Aboyne Academy

Respect | Determination | Compassion

Practitioner Enquiry

Challenge · Support · Oracy · PBL · Skills · Crew

Support Staff · Teachers · PSAs · Guardians · Librarian · Community

Have high expectations · Use my voice · Provoking thinking · Knowing why · Use feedback · Listen actively · Reviewing knowledge · Knowing how · Feel supported · Building knowledge · Welcome challenge · Build relationships · Keeping knowledge · Develop skills

Respect Determination Compassion

EDGE FOUNDATION

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Aboyne Academy Practitioner Enquiry

The context

Aboyne Academy is a 6-year comprehensive secondary school which caters for 668 pupils from the Upper Deeside area in North-East Scotland. The school has the largest geographical catchment area of all the schools in Aberdeenshire and has 10 associated primary schools. The school has Enhanced Provision facilities to support pupils with additional support needs and the complex needs provision for Deeside.

Aboyne Academy is known for having a positive ethos and prides itself on having a welcoming atmosphere and strong community spirit. Attainment levels are consistently high. The school ethos is underpinned by its three core values of **respect, determination** and **compassion.**

The school is very proud of powerful partnerships with the Wood Foundation, the Fife Arms in Braemar, Glen Tanar Estate, HorseBack UK and Aboyne and Upper Deeside Rotary Club. Working with these partners allows us to share an ambitious plan to transform the way we prepare young people for life beyond school.

The school strives for **excellence** through strong **leadership** and effective **collaboration**.

Why Practitioner Enquiry?

Following significant change in the school after the pandemic coupled with a new leadership team, Aboyne's Headteacher introduced a Leadership of Change policy for the first time in 2022 adopting a four-stage model inspired by the Education Endowment Foundation:

Explore

Prepare

Deliver

Sustain

Leadership of Change

Explore

Identified area for improvement:

Desired outcomes:

Link to school vision and values:

Link to school improvement plan:

How will this development improve Equity?

Confirmation of current position (self-evaluation evidence):

Prepare

Working/focus group established (when/who/remit):

Consideration of research:

Evidence from looking outwards/visits to other schools:

Deliver

Draft proposals discussed at SLT:

Details of change:

Resources:

Proposed delivery plan with timings:

Key actions:

Confirmed communication plan:

Planned support for implementation (time, dialogue, professional learning):

Sustain

Confirmed plans for self-evaluation of impact of change:

How?:

When?:

Who?:

Ensuring sustainability:

Explore

Applying the Model to Staff Collegiate Time Change

We knew that there were pockets of excellence in our school in terms of learning, teaching and assessment, but self-evaluation evidence showed that **consistency** was lacking and a transformation of approach was required. We recognised that our community had strong relationships and a wealth of knowledge; we did not want to lose this realising that it provided the strong foundations on which to build open and honest reflection; with greater engagement in career long professional learning (CLPL) and increased empowerment/**autonomy** we could get closer to our goal of excellence across the board. The school had already embarked upon a coaching journey during the pandemic thus the notion of **empowerment** and autonomy was not new. Following a DHT completing training through Leeds Beckett University and Education Scotland, all middle leaders and around 20 teaching and support staff completed an in-house GROW (Goals, Reality, Options, Will) coaching course in 2021/2022 and coaching was an integral part of the professional review and development (PRD) process. Furthermore, the new investment from the **Wood Foundation**[1] Excelerate Programme in 2021 brought with it access to high quality CLPL and learning visits to support us to open our eyes to possibilities.

The teacher induction scheme for probationary teachers in Aberdeenshire includes 0.2 FTE additional non-contact time to allow for professional learning. A core requirement of this time is that all new teachers carry out an enquiry which they report on. The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) define Practitioner Enquiry as "a form of professional learning that enables teachers and college lecturers to engage with research to support their learning needs and to enhance learners' experiences." Since the reflections and data gathered by our probationary teachers are relevant to learners in our school, as well as strengthening the purpose of the enquiries, the four probationers in 2021/2022 were asked to share their

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[1] Wood Foundation https://www.thewoodfoundation.org.uk/ Excelerate https://www.thewoodfoundation.org.uk/developing-young-people-in-scotland/excelerate/

findings with colleagues one lunchtime. (See **A Turner enquiry** pages 18-21) Whilst the enquiry task had been an obligatory component of the induction scheme for some years, the showcase idea was new and relatively impromptu. As we had been working particularly hard to foster a culture of collaboration amongst staff following the impact of the pandemic the idea was appropriate to this ethos. Interest in the showcase was overwhelming, with more than a third of our staff – teaching and non-teaching across the whole spectrum of experience – attending the event. The impact of the showcase ranged from **boosting the confidence** of the probationers, sharing findings, and learning collectively as a staff and ultimately **sparking an interest** in the enquiry process.

Whilst engaging in research, reflection and enquiry is a professional duty linked to GTCS registration (GTCS, 2021, p4, 2.1.2) fully registered teachers do not have protected time to engage in such activity. At the beginning of our journey we recognised that enquiry is something all practitioners do, but often in micro doses, without explicit time for reflection, and without recording it, or subsequently being given opportunities to share in meaningful ways with colleagues.

As part of the Excelerate program, the organisation gathered baseline feedback from both staff and pupils to assess where in our learning journey we were. Staff participated in focus groups and intimated that CLPL was 'tick boxy' and not meaningful at individual teacher level; they wanted more opportunities to share practice, collaborate and pursue their own areas to interest relevant to their classroom needs. **Time** was frequently cited as the main barrier to engaging in this type of CLPL.

Prepare

For the 'Prepare' stage, in-line with our attempts to support reflective practice and build a learning community, we had to prioritise the time and resources to allow our busy teachers to engage in it, recognising that professionals need to be allowed **time to lead** their own development and to build a **social network** to support it.

We realised that it would be necessary to re-think the working time agreement (WTA) to make the time and prioritise building that all-important social capital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Recognising the limitations of local authority governance in the Scottish system, a lack of flexibility to create extra CLPL time meant that time had to come from what we have already. We knew that raising our expectations of staff engagement with CLPL meant demonstrating commitment by protecting time.

> *'And what is the point of student teachers doing extensive inquiry projects…when in their heart of hearts they know that the unsympathetic school systems will give them no time or encouragement to inquire into their practice when they start their regular jobs?' Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p84*

We needed to understand what our staff interests in CLPL were, and understand how other Scottish schools had utilised the enquiry process to support CLPL. To understand what the potential areas of enquiry might be we explored data from the PRD process to highlight the areas of development identified by teaching staff across the school. A list of topics was then produced and used by the librarian to identify professional publications that would form the beginning of a CLPL section in the school library. This **investment in resources** was a further demonstration of us prioritising CLPL and sending the message of the enquiry process being integral to our whole school improvement.

