'Next Practice' in education:
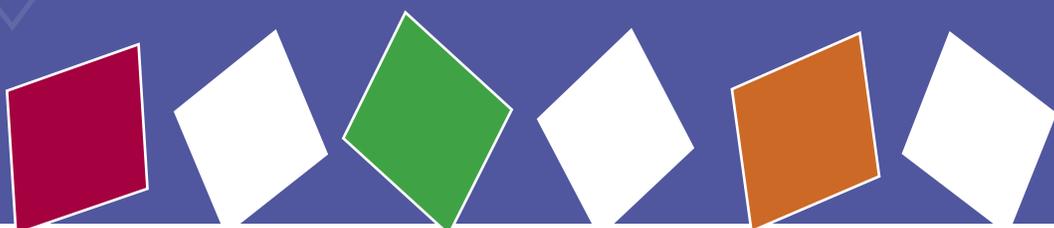## a disciplined approach to innovation

VALERIE HANNON

'NEXT PRACTICE' IN EDUCATION: A DISCIPLINED APPROACH TO INNOVATION

How shall we make successful innovation an ingredient of our education service? Is it possible systematically to apply, to scale, what is known about innovation in schools?

It is widely understood that innovation is central to the success of modern enterprises, whether they are product or service focused, private, public or voluntary sector. But the term is often used loosely to include virtually any form of change; and, notwithstanding the growing literature on the subject, clarity about the *form* of innovation suitable for given contexts is not always easy to establish. What may be appropriate in advancing improvement in education may not be the right approach if transformation is the goal.

In the public sector specifically, since the 1980s, the pace of change has been relentless. This has been policy-led innovation, driven from the centre. However in general, innovation is not a critical factor in the survival of public service institutions (as it is in the private sector). Indeed to some extent the reverse is true. For public service practitioners, innovation is a high risk activity and the incentives are few[1]. In a system where the centre has been the innovator, practitioner compliance understandably becomes the habit.

The dynamic of change in education in

England has been described in terms of a set of shifts, first, from 'uninformed prescription' (in the 1980s); to 'informed prescription'; then towards 'informed professional judgement' (ie practitioner-led change)[2]. This last was seen as the key to self-sustaining, rapid improvement. It was within this context, that an Innovation Unit (IU) for schools was established, by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)[3], to take forward the agenda of practitioner-led change. The work of The IU is described in detail elsewhere[4], but this pamphlet describes what may be its key contribution to the evolution of public service innovation and improvement: a new approach to *stimulating, incubating,* and *accelerating* innovation, which is strongly driven by users' needs. This approach is known as Next Practice. This pamphlet sets out to do three things: to capture, briefly, what we know so far about the process of encouraging public services to become more innovative; to describe the Next Practice innovation model which is built upon these understandings; and to describe the practical programme of work in train at the time of writing (March 2007) which utilises this model.

[1] Cf Moore, M.H., 2005. *Breakthrough Innovations and Continuous Improvement: Two different models of innovative processes in the public sector Public Money and Management*.

[2] Barber, M., 2002. *The Next Stage for Large Scale Reform in England: From Good to Great.* Background paper for the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston 47th Economic Conference, 'Education in the 21st Century: Meeting the Challenges of a Changing World' (19-21 June 2002).

[3] DfES Publications White Paper, *2002. Schools: Achieving Success*

[4] See The Innovation Unit website: www.innovation-unit.co.uk

WHAT IS NEXT PRACTICE?

In one sense 'next' practice is like tomorrow: it is never here. The term is meant, though, to convey the notion of genuinely new approaches rooted in practical understanding. CK Prahalad, Professor of Business Administration at the University of Michigan, remarked: [5]

"There is a lot of research focused on best practice, but I focus on next practice. Next practice by definition has three problems: firstly it is future-oriented; secondly, no single institution or company is an exemplar of everything that you think will happen; and thirdly, next practice is about amplifying weak signals, connecting the dots. Next practice is disciplined imagination."

In an IDeA[6] (Improvement and Development Agency) pamphlet Charles Leadbeater argues, on the basis of work in local government, that

"Next practices – emergent innovations that could open up new ways of working – are much more likely to come from thoughtful, experienced, self-confident practitioners trying to find new and more effective solutions to intractable problems."

The concept of Next Practice suggests a way forward for purposeful, disciplined interventions, which nevertheless optimise the scope for professional creativity.

