Getting to the Heart of System Reform – A micro strategy for large scale educational change

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Abstract

There is a paradox at the heart of contemporary system change in education. On the one hand there is the unequivocal conclusion from the accumulation of PISA evidence for example, that both excellence and equity are possible at a system level; yet on the other hand there are concerns from most educational jurisdictions over the stubbornness of low standards. Why is it that despite the phenomenal increase in our recent knowledge about what works in schooling, that standards still lag behind expectations and school level performance is far too variable. The paper addresses this paradox and concludes that unless we focus unrelentingly on the quality of teaching in both our small and large-scale reform efforts, then current practice will never meet society's expectations. A 'micro-strategy' for sustained systemic educational change, generally known as 'Instructional Rounds', is described. This strategy for pedagogic improvement has the potential for generating an increasingly specific language for teaching and learning that significantly aids consistency and precision in the quest for both excellence and equity. The argument concludes by proposing a school improvement strategy for moving Instructional Rounds, the generation of Theories of Action and Peer Coaching to scale. This has particular relevance for school networks and Multi Academy Trust and has the potential of having has the potential of having large-scale system reform impact.

Keywords

Instructional Rounds, Peer Coaching, Teaching and Learning, Theories of Action, School Improvement, System Reform

Introduction

There is a paradox at the heart of contemporary system change in education. On the one hand there is the unequivocal conclusion from the accumulation of PISA evidence that both excellence and equity are possible at a system level (Schleicher, 2018). Yet on the other hand, there are overwhelming examples from most educational jurisdictions expressing concern over poor standards. As a recent World Bank report succinctly put it, "while countries have significantly increased access to education, being in school isn't the same thing as learning" (World Bank, 2018). Why is it that, despite the phenomenal increase in our knowledge about what works in schooling in recent years, standards lag behind expectations and school level performance is far too unpredictable? As Ernest Becker (1985: xix) put it in a slightly different context:

> "… either we get some kind of grip on the accumulation of thought or we continue to wallow helplessly, to starve amidst plenty."

In a far more modest way, that too is our aim in this paper. We begin by exploring in a little more detail the paradox described above and from it conclude that, unless we focus unrelentingly on the quality of teaching in both our small and large-scale reform efforts, we will certainly "*continue to wallow helplessly, to starve amidst plenty".* We then describe a 'micro-strategy' for sustained systemic educational change, often known as 'Instructional Rounds'. This strategy for pedagogic improvement has the potential for generating an increasingly specific language for teaching that significantly aids consistency and precision. We conclude by proposing a school improvement strategy for moving Instructional Rounds, the generation of Theories of Action and Peer Coaching to scale. This has particular relevance to school networks and Multi Academy Trusts and has the potential of having large-scale system reform impact.

We write from the perspective of being 'school improvement activists'. We locate ourselves in the middle of that triangle bounded by the vertices of practice, research and policy. Over the years, we have variously been teachers, principals, professors, researchers, policy makers, civil servants and consultants. Most recently, one of us has been associated with the implementation of the 'Curiosity and Powerful Learning' school improvement programme with cohorts of schools in Australia and England (Hopkins, 2013; 2020). The other has been working with an international network of schools inspired by Kunskapsskolan's personalised learning model, which through a goal-driven approach brings intrinsic motivation and agency to students so they achieve more than they thought possible (see - www.kunskapsskolan.com). What follows draws directly on those experiences.

Debates still rage - which policy levers and strategies make the difference?

There is no doubt that the world's educational systems have made significant progress over recent decades. It is also indubitably true that we have generated substantial practical knowledge over the past fifteen years about how to improve both schools and systems (Hopkins et al., 2014). Yet debates still rage at the policy, practitioner and academic levels over which policy levers and strategies actually make the difference. It is also sadly the case that the most significant consequence of this 'debate' has been to slow the progress of student achievement at the system level (Hopkins, 2017a).

This is the issue that one of us addresses directly in *Exploding the Myths of School Reform* (Hopkins, 2013), by arguing that the failure of so many educational change efforts to impact on the learning and performance of students is due to misguided action based on a number of myths associated with school reform. Discussion of the myths stems from a deep frustration that despite what we collectively know about school and system reform, the potential contained in this knowledge is not systematically realized. This is, in our view, because of the negative effect of top-down and instrumental approaches so dominant in most school reform efforts. As a global community we have succumbed by-and-large to a single solution approach—this reading scheme, this theory of learning or the latest textbook or fad. By way of contrast, 'inside–out' school improvement works from careful diagnosis followed by customisation of strategy to context (Hopkins et al., 2011). Without a degree of professional precision and reflexivity to context, it is inevitable that pre-packaged solutions, however good and well intentioned, end up having a limited effect of student learning.

