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Helping schools¹ to use evidence on Joint Practice Development to improve their practice

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Resource

This short paper summarises the key research evidence on Joint Practice Development (JPD) to help teaching school leaders and teachers design JPD across the teaching school alliances in order to bring about long term sustainable improvement.

What is Joint Practice Development?

Joint Practice Development was the term suggested by Fielding et al², in their research on transfer of practice between individuals, small teams, schools, LAs and others. They defined it as the process of learning new ways of working through mutual engagement that opens up and shares practices with others. The process of mutual development and 'co-constructing' new ways of working goes beyond the traditional view of transferring knowledge or best practices that do not necessarily lead to improvement. The mutual learning that takes place in JPD may involve some transfer or exchange of knowledge but will always lead to some development of practice.

What types of knowledge and practice should be exchanged?

Promoting JPD raises the question of what should be developed, what should be regarded as good evidence and practice, and how the exchange and further use of bad evidence or practice might be limited? High quality synthesis of research with a specific focus that draws on quality assured studies in order to establish greater trust in the overall findings can support JPD. However, areas in which little or no such evidence is readily available or where locally-generated evidence is supportive, may also be progressed through JPD. Higher education partners and the National College research and development (R&D) projects can help schools in judging which types of evidence strengthen further development.

¹ We refer to teaching schools throughout, but most of what is said applies equally to schools and academies generally. Most of the approaches to JPD apply equally to different phases.

² Fielding, M, Bragg, S, Craig, J, Cunningham, I, Erait, M, Gillinson, S, Horne, M, Robinson, C & Thorp, J, 2005, Factors Influencing the Transfer of Good Practice, Nottingham, DFES Publications

Ten key messages from research about JPD

In summary, the literature suggests that the following ten processes are key to supporting effective JPD across a teaching school alliance:

1. **Clearly articulated aims and improvement priorities** frame effective JPD.

Implications for practice: Each alliance partner draws on its wider school community to prioritise aims and to evaluate and revise these regularly – through student surveys, staff meetings, discussions between governors and staff, and governors and students.

2. **Developing trust is crucial** for effective JPD in which mutual challenge is involved. JPD involves engaging in observation and evaluation of teachers' practice rather than merely exchanging information which is the current dominant form of CPD for most teachers.

Implications for practice: School leaders need to demonstrate the spirit of partnership through modelling the actions and working on challenges that will assist in securing others to act similarly. Trust grows as successful development is experienced.

3. **Building on existing relationships and networks** is the most effective strategy for JPD. Acknowledging established relationships in order to build on these provides a strong basis for JPD. Assumptions that the network participants share a common understanding of aims, roles and functions needs to be verified.

Implications for practice: Identifying and analysing how people and activities in the alliance are connected provides a basis for targeting action. Established relationships can be mapped, by drawing a diagram of the networks in which the schools participate and identifying 'gaps'.

4. **Developing effective networks** requires careful thinking and planning by school leaders in order to coordinate the work of alliances and support teachers' practice.

Implications for practice: Develop a mutual understanding about how different networks support the R&D activities of the alliance. A clear distinction should be made between a network as a 'delivery service' that supports JPD based in other forms of interaction, or participation in the network itself being the core JPD activity.

5. **Recognition of respective roles and contributions** of schools is critical to success.

Implications for practice: Mutual partners each have something to offer and gain, avoiding the negative effects of 'badging' that attributes higher status to one partner. The teaching school can 'broker' the relationships that best make use of resources across the alliance.

6. **Multilevel (distributed) and multisite leadership** should be viewed as essential.

Implications for practice: School leaders provide the big picture, setting the vision, encouraging participation and locating necessary resources. Multilevel steering groups of staff and students lead specific areas of activity while network facilitators ensure that the JPD is designed, developed, focused and sustained.

7. **Challenge and support** is vital to building capacity for sustainable JPD, achieved through approaches such as lesson study, which can lead to significant student gains.

Implications for practice: Reciprocal coaching, peer lesson observation across schools and lesson study provide challenge by opening up teaching practice to feedback from others. Using video enables peer observation and coaching to be more easily integrated into teachers' busy daily lives.

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8. **Knowledge that meets local needs** significantly improves JPD. When CPD is based in the classrooms of the teachers involved, better student and teacher outcomes are achieved.

Implications for practice: The teaching alliances are identifying their own priorities and using existing research or conducting their own research to address these needs. They will be involved in the design, delivery and follow-up activities associated with the research.

9. **Student participation in decision-making and governance** enhances the effectiveness of JPD. Recent evaluations suggest that students' participation in governing bodies and staff appointments establish ownership and leadership in the school leading to better outcomes.

Implications for practice: Student involvement as JPD partners through governance, leadership and evaluating teaching and learning will challenge schools to improve. Students will need opportunities to be 'trained' in observation and feedback.

10. **Addressing competing priorities** by supporting schools to integrate these effectively is vital. School-to-school learning benefits when initiative overload is counteracted by school leaders, creating cohesion, by adopting new initiatives to pursue already planned changes.

Implications for practice: JPD is not an additional extra but a means of increasing capacity and synergies across activities. The benefits experienced will convince schools that JPD can reduce rather than exacerbate competing priorities.

These points are drawn from research evidence which is detailed in the longer version that can be accessed at: <https://network.nationalcollege.org.uk/groups/20771/resources>

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