This is not to say that theory has no part to play: practitioners will have an implicit theory of action. Consider Bromley-by-Bow Healthy Living Centre:

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[5] Prahalad, C.K., 2004. Interview posted on *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid*
[6] Leadbeater, C., 2006 *The Innovation Forum: Beyond Excellence* IDeA

BROMLEY-BY-BOW HEALTHY LIVING CENTRE, TOWER HAMLETS, LONDON

Bromley-by-Bow Healthy Living Centre subverts many traditional assumptions about how primary healthcare is delivered. Serving one of London's poorest districts and a community predominantly of Bangladeshi descent, the Centre adopts an holistic approach designed around the needs of its users. Co-founder and General Practitioner, Dr Sam Everington believes that people's health problems are caused by a variety of factors, including unemployment, poor housing, poverty and loneliness. At the Centre patients might be prescribed medication, but they might also be offered art classes, gardening therapy or exercise in the gym. Health professionals have shopped and cooked with patients and have helped them to access training, find jobs or move house. As Sam explains: "If you're really going to address people's health needs, you need to address their environment, their education, their creativity and their health all in one go."

The Bromley-by-Bow approach is fuelled by the belief that people need to be actively engaged in their own health care, rather than simply being the passive recipients of a white-coated expert's treatment. This means that patients at consultations are often asked what they, in turn, might do for the Centre or for their community. Patients have made art for the gallery that doubles as a reception, they have worked creating and up-keeping the gardens, water features and sculptures that surround the buildings and have set up their own workshops and counselling sessions. Around 100 community projects are currently based within the Centre which, along with its café and cinema, means it feels totally unlike a traditional General Practice. When Sam and his colleagues were originally forming the concept of Bromley-by-Bow they were driven by a desire to make doctors' surgeries less fearful and more approachable places – especially for those particularly estranged from medical provision. The Centre is always trialling creative ideas deigned to attract new people to its services. A good example is its Blood Pressure Bazaar, where getting your blood pressure taken is one of the attractions set amidst the bustling hub of farmers' markets, cookery stalls and musicians.

A Next Practice approach asks: What would an extended school with similar levels of ambition and imagination look like?

Or, reflect upon emergent services – Next Practice – in the financial sector.

ZOPA (ZONE OF POSSIBLE AGREEMENT)

Often described as the 'eBay for financial services', Zopa (Zone of Possible Agreement) is an online lending and borrowing exchange that by-passes the need for banks of the High Street variety. The UK-based company Zopa is the brainchild of Richard Duvall, who is renowned as a creator of revolutionary businesses having also founded Egg. Through Zopa, customers choose the individuals they would like to borrow from and lend to via the internet. People with money to lend pay nothing to do so, often earning much healthier returns than they would if those same sums sat in a savings account. Meanwhile the charges applied to lenders are kept extremely low by the non-existence of the kinds of overheads needed to run traditional banking establishments.

Enabled by new digital and internet technologies, Zopa both responds to and exploits customer disillusionment with traditional banks. The company compares itself to the 'local micro-lending schemes that operate in Asia and Latin America' in which families and friends borrow and lend amongst themselves. Zopa's customers make choices about the nature of their financial exchanges based on all kinds of criteria, including very human sentiments and ethical concerns. As one client comments: "I like the idea that a private individual is helping me out with a loan and I'm helping them out by paying them interest (rather than my interest becoming part of another record payout to shareholders). I find banks very dehumanising and Zopa very humanising."

Zopa strikes a particular chord with 'free formers' – self-employed or contract-based professionals whose life-styles and careers are dynamic and highly mobile. Shunned by banks for their inability to tick the right boxes and predict their annual incomes, Zopa has a ready market in this ever-growing and potentially powerful sector of the contemporary workforce. Since its launch in 2004, Zopa has built up a base of over 50,000 registered members.

What ideas does this stimulate around how we organise and personalise learning?

These illustrations give an indication of the kind of shifts which are needed to transform our system of education and not just improve it. They suggest the characteristics of Next Practice which The Innovation Unit believes is needed. We suggest these include significantly changed methods of service delivery, organisation or structure, which, if shown to be successful, would hold implications for the wider system and they are:

◆ in advance of hard evidence of effectiveness

◆ not (yet) officially sanctioned and therefore maybe entailing some risk

◆ consciously designed with an awareness of the strengths and limitations of conventional 'best' practice

◆ generated by very able, informed practitioners aware of the existing knowledge base

◆ informed by critical scanning of the wider environment

◆ directed at serious, contemporary problems

◆ user focused

If we consciously set out to foster such practice, and subsequently harness it, how should we go about it? A starting point is the existing knowledge about social and public service innovation.