This is a theme that has been taken up and pursued with much passion and intellectual vigour by a number of the most influential opinion leaders in our field. We review three of them briefly here.

Michael Fullan, in his paper '*Choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform',* describes how certain popular policy options are implemented but without any serious consideration of context. The following quotes give a flavour of the argument:

> "A 'wrong driver' is a deliberate policy force that has little chance of achieving the desired result, while a 'right driver' is one that ends up achieving better measurable results for students" (Fullan, 2011:3).

> "The glue that binds the effective drivers together is the underlying attitude, philosophy, and theory of action. The mindset that works for whole system reform is the one that inevitably generates individual and collective motivation and corresponding skills to transform the system" (Fullan, 2011:5).

These drivers may be wrong for one of two reasons, or both. They may be wrong because they are wrong, or wrong because they are inappropriate to the stage that the school or system is currently at. As Fullan (2011:5) comments:

> "In the rush to move forward, leaders, especially from countries that have not been progressing, tend to choose the wrong drivers. Such ineffective drivers fundamentally miss the target. There are four main 'wrong driver' culprits...

1. Accountability: using test results, and teacher appraisal, to reward or punish teachers and schools, versus capacity building;
2. Individual teacher and leadership quality: promoting individual, vs group solutions;
3. Technology: investing in and assuming that the wonders of the digital world will carry the day vs instruction;
4. Fragmented strategies vs integrated or systemic strategies".

In reflecting on this issue, it is worth quoting David Hargreaves (2012) and note his quite appropriate emphasis on the contextualisation of any change to context:

> "There may be real gains from looking around the world for some educational policies and practices that might benefit our schools. But a transformation of schooling that is self-generating and sustainable requires that attention be paid to the deep cultural capital that underpins the life of individual schools, of partnerships and alliances, and of the school system as a whole. This is the key lesson we learn from China and East Asia, one by which we can develop our version, based on our own well-established native roots of extended moral purpose and distributed system leadership" (Hargreaves, 2012:25).

So the key point being advanced here by both Fullan and Hargreaves is the danger of promiscuous policy borrowing, a contention that one finds enthusiastically endorsed in the writings of Pasi Sahlberg.

Sahlberg (2011) in his bestselling book *Finnish Lessons*, explains the success of the Finnish educational system, not in terms of the adoption of a range of external strategies and policies, but more in terms of carefully reflective, customised and culturally relevant approaches. In the book, Sahlberg explains the Finnish paradox that 'less is more' with the following implications: teach less, learn more; test less, learn more; and ensure more equity through growing diversity. This is not a universal panacea and it certainly does not apply to all systems, but is an intelligent response to the cultural context of Finland. The Finns themselves sensibly prefer to combine knowledge of what works, together with a view as to how the Finnish system itself will continue to evolve.

In a subsequent blog, *Global Educational Reform Movement is here!,* Sahlberg (2012) argues that the main strategies for developing an equitable, high-performing education system are similar to those underlying the social and economic transformation of Finland into a welfare state and a competitive knowledge society. He continues that, because of the professional strength and moral health of Finnish schools, their system has remained virtually free of the viruses associated with the Global Educational Reform Movement (GERM). These are the collection of ubiquitous policy agendas critiqued above by Fullan and Hargreaves. The main components of GERM are:

- Standardization
- Focus on core subjects
- Search for low risk ways to reach learning goals
- Use of corporate management models
- Test-based accountability policies.

By contrast, he argues that the typical features of teaching and learning in Finland are:

- Great confidence in teachers and principals as high performing professionals;
- Encouraging teachers and students to try new ideas and approaches, in other words, to put curiosity, imagination and creativity at the heart of learning; and,
- Seeing the purpose of teaching and learning as pursuing the happiness of learning and cultivating the development of the whole child.

We stand with Sahlberg and our own work is based on a similar ethic. Indeed, it is our key contention that unless school improvement strategies focus unrelentingly on the quality of teaching then they are, as Jerome Bruner (1966:21) once memorably said,

"doomed to triviality". There is now significant empirical evidence to suggest that teaching quality is the most significant factor influencing student learning that is under the control of the school (Hattie, 2019). A widely circulated international study based on the PISA research (Barber and Mourshed, 2007:40) concluded that:

- The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers
- The only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction
- This means taking professional development into the classroom and making it routine (e.g. through peer observation, lesson study, demonstration lessons).

The phrase 'professionalised teaching' implies that teachers are on a par with other professions in terms of diagnosis, the application of evidence-based practices and professional pride. The image here is of teachers who use data to evaluate the learning needs of their students, and are consistently expanding their repertoire of pedagogic strategies to personalise learning for all students. It also implies schools adopting innovative approaches to timetabling and the deployment of increasingly differentiated staffing models. Crucially, the focus of professional development needs to continuously be on the 'instructional core'. This has been the focus of our own school improvement and system reform work.

