

Learning to Lead

The Story So Far

Illuminating the nature, benefits and challenges of the Learning to Lead programme



Learning to Lead: The Story So Far

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benefits and challenges
of the Learning to Lead
programme

by
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Foreword

Barry Sheerman M.P.

During my select committee enquiry examining citizenship in schools, I had the good fortune of discovering the Learning to Lead programme at the Blue School in Wells. I visit more schools than most people and certainly more than any other parliamentarian; I am therefore quite difficult to impress.

My committee and I were amazed by the way in which the students in the school had been empowered to lead and actively share in the organisation and management of their education at their institution.

The scheme left such a lasting impression on me that I have become the ambassador for Learning to Lead and constantly extol its virtues when I am in other education settings. Whether it is a system, programme, or a social lever, I have seen how it empowers students and staff to transform their learning culture. I believe it should be at the heart of every school in the country.

Professor John MacBeath

Student voice has been around for some time, but never quite in the form or with the impact realised through the Learning to Lead initiative. All too often 'voice' is a token gesture, a ritual process which leaves the essential authority structures intact, assumptions of leadership untouched and 'agency' simply a foreign concept.

Understanding agency and what it means in the life of a school and in the lives of students requires an honest attempt to come to terms with what disenfranchises young people and inhibits their engagement with learning. It is a risky business to open this Pandora's box but a risk that is repaid many times over. As this report so powerfully demonstrates, the benefits are at least threefold - to students, to the school and to the community which it serves. Nonetheless, this trinity of benefits does not tell the whole story. Students are only temporary visitors to schools and however significant the benefits to them in the 'afterlife', beyond schooling, there is always another generation following behind. These students' legacy and the ultimate impact of the project has therefore to be tested by a set of values and ways of working which become deeply embedded in the fabric of school life, and in learning which crosses boundaries of role and status. On every count this report offers hope and optimism for a better kind of school.

Contents

Foreword	i
Barry Sheerman M.P.	
Professor John MacBeath	
Contents	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	p1
Genesis and rationale	p2
Vision and values	p5
Learning to Lead: the essential elements	p6
The role of the Community Link Teacher	p8
Governance and management	p8
Tools and techniques	p10
Learning to Lead in action	p10
Benefits and impact	p19
Challenges and issues	p28
Conclusion	p30
References	p31



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- The Meadow Sports College, Sandwell, Birmingham
- Whalley Range High School, Manchester
- St Egwins Middle School, Evesham
- Frome Community College, Frome, Somerset
- The Hertfordshire & Essex High School and Science College, Bishops Stortford
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Introduction

This document seeks to do two things: first, to present a clear and accessible picture of the Learning to Lead model; second, to portray the Learning to Lead programme as it has been implemented and developed within the 'pilot schools' in 2008-2010. To this end, the authors draw on an evaluation study carried out by a team from the Leadership for Learning group at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. The report (Frost and MacBeath, 2010) can be downloaded from www.leadershipforlearning.org.uk.

“Leadership is not just about being the person in control. You learn to listen and work as a team. You learn to trust each other.”

Student, School I

Learning to Lead breaks new ground in the field of student participation and reflects the growing conviction amongst practitioners, policy makers and researchers that young people are entitled not only to be heard, but to be active partners in the process of their own education. The principles underpinning such work have been articulated in documents such as *Working Together: Listening to the Voices of Children and Young People* issued by the DCSF (2008) and the report of the GTC commissioned research 'The influence and participation of young people in their learning' project (MacBeath *et al.*, 2008).

Learning to Lead is a programme that enables students to lead projects that make a difference to their schools and wider communities. Their engagement in such activity helps to transform schools into communities where the interests and abilities' of all its members can flourish.

The programme is designed to capitalise on the ideas, energy, abilities and enthusiasm of students working collaboratively with each other and with the school staff.