To understand how the enquiry process could be upscaled to a whole school level we spoke with the existing probationary teachers, gathering their feedback on their experience of enquiry. Of particular interest was the model shared by **East Dunbartonshire Council**[2] – and Rethinking Education's **12 steps to practitioner enquiry document**[3].

Based on these models we then looked at our existing meeting schedule for the whole year. Most meetings happened in the school theatre and involved passive information-giving. Inservice days were often high cost and enforced. We needed this to change and initiated the **culture shift** with the first in-service day of the new school year being designed to get people **talking about teaching and learning**. The day needed to be exciting and engaging to mark a new way of doing things, allowing our staff to buy in and feel a sense of empowerment. The emphasis was on the **power of small changes** which collectively will create a big impact thus we adopted the tagline: "Don't be a star, be a galaxy."

Feedback from a class teacher on this day was encouraging:

> "I usually dread coming to school on day 1 but left at the end feeling unusually motivated and excited by the prospect of being encouraged to develop my practice autonomously."
>
> (Kate Abrahams at end of Inset day August 2022).

Deliver

Passive staff meetings were replaced with collaboration sessions throughout the school year. This was a new format for staff and a new approach to collegiate working, adopting many of the new speaking and group work pedagogies we had been focussing on since becoming an Excelerate school.

Four structured sessions happened throughout the school year to support enquiry:

Session 1

Covered the practitioner enquiry timeline, teachmeets on developing an enquiry focus were advertised, an overview was given of potential data collection methods and where the data may lead, and staff were split into groups based on MSForm replies (using sentence starters, working together to understand issues they wanted to address).

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[2] https://education.gov.scot/improvement/documents/sac76-practitioner-enquiry-guide.pdf
[3] https://www.rethinking-ed.org/practitioner-research-in-12-easy-steps

Session 2

Developing a driving question, identify gaps in knowledge and start searching literature to fill them.

Session 3

This session was co-delivered by newly qualified teachers and covered data collection methods, using data we already have or collect, reassuring and reaffirming that process matters more than outcome.

Session 4

Faculty discussion and research!

Further collaboration sessions were allocated to the process ensuring that protected time was available to research and write up. **The planned 10 hours needed to be expanded to facilitate completion of the enquiries and so two half day chunks of Inservice time were protected to do this.**

Term 1 – reflect on current practice, find collaborators, and narrow focus.

To ease everyone into the new format, the first two collaboration sessions were on school-chosen topics – Oracy and project-based learning (PBL). At the third session the concept of practitioner enquiry was introduced to the whole staff group, with an overview of the process and timeline given and overall emphasis on the flexibility and autonomy that would be given to complete it. In this first session, the approach was one of **support and reassurance**. Our staff cohort were split into three groups based on their broad areas of interest identified before the session via a MS Form. Each group were tasked with moving around their group, and using sentence starters to express their enquiry ideas and find someone who was thinking about similar ideas. Everyone was also provided with an enquiry pack during the first session, which included things like a "narrowing our focus" triangle to help ensure enquiries were manageable and examples were given. Staff completed an exit task: 'Collaborating with colleagues today has…'; 'Following this session I am going to try…'; 'I need…' to ensure that they understood the commitment required by all and were reassured that support would be available.

Three enquiry support sessions with the school librarian were scheduled for the week after enquiries were introduced to all staff. This provided an informal, relaxed space for individuals to talk through their ideas for enquiry and help to develop a focus for secondary research and reading.

Another key consideration was using the expertise of the probationer teachers who were now fully registered staff members. Involving the newly trained practitioners in the planning and delivery of the change helped to create a **non-threatening ethos** which was not seen to be 'top-down', acknowledging that all are learning. A non-negotiable element of the change was that EVERY member of teaching staff was involved, including the senior leadership team (SLT). Not only did this communicate the message that

the enquiry process was something we were all doing rather than something that was 'being done' to classroom practitioners only, it also meant that leaders could empathise at those times when the pressure was on to meet deadlines in amongst juggling other priorities from day-to-day practice. Central to all of this was a focus on promoting and celebrating the reality that our skillset within the building was strong and we were facilitating ways of sharing this through **a strong culture of collaboration and reflection**.

Term 2 – gather resources for research, begin research, finalise enquiry plans.

All staff gathered in November 2022 to share their thinking so far around practitioner enquiries. The connection between enquiries, GTCS membership and our own school learning charter was made, reiterating that our year of practitioner enquiry was facilitating our educators to have time to reflect, engage in learning and to collaborate with colleagues in a way that would have a direct impact on their classrooms.

Time was given at this stage to explore the Learning Teaching and Assessment in Aberdeenshire[4] page which has links to relevant research and expertise to help refine areas of enquiry focus. Individuals were encouraged to contextualise their own enquiry into an area of the Aberdeenshire key features of high-quality learning experiences but identifying firstly the quadrant and then relevant statement.
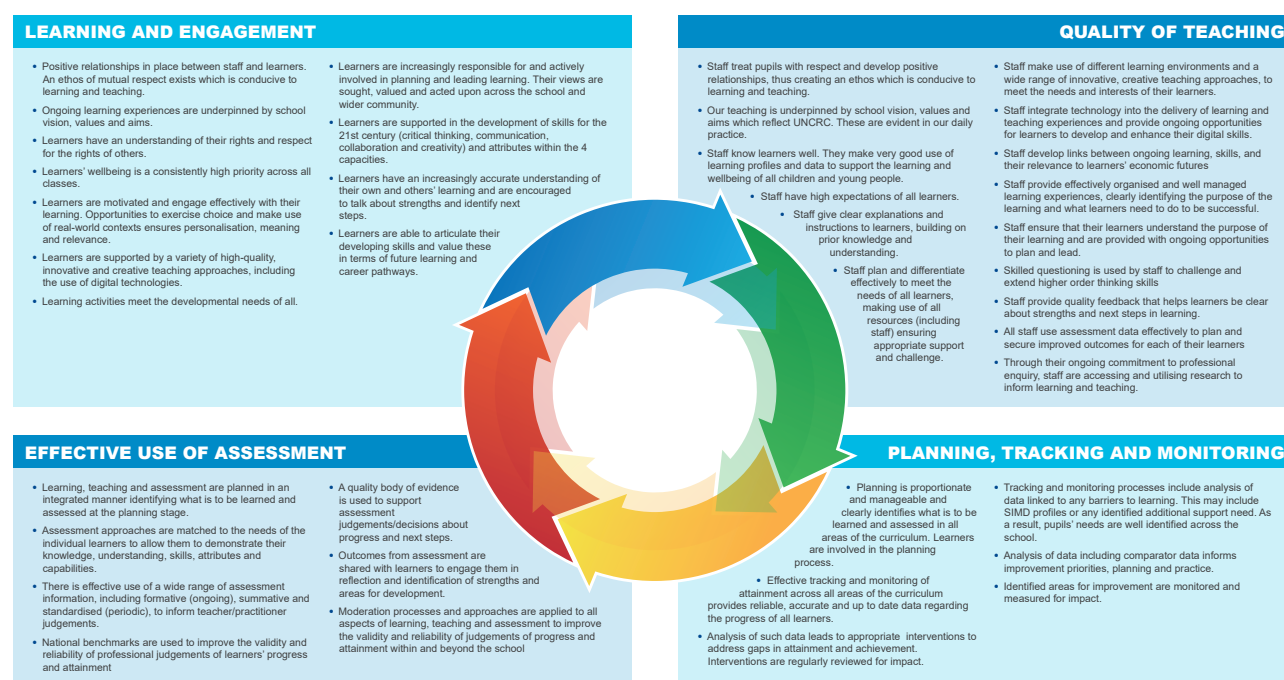
See foot note[5] to download a larger version of this diagram.