Instructional Core

For us, the elephant in the room of school and system improvement, and it has been resident for some time, is the lack of a professional practice that provides a language and a set of behaviours or processes to connect teaching to learning. There are two key problems here: the first the individualised and atomised nature of teaching as a profession; the second that teaching is a profession without a practice. These two tendencies intertwine in intricate and resilient ways.

We have been helped to understand the nature of this complexity through conversations with Richard Elmore, and the book he co-authored with his colleagues entitled *Instructional Rounds in Education* (City et al., 2009). In that book they contrast the individualism that too often characterises teaching, where the person and the practice are intertwined, with professionals who are those that share a common practice and open it up to public scrutiny. Professionals believe that the only way to improve one's practice is to allow yourself to think that your practice is *not* who you are. It is, instead, a way of expressing your current understanding of your work, your knowledge about your work, and your beliefs about what is important about the work.

All these things can change—*should* change, if you are a professional—as your knowledge, skill, expertise and understanding of your work increases. The real insight here is that you can maintain all the values and commitments that make you a person and still give yourself permission to change your practice. Your practice is an instrument for expressing who you are as a professional; it is not who you are. How practice is defined is therefore critical, and Elmore and his colleagues mean something quite specific:

> "We mean a set of protocols and processes for observing, analyzing, discussing and understanding instruction that can be used to improve student learning at scale. The practice works because it creates a common discipline and focus among practitioners with a common purpose and set of problems" (City et al., 2009:3).

It is the lack of such a practice that has inhibited recent reform efforts from unleashing the potential of our students. We need to reach down into the classroom and deepen reform efforts by moving beyond superficial curriculum change to a more profound understanding of how teacher behaviour connects to learning. In particular, it requires a direct and unrelenting focus on what many are now calling the 'instructional core'.

In its simplest terms, "the instructional core is composed of the teacher and the student in the presence of content" (City et al., 2009:22). Although there are a number of principles associated with the definition of the instructional core, there are three features associated with our interpretation of the concept in particular that require emphasising from the outset.

The first feature are the individual elements of the instructional core that provide the framework for developing curiosity and powerful learning within our students. They are; curriculum frameworks, pedagogic knowledge, student learning, and assessment (as seen in Figure 1). Each of these core elements are supported by their own set of common practices and protocols, that in our case were developed both centrally and locally, but implemented and shared across all the schools in a Network. By doing this, particularly through the development of the Theories of Action, we were able to generate a common language around teaching and learning focussed on the generation of student curiosity.

The second feature follows from the first and is that one element of the instructional core cannot be changed without impacting directly on the others. Yet most change efforts focus on only one—curriculum innovation, or professional development, or student voice, or assessment. They all need to be regarded as a whole if authentic

change in student achievement is to occur. It is the relationship between the teacher, the student, content and assessment—not the qualities of any one of them by themselves—that determines the nature of instructional practice. Each corner of the instructional core has its own particular role and resources to bring to the instructional process.

Figure 1:The core elements of classroom practice: the 'instructional core'

The third feature is more subtle but even more important. It is the appreciation that the 'instructional task' is, as it is in Figure 1, at the centre of the instructional core. The instructional task is the actual work that students are asked to do as part of classroom practice. It is not what teachers think they have asked students to do, nor what the prescribed curriculum says they should be doing, but what students are actually doing and the sense they make of it that is fundamental (City et al., 2009). This is why in *Models of Learning: Tools for Leaching,* we claimed that:

> "Learning experiences are composed of content, process and social climate. As teachers we create for and with our children opportunities to explore and build important areas of knowledge, develop powerful tools for learning, and live in humanizing social conditions" (Joyce, Calhoun and Hopkins, 2009:7).

Unless we make the instructional task the focus of our enquiry, then we can have no confidence that learning will be enhanced, and consequently the outcomes of educational reform will remain capricious. We must continuously remind ourselves that it is the tasks that students undertake that predict their performance (Doyle, 1983). Taken as a whole, it is the instructional core with the task at the centre that provides the essential classroom infrastructure for promoting curiosity.

Instructional Rounds

Viewing the instructional core in this way offers us the potential of establishing a professional practice in the school that can create a new culture of teaching and learning. The question is – how do we actually create this new culture of teaching and learning that embraces the instructional core?