The Fitness Cuisine Team serving visitors at a 'Sharing Day' when students and staff from other schools visited the Blue School

Genesis and rationale

The Learning to Lead programme developed from a strategy for enhancing student participation and engagement at the Blue School in Wells, Somerset. The more traditional model of school council was reconstructed and re-launched in 2002 in order to engage more students in a direct and active way. This was a radical transformation which began with a whole school survey and led to the birth of student-led project teams. The teams would enable students to become activists and to exercise leadership in tackling problems and concerns in practical and transformative ways.

The original programme, known as the 'Blue School Council' continues to develop and now has 260 students involved in over 30 teams.

The Blue School Council has its own website and plans to set up a radio station. Students are working with the Parent Teacher Association to raise funds for a dedicated office and meeting space. Teams that enrich the school in different ways have been formed, for example the 'B-Human Team' offers break dancing training. Teams focussing on curriculum matters are also developing.

To date Learning to Lead has been adopted by over 40 schools including secondary, primary and special schools.

Learning to Lead is a very deliberate and specific approach to support for student leadership. Its rationale rests on the belief that, when schools take on the characteristics of communities, they enable all community members to exercise human agency – that capacity to be purposeful and to influence their own environment. Communities by definition are concerned with the wellbeing of their members and, when they create opportunities for the enhancement of human agency, they promote wellbeing and contribute significantly to the goals of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda (DCSF, 2007).

As the potential of the Learning to Lead approach to transform the nature and intensity of student engagement became clear, a training programme was developed to make the approach available in the first instance to a handful of schools close to the Blue School.

Student teams at the Blue School

January 2010

Buddying Team

Shelter Team

Quiet Team

Toilet Team

Transport Team

Africa Link Team

Fitness Cuisine Team

Beautiful School Team

Dyslexia Support Team

Fundraising Team

Waste & Recycling Team

Badger & Spoon Team (wildlife)

Fair Trade Team

Year Reps Team

Governance Support Team

Management Support Team

B-Human Team (Break dancing)

Aquarium Team

Minibeasts and Reptiles Team

Garden and Growing Team

Energy Team

Science Support Team

Office Support Team

Wild Bird Team

Blue Bow Fundraisers

New Office Team

Children of Chernobyl Team

New Kitchen Garden

Radio Team

Circus Skills Team

Stationery Team

I've seen initiatives come and go and I must say none have made such a sustained change for the good in the school as this one. It has had a profound effect.

Steve Jackson

Headteacher, The Blue School



The Blue School teams in action



The Learning to Lead Community Interest Company (CIC) was formed in 2007. This is a not-for-profit organisation with 10 young people included on its board of Directors. In 2008, the model was adopted by a further 13 schools in various parts of England including a number in economically disadvantaged areas, a special school, a middle school, rural and city schools and schools with students from a mix of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. All of these schools agreed to participate in an evaluation of the programme.

The Learning to Lead programme has appealed to senior leaders for different reasons. In some cases it may have been because their school council had become less effective and Learning to Lead seemed to offer a more inclusive approach to student participation. For others, Learning to Lead offered a way of creating a greater sense of ownership amongst students, enabling them to learn through taking responsibility, build their confidence and contribute to the improvement of the school. Uppermost in the minds of some senior leaders was the potential of the Learning to Lead approach to transform the school culture, changing attitudes, improving relationships and redefining the nature of learning and teaching. This applies as much to schools in challenging circumstances as it does to those serving more advantaged communities.

This comment was made by a senior leader in a school in a disadvantaged community and reflects the way Learning to Lead can play an important part in helping schools to respond to the challenges involved:

“*Learning to Lead is the most important thing I can bring to this school.*”

Deputy Headteacher, School M



The first board meeting of the Learning to Lead Community Interest Company



Learning to Lead

The Learning to Lead Community Interest Company (not for profit)

The role of the Learning to Lead Community Interest Company is to provide training, tools and support, including an annual online survey service, an annual Review and Renew session for teachers and an online teacher's forum. The organisation supports the development of self-sustaining networks for staff and students.

