

THE LEADING EDGE SERIES

Exploring the  
Territory

02  
part



National College for  
School Leadership

# part 2

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# Exploring the Territory

This section consists of cases studies of leadership learning groups in England and Wales, the key characteristics which emerge from them and a summary of international perspectives on effective collaborative leadership learning.

## **Case Study 1**

Primary headteachers engage in collaborative action research for impact on learning in their schools.

## **Case Study 2**

Special school heads develop peer coaching and a focus on learning from an initial commitment to honesty and mutual support.

## **Case Study 3**

Primary, special and secondary school heads engage in change management supported by coaching, consultancy and wider development opportunities for leadership teams.

## **Case Study 4**

A large group of school leaders engage in leadership learning activities to raise attainment strategically linked with wider development opportunities in their schools.

## **Case Study 5**

Infant, junior, primary and middle school headteachers across a wide geographical area work together with a clear focus on improving teaching and learning through coaching.

## **Key Characteristics**

An analysis of powerful common features emerging from the case studies.

## **International Perspectives**

A practical summary of broader themes.

The five case studies have been developed through dialogue with headteachers, facilitators and others involved in leadership learning groups. You can either read them for personal reflection or use them interactively.

We suggest that you select two or three of the case studies and use them with **Learning Frame 2** to explore the common characteristics of the groups, including shared values, practice and principles. Following your discussion, you may find it helpful to review our analysis of **Key Characteristics** and **International Perspectives**.

**Learning Frame 2: Exploring the Territory**

What are the common characteristics of leadership learning groups in the case studies?

What are the major points of difference?

What seems to enable them to work well?

What other issues and questions emerge from the case studies?

How do these compare with our own experience of leadership learning groups?

What are the main points of difference/similarity?

# Case Study 1

## Background

In 1999, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation funded an enquiry-based project for primary school headteachers in an urban area of South Wales. This grew from a fruitful relationship between an experienced school leader and an academic researcher and built on a well-established partnership with the LEA. Eight schools participated on an invitational but centrally co-ordinated basis, and headteachers worked as equal partners. The group was externally facilitated, made effective use of local expertise, was overseen by a steering group which provided critical friendship, and was externally evaluated.

Underlying the project was a belief that “increasing the effectiveness of headteachers would result in more committed, knowledgeable and skilled teachers”. It worked through action research to promote “a culture of openness and collaboration within the school” with considerable emphasis on empowering, guiding, monitoring and evaluating the wider impact on school improvement.

The external evaluator concluded that “the project really had helped heads stand back from their roles and responsibilities to explore their practice in ways they had not experienced before”. It had been a “unique experience” generating “great enthusiasm” and outcomes which were both “impressive and encouraging”.

## Process

- **Regular seminars**

The group explored aspects of leadership theory and research methodology through readings and presentations and gave accounts of their action research.

- **School visits**

Headteachers visited each other's schools and developed coaching relationships – also supported by visits from the steering group.

- **Personal reflection**

The project placed considerable emphasis on personal reflective space both through a reflective journal and by recognising the need for thinking space within the school day.

- **Feedback**

The group used 360-degree feedback techniques, produced newsletters and set up a conference to celebrate and share their work.

- **Clear focus**

A clear focus on leadership learning meant, for heads, “developing understanding of themselves as headteachers”. Through this, the group’s work moved from the comparatively safe world of ‘what we are doing in my school project’ to ‘what I think and feel’, ‘how I interact’ and ‘the impact of my actions on staff and pupils’. In the early stages this was an area they found challenging – it was not easy to see, understand and articulate their own leadership roles, but important growth was taking place:

At the core of the improvement was the exploration and development of the ‘intrapersonal’ and the ‘interpersonal’: ie of the ‘inner world’ of values and feelings and the ‘outer world’ of how headteachers relate to staff. For example, several headteachers focused on the issue of delegation. For these headteachers it was through exploring their underlying fears about ‘losing control’ that they began to take the first tentative steps towards what can be described as ‘fundamental’ growth and change. (Maynard, 2001)<sup>4</sup>

Other points of growth were identified as greater openness, reflection, awareness of the aspirations of staff, and a re-conceptualisation of continuing professional development as doors were opened and cultures changed.

