

SCEL Fellowship Programme
Area of Enquiry

**In a time of significant change, how
can we support schools in
successful and effective curriculum
development whilst
considering the pressures facing
education?**

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SCEL

Scottish College for
Educational Leadership

Introduction

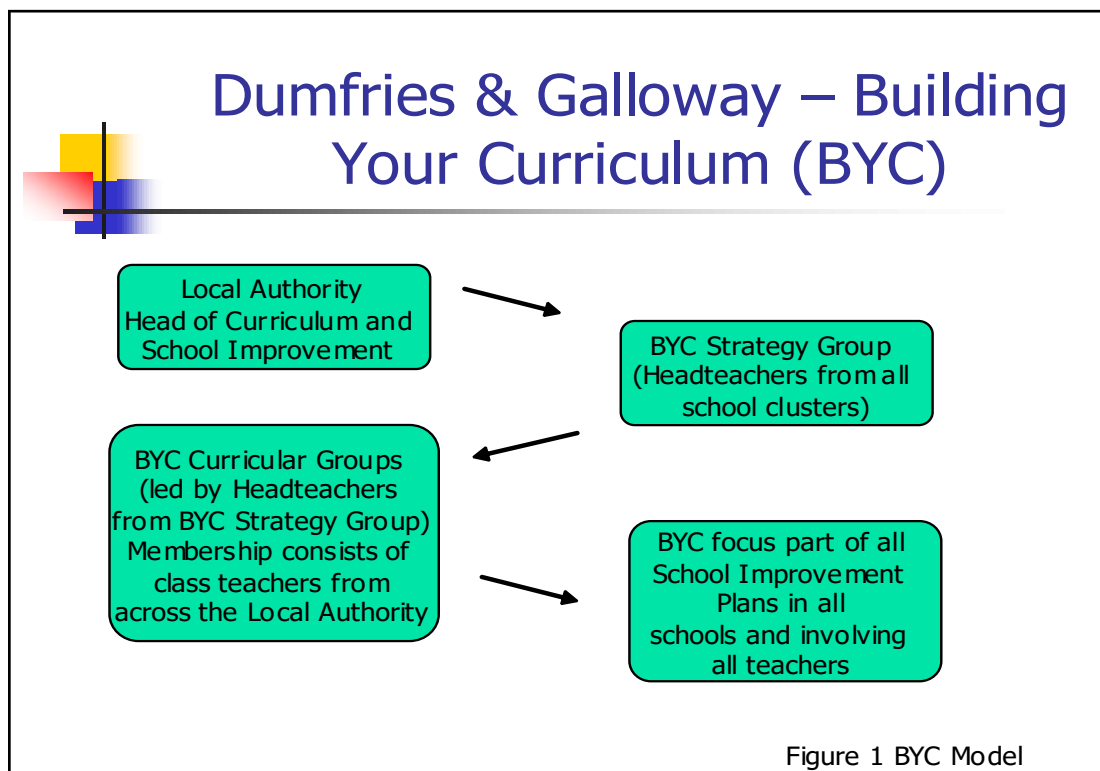
A key component of the SCEL Fellowship Programme is to allow the opportunity for aspiring fellows “to take forward an aspect of policy development so enabling them to engage with policy formation and implementation at local, national and international levels”. (SCEL 2014, Fellowship Programme Development Project Guidance: 1).

The aspect I chose to take forward is related to the fact that Scotland is currently facing many challenges to which schools need to respond if they are to develop a curriculum which best prepares our young people for the twenty-first century workplace and society as a whole. These challenges are unprecedented in that, whilst we have a new, evolving curriculum that aims to better meet the needs of our modern society and young people, we are working within levels of financial constraint like no other which are resulting in a diminishing ‘centre’ of authority personnel. As such, we require unprecedented approaches to organisational structures, processes and leadership in schools and this is resulting in a need to find a way of ‘working differently’ to utilise the skills and talents of the workforce we still have in supporting all of our schools in developing their curriculum.

The opportunity within these challenges and so the rationale for my project in involving class teachers more intrinsically in curriculum development is clearly outlined and supported by Fullan (2001: 9) who tells us that “educational change depends on what teachers do and think”. Teachers need to be the main agents of change and ways need to be found to bring class teachers on board and support them in being committed and prepared to become intrinsically involved in curricular change.

