



Leading Collaborative School Improvement

If you are here with colleagues from your Partnership – please sit on your allocated Partnership table. If you are representing a Partnership/MAT on your own please join any table – you may wish to sit on a table which is in the same quadrant as you

Maggie Farrar and Nicola Woolf

Thursday 13th February

9.30 – 3.30



Essex County Council

Collaboration: a Global Trend

The future belongs to the people and companies who have learned that they are greater working together than against one another. Some call that soft but it's harder than anything they've done before. They are the real winners'

Margaret Heffernan

A Bigger Prize : Why Competition Isn't Everything And How We Do Better

Simon & Schuster: 2014



Essex County Council

Today's enquiry question

How do we

- realise the potential of collaboration to support our shared ambition?
- draw on international research to improve our collaborative practice?
- explore leadership skills, behaviour and mindset for leading collaborative school improvement?
- maximise the impact of our work, through deepening peer review and extending the reach and impact of effective collaboration to all parts of our school system?



Today we will explore:

- Setting the scene, the Essex vision and our practice
- International research into great collaboration
- The leadership skills required in your partnership, and within your own school to achieve it
- Strengthening our approach to peer review
- How you might take your partnership forward, sharing your insights and commitments within your partnership



Our community today

What's brought you here ?

Go round the table and share your purpose for being here today



Session 1

Setting the scene – exploring the Essex vision and our practice



Our Essex Vision

‘To establish a system in which schools, maintained or academy, improve themselves by working in partnership with each other in a school-led improvement system which supports children and young people 0–25 to achieve their highest aspirations in education and employment’



Our watchword - 'mutual gain'

- Vision, outcomes and moral purpose
- Commitment and contribution
- Networks and clusters
- Challenge welcomed as part of support
- Peer review

Let's start with an initial conversation

How far along this journey would you say we are as an Essex system?

How have you, and your partnership contributed to this vision so far?

What more could you offer ?

What more do you need to support you?



Session 2

Exploring international research and practice

What can we learn about:

- why we should collaborate?
- what we need to attend to in order to do it well?
- what gets in the way?



Activity

You have a range of quotes on your table taken from international research into what makes collaboration work

- Take a look at them
- Individually pick 1 / 2 that resonate most strongly for you in relation to the ambition of your partnership and why
- Share this beyond your table



Plenary

- What did we learn from this?
- What are the implications for us?
- How might you use this activity in your partnership?



A collaborative system is self improving - what does it take?

Systems and processes: To monitor, review and improve

Architecture: Groups of schools working together to secure better outcomes

People: System leaders, Teacher leaders
Partnership leads

Mind set and culture: Trust, transparency and honesty, and agreeing a responsibility to work for the improvement of all schools

Harder

More
Essential



Taken from David Hargreaves: Self Improving Systems –
toward maturity NCSL

Collaborative School Improvement

is based on a belief

It is our belief that schools and educators improve more and improve faster by working together.

Collaboration enables professional development and school and system level improvement;

by making school systems into learning systems, that look inward and outward.



Collaborative School Improvement is....

*Made possible through **facilitated processes**, that lead to sustainable change.*

To what extent is there a shared understanding and commitment to collaborative school improvement in your partnership?

What facilitated processes do you use?



But there are challenges

- Danger of distraction from core purpose
- Developing new skills
- Finding capacity
- Going beyond the 'land of nice'
- Shifting the accountability mindset from vertical to lateral
- Securing recognition
- Cultivating trust

So how do we make sure we get it right?



Let's talk about 'Decisive Collaboration'

'Decisive collaboration needs networked professionals. The good news is that they are out there; they are also (given the right encouragement) infectious in their behaviours and a relatively small number can make a disproportionate difference'

The Hay Group
Decisive Collaboration
Insight 1: Creating the Culture



From talking shop to powerhouse

- Effective collaborative relationships are essential for all organisations, regardless of size and geography
- Moving from talking shops to collaborative partnership that transforms people requires decisive collaboration – words that don't often sit naturally together
- In today's climate of complexity and austerity organisations cannot afford to avoid collaboration but equally cannot afford collaboration without purpose and efficiency
- A shared sense of purpose, personal commitment from senior leaders, openness and trust and a focus on outcomes is what makes the difference

Hay Group Decisive Collaboration



Essex County Council

Decisive Collaboration - Characteristics

Belief

Pragmatism

Communication

Negotiation

Inclusion

Trust

Agree who on your table is going to have a closer look at which characteristic



Activity; set up

- You have been given 6 characteristics
- On the back of the card are 6 suggestions as to how this might be strengthened in a partnership

Take the card you have been 'assigned' by the partnership / table



Activity Step 1

Working with your 'decisive collaboration characteristic' group, discuss your characteristic & prepare your response to your partnership

1. Paraphrase the characteristic - what do you understand by it?
2. State how well you think you it is embodied in your partnership, or not, with an example
3. Agree what your partnership might do to make this characteristic a stronger feature of your work together



Activity Step 2

- Reconvene as a table group
- Take it in turns to share your insight from the ‘decisive collaboration characteristic’ outlining:
 1. What this characteristic means
 2. This is how well I think we embody it (or not)
 3. This is what we might do to strengthen this characteristic in our partnership

Plenary

- Note any commitments that emerge from this conversation that you would want to take back to your partnership.



So if we know what makes great collaboration and improvement

..... what makes it hard and what might be getting in the way?

“What gets in the way?”

We do.

