

Continuous teacher professional development through collaboration

[Profession](#), [Teacher](#)



The School as a Learning Environment

Introduction

A positive acquisition environment can be described as an environment in which a community of scholars dwelling of kids and grownups work together to supply, promote and prolong their ain and one another 's acquisition (Barth, 2001: 31) . In this essay the writer, pulling from professional experience in an Irish primary school context and mentioning to relevant literature, will sketch the cardinal features of schools that are positive learning environments. It will be outlined how devolved leading affecting all teaching staff ; supplying students with a voice singschool policies and their ain acquisition ; a physical environment which enables and encourages larning ; advancing uninterrupted teacher professional development through coaction ; and steps to affect all parents in the administration of the school and in heightening their kids 's, and through the procedure their ain, larning are cardinal features of schools that are positive learning environments. It will besides be highlighted how factors such as opposition to alter among school forces, dysfunctional staff relationships and recent Irish Government policies are common obstructions to gaining such environments.

Teacher Leadership

With a invariably increasing work load and duty `` the demands and challenges of prima schools are merely excessively great for any one individual (the principal) " (Stoll, 2009: 122) . As Barth (2001) notes principals need aid in `` carry throughing this impossible occupation description " (p. 84) . One possible solution to this state of affairs is

devolved leading whereby teaching staff are provided with leading functions and duties in the running of the school. Much has been written in educational literature recommending this engagement of instructors in leading functions (Callan, 2006: 214 ; Harris, 2008: 31 ; Sergiovanni, 1992 ; Stoll and Fink, 1996: 52 ; The Teaching Council, 2010 ; Tuohy, 1999: 166) . Cases in which instructors can take include take parting in the creative activity of a school vision and associated policies, determining course of study for the school, planning and prima staff development activities, prosecuting in determinations about how finacess should be allocated and engaging new instructors (Barth, 2001: 88) . The writer 's school has started this procedure of instructor leaders with greater duty being given to the in school direction squad, which consists of instructors who hold Posts ofResponsibility, sing determinations about school policies, but this is merely a first measure every bit in order for schools to accomplish maximal good results `` all instructors must take " (Barth, 2001: 85) .

This teacher leading can take to a positive acquisition environment in legion ways. It can assist to prolong and advance instructor committedness and motive to the school as they are involved in doing determinations which affect them (Fullan, 2003: 38) , which can besides promote instructors to alter their schoolroom pattern which is important to school betterment (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991: 23) . This leading function can fix instructors for the function of chief instead than all of a sudden puting them unprepared into this place subsequently in their calling (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991: 20) and enable these teacher leaders to larn as they can larn through the

experiences of leading (Barth, 2001: 82) . It has been argued that if instructors are provided with leading functions they in bend will supply leading functions for students turning the school into a more democratic environment with less subject jobs and higher student accomplishment (Barth, 2001: 80) and that better determinations are made as a consequence of scattering determination doing sing school issues such as subject processs and professional development (ibid: 82) . This leading function besides adds assortment to the instructor 's function and can enable them to act upon the lives of grownups every bit good as students (ibid: 83) . Sharing leading can besides enable the principal to go a scholar in this acquisition environment as he can larn through coaction with these instructor leaders (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991: 122) . As Barth (2001) notes `` A school civilization hospitable to widespread leading will be a school civilization hospitable to widespread acquisition " (p. 81) .

Pupil Voice

Equally good as supplying instructors with greater duty through leading functions another cardinal feature of a positive acquisition environment is one in which students are given greater duty by apportioning them a voice sing school policy and their ain acquisition. The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) states `` States Parties shall guarantee to the kid who is capable of organizing his or ain positions the right to show those positions freely in all affairs impacting the kid a^! . " (Article 12) . Irish Policy recognised this right with the publication of the National Children 's Strategy (2000) which aims to make `` An Ireland where kids are respected

as immature citizens with a valued part to do and a voice of their own. " (Department of Health and Children, 2000: 10) . An obvious context for kids to exert this voice is sharing their school experiences as a consequence of the big part of their lives they spend in school (Devine, 2004: 112) .

Opportunities for students to be given this voice in school include affecting them in building and taking part in their own acquisition by supplying feedback to instructors on lessons and how students learned and ways the instructor could do the lesson more ambitious or gratifying (Claxton, 2008: 157) and by putting up pupil councils to discuss school policies and processes (McLoughlin, 2004) . This voice can even travel every bit far as learning instructors as Barth (2001: 3) describes a school in which students provide direction to instructors and information communicating engineering accomplishments. This writer 's school has begun the procedure of supplying this voice to pupils through the constitution of the Green Schools Committee in which pupil representatives from every category meet on a hebdomadal footing to discuss school environmental processes.

