

SCEL Fellowship Programme
Area of Enquiry

Sharon Hayward
January 2015



SCEL

Scottish College for
Educational Leadership

SCEL Fellowship Submission

Creating a dialogue-rich and bureaucracy-light assessment system to track learners' progress across establishments and across Glasgow City.

Having been a Headteacher (HT) for sixteen years, I have always strived to ensure I work to develop my professional learning, relating to my school setting and as part of a large local authority, taking cognisance of both national and international perspectives where possible. For the last five years, as well as being a primary HT, I have held strategic responsibility for assessment of the Broad General Education 3-15 across Glasgow City, chairing the local authority's (LA) Assessment Strategy Group (ASG). It was in this area of responsibility that I saw the potential of working within the SCEL Fellowship Programme to develop my understanding of system-wide leadership and to allow me to develop and refine the leadership I have at this level. My enquiry involved creating a city-wide strategy for assessment which was dialogue-rich and bureaucracy-light. That is, a set of LA guidance and CPD to establishments to allow them to track learner progress across their establishment and allow progress to be tracked across the whole city. This system needed to ensure it was not simply an additional layer of bureaucracy. This enquiry allowed me to evidence the SCEL vision of leadership which is research based, practice focused and benchmarked internationally.

In the following report, I will outline my evolving leadership role at a national and systems level in relation to assessment and moderation. Drawing on research, reading and significant professional experiences the report provides a reflective view of the changes I have been involved with and led.

It has long been established that the basis of good assessment is Assessment for Learning, which improves learning by providing quality feedback on how to progress (Townsend *et al* 2011, Middlewood *et al* 2005, Carroll *et al* 2014, Hutchinson *et al* 2005). Assessment for Learning has been the cornerstone of Scotland's formative assessment policy for more than ten years and remains so. The advent of Curriculum for Excellence and the removal of national assessments prompted a radical change in how we assess learners' progress over time. Schools and Local Authorities could no longer use hard data alone to evidence this and for both formative and accountability purposes, a new way had to be found.

On deciding the way forward in Glasgow, we agreed to consider current research, seek international comparators and look to support leaders and practitioners in growing their professionalism and confidence in talking about student assessment and progression.

The importance of teachers needing to adopt manageable procedures enabling the tracking of pupil learning across the new curriculum without recording everything a pupil does and also ensuring minimal variations to standards (Mansell *et al* 2009) was set early in the process. This was further augmented by the highlighting of social moderation as a primary mechanism for ensuring teachers discuss and negotiate their judgements, thus raising achievement. (Hayward *et al* 2012). Sir Andrew Cubie (Chair of the Leadership Foundation) encouraged SCEL participants (SCEL Network Meeting 4) to consider the 'time we are in educationally' when making system-wide change i.e. the national agenda and how this compares with the practitioners' agenda. The national focus in education was to ensure bureaucracy was kept to a minimum (Scottish Government, 2013). This was in partnership with assessment decisions which were based on teachers' professional judgements against agreed standards and

relied on day to day evidence of teaching and learning. Ensuring time for professional dialogue which supports the development of staff confidence and professional trust in teachers, was also an agenda promoted by professional bodies and teaching trade unions. This provided the backdrop for my enquiry.

In the largest Local Authority in Scotland, with 30 Secondary schools, 140 primary schools, over 120 nurseries and early years' centres and 55 Additional Learning Needs (ALN) schools and units, I have worked to ensure that key messages about moderation, tracking, profiling and reporting were articulated and shared with practitioners at all levels: messages which were founded on relevant research (Mansell *et al* 2009, Hayward *et al* 2012). The development of teacher professionalism and confidence, as trust was given to their professional judgements, allowed a growing 'intelligent accountability' (Hayward *et al* 2012) and avoided the 'scientific Marxism' which the overvaluing of (hard) data can bring (Hargreaves, 2014).

A wide range of guidance, conferences, exemplification, seminars, city-wide moderation activities and sharing of best practice has been co-ordinated and is available to all practitioners on our assessment intranet. Ensuring a consistent message to all practitioners has been vital throughout. As Chair of the ASG, I organised and led a recent set of three seminars, attended by over 200 School Leaders from the LA allowing the above messages to be reiterated and underlined. Research was reviewed (Mansell *et al* 2009, Hayward *et al* 2012) government policy cited (Scottish Government, 2013) and agreed practice redefined during presentations and workshop discussions. Starter packs of key written guidance and web links were produced, to be provided to every practitioner in the city and a set of activities reinforcing the key messages of the city assessment guidance launched. For the fourth year in a row, the ASG has ensured the February INSET day will be used to

promote and work through aspects of the city assessment strategy with every practitioner, providing a menu of activities and workshops to support school developments, while recognising that schools are at different places on their 'assessment journey'. These opportunities to research, read, and lead at systems level have given me the chance to demonstrate exactly the sort of responsibility and capabilities required of a SCEL Fellow.