Yes, the final barrier to effective collaboration and the development of a new kind of network that serves the interests of all children is us. Working in partnership with others is hard”

Richard Sheriff ASCL President: ASCL Conference speech 2019
'Connected Leadership'

<https://www.ascl.org.uk/professional-development/conferences/ascl-annual-conference/richard-sheriff-annual-conference-2019-speech.html>

Session 3: Team (and partnership) pitfalls

‘Organisations fail to achieve teamwork because they unknowingly fall prey to five natural but dangerous pitfalls’

Patrick Lencioni



It's all about relationships

So what have you learned about great team work from your own school / organisational leadership?

How is leading a team in school the same or different from leading within a collaborative based team of peers?

How can you draw on your single institution team leadership skills to support the partnership collaborative team working?

A conversation – pair / share



How can Lencioni help us?

The Five Dysfunctions of Teams



Everything is built on a foundation of trust

“Vulnerability-based trust is the confidence among team members that their peers’ intentions are good, and that there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group. In essence, teammates must get comfortable being vulnerable with one another.”

Patrick Lencioni

The 5 dysfunctions of a team

How does leadership (that' s us) get in the way?



How does great leadership (that's us) help?



A closer look at the leadership skills, mindset and behaviour needed to lead Collaborative School Improvement

How do we become the leaders we need?

Exploring our leadership strengths and areas for development

Step 1

Look at the handout 'what are the skills and competencies of collaborative leadership'.

Highlight the ones that you think you demonstrate, thinking of examples from your practice that bring these skills and competencies to life.

Now choose a partner you want to work with who will help you to explore your leadership strength(s) in more detail.



Step 2

Work with your chosen partner.

Using the leadership skills self review handout, take it in turns to:

1. Share your leadership strengths; talk for 3 minutes uninterrupted then swop over
2. Now explore how you would like to use these strengths to support even more effective collaboration and improvement in your partnership.



Step 3

Regroup as a table / partnership

Taking it in turns, share your partners' leadership skills with examples including how they can be used in the service of their partnership.

Take stock asking; - Where are we strong? - What gaps do we have (if any) and how might we address this?

To what extent are we making the most of the leadership skills across the partnership and in Essex and how might we strengthen this?

Session 4

Peer Review

A focus on impact



The power to transform; what matters?

Above all the purpose of partnerships is to improve outcomes

Every partnership must be founded on a clearly articulated shared 'moral purpose in action'

Transparency, trust and honesty are a professional obligation

A commitment to and a capacity for effective peer review is the engine that drives improvement

The partnership must have a clear plan to move from collaboration to co responsibility to shared professional accountability

The partnership should go beyond relationships between school leaders to engage with student, teachers, families and communities

Partnerships should not be isolated but should welcome scrutiny and support from other partnerships as part of their contribution to creating a connected and improving wider system

Fullan and Munby

Inside out and upside down

How leading from the middle has the power to transform education systems

Peer Review; what makes the difference?

NAHT, Challenge Partners and Ed Dev Trust have been working together on the core principles and the features of great peer review, whatever model you use.

1. Divide your table into two sub groups
2. As a sub group take a look at either the core principles or the features
3. Which of the principles or features are currently 'designed in' to your partnership peer review , and how do you know?
4. Which if strengthened would have the greatest positive impact on your partnership and its ability do practice great peer review and achieve its ambition?

Essex voices – leading the way in peer review

‘ We now know our areas of strength and our development needs’ across the partnership’

‘ We are balancing the growth of trust with the growth of rigour in peer review’

‘We had pre conceptions about each others schools, these have been challenged allowing us to be more open with each other’



‘ All staff are seeing the benefits of collaboration not just the senior teams because of the way we have involved them in the peer review’

‘ We have learned the discipline of setting a really strong focus for the peer review in an area we genuinely are not confident enough about what action to take’

‘We have evidence of narrowing the gap between Pupil Premium students and others at Key Stage 2’

‘Senior leaders and staff are no longer afraid to ask for help’

More Essex Peer Review Case Studies can be found here:

<https://schools.essex.gov.uk/data/saes/SchoolLedImprovement/Pages/Peer-Review-Case-Studies.aspx>



Peers working with peers in a deliberate way generates greater lateral accountability and provides both the support and challenge needed to improve.

Once this work is underway there is no greater motivator than internal accountability within groups of schools, to oneself and ones peers, – what we call ‘the moral imperative realised’

Fullan: Learning is the work 2016

Session 5

Maximising the impact of our partnership work



The power of the questions we ask ourselves

Our commitment to changing beliefs and behaviours
Are we thinking and behaving differently about how we work together as a partnership?

Are we identifying, developing and using talent and capacity across our partnership?

Are we more confident in holding each other to account for actions?

Are we being totally honest and open?

Exploring our commitment to changing beliefs and behaviours

In the light of today's conversations choose one of three 'partnership reflection' grids

- B1 Are we identifying, developing and using talent and capacity across the partnership?
- B2. Are we more confident in holding each other to account for actions?
- B3. Are we being totally honest and open with each other?

Where are you now?

Where would you like to be in 12 months time?

Plenary

- Agree and share one area for growth and development will now take back and discuss with the wider partnership
- Why is this important to you?
- What will be different when you have achieved it?



Key messages from today

- Round table protocol
- An individual response to a table response
- A table response to a whole community response

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has

Margaret Mead



Essex County Council

Resources to help you continue to grow as a partnership

Essex School Led Improvement site:

<https://schools.essex.gov.uk/data/saes/SchoolLedImprovement/Pages/School-LedImprovement%28default%29.aspx>

Partnership Evaluation Development Tool

Partnership leads handbook