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

There are now a number of clear understandings, both conceptual and empirical, about the nature of innovation. Definitions of innovation are legion, but they

The 'radical' challenges the existing paradigm, and this latter typically emerges through 'organised discovery'. Some key characteristics of public service innovation have been

Figure 1: The nature of innovation
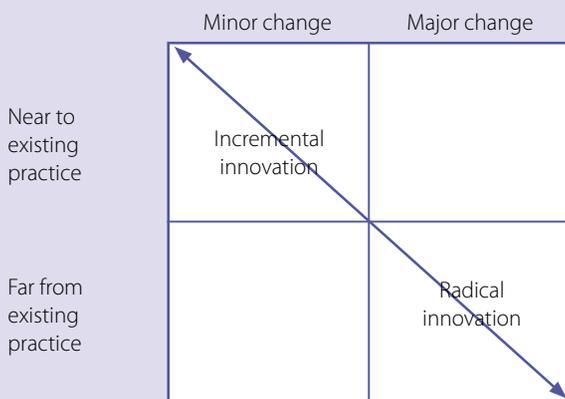
tend to be variations on *the successful exploitation of new ideas*[7]. David Hargreaves[8] characterises innovation on the axes of minor/major and near/far to existing practice, shown diagrammatically in figure 1.

Thus, innovations can be understood in terms of their depth and reach. The ' incremental' comprise relatively minor changes or adaptations, well within the prevalent paradigm.

identified by other writers[9]. They are said to include evidence of partnerships and collaboration at all levels together with attempts at cross-service integration. They almost always demonstrate an emphasis on user-centredness and the exploitation of the power of ICT.

Other features which have been noted by analysts and researchers of innovation include:

[7] See also Mulgan, G. and Albury, D., 2003. *Innovation in the Public Sector* p.3. "Successful innovation is the creation and implementation of new processes, products, services and methods of delivery which result in significant improvements in outcomes efficiency, effectiveness or quality."

[8] Hargreaves, D.H., 2003. *Education Epidemic* DEMOS

[9] Borins, S. February 2001. *The Challenge of Innovating in Government*. The PricewaterhouseCoopers Endowment for The Business of Government.

- The importance of a systems approach – by which is meant the power of locating one's innovation in the wider interconnected context of other organisations, activities and concerns[10]

- Attention to process improvement: the deconstruction of 'the way things are done', and the search to invent high leverage changes

- Closer engagement between the private and voluntary sectors, whether in competition or partnership

- The empowerment of – not just consultation with – users and communities.

Perhaps the most significant evidence to be considered in the search for how to foster practitioner-led innovation is that concerning the **enablers and barriers.** Observers[11] have noted that innovators have some obvious needs including legitimation and support; and recognition and incentives (which need not be financial). They suggest also that the availability of experimental 'space' can be critical – especially when it is closely tied to the involvement of end-users. The Young Foundation[12] points to the need for explicit methodologies for R&D in the public sector.

Barriers of course include the lack, or reverse, of the above conditions. But interestingly – from the perspective of the design of a support programme - also identified[13] is an over-reliance on high-performers as sources. This finding is difficult to interpret. At one level, such practitioners are invested in their already-successful approach; at another, they are well-placed to know the limits of current 'best practice'. To embark upon radical innovation requires, one could argue, confidence based on a secure reputation. Innovative initiative is likely to be regarded, (as Schopenhauer pointed out in relation to any 'new truth') first with ridicule, then with violent opposition. Finally the outcome will be regarded as self-evident.

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[10] Borins, S. February 2001. *The Challenge of Innovating in Government*. The Pricewaterhouse Coopers Endowment for The Business of Government.
[11] Borins, S. ibid; and Mulgan, G., and Albury, D., ibid.
[12] *Social Innovation: what it is, why it matters and how it can be accelerated* (2006) The Young Foundation.
[13] Albury, D., January 2005. *Fostering Innovation in Public Services.* Article in Public Money & Management Journal.

REFLECTIONS AND ISSUES

The role of professional practitioners

There is plenty of evidence pointing to the difficulty of incentivising and empowering practitioners to engage in innovation, especially in tightly accountable systems based on performance targets. Yet in education we know there is no shortage of energy and expertise, and certainly no lack of commitment or moral purpose amongst practitioners. How could we support them, and give them the creative space and incentives they need to be innovative? What sort of interventions could both release professional imagination, whilst encouraging work that is disciplined and system relevant? How can the system learn from the resultant innovation and its process characteristics so that these can be taken to scale?

Fostering an outward-facing disposition

How can busy, performance-driven practitioners become aware of approaches and techniques which are emerging in other sectors - private and voluntary, as well as across public services more widely? It is enormously difficult in practice to be fully alert to developments and methods outside one's 'zone of operation' (and sometimes even within it) which offer improvement potential. Some school leaders do manage to scan other horizons for ideas with transfer potential. How far can this be done on their behalf, to shortcut the investment of time, and also optimise the scope for adaptation?

SOME ASSUMPTIONS UNDERPINNING THE NEXT PRACTICE PROGRAMME

Taken together, the evidence set out above and the questions and issues it raises suggest some assumptions, which in turn have influenced the design of the Next Practice education programme.

