

A Reflective Learning Journal of Leading Gifted and Talented Provision at a Mixed Comprehensive School

Introduction

The project has been led in a mixed comprehensive school (11-16) with approximately 830 pupils on roll. In a recent ofsted inspection (March 2009), the overall effectiveness of the school was judged to be satisfactory. My appointment as Assistant headteacher in July 2009 involved raising standards in ICT which later evolved into leading gifted and talented provision- whole school. In June 2010 work on leading G&T across the whole school was initiated. This formed the school based project for my leadership change. The project was identified in requiring Planning - seeking information, defining tasks, setting aims, which Adair sets out as part of core functions of leadership and states that they are vital to the Action Centered Leadership model (Adair, 1979).

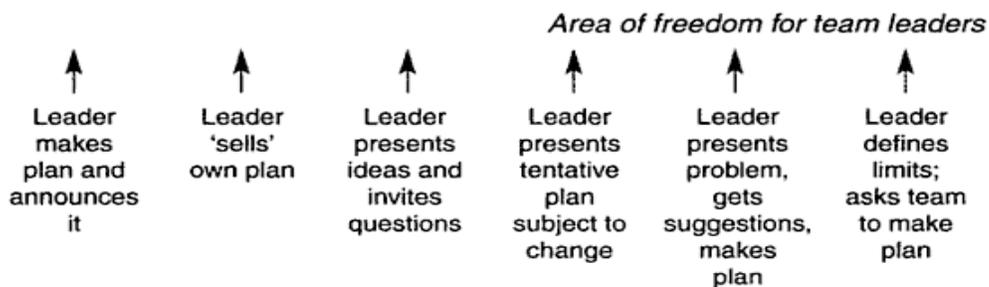
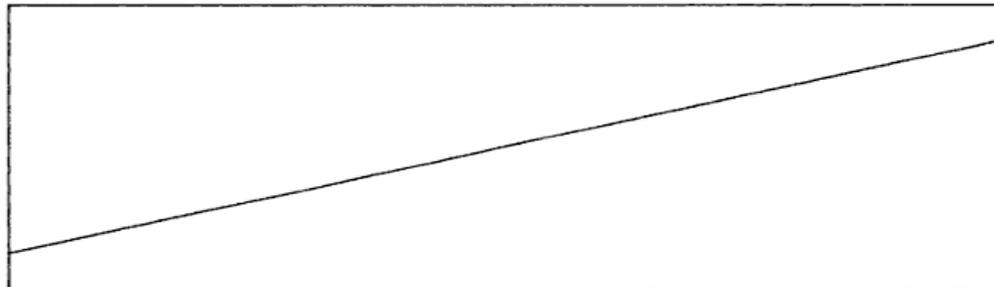
Adair (Adair2010) defines three types of leaders:

- 1) team leadership (where you are leading about 5 to 20 people)
- 2) Operational leadership (this is composed of a number of teams where the leaders report to you)
- 3) Strategic leadership (leading a whole establishment with overall accountability of the above 2 levels).

On reflection, I envisage myself as both a team leader and operational leader in this role. I will however, develop into a strategic leader. Adair uses a very useful way of looking at the planning function- The planning continuum (see illustration below). I can identify where this project initiated on the planning continuum- "leader presents ideas and invites questions". The use of authority by my leadership is greater than the area of freedom for team leaders for this planning function and I use this level of planning throughout my project. Other business

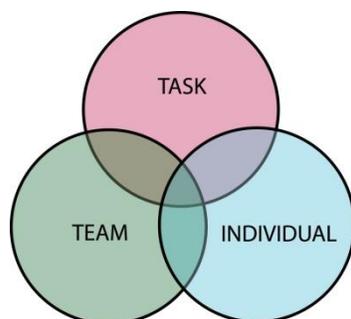
definitions of planning continuum include- a sequence of activities and decisions involved in identification of aims or needs, and their achievement.

Use of authority by the leader



Adair states that *“in whatever field you are, at whatever level of leadership- team leader, operational leader or strategic leader- there are 3 things that you should always be thinking about: task, team and individual(see illustration below)”*

(Adair. J, 2010, p.18). I later learn that as a leader, I must not be a self centred one as the need to succeed in performing the common task will involve building the team which will in turn satisfy personal human needs in individuals.