Internationally, we have looked to Finland, currently top of the international PISA tests of student achievement as a comparator and saw significant similarities between their assessment expectations and those we are promoting in Scotland (OECD, 2012).

Pupils' progress is assessed in relation to the curriculum's goals and descriptions of achievement. These descriptions and the final criteria specify the knowledge and skill levels that constitute the basis of pupil assessment. These are agreed through teacher moderation and not through formal testing. At the Scottish Learning Festival 2013, Pasi Sahlberg said of Finland, "Here, the answer is to not use test score data at all. The point is to know and teach your students well." Rather, Finland confidentially tests groups of students, not to assess their individual progress but to test the effectiveness of the system, similar to the Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy (SSLN). Sahlberg likens this to testing a blood sample when seeking to find out how a body is working and not removing all the blood from the body (Hargreaves *et al* 2014).

Similarly, as a LA seeking to evaluate the progress and effectiveness of our assessment strategy, we decided to undertake a Moderation Sampling exercise in every establishment in three of our twenty nine learning communities each year asking colleagues the question, "How do you know learners are making progress?" A team of senior leaders speak to the HT, class teacher and groups of learners who evidence progress using real work in real places (conversations, learning logs, planning, jotters)

ensuring that bureaucracy is kept to a minimum. This allows us to evaluate the extent to which key messages are being consistently applied across the LA, identify any support an individual establishment or sector might require and note further actions for the ASG in supporting the work across the city. Like the SSLN, which relies on a sample to evaluate the system, we likewise have chosen to adopt the same method.

In the first SCEL Network Meeting, Graham Donaldson spoke of Local Authorities having increased autonomy, but still needing to acknowledge demands for evidence based policy from Scottish Government and from parents. This Moderation Sampling Exercise allows us to report to elected members, with clear data about the confidence we have in Glasgow's teachers and learners to describe progress in learning. This has also provided an effective manner in which to identify the CPD requirements of teachers and leaders for the coming year. This allows me to reflect and draw on the data provided without being driven by it (Hargreaves *et al* 2014).

In stark contrast, while working in Malawi this year with the charity Malawi Leaders of Learning, I was able to see a very different system in action. Malawi as a country, had no national assessment policy in place until 2004. Research showed teachers had a very positive attitude towards classroom assessment but extremely limited knowledge of the major assessment concepts (Chulu, 2013). The idea of continuous assessment is still relatively new. Documentation is in place and CPD delivered to show the need for pupil and teacher assessment, learning for understanding, appropriate records of pupil progress and remediation and enrichment of learning. The reality of this in the school I worked in for a month and the three other schools involved in the programme this year was that:

- ✚ often learners remained in a class for several years, unable to pass the end of session test:

- ✚ Friday was 'test day' where learners had to recount that which they had been taught that week:
- ✚ records of pupil progress were simply lists of scores and percentages and
- ✚ lists of Standard 8 pupils and their final test scores were displayed publicly and learners who had failed were named and sometimes scorned or ridiculed by the school community.

There is definitely a long way to go before the children of Malawi receive a research-based educational experience as robust as the children of Finland or Scotland. There is no doubt that my work in Malawi provided me with a lens through which to reflect on the assessment and moderation work I have led in Glasgow for the last five years. The contrasts were stark.

Throughout the SCEL Fellowship programme a recurring theme has affected my practice as a leader within my school and as a system leader relating to my assessment enquiry, that of trust. From the first SCEL Fellowship network day, Clive Dimmock's comment that, "A country that doesn't have confidence in its teachers will have great difficulty improving education." struck a particular chord with me as I equate confidence with trust. Trust is an essential component of what it means to be a professional (Frowe, 2010) and the major requirement of Glasgow's approach to assessment of Broad General Education, is to acknowledge and enhance teacher professionalism. It is clear that in coming to an assessment judgement based on an agreed standard, teachers need to trust each other within schools and at points of transition and society needs to trust teachers' judgements too, particularly at the end of secondary schooling, when future education and employment stakes are high (Hayward *et al* 2012). I have also found that teachers and school leaders need to trust the LA, to believe the LA will do as it says, to expect only what it has asked for and to

have support provided where schools require it. During the last set of assessment seminars, school leaders also commented in number that there was an important issue of trust between schools and the Inspectorate, HMIE. On occasions, the subjectivity of inspectors meant that trust was broken as schools felt they had been judged harshly as they were still learning to articulate the Glasgow assessment message within their schools. This macro level trust issue is difficult to resolve and takes time. We are wise to avoid exhaustion and over reach, recognising that 'progress is rarely swift' (Hargeaves *et al* 2014) but need to strive for consistency.

