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KEY FACTORS IN THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF A LEARNER CENTRED APPROACH THE NEW PEDAGOGY OF LEARNING

A 19-year-old student said of her 15,000 hours of formal education

“A lot of time at school they teach you the knowledge but they don’t teach how to learn”.

Learning how to learn, implementing an effective pedagogy that embraces the characteristics of effective teaching, effective learning so that we create a community of learners is the heart of a learner centred approach.

Slide 2 Themes Models of effective learning
Effective learning characteristics
Teaching characteristics and teaching teams
The learning community

Firstly, I want to contextualise the characteristics of a world class education system as suggested by Michael Barber, and the models of effective learning.

Secondly, I want to examine effective learning characteristics and the learner’s approach to learning. This will touch upon ideas such as Thinking Skills and Gardener’s work on multiple intelligence.

Thirdly, I want to examine the issues surrounding teaching teams and how we connect with the learning process. I also would like to share with you the evidence from student voices on teachers, teaching and learning because they confirm powerful truths and they highlight our need to incorporate student experience into our work.

Finally, I want to examine the idea of schools and educational communities as a Learning Organization. Some of the results of research internationally have been very uncomfortable but illuminating.

I shall be setting all of this discussion with an international context and linking this evidence to wider themes such as Thinking Skills and Emotional Intelligence.

Finally, I want to summarise what I believe are the characteristics of effective learner centered approaches.

Slide 3 Quote

The policies of most governments are concerned with ensuring that we produce a generation of children from our schools that are skilled contributors to their society, engaged with the cultural values of their own community, but secure in the future through applying knowledge and skills in a global context. In other words we want education that is relevant not for the society or the economy that is current, but for the one to come. We have to avoid the false dichotomies that have pervaded much of education debate to a balanced menu of actions appropriate to local needs. Michael Barber's seven characteristics of a world class education: highlight the key principles of reform.

Slide 4 7 characteristics of a world class education

The first element is a focus upon teaching and learning. The remaining principles re-enforce this central belief that teaching and learning is the core – what happens in the classroom is the most important element, the rest is support. At the heart of this principle is the ideal of learner centered approaches, creating a continual balance between action and reflection. I find it ironic that if a 19th Century doctor were to walk into most hospitals s/he would not be able to function, the advances in knowledge, the technology and the continual reskilling are of such an order that the landscape is incomprehensible. It is a sad reflection that most 19th Century teachers would be able to walk into most classrooms and recognise it as very familiar and comfortable. Teaching and Learning is, I believe, about to witness the scale of change and reform that medicine has witnessed. We are moving away from a discussion on structures to a debate on learning and pedagogy.

The tension is to avoid the debate on structures and consider standards. Most of the failed education reform from the 1970's onwards has focused structural issues and not the central task of learning. We have a list of the

structural reforms, devolved management, local management; site based management – there were concerned with changing the structure not culture of interaction between teacher and learner. A new pedagogy of learning is the principle agent for school improvement not structural reform divorced from the classroom. I do believe that sometimes it is necessary to change structures so as to liberate the internal culture of learning, but too often education reformers are engaged in peripheral because they are not addressing the key concerns.

The remaining characteristics of Barbers model are concerned with supporting the core principle of teaching and learning. The recent OECD report on Education and Impact in 30 countries examined a range of factors to assess education progress and relevance. Factors included value for money, student impact, school improvement and placed the UK in the top 10, in advance of France, Germany, the USA – evidence that the shift from structures to a standards or learner centred approach is working. The UK has significantly improved upon its previous performance

Slide 5 Models of Effective Learning

It is only in the last 10 years that we are beginning to understand the complexity of the learning model. We have learnt more about the brain and cognition in the last decade than we have for the previous 100 years. Goleman and Gardner's work on multiple and emotional intelligence and brain based learning all illustrate that learning is a multi-dimensional activity.

What is effective learning is also contextual and culturally specific – teacher, student, parental and even governmental perceptions on this differ but one thing is clear, we need to build alliances of mutual dependency where all contribute. Effective learning only makes sense when we articulate the context and goals? The current context has key features:

- The knowledge base in society is increasing rapidly and now doubles every year. Teaching knowledge in isolation is anachronistic
- Knowledge and information is more widely dispersed than ever before
- Employment prospects and future development relate to knowledge transfer and re-learning

- The learning landscape is diverse and not the province of schools alone.