Supplying students with this voice can make a positive acquisition environment in a number of ways. The positives of giving pupils chances to lend to school policies such as the codification of behavior are outlined by the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) observing that:

Students are more likely to back up a codification of behavior when they have helped to develop it. Relationships of trust between instructors and pupils can turn through the procedure (NEWB, 2008: 16) .

Children can besides learn accomplishments of hearing, negotiating and pulling off differences through active battle in a societal context (NEWB, 2008: 16) . Supplying students with this voice can actuate them to come to school by demoing them that both they and their sentiments sing determinations that affect them affair (Stoll and Fink, 1996: 139) . It shows kids that the school will handle them rightly as Devine (2004: 122) notes kids feel that schools treat them below the belt when schools exclude their positions. Children 's ability to learn about issues such as democracy, justness and inclusiveness can be made more effectual as kids experience these rights foremost manus through pattern and engagement (Devine, 2004: 124) . In his survey of a pupil council set up in a primary school McLoughlin (2004: 132) noted positive acquisition results for the students involved including felicity and pride as a consequence of being involved, a sense of belonging, increased assurance and a turning sense of partnership with school forces. Claxton (2008) notes that putting up pupil councils to discourse issues of existent importance enables participants to `` cognize that what they learn by undertaking these issues will function them good in ulterior life " (p. 149) .

Resistance to Change

In order to include these comparatively fresh constructs of instructor leading and pupil voice as outlined above schools have to get the better of the common obstruction of opposition to alter. As Eisner (1992) notes `` It is much easier to alter educational policy than to alter the ways in which schools map " (p. 610) . This opposition can come from instructors and

principals. This opposition to alter is an obstruction to gaining a positive acquisition environment as Stoll and Fink (1996) note:

A school is either bettering or it is acquiring worse. It can non stand still because its context is invariably altering (p. 42) .

Many instructors may defy alteration as they fear new inventions that they feel might expose their ain perceived insufficiencies (Stoll and Fink, 1996: 50) , experience a sense of loss go forthing a set of familiar set of behaviors behind and fear the hereafter and the unknown (Tuohy, 1999: 27) .

Experienced instructors may defy alteration as a consequence of familiar modus operandis they have built up which require minimum attempt on their portion (Eisner, 1998: 159) .

The writer experienced this opposition to alter on several occasions. One such juncture was when the writer displayed a posting saying to pupils `` You have the right to give your sentiment, and for grownups to listen and take it earnestly '' , adapted from Article 12 of The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) , in his schoolroom. Several of the writer 's co-workers expressed their disapproval of this message being displayed to kids due to its 'inappropriateness ' on the evidences that students should make precisely and without inquiry as they are instructed to by instructors as has ever been the instance. This mentality earnestly restricts the possible to supply a voice to pupils as outlined above. This writer has besides witnessed instructors learning the same content utilizing

the same methodological analysis twelve months after twelve months irrespective of alterations in national or school policies.

Callan (2006) in researching the School Curriculum Development (SCD) enterprise in 20 Irish secondary schools notes that principals can besides defy alteration saying `` Consequently, one learned in the procedure of this enterprise that one could not presume that there was a preparedness, willingness, or a capacity among school principals to change their function '' (p. 107) . Possible grounds for this include principals desiring to keep on to power and control and to be at the Centre of doing determinations since everything that happens in their school (Barth, 2001: 108) . This has an obvious damaging consequence to the end of supplying leading functions for all instructors.

Physical Environment

Cohen, McCabe, Michelli and Pickeral (2009: 3) highlight the importance of a school 's physical environment observing that the environmental-structural dimension of a school including its cleanliness, infinite and stuffs and aesthetic quality is one of four indispensable dimensions since the quality and character of school life. Research has shown that the first alteration the bulk of freshly appointed principals make upon getting down in the function of principal is a calculated alteration to the school 's physical environment (Stoll and Fink, 1996: 51) . Marie Stubbs when appointed principal to St. George 's Roman Catholic Secondary School in London, England transformed the fighting school which was on the threshold of closing from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) into a positive acquisition environment

which went on to be nominated by Ofsted as a national illustration of good pattern. One method she adopted to accomplish this was by doing several alterations to the school 's physical environment. These included painting each floor of the school a different bright coloring material doing the school more visually appealing and welcoming to pupils, altering the schools atrium by seting in new comfy chairs doing it a more comfy and inviting topographic point for pupils and seting up noticeboards incorporating images and information about pupils and their activities, including birthday notices, to demo them they were valued (Stubbs, 2003) . The late appointed principal in the writer 's school has besides made several alterations to the school 's physical environment including the creative activity of a new computing machine room which enables students to larn, and hopefully learn, information communicating engineering accomplishments.

