

Summary

What leads to positive change in teaching practice?



This report presents the findings of a study in which the NFER aims to map the key research findings about what leads to positive change in teaching practice in schools. It is one of a pair of reviews that collectively consider creating change in schools through workforce development.

This study explores the factors that lead to changes in teaching practices which directly impact on the learners' experience, and aims to answer the following questions.

- Are there particular forms of support that encourage teachers to change their practice?
- Is there evidence about the types of change that have the greatest impact on student outcomes?
- Are there any forms of support that are particularly good value for money?

The report explores evidence from 2006 to 2011, through the selection of 16 influential reports, to answer these questions and to assess directions for future research work.

The focus of the report is the transferable principles of practice development, which schools can adopt or interpret in a flexible manner, rather than attempting to present a single 'ideal' model. Four main themes were used to organise the findings: leadership, planning and preparation, practice development and monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

Leadership

The first theme to emerge was that change requires leadership. The study identified three leadership practices which all facilitate change in different ways.

Strategic leadership

Central to a headteacher's role, the vision, clear reasoning and balance of loose-tight leadership associated with a strategic approach can inspire teachers to change aspects of their working practices.

Operational leadership

Leaders need to create the right climate for change, by putting in place the objectives needed to achieve their vision; operational leadership refers to the activities undertaken to implement change.

Distributive leadership

By fostering a culture that enables others to act as agents of change, thus sharing leadership responsibilities across an organisation, distributive leadership is particularly effective in motivating, embedding and sustaining change.

Planning and preparation

Effective planning and preparation provides a structure and context for teachers wishing to implement change, as well as a framework for their reflection and evaluation. This review organises the principles and processes of effective planning and preparation into three themes.

The strategic context for development

Local and national policy agendas and reform regularly affect teachers' work. Reflecting local needs within national frameworks and targets is a constant challenge, but the evidence shows that schools benefit from linking targets for improved practice outcomes to overall education strategy. Cost effectiveness and value for money are increasingly important considerations, and public service managers are looking to schools to build internal capacity to reduce costs.

Involving and listening

The evidence highlighted the importance of involving, at the planning stage, all the stakeholders participating in or affected by the intended practice development, as this can help to embed and sustain positive change. The

partnerships between academic researchers and those who plan and prepare teachers' practice development are also seen to be important.

Resources and systems

Planning and preparation needs to ensure that the right resources (people, time, finances and teaching instruments) and systems (formal and informal structures and operating protocols within which schools operate) are in place. The research evidence highlighted the importance of building practice development into schools' everyday activities, as this helps to underpin and define explicit goals and create staff 'buy-in' for changes in teaching.

The increasing focus on cost effectiveness and value for money requires schools to carefully monitor and evaluate practice development outcomes, in order to best inform their future spending decisions.

Types of practice development

Teacher learning, by way of practice development, was seen to enhance pupil learning. Moreover, the review found commitment to practice development to be a characteristic of innovative schools. Schools should provide time and funding for multiple teacher learning opportunities, which should focus on the links between teaching activities and positive learner outcomes. Three types of effective practice development were highlighted from the literature.

Leadership

Evidence shows that teachers have the greatest influence on student outcomes, and the most successful, continually improving schools incorporate both practitioner-led and leader-led innovation. Good leadership support can provide the organisational conditions that enable teachers to effect change.

Collaboration

This is teachers working within a school, in different schools, or involving schools and other partners such as researchers. Collaborative practice is seen to bring the drive for improvement to the front line – the classroom – and provide ongoing challenge and support so it has a better chance of becoming self-sustaining. However it does require dedicated responsibility and time for co-ordination, and is often tied in with specific research-led programmes.

Research-led

Teachers using research evidence to inform their development and to look back at their practice to evaluate success are research-led. This personal reflection can initiate and inform change, but is most effective in conjunction with a collaborative approach.

Monitoring and evaluation

When teaching practices change, it is important to know how well the changes are working and the impact they are having, to be satisfied that the required change has been achieved. The processes of M&E enable schools to assess the quality and impact of their work against strategic plans. These processes operate at a number of levels.

School-wide M&E

Schools need to change constantly to keep up with the changing needs of their students. Through systematic collection and analysis of information, schools can identify and prioritise areas for development. Often, schools will use exam scores as part of their measures of success.

Teacher-led M&E

Self-regulation is regarded as a critical aspect of M&E, allowing teachers to evaluate, monitor and adjust their performance against agreed goals. This process ensures practice change has a positive effect on learner outcomes, rather than the process of change in itself becoming the end goal.

Student-involved M&E

By involving students in developing, testing, evaluating and sharing ideas, they can understand what the process of change actually means for them. This in turn can help overcome possible resistance to new techniques, in addition to improving teaching practice and learning.

Concluding comments

The review has identified the key factors leading to positive change, highlighted the role of leadership, outlined the need for effective planning and preparation, discussed types of practice development that can lead to change in schools, and identified how processes of M&E enable schools to assess the quality and impact of change against strategic plans.

When considering future directions for NFER research work, evidence shows there is plenty of existing research on how to effect change in schools. Instead, this review identifies other areas where research, and researcher-school collaborations, could help inform, drive and monitor ongoing development in teachers' professional practice.

There were certain areas of the research where limited evidence was available. The relationship between practice change and learner outcomes, and the relationship between different forms of leadership and improved learner outcomes were both highlighted as potential areas for future investigation. Other areas for consideration included the ways Initial Teacher Training encourages teachers to be more receptive to change, how specific processes impact on student outcomes, the value for money of different interventions and how M&E can add most value.

The new policy backdrop in which education now sits embraces the localism and local governance agenda. Central government is giving schools more power and responsibility than has been offered in decades. Considering this shift, through various methods, the NFER could work in partnership with individual or groups of schools to:

- design practice development approaches
- create M&E models
- develop enquiry-based learning
- design tools and instruments to support practice development.

The NFER's research knowledge and experience could lead to some exciting research collaborations with schools and training providers.

This is the second review in the Developing the Education Workforce series. The first review, *Mapping of seminal reports on good teaching*, is available from: www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/RSGT01

The NFER Research Programme

This Programme was set up in 2011. Funded by NFER, it is developing partnerships with organisations and individuals who share our commitment to solving unanswered challenges young people face in education. The Programme targets key areas of education, highlighting gaps in existing evidence and conducting new research to provide evidence to fill the gaps. Current areas of focus are: *From Education to Employment, Developing the Education Workforce and Innovation in Education.*

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