At this stage in the enquiry process we emphasised that the success of any classroom changes or interventions were not the ultimate end – that a year of reflection and collaboration would bring about improvements in our teaching, achieving the aim of our Head that we would all be better teachers by the

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[4] Learning Teaching and Assessment in Aberdeenshire https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/as/ltaaberdeenshire/
[5] https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/as/public/ltaaberdeenshire/uploads/sites/3769/2022/03/01074802/2.3-Quad-1-to-4-Second-Draft-002.pdf

end of the year. We also reiterated that whilst the end point of a completed enquiry showcased at a whole school session was fixed, individual pathways to that end point were flexible. The authors of this paper shared with the wider school staff their own enquiry focus – enquiries! – and that in exploring how to facilitate professionalism and becoming a reflective practitioner, individuals need to be given time to lead their own development as well as having access to a social network for development (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012).

Focus was draw again to their enquiry packs which included various documents to help with thinking through and planning enquiries, and these could be used in conjunction with a **driving question** which individuals had identified earlier in the term.

Groups were formed based on the area of enquiry focus identified toward the end of term 1. Using coaching techniques they explored their areas of enquiry – all middle leaders had been through compulsory training on coaching, then around 20 members of teaching and support staff attended voluntary coaching CLPL. Coaching is an integral part of the PRD process in Aboyne and using that approach for the enquiry conversations made sense. We also reminded people of where in the process they were – at this stage, it was the "how" we were focussed on getting towards through conversations and professional reading, which could then refine what the specific focus of enquiries would be. As an exit pass for this session we asked everyone to identify what they needed to know to allow them to effectively plan for their enquiry. This allowed us to plan for the next sessions, to input targeted support to individuals, faculties or groups as required, and shape the direction of our professional reading for our own enquiry.

We put in **scaffolded support** for finding appropriate reading for enquiries. We recognised that for many, it would have been a long time since they had conducted a more formal search of academic and professional literature. Equally it can be difficult to access materials behind a paywall. Therefore, we created a "resources to support practitioner enquiry" document which included links to open access databases, and resources available in the library. The librarian gave a brief reminder of effective search strategies – using keywords, refining results, reading abstracts before trying to find full text versions – all habits that can fall away if you're not conducting research regularly, and things that can save a lot of time, something we were acutely aware of when asking folks to embark on enquiries on top of the busyness of day to day school life. Support was also offered to all staff with help finding specific articles (many took up this offer). A shared repository was created for articles found based on the subject groupings, so people could engage with literature already found by others.

Term 3 – carry out enquiry in classroom, gather research.

Term 3 focussed on allowing teaching staff to carry out the classroom interventions and data collection. The collaborative session this term focussed on different types of data collection and an emphasis to keep things simple.

A mid-way point gave us the opportunity to reflect when ten colleagues fed back on the enquiry process to representatives from the local authority. Predominant themes were positive and optimistic, recognising that enquiries can't 'change the world' but the impact of sharing the small changes with others has power. A vital part of the leading this initiative has been promoting the importance of the *process*; changes and interventions might not work as we expect or want them to but, by engaging in theory, collaboration and reflection, we are significantly improving our professionalism.

A big challenge was to reassure so that the impact of time investment and change was seen as a positive; to reflect and adapt, ensuring that we **had sustainable systems** in place to support and motivate our team of professionals to be the 'very best' (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012) and achieve 'mastery' (Kelchtermans 2009) in building that collaborative learning community.

Term 4 – Prepare final showcase and reflections.

Collaborative time in the fourth term was devoted to having conversations in faculty groupings and progressing enquiries. We focussed on faculty groupings in the third term as by this stage we knew not many people were collaborating in the way we had hoped (across faculties, around topics of interest rather than subject teaching). On reflection these were perhaps ambitious targets. With the skills of enquiry and collaboration embedded in the future, this is something we can work towards. Faculties were asked to have honest conversations with one another about whether their enquiry was manageable (and if not, to refine it), about where they were with their enquiries and what their next steps needed to be to ensure they would be able to share enquiries with colleagues in June. Debbie (DHT) and Hayley (School Librarian) were available during the collaborative sessions for support to help have those conversations and to help individuals refocus and get across the finish line. We shared example posters of enquiries conducted in other settings, encouraging people to give a **visual representation** to keep things brief and digestible, and encouraging **further discourse** between those with overlapping interests. All enquiries were displayed and shared with staff during a showcase event, with half the staff group standing beside their work and the other half circulating and asking questions, we then swapped halfway through. As it was summer, ice lollies were essential for staff wellbeing!