The issue of trust and in particular how to 'measure' trust within an organisation and improve upon it was further crystallised during a trip to Washington, D.C. With a fellow SCEL Fellowship participant this year, I attended the Sutton-Gates Foundation Teaching Summit. There I met Dr Paul Browning who spoke of his doctoral work in this area (Browning, 2014) and in particular of his trust rubric which I think will be really helpful in moving my own school forward through a challenging period, where trust between some staff is not well established.

Trust was also a feature of the coaching sessions I was asked to take part in through the Fellowship Programme. While fully recognising the benefits of coaching, I initially found it difficult to see the relevance of this within the programme and its relevance to my enquiry and struggled to engage fully. However, as trust grew, I was able to discuss a number of significant events, both within school and within the context of the Fellowship Programme with my coach and now feel this was useful time. The opportunity to debrief following my Malawian trip was particularly beneficial to me. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my coach for her work with me.

The clear links between the issue of trust and the SCEL Fellowship are also clear. To hold the position of SCEL Fellow, as with Fellows of any other learned institutions, denotes both trust and responsibility.

Being part of the first cohort of prospective Fellows of SCEL has been a real privilege and has provided me with opportunities to engage with system leaders from a variety of backgrounds, which I would otherwise have not had. Many of these leaders have impacted upon my thinking and I believe I now have a clearer understanding of how leaders can impact most positively within their given area of responsibility, whether that be within a school, local or national context. I am keen to lead 'beyond my authority' (Middleton, 2007) and believe I have been given the opportunity to reflect on my personal characteristics as a 'change driver' (Clive Dimmock SCEL Network Meeting One) throughout the programme. I also have been supported to develop my confidence as a system leader and widened my sphere of influence by accepting invitations I would otherwise have possibly refused such as speaking at Scotland's Policy Conference or agreeing to work with Louise Hayward in writing a chapter for a forthcoming book.

SCEL came at the right time for me. I am very grateful for the platform it has been and I look forward to returning the service should I be successful in my Fellowship pursuit.

References

Paul Browning (2014) *Compelling Leadership: The Importance of Trust and How to Get It*. <https://www.apple.com/uk/itunes/> (last accessed 19.01.15)

Bob Wajizigha Chulu (2013) 'Institutionalisation of assessment capacity in developing nations: the case of Malawi', *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 20:4, pp 407-423

Ian Frowe (2005) 'Professional Trust'. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 53:1, 34-53.

Andy Hargreaves, Alan Boyle & Alma Harris (2014) *Uplifting Leadership: How Organisations, Teams, and Communities Raise Performance*. San Francisco USA. Jossey-Bass.

Louise Hayward and Ernest Spencer (2014) in M.Carroll and M.McCulloch (Eds.) *Understanding Teaching and Learning in Primary Education*. California. SAGE

Louise Hayward, Ian Menter, Vivienne Baumfield, Richard Daugherty, Nasrin Akhtar, Lesley Doyle, Dely Elliot, Moira Hulme, Carolyn Hutchinson, George MacBride, Margaret McCulloch, Fiona Patrick, Ernie Spencer, Georgina Wardle, Harry Blee (until June 2011) and Liz Arthur (2012) 'Assessment at Transition. Project Report.' University of Glasgow, UK.

Carolyn Hutchinson and Louise Hayward (2005) *The Journey So Far: Assessment for Learning in Scotland*. Curriculum Journal, 16 (2). pp. 225-248.

Warwick Mansell, Mary James, the Assessment Reform Group (2009) *Assessment in Schools. Fit for Purpose? A Commentary by the Teaching and Learning Research Programme*. London. Economic and Social Research Council, Teaching and Learning Research Programme.

David Middlewood, Richard Parker, Jackie Beere (2005) *Creating a Learning School*. Gatehead, GB. Paul Chapman Publishing

OECD (2012) *PISA 2012 Results in Focus. What 15-year-olds know and what they can do with what they know* <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf> (last accessed 08.01.15)

Scottish Government (2013) *Curriculum for Excellence Working Group on Tackling Bureaucracy* <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/resource/0043/00438617.pdf> (last accessed 08.01.15)

Sue Swaffield (2011) 'Leading assessment for learning' in T. Townsend and J. MacBeath (Eds.) *International Handbook of Leadership for Learning*. Rotterdam: Springer.