Our response was to refine the generic Instructional Rounds leadership strategy associated with the work of Richard Elmore and his colleagues (City et al., 2009). Our approach works iteratively but systematically, from the existing knowledge base of individual teachers to develop Theories of Action that discipline and deepen the culture of teaching and learning of all teachers in the school and their network. Critical to the success of the Instructional Rounds approach has been the development of 'Theories of Action'. A theory of action is a link between cause and effect: *if* we take a particular action, *then* we expect that action to have specific effects. A theory of action connects the actions of teachers with the consequences of their actions—the learning and achievement of their students. It is these collectively that provide the basis of the protocols that ensure precision, consistency and engagement in the classrooms of our schools

The Instructional Rounds process supports school Heads and leadership teams in developing a shared understanding and common language around effective teaching practices; to recognise what good teaching and good student learning looks like; and to identify the next level of work for the school and network. The outcome of the process is the identification of a set of Theories of Action for the School and Network

that can be used as a basis for further professional development and school improvement. The process works like this:

- The network convenes in the host school for an instructional round visit. The purpose of the instructional round is to generate a series of Theories of Action that present a positive picture of the pedagogic practice of the school. The emphasis is solely on description, not evaluation or judgement.
- There are usually a maximum of twenty-four participants. The network divides into groups of four that visit a rotation of six classrooms for approximately twenty minutes. In each classroom network participants collect descriptive evidence of the practices – teacher, students and classroom environment – they observe.
- After completing the round of classroom observations, the entire group assembles in a common location to work through the process of description, analysis and prediction. The group analyses the evidence for patterns and look at how what they have seen explains or not the observable student performance in the school.
- Participants then develop a series of 'theory of action' principles from the analysis of the observations and discusses the next level of work for the school and network to assist them on their school improvement journeys.
- Finally, the network provides feedback to the school and teachers involved in the rounds visit. No comments are made about the behaviours of individual teachers; the focus is unrelentingly on describing the practice, how it can be enhanced and lead to the next level of professional work in the school.

This approach enables the knowledge-base of teachers to be used to develop Theories of Action that discipline the culture of teaching and learning in the school, and across the network. As our experience with Instructional Rounds has continued to deepen through experience in schools in the UK, Australia, Sweden and elsewhere, five important lessons have been learned:

- The first was that despite the phase or context of schooling, the Theories of Action generated by each school were in most cases very similar.
- Second, this is not a 'pick and mix' approach—all the Theories of Action have to be integrated into the teacher's professional repertoire if they are to impact in a sustained way on student learning.

- Third, and most importantly, all the Theories of Action are characterised by an approach to teaching that has enquiry and personalised learning at its centre.
- Fourth, some of the Theories of Action relate to the school and some to the practice of individual teachers.
- Fifth, all of the Theories of Action have a high level of empirical support in the educational research literature (Hattie, 2009).

So to summarise, through the Instructional Rounds process an approach to teaching has been developed from the practice of teachers that, if consistently applied, will enhance not just the achievement but also the spirit of enquiry and curiosity of all students.

The Six Theories of Action for Teachers

Below are the six Theories of Action for teachers and teaching that emerged from our work with schools. Together with the four whole school Theories of Action noted later, they comprise the content of the *Curiosity and Powerful Learning* manual (Hopkins and Craig, 2018b). The manual has a two-page spread devoted to each theory of action: the left hand page contains a description of the individual theory of action, much as below; the right hand page provides a protocol or rubric. Each rubric provides a precise description of the habits, behaviours and ways of doing that characterise teacher practice at four phases of a professional development continuum – Commencing, Intermediate, Accomplished, and Expert.

The teacher protocols or rubrics have four primary purposes:

- To set out clearly the habits, behaviours, and performance expectations that characterise teaching of the highest quality, as reflected in the Expert phase.
- To support personal reflection by teachers about where their practice falls on the continuum.
- To provide a common reference point and language for teachers and school leaders to use when they discuss teaching practice and teacher performance.
- To inform planning for professional learning and development for individual teachers, groups of teachers, and for the whole school.

Harnessing learning intentions, narrative and pace - When teachers set learning intentions and use appropriate pace and have a clear and strong narrative about their

teaching and curriculum, then students are more secure about their learning, and achievement and understanding is increased.

It has become very clear from the Instructional Rounds that when teachers are clear about their learning intentions then the students become more engaged and feel more secure in their learning. But it is about more than just setting a learning intention or goal; importantly it is also about linking the intention to the learning outcome and success criteria for the lesson, as well as ensuring curricula progression. This becomes the basis for the narrative of the lesson. Teachers with a strong sense of narrative are able to engage with deviation, knowing how to bring the discussion back on track. Pace is also necessary to keep the lesson lively and through increasing tempo, deal with potential low-level disruption. A learning intention for a lesson or series of lessons is a statement that describes clearly what the teacher wants the student to know, understand and be able to do as a result of the learning and teaching activity. In formulating the learning intention it is essential to consider three components:

- An action word that identifies the performance to be demonstrated
- A learning statement that specifies what learning will be demonstrated
- A broad statement of the criterion or minimum standard for acceptable performance, e.g. 'By the end of the lesson you will be able to describe foundation concepts and questions in ...'