Our own enquiry came to an end during term 4 and we presented our findings to the wider staff group both at the showcase event and at a whole staff meeting, to facilitate feedback and reflection. In baseline feedback, gathered at the start of our process of being an Excelerate school, "practitioners expressed a desire for more collaborative activities across the school with potential ideas being shared during discussions." In January 2023 we surveyed 70 staff using a form based on our reading (Nguyen, Pietsch and Gunus, 2021) and received 46 responses. The questions were designed to gauge staff perceptions of the climate for collaboration almost a year after the initial baseline feedback was gathered by the Wood Foundation. Responses were largely very positive with a suggestion there is a culture of shared responsibility for school issues, however in terms of having autonomy, those areas of practice with external influences such as course content or assessments led to less positive responses. The most significantly positive area was in selecting teaching methods, suggesting that there is a sense of autonomy in terms of how we teach.

Sustain

The enquiry process was primarily designed to promote open reflection from ALL teaching staff and empower them to identify their own areas for improvement. The work shared at the showcase and subsequent feedback from staff demonstrates that these objectives were met. Staff were **proud of their work**, felt **confident** in sharing the outcomes with colleagues and recognised the **value** that it added to their classroom practice. They received praise and recognition from colleagues which, in turn, **impacted positively** on their wellbeing and motivation. Fundamentally, it helped staff to recognise that continual reflection is a positive and that together our efforts create a bigger impact.

However, feedback during the session focused on positive praise rather than on problem solving and coaching around more challenging areas needing development and this was identified as an area to take forward. We have built the foundations to facilitate staff collaboration and support and using this to maximise problem solving and continuous improvement is an important next step.

In year 2, Collaborative Learning Groups (CLGs) were established to allow staff to **build on the skills** developed through the enquiry year. Each group focused on an area of priority in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) improvement plan. Staff were given autonomy in term of which group they joined. The ten hours of the working time agreement (WTA) previously allocated to enquiry were given to the CLGs to allow staff to use and progress the skills (research, reflection, collaboration) developed through enquiry. Each CLG had several sub-groups to collectively work on improving an area of practice and sharing that back with the wider staff. (See **CLG proforma** page 22-23)

Each CLG session involved professional reading and discussion, followed by collaborative work on a focal point. This work would have an element of practice to share with the wider staff. Such things as delivery of Inservice training, development of a skills assessment rubric and an exemplification toolkit for ensuring challenge in LTA were created and shared with the wider team at various points throughout the year.
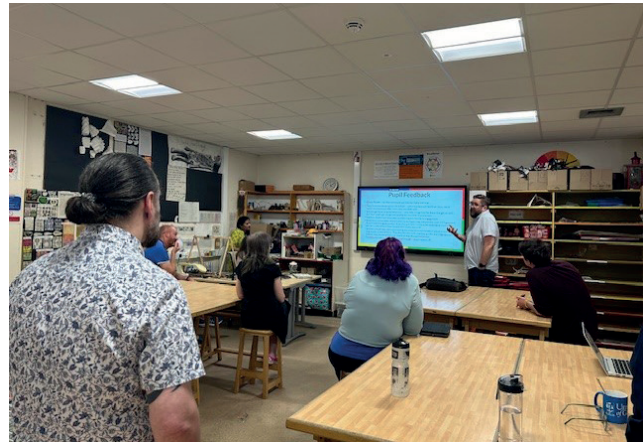
The success of the groups would not have been as great had the skills from the enquiry year not been cemented. Staff immediately saw the value in accessing professional reading and collaborating with colleagues and appreciated having the opportunity to do this built into the working time agreement.

In June 2024 we surveyed teaching staff in Aboyne Academy with the same questions used in January 2023, informed by Nguyen, Pietsch and Gunus (2021). We received 23 responses from staff, which is half the number of responses received during the first survey.

Broadly the responses from the survey indicate there has been an improvement in the capacity for professional reflection, an increase in the amount of professional reading engaged with, and greater confidence in staff to experiment, collaborate and make informed changes to their pedagogy. The most common forms of professional learning are now peer observation and reading professional literature, a **shift change** due to learning walks, collaborative learning groups, and provision of CLPL materials in the library.

There was evidence of greater autonomy in classrooms with higher incidences of leadership in areas of planning and teaching. However, there is a feeling of less shared responsibility for school issues and a decrease in the feeling of a collaborative school culture. Some reported feeling isolated in faculties both in relation to awareness of what is going on in other parts of the school, and in relation to workload levels. In terms of the approach to collaboration taken in 2023-2024 there is a perception amongst some that the Collaborative Learning Groups lack focus or overlap in places, leading to some negative views about their value.

There are reports of more innovation in classrooms however there exists a perception there is less openness to change. This is something we will need to explore further going forward. Individuals are better able to search for new ways of solving problems and there is more practical support available from colleagues.

Despite mixed results from the survey there pervades an appetite for more collaboration, and an understanding that collaboration also includes looking outward beyond our school to others within our cluster, our authority and more widely by engaging with professional literature. Whilst we fully acknowledge that our journey towards consistency across the school is still underway, effective collaboration amongst colleagues will be a fundamental component of its success.

School Librarian Reflections

Our goals for a year of practitioner enquiry were to get people working collaboratively post covid, building confidence in our staff to make changes to their pedagogy based on their own professional judgements and reflections, and to develop our skills in engaging with professional literature and conducting research. As school librarian, my connections with staff are stronger and I have a greater awareness of what goes on in classrooms and faculties. This means I can more fully support teaching, learning and assessment in our school. Staff are more empowered to try new things, evidenced by breadth of enquiries conducted, on the enthusiasm which staff have approached collaborative learning groups, and the uptake of opportunities provided by the Excelerate programme (e.g. oracy, PBL etc).

Hayley Lockerbie

The biggest learning was that it takes a lot of time to support a whole staff group to undertake practitioner enquiries! That may seem obvious however by emphasising and embodying an open-door policy for support, many staff took us up on that. This was exactly what we wanted to happen, but perhaps underestimated how encompassing that would be for us whilst also trying to complete our own enquiry. The process also helped me to understand the broader role a school library and librarian can play in whole school development, in using research and information skills to connect educators with resources to help their development, not just in connecting young people with resources. Individuals and groups have continued to use the library resources and the librarian to gain access to information to support the work going on in Collaborative Learning Groups during the 2023-2024 session. "Spotlight on" posters which started during the year of enquiry have continued and are shared with staff once or twice a term.

Spotlight on... **Engagement**

flipped learning
GATEWAY TO STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Flipping, combined with practical project-based learning pedagogy, changes everything. Focusses on when a classroom is truly student-centred and teachers are free to engage with students on an individual level.

ENGAGING LEARNERS
OUTSTANDING TEACHING

Unpicks intrinsic motivation, the foundation that underpins a productive learning environment and helps to develop independent learning, creativity and improved behaviour management.