## Perspectives

From the heads' perspective, development of trust was considered crucial to success. There was "tremendous bonding" and "relationships of trust" which grew to personal friendship. Seminars, which were "unlike anything I'd been involved in before", engaged and sustained the heads' interest. There was a feeling that "people were not on their own" and that learning was unique and personal:

"I'd learnt something about me."

There was a clear recognition that schools and leaders were different:

"I've learnt that the different contexts and cultures in which heads work is the rock on which school improvement is built."

Finally, the project had a sense of a learning journey and provided time both for collaborative learning and individual, reflective space:

"The teachers and leaders grew with their schools."

## Issues and questions

This funded project provided a wide range of opportunities for a small group of headteachers. How do you sustain the work of such groups or do collaborative learning groups need to dissolve and reform in new, dynamic ways?

<sup>4</sup>Maynard, (2001), *Chain Reaction: Head Teachers, Teachers and Action Research*, Esmee Fairbairn Final Project Report

# Case Study 2

## Background

With the establishment of an urban unitary authority, eight headteachers of special schools, who shared similar values, formed a mutual support group. One took the lead, as she was concerned by the number of headteachers of special schools who were leaving the profession as a result of stress in the workplace. (Ten out of eighteen special school headteachers had resigned or retired in the recent past.)

The headteachers in the group shared an understanding of the complexities of their role and agreed that if they were open and honest with each other it would be mutually supportive. The original aims of the group were to:

- provide personal peer support
- ensure continuity of special education in the county, without competition between schools
- establish a united special school voice in the LEA
- consult with each other about leadership and management issues – such as pay, performance and target setting
- support each other professionally to promote strong leadership of learning and teaching

## Process

- **Termly meetings and annual residentials**

The first meeting of the group was described as “quite remarkable” as the members of the group established a climate of honesty where individual fears and problems could be shared for the first time. The group now meets for a whole day once a term and holds an annual residential. Speakers are invited to address issues such as The Heart and Art of Headship. In the past, the LEA has paid for all the meetings except the residential. This source of funding has now been reduced and the group is considering ways in which it can continue to fund its activities.



- **External independent facilitator**

The facilitator is paid for by the group. She arranges the meetings and draws up the agenda in response to issues raised by the members. A typical agenda includes:

- personal reflections (10 minutes from each member on their own school)
- critical incidents exercise in triads (professional reflection, with feedback)
- issues for discussion – which are prioritised according to the urgency of the issue

There is no LEA involvement, although representatives of the LEA are sometimes invited to the meetings.

- **Feedback**

Ongoing feedback is an important part of the process and there is regular telephone contact between members of the group.

- **Clear focus**

The focus for the group continues to be related to leadership by the headteacher and the leadership team. As a result, roles within schools have been clarified and staff and governors are encouraged to question and challenge. There is evidence to suggest that leadership teams are taking on a wider role and that headteachers no longer feel that they “have to know everything”. A chair of governors’ and headteachers’ group has been set up in parallel to the original group and this, in turn, influences the work of governing bodies.

- **Self-sustaining and committed membership**

The group is self-sustaining and there is a high level of commitment from the members resulting in almost 100 per cent attendance at the meetings. Despite local disagreements, the group is convinced of the benefits of a collaborative approach, which contributes to its strength and effectiveness. A similar approach is now being applied, across the member schools, to other groups such as subject leaders.

### Perspectives

The headteachers identified trust and honesty as essential factors contributing to the success of their group. It was “very heartening to hear others talk about their problems” and realise that “I am not alone”:

“If you are not honest there is no point in doing it.”

By working collaboratively the headteachers brought a different perspective to their own school and contributed to the development of others:

“I bring the outside picture to the vision of the school.”