Vision and values

The model is based on a clear vision of student leadership underpinned by clearly articulated values. Learning to Lead challenges common understandings of the term 'leadership' and defines it as something that is open to all, rather than the preserve of a few. In this way the qualities and talents of everyone can be recognised and nurtured.

The underlying values of the programme are reflected in its processes, tools and structures. They are also modelled in the training for both staff and students. Members of staff are encouraged to see themselves as enablers who can allow all participants to flourish and learn.

There is an emphasis on the need to establish a safe and supportive environment in which it is possible to learn from mistakes. At the heart of the values that underpin the Learning to Lead approach is the all-embracing commitment to respect.

The commitment to values such as 'respect for others' is pursued through the use of tools such as the one included below.

Learning to Lead is viewing life as a journey to find out what is in us and others and how to lead this outward to be of value to the world.

Learning to Lead manual

The "Working with RESPECT" tool

- R** We are *RESPONSIBLE* for what our team has agreed to do
- E** We *EXPECT* each other to do what has been agreed
- S** We *SUPPORT* each other to talk and be heard
- P** We *PREVENT* anyone feeling left out
- E** We help *EVERYONE* to be happy with our plans
- C** We *CONSIDER* each others feelings and needs
- T** We *TALK* well of each other

Learning to Lead: the essential elements

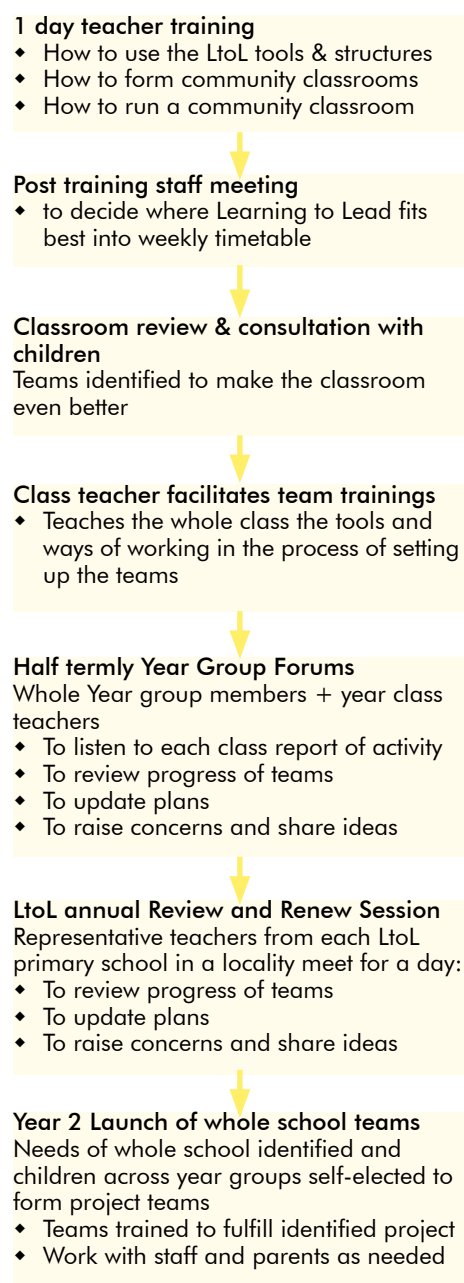
The Learning to Lead programme, informed and inspired by developments at the Blue School, offers a coherent and comprehensive approach which allows for flexibility and continues to evolve by being receptive to the experience of the schools where it is adopted.

There is a different model for Learning to Lead in primary schools and this is set out alongside the secondary model. The primary model is distinctive in that it is integrated into the curriculum. The secondary and primary school models for Learning to Lead are contrasted below.

The secondary school model



The primary school model



I felt like someone had catapulted me 8 years into the future and shown me what meaningful education could be like. It was one of the most inspirational experiences I've had as a teacher. The reason was that the day had absolutely nothing to do with teachers.

Deputy Headteacher, School M

The decision to implement Learning to Lead tends to be made after the headteacher or deputy head has attended an Insight Session. This is an introduction to the programme where students talk about what it means to be involved and the ethos and benefits of the approach are outlined.