Rationale / Justification

Whilst taking account of the national context and also the current climate, the vision for schools in Dumfries and Galloway (2007) involves “securing the highest levels of attainment, achievement and participation for all learners”. In complementing this and, through the current Education Services Business Plan, there is active encouragement to “promote and support a culture of confidence, collaboration and creativity which means a focus on learning, ambition, professional standards and building capacity in all staff ” (Dumfries & Galloway Education Services Plan 2014/15, Objective 3). As



such, teachers are now, through the Building Your Curriculum (BYC) model, being encouraged to embrace a collaborative and innovative approach to curriculum development which has greater alignment to effective classroom practice and learners' outcomes (figure1).

In supporting the required changes the Scottish Government is assisting by providing frameworks within which to innovate and this can be seen by the recommendations outlined in Teaching Scotland's Future (Scottish Government, 2010), the guidance in Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2004) and the self-evaluation opportunities for all teachers in Scotland as outlined in the new GTCS Professional Standards (GTCS, 2012). However it is now the expectation of schools to engage in research, build capacity and focus upon what matters i.e. collaboratively creating, planning, delivering, evaluating and improving quality learning experiences for young people.

As a member of the BYC Strategy Group and also co-lead of the BYC Literacy Curricular Group (see figure 1), this professional report focuses upon the BYC Literacy Group and the approach taken to nurturing and developing the leadership of its members in building a collaborative approach to literacy / writing curricular innovation.

Links to Wider Contexts / Issues / Literature

A key element of the approach was one of recognising the need to build leadership capacity amongst the BYC Literacy Group members. In doing this the view of Fullan (2001: 23) was very much embraced. He notes that capacity building needs to be more than 'indirect' capacity building i.e. training and workshops. It needs to focus upon 'direct' capacity building which involves "application, coaching, monitoring, exchanging ideas and strategies, assessment for learning and the results-focused activities that take place in a leadership context."

This latter point supports the development of Distributive Leadership in schools and the impact this can have in influencing school improvement. It was the aim of the BYC Literacy Group that members would be encouraged to engage in a distributive leadership model because "school leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed" (Smith 2011: 53).

Key Questions / Themes Explored

In considering the rationale and wider contexts within which this project sits, the following key questions and themes were explored –

- how can we support staff in embracing the changes facing curriculum development?
- how can we build capacity within schools to ensure development sustainability?
- how can the leadership of / within a group facilitate the development of the project?

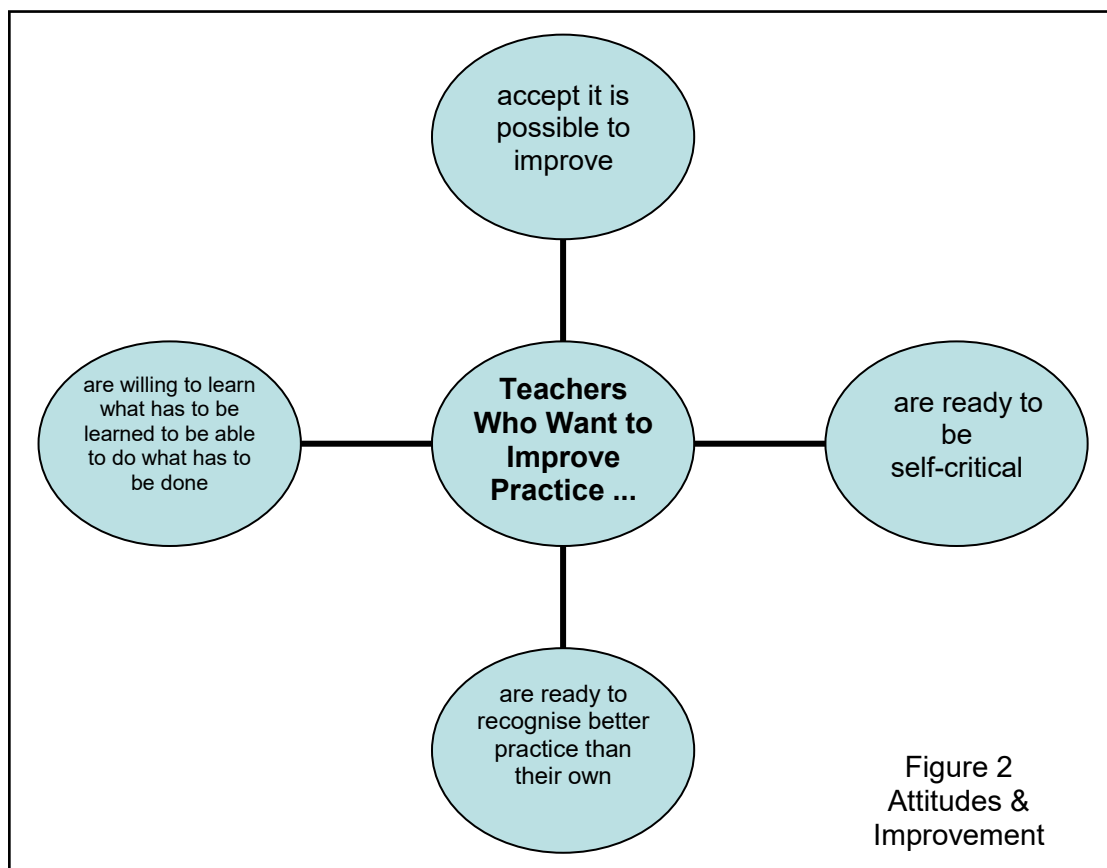
The Enquiry and the Enquiry Process?