In such an environment then, the goal of learning needs to focus not on acquisition but more on skills, applications and the ability to learn how to learn or “Meta learning”. Effective learners are not dependent they are autonomous; the question is how do we reach this state? How do we ensure that learners are versatile, use different approaches to solve different problems and become advocates of learning for life.

Slide 6 Effective learning for a child centred approach

See grid (source Research matters IoE, London)

This grid of effective learning is based upon the four stages - activity, reviewing, learning and application. Contained within this are the strands of differing learning styles – so that activity can be broken into independent or group task, where responsibility is shared but above all the tasks are determined by the need of the learner and not that of the teacher.

The outcomes of such a learner centred approach are clear; students will be able to:

- apply a wider range of strategies to investigate problems
- understand complex issues
- use critical analysis and reflection
- be more engaged and have the tools to be able to share ideas
- develop a sense of participation and community.

The creation of this strategy though requires balance between all four components, activity without reflection is limited, application without analysis is like downloading information from the internet and calling it research. These four components connect and re-enforce each other to create holistic learning. Collaboration creates team centred approach for learning solutions whilst reinforcing social and linguistic skills, learners who assume responsibility for activity within this approach became active participants engaged with activity. These are the skills that are necessary for the future where young people must continue to learn throughout their working life.

Slide 7 Learning how to learn (page 6)

What then are the characteristics of effective learning? We can say that it is:

- Active and not passive
- Strategic and not local
- Collaborative rather than isolated
- Goals focused and able to respond to challenge
- Reflective and versatile.

The problems with this are that we ourselves, as educators, are not skilled in recognizing all the elements of this. We live in a context that believes that silence is best, passive activity is to be supported and reflection is not acknowledged. Teachers still challenge students staring out into space and asking what they are doing. “Thinking sir” is the answer “Well, stop it immediately and get on with your work” is the reply..

The creation of an effective learning curriculum requires these characteristics but it demands that teachers are able to manage this complex activity. There is no more demanding and challenging task than that of teacher. When teachers are engaged in a traditional, instruction- didactic model, we create dependant learners who are unable to apply knowledge in skills, when teachers engage in more flexible models they create autonomous learners who can more between differing learning cultures.

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To create the strategy for the implementation of a learner centred curriculum requires then four elements:

- Recognising the characteristics of effective learning and teaching
- Creating a teaching strategy that is based upon new approaches
- Developing Teaching Teams capable of meeting this challenge
- Developing a supportive school context.

Slide 9 & 10 (page 6) Teacher and Learner Centred Approaches

The teachers who will lead the change to a learner centred approach are already teaching in the schools in Thailand. It is to that dedicated cohort of professionals that the responsibility for reform and implementation will fall.

Teaching is a demanding profession and it requires continual re-skilling. The status of teachers in Western Europe has undergone a silent revolution, from a respected community figure in the early 20th C to an icon of educational failure in the 1970s, to the current perception of teacher as community builder.

Yet, we still find it hard to slip the bonds and the burdens of administration. Much of the previous education reform was predicated upon management based solutions that imposed a huge bureaucracy upon the education system. Every year, teachers sit in 40 hours of meetings examining administrative issues but they do not share philosophy, methodology or practice. The cynics would sigh over such an approach but teaching at its most effective is a research-based profession and we have a wealth of experience that has yet to be liberated. We tend to view teacher observation as the spy in the classroom rather than as a means to enhance performance. We regard teacher appraisal as a life threat that can only be linked to staff development rather than a professional discourse. My contention is simply that we have created a self-regulating culture of isolation and regression. Teaching is a dynamic profession and we need to implement some of the following within our schools:

Firstly Time

Liberate time to discuss theory, practice and methodology to improve our teaching styles, and skills through focusing on what matters. Administration will always fill the vacuum of time we leave. Change the structure, culture and function of meetings.