1. The combination of a **methodology** derived from the available evidence base, with a **mobilised group of empowered practitioners motivated by a compelling purpose, supported by a dedicated innovation agency** in partnership with the key national bodies, will result in emergent Next Practices which will have system significance.

2. The right group to work with will be drawn from those practitioners who are already pushing at the boundaries of current practice in a chosen area. They will be well aware of practice deemed 'best' – will perhaps have generated/adopted/adapted it. But they will be conscious too of its limits, and will have experienced the need to push on further, or in new directions. Skilled and self-confident, these are likely to be practitioners whose deep immersion, and success, in their work gives them the platform upon which to contemplate risk and to lead others. Visionary and energetic, their ideas spring from immersion in practice: not in theory or in ideology. They may well be alert to and interested in such fields, but the practical applications for their own 'day jobs' are

paramount. Indeed, it is likely that they have a wide field of vision. They will have a lively interest in the overall direction of the service in which they work, and be constantly scanning the environment for ways in which both to influence and exploit it.

Such an innovation programme holds great potential. If we want a powerful innovative culture in schools which is self-sustaining we have to empower system-aware practitioners, working ever more closely with the service users, to create it. And to avoid simply creating interesting but isolated pockets of experimentation, we have to design in collaborative ways of learning and enquiry between professionals – a 'pull' rather than 'push' approach.

A PRACTICAL PROGRAMME TO FOSTER 'NEXT PRACTICE'

In Stevenage, all the 11-19 Community Schools, along with the two Special Schools, the PRU (Pupil Referral Unit) and the FE College, have formed a 14-19 partnership to deliver 14-19 provision to the town. The partnership is led by a 14-19 Director (previously a headteacher of one of the schools) and has so far had Local Authority support and national support, too, through the 14-19 'Pathfinder' programme. The alliance has a base in a central business park and has developed materials to support the work and an infrastructure of practices that is impressive. They plan to take this work further under the aspirational umbrella of 'Stevenage: A Learning Town'. Their Next Practice field trial will create a small Governance Group designed to bridge the gap between sectors. The Group will be directly accountable for the configuration of provision, which will include town-wide curriculum planning and joint blocked timetables.

Bridgemary College in Hampshire has already developed an ability-related rather than age-determined curriculum for all learners, and students can opt to take SATs and GCSEs early. This extended school employs a police officer permanently as a member of staff, and hosts several 'academies' for the students and community – for example the Engineering Academy is taught by the naval engineers from a local dockyard. The field trial will build on the established ability-driven curriculum to personalise when the learning takes place.

They will focus on how they might start offering a combination of teaching times and slots for students who will be able to create a flexible day. This might mean that provision will be made for students who choose to be in or out of school. Perhaps some students might attend a local college or training course, and some might choose to take two hours during the day where they look after siblings before continuing working virtually or back in school outside traditional hours. In order that the offering can be made to all students, the college is committed to a complete reconstruction of the timetable, and redefinition of the professional roles of staff.

Stevenage and Bridgemary are amongst some 34 Next Practice field trials (incorporating over 100 schools) which are the early exemplars of the first 2 Next Practice projects running in 2006-8. How has their work arisen, how is it being supported, and how might it become significant for the system as a whole?[14]

A programme of work is now underway, financed and supported by DfES Ministers, to develop Next Practice in some key areas of policy and service development. It is based on the evidence and assumptions set out above.

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[14] For up-to-date information about all the Next Practice projects see The Innovation Unit website www.innovation-unit.co.uk

It is supported, too, by legislation which can set aside any factors constraining innovative experiment in certain circumstances – the Power to Innovate.[15] The 2006-8 programme is described in more detail later in this pamphlet.

The design of the programme is shown in the model (Figure 2). It is provisional, in the sense that this is guiding and shaping work in progress but also being amended by it. The three diamonds capture the sequential life-span of a Next Practice project within the programme over, roughly, an 18-month period. Each phase is deliberately represented visually by a diamond: it seeks to capture the movement within each phase from an initial focus broadening to a wider set of generated possibilities, which subsequently become refocused.

The four key policy areas which have been selected collaboratively are:

◆ System Leadership

◆ Resourcing Personalisation

◆ Workforce Modernisation (Communities for Learning), and

◆ Deep Engagement of Parents and Carers in Learning.

It is an important feature of The Innovation Unit's Next Practice work that projects are in partnership with the key national agency for which the subject or content area is core business. This is critical, not only to ensure that the work is informed by the most advanced of current practice, but also that outcomes can be fed into the agency's own national work programme. Hence, for example the partner in the first of the projects listed above, on System Leadership, is the National College for School Leadership.