“I act as a change agent: I can share my knowledge that the same thing is happening in my school.”

There was a greater understanding of their own leadership role and of strategies they could use to fulfil this role. Time for structured reflection away from school (personal time and critical incidents) was seen as an important part of the professional development process:

“It’s a measure of where you are. As a headteacher you can’t see where you are.”

“As the leader in the school you are there to be shot down.”

The group had been formed to help reduce the amount of stress upon the headteachers and still fulfilled this function:

“Someone listened to me.”

“The role of the headteacher is difficult/impossible, so we need to make it manageable. It’s impossible to do this without the support of my colleagues.”

However, the group has evolved from being simply supportive, to being primarily concerned with professional leadership development:

“I am more analytical now, learning from my mistakes.”

“You realise you keep on learning. I use a range of leadership styles and question more.”

This is attributed to the fact that the group is driven by the needs of its members rather than any external agents. Group norms have been established and “if something is undermining the group, we tackle it.” The facilitator has no role in directing the group but “keeps us to task and chips in with advice”.

### Issues and questions

The funding available to the group is being reduced, raising questions of sustainability in its present form. There is also a general recognition of the importance of nurturing good group dynamics, whilst acknowledging the inevitable tensions that may arise in inducting new members into the existing tightly knit group. Can the group continue to grow and evolve or will it need to dissolve and reform?

# Case Study 3

## Background

Following a successful bid for Education Action Zone (EAZ) status in 1998, the chief executive of the zone proposed a team building programme involving a residential to hand over ownership of the EAZ to headteachers. The residential was a turning point for the group, which then comprised 15 primary, two secondary and two special school headteachers. During the residential, the headteachers designed a Zone Rocket, which identified the vision and key aims of the zone. They also requested an in-depth leadership programme.

The agreed aims of the leadership programme were to:

- explore leadership in depth in order to develop change leadership and transformational skills at all levels
- share ideas and have common questions answered
- explore innovative ways of leading schools
- support one another
- work to recruit governors
- enable all schools to achieve the Investors in People award

## Process

The focus was on “opening up thinking, which leads to action” and to “think beyond day-to-day management”. To support these objectives a menu of interactive activities was available.

- **Coaching and development**
  - Bi-monthly professional management coaching sessions for headteachers run by external management consultants who usually work with business organisations.
  - A six-day Change Leaders programme for leadership teams and a parallel programme for headteachers.

- A team leaders' programme for primary and secondary schools, which takes place over three days and five twilight sessions. One junior school held a Super Learning Day and teachers from other schools visited to see how the work was linked to accelerated learning.

- **Consultancy**

Schools were offered up to seven days organisational development consultancy. This includes an audit of their current position, feedback from stakeholders and is followed up by a strategy development day.

More recently secondary schools have also been offered support/consultancy on transformational change, emotional intelligence workshops for all headteachers and additional funding for some schools to offer training to leadership teams.

- **Regular workshops**

Through these initiatives, the EAZ invested heavily in building up a group of headteachers who work as a collaborative group. All meet monthly, together with an annual residential meeting and additional strategy events.

- **Facilitation and funding**

The headteachers recognised the need for a facilitator who organises the meetings and brings in high-quality trainers, as well as the importance of additional funding to support the initiative. Headteachers are, however, increasingly willing to contribute funding to maintain the momentum and have agreed to pay membership fees to the group from 2003 onwards. Part of the process has involved training coaches and trainers from within the group and the current Change Leaders programme is co-facilitated by one of the headteachers. The EAZ works in close co-operation with the LEA and the chief executive of the zone has been fully involved in headteacher and governor recruitment.

## Perspectives

The leadership programme is credited with making a fundamental change in the competence and confidence of the headteachers in the zone:

“Good headteachers are coming into the zone, there are no unfilled headships.”

“It has been about a culture change.”

“We have developed a critical mass within the schools and there is the spark to spread it.”

“The zone has moved from having 14 schools in serious weaknesses to just one.”

