



GOING  
BEYOND  
**PLD**

To develop  
**outstanding**  
Teaching and  
Learning



**Building on ‘Making the Network for Teachers’ (2011), ‘Going Beyond PLD’ moves the discussion from the importance of effective CPD for individual teachers (building human capital) to the importance of collaboration (building social capital). This paper considers the complexity of this journey and how it can be effectively supported by video and web-based collaboration within and between schools.**

“ ... simply laying on more courses is not enough. Above all, professional development needs to be **integrated** into both an individual teachers’ career and school system changes.

(OECD, 2011)

In the paper ‘Making the Network for Teachers’ (2010), the influence of individual teachers and their impact on outcomes for pupils was reviewed. Reference was made to the seminal research of Sanders and Rivers (1996) and to the more recent research of Burgess et al in English schools (2009).

A central theme of ‘Making the Network for Teachers’ was that PLD paid insufficient attention to effective approaches for adult learning. In particular, the following key features were often missing:

- Experience based learning
- Self review and reflection
- Coaching and mentoring
- Building communities of practice

The failure of traditional PLD is neatly summarised by Michael Fullan (1991), “Nothing has promised so much and has been so frustratingly wasteful as thousands of workshops and conferences that led to no significant change in practice when teachers returned to the classrooms”.

### Is there an alternative to traditional PLD?

Ofsted’s Report, ‘Good Professional Development in Schools’ (March 2010), identified the key characteristics of what makes good professional development work

in successful schools. Amongst a number of helpful observations, were the following comments:

- The most successful schools prided themselves on being learning communities
- The Headteachers in the survey schools knew that one of the best resources for professional development was the expertise of their own staff
- Lesson observations led to the identification of teaching strengths that could benefit the whole school

‘To the next level: Good schools becoming outstanding’ (CfBT, 2011) also picked up this theme and identified two key characteristics of outstanding schools:

- Senior leaders make sure professional development of all staff, teaching and non-teaching, is relevant, continuous and of high quality. Most of this professional development takes place in schools
- A key difference between being a good school and being an outstanding school involves going beyond tight quality controls towards the quality assurance of a self confident, self critical community in which learning is interactive and permanent

This suggests an effective way forward in the development of outstanding teaching without relying simply on providing more traditional PLD.

### A PLD model for all stages of a teacher’s career:

The journey of a teacher from fair to good to great to outstanding is a complex one which involves high levels of interaction with colleagues. Do young teachers emerge as ‘good or great’ following their initial training? Do they simply have to attend courses to become ‘super teachers’? As teachers’ skills evolve, they require different levels of support, challenge and experience. For example:

- A newly qualified teacher may enter the classroom with a ‘fair’ understanding of the theory but will require scaffolding in the early years through a process of modelling and coaching from more experienced colleagues
- As skills develop and a teacher becomes ‘good’, coaching may still continue but peer mentoring and self review will become more important
- As a teacher becomes ‘great’ they will start to initiate collaboration both within and across schools and, as professionals at the front line, they will reflect more deeply on their own teaching skills
- Some teachers will become ‘outstanding’ and they will contribute to the teaching, coaching and mentoring of colleagues at earlier stages of the professional journey

The following diagram provides a model to describe this:



© IRIS Connect 2012 | All rights reserved.

Implicit in this model is that at different stages teachers require different levels of input and, as professional skills develop, there is a move away from simply building the 'human capital' invested in the individual teacher to building the 'social capital' of the staff group where skills and knowledge are deployed for mutual support and benefit.

