

Sheringham Primary School, Newham: our journey

The beginning

When I started as head teacher at Sheringham in 2000 the school was sadly stuck in the past. The emphasis was on what the children were going to do but with little structure. Much of my first few years at the school were spent reinvigorating teachers, enhancing teacher subject knowledge (this was at the peak of the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies) and introducing schemes of work. My time had to be spent telling staff what to do and helping them to judge their progress in teaching against a set of criteria.

Partnership teaching – the way forward

I soon realised that some teachers made rapid progress and that others needed to see good practice in action rather than have it described to them. That's when we started with a philosophy that has continued until this day - the development of **partnership teaching**. Since that moment I've always had some of my best teachers not based with their own class but working alongside others. The Sheringham model of partnership teaching is not about team-teaching individual lessons but instead working alongside teachers in one subject for a period of *at least a half term* properly sharing responsibility and accountability for the progress that the pupils make in that time, but also with an ongoing dialogue between the teachers about the impact that their pedagogy is having upon the pupils.

By about 2005, by the criteria of the day, teaching at Sheringham was consistently good, but we still felt there was so much more that we could do. Our best teachers had it absolutely clear what they wanted the pupils to learn, how they were going to guide them towards that learning, how the pupils were going to complete a task that supported the learning and how they were going to tell the pupils whether they had succeeded in the task and what they needed to do to be even better. This wasn't universal though as in many lessons one of these elements was missing. It had however become clear that teachers can only move a certain distance by being told what to do, and the partnership teaching model of teachers working together to improve their practice was having a real impact.

Using 'Formative Assessment in Action' as a development focus

I knew of colleagues who had started working with groups of their staff working together on areas of school life and realised that this was an approach that I wanted to take. It was at that time that I read a review in the TES of Shirley's book 'Formative Assessment in Action'. I seem to remember that the review was positive, but more importantly it struck a chord with where the school was. I had worked with Shirley on a number of her courses at the Institute of Education, University of London in the early nineties, and had always felt that the work that we did then had heavily influenced me when I was a classroom teacher. I bought the book and it taught me some things that I hadn't considered but, far more importantly, it articulated some of the things that I was trying to say to staff far better than I ever could. One of the challenges of improving

learning in a school is getting a shared language - even at the surface you have different terms with similar or exactly the same meaning - formative assessment or assessment for learning, learning intentions or learning objectives. I realise that if we had a shared understanding of the book we also had a shared staff room language of learning.

Using Shirley's book as a key source material for what we were doing also added credibility to how I wanted to move things forward. For years I had been (and still am) very critical of the wording of the learning objectives in QCA schemes of work and National Strategies materials, feeling that they often didn't really describe what the teacher wanted the pupils to learn. After the staff had read the book people realised that I wasn't on a one person mad crusade!

The structure of staff development for each element of formative assessment

The key shift that was needed in teachers was the change from including a range of strategies in your lessons because that's what Ofsted are looking for to **understanding what makes a difference to pupils' learning and becoming a facilitator of this learning**. We had to start simply though, and we decided that we also had to build upon the strengths of the existing teachers. We also decided that we wanted to get good at one element of AfL, then concentrate on the next area, and move things systematically, so we essentially worked through the book one question at a time. We've used the approach below several times since we first started using it and it been refined over the years. Essentially the pattern has been-

1. Read the chapter.
2. Meet to discuss whether what is described in the chapter in groups with each teacher indicating whether they recognise what is being described.
3. Discussing some approaches to trialling something new in classes.
4. Every group member deciding on one element of their practice over the next two or three weeks to focus on.
5. Set up opportunities for a group member to observe one of the other staff - it's important that nothing is written down and given to senior managers at this point as this should be one colleague honestly saying to another ' I'm going to try this today - can you please let me know whether I'm actually doing what I think I'm doing, and whether you can spot whether it is having an impact upon the pupils.'
6. Feedback as a group and then as a whole staff.
7. Consider whether there are things that we now think all staff should be doing, and others that could be optional.

Only once the research period has taken place do we start to think about what our written policy might look like, changing the section of the teaching and learning policy to reflect everyone's thinking.

Non-negotiables

There were a few strategies that we introduced across the school without using action research.