Next Practice Innovation Model
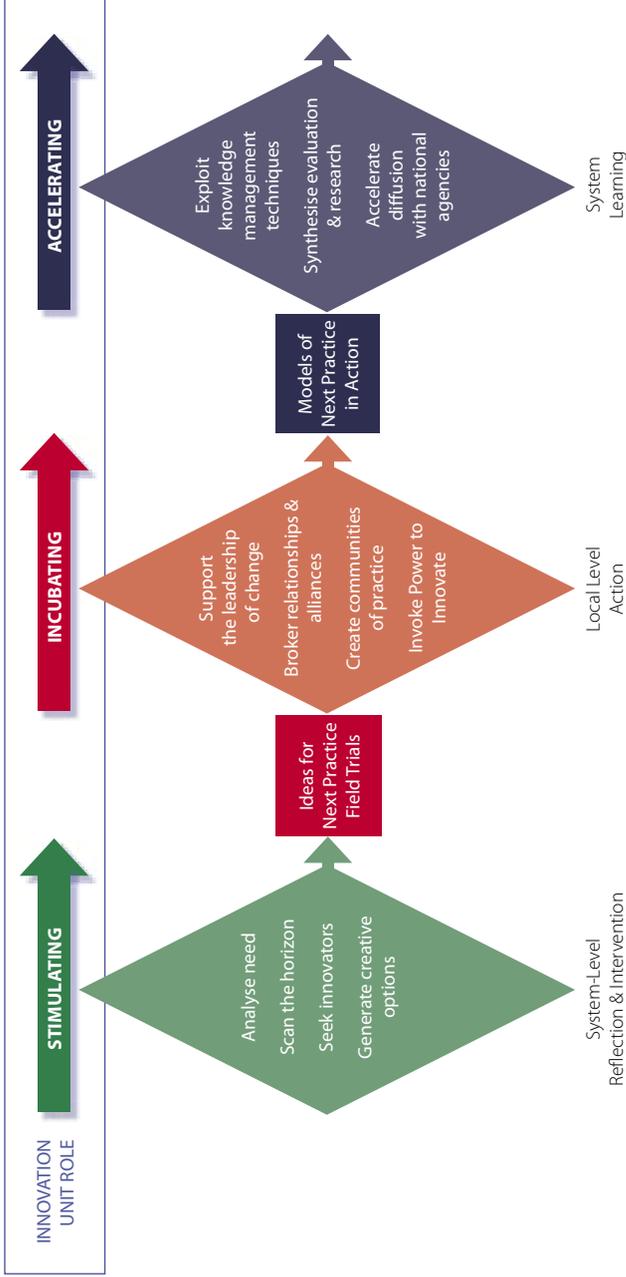
Figure 2

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PHASE 1

The first phase in any Next Practice project is at system level, and consists of reflection – followed by intervention – to clarify the specific practice to be the focus for innovation. Those involved at this phase will be policy makers, national agencies, system leaders and practitioners, service users, thought leaders – and provocateurs from other zones.

Analyse Need seeks to:

◆ articulate the current state of the English education system in the relevant content area, analysing the problems and challenges in order to agree the objectives of the project

◆ highlight available data

◆ identify practitioners and organisations already pro-active in this area, who might wish to be the innovators to take it forward.

Scan the Horizon seeks to:

◆ create the 'outward facing' orientation, and the right set of stimuli, to provoke challenge and encourage creativity amongst experienced practitioners

◆ focus on how the above problems and challenges are being addressed, both in international educational practice and by innovative practice in sectors outside education (eg retail, banking, information technology, energy, advertising and healthcare)

◆ identify key contacts and organisations outside English education who could help generate new ideas for the project.

The work of analysing the need and scanning the horizon may be of theoretical and policy interest, but the Next Practice approach seeks to involve potential innovators (including users) in these processes from the start, as a platform for action. Assembling the right practitioners – diverse, accomplished, motivated and already poised to drive forward if the right conditions obtain – is key if they are to be mobilised to embark on significant change.

Generate Creative Options is focused on bringing such practitioners together with innovators and provocateurs from other sectors, and with users, to generate creative options for Next Practice field trials. Activities might include focus groups, creative workshops, futures thinking, service design workshops or clinics, and the use of open space technology.

The key outcomes of this phase are **ideas for Next Practice field trials,** which will satisfy the criteria for Next Practice, and then be supported over time by The Innovation Unit and its project partner. The quality of the ideas generated will itself be some measure of the success of this approach: some may only be capable of realisation in a 10 or 15 year timeframe. However the critical success factor will be the degree to which practical field trials result which genuinely model Next Practice, holding the promise also to deliver:

◆ improvements in relevant outcomes

◆ service responsiveness to needs of individuals and localities. (Will customer needs be better met?)