Setting challenging learning tasks - When learning tasks are purposeful, clearly defined, differentiated and challenging then the more powerful, progressive and precise the learning for all students.

In many of the Instructional Rounds conducted, we found that, by and large, most students did not find the tasks they were set very challenging. Yet it is the tasks that students do that predict their performance. This requires setting tasks that are within the student's 'zone of proximal development', if their learning is to progress. Usually, this involves having three or four 'graded tasks' available for each group with scaffolding around the task to ensure success. In *Looking in Classrooms*, Good and Brophy (2008) identified the six components listed below as central to scaffolding support for pupils carrying out tasks:

1. Develop student interest in accomplishing the intended goal of the task.
2. Demonstrate an idealised version of the actions to be performed.

3. Simplify the task by reducing the steps.
4. Control frustration and risk.
5. Provide feedback that identifies the critical features of discrepancies between what has been produced and what is required.
6. Motivate and direct the student's activity to maintain continuous pursuit of the goal.

Closely associated with scaffolding is the gradual transfer of responsibility for managing learning. As students develop expertise they begin to assume responsibility for regulating their own learning, by asking questions and by working on increasingly complex tasks with a concomitant increase in learner autonomy.

Framing higher order questions - When teachers systematically use higher order questioning, the level of student understanding is deepened and their achievement is increased.

John Hattie reports in *Visible Learning* (2009:182) that questioning is the second most prevalent teaching method, after teacher talk. Most teachers spend between 35% and 50% of their time in questioning. Questioning has a positive impact on student learning—but this effect is associated more with higher order questioning which promotes more conceptual thinking and curiosity. The evidence suggests that most teachers ask low-level questions, related more to knowledge acquisition and comprehension. Research studies suggest that 60% of teachers' questions recall facts and 20% are procedural in nature. Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001) of learning objectives is widely used as a basis for structuring questions, particularly higher order questions. They are:

- **Knowledge**—recall previous material learned.
- **Comprehension**—demonstrate understanding of facts and ideas.
- **Application**—solve problems by applying knowledge, facts and skills learnt in different ways and situations.
- **Analysis**—examine information and break into parts, make connections and support ideas and arguments.
- **Evaluation**—present judgements, recommendations and opinions.

- **Synthesis**—compile information in different, more creative ways; choose other solutions.

The following sequence works well, as this approach makes everyone responsible for generating an answer, particularly when combined with some of the simple cooperative techniques:

- Frame a question to the whole class
- Allow students time to think—'wait time'
- Only then, call on someone to respond.

Connecting feedback and data - When teachers consistently use feedback and data on student actions and performance, then behaviour becomes more positive and progress accelerates.

Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on student achievement. That is clear from both psychological theory and research. In *Visible Learning*, Hattie provides a powerful insight, as he describes his attempts to understand feedback:

> "It was only when I discovered that feedback was most powerful when it is from the student to the teacher that I started to understand it better. When teachers seek, or are at least open to, feedback from students as to what students know, what they understand, where they make errors, when they have misconceptions, when they are not engaged—then teaching and learning can be synchronized and powerful. Feedback to teachers helps make learning visible" (Hattie, 2009: 173).

In considering data and feedback that moves beyond the purely academic, Hattie suggests that a behavioural focus on student performance helps students to recognise the linkage between effort and outcome. In addressing this behavioural dimension of student performance and achievement, it is recommended that the teacher should:

- Model beliefs.
- Focus on mastery.
- Portray skill development as incremental and domain specific.
- Provide socialisation with feedback.
- Portray effort as investment rather than risk.

Committing to assessment for learning - When peer assessment and assessment for learning (AfL) are consistently utilised, student engagement, learning and achievement accelerates.

The generally accepted definition of AfL is:

> "The process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there" (Assessment Reform Group, 2002:3).

This may be organised differently in different schools, but the rationale is always the same:

1. Clear evidence about how to drive up individual attainment.
2. Clear feedback for and from pupils, so there is clarity on what they need to improve and how best they can do so.
3. Clarity for students on what levels they are working at, with transparent criteria to enable peer coaching.
4. A clear link between student learning and lesson planning (Hopkins, 2007).

Teachers need to continue to develop their understanding of how students learn so they can help them to: reflect on how they learn; develop learning strategies and apply them in different circumstances; and engage in high quality dialogue with teachers, peers and others.