“I didn’t become a headteacher to manage buildings and budgets, I want to make a difference to young people.”

“The level of challenge has made some headteachers reflect on whether they are in the right place.”

Headteachers recognise the value of working collaboratively and having structured time to receive constructive feedback and reflect on their practice:

“People come back and reflect on their own institutions.”

“It’s allowed me to step outside and reflect, I am better at evaluating now. I think out of the box and ask ‘What if?’”

“A genuine honesty and trust emerges.”

“We can share concerns, raise questions and support one another.”

“Sharing common issues has been of value, it’s built up trust.”

The notion of having a collective agenda that is responsive to the needs of the schools was seen as being crucial to the effectiveness of the group.

A Headteacher and Chair of Governors Day has been held on ‘How do you respond as leaders to amalgamating schools?’ The introduction of the leadership programme itself was at the request of the headteachers, although the chief executive designed the content.

An ability to understand oneself and others emerged as an essential attribute for an effective leader and a collaborative group member:

“It’s not easy to affect headteachers who are close and defensive.”

“The leadership team has got rid of lots of emotional baggage; they are now all working on the same thing. It’s more enjoyable and upbeat.”

One headteacher cited the emotional intelligence training as being the most significant part of the leadership programme and others recognised the important part that it had played in their own professional development and that of the school:

“It helped people work together as a team, they know others have emotional intelligence awareness and it has impacted on relationships and the way people operate.”

“Both myself and my literacy co-ordinator are much more enthusiastic. There is more a feeling of looking to the future.”

“My way of dealing with staff and parents has improved. I am better at listening and thinking through.”

### Issues and questions

How does the group support and challenge members who are unwilling or unable to participate in the leadership programme? How is a balance of time achieved between the opportunities and demands of the group and the implementation of ideas, leadership and management of a school?

# Case Study 4

## Background

This EAZ in the north of England comprises 13 primary schools, two special schools and three secondary schools. Initially the group lacked cohesion: some of the primary schools were suspicious of the secondary schools, some of the secondaries thought the primaries were intransigent and the special schools felt a degree of isolation from the mainstream. For several of the headteachers there was a history of diverse personal and professional views and the majority saw the zone simply as an access to additional funding.

The headteachers' initial expectations had been quite low:

“There was cynicism – yet another government initiative.”

“I didn't want anything to do with it at first, then thought it would be a useful honey pot, now I recognise that it has made a profound difference from the bottom up.”

The development of leadership and management was seen as central to the purpose of the EAZ and formed an explicit part of the Zone Action Plan. There was a common understanding that one of the aims of the EAZ was to “increase leadership effectiveness in order to raise school performance”. A comprehensive programme for the development of leadership was devised to impact on all tiers of management and promote collaborative working across the initiatives.

## Process

The leadership programme comprised a number of different strands, designed to interlink and create a productive synergy. Participation was voluntary and the uptake was very high. These included:

- **Facilitated monthly headteacher meetings**

Headteachers had regular opportunities to reflect upon and evaluate the activities in their school. There was a degree of challenge from other headteachers and the director of the zone, who acts as facilitator.



- **Headteachers' five-day residential programme on managing professionals for performance improvement**

Each headteacher received 360-degree feedback from their colleagues in school in a process led by the director and a firm of consultants. They developed a common vocabulary related to their leadership behaviour and shared an understanding of the key variables that impact on school performance.

- **Five-day leadership team residential programme**

Between two and eight members of schools' leadership teams attended. The headteachers joined their leadership teams on the penultimate day and they drew up a leadership team action plan, in addition to the individual action plans drawn up by each participating member. Follow up meetings were held back in school with ongoing monitoring of the impact within and across the zone.

- **Bursaries for National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) candidates**

Over half the schools in the EAZ now have at least one NPQH candidate, totalling 18 across the zone. Two candidates attend the monthly headteacher meetings to outline their individual school improvement project. A small bursary is provided by the EAZ for each candidate and is conditional upon him or her sharing their good practice across the zone. Presentations to the meetings provide an opportunity to practise skills of leadership.