## What is social capital?

Social capital is described by Carrie Leana (2011) as residing in the relationship between teachers:

“ In response to the question, 'Why are some teachers better than others?', a human capital perspective would answer that some teachers are just better trained, more gifted or more motivated. A social capital perspective would answer the question by looking at just not what a teacher knows, but also where she gets that knowledge. If she has a problem with a particular student, where does the teacher go for information and advice? Who does she use to sound out her own ideas or assumptions about teaching? Who does she confide in about the gaps in her understanding of her subject knowledge? ”

In business, the concept of social capital gained attention because of its role in creating intellectual resources within the firm and consequently improving performance. Much of this interest has developed following research

by Ikujiro Nonaka into why Japanese companies were outperforming American companies. He concluded that Japan's success was largely the consequence of their developing 'The Knowledge Creating Company' (1995). He set out an argument that many Western companies had invested in 'brainpower' and 'intellectual capital' without releasing the power of the knowledge held by individuals into the company as a whole. Nonaka argues that throughout any organisation individuals hold a wide range of 'tacit' knowledge which needs to be developed into 'explicit' knowledge which can be fed into the whole organisation and used as the springboard for effective change and development.

## Collaboration is important:

As Michael Fullan (2011) says of schools:

“ Teaching quality also improves within a collegial, collaborative environment... The power of collective capacity is that it enables ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. ”

Activities and projects such as 'Instructional Rounds', 'Study Lessons', 'Walk Throughs' and 'Lesson Study' are all very powerful and have successfully built upon the concept of collaboration as being at the core of improvement. A key challenge for these great ideas has been sustainability and resource implications.

Despite the known value of such approaches, developing human capital often appears to be the major focus of most PLD programmes.

With the drive towards value added metrics and individualism it is easy to understand there is some cynicism around 'wishy-washy' notions which emphasise the value of collaboration and team building.

## Collaboration and building social capital does have an impact:

There is, however, a growing body of evidence underpinning the importance of developing and encouraging active professional interactions between staff.

Carrie Leana (2011) reflects on the large scale studies undertaken over a decade in the USA. The research provides a strong evidence base showing that where social capital has been developed in and across staff groups it is a significant predictor of student achievement gains above and beyond teacher experience or ability in the classroom:

“ And the effects of teacher social capital on student performance were powerful. If a teacher's social capital was just one standard deviation higher than the average, her students' maths scores increased by 5.7%. ”

Amongst Leana's conclusions, based on this extensive research, are the following key points:

- If human capital is strong, individual teachers have the knowledge and skills to do a good job in their classroom. But if social capital is also strong, teachers can continually learn from their conversations with one another and become even better at what they do

and critically,

- Even teachers with initial low human capital can perform as well as teachers of average ability if they have strong social capital. Strong social capital can go a long way to off-set any disadvantages pupils face with lower skill teachers

This second point is important. In the Radio 4 programme 'Reality Check' (July, 2010), Professor Dylan William made the forceful and ultimately pragmatic point that we should not rely upon 'magic and heroic' teachers coming to the rescue but need an approach which can support all teachers; as he put it, "What I call the love the one you have strategy".

## Enactment is the key to sustainable change:

At its heart, building social capital is about developing mechanisms to support the identification of effective techniques and the enactment of these techniques by teachers. Enactment is the key to sustainable change. As Dylan William (2011) says, "Teachers don't lack knowledge. What they lack is support in working out how to integrate these ideas into their daily practice ...".

Richard Elmore (2009) provides the insight that: "there is almost no opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous and substantial learning about their practice ...observing and being observed by their colleagues in their own classrooms and the classrooms of other teachers in schools confronting similar problems of practice".



## Developing a high quality teaching profession



© IRIS Connect 2012 | All rights reserved

## Going beyond video

Video technology can be a helpful tool to record and reflect on lessons but it is limited. By fusing mobile cameras with a secure web community and cutting edge tools for analysis we have, for the first time, the opportunity to genuinely change what we do for the better.

Bringing the network to the learning community enables everyone to participate in a community of practice, sharing skills and experience with their colleagues at relevant times.

This fusion of technologies allows school managers to meet the needs and develop the skills of individual teachers and at the same time build the social capital which is the hallmark of an outstanding school.

## Developing an open classroom culture:

At the core of this must be an acceptance by teachers of an open classroom culture and this can prove challenging. Even in some primary schools, where there is greater acceptance of the free flow of adults through the room, there can be concerns around observation. This is understandable. Observing and being observed is often seen as part of a judgemental performance management process rather than collaboration. Key to the development of social capital is the development of a trust based learning community.