Claxton (2008) identifies extra physical characteristics of a learning school including shows which show the journey of acquisition every bit good as the terminal merchandise, such as a student 's different efforts at making a picture, showing to them `` We are every bit interested in the traveling as in the arriving " (p. 145) . He besides states that `` One of the ways you can recognize a larning power civilization is by looking at the objects and shows that instructors have chosen to 'decorate ' their classroomsa^| . " (p. 145) encouraging shows that develop students ' `` acquisition musculuss " (p. 148) . He recommends a schoolroom layout which encourages students to travel about and larn from each other in a societal context (p. 148) . Such a layout can enable students to larn through the societal procedure described

by Vygotsky where with aid from person more knowing and skilled in a co-operative scene, the scholar is able to accomplish more than he could entirely (Stoll, Fink and Earl, 2003: 38) . A school physical environment which both enables and encourages learning is hence a cardinal feature of a positive acquisition environment.

Continuous Teacher Professional Development through Collaboration

Equally good as promoting students to learn, positive acquisition environments encourage instructors to learn. Stoll and Fink (1996) highlight an important ground for this stating:

An important contributor to pupil acquisition is teacher learning. When instructors are professionally fulfilled, demonstrate occupation satisfaction, accomplishments and cognition, and have a strong feeling of efficaciousness around their pattern, they are more likely to actuate students to desire to learn (p. 152) .

Another factor in instructor learning promoting student acquisition is the illustration this sets for students many of whom will seek to emulate their instructor 's illustration (Barth, 2001: 28) . In order to supply a positive acquisition illustration, instructors can be seen by their pupils to be seeking out ways of going a better instructor. In making so they are patterning person who is invariably looking to acquire better at what they do (Claxton, 2008: 157) . It has besides been argued that teachers become better pedagogues when they invariably learn how to learn (Barth, 2001: 28) .

The Education Act (1998) refers to the significance of instructor learning observing the importance of `` a school environment which is supportive of learning among pupils and which promotes the professional development of instructors " (subdivision 23-2c) . The cardinal issue is how the school supports this development. This development should be uninterrupted and changeless because there will ever be a demand for instructors to better (Fullan, 1991: 344) and `` When instructors stop turning, so make their pupils " (Barth 1990: 50) . Many educational authors advocate the importance of coaction between instructors as cardinal to their professional development (Callan, 2006: 71 ; Lieberman and Miller, 1999: 69 ; Palmer, 2007: 146 ; Stoll and Fink, 1996: 54) . As Stoll et Al. (2003) note `` If systems to back up professional growing are intended to prolong their acquisition, they must nevertheless, aid schools develop as acquisition communities where pedagogues collaborate to ask critically about their ain pattern " (p. 173) .

Methods of teacher coaction presently used by the writer include squad instruction, in which the mainstream category instructor and resource instructor prepare and Teach lessons together and joint planning, where instructors of a specific twelvemonth group program lessons together on a monthly footing. Other methods, non yet utilised in pattern by the writer, include mentoring, in which a senior member of staff provides feedback to a late appointed instructor sing lessons, lesson readying, resources and planning ; collaborative action research, in which instructors examine a specific country of the school such as methodological analysiss used in

learning job work outing accomplishments in mathematics; and common observation and feedback of lessons in which 'critical friends' observe each other's lessons and supply critical feedback sing strengths and failings in learning methodological analysis employed (Stoll et al. , 2003: 94) . In trying to make a collaborative acquisition environment it is of import that instructors are shown that collaborative work can take many diverse signifiers and empowered to choose patterns which suit them best instead than one peculiar attack being forced on them (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991: 123/124) .

These collaborative environments can assist instructors to learn in assorted ways. As Rosenholtz (1989: 85) notes they can enable instructors to admit that instruction is hard and that it is of import to seek aid from co-workers. In passing more with co-workers, instructors can go more confident and certain about what they are seeking to accomplish and how good they are accomplishing it. Merely as it has been noted that pupils learn better in a societal context from each other the same can be said about instructors. Equally good as instructor coercion bettering instructors' chances to learn it can make likewise for students as `` you can not hold pupils as uninterrupted scholars and effectual confederates, without instructors holding these same features '' (Fullan, 1993: 46) . It besides enhances the school's overall ability to better as a high degree of shared vision and teamwork is required to convey about important alteration (Tuohy, 1999: 179) .