- **Monthly EAZ co-ordinator meetings**

These focus on extending their role beyond the purely administrative to encompass raising attainment. This included learning to motivate and encourage, and meeting representatives from other schools.

- **Learning groups**

These have explored transition, gender and performance and challenging the more able. Membership includes senior leaders, including several headteachers. The meetings are chaired and facilitated by their members and they research and report on good practice to the monthly headteacher meetings.

- **Programme of coaching on emotional intelligence**

In the first phase, headteachers and senior leaders received feedback on their own emotional intelligence competencies. At a follow-up day which has been planned, each participant will prepare to coach a member of his or her school staff. After six months, participants will receive feedback on their coaching. In the future, they may also work as coaches in other zone schools.

Underpinning all the initiatives is a belief that leadership and management impact upon school improvement and that this, in turn, contributes to raising standards.

### Perspectives

The external evaluator of the leadership programme concluded that: “Headteachers are very positive about the leadership and management activities provided by the EAZ and also believe that these have contributed to raising achievement in schools.” “Most heads commented on the value of working with other zone heads and thought the atmosphere of trust that has grown within the zone to be related to this... Several spoke of the importance of working together rather than competing, in order to produce the best possible level of achievement for children within the zone.”

There was general agreement that several other aspects had also contributed to the success of the leadership programme. These included:

- **Increased self-awareness and understanding of the importance of professional relationships to effective leadership**

“Knowing how to develop the SMT is key. You can’t just assume they will all fit in. They haven’t had the same shared experience.”

“You can’t just stick headteachers together. There has to be something that makes us want to work together, a common purpose.”

“I feel very positive. I developed greater self-awareness and also gathered information on the perception of others.”

“I now have a staff view and know how to reach them.”

“There is an enhanced relationship between senior managers.”

- **The need for a sustained challenge and sense of shared purpose**

In relation to the headteachers' programme one head said, "Our vulnerability on arrival helped - it was not comfortable but it was important and it made us stop and listen."

"The group was functioning OK before the programme, but suddenly in a very exposed way we were baring our skills."

"We all had to be courageous if we were to make this work. We are now much more working as a group with the same goals."

"It has not just been about the money. She (the director) is not soft and challenges everyone."

- **The key role of the facilitator**

"Leadership experience is on a continuum because she keeps it spinning."

"[The facilitator] focuses thinking and deals with individual schools."

"It has come together better than I thought it would. It used to be a mismatch of self-glory and vision. (She) gelled it and discussed it with us – reframed and helped us to understand what we wanted."

## Issues and questions

How can the group ensure that headteachers newly appointed into EAZ schools will be able to integrate into a well-established group with a high degree of shared learning and experience?

How can leadership learning be sustained as a priority at the end of the five years of the EAZ?

How do we balance involvement in development initiatives that may require a significant number of the leadership team to be out of school at any one time with the need for high profile and sustained presence within school?

# Case Study 5

## Background

When 14 schools from four different education authorities obtained grant maintained status, they all realised that, in the words of one of the headteachers, they “were on a massive learning curve and feeling pretty isolated”. They approached their LEA which provided an adviser/inspector to draw together the separate schools into a group and facilitate their needs.

When grant maintained schools were disestablished, 15 schools decided to remain together, fund the facilitation of the group from their school budgets and develop their own title and identity. They were a group of infant, first, primary and middle schools ranging in size from 155 to 644 pupils on roll. They served different communities, including Muslim, rural and stockbroker belt.

In 1999, the group submitted a bid to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for additional funding to support a fixed-term programme for leadership development under the Heads You Win initiative. The group had moved beyond the “price of bins type meetings” and began to use the development of monitoring and classroom observation skills as a means of extending leadership and management and raising standards.

The one-year project aimed “to develop the skills of the headteachers in evaluating classroom practice and in providing constructive feedback, with performance targets for improving teaching”.