Impact on Me as a Leader

My training: This was essential for me initially to gain the knowledge that I needed to take the school forward in this area. This included attendance to various conferences and universities. I was presented with valuable support from the local authority advisor and my own research. The leadership pathways training was designed to help me improve the quality of my leadership capability at the senior leadership level. Core day 1 helped me to identify my ideal self through using the Hay Group insight activities. Through this activity I was able to clearly communicate what I want to be:

- To be highly knowledgeable and confident with G&T practices so that I have “*good information to make good decisions.*” (Boyatzis, 2009, Royce Carlton channel)
- To be creative in introducing (taking risks) novel ideas
- To influence change with impact
- To be able to present my ideas with ease, passion and inspire and excite others
- To lead change innovatively.

I was able to then form my dream for the future, which is to be part of a highly successful school where I will be a big part of the change and improvements. The Leadership pathways programme was introduced as a personalised pathway to grow and develop as a leader.

The use of Boyatzis’ theory of self-directed learning helped me to reflect on key questions:

1. My ideal self
2. My real self
3. My learning agenda

4. experimenting with new behaviour, thoughts and feelings
5. Developing trusting relationships that help, support and encourage each step in the process.

The coaching sessions were a tool to develop a commitment to specific plans and actions, reviewing, evaluating, extending and disseminating my learning. My expectations of the coaching relationship and one which I would later use with leading others, is based on the G.R.O.W model. This is one of the most effective models of coaching, the GROW model (Whitmore, 2009) provides a four-stage process for questioning the subject:

Goal, Reality, Options, Will

The initial routemap (part of the Leadership pathways) was designed to review the feedback received from both colleagues and myself. The most useful aspects of this initial feedback-confirmed my real self views most of the time and provided a guide on areas of development. This report indicated the units that I should definitely consider for study:

- Creative resource management
- Leading through Influence (this unit was completed)

My key learning from completing the Leading through Influence unit was to influence change through good communication and working with key stakeholders to make change happen. The challenges were getting more people to contribute to the vision. My priorities were to deliver workshops to start the planned changes.

There were 5 stages that I followed in a flexible way to lead change on G&T:

- Where are we now?
- Creating the vision
- Action planning
- Making it happen
- Measuring the impact

The above idea was taken from the 'Making the Difference' compulsory online unit on the Leadership and Pathways course. As I worked through this unit, emphasis was placed on how the proposed change would effect me as a leader; how effectively I would lead my team contributing to the whole school agenda and most importantly at the core of change- how it affects the outcome for the pupils. Kotter (1996) describes the eight-stage change process of creating major change.

1. Establishing a sense of urgency- in the case of my school it was imperative that challenge in lessons (differentiation), enrichment activities and raising standards (target grades being met) had to improve.
2. Creating the guiding coalition- The senior leadership team, were introduced to the plans and ideas clarifying aims & objectives linked to the school.
3. Developing a vision and strategy- My vision was vital for the first step in creating the vision.
4. Communicating the change vision- this was shared at a whole school INSET (6th Sep 2010). Effective speaking was key for this stage to be effective. It encouraged me to be well prepared, clear, simple, to be vivid and natural (Adair, 2010).

5. Empowering Broad-based action- getting rid of obstacles such as fear of planning for G&T pupils in lessons and out of school activities.
6. Generating short-term wins- this was accomplished through G&T updates being given which encouraged an influenced other departments to focus on this area of change.
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change- this is difficult to comment on.
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture- improved leadership at departmental level was seen and middle managers were influencing each other to drive G&T provision forward.

Where are we now?

The start of the project focussed on measuring current practice on a Whole School level. The senior leadership team were introduced to the plans and ideas clarifying aims & objectives linked to the school. The evidence- whole school audit (using IQS- institutional quality standards) taken from the National strategies website was carried out as a team. Schools are advised to use the IQS as a starting point to provide a baseline of their status. It is advisable to conduct an overview or snapshot audit of all 14 elements, and then to focus on four or five elements that will best support and demonstrate progress over the lifetime of the project (DCSF, 2009, A Gifted and Talented approach to whole-school improvement).