TEACHING BACKWARDS
OUTSTANDING TEACHING
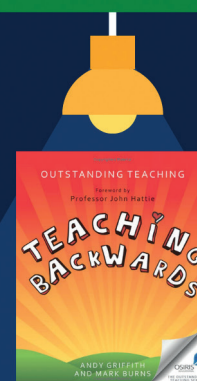
A follow up to Engaging Learners, Teaching Backwards offers a practical, hands-on manual for teachers to further develop their attitudes, skills and habits of excellence both for themselves and for their learners.

Contact Hayley in the library to borrow these books.

We wanted to facilitate more professional reading in our school through the development of our staff collection in the library. We purchased 69 books based on the areas of enquiry focus and of those, 60 have been borrowed at least once over the enquiry period. In library worlds, that's a very good circulation rate! The established staff collection continues to be well-used across faculties and beyond as teachers in the local primary school come and browse/borrow books too. Several schools in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire have expressed an interest in learning from our experience with a view to implementing practitioner enquiry, including how the library has supported research and professional reading. Collection lists have been shared with other librarians to help begin their own collection development.

Next time we embark on enquiry, we should insist on greater collaboration. As school librarian I feel more confident to run support sessions on research skills specifically for teaching staff. We should explore training staff as enquiry mentors, allowing for more concentrated support and deeper relationships to build.

LTA Lead Reflections

The readiness of our staff to improve learner outcomes is one of Aboyne Academy's key strengths. However, post-covid we were finding that many of our educators would enthusiastically engage in the professional learning opportunities that we, as a leadership team, presented them with but when it came to leading their own development, focusing on areas that would have the biggest impact in their individual classrooms, they were less confident. Added to this, only a few people were engaging in the wealth of research and professional learning materials that we had recently invested in. The enquiry year was designed to find a way to support reflective practice, build teacher agency and increase the power of collaboration within our team.

Debbie Mercer

As it progressed, the year of enquiry was both exciting and exhausting in equal measures! Hearing staff talk to colleagues with enthusiasm on a wide range of pedagogical theories was heartening; there was a real energy, especially in the early exploratory sessions as well as in the final showcase, as staff supported each other in professional dialogue and reflection. However, ensuring that guidance was available throughout the year, in addition to meeting our own enquiry deadlines, was challenging.

Relinquishing control and encouraging our team to pursue their own areas of relevance and interest felt like a brave step and it did require a significant culture shift.   We had to implement a clear framework of support as well as make expectations of quality and impact explicit; it was a delicate balance to achieve. Reassuring staff to trust the process and focus on the collective power of small changes was key throughout.   The fact that we were on the journey with them, carrying out our own enquiries, allowed us to have genuine empathy which was a big part of gaining engagement and trust.

A year on, following the input and support through enquiry, staff are significantly more skilled in reflection, they can (and do) access high quality professional learning regularly and are appreciative of the skillset we have within our own four walls. In-service sessions post-enquiry are typically led by our own practitioners and staff talk to each other more, sharing practice and offering feedback. There is more of a readiness from all staff, regardless of experience or role, to offer up ideas and drive change across a range of contexts.

Another key takeaway which was more unexpected is that our students recognise the teaching staff as learners too which is a huge win. We openly spoke about enquiries and our final products with classes in an attempt to celebrate the importance of metacognitive skills, pedagogy and lifelong learning; definite interest was evident, helping pupils to 'see the point' in their own learning.

Next time, and there will definitely be a next time, we will work harder to encourage colleagues to collaborate on the enquiry itself as most educators carried out an individual piece. The introductions of CLGs in year 2 has gone some way in continuing to build this culture. Furthermore, much of the hard work around developing the framework and building the resources is in place so all-in-all the process should be more straightforward for us, allowing us to focus on quality and impact.

Headteacher Reflections

The General Teaching Council for Scotland promote an aspirational professional standard for Scotland's teachers known as the Standard for Career Long Professional Learning. This provides a framework for the professional growth of teachers. At the heart of this document is a professional commitment to developing vibrant learning communities, developing pedagogy through critical research and collaboration.

As we sought to reignite our learning community following the pandemic, we felt a need to refresh our skills in critical research and developing pedagogy. A structured and supported approach to professional enquiry

Michael Foy

seemed a good fit to meet this need. Enquiry can be driven by whole school themes but supports empowerment through lots of opportunity for staff to take it in a direction that best supports their own current skills, interests and practice.

What was very important to me from the outset was the need to support all teaching staff to successfully engage with a practitioner enquiry. Building an empowered learning community can only happen if everyone feels an equal partner in the system. I believe that once that trust is established, the capacity of the system grows.

As a result, we approached the process of enquiry as a key whole school priority. We established and devoted 10 hours of collaboration time throughout the coming school year to launch, plan, support and showcase with the clear expectation that everyone would participate.

I feel the impact of this work across the school has been significant. We intentionally used the professional enquiry process to reestablish critical research and inter-disciplinary collaboration as norms for improvement across the school. As we work together on whole school improvement, there are still many areas to develop but all staff have demonstrated through practitioner enquiry that they care passionately about moving pedagogy forwards but are now rooting their developing practice in research, theory and collaboration again.

We plan to revisit professional enquiry on a cyclical basis. I think leading into next time we could do more preparatory work with the staff so that all the collaboration time itself was focussed on individual exploration, dialogue and research. I think we learned a lot about effectively supporting staff towards outcomes that actually change learning, teaching and assessment in classrooms through this process. I look forward to driving whole school improvements forward through practitioner enquiry in future years and also look forward to completing another enquiry myself!

A Turner enquiry

Name: Andrew Turner School: Aboyne Academy Stage/Year: S1

Area for development/enquiry:

The use of a structured approach to help my pupils develop their ability to communicate and contribute vocally in class. This involves engaging in classroom discussions and answering questions. I want to improve my ability to use structures and techniques in order to help my pupils' oracy skills develop. Indeed, 'the amount of talk young children are involved in is predictive of their success in school' (Mercer and Dawes, 2018, p.3). I envisage increasing the participation of pupils vocally across the entire class, refining their communication skills and improving their teamwork and inclusion as a whole.

Enquiry question:

In what ways does the introduction of the Oracy 'Dialogic Talk Moves' and strategies affect pupils' confidence, ability, and willingness to participate aurally in class?

