority, in all sectors. This involves having justification and policy support to inform the senior management of the benefits of Outdoor Learning and the practical hands on approach to delivering lessons to pupils alongside the teachers. Some teachers have little or no experience of delivering the curriculum outdoors, and for them this can be daunting and bring new challenges. We felt it was important to acknowledge that both of these elements of Middle Leadership were important; the knowledge and good teaching, but also the policy understanding.

Self-Evaluation and observations are also a key element of middle leadership. Our understanding of evaluation can vary enormously so we found the framework by Tuytens and Devos (2014) to be extremely helpful in identifying the key elements of purposeful observation to support professional development. Within the framework they suggested that 3 main characteristics would affect the effectiveness of observation/evaluation;

- Teacher characteristics; Collaboration, self-efficacy and experience.
- Procedural characteristic; Participation and Procedural justice.
- Leadership characteristics; Active Leadership support, Leadership content knowledge and charismatic leadership.

Using both quantitative and qualitative measures they collected data that produced some interesting findings. Charismatic leadership had a significant influence on teachers' perceptions of the procedural justice. The teachers felt it was more useful and were more likely to engage and accept the evaluation procedure. They found also that teachers who had observations completed by someone with Leadership Content Knowledge (Stein and Nelson, 2003) stimulated further action from teachers regarding professional development. In other words when evaluations were completed by someone who they respected as knowing their subject, and delivered in a way that they felt engaged in the process it became more valued and resulted in better outcomes regarding impact on their teaching practice. This is a vital point to take into consideration when working on the COACH programme, the person leading must inspire, be knowledgeable and adaptable.

Brody and Hadar (2015) highlighted some important findings on Professional Development Communities, or Professional Learning Communities. They found that more experienced teachers exhibited two modes of inaction when challenged with a new method of teaching

or delivering, 'a re-labelling of current practice or identification of roadblocks to implementation' (Brody and Hadar, 2015. p261).

Linking this to the findings of Stein and Nelson (2003) where if the teacher doesn't value the opinion or experience of person evaluating them then they will put less value on the experience led us to consider again the value of the 'right person for the job' when delivering COACH.

Sinnema and Robinson (2007) raised concerns that often the process is not explicitly labelled as being about impact on teaching and learning. Through their research they looked at tools used for evaluation and how much they focussed on the impact of teaching on student learning. They suggest that 'teacher evaluation should be designed in ways that align with, and support, the goal of instructional improvement...every aspect of school organisation should be enabling more effective and equitable teaching and learning' (Sinnema and Robinson, 2007. p321) Often the observation/evaluation process is given lip service, something that is quickly done, if at all, and then put back in the filing cabinet till next year. Teachers do not see the value of the process, the relevance to the policies they are being asked to implement or the improvements they are being asked to make ie raising attainment. 'Teachers only learn what is real, useful and valuable to them' (Su, Feng & Hsu, 2017). We need to recognise the importance of it being a collaborative process that is authentic, meaningful yet accountable and relevant to both current policy and the job that teachers are expected to do each day.

There are other skills that are required to fulfil the role of a middle leader. Busher (2006, pp124) suggests that the 'same elements of authentic relationships that Hopkins *et al.* (1997) promote for teachers' relationships with their students' are similar to those describe by Kelly, when working with school leaders and members of their teams. It would appear that collaborative approaches to both leading and learning are desirable and effective when communicating in education settings, particularly when thinking about vision and direction of the establishment.

Interestingly another skill required by the middle leader is around morals and mindset. A sense of moral purpose is often awakened when delivering outdoor learning as the connection to the planet, environment and community are central themes. We have witnessed schools embracing the outdoor learning practices and simultaneously developing

a sense of their own agency, beginning to operate as a new community that 'helps to share and shape ... moral purpose' (Swaffield and MacBeath 2013, p.20). 'Minor personal and physical changes are linked to large scale transformation' (Ball 1998, p.124). These positive shifts in school can have a positive impact on the learning provided for the pupils. Fullan (Fullan, 2003: cited in Wise, Bradshaw and Cartwright, 2013 pp 21) suggests that 'the moral imperative of the principal involves leading deep cultural change that mobilizes the passion and commitment of teachers, parents and others to improve the learning of all students'. Swaffield and MacBeath go on to exemplify Giddens' theory of action, where the leader is making links, shaping the moral purpose, spotting the learning and leadership moments and making it all happen, as invaluable to ensure that political and social structures don't constrain and limit the potential. This will be a key aim of the lead teachers as they lead outdoor learning within their establishments.

Recognising that different approaches to leadership can have influence on teachers' pedagogy Leithwood (2011, pp28) highlights the practices used by the most successful leaders. Again, these tie in nicely with Busher and Kelly; Setting directions or moral purpose, developing people or building capacity, redesigning the organization or building collaborative cultures and managing instructional programmes. Within each of these there are common threads of communication and collaboration. We recognise that support is required when schools are placing outdoor learning in their improvement plans. Helping management teams to share their visions for outdoor learning across a school whilst ensuring that the whole staff team feel a part of it, requires the ability to utilise several leadership skills. Allowing each members' voice to be heard and valued, to encourage innovative and creative ideas, to challenge the status quo, to encourage ownership in all staff, these practices are often needing nurtured and modelled.

In a study investigating the relationship between time teachers have been teaching and their attitudes towards professional learning, Brody and Hadar (2015) quoted previous work from 2011, as being important when looking at teacher capacity. 'We found four stages: anticipation and curiosity, withdrawal, awareness and change'. (Brody and Hadar 2015, pp247). The personal trajectories of experienced and novice teachers varied as they moved through the different stages of professional development. The experienced teachers often likening new practices to their own older practice, 'exhibited two modes of inaction: a re-

labelling of current practice or identification of roadblocks to implementation.’ (Brody, Hadar 2015, pp261) In contrast, the novice teachers implemented the new practice or skills learned and took pride in the new learning and teaching. As outdoor learning is still perceived as a relatively new concept for many teachers, this research would suggest that as a team we need to look at ways of ensuring that all members of the establishments will want to engage. This will require different supports depending on the preferred learning style of the teacher and their attitude to being ‘taught’ by a peer, lead teacher. Exploring and summarising the role of the middle leader with the COACH programme, has allowed us to identify key features which we believe have had a positive impact. Recognising the need for practical skills, policy understanding, personal skills in collaborative approaches to teaching and leading and the ability to engage with teachers who are all experiencing different levels of motivation and engagement, is a tall order to meet. However, using the articles cited throughout this review, we believe that the approaches that we now have in place have helped to create a more engaging and dynamic programme which will be rolled out in future years.

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