This enabled the leadership team to identify strengths, weaknesses and next steps that could be taken. This also made my contribution to the school improvement plan robust.

Learning walks: the focus was to determine the current state of differentiation for the more able pupil in the classroom. The CQS (classroom quality standards) criteria, was used to observe each lesson (DCSF, 2009, A Gifted and Talented

approach to whole-school improvement). The evidence- summary of findings which was shared with the SLT and teachers observed. The main criticism of learning walks was the way in which I had informed staff of the intended learning walks. This left staff feeling vulnerable and unclear about the purpose of the lesson observations. In my initial thinking, I was crystal clear to what I was looking for, my e-mail was simple to all staff, but I learnt that staff were confused by the complexity of the attached document- the CQS criteria. In future I would conduct the process of learning walks in the following steps:

1. Train staff initially
2. Inform staff that the application of the new learning will be tested through learning walks
3. Ensure that the criteria is shared at the training session- in its simplest form- model excellent practice
4. Ensure that all understand the expectations
5. Give staff time to apply the new learning in the classroom
6. Inform staff of the actual learning walks (long term notice recorded in the school calendar)
7. Conduct the learning walks (cross section of lessons- various subjects and year groups)
8. Share the findings with individual teachers; heads of department and other stakeholders
9. Plan future action.

“...school improvement can be initiated and built upon through gentle and evolutionary strategies for change. These strategies must concentrate first on the act of learning as represented by the interactions of learners, teachers, and the curriculum. In the early stages of the change process, these strategies should make minimal, but specific, changes in existing schedules, textbook usage, and curricular conventions. And these strategies should be based on practices that have already demonstrated favorable results in places where they have been

used for reasonable periods of time and with groups from varying ethnic and economic backgrounds” (Renzulli 1998). The focus here is that Teaching and Learning must be the integral driving force to really raise standards and embrace change. The Learning walks must therefore be viewed as a vehicle of support as opposed to a monitoring exercise alone.

My belief is that for our school to become ‘outstanding’ the foundations of teaching must be secure. This means that all our teachers must be at least good. Further research into the area of what makes a good teacher, revealed that: *“the good teacher is precisely the teacher who does not ‘take over’, dictate, instruct, but who supports, responds, advises, assesses needs and assists development: a communicative, competent, reflective practitioner who also enjoys a high degree of professional autonomy and respect and whose success as a teacher may be judged in terms of the extent to which they expand their students’ expectations and possibilities.”* (Moore. A, 2004, p.170). As teachers, if we can effectively reflect (helping us to understand ourselves), it should help to make us aware of the difficulties, challenges, hopes, dreams, desires and reluctance experienced everyday by our pupils.

Pupil Voice: a sample of y 9 & 10 pupils were invited to voice their opinions on their subjects. The evidence produced was a summary of pupil voice. I found that the questionnaire that the pupils completed was complex and caused some confusion with some of the G&T pupils. My criticism of this is that pupils found it difficult to give their true feelings. Moving forward, I would use electronic surveys, such as activate or even conduct a survey on www.surveymonkey.com where the benefits are:

- Quickly create professional surveys.
- Gather responses through email or embed a survey on your blog or site.

- See results and analyze data in real-time.
(www.surveymonkey.com 03/06/11)

The G&T update (issue 81 Feb 2011), presented an article on 'How the Regional Partnerships have developed pupil voice. Christine Mitchell, Rita Peasland and Sharon Rhodes describe some of the effective approaches developed by the Regional Partnerships. The benefits of pupil voice involving gifted and talented learners in action research proved beneficial on a many aspects, for example., teacher-pupil relationships, with pupils taking more responsibility for their own learning.

What did this reveal to me as a leader? The whole school audit indicated that there were many essential elements missing from the school, for example, identification of G&T pupils was weak in nearly all areas. This type of activity opened up professional dialect as to how we would proceed and action plan. The idea of presenting to the senior leadership team (of which I am a member), allowed materials to be introduced and checked by all before leading a whole school inset. The SLT team were the first step in recognising a need to raise the profile of this cohort of pupils. The evidence highlighted the areas of weaknesses, strengths, opportunities and threats. They acted as critical friends and it helped to have people around me that were creative thinkers which had a great input in forming the vision. The focus of my leadership change was included identifying the need for CPD and a working team of leaders to carry the shared vision across the school. Initiating (this stage in the process) - briefing, task allocation, setting standards which Adair sets out as part of core functions of leadership and says they are vital to the Action Centered Leadership model (Adair, 1979).