The Learning to Lead model rests on the recruitment of one or two members of staff to be the Community Link Teachers. A teacher and, ideally, a deputy headteacher attend the Learning to Lead 2 day training programme to discover how to develop the programme in school. Participants experience the processes and materials for themselves to prepare them to become Learning to Lead co-ordinators in their own schools.



'This Is Our School' planning session at the Blue School



Students from the 'Children of Chernobyl' team showing the Blue School Council office to visitors from Chernobyl

The programme in school normally begins with an online whole school survey to elicit the views of students and staff about their school and community. The data from this are discussed by all students and staff in the 'This Is Our School' planning sessions usually organised within tutor groups. The outcome of the survey and workshop discussions is a set of priorities for change and improvement which are then publicised throughout the school. Students of all ages 'self-elect' to join project teams focused on the priorities identified. Once formed, the teams are provided with a training session which is values driven and focuses on team members as individuals. The training aims to launch the teams as self-managing groups in which leadership is shared and reliance on the Community Link Teacher diminishes over time. The teams normally meet at lunch times.

The provision of a designated office enables student facilitators and Community Link Teachers to meet and carry out the necessary administration. This becomes more important as the scope of the teams and the number of students involved in Learning to Lead increases. In the Blue School for example, the office is a hive of organised activity run by the students.

The role of the Community Link Teacher



Teachers make the most of the good weather during the Community Link Teacher training



A team training session at the Blue School

The role of the Community Link Teacher is to support the setting up and co-ordinating of the programme. This includes the administration of the whole school survey, support for tutors as they prepare to facilitate the 'This Is Our School' planning session, training and supporting the teams and assisting with the events such as Review and Renew sessions and the termly School Forum. An overarching function is to develop a positive rapport with the students through which values such as mutual respect are modelled. The training emphasises the key importance of this attitude and approach whilst at the same time introducing teachers to the tools and logistical considerations.

The burden of coordination can be shared; for example, at the Blue School, students assist with the co-ordination role and, in one of the schools new to the programme, there is a 'Steering Team' which consists of students who organised the survey and helped to collate responses and prepare feedback.

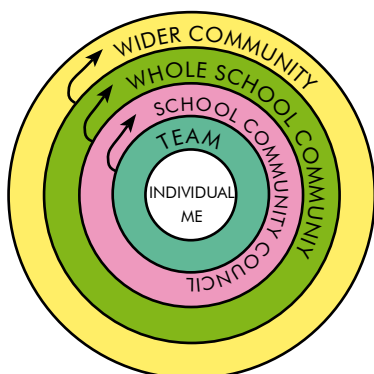
The Community Link Teachers' role in supporting the student project teams involves a skilful balance between standing back to allow the students to lead and being available when they are needed. It involves gauging the level of input that is required and having the courage to allow teams to make their own mistakes and learn from them, whilst at the same time ensuring that they are safe.

Governance and management

The concept of holarchy underpins the organisational structures that are essential elements of the Learning to Lead model. The term 'holarchy' refers to the inter-dependence of parts of a system wherein those parts have their own momentum. Individuals are encouraged to see themselves as part of a team and teams are seen as part of the school which is part of the wider community and so on. The term School Community Council is recommended to refer to the collective activity of the teams, including the elected Year Reps Team. In the Blue School historically it is referred to as the Blue School Council (BSC).

The School Community Council is made up of teams each carrying equal weight and at the Blue School one of those teams comprises students who communicate with and represent the views of the student body (Year Reps Team). This team is the only one with elected representatives. The Blue School holds

School Community Council in context



Management Support Team meetings to solve problems that require decisions or action by members of the school staff. They also have a 'Governance Support Team' which includes the Headteacher, a member of the Governing Body and a number of student representatives. This connects the work of the teams with the School Development Plan. Once each term there is a meeting of the School Forum in which all teams meet together to share their work and discuss issues that relate to the Community Council as a whole. At this meeting a number of students are elected to serve on the Governance Support Team.