◆ reductions in costs for a given set of outputs or increases in productivity. (Will the activity represent improved value for money?)

PHASE 2

At the next phase, the action shifts to the local level. With its partner agency, The Innovation Unit moves to select schools to become Next Practice field trials. What incentivises schools to step up to the plate for this endeavour? Based on the evidence reviewed above, the offer is designed as an attractive one – but not one based on money.

The selected schools or localities (some field trials incorporate all the secondary schools in a Local Authority) are given as customised a version of the 'offer' as is possible. Space precludes detailed expansion of this, but the key processes are:

Supporting the Leadership of Change by empowering leaders and participants with increased insight into their overall context and the appropriate responses to this analysis. A Change Leadership model has been developed fit for this purpose which is both a diagnostic and, in use, an intervention in itself. Critically, the field trial sites are entitled to expert consultancy (drawn from the field of change management rather than content-specific). Next Practice consultants themselves are on a steep learning curve, working in new and dynamic ways with schools, local communities and businesses.

Evolving too is a Next Practice 'toolkit' of considerable potential, which has been expressly designed to be interactive, flexible and developmental. The 'tools' within it have already been adopted by other programmes, for the value they add in enabling school leaders and others to progress their aspirations (see Annex 1 for details).

The incubation 'offer' to identified trials

Access to a wider ideas pool

Creative space
(to incubate ideas)

Safer space (to legitimate
experimentation)

Gateway to
departmental teams

Obstacle removal (e.g. Power
to Innovate)

THE OFFER

Support for the change and
development process

Access to practice of interest

Co-design of evaluation

Confidence and moral
support

Social capital and connection (between
schools and beyond)

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Creating 'communities of practice' whereby the field trials both share their learning and development together on an ongoing basis, and come together periodically to advance it further.

Brokering relationships and alliances which can take a number of forms. These include relationships as diverse as with a potential IT investor; with a research body holding specific expertise; with a policy team from the DfES or other government department; or a local health service.

And – if and where it should be necessary – The Innovation Unit is able to advise the Secretary of State and officials to apply the Power to Innovate to lift restrictive regulations. In practice it is interesting how few proposals require this facility.

The outcome of this phase of activity is models of Next Practice in action.

PHASE 3

In the third phase of the Next Practice Innovation Model, the action shifts to wider system learning and development. We now know a lot more, though not nearly enough, about how practice transfers and is built upon[16]. We are seeking to adopt and adapt the techniques widely employed in knowledge management in business innovation. Social networking, through the processes of blogging and wikis are not yet a popular form amongst teachers and school leaders, but they could be powerful. We believe in the potential of these and similar technology-based approaches to accelerate interest in and knowledge of Next Practice. Communities of interest are being built, enabling those beyond the immediate active participants in the work to engage with it. Of course other techniques are used – face-to-face events, publications and so forth. And to have traction, the models and processes being developed in this programme must inform the mainstream work of the national agencies. That is why it has been important to have, as partners to each one of the Next Practice projects, the national agency charged with taking forward the agenda in question. Thus, the National College for School Leadership, as partner in the System Leadership project, is drawing upon the work of the field trials to inform its leadership development programmes, and its evidence to national reports/enquiries on the future of school

leadership[17]. Similarly, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) in relation to the Resourcing Personalisation Next Practice project; and the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) in relation to the Communities for Learning Next Practice project. A key question will be the degree to which the programme is successful in engaging and retaining the attention of policy makers, an ambitious aim. The programme is investing in an independent evaluation to generate forms of evidence which, hopefully, policymakers will find of use.

[16]Cf Fielding, M. et al (2005), *Factors influencing the transfer of good practice* Nottingham DfES
[17] Eg. *Independent Review of School Leadership* PricewaterhouseCoopers (2007) DfES

THE 2006-8 PROGRAMME

As set out above, the Next Practice Innovation Model is being applied across four key policy areas. It may be helpful to say more here about the choice of these areas and the detail of the work in progress. The four projects are sequenced. The first, on System Leadership, selected its 17 field trials in the summer of 2006 and the other three are each spaced roughly three months apart, in order to build real-time learning into the methodology.

Why System Leadership?

In England, the context for school leadership is changing fast. One of the most striking and important trends is towards the exercise of leadership beyond a single institution. This development is profoundly altering our long-standing models of school leadership.

Headteachers today are already taking on the responsibility of leading more than one school; they are co-leading in partnerships and federations; they are leading schools in close collaboration with other agencies, or are providing a range of services themselves, giving children access to much more than education – healthcare for example and other services. Most radically, perhaps, we are beginning to glimpse a future in which the whole idea of 'school' is re-imagined. School leaders are already guiding education beyond school walls, as ICT opens up new possibilities for schooling that needs no 'school'.