Creating the vision

My vision was vital for the first step in creating the vision. The Making the Difference online unit encouraged this initial stage:

“My vision is where pupils of high ability are achieving, inspirational opportunities in life long learning- aspiring to HE and achieving A*. To raise attainment -the most A* G.C.S.E grades (2011)in the history of the school”.

The unit enabled me to expand the vision by considering the various stakeholders:

Pupils	Me	My Team	My School	Others
Pupils will have the scaffolding, guided through their learning and achieving high grades. Achieving life long learning.	I will direct the learning experiences and ensure that pupils have high quality provision in and out of school.	Involved in creative thinking to innovate pupil learning	It will contribute to creating an environment of excellence in all subject areas	The provision for all learners will be high quality in all aspects of school life and other stakeholders will be more accountable for their contribution.

Kotter describes the eight-stage change process of creating major change. This is where the 3rd step fits into my leadership change- Developing a vision and strategy.

The vision was developed through feedback from SLT, whole school audit, evidence from learning walks, pupil voice and my personal vision. Lead professionals responsible for Gifted and Talented education such as myself, must ask and draw together: “What are we doing well as a school and what do we

need to do to improve our practice?” DCSF, 2009, A Gifted and Talented approach to whole-school improvement

Sharing the vision: this was shared at a whole school INSET (6th Sep 2010). One of the challenges was to measure how much staff would buy into the vision and how well I could effectively influence others. A generic definition of leadership from Bush and Glover (2003), states that it is *“a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. It involves inspiring and supporting others towards the achievement of a vision for the school which is based on clear personal and professional values”*. Reflecting on this statement, I find myself instinctively practising this style of leadership. The types of questions that were considered included;

1. What aspirations does the school have regarding its education of G&T pupils?
2. What will these pupils be encouraged to achieve?
3. How will teachers improve their practice to become “good teachers”?

The Effective Influencing skills workshop was designed to look at the thinking approaches and behaviours that constitute effective influencing. An understanding into people’s underlying motivation and beliefs. And finally, it provided me with a range of accessible techniques and models to enhance my capability in the area of influencing. The usefulness of the logical levels as a diagnostic tool, helped to raise awareness of how to influence others. Through conducting the influencing styles questionnaire, it confirmed what I believed- I have a Visioning style of influencing others. I also used this tool with Heads of Department that I line manage to help them understand their influencing style. This simple tool helped these middle managers to acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses and together through coaching, consideration of how the skills could be increased in particular areas. The force-field analysis is a useful tool to help make decisions at all levels (it influences decisions).

Action Planning

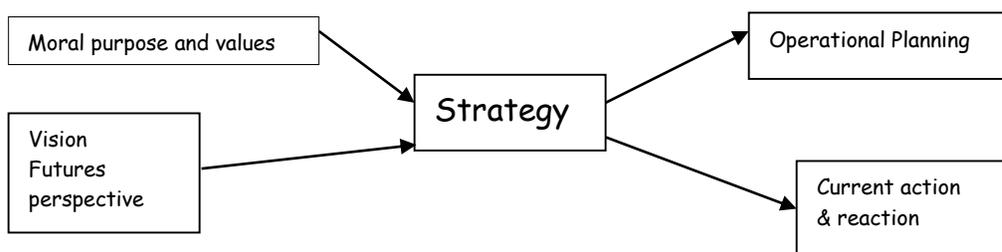
“Action-planning should build on an audit of needs”, DCSF, 2009, A Gifted and Talented approach to whole-school improvement

Departmental and whole school audit : All departments were involved in completing this audit to identify where they were currently, what evidence could be presented to support a criteria and finally to focus on planned future developments.

Follow up of this will be to examine the departmental improvement plans to identify where these actions have been presented. A key question to investigate is “How does the curriculum aim to support and challenge the G&T pupil”.