The Blue School Council forum brings all the teams together

The following vignette portrays a meeting of the Forum in action.

A meeting of the Forum at the Blue School

The seating and audio visual technology had been set up by the students in the Coordination Support Team with minimal support from the Community Link Teacher. They also facilitate the meeting as a whole. There are 250 students from the 28 student teams with all age groups represented. A Year 10 student, Amy, welcomes guests, using the microphone confidently.

The forum opens with members of the Fundraising Team presenting a cheque for £500 to a representative of 'Horses for the Disabled' who then speaks about the charity's work.

The Buddying Team makes a presentation about their work. They talk about what had worked well, what could be improved and what could be learned for the future. Their slides contain observations, ideas for action and some criticism of teachers' behaviour. They argue in favour of vertical tutor groups and say that they intend to carry out research in other schools. Forum members express views and ask questions. How would we be taught as we'd be at different levels? / It's a big plan. I think there should be consultation with the whole school. I think everyone should be involved. / Why do we need houses back? / Aren't vertical tutor groups daunting for Year 7s? There is a good discussion about how best to consult students. Would everyone respond to an online survey for example?

A video of the work of the Blue School Council teams is shown. The new Blue School Council website is introduced by the student who had designed and constructed it. He explains the interactive facilities. In the discussion some students say that they would like to see more pictures and videos on the site. The lead student describes how he would be training facilitators of teams to use the site at lunchtimes. Facilitators would then train other team members.

At the conclusion of the meeting a candle is blown out after 10 to 15 seconds of silent reflection on their time together. Drinks and mince pies had been organised by the 'Beautiful School Team' as a Christmas end of term celebration.



Tools and techniques

Learning to Lead provides a comprehensive set of tools and techniques. The materials and methods of working reflect a good balance between the provision of guiding structures and the freedom for young people to express their views, formulate their own plans, take risks and learn from their mistakes. All of the stages described above are supported by tools that have been refined over a number of years.

One of the most popular tools with students is the consensus map which is a group decision-making tool. The RESPECT tool is central in establishing the groundwork. Other tools help the processes of planning, running meetings and reviewing progress, for example, 'A SMILEY' checklist helps people to think through what they are going to do, what they want to achieve and what they need to do to achieve their goals. It begins with 'A' for Accountability in order to emphasise responsibility and the connection between the work of individual teams and the wider community. There are also tools that help to structure and simplify the process of creating and using agendas and recording meetings.

Learning to Lead in Action 2008-2010

This section focuses on how the Learning to Lead approach is working and developing in the 'pilot schools' which participated in the evaluation study. The majority of these were secondary schools, but also included a middle school and a special school.

Implementation

In most cases the programme has been successfully adopted and is already having a significant impact as the comment from a deputy headteacher from one of the schools reported.

The pilot schools are at various stages of development; most have undertaken the survey, established teams and taken significant steps to embed the approach. Two of the original pilot schools withdrew in the early stages due to lack of staff capacity or change of headteacher, but have since rejoined the programme. The high level of commitment and enthusiasm of staff and students has enabled schools to come through challenging times, including staff changes or absences and few schools have had periods when activity has stalled. There is an awareness of the need for gradual development that is responsive to the character and needs of the school. At the same time however, some Community Link Teachers are daunted by



Some of the tools on display during the team training at one of the pilot schools

It's the only thing I've seen work at such a deep level after such a short amount of time.

Deputy Headteacher, School M

“The training confirmed my whole belief in education and has been the first initiative that has done that in 5 years of teaching. Since the training I have used some of the skills and philosophies in my classroom. Child-centred learning is very important ... a child that is valued, respected and listened to will become an adult who carries those traits with them.”

Community Link Teacher, School G

“I love the role; it gives you a completely different relationship with the pupils. They're more willing to talk to you; it becomes more friendly.”

Community Link Teacher, School L

“He doesn't take over, but helps if you need him to. ... You get treated like an adult”

Student, School D

the achievements of the Blue School and appreciate reassurance about the significance of what they have achieved in a short space of time.

