Swaledale Metacognition in Service Schools SSIF Project Evaluation
@SwaleAlliance @CollectivED1

A Pedagogy-led Project

The Swaledale Metacognition project took a collaborative coaching approach to delivering metacognition in the classroom and focused on mathematics.

It ran for five school terms from September 2017 to April 2019. It was managed by the Swaledale Alliance and funded by the DfE SSIF budget.

Ten primary schools in North Yorkshire, with a predominance of Service Children, participated in the project. KS2 data shows that outcomes for pupils at these schools has been below the national average for some years. Attainment and progress in maths has been particularly weak. One of the main issues is pupil mobility.

The aim of the project was to empower pupils to understand their own learning and to develop skills to enable them to take more responsibility for their own progress and be able to transfer learning skills to new setting when they inevitably move schools.

Metacognition matters

'Metacognition and self-regulation' is a term which is relatively are common in the current teaching and learning discourse. It has been adopted by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and is one of the effective teaching strategies in their Toolkit. Previously these approaches might have been described as 'teaching thinking skills'. The inclusion of 'teaching' emphasises an active instructional and facilitative role of the teacher.

Effective Evaluation

The evaluation grew out of the project's specific *theory of change* which was that *effective development of teachers' practices to create more metacognitive learning and support greater self-regulation by pupils in Maths could enhance the achievement and progress of pupils and help them to overcome some of the challenges associated with high mobility between schools*. The evaluation was qualitative and consisted of evidence from a range of stakeholders including the Lead Practitioners (or coaches); the Lead Teachers; the Head of the

Alliance (the Strategic Lead); the Project Manager; and the Quality Consultant. In addition, a range of documents - such as termly school delivery plans, the results of pupil and staff surveys and cluster observations, were taken into consideration.

Leading Professional Learning

Three *Lead Practitioners (LPs)* were appointed to this project and have been the driving force for this project and played a key role in its success. They have been highly organised, methodical and professional.

The LP's developed *contextualised specialist coaching.* The pedagogic approaches they developed were designed with the needs of the project's teachers and pupils in mind. Their approach was contextualised by the individual challenges in each school, the different year groups in focus, the different levels of experience and the different roles of the LTs they were working with. To support this, the LPs continually gathered data, reflected on how and where the project was going and adapted their delivery model and pedagogical approach accordingly. Consequently, the coaching approach included modelling, joint planning and co-teaching and debriefing with the LTs.

Pupils as Participants in Learning

The project created new outcomes for learners

➤ There is anecdotal evidence of *positive pupil impact*.

➤ Pupils were reported to be more confident learners, especially in maths.

> *"I asked them about their favourite topics they learnt in maths and one of them said: "I really like fractions because it was challenging and that meant I was learning."*

> *"It's in their reasoning and their confidence. They are more likely to be able to identify how they have learnt. Definitely, from the data and the assessments, the maths [scores] have increased."*

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- Classroom tasks have become more pupil-led.

- Pupils are no long afraid of mistakes, asking questions or seeking help. Instead, they see these as opportunities for learning rather than a sign of failure.

"They are not afraid to say they are struggling. Whereas before they would just sit there and do nothing. Now they are saying: "I'm struggling a little bit, can someone help me". They don't necessarily mean the teacher, but can somebody help me… And I just think that is showing that they are a bit more resilient. They are more willing to ask for help, they are not afraid to come out when they have got a wrong answer, and they look at each others answers and think, "oh, I know where I went wrong now."

"There was one boy who in lesson had switched off and a girl saw him, stood up and went over and said "do you want some help?" and he went (pause) "yes please." And it was just him saying yes, and she sat down with him and they did it, they worked through it. That to me was just, wow"

Lead Teachers as Leaders of Learning

- There is evidence of *Lead Teacher impact*, mainly in terms of developing new school leaders.

- The Lead Teachers valued the coaching style used by the Lead Practitioners and the time they had on the project; that it was ongoing over a period of time rather than a one-day hit.

- It is important for schools to choose the right Lead Teacher to take such projects forward.

- Cluster observations were particularly valued by the Lead Teachers, benefiting not only the Lead Teachers but other colleagues at participating schools, including teaching assistants.

- Network meetings were particularly valued by the Lead Teachers.

"They energise you, they motivate you again to keep it going."

"I find that when I come to these meetings I always go back with tons of new stuff to remind me to put into lesson plans..."

- It is essential to have a good working relationship between Lead Practitioners and the Lead Teachers, the Lead Practitioners and their Headteacher.

- Funding to cover Lead Teachers has been effective, allowing all Lead Teachers to take part in cluster observations and network meetings.

- Good communication between all stakeholders is also important, along with clear lines of reporting and accountability in times of difficulty.

Conclusions and recommendations

The evaluation found that a new school improvement initiative such as this works best where individual schools and teachers have buy-in, feel they have something to offer and see it as a *collaboration*, whereby they are valued as equals; rather than the initiative being done unto them.

The Alliance and individual schools might like to consider the following when implementing school improvement initiatives in the future.

- ✓ Allow time for the building of relationships and development of trust between Lead Practitioners and Lead Teachers.

- ✓ Collect on-going data as deemed appropriate.

- ✓ Reflect regularly on how well the initiative is going and do not be afraid to change direction or add in new aspects to the project if necessary.

- ✓ Plan regular network meetings for the Lead Teachers involved to strengthen collaborative working, encourage knowledge exchange and to share resources.

- ✓ Ensure funding for teaching cover is available for Lead Teachers to attend network meetings;

- ✓ Encourage regular cluster observations to allow Lead Teachers and others to benefit from the new strategies.

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