The drivers for these shifts are not difficult to discern. We need to:

◆ spread high quality leadership across several schools, at a time when the highest quality is not available everywhere – especially in the most challenging circumstances

◆ support a school or schools which are 'causing concern'

◆ deliver the 'five outcomes' of the *Every Child Matters* agenda

◆ deliver 'all-age' learning

◆ develop 14 -19 curriculum provision

◆ develop 'whole town' services

◆ deliver shared services more efficiently and

◆ resolve headteacher succession issues.

Given these existing trends, why are interventions such as Next Practice innovation projects necessary or desirable?

First, much of the development of this extended concept of leadership is being conducted in spite of, rather than facilitated by, existing structural conditions. The most notable of these is the existing arrangements for school governance, which are not well suited to the evolving practice in response to system challenges. Working in the 'safe experimental space' of a Next Practice innovation project will give scope to vary these arrangements.

Second, current developments are tentative and fragmented. The creation of a legitimated innovation community of practice will overcome this, emboldening practitioners and communities to re-conceive leadership beyond the single school as a powerful lever for achieving better outcomes. The aim must be to enable them to be more ambitious and in ways which are more sustainable.

Why Personalisation?

Most school leaders now appreciate the importance of personalisation, and this has been underlined by the publication of the 2020 Review Group[18]. However, many struggle with how to resource it in the current conditions. This project addresses the problem head-on.

The issue-analysis phase of the work demonstrated that schools have access to a wide variety of non-financial resources which they could utilise more effectively to meet learner needs. It also vividly brought to life the degree to which other areas of service, public as well as commercial, have transformed their approach not necessarily by investing more, but by reconfiguring their resources.

The selected field trials focus on four resource domains:

1. the use of time

2. harnessing technology for learning

3. co-constructing learning with students

4. the learning environment.

The example of Bridgemary College, given earlier, is of a field trial working on a blend of the above resource domains (as many do). Other field trials are piloting flexible timetables, two-shift days, digital toolboxes, personalised transition programmes, and 'anytime anywhere' learning. Each has been supported because it represents an ambitious departure from, or disruption of, current practice in teaching and learning. In addition, each project takes a uniquely creative approach to the investigation and improvement of a current issue within their local context.

These field trials benefited from commencing work at a time when the partner to The Innovation Unit in the project – The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust – was advancing conceptualisation of personalisation through its publication of the work of David Hargreaves[19], and there is cross-fertilisation with the SSAT networks.

Why Seek Next Practice in Workforce Reform?

This project looks at how the wider school 'workforce' might change to optimise outcomes in learning: and it looks at the implications of these changes for the professional skills of teachers. The years 2001-6 saw a national programme of Workforce

[18] *2020 Vision: Report of the Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group* DfES January 2007
[19] See *A New Shape for Schooling* Hargreaves, D. H. SSAT 2006

Reform with some schools beginning to report that they have used the remodelling agenda to deliver new and innovative approaches to teaching. But changes in this area could be much more ambitious.

Several key messages emerged from the analysis of need and scanning the horizon phase of the work:

◆ England is at "the leading edge" of workforce reform[20]. With the support of the National Remodelling Team (NRT), the majority of schools were implementing Phase Three of the National Workforce Agreement by the end of 2005. Schools are gradually re-defining the range of roles that operate in schools and are beginning to see reforms as a way to deliver improved teaching and learning strategies

◆ Some case studies have been developed by the NRT on schools who believe standards have risen as a result of remodelling, and Ofsted's recent evaluation begins to consider the impact of workforce reform on teaching and learning (although its case studies are anonymous)[21]. However, the evidence base to support schools' claims is in its infancy and little is available in the public realm

◆ While there is consensus that workforce remodelling is a potentially powerful way for schools to deliver innovative teaching

strategies, it is policy-makers and theorists who are leading these arguments. Indeed, it is one of the Hay Group's key findings that workforce reform remains a centrally-driven project that has yet to fully engage all schools and teachers[22]. In some schools and with some teachers, the Hay Group finds low morale, a lack of engagement and a lack of ownership, where matters of workforce reform are concerned. The NRT also concedes that while remodelling should "release the potential for creativity and innovation which already exists in our schools", many schools have been hesitant to embrace the agenda[23].

At the time of writing, field trials had not yet been selected for this project. But it is likely that they will centre on the following questions:

◆ How are teachers empowering their learners to support the learning of others?

◆ Support staff - can the pool of people available for paid support roles be enlarged, and more skills enlisted?

◆ How can members of the local and wider community engage in a systematic, aligned and sustainable way as part of their strategies for learning?