## The challenge for school leaders:

Schools, like teachers and systems, go through a series of steps as they move to outstanding and school leaders have to manage a complex interaction of evolving activities and this requires a clever balancing of management styles. The locus of control gradually moves from the centre

to the periphery as empowered teachers become professionals at the front line with increasing responsibility to manage their own professional development and to contribute to the social capital within and between schools.

This is captured in the observation of a Headteacher, "You have to tighten up to be good. You loosen to become outstanding." (quoted in, CfBT, 2011).

This is a complex journey for school leaders to manage. At the different stages, activities will be repeated for different purposes. Classroom observation, for example, is an activity which can be seen as part of the benchmarking and quality assurance process or as a tool for teachers to reflect on their own practice and contribute to peer to peer support. Within the school there needs to be clarity of purpose and logic behind observations in order to minimise tensions and maximise value.

The diagram below provides a model to reflect how schools move from 'control' to 'development' to 'empowerment':

## What is IRIS Connect?

IRIS Connect is a web-based community incorporating sophisticated analysis tools and a range of mobile video systems that enables teachers to record and share their lessons. It is a collaborative PLD system that empowers schools to harness their collective capacity by enabling all teachers to reflect on practice purposefully, access brilliant teaching and share expertise. IRIS Connect enables:

- Evidence based objective review and evaluation
- Coaching and mentoring from both internal colleagues and external consultants
- Contextual, experience based, learning
- Peer to peer mentoring
- Self review and self reflection
- Shared libraries of best practice
- Research and Action Research
- Communities of practice which can extend across the school and to other schools

The IRIS Connect team has a clear understanding of the 'theory to practice' of professional development. From the ground

up, IRIS Connect was developed to enable key interactions which help both teachers and schools to move to excellence. IRIS Connect was built to support the development of a trust based learning community with exceptionally high levels of security and teacher permissioning which, together with leadership from school managers, minimises the tensions inherent in using video technology.

IRIS Connect supports teachers and schools move to outstanding as they go beyond traditional PLD and build sustainable and cost efficient communities of practice.

## References used in this paper:

Blatchford, R., Dougill, P., Fryer, L., Raleigh, M., Richmond J., Robinson, C. (2011). 'To the next level: Good schools becoming outstanding'. Reading : CfBT

City, E., Elmore, R., Fairman, S., Teitel, L., (2009). 'Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning'. Harvard Education Press

Fullan, M. (1991). 'The New Meaning of Educational Change – 4th ed'. NY: Teachers' College Press

Fullan, M. (2011). 'Learning is the Work (unpublished paper)

Leana, C. (2011). 'The Missing Link in School Reform'. Stanford Social Innovation Review

Newell, G. (2010). 'Making the Network for Teachers'. Unpublished: IRIS Connect

Nonaka, I., Takeuchi H., (1995). 'The Knowledge Creating Company'. Oxford: Oxford University Press

OECD, (2011). 'Building a High Quality Teaching Profession': OECD

OfSTED, (2010). 'Good professional development in schools.' London: HMSO

Sanders, W.L., Rivers, J.C. (1996). 'Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student's academic achievement'. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee

Slater, H., Davies, N., Burgess, N. (2009). 'Do teachers matter? Measuring the variation in teacher effectiveness in England'. Bristol Institute of Public Affairs: University of Bristol

William, D., (2012). 'Teacher Learning Communities'. London, Author

## Do you have any comments on this paper?

**Author:** Graham Newell,  
graham@irisconnect.co.uk

**Australia and New Zealand Contact:**  
Christophe Mullings,  
CMullings@cognitioneducation.com

## Interested in finding out more?

**w:** [www.irisconnect.co.nz](http://www.irisconnect.co.nz)  
**e:** [info@irisconnect.co.nz](mailto:info@irisconnect.co.nz)