## Process

Within the Heads You Win project, the following processes emerged:

- **External facilitation**  
Existing external facilitator offered advice and expertise and assigned a trained adviser/inspector to each headteacher.
- **Self-evaluation**  
Headteachers completed a self-evaluation sheet about their existing skills in monitoring and evaluation and were observed by the inspectors to establish a baseline of heads’ strengths and weaknesses.

- **Regular workshops and conferences**

Termly group sessions were held plus a two-day residential on issues such as effective teaching and learning, teachers' planning, interaction in the classroom and evaluating attainment and progress.

- **Focus on pupils' learning**

The 15 schools became training venues for heads to observe teachers objectively. Headteachers practised their observation skills and received internet and email training.

There were paired evaluations of classroom practice by heads coached by the inspectors and feedback was given to teachers. Headteachers were trained to scrutinise pupils' work and evaluated the term's work and planned future action.

The next two terms followed a similar pattern: a two-day residential conference, opportunities for headteachers to practise skills in their own schools, paired observations of teaching and learning with feedback to the teachers and communication between the headteachers using emails, a conference site and the telephone.

The final term involved paired observations and feedback to staff in two other schools and a final assessment of each headteachers' progress with suggestions for future steps.

The heads now use the same coaching style to train team leaders in classroom observation, monitoring, evaluation and feedback. One school is undertaking staff development, which is utilising the core of the heads in the group linked with an NPQH school improvement project.

Following the Heads You Win project, some schools have joined the group for a particular issue and, on the agreement of the whole group, a small number of new headteachers have been invited to join.

## Perspectives

The learning group has been described by one of its members as “organic”, generating a strong feeling from the headteachers that it was important enough “to give up time and energy to, because it meets our needs”. Two headteachers also commented on the way in which a climate of “mutual trust and respect” enabled members to “support and positively criticise each other” as they are a “hard-edged group – very direct with one another”. The external evaluator for the Heads You Win project concluded that the learning group is “a cohesive group of high quality professionals (who) support and challenge one another, placing great trust in each other, honouring commitments to the project, to one another and to their schools”.

The importance of an effective facilitator was emphasised. The role was described as “essential” by one headteacher, despite the length of time that the group has been in existence. The steering group carries out regular administrative work, but the facilitator “asks questions, interjects and is quite strict”. He is also responsible for engaging trainers and coaches for the group.

As a group, they only felt able to undertake the Heads You Win project “because the funding was realistic and meant that they could participate without their schools suffering”. The financial support being available over a period of a year was cited by participants as “vital to giving depth to their development” (external evaluator’s report).

Some headteachers also spoke of the value of visiting each other’s schools, despite the fact that they found it difficult to be objective when giving feedback to a teacher in a different school.

## Issues and questions

This is a long-established group with a gradually ageing core membership. How will new members be integrated? Will the group survive?

How might the quality of the learning diminish if funding were to be reduced?

Does the role of the facilitator change and evolve as the heads grow in competence and confidence?

# Learning from the Studies

Viewed together, the case studies generate quite powerful messages about what we need to do to create and sustain vibrant leadership learning groups. These are summarised in the next section.

To use them interactively, use or adapt **Learning Frame 3**.

Finally, **International Perspectives** concludes this section and provides a broader summary of broader international thinking on how to create conditions for and expectations of collaborative leadership learning.

## Learning Frame 3: Key Characteristics

Where do the **Key Characteristics** confirm our thinking?  
What additional ideas are here?

Now, as a group, identify one statement which you feel is particularly difficult to achieve. Imagine a leadership learning group where this is fully in place.

What exactly does this look like in practice?  
What needs to occur to enable this to happen?

# Key Characteristics

## Background

- Groups were formed by individuals opting in.
- Groups varied in size from 8 to 20 members. Fifteen is considered the optimum maximum size for an effective group.
- All groups had access to external funding in their initial stages and some chose to maintain the group by making contributions from school finances.
- Headteachers were equal partners within the group.
- The make-up of groups (cross phase or phase specific, local or wide geographical area) did not appear to be a determinant of group effectiveness. The major contributory factor was the commitment of the members to “make it work”.
- Frequently the groups had formed as mutual support groups, but had evolved into leadership learning communities.