The actual focus of the project being undertaken sat within the BYC model shown in figure 1. However, the specific work being examined in this report was how to successfully work with and lead a group of volunteer class teachers from across our authority i.e. the Literacy BYC Group, in effectively engaging in leading learning regarding relevant and worthwhile curriculum development which could then be used by others across the authority and beyond as a way of sharing standards, moderating learning and teaching and pupil outcomes and so developing a shared understanding

of pupil progress and attainment expectations. The planned outcome of this work was for the group members to work collaboratively to support both their own understanding and also that of their colleagues by creating examples of literacy / writing Annotated Exemplification (Education Scotland, 2014) which show how relevant Curriculum for Excellence Experiences and Outcomes can be brought together to exemplify the skills, knowledge, methodologies, pupil activities and assessment in planning for manageable and meaningful contextualised learning and teaching.

Core to this enquiry was the research undertaken by Hattie (2012). He describes the need to develop 'Visible Learning' in our schools and classrooms – improving learning and teaching through “creating a collaborative approach where teachers work together to develop plans, develop common understandings of what is worth teaching, collaborate on understanding their beliefs of challenge and progress, and work together to evaluate the impact of their learning” (Hattie 2012: p41).

The group with whom I was working met termly and for the co-lead and me it was important, at these meeting times and in building the collaborative approach promoted by Hattie (2012), that an ethos of Quality Assurance and not Quality Control was nurtured i.e. we wanted to build ownership of the project so that staff were motivated and wanted to participate and, as such, we created a climate which was characterised by the attitudes outlined by Jennifer Nias and colleagues (1992) as shown in figure 2.



Key Findings, Impact and Outcomes

The findings highlight the importance of creating a collaborative approach amongst the team members. Team members worked in sub-groups to successfully create literacy / writing shared annotated exemplification. These sub-groups were organised around staff who worked at similar levels of the school and in fairly close geographic proximity (which is an important consideration in such a widespread, rural authority) to each other. Members felt supported and, through shared tasks, the feelings of isolation and fear of the unprecedented work they were undertaking were greatly reduced.

In this project the benefits of Distributive Leadership were clearly evidenced. Dimmock (2012: 113) sees Distributive Leadership as “a way of increasing and extending the organisational capacity of a school” and, with the introduction of the new GTCS Professional Standards (GTCS, 2012) where there is an expectation of leadership at all levels from all teachers in Scotland, the group members were able to consider not only the task they were undertaking but also the professional learning opportunity that this work was offering them as leaders, taking forward projects that were being supported not only at school but also local authority level.