The schools have focussed on establishing project teams and have not yet integrated elected year representatives into the programme or developed the proposed governance and management structures. Different models are also emerging: for example, one school has set up a Communications Team to keep the whole school informed and, where schools have retained their existing school councils, there is ongoing discussion about how Learning to Lead can best work alongside them. These schools and a number of others have chosen not to use the term 'School Community Council' and refer to the programme simply as 'Learning to Lead'.

Community Link Teachers

The pilot schools were asked to identify two Community Link Teachers who were invited to participate in a 3 day training course which included a visit to the Blue School.

Where schools were only able to recruit one person rather than the two recommended, it was generally more challenging to establish Learning to Lead.

Both staff and students were very positive about the role of the Community Link Teacher. The comment on the left is quite typical and indicates the impact on relationships between teachers and students.

Community Link Teachers also emphasise the challenge posed by the need to be flexible and responsive as well as well organised; to be able to stand back rather than take control. On the whole, feedback from students suggests that this balance is being achieved.

These comments represent a widespread feeling that Community Link Teachers are having considerable success in enabling students to take the lead.

“We cover a lot of things and we don't really need her. ...we're kind of in charge.”

Student, School L

Learning to Lead in challenging circumstances

This school is in an economically disadvantaged city location and students' aspirations and commitment to school are generally low. The headteacher saw a presentation about Learning to Lead and was inspired. It was decided to embrace fully the Learning to Lead programme and a deputy headteacher subsequently attended the training for Community Link Teachers. The Senior Leadership Team identified Learning to Lead as a key strategy in raising students' attainment by building self-belief and sense of ownership. The deputy head explained that Learning to Lead was helping to address a fundamental issue which concerns the way our expectations can put limits on what students can achieve.

The school developed a new way of engaging students in the Learning to Lead process. The Community Link Teacher established a 'Steering Team' of students who went through the team training and then took on the organisation and promotion of the whole school survey. The survey was due to take place around the time when there were incidents in the vicinity of the school, caused by racial tension, but the students persevered. The survey provided an opportunity for some to express their views about what had happened and this led to the formation of a team called 'Building a Better Community' which aims to address racism and bullying and help people feel more positive about their community.

The Steering Team includes students who had not always felt at ease in the school context and it became apparent that the experience of being involved was making a big impact on their lives, particularly in developing a sense of purpose and a belief in their ability to make a difference. The deputy head talks about 'lending the students energy and belief until they can take it for themselves' and this strategy seems to be paying off. She is investing time in encouraging this team who will then help to support other students. She is also building awareness and capacity amongst the wider staff group.

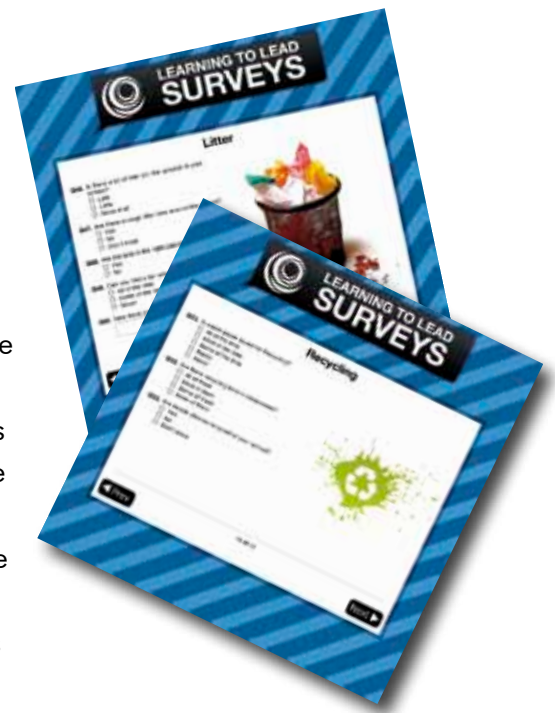
School M

Community Link Teachers have been allocated time for the role, although they often feel that it is not enough. Some schools have been creative in addressing this; one approach being to recruit other staff to support the teams, although this can require more time initially to set it up and train staff.