Implementing cooperative group structures - If teachers use cooperative group structures/techniques to mediate between whole class instruction and students carrying out tasks, then the academic performance of the whole class will increase as well as the spirit of collaboration and mutual responsibility.

Cooperative group work has a powerful effect in raising pupil achievement because it combines the dynamics of democratic processes with the discipline of academic enquiry. It encourages active participation in learning and collaborative behaviour by developing social as well as academic skills. The approach is highly flexible and draws on a wide range of methods—individual research, collaborative enquiry and plenary activities—and allows the integration of them all into a powerful teaching tool. We

advocate its use as part of the direct instruction 'model of teaching'[1], both as part of teacher instruction and the structuring of group activities, although at times the teacher will use the approach to structure a whole lesson or series of lessons (Hopkins, 2017b; Kagan and Kagan, 2015).

There are a wide range of strategies that comprise cooperative group work. They are all underpinned by the following five principles (Johnson and Johnson, 1994):

1. Positive interdependence: When all members of a group feel connected to each other in the accomplishment of a common goal—all individuals must succeed for the group to succeed.

2. Individual accountability: Where every member of the group is held responsible for demonstrating the accomplishment of their learning.

3. Face-to-face interaction: When group members are close in proximity to each other and enter into a dialogue with each other in ways that promote continued progress.

4. Social skills: Human interaction skills that enable groups to function effectively (e.g. taking turns, encouraging, listening, clarifying, checking, understanding, probing). Such skills enhance communication, trust, leadership, decision-making and conflict management.

5. Processing: When group members assess their collaborative efforts and target improvements.

Cooperative group work requires pupils to practise and refine their negotiating, organising and communication skills, define issues and problems and develop ways of solving them. This includes, collecting and interpreting evidence, hypothesising, testing and re-evaluating.

The Curiosity and Powerful Learning Manual

Once we realised that the sets of Theories of Actions emanating from our Instructional Rounds process were essentially similar we decided, as mentioned previously, to produce a manual to describe them in practical detail (Hopkins and Craig, 2018b)**.** As teachers and principals quickly embraced the Theories of Action it became apparent

[1] See the work of Bruce Joyce and his colleagues for the authoritative discussion and description of the range of *Models of Teaching* (Joyce, Weil and Calhoun, 2018; Joyce, Calhoun and Hopkins, 2009).

that, while the 'different' style and language of the *Curiosity and Powerful Learning* manual was highly engaging, it was the strong research base that stood behind the various theories that made the propositions so compelling. Our colleague John Hattie generously encouraged us to use his work to illustrate the likely effect size associated with each of the Theories of Action (Hattie, 2009). This served to deepen the view among principals and teachers that although significant progress had already been made, the possibilities were boundless if the Theories of Action were applied with precision.

One particular insight was critical here. It was clear from the specifications of practice and research evidence presented in the *Curiosity and Powerful Learning* manual that each of the Theories of Action if implemented with precision would have a significant and sustained impact on student achievement. Over time this was accepted without equivocation. What however was also becoming apparent was that when applied together, as a shift in the culture of teaching and learning in a school, was that in concert the Theories of Action would also have a profound impact on the incubation and development of curiosity within our students. The Theories of Action have both a meta-cognitive as well as achievement effect. Thus the twin goals of developing learning skills and raising student achievement could be met at the same time, using the same processes.

The Four Whole-school Theories of Action – Although the focus of this paper has been on the teacher Theories of Action emerging from the Instructional Rounds process, it is also important to note that we also identified and described four whole-school Theories of Action in the *Curiosity and Powerful Learning* manual. They are as follows:

1. When schools and teachers set high expectations and develop authentic relationships, then students' confidence and commitment to education increases and the school's ethos and culture deepens.

2. When teacher directed instruction becomes more enquiry focused, then the level of student achievement and curiosity increases.

3. By consistently adopting protocols for teaching, student behaviour, engagement and learning are enhanced.

4. By consistently adopting protocols for learning, student capacity to learn, skill levels and confidence are enhanced.

The implications of these whole school Theories of Action are discussed in our other work (Hopkins, 2013; Hopkins and Craig, 2018a; 2018b). Meanwhile, it is to the implementation of the 'Theories of Action for teachers' that we now turn in the following section.

Implementing the Theories of Action

The potential contained in the Theories of Action described in this paper is to create a new culture of teaching within the school that promotes both enquiry and achievement. This requires adopting staff development strategies that have the ability to build a common language of instructional practice within and across schools.

The strategy most suited to the acquisition of the Theories of Action is the now established approach to 'peer coaching' developed by Bruce Joyce and his colleagues (Joyce and Showers, 1995; Joyce and Calhoun, 2010). Their research on staff development has identified a number of key training components which, when used in combination, have much greater power than when they are used alone. The major components of training are:

- Presentation of theory or description of skill or strategy.
- Modelling or demonstration of skills or models of teaching.
- Practise in simulated and classroom settings.
- Structured and open-ended feedback (provision of information about performance).
- Peer Coaching for application (hands-on, in- classroom assistance with the transfer of skills and strategies to the classroom).

