

A brief history of the Development and Research networks

Development and Research phase one 2004 - 2006:

The Trust's work on personalising learning (PL) began in 2004 and followed the Trust's core principle of operating 'by schools, for schools.' The first stage of the work was to clarify the concept of PL. Practitioners argued that there was more to personalising learning than the five components advocated by David Miliband¹. From the conversations held with 250 school leaders, Professor David Hargreaves concluded that there were nine interconnected gateways for personalising learning. The findings from the conversations were published in the first pamphlet: *'Personalising learning: next steps in working laterally.'* The informal feedback and the evaluations from the workshops convinced Hargreaves and the Trust that headteachers in England would welcome the opportunity to lead on this important aspect of the government's agenda.

The second stage of the Trust's work began in autumn 2004, when ASCL and the Trust organised a series of 5 conferences over a period of eighteen months designed to help schools explore the gateways. Each conference focussed on two gateways. Each conference was followed up by a pamphlet that reported the key themes of the conferences and included case studies of interesting practice in the gateways covered. The broad line adopted by the conferences and the pamphlets was that PL is the path to the transformation of the secondary system.

Through the conferences the Trust helped schools to disseminate existing good practice. It became clear, however, that some new practice needed to be developed if the potential of personalisation was to be realised to the full. The Trust decided it was essential to support those schools seeking to extend their work into what might be described as 'next practice' and help that next practice be disseminated widely. These aims could best be achieved through the establishment of innovation networks of schools committed to the creation of the new professional practices that would go beyond what had emerged from the conferences as current good practice. These networks would focus on development and research of next practice and so were called Development and Research (D and R) networks.

It was certainly apparent from the first conferences that whilst the PL agenda was large and complex, schools were doing excellent work around the gateways. However, schools tended to be working in isolation and seldom shared their success with others. Often the Trust was 'stumbling' across good work or relying upon regional coordinators to gather intelligence of good practice around the gateways. This system was not sophisticated enough to provide the examples of interesting practice needed by a system grappling with such a huge agenda. Furthermore, as schools were working in isolation they could not learn from the mistakes of others, a problem which limited schools to slow progress. A more systematic approach was needed, one that brought together schools working on common problems and provided the infrastructure for the dissemination of their work – development and research networks.

The D and R networks set out an ambitious plan to create a focused, systematic and school-led drive for innovation. To ensure the success of our networks Hargreaves suggested the adoption of a '3 'D's Model' (Hargreaves, 2004). Thus from inception the D and R networks would be decentralised (in their structure); disciplined (in the way that innovation was organised) and distributed (in the construction of the innovation agenda).

The D and R networks were decentralised, thus they had no central plan laying out what each school would do (which is not to say that there was not a clear focus for the work). Instead the schools involved drew up the agenda in which they engaged in collaboration with SSAT staff. It was a condition of funding that schools laid out clear plans for innovation that were disciplined in nature and had the core purpose of creating new and better practices in personalising learning.

The D and R networks were designed to be distributed in several senses of the word. The process by which this broad aim was to be achieved was through various forms of distributed innovation (spliced,

¹ In 2003 David Miliband (then Minister for schools) stated that the five components of PL were assessment for learning, varied pedagogy, curriculum choice, school organisation and links to other services.

segmented and sequenced - see *Personalising Learning - 1*, chapter 3) within networks of schools and teachers who combined outstanding achievements in the area with a commitment to becoming yet better in partnership with others. The networks consisted of volunteers who had themselves to determine the scope of their activity, over what time scale, and by what means of working. The innovation activity within each gateway was further distributed across all eleven regions. The hubs had a local network of schools to which the outcomes, both of the hub itself and of the national network of all hubs for all gateways, could be distributed through knowledge transfer.

The most important factor in ensuring the success of the D and R networks was the degree to which the agenda on which they focused was disciplined. Critically the SSAT could not allow 'a thousand flowers to bloom' in the hope that something of major significance would somehow emerge. D and R had a sharp focus: personalising learning and the nine gateways. But in itself this would not provide an adequate degree of self-discipline. The nine hubs in each gateway also had to decide on a limited range of agreed priorities. This involved discussion and debate between hubs and their partner schools. As many individual schools and teachers would have preferred topics that met their immediate needs, there was a need to ensure that these differences converged on an agenda of innovation that added up to something much bigger and of greater national significance than a plethora of individual local activities that never become more than the sum of the parts.

The D and R networks were officially launched in October 2005 with the appointment of 55 schools to the role of 'Development and Research hubs'. Over 300 applications were received for the 55 positions. The first set of D and R networks were created in the following 5 gateways of the PL:

1. Student Voice
2. Assessment for Learning
3. Learning to Learn
4. New Technologies
5. Curriculum

These 'hubs' established a network of schools around them, all working on the creation of next practice. Each hub school received £6000 per annum from the Trust to fund their work.

D and R Phase 2 2006-07: the evolving thinking – clustering the gateways

As the D and R networks have progressed it has become clear that gateways interact in extremely complex ways. This has led to the view that the gateways model can be simplified by clustering the gateways.

(i) Deep learning incorporates Student Voice (by which learners articulate their needs), Assessment for Learning (by which assessment is used to improve learning, not just record achievement) and Learning to learn (by which students acquire the generic skills of learning). The three gateways overlap and, when they are developed together, their combined effect is to promote deep learning and to help students develop their learning power. The work of the D and R networks in these key gateways is to explore next practice to strengthen deep learning.

(ii) Deep experience is about enriching the experience of school so that students are more engaged with their learning. Hargreaves has contended that many secondary students are bored in school and disengage from learning. Two of the gateways, curriculum and the new technologies, have the potential to make the experience of schooling a more rewarding and engaging one. D and R hubs in this area will develop new approaches to the curriculum and will draw on the power of the new technologies to enrich student experience.

(iii) Deep support - from the work undertaken on learning and experience, it became clear that a third cluster was integral to the successful implementation of deep learning and deep experience – deep support. Deep support demands that schools and teachers should collaborate with other institutions, agencies and people to secure deep learning for students. In terms of the gateways this would involve a focus upon advice and guidance and mentoring and coaching.

(iv) Deep Leadership is the final cluster. The leadership cluster contains the gateways of workforce reform and school organisation and design. Deep leadership requires school leadership teams to work across the gateways to re-design education so that, through a culture of personalisation and co-construction with shared leadership, the school secures deep experience, deep support and deep learning for all its students.

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