Dysfunctional Staff Relationships

An obstruction to teacher acquisition, particularly in footings of collaborative acquisition, and hence to gaining a positive acquisition environment is dysfunctional staff relationships. It has been noted that negative school environments have actively hostile relationships among staff (Peterson, 2002) . The writer, through experience of learning in a school with over 30 instructors on staff, has seen dysfunctional, and even hostile, staff relationships as a consequence of subcultures or 'cliques ' of instructors organizing, a procedure described as `` Balkanization '' (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991: 72) . In the writer 's experience members of assorted subcultures had no involvement or desire in working with yet alone join forcesing with members of other subcultures. This subculture outlook, and ill will which sometimes accompanies it, besides provides a hapless illustration to pupils who frequently strive to emulate their instructor 's illustration. In add-on as Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) note:

Balkanization may take to hapless communicating, indifference, or groups traveling their separate ways in a school. This in bend can bring forth hapless continuity in supervising pupil advancement and inconsistent outlooks for their public presentation and behavior (p. 72) .

Another type of dysfunctional staff relationships are congenial relationships as opposed to collegial 1s (Lieberman and Miller, 2008) . These congenial civilizations can curtail instructors ' potency to larn through coaction as although relationships are good-humored and compatible they do non affect the struggle or hazard needed to convey about effectual critical coaction and

acquisition among instructors, such as critical feedback and lesson observations, as instructors are excessively concerned with their popularity (Lieberman and Miller, 2008: 18) .

In the writer 's experience dysfunctional relationships can besides be between principals and instructors around issues such as work load, acknowledgment, regard and duty assigned to instructors by principals. This has a negative consequence on positive acquisition environments as Barth (2001) notes a common feature of a troubled school is `` troubled, embattled, or antiseptic decision maker - teacher relationships " (p. 105) . These dysfunctional staff relationships can therefore earnestly impede a school 's possible to go a positive acquisition environment and as Stoll and Fink (1996) note `` Until climate and collegiality issues receive attending, instructors in schools with troubles frequently show small involvement in development of instruction and acquisition schemes " (p. 78) .

Parental Engagement

Educational literature has noted the positive benefits, such as making a sense of community belonging, which can accrue from affecting other grownups in the local community besides instructors in schools (Fullan, 1993: 84 ; Stoll et al. , 2003: 73 ; Tuohy, 1999: 89) . Involving the most important grownups in students ' lives, their parents or defenders, can go a cardinal feature of a positive acquisition environment. Parents can be encouraged to go involved in the administration of the school by doing costumes for school dramas, supplying aid in schoolrooms, providing resources, giving negotiations on countries of expertness, training athletics

squads, functioning on school commissions and the Board of Management of the school, join forcing with instructors sing their kids 's acquisition and lending to the development of school policies.

This engagement can hold several positive results. The National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) (2008) outlines the significance of affecting parents in developing the codification of behaviour school policy for a school by pulling on their outlooks, penetrations and experience which may offer the school a different position. Possible positive consequences include fitting parents to reenforce to their kids the messages about acquisition and behavior that are contributing to a positive school, giving parents an penetration into the demands for instructors to learn efficaciously and assisting parents to hold a strong sense of pride and ownership of the school 's work (NEWB, 2008: 16) . In add-on as Stoll and Fink (1996) note `` The fact remains that parents and instructors need to be 'reading from the same page ' to advance student acquisition and development '' (p. 135) . It has been noted that most parents have a important desire for schools to be positive larning environments as they want their kids to larn to their full potency (Barth, 2001: 168) . By join forcing with parents sing their kids 's larning instructors can happen out a wealth of information refering these students such as their involvements enabling instructors to construction lessons based on these involvements which can increase pupil motive.

Schools can besides follow steps to affect parents in heightening their kids 's acquisition at place. In researching international surveies from 20 states on school - household - community partnerships, Drum sanders and Epstein

(2005: 208) discovered this was the country most households in most states requested support and counsel in. This can be achieved by schools carrying on plans and patterns, such as workshops and place visits, to beef up rearing accomplishments and aid parents supply place environments to back up their kids 's acquisition. Research suggests these steps can advance a positive acquisition environment as a consequence of positive influences on households ' patterns at place, parent and student attitudes about schools, students 'academic accomplishment and instructors ' attitudes towards parents (Sanders and Epstein, 2005: 208) . Parents can besides be encouraged by instructors to talk to their kids sing their ain acquisition in their mundane lives. As kids frequently look to their parents as function theoretical accounts this can excite kids 's acquisition and enable them to see the importance of womb-to-tomb acquisition (Barth, 2001: 24) . Drum sanders and Epstein (2005) besides discovered `` Surveys across states indicate that pupils benefit when they interact with household members about subjects they are larning in category " such as in reading, spelling, literacy and mathematics (p. 217) . In transporting out the attacks outlined parents can besides go scholars in this acquisition environment and understand the altering nature of schools and acquisition.