Secondly Review

We also need to learn from each other and this means making the walls of the classroom a plastic environment. We therefore should actively welcome observation, dialogue on performance without fear. This means difficult conversations about the use of methodology as well as agreeing time for this to occur.

Thirdly Quality Assurance

We should also consider using quality assurance systems such as quality circles, external review from students and other strategies, to reflect how in tune we are with their needs. Schools in Scotland created quality circles of students, teachers and parents that examined themes of teaching and learning and then shared this with the school community.

Fourthly Thinking Skills

We also need to adopt a Thinking Skills approach to our work encouraging pupils and teachers to reflect. The development of generic thinking skills and their application in lessons has proved highly successful in the US and countries in Asia Pacific Rim.

Fifthly Creating Teaching Teams

Creating Teaching Teams for school effectiveness is concerned with looking at schools differently. This is not about a subject department discussing strategies, nor merely about monitoring and evaluation, rather it is concerned with the process of pedagogical theory, testing practice, reflection, assessment and discussion. This challenges traditional systems and structures and puts pedagogy at the heart of all activity.

Finally Learning Theory

We need to be abreast of the work on Multiple Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence and on How we learn. How many teachers, middle managers or Heads have read Goleman's work on Emotional Intelligence, or discussed Gardners Theory of Multiple Intelligence and its application to teaching strategy?

My personal means to improve teaching teams would be to abolish staff rooms as a symbol of the 19th Century. Consider the impact of staff working and studying in learning centres alongside pupils rather than creating the private space where teachers escape.

I am suggesting teachers should operate within a learning context, working within school based professional teams whose hallmark is critical reflection and applied skills. How else can we address the variation between lessons, between teachers and departments and schools unless we engage in both the dialogue of pedagogy and the creation of teaching teams.

Thinking Schools, Thinking Teachers create Thinking Students who will perform far more effectively across a range of subject areas.

None of this is easy for it requires a change in mind set and in the management culture of the classroom or the school. We are all capable of falling into closed circuit of isolation but just for a moment consider this data.

Just consider how much time and opportunity is wasted every day. Evidence from the USA and Europe illustrates the fractured nature of learning. Research into time-on-task with some schools in the UK seven years ago is still relevant. It found that in a 60 minute lesson pupils are on-task for an average of 38 minutes. The data showed that in a 25 teaching hour week for years 7, 9 and 11 the breakdown of activity was:

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Year	7	9	11
Time on task	16	17	18
Teacher direction(within time on task)	7.5	8	6.25
Settling in	3	4	2
Departure preparation	2	2	2
Off task	4	4	3

Students are on task for only 64% of time and were losing the equivalent of 70 weeks teaching in a five-year cycle. Not all schools are like this but there are more than we would anticipate. This occurs because teachers are operating as the sole source of expertise creating dependant students. Evidence from researchers such as Reynolds highlighted the connection between learner centred approaches, enhanced time-on-task and more effectiveness. Simply put, students learnt more when we are able to maximize the learning time and achieve significantly higher outcomes in a learner centred environment. The equation is clear - the higher the time on task, the greater the clarity and diversity of learning and the more effective the lesson.

Slide 12 Student voices and teaching teams

To create teams for a learner centred curriculum we need to develop the learning organization that encourages student participation. Research undertaken by the University of Strathclyde was fascinating. They examined pupil attitudes to teachers in a series of schools where students were being used as part of the quality assurance system. The following two slides are very revealing, consider student voices on expectations.

Students model themselves on the behaviour of teachers. All teachers make compromises balancing group and individual needs but interestingly failing schools have several key characteristics - one of them is teachers are continually late for lessons and yet berate pupils for the same issue.

Slide 13 Student voices on a good teacher

There are powerful lessons about clarity of purpose and teaching and learning contained within these comments. None of us would be surprised by these observations. One lesson from international practice is the positive influence and enhancement to learning that can be derived from involving students in the evaluation of lessons. We all want to develop quality approaches to teaching and learning – we have just missed one element. We don't involve the key workers in our quest for excellence, namely pupils and parents.