The actual task we undertook was to create annotated exemplification related to the Literacy / Writing Experiences and Outcomes as outlined in Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). This included making links to the progression of the teaching and learning of writing as linked to the Progression Frameworks developed by Education Scotland and highlighting the assessment of the work in relation to the Significant Aspects of Learning, also created by Education Scotland. The nature of the task and, the way in which we actioned it, with the team members through a collaborative approach, allowed for moderation to also take place. This was initially within the group through discussion and analysis but when this work is more widely shared, it will allow other colleagues to build their understanding of curriculum development and their confidence in making decisions about pupil progression through the curriculum.

Much of the drive of the group in undertaking the task came from the focus of the work on what staff saw as relevant and their ‘core business’ i.e. learning and teaching. As Elmore (2006: 4) notes “locate the learning as close as possible to the work the influence of learning on practice is greater the more direct and immediate the

application to practice.” What also came from this was that the group members stated that they were enjoying the work because it was helping them to understand their ‘work’ and also, more importantly, how they could further improve and enhance outcomes for pupils.

Analysis / Implications / Next Steps

In relation to school leadership, this work would indicate that the traditional configuration of leadership which was previously linked to hierarchy, seniority and formal position is outdated and no longer fit for purpose. Smith (2011: 124) highlights that “where school leadership teams have collegiate decision making around the implementation of whole-school issues, there is more evidence of staff members interacting with each other and sharing good practice so leading to school improvement.” This builds capacity in schools where as Dimmock (2012: 175) states “the onus for transformation and implementing change must ultimately lie with the schools themselves.”

The next steps in this particular piece of work are for the BYC Literacy Group to

- continue to develop annotated exemplification, including a focus upon the other aspects of literacy i.e. talking and listening and reading which will complement the work that is taking place in the other curricular groups, co-ordinated by the authority’s BYC Strategy Group;
- share the group’s work to date across the authority through the Professional Learning Community (PLC) and also nationally by uploading our work to the National Assessment Resource (NAR).

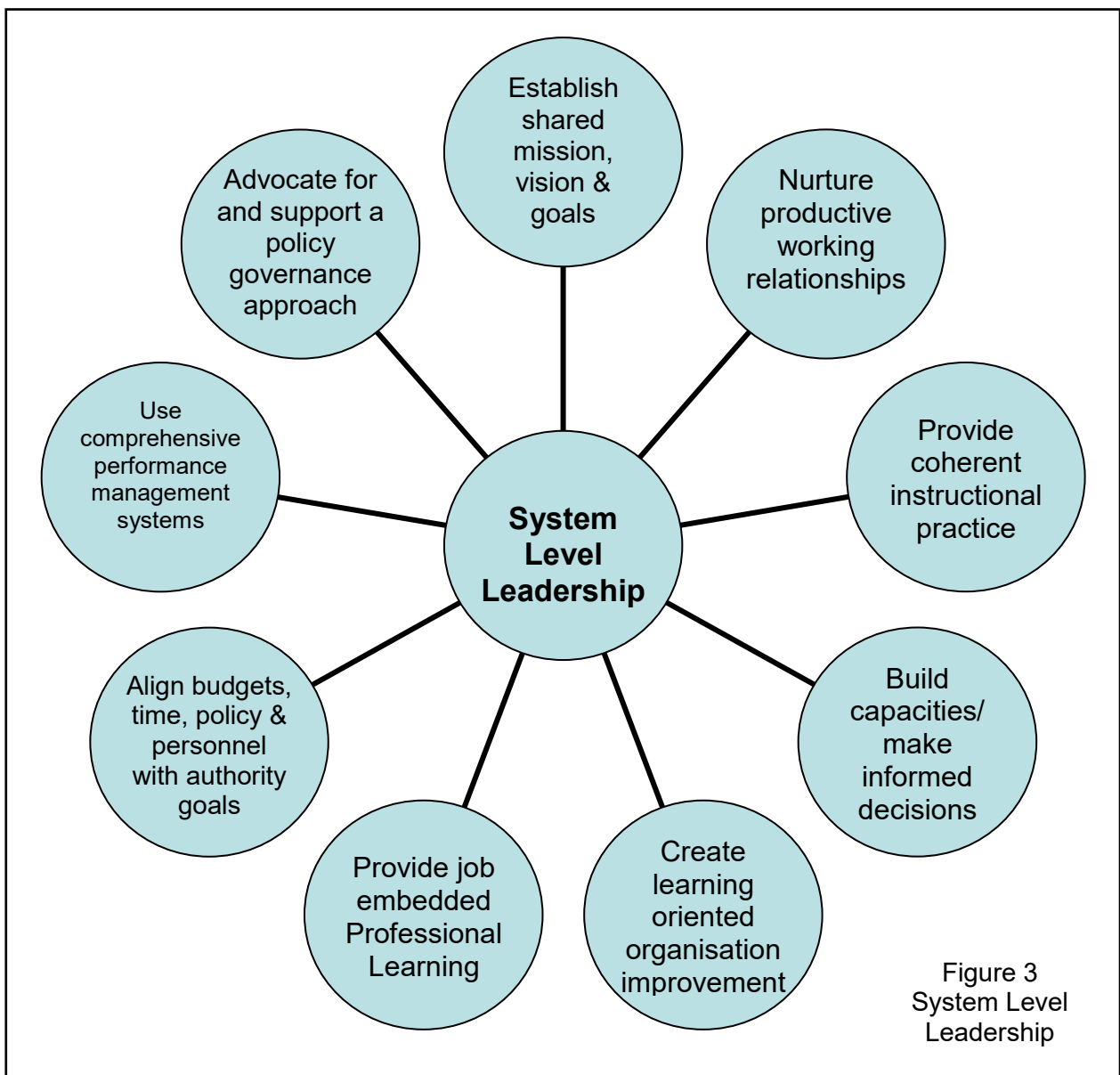
In addition, the groups members’ own professional learning will be developed in relation to the building of their Distributive Leadership which, as this project highlights, will facilitate the capacity building we are looking for in this current climate of perceived constraint and unprecedented change.