Links to Standards for Full Registration:

2.1.2 Have a depth of knowledge and understanding of Research and Engagement in Practitioner Enquiry

3.1.2 Effectively utilise pedagogical approaches and resources

1.1 Professional Values

1.2 Professional Commitment

Links to professional reading:

– Mercer, N. & Dawes, L. (2018) The development of Oracy skills in school-aged learners. Part of the Cambridge Papers in ELT series. [pdf] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

– Littleton, K. & Mercer, N. (2013) INTERTHINKING - Putting talk to work. Abingdon: Taylor and Francis Group

– Millard, W. & Menzies, L. (2016). The State of Speaking in Our Schools: Oracy in English Schools. Accessed online: 10.13140/RG.2.2.33697.45928.

Enquiry actions:

Plan for carrying out the enquiry - The intervention will involve using oracy techniques to provide a structure to develop pupils' vocal and communication skills. I have primarily chosen to use the 'Dialogic Talk Moves' to achieve this. These are:

1. Wait / Think Time
2. Say More
3. Revoice
4. Think, pair, share
5. Rephrase

6. Ask for evidence / Reasoning
7. Challenge
8. Add on
9. Agree / disagree
10. Explain what someone else means.

I anticipate the enquiry to last roughly 2 months, which encompasses around eight lessons per class. It will involve two S1 classes - 1M1 and 1M2 who I have identified as potentially benefitting most from this approach. One of these classes is very vocal, but the quality of responses is not always high/focused, and the other class is often quiet, with some members reluctant to use their voices. I am interested to see if this structured approach can work in both ways – both focusing and encouraging the development of the pupils' oracy skills. For the enquiry, I will initially need to keep a copy of the 'Dialogic Talk Moves' on hand so as to refer to them. As I progress through the intervention, this should become more natural.

Preintervention – I will gather information via a Microsoft Form which the pupils will access via mobile devices and a QR code displayed on the board. They will answer a variety of questions on how often they are given the opportunity to take part in class discussions, answer questions, how often they actually do, and how confident and comfortable they feel when doing so.

Intervention – This will involve me using the 'Dialogic Talk Moves' as often as possible and ensuring that each pupil in the class is asked to speak or is given the opportunity to do so at least once in every lesson. Contributing vocally in class will be the 'expectation'. I will also be encouraging the pupils to read from the board - in a sense 'delivering' the lesson in order for them to become comfortable hearing their own voices in front of the class. I will be observing changes in pupils throughout the process, particularly in pupils who I have identified as quiet or disruptive, to see if it helps provide a structure which we can build on.

Postintervention – At the end of the intervention period, I will run a second questionnaire in the same format as the first but with a few altered questions. These will focus on how the pupils feel about engaging in the vocal elements of class now, when compared with the preintervention period. Some of the questions will be the same so that I can make a direct comparison between the preintervention and postintervention periods. I will look at the pupils' responses and the data, compare the results of the questions which are the same, and will also reflect on how this matches my own personal observations.

Impact of classroom based enquiry:

The impact of the intervention was looked at in a number of ways, drawing information from the pupils' responses, the comparison of data from the forms, and my observations as a teacher.

Preintervention data

In the preintervention form, 38% of pupils felt they were 'almost always' given the opportunity to take part in class discussions, 23% felt they were 'often' given the opportunity, and 38% felt they were 'occasionally' given the opportunity. Regarding being given the opportunity to answer questions in class, these figures changed to 27% for 'almost always', 42% for 'often', and 31% for 'occasionally'. In terms of how the pupils felt, 27% identified speaking in front of others as 'challenging', 50% found it 'neither challenging or easy', and 23% said they were relaxed and confident when doing so. This identifies that as a teacher, I can work to give the pupils who are currently not feeling that they are given the chance to answer questions or participate in class discussions more opportunities to do so.

Postintervention data

In the postintervention form, 41% of pupils said that they now take part in class discussions and answer questions more than they did at the start of 2022. 34% thought they 'maybe' did, and 24% said that that they did not. In terms of the pupils' confidence, 28% of the pupils said that their confidence had increased over the same period, 45% said that it had 'maybe' increased, and 28% said that it had not increased. 34% said that they were now more relaxed, 48% said that they were 'maybe' more relaxed, and 17% said

that they were not more relaxed. This demonstrates that there have been some improvements in the way in which many pupils view speaking in front of others due to this intervention. However, there are still pupils who have not noticed any difference, or who feel that answering questions or participating in class discussions is still challenging.

Direct comparison data

Deliberately, I chose to ask the pupils to answer some of the same questions in both of the forms, so as to compare data from the pre and postintervention periods directly. Below is a data table showing the four questions asked in both questionnaires.

How often do you take part in work-related discussions in class?

	Pre -intervention	Post -intervention
Never	4%	7%
Occasionally	46%	66%
Often	31%	21%
Almost Always	19%	7%

How confident do you feel taking part in work-related discussions in class?

	Pre -intervention	Post -intervention
Not Confident	15%	17%
Slightly Confident	38%	41%
Mostly Confident	35%	21%
Very Confident	12%	14%

How often do you answer questions in class?

	Pre -intervention	Post -intervention
Never	4%	17%
Occasionally	69%	55%
Often	23%	24%
Almost Always	4%	7%

How confident do you feel answering question in class?

	Pre -intervention	Post -intervention
Never	15%	21%
Occasionally	46%	48%
Often	27%	21%
Almost Always	12%	10%

This comparative data was surprising as it shows a slight decrease in confidence and frequency levels involving taking part in class discussions and answering questions. In some ways it contradicts the other data received in the postintervention form, which showed increased confidence and participation levels in class discussions and answering questions. In my view, there may be several reasons for this.

1. Pupils are now more aware of contributing and participating orally. This is still new to them, it is not easy, and they are adjusting. Confidence levels are not high due to this.

2. Pupils are now more self-critical, as they adjust to new expectations.

3. The class personnel was slightly different when I ran the two forms. For the preintervention form there were 26 responses, and for the postintervention form there were 29. A new pupil had joined one class, who wasn't there for most of the intervention.

4. To develop new skills and confidence, two months is not a long period of time. To really make a large impact, I anticipate needing at least six months. However, I believe this oracy-based approach is better carried forward indefinitely.

5. There is a difference between feeling like you are making progress/becoming more confident and actually making progress. Often progress is being made but initially it is hard to identify this.