The role of the Community Link Teacher in capacity building and spreading the approach across the school is emerging as a key requirement if Learning to Lead's transformative potential is to be achieved and sustained. This is difficult when some of the senior managers do not fully understand or actively support the programme, but in most cases headteachers have attended a Learning to Lead Insight Session which has had a major impact on their commitment to the approach.

Whole school survey

Everyone in the school is invited to participate in a survey by completing the online questionnaire in which there is an emphasis on issues to do with school facilities and environment. Almost all the pilot schools carried this out, in some cases adapted to the local context. For example, the special school created their own version which was more accessible to their students. In another school, the questionnaire was supplemented with an art activity that enabled students to convey their views about school through pictures. While there is scope for schools to personalise the instrument to make it more relevant to their school, in the first instance schools tended not to take up this option. In some cases senior leaders were aware of the potential to broaden the questions to reflect issues of particular relevance to their own school and to involve students in constructing the survey.

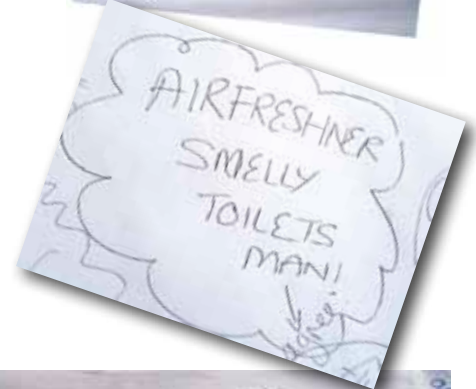
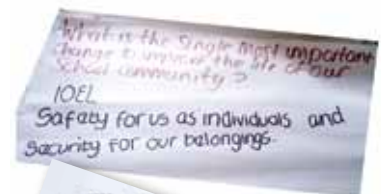


Example of 2 pages of the survey which students and staff complete online

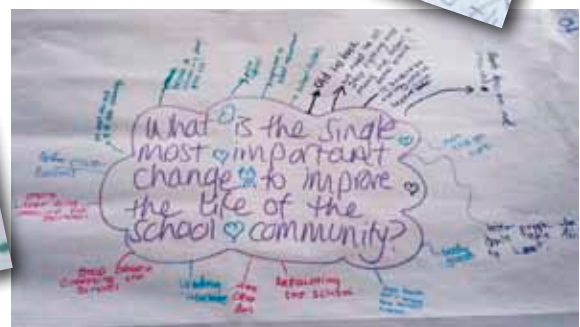
Schools are encouraged to repeat the survey in the subsequent year with their new intake and some schools have done this. In one school it was not possible to arrange access to computers for the purpose of the online questionnaire so the survey with the new Year 7s took place through discussions held during the geography lessons which happened to be taught by the Community Link Teacher to all Year 7 students.

The 'This Is Our School' planning session

The majority of the schools arranged for the Form Tutors to lead this half day session to discuss the survey results. Some tutors found the interactive nature of the session quite challenging, but often very rewarding, enabling a level of discussion with their tutor group that they would not normally have. They appreciated the clear and simple guidance provided. In a few schools it had not been possible to arrange these sessions. During the sessions, students mapped out their ideas on large sheets of paper, and in one school the Steering Team of students used these as part of an assembly presentation in order to demonstrate that students' views and ideas were being listened to.



Flipcharts created during the 'This is our school' planning session and used by students as part of a presentation in an assembly





'This Is Our School' planning sessions in action

Establishing teams

The Community Link Teachers usually analyse the data from the whole school survey together with records of the discussion in the 'This Is Our School' planning session. Through this they are able to identify the priorities around which the student project teams are formed. In the school that has set up a student Steering Team, the students were central to this process and actively involved in feeding back the findings and promoting the teams. The schools normally announced the titles of the teams in an assembly and invited students to 'self-elect'. All volunteers are accepted, which means that some teams start