Own Learning / Own Insights

Through this project I have had an enhanced opportunity to be a system leader i.e. someone who works beyond their own school to support other schools and local authority developments. As such I have and continue to engage in system - level

leadership which is defined by the National College for School Leadership (2010: 1) as “leaders who work within and beyond their individual organisations; sharing and harnessing the best resources that the system can offer to bring about improvement in their own organisations; and influencing thinking, policy and practice so as to have a positive impact on lives and life chances of all children and young people”.

The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF, 2012) highlights the practices demanded of system-level leaders and these are shown in figure 3 and, as outlined earlier, my work in this project followed the key requirements of successful system-level leadership. It was closely aligned to the national agenda and key purpose of curriculum review through Curriculum for Excellence and also the authority’s aim to provide authority wide development which builds the learning and teaching capacity of staff in schools deep rooted in curriculum improvement.



As such and, through carefully planned Professional Learning which myself and my co-lead offered in our work with the BYC Literacy Group members, we were able to nurture and build supportive working relationships and support members in making informed decisions about how best to take forward literacy / writing curriculum developments which are aligned to best classroom practice and which can be shared for the benefit of all involved in curriculum review and development.

On a personal note, throughout this work, I was required to be a strategic, positive role model to group members, supporting and nurturing them as / when required to ensure that capacity was built and the literacy / writing curriculum was developed in line with current national and local thinking.

Critical Reflection and Conclusion

Ken Muir, Chief Executive Officer of GTCS in 'Teaching Scotland' (February / March 2014: 1) noted that "in Scotland, we are all engaged in what will be seen in years to come as a point where we are experiencing and delivering a paradigm shift in moving a good education system to becoming a great one; a system that sustains continuous improvement in outcomes for learners and ongoing professional learning for teachers".

Through the project described in this professional report it is clear that teachers in our classrooms can and should be the people who shape the curriculum which will ensure our education system moves from being good to great and so supports our young people in achieving their full potential.

In terms of my participation in the SCEL Fellowship Programme, it is my view that the sharing of the work in which I have engaged in my project, could support and influence others in addressing how local authorities and schools can engage in successful and effective curriculum development in line with Curriculum for Excellence and Scottish Government guidance. Alongside this the need to build staff capacity could then be addressed so there is the appropriately skilled and available human resource to engage in this work so we can successfully progress sustainable curriculum development in our schools which will help move our education system from being 'good to great'.

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