It is also helpful to distinguish between the locations in which these various forms of staff development are best located – either in the 'workshop' or the 'workplace'. The workshop, which is equivalent to the best practice on the traditional professional development course, is where teachers gain understanding, see demonstrations of the teaching strategy they may wish to acquire, and have the opportunity to practise them in a non-threatening environment. If the aim is to transfer those skills back into the workplace – the classroom and school – then merely attending the workshop is insufficient. This implies changes to the workplace and the way in which staff development is organised. In particular this means the opportunity for immediate and

sustained practice, collaboration and peer coaching, and the studying of development and implementation.

The paradox is that changes to the workplace cannot be achieved without, in most cases, drastic alterations in the ways in which schools are organised. Yet the transfer of teaching skills from professional development sessions to classrooms settings will not occur without them.

A key element in all of this is the provision of in-classroom support or triads and 'peer coaching'. It is the facilitation of peer coaching that enables teachers to extend their repertoire of teaching skills and to transfer them from different classroom settings to others. When incorporated into a school improvement design, peer coaching can virtually assure 'transfer of training' for everyone:

- Peer coaching teams of two or three are much more effective than larger groups.
- These groups are more effective when all members of staff are engaged in school improvement.
- Peer coaching works better when Heads and Deputies participate in training and practice.
- The effects are greater when formative study of student learning is embedded in the process.

Peer coaching in triads creates the infra-structure for professional learning in the school, this however necessitates scheduled time being made available for staff to observe each other. Without regular timetabled opportunities for professional collaboration such as peer coaching or triads that are developmental rather than judgemental, it is unlikely that the teaching and learning culture of the school will change.

In the spirit of collaborative working, putting this framework into practice requires actions from teachers, the school and the network[2].

- **Teachers** – will need to be prepared to expand their 'circles of competence' by embracing the Theories of Action and incorporating them into their professional

[2] The term 'network' is used here as a synonym for region, local authority, school district, academy chain or any other middle tier organisation.

repertoires. The real insight here is that, as we have seen, teachers can maintain all their personal values and commitments, whilst at the same time seeing their practice as an instrument for expressing who they are as a professional.

- **Schools** – will need to become increasingly self-conscious and specific about the expectations and entitlements of their students as learners. Simultaneously they will need to allocate time to allow for powerful professional learning opportunities among their staff.

- **Network**– will need to develop the narrative around learning as well as carefully balancing challenge and support for schools as they progress on their journeys of school improvement.

Building Capacity at the Local and System Level

In England currently, the most common middle tier organisation is the Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) (Hopkins, 2016). In outstanding MATs, capacity is built at the local level to ensure that all those in the Trust's family of school's progress as rapidly as possible towards excellence. Figure 2 illustrates how this works:

- Central to local capacity building is the Regional Director or Executive Principal who provides leadership, develops the narrative and acts as the Trust's champion in that geographic area.

- One of their key tasks is to build local capacity by training a group of lead practitioners in the MATs ways of working, materials and strategies.

- The training design used to develop trainers is the Joyce and Showers coaching model.

- These trainers then work with the school improvement teams in each school to build within-school capacity and consistency.

- Inter-school networking allows for authentic innovation and the transfer of outstanding practice, thus building the capacity of the network as a whole.