- a) As soon as I arrived at the school I stressed the importance of having a language rich classroom, particularly because of the large number of pupils at the school with English as an additional language.
- b) We started encouraging staff to use talk partners to get pupils to work together. We even did some work in the early 2000s on what makes a good talk partner. This has been an area where we have told staff how to apply the strategies in the classroom, although things have constantly evolved as staff have developed new ideas, particularly because senior staff are continually working alongside others in partnerships. Talk partners became *learning partners* and we then became quite regimented about how regularly they would be changed in classrooms and how they are displayed in a very uniform manner as you move around the school.

Introducing metacognition

Another shift that happened at Sheringham directly after seeing one of Shirley's conferences is our emphasis upon children knowing what makes a good learner. This certainly does not focus on asking the children to define themselves as a learner using one of the many definitions that there are. Our work has been based upon children understanding what makes a good learner, and the habits that a good learner gets into. This is, of course, all intertwined with them having good success criteria to follow and check against. After experimenting over several years we have now developed a very regimented and formatted approach to the start of the school year in every classroom as outlined in fig. x . Experience has shown us that investing three or four days in re-training the children each year has a very positive impact. It also provides classroom display materials that can themselves be continually used to support learning.

Current experimentation with iPads and appletv

We have always been keen to embrace new technologies at Sheringham, sometimes being prepared to invest in them before we were really clear about what impact they would have on learning. When we purchased our first visualisers, for example, they were given to a few staff to explore how they might use them in their classrooms. Our initial thinking was that they would mainly be used for showing worksheets or for use at the end of the lesson. It was once this technology was in the hands of teachers that their full potential became realized. Staff started to develop mini-plenaries and use visualisers to display models of excellence. I believe that we are once again at this stage with iPads and mobile technology. We have invested in iPads and appletv display technology in each classroom and we are at the stage where staff are exploring how to use them with children to enhance learning. This might be a bit haphazard at the moment but by regularly talking to each other we will soon develop a menu of quality uses for them.

New teachers

One of the most interesting parts of our journey has been to see how new teachers have dealt with moving to Sheringham. There are a number of examples of highly competent experienced teachers who were highly rated at their previous school struggling a few terms into their time with us. They find it relatively easy to start using lollipop sticks and learning partners, but are often used to being at the forefront of the lesson. These teachers have often had a clear idea in their own mind what they want the pupils to learn, but more often than not they have been more worried about their teaching than the children's learning. It appears that these staff need to deconstruct how they teach to allow them to really find out what really makes a difference to learning. Usually this is them taking a back seat and letting the children get on with it! Getting the balance right between a clear introduction with a level of modelling that supports the pupil progress, using models of excellence/ high quality success criteria and using mini-plenaries, discussion of pupil work on the visualisers and conferencing with pupils, is incredibly difficult. I've certainly learned that even the best experienced teachers need to spend some time working alongside a Sheringhamised teacher before they really get it!

What matters

The most significant learning that I've had during our journey is that we are on a journey with no destination! Teachers are all different and we should use their strengths and weaknesses. I believe that almost all teachers want to be the best that they can be, but they don't want to be told what to do. They want to believe what they are doing makes a difference. I think this can only come from a culture where the questioning and challenge doesn't come from the leadership within the school, but from a culture where everyone is continually questioning and challenging themselves and others, and by creating a school where it is ok to fail, as long as from that failing there is learning.

Gary Wilkie

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In Year 6, how is my child learning?



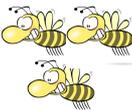
Resilience

Is persistent and doesn't give up when faced with things that are difficult. Tries different approaches to find what works.



Independence

Can work well alone, focusing on the task and ignoring disruptions. Is self-confident and can make their own decisions.



Cooperation

Works well in a team or with a partner, sharing ideas and compromising where needed. They are supportive of others and are a good listener.



Creativity

Is imaginative and comes up with original ideas. They are adaptable and will think of alternative suggestions to problems.



Curiosity

Asks lots of questions and is keen to find out the answer to problems. Enjoys discovering and exploring new things.



Making Links

Makes links between ideas and spots similarities and relationships. Can apply their learning to different settings.



Changing and Learning

Enjoys a challenge and has a belief that they can learn and improve with effort. Is open-minded and flexible.



Strategic Thinking

Makes plans and follows them, thinking carefully about the next steps. Is organised, prepared and analytical.



General Comment