My own observations

Despite the contradictory data resulting from the forms, my observations of the classes and of certain individuals has yielded some positive changes. Pupils who may usually try to distract others have been drawn into the learning and have engaged positively on a number of occasions. Other pupils who are naturally quieter are also being given a structured opportunity to participate vocally. This improvement has been noted in several classes who I have not included in this enquiry. As my own teaching has developed, these techniques have naturally found their way into my general practise with some notable results. In particular, an incredibly shy S1 girl who would usually not answer 'yes' to the register is now putting her hand up to ask questions and is smiling instead of trying to hide her face. This is a result of consistent work across the school throughout the entire year, but I believe that the oracy strategies I have utilised have played their part and are to be used as tools in the continuation of this progress.
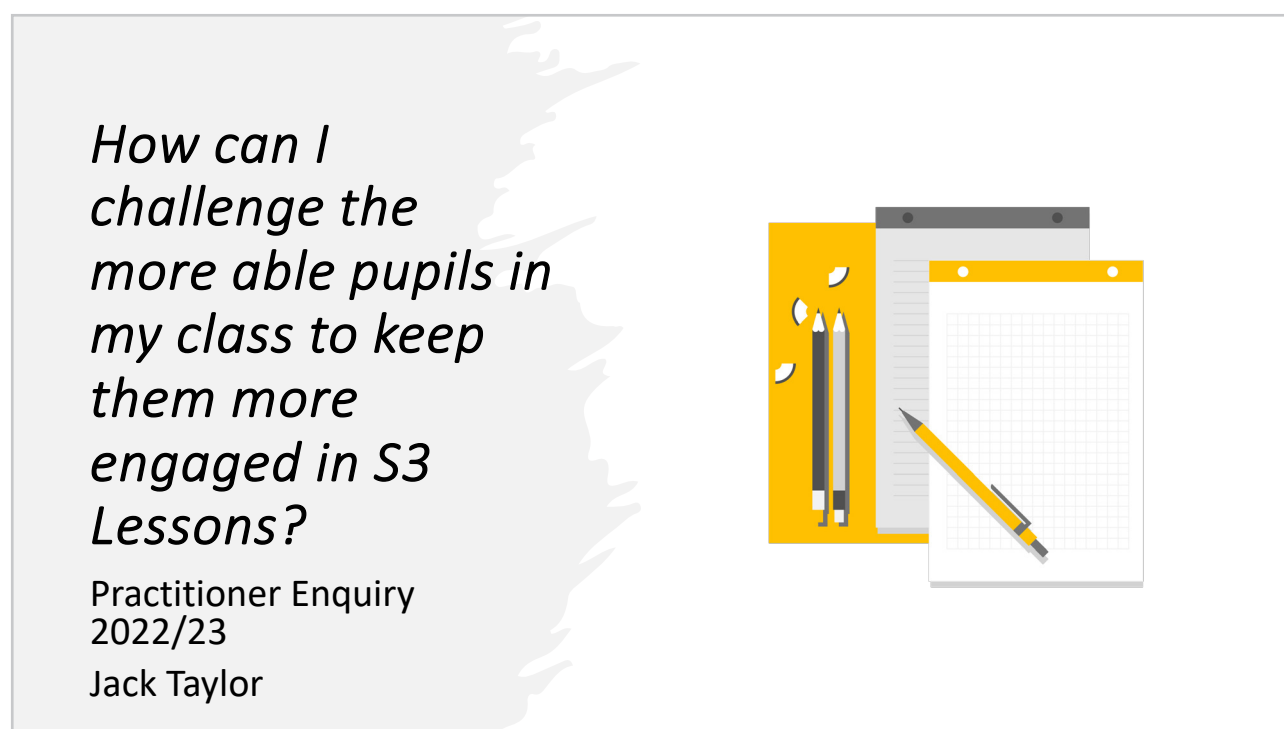
Next steps for learning and teaching:

As previously mentioned, I believe that the oracy strategies have a role to play in promoting better development of communication within the classroom environment. Firstly, they give the teacher a framework to provide equal and equitable opportunity for all pupils to take part in dialog. Secondly, they enable pupils to direct their speech skills in a positive direction and encourage those who are finding their voices to attempt to participate vocally. In this enquiry, I used the 'Dialogic Talk Moves' predominantly to achieve this, as well as asking my pupils to read from the board. I have also acknowledged other strategies such as 'Talking Points' which are used to encourage conversation and debate. This is something which I will be including in my teaching as starter, mid-lesson, or plenary activities. The enquiry has highlighted a need for consistency in this approach over a prolonged period of time for positive changes to be noticed and felt by the pupils. This is also alluded to by Millard and Menzies who say that teachers have concerns that the quality of oracy-related tuition varies greatly between classrooms (2016, p.72). This is something which can be rectified, by ensuring that each lesson contains an oracy element - a similar approach to incorporating the 'responsibilities of all' which include numeracy, literacy, and health and wellbeing. I would argue that the development of pupil oracy skills deserves a place alongside these fundamental skills as something which is taught as part of teacher-training, and which is included in university pedagogy. This is inline with Millard and Menzies's belief that 'a change of mindset' is required 'so that teachers and schools recognise that oracy is as critical for pupils' development as literacy and numeracy.' (2016, p.72). I will be continuing to observe the changes in all classes as I continue with this approach, particularly in pupils identified as requiring targeted support. Additionally, I see the oracy framework as a tool to aid in the general recovery from Covid-19 which involves the reclamation of social, thinking, communication and confidence skills, in addition to the development of vocal skills in young people. This report will be shared with my mentor and senior leadership team, alongside the Oracy working group who have shown an interest in this study. I look forward to gathering their thoughts on these conclusions.

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https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oLWU4nAOdH3K9k5cA4UC1rig0TqHAWsl/view

Download:
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To what extend does 'pupil choice' impact engagement and creativity in art and design lessons?

Robyn Morrison

What was your driving question?

At the start of the year, when I returned from maternity leave, the art department worked in other areas of the schools whilst building work was taking place in the department. Project work was begun in these different settings and then continued on in more practical forms when returning to the department. From my observations in these different settings learners seemed more disengaged and it was challenging on some projects to break this cycle even when work took more of a practical format. BGE pupils were impacted most without the pressure of exams looming. Reading into engagement and encouraging creativity lead me to consider the importance of pupil choice and autonomy in their learning.

Literature Findings and Initial Enquiry

Kelly (2017) states that 'student engagement thrives when learners have the autonomy to select the order, approach, or style of their tasks.' In order for pupils to actively engage in their learning they need to have an intrinsic motivation for doing something, a personal enjoyment which as Kelly recognised can come from choice. The concept of 'flow' is the optimal level of engagement where people are 'in the zone' and have heightened concentration in which creativity can and might occur. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990.) According to Schmidt (2010) learners who achieve a state of flow are more motivated to seek out that experience again.