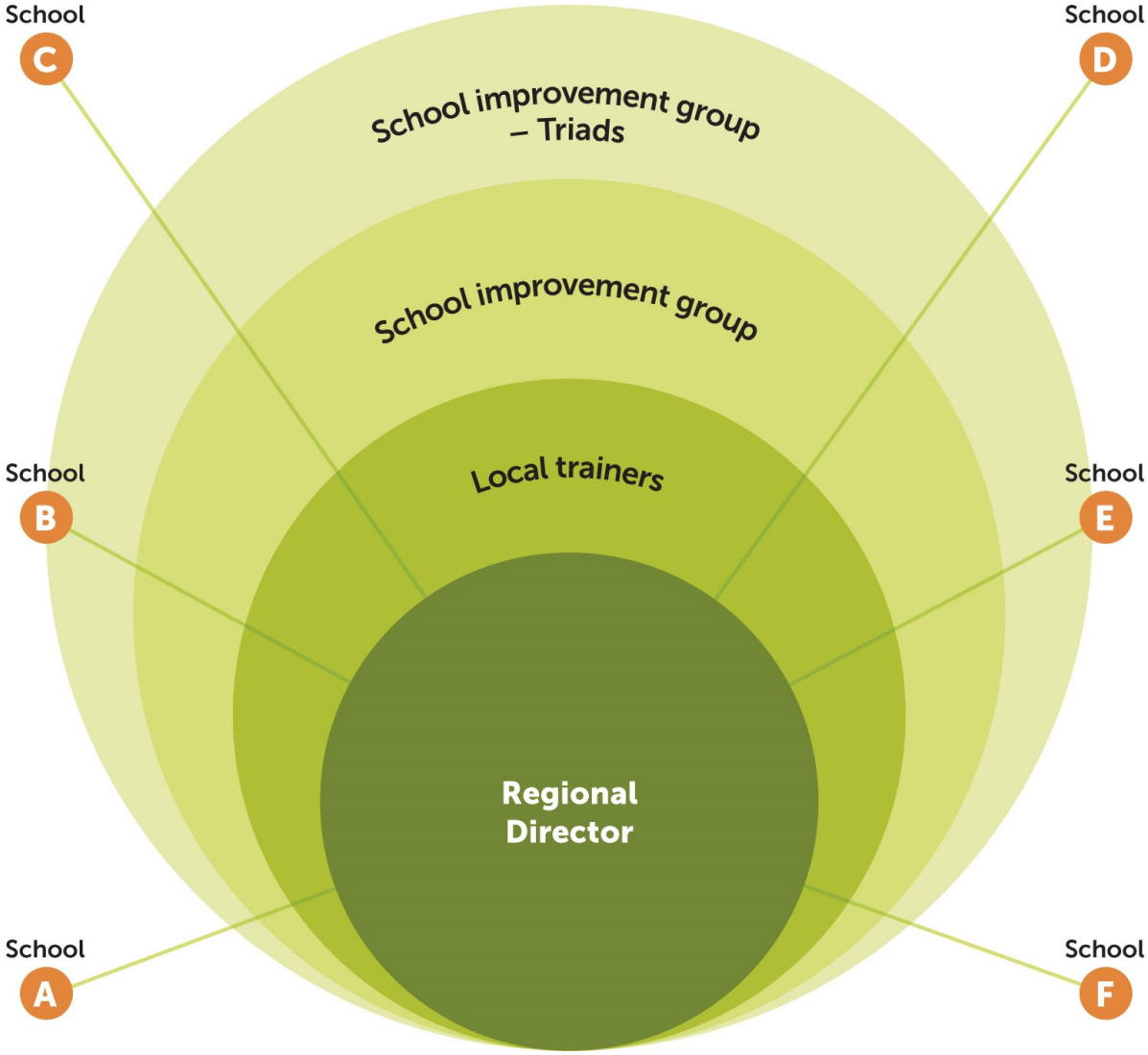

Figure 2: Local Capacity Building Model

In our experience, the three key aspects to this strategy – school improvement teams, staff development processes and networking – should provide the focus for much of the training for executive principals or equivalent within the MAT, as they play their critical role in systemic improvement. In moving to scale, it is clear from international benchmarking studies of school performance (Hopkins, 2013) and the evidence of this paper that:

- Decentralisation by itself increases variation and reduces overall system performance. There is a consequent need for some 'mediating level' within the system to connect the centre to schools and schools to each other – *Academy Chains and MATs can provide this function*.

- Leadership is the crucial factor both in school transformation and system renewal, so investment particularly in Head / Principal and leadership training is essential – *hence the use of frameworks such as the whole school design and improvement pathway to guide action* (Hopkins and Craig, 2018b; 2018c):

- The quality of teaching is the best determinant of student performance, so that any reform framework must address the professional repertoires of teachers and other adults in the classroom – *thus the focus in high performing Trusts on the progress of learners and the development of teachers.*

- Outstanding educational systems find ways of learning from their best and strategically use the diversity within the system to good advantage – *this is why capacity needs to be built, not only within Trusts, but also between them at the system level*.

Coda

In concluding, we must remind ourselves that in making it happen, the Theories of Action are simply tools that teachers can use to enhance students' learning, skills development and achievement. There are no ceilings to the performance of quality teachers.

Outstanding teachers take individual and collective responsibility to base their teaching on the best knowledge and practice available. But they also then take those ideas and strategies and critically reflect on them through practice in their own and each other's classrooms.

It is through reflection that teachers are able to harmonise, integrate and transcend the necessary classroom management skills, the acquisition of a repertoire of models of teaching, and the personal aspects of their teaching, and turn these into a powerful strategy for effectively leading learning in a way which has a positive impact on students' success.

When this professional practice is embedded in a local capacity building network structure as just described, then we can clearly see how such a micro-strategy can lead to systemic transformation.

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