Crucially, the questions listed above have consequences for the role, skills and knowledge of a teacher. These are likely

[20] Hay Group, November 2005. *Workforce Remodelling: International Perspectives.*
[21] Ofsted, December 2005. *Remodelling the School Workforce: A Report from Ofsted.*
[22] Hay Group, November 2005. *Workforce Remodelling: International Perspectives.*
[23] Collarbone, Dame P., August 2004. *Touching Tomorrow: Remodelling in English Schools*

to include the leadership of a learning community; what will Next Practice here look like?

Why Next Practice in Parental and Carer Engagement?

The fourth Next Practice project in the current programme aims to build on the existing raft of work – which is extensive – to develop deep parental (or carer) engagement in young people's learning. Building on the substantial research and practice base, this project will generate and support field trials which are co-produced by parents and professionals built around the needs of users. Generating transformational change will depend upon developing different relationships between parents and an enabling state: one where parents are actively involved and better supported by schools. Amongst the domains being considered at the time of writing are: peer support between parents in engagement; building on the concept of supplementary schools, and some ethnic minority leadership approaches; and the reconfiguration of public services in some very disadvantaged areas.

THE ROLE OF THE INNOVATION UNIT

The Innovation Unit sets out to stimulate, incubate and accelerate Next Practice in education. The approach is rich with potential for the public services, and much will be learned about its efficacy in the coming two years. Currently government funded, The Unit is a unique hybrid organisation, built on practitioner expertise. The best metaphor to describe its modus operandi in this phase is possibly that of public sector venture capitalist, or broker.

The Innovation Unit:

◆ identifies practitioners poised to make more than incremental improvement

◆ makes assessments of potential for the creation of public value; in this instance, specifically, the achievement of the five outcomes for more children including the raising of standards – especially in areas of high challenge

◆ acts to remove, where possible, inhibitors

◆ creates the conditions to enable faster 'bringing of ideas to market'

◆ legitimises experimentation

◆ makes judgements on behalf of 'public stakeholders' (government/the public)

◆ shares risk

◆ brokers external facilitation and supports the strategic leadership of change

◆ engages in partnership with other key agencies (eg SSAT, NCSL, TDA), for whom the particular content area is core

business, to ensure maximum knowledge flow, and to generate the potential for promising practice to be taken to scale.

Conclusion

Generative innovation – Next Practice work – is far from being the only game in town. On the contrary, in the effort to achieve transformed public services, incremental improvement, scaling up and diffusing good or (where it is identified) best practice must be the basic and central constituents. The work of the National Strategies exemplifies this. Thoughtful work is going on around how known good practice can be effectively disseminated and ineffective practice discontinued. However, this alone is insufficient. It has to be accompanied by the drive to invent and discover the new.

The animating idea of the Next Practice programme is that such invention can be accelerated if motivated practitioners, working closely with service users, encounter the right conditions in which to exercise disciplined professional imagination. The current programme, funded as it is by government, falls well within the parameters of the existing system. However, it is fascinating to speculate what might emerge were the approach to be sponsored from wholly different sources. What disruptive, unanticipated new paradigms might then emerge? They are long overdue.

ANNEX 1

Evolving Next Practice 'toolkit'

Delta 6
Prioritising 21st century challenges
A tool for prioritising the challenges education faces. Good for building team consensus, creating constructive dialogue and looking beyond the day to day challenges.


The Landing Pad (in production)
Enabling constructive dialogue
Facilitated toolkit which enables constructive dialogue around 5 complex issues; context, action, purpose, leadership and governance. Explores system leadership from different perspectives.


To Be: Next Practice Process (in production)
Designing the right change
A tool that can be used by schools and groups of schools to develop a clearer view of what they looking to achieve and the operational processes that will need to change to achieve their aims.
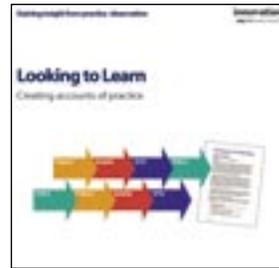
Looking to Learn (in production)
A tool for group learning from observation and reflection of others' practice
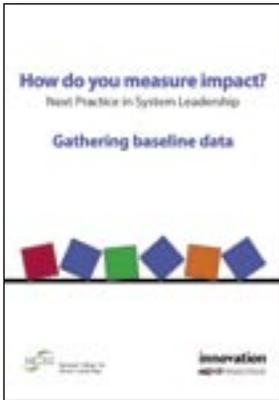
Gathering baseline data
A guide to the five strands of the field trial baseline strategy for the System Leadership project. Offers suggestions for developing indicators for measuring impact.

Change Leadership Model (in development) Offers an approach to changing the culture and leadership behaviour of organisations based on work undertaken with major private sector companies.

More details can be found on The Innovation Unit website: www.innovation-unit.co.uk

innovation