I believe that unless we actively involve students in both the evaluation and assessment of their own learning and in the evaluation of teaching we are creating a flawed system. There is a huge gain to be derived from the inclusion of student evaluation on work units that includes honest assessment of teacher style, methodology and approach. We all want to develop critical reflective students; we just don't want to empower them to do so. The evidence from many countries and systems where this is used is that pupils are mature, balanced and normally always err on the side of the teacher, but they have profound implications on how we work. After all it is they who experience 15,000 hours at our hands. We could capture a whole new set of positive, reflective and critical understanding about how we work.

A real learning organization listens to the people it serves.

Slide 14 Towards a learning organisation

I have suggested that we need to create learning teams, allow parents and pupils to participate in the performance evaluation of schools but this needs to be part of the learning organization. The RSA noted:

The school system assumes that what takes place in schools is learning and that school is where children learn. There is a mismatch between this view and reality.

In redefining School, Bayliss argued that schools were in danger of losing their role within society and whilst I am hesitant about aspects of the analysis I was struck by this.

There is a real mismatch between the move to flatter less hierarchical structures in business and the management model in schools.

Effective schools have minimalist structures because they focus upon core tasks – pedagogy – effective teaching teams – rather than power-relationships to ensure compliance. The culture of a learning organisation that supports the learner centred approach creates teams of teachers.

Slide 15 The characteristics of effective teams within schools

There are, I believe, 9 characteristics for effective teachers, working together in a team, whether in a department or across a whole school.

1. **Collegiality** – when people in the school at all levels are working together on teaching and learning, on pedagogy and practice, collegiality becomes a trait. Discussion takes place on how lessons can be taught, the best methods of assessment and how the experience can be organized more effectively.
2. **Action-Research** - schools should become research environments encouraging risk taking and assimilating the lessons of development. Data can be generated without fear; shared and used as the basis for critical evaluation and discussion. The most effective schools are already doing this.

3. **Recognition** - values and how we model behavior are important. Yet we are still reluctant to reward and praise both teachers and students. We do not celebrate success on a regular basis.
4. **High expectations** - whether amongst teachers or for students - these are crucial. The evidence to support the powerful impact of high expectation is overwhelming yet despite this we continue to label and judge. A culture of high professional expectations will produce outstanding results.
5. **Communications** - effective teams and learning organizations spend time and energy on communications. Consider how often schools explain to students, parents or others their approach? We need to log, to share and debate our work
6. **Knowledge** - a learning organization is one that is concerned with improving its knowledge base, with expanding the instructional strategies and skills for students, not merely the acquisition of facts but understanding.
7. **Trust and Honesty** - Effective teams within a learning organization flourish in a climate of mutual trust and honesty. We are all sensitive to the micro-politics of the school and the real challenges, which sometimes confront us but unless we generate an environment based upon trust how can we move forward.
8. **Philosophy, Policy and Practice** – enhancing pedagogy, action research and school improvement is concerned with making real philosophy and practice. Whether it is the application of marking policies, teaching statements – how is translation occurring? Do we walk the talk or just talk? We can speak endlessly about school improvement but unless we create the culture for effective teams allied to a new pedagogical frame, it is idle gossip. Learning organizations keep asking – are we doing this right, how do we know and how can we get better?
9. **Modeling** – we are all models – to parent, students, society outside. Do we demonstrate thinking in our approaches, do we establish ourselves as professionals in our conduct and work, or do we retreat into the staffroom?

Slide 16 Conclusion

Learner centred teaching teams within schools are characterized by these aspects – how would we measure up. It is time to move away from the image of teacher as Commander of the Classroom into one of collegiality where we succeed because we are part of a teaching team – a team based upon reflection, reaction, critical analysis and intervention.

If we can bring together the principles of teaching teams, the characteristics of a learner centred approach and the learning community, then we can transform education into learning

Teaching is one the most important tasks and teachers are the most important resource that we have. There is a collective responsibility we share to ensure that in creating a learner centred approach we build the skills base together.

Creating models of effective learning, deploying staff development models that facilitate this, identifying effective learning and creating teaching teams are key factors in implementing a learner centred curriculum.

What happens in the classroom is what matters – it is a question of standards not structures, of classroom culture not classroom management. As Einstein neatly observed

We cannot solve the problems of today using the solutions of yesterday