## Process

- A climate of trust, respect and openness was seen as an essential prerequisite.
- The members decided the general focus of the groups’ agendas.
- External facilitation. Facilitators were selected because of their experience, expertise and skills. They were useful in introducing new ideas and challenging leaders, causing some to reflect on whether they were in the right place.
- High importance was attached to the relevance of the agenda, processes and learning in relation to each individual’s school context.
- Learning together and from one another was integral to the way in which the groups worked.
- Development of ICT skills to enhance communication within the group was important.
- An annual residential meeting and regular meetings were viewed as fundamental.
- Some other successful strategies used by different groups included an internet community, learning logs and school visits.
- All the groups had developed an experiential, cyclical, learning process, which included elements of reflection, sharing, feedback, coaching and challenge.



# International Perspectives

To be in an authentic relationship means that we provide long-term support for one another, challenging one another to improve and to question our current perceptions, and to learn together. Attention to relationship is critical.

Leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively (Lambert, 1998)<sup>5</sup>.

International research offers a broader perspective on collaborative learning, offered in summary form here.

If collaborative leadership learning activities are to be effective and meaningful, headteachers need to:

- Establish regular and frequent seminars. Make learning a priority and take personal responsibility for it. Allocate and protect time for learning and informed reflection. Identify and be explicit about your shared values and common purposes.
- Focus on learning about learning and nothing else. Make this your shared core purpose. Recognise the symbolism of head as lead learner. After all, if you don't learn, why should anybody else?
- Recognise that leadership learning requires structure, leadership and skilled external facilitation. People need to commit to long-term participation through offering resources to make it happen.
- You don't create a culture of trust and shared values, then begin to work together. You develop a collaborative culture by working together, through external facilitation and a relentless focus on instructional issues.
- In the early stages, win hearts and minds by surfacing immediate perceptions. After all, people come from different contexts, with different experiences and needs. Ensure that each seminar is affirmative and makes you feel good about the job you do rather than bad about what you don't. The challenge will grow from this.
- Make it relevant. Meet in schools where you can, and agree your programme as a group. Look together at children's work, your own work and research on a regular basis to learn to derive theory from practice. Visit each other's schools using agreed approaches and develop longer-term coaching relationships.

- Build accountability to yourselves, to the group and to the people in your school. Always ask what difference it makes. This will help to sustain your work as a group.
- Strive for deep learning, reach beyond shallow exchanges of information. Establish protocols about trust, confidentiality, about how to listen and value outside voices, how to question and how to challenge. Recognise that this is a journey, provide space for personal reflection and learn the value of giving and receiving meaningful feedback.
- Get into the habit of using pre-readings, study groups, enquiry and other well researched learning processes to enable you to construct knowledge together and apply it in the context of your own school

10. Make your learning seminars events that nobody can afford to miss.

When leaders meet regularly and reinforce changes in their thinking by using evidence from their practice, the possibility of real change increases (Mohr, 1998)<sup>5</sup>.

### Core beliefs for principals' learning (Mohr, 1998)<sup>6</sup>

- Principals' learning is personal yet takes place most effectively whilst working in groups.
- Principals foster more powerful staff and student learning by focusing on their own learning.
- While we honour principals' thinking and voices, we want to push principals to move beyond their assumptions.
- Focused reflection takes time away from 'doing the work' and yet is essential.
- It takes strong leadership in order to have truly democratic learning.
- Rigorous planning is necessary for flexible and responsive implementation.
- New learning depends on protected dissonance. Providing a safe setting within which to stretch makes all the difference.

Nancy Mohr

<sup>5</sup> Lambert, L, 1998, *Building Leadership Capacity*, ASCD

<sup>6</sup> Mohr, N, 1998, *Creating Effective Study Groups for Principals' Educational Leadership*, ASCD