From these readings, I carried out a questionnaire with a range of S1, S2 and S3 pupils. Pupils were asked about which areas of their learning they felt they had pupil choice and which areas of choice they deemed as important to their own engagement in a lesson. The plan is to use this data to determine next steps for changes in my practice.

Postintervention Data

The questionnaire produced some results to be expected. Most interestingly was the difference in responses between year groups. The majority of pupils (71%) found that they only *'occasionally'* had choice within their learning. This results was higher in S1 and S2 year groups. S1 in particular had less of an understanding of choice, recognising free reign in terms of lesson content as choice. S2 and S3 year groups recognised a wider range of subjects as offering choice in their learning. All year groups placed value on having a choice of where and who they sit with as having an impact on their engagement in a lesson. This is an understandable result that was higher amongst S1 (50%) than S3 (31%). S3 pupils placed more value on the choice they had within a lesson such as lesson content (22%) and choice of activity in a lesson (13%). Although these results are not overly high, they did outweigh that of younger year groups.

Based on the initial questionnaire S1 learners seemed to recognise simple choices in their learning. S1 also didn't recognise art and design as one of the subjects where they were given choice. Moving forward, I intend to make S1 the focus of my enquiry with an aim of improving their understanding of choice and therefore engagement.

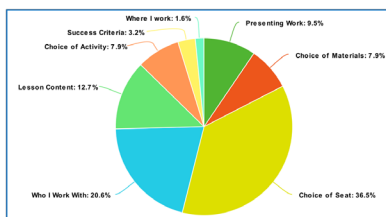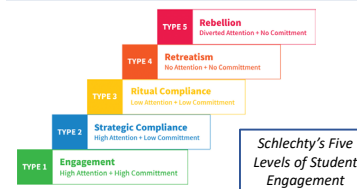*What area of choice do you think impacts your engagement in your learning? (Overall results)*

Next Steps and Impact on Practice

Over a roughly 3 week project on the recreation of a Van Gogh art work, learners will have two recognised points where they are given a clear choice in their learning going forward. Firstly this will be a group project, as according to Schimdt (2010) as group work plays a vital role in fostering and enhancing creativity. Learners will have choice with who they work with to complete the artwork. The second point of choice will be the materials they use to complete the project. At the start and the end of the project pupils levels of engagement will be measured against Schlechty's (2001) five levels of student engagement scale to understand the impact of 'choice' on their engagement. Creativity will prove more challenging to measure but observations will look for learners who could be considered to be in the state of 'flow'.

Schlechty's Five Levels of Student Engagement

### References

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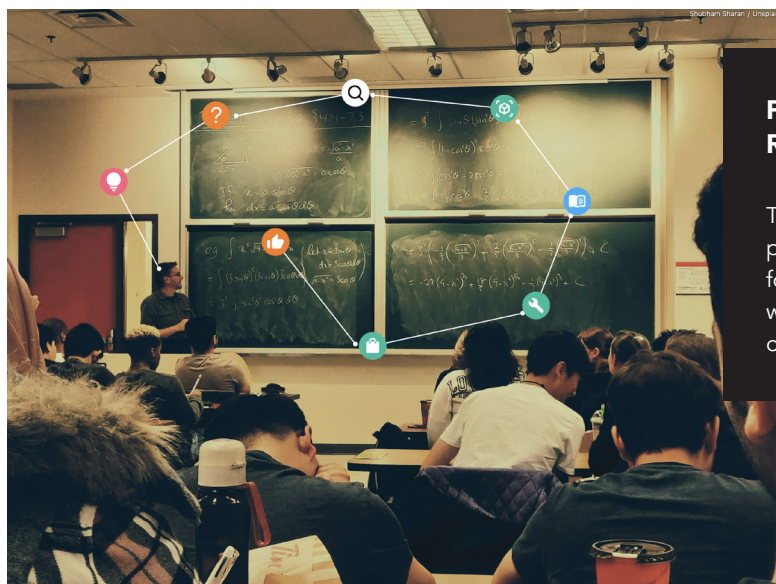
**Practitioner Enquiry 2022-23
Rona Lindsay**

This practitioner enquiry is based on the pedagogy of using worked examples in Maths for learning and teaching. However, some of what I learned in my research suggests that parts of this would be applicable in other subjects.

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Excellence

Collaborative Learning Group Planning

CLG:	
Sub-group name:	
Narrow focus/driving question:	
Relevant HGIOS challenge questions linked to this focus:	
Member names & roles:	
Three objectives for 2023-2024:	• • •
Know your impact: • What data (qualitative or quantitative) do you need to collect before you get started? • How will you measure the impact of your work?	
Links to research and professional reading (including requests for purchase of texts):	

Stakeholder input: • How will you capture pupil voice? • How will you widen input from our learning community? • How will parental views be sought/ captured?	
Sharing practice: • How will you share the work of your group with colleagues?	
Links to Excellence charter & toolkit?	
Links to School Improvement plan?	

References

Aberdeenshire Council, (2022) Learning Teaching and Assessment in Aberdeenshire. Available online: https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/as/ltaaberdeenshire/ [Accessed 4th July 2024].

GTCS, (2021) The standard for professional registration. General Teaching Council for Scotland. Available online: https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/653fc30601a80aefd5668009/65de10ce9d1436edbc53b787_GTCS_The%20Standard%20for%20Provisional%20Registration.pdf [Accessed 4th July 2024].

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Kelchtermans, G. (2009). Who I am in how I teach is the message: self-understanding, vulnerability and reflection. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, 15(2), 257-272.

Nguyen, D., Pietsch, M., & Gümüş, S. (2021). Collective teacher innovativeness in 48 countries: Effects of teacher autonomy, collaborative culture, and professional learning. Teaching and Teacher Education, 106.

Explanation of each enquiry example:

– **A Turner:** probationary teacher, Music, "In what ways does the introduction of the Oracy 'Dialogic Talk Moves' and strategies affect pupils' confidence, ability, and willingness to participate aurally in class?"

– **J Taylor:** first year teaching, Geography, "Classroom routines for challenging more able learners"

– **R Morrison:** part time teacher, Art and Design, "How does pupil choice improve pupil engagement?"

– **S Bell:** mid-career teacher, Music, "S1 music and listening to pupil voice"

– **R Lindsay:** Principal Teacher and Senior Leadership Team, Maths, "How to use worked examples more effectively in the Maths classroom."

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