

David Hopkins' Approach To School Improvement and System Leadership

Professor David Hopkins is widely acknowledged to be one of the foremost thinkers about school improvement and how to put in onto a sustainable footing. He has written a lot for TeachingTimes and here we collect his articles and some wider links to give an over-view of his thinking and strategies for implementing change in schools

Many volumes have been published and much has been tweeted and blogged about how to improve schools. Amongst this barrage of diagnosis, analysis and advice some have singled out the crucial importance of teaching and learning. Others have emphasised organisational capacity and culture. Leadership capability has been the watchword in much commentary. Whilst for many the professional learning and growth of teachers is placed centre stage. Few have provided a comprehensive and generic framework which connects and synthesises all these elements. David Hopkins does just this ... and indeed not only makes these connections but argues that the dynamic interplay between these dimensions is vital for making real and significant progress in school improvement.

Few people can cite careers so extensively dedicated to pursuing the school improvement cause. Spanning decades, Hopkins laid the foundation, with colleagues like David Hargreaves, to our understanding of school development planning. Thirty years ago Hopkins, working within the Faculty of Education in the University of Cambridge, pioneered the Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA) approach which powerfully prepared the way for his work in recent years on a generic framework for school improvement.

Along the way he has led national policy, international thinking and research, whilst continuing to work alongside and empower practicing teachers. So, for instance, he has been Chief Adviser to three Secretary of States on School Standards in the UK ... and also a secondary school teacher and Outward Bound Instructor! David helped found the National College for School Leadership. He was recently ranked as the 16th most influential educator in the world by the American based Global Gurus organization ... and was one of the ten British mountain guides to first receive the UIAGM carnet. So in David Hopkins we have someone who has scaled not only the physical heights of the world's great mountain ranges but also the pinnacles of shaping the world's educational policy and practice.

In this Knowledge Bank we have drawn together a range of thinking and resources related to David's work. This includes an early account of the IQEA initiative entitled: School Improvement and Cultural Change, in which the five IQEA principles continue to resonate today. There follows a range of pieces which explore strategies for improvement at school and local level through a framework which has "powerful learning" at its heart. Instead of taking the traditional approach of improvement policies being forged outside the school and then rolled out and implemented, the framework "begins at the other end of the sequence, with student learning" and supports an "inside-out" way of working.

The Powerful Learning Framework provides a range of powerful insights. These include a picture of professionals as people who are ever willing to change and improve because they understand that their practice does not equate with "who they are". There is a clear focus on the "instructional core" which comprises the teacher, the student and the content. In this there is the fundamental need to concentrate tenaciously on what students actually do (rather than what the teacher think

they are doing) and the sense the children make of this. This approach was first developed in a region of Australia and the gains made in student performance pose important implications for professional development everywhere.

Another article, Theories of Action – teacher practice and student achievement, explores six theories of action for teachers, captured within a resource called the “Curiosity booklet,” which has been used by schools in Australia, Wales and London. This is designed to increase the level of professional skill so that this impacts on the learning of students. We hear how this approach has led

to significant commitment of teachers to their own professional learning, along with increased engagement of headteachers with school improvement and student learning.

Another piece in the knowledge bank, High Quality Teaching, High Quality Learning – a framework for improvement, looks at the leadership strategies and necessary conditions needed to bring about this improvement. This describes in detail five conditions needed to secure the necessary change in culture. Among these the importance of the school developing its own narrative of its improvement journey is singled out as being vital. Telling one’s improvement story is a potent strategy. It is seen as fundamentally powerful in acting like a dress rehearsal for doing the work itself, at both school and classroom level; it “not only gives students a chance to mentally practice what they will do, it also provides a clear path for the teacher to follow”. The model not only focuses on improving student behaviour, learning and attainment, but also pays attention to teacher and school development.

The final article, A Generic Model for School Improvement, builds on all the other pieces and brings all the elements together into a comprehensive approach to school improvement. All the reading and resources in this knowledge bank have in common the belief that to advance achievement for all students it is necessary to address not only the learning of individual teachers, but also the organisational capacity of the school. The crucial element in the framework is school culture. In his most recent piece, included in this knowledge bank, Hopkins stresses that a key assumption is that school improvement strategies will lead to cultural change in schools through modifications to their internal conditions. It is this cultural change that supports innovations in teaching and learning processes, which leads to enhanced outcomes for students. In his generic model for school improvement we are given a concise guide to: Establishing the Process; Going Whole-School; and Sustaining Momentum.

Graham Handscomb, July 2020.

Issues to consider

- How does the framework developed by David Hopkins fit with our practice

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A Generic Model For School Improvement

Professor David Hopkins , one of the world's leading education researchers, outlines the steps to a continuously self-improving school, based on student and staff learning



High quality teachers, high quality learning – a framework for improvement

What is needed to establish a spirit of enquiry which makes a real improvement difference in schools? David Hopkins and Wayne Craig look at the conditions required which have profound implications for leadership and for professional development.



The “Powerful Learning” Framework

David Hopkins and Wayne Craig describe strategies for a “powerful learning” framework. It includes an unrelenting focus on the “instructional core” – curriculum innovation, professional development and student voice – and places what students actually do, and the sense they make of it, at the centre.



Exploding the myths of school reform

Is it truly impossible for all students to achieve, no matter their background or family circumstances? Does innovation always add value to school improvement efforts? David Hopkins challenges some of the most commonly accepted views of education, achievement and school reform.



System leadership for system reform

Professor David Hopkins' series on school improvement ends with a look at the way reform is intrinsically linked with leadership style.



Using Theories of Action to bring about improvement

Chris Brown and Jane Flood explore how the use of “Theories of Action” can help teachers engage in evidence-informed self improvement?



School Improvement and Cultural Change IQEA