What are the benefits of action planning? *“It would help you work in a methodical and organized way towards your objectives allowing you to identify priorities. Action plans provide a clear timetable of activities and tasks to help facilitate the effective use of time and resources. It can provide the basis for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of work carried out so far”* (member.goodpractice.net/nclscsleadership/Resources, 01/06/11).

Davies, B (2009) links direction setting as part of what strategic leaders are concerned with. It emphasizes that the function of strategy (action planning) is to translate the moral purpose and vision into reality. This is illustrated below:



“strategy, therefore , is translating the vision and moral purpose into action. It is a delivery mechanism for building the direction and the capacity for the organization to achieve that directional shift or change”. Davies, B (2009) p. 16.

Making it Happen

The main issues identified from the audits were planned for delivery at a whole school INSET on 13th Oct 2010. I delivered this with the local authority advisor where intensive planning was key to a successful outcome.

1. How to provide challenge in lessons – at this INSET (13/10/10) emphasis was placed on use of the Kurt Lewin’s force-field analysis: Decision-making made easy.

“.....the more challenging area of group decision making. Somehow, out of the personality clashes, power struggles and hidden agendas, a perfect solution is expected to emerge...” (Management for the rest of us, Decision Making Psychology Made Simple, www.mftrou.com 02/06/11)

Providing challenge in lessons- this was variable between teachers across different departments. A decision at departmental level about the pros and cons to providing challenge in lessons was needed. The secret of good decision making is figuring out whether the pros outweigh the cons BEFORE you take action (Management for the rest of us, Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis: Decision Making Made Easy, www.mftrou.com 02/06/11). Three easy steps are taken when using this tool and fourth may be needed to help increase the ‘for’ score. The result- a crystal clear decision is derived. The overall decision in our

school was overwhelmingly in agreement that challenge in lessons must be increased if we are to make sustained progress with more able pupils.

Evaluation of the INSET (13th Oct 2010) was carried out by all staff completing a 3-2-1 arranged in the form of a series of 3 open ended questions. One of the advantages of the open ended approach is that the respondents can give much more of their own expectations, hopes and perspectives on the professional development (Craft, A, 2000). I discovered that in some cases their responses included areas which the questions asked did not directly address and so revealed new areas for evaluating. One of the disadvantages however was that, given the individuality of each response, the job of summarising the responses was far more complex.

2. Using data, subject specific criteria and professional judgement – creating the G&T lists.

It was vital that teaching staff were all involved in the creation of the lists as *“allowing greater team member contribution, especially around initiatives that will directly affect them, gives people a sense of inclusion and importance. In the workplace, if people are rarely involved in the decision-making process, or they are not invited to contribute their thoughts and ideas, it’s all too easy to begin to feel like a non-entity, someone that does not matter. This can have serious consequences for creativity, innovation and productivity”* (nclscs-leadership/Resources 01/06/11).

3. Planning for enrichment activities. This has involved many different departments where professional collaboration was vital.

Enrichment activities expand on students' learning in ways that differ from the methods used during the school day. They enhance a student's education by bringing new concepts to light or by using old concepts in new ways. These

activities are fun for the student, but they also impart knowledge. They allow the pupils to apply knowledge and skills stressed in school to real-life experiences.

Measuring the Impact

For this part of my learning, it was essential that before embarking on the project, I was clear about how I was going to measure the effect of change that I was implementing. It was essential that the type of data that I collected, captured the evidence of that change. Adair outlines that if we don't evaluate performance, then there is no material for giving either the group or individual, accurate and helpful feedback. *"The aim of the evaluation is to do better next time- this implies the use of measures, performance indicators and targets"* (Adair. J, 2009, p.33- leadership functions). Below is some of the evidence that captured the change:

1. The impact of training (13/10/11) was measured by carrying out a 3-2-1 plenary.
2. Providing G&T updates at the staff workshop (9/03/11)- various departments provided details about enrichment activities conducted over the year.
3. Evaluations carried out by teachers responsible for providing enrichment activities
4. Regular meetings with attainment managers to track pupil progress by using data to identify underachievement; plan action; monitor; follow up action.
5. Whole school audit
6. Departmental feedback of progress
7. Cohort reviews including G&T pupil progress conducted by SLT.