The writer has witnessed merely limited parental engagement confined to fund-raising responsibilities through engagement in the Parent Teachers Association. Even in this limited engagement parents from cultural minorities groups, disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and the Traveller community are non included which appears to be the norm in many Irish

schools (Lodge, Devine and Deegan, 2004) . Schools hence need to affect all parents in the administration of the school and heightening students ' acquisition as `` Most kids learn academic topics in school, but how they learn, what else they learn, and why they learn are influenced by schools, households, communities and their connexions '' (Sanders and Epstein, 2005: 214) .

Government Policies

While outside spouses, such as parents, can assist to make a positive acquisition environment, external factors beyond the schools control, such as recent Irish authorities policies can besides be an obstruction to gaining such an environment. Recent Budgets have created such an obstruction. Budget 2009 increased category sizes which besides led to a loss in learning stations (Department of Finance, 2008) while Budget 2010 saw cuts made in the allotments to teacher professional development (Department of Finance, 2009) which has been outlined as a cardinal feature of a positive acquisition environment. Budget 2011 programs to cut down instructor Numberss in mainstream primary schools with the backdown of Resource Teachers for Travellers and cut downing the figure of Language Support Teachers by 500 in the following four old ages (Department of Finance, 2010) . In making so the Irish authorities are taking support constructions for students and their parents who, as has been noted in this essay, frequently do n't hold a voice or input into schools.

The Department of Education and Science placed a moratorium on primary schools advancing instructors to stations of duty (DES Circular 0022/2009) .

In response to this step the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) instructed its members not to set about extra responsibilities where a post/acting station of duty is not filled as a consequence of this moratorium (INTO, 2009) . These combined steps, by curtailing instructors ' possible to take on excess duties, have hence badly hindered the capacity for schools to implement teacher leading for all instructors as outlined in this essay.

The writer 's school later underwent a Whole School Evaluation in which three departmental inspectors inspected the schools' effectiveness for the continuance of a hebdomad. These inspectors placed a heavy accent on written planning which the writer felt did little to heighten the quality of instruction and acquisition in the school. Problems such as external reviews can convey on schools include force per unit area to conform to the review theoretical account and standards and they can suppress original and critical instructor contemplation on the opinion and rating of school effectiveness (Stoll and Fink, 1996: 170) . The inspectorate completed unheralded (incidental) external reviews in over 450 primary schools throughout all parts of Ireland between October 2009 and October 2010 (DES, 2010) . Finland, which has no national school reviews but a system of school self-evaluation (Webb, Vulliamy, Sarja and Hamalainen, 2006) , was one of the highest performing states in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study of instruction public presentation while in both literacy and maths degrees Ireland's ranking declined significantly when compared to 2000 (OECD, 2010) . It can be argued hence that the current Department of Education and

Skills theoretical account of school reviews can make an obstruction to gaining positive acquisition environments.

Decision

As outlined in this essay, principals, instructors, students, parents and the schools physical environment can all play important functions to enable schools to go positive learning environments. The cardinal features of such a school can be described as one that provides leading functions and associated duties to its full teaching staff ; affords a voice to pupils sing school policies and their ain acquisition ; contains a physical environment that enables and encourages larning ; promotes uninterrupted instructor acquisition and development through coaction ; and has steps to affect all parents in the administration of the school and in heightening their kids 's acquisition. As illustrated by holding these features the school will heighten the possible and motive to larn in all its participants making a community of scholars.

In the writer 's experience while initial stairss have been made Irish primary schools still have to to the full gain this presently mostly theoretical theoretical account of a positive acquisition environment. Reasons for this include troubles in get the better ofing common obstructions such as opposition to alter from school forces, dysfunctional staff relationships and recent authorities policies. Developing the features outlined is important to making a community of scholars as American pedagogue Laurence Downey (1967) expressed it `` A school Teachs in three ways: by what it teaches, by how it teaches and by the sort of topographic point it is " . 1

1 Quoted by David Hopkins Teaching and Learning as the Heartland of School Improvement Seamus O Suilleabhain Memorial talk, NUI Maynooth, September 2001