Overall, I learnt that when I provided feedback of the various aspects of the project, which was shared with staff in various settings; it was vital that it was interesting, enticing, stimulating by using interactive methods by getting everyone involved and inspired.

Future work

To further measure the impact of the project, the following information will be revisited:

The impact of challenge and differentiation in lessons through pupil voice. This will be compared to the pupil voice conducted in Nov 2010. SLT whole school audit in July 2011, to discuss how we have moved on. Departmental audits revisited. Analysis of data and exam results. Have we achieved our vision. Staff opinion on the success of the vision

Every department or team has a role to play; to establish a cross-curricular group of staff, who teach the target group of pupils, and develop trios of teachers to work together. This allows every department to be involved in the project. The target pupils provide a useful focus for measuring the impact of the development work, although improvements and interventions will be of benefit to all (DCSF, 2009, A Gifted and Talented approach to whole-school improvement).

To explore strategic leadership in detail by implementing 5 key activities: direction setting; translating strategy into action; aligning the people and the organization to the strategy; determining effective intervention points; developing strategic capabilities. The modeling of this type of leadership can be used to influence middle leaders.

To improve links with parents to guide them on how to support their child throughout school life. *“Pupils who have good parental support achieve more highly than those who do not. Taking an active interest in their child’s learning is a simple but important element of effective support. Most parents want to do all*

they can to ensure their child achieves well, but they do not always have the knowledge, skills or understanding to provide this help. Effective discussions between home, school and pupil are one of the most effective ways of bridging this gap” National strategies, DCSF, 2009, A Gifted and Talented approach to whole-school improvement p47.

Impact on whole school

- The G&T cohort profile has been raised through INSET/CPD.
- Differentiation in lesson planning and delivery is evident.
- Part of a whole school structure.
- Measuring pupil progress more effectively at all levels.
- Pupil voice.
- Attainment managers involved in leading attainment for specific cohorts.
- Departments are accountable for pupil progress.
- Improved enrichment activities and opportunities for pupils.
- A paradigm shift in school culture. The culture of a school can both influence and be influenced by the professional development of individual teachers (Craft. A, 2000).

My progress as a leader

I believe that I have developed into a strategic leader. So what is a strategic Leadership? Essentially strategic leadership is about creating a vision and setting the direction of the school over the medium to longer term (Davies, B 2010).

My improved confidence in delivering whole school INSET and SLT presentations. As a leader, I have developed my communication skills, Adair points this out – “.....at the first level of leadership you should strive to become competent at briefing your group on objectives and plans. At the senior level you will have to brief the organisation, a much more demanding task”. (Adair, J 1988). He further describes that they are also opportunities for you to create the right *atmosphere*, to promote *teamwork*, and to get to know, encourage and motivate each *individual* person. I have experienced this at many different levels (whole school INSET, senior leadership team meetings, attainment managers meetings, departmental meetings).

Building cross curricular links and developing trusting relationships has enhanced my leadership skills. Leading on G&T across the whole school using a staged approach. Communicating and engaging with a range of stakeholders.

Contributing to the vision and improving pupil progress with G&T pupils by

- Exemplifying best practice for G&T learners in the classroom
- Leading training and developments in learning and teaching; coaching colleagues; embedding CQS
- Leading pupil mentoring, setting targets
- Leading on G&T opportunities beyond the classroom
- Monitoring data
- Acting as an advocate for G&T
- Working with the SLT, governors, HODs and attainment managers
- Ensuring demographic representation of cohort
- Developing, monitoring and updating the G&T Register

And finally, this reflective learning journal concludes with a statement by my coach- Mary Morrison 27/05/11 (Headteacher)....”*Anita is an exceptional individual. She is self driven, highly motivated and has extremely high*

standards. She is easy to inspire as she has a passion for raising the aspirations of students and is always looking for new ideas to undertake this. She is an inspiration to her colleagues and students. The high expectations she has of herself, she demands from those around her. This has a significant impact on whole school initiatives. Over the last two years, Anita has grown from an outstanding Head of department to a 'leading leader' within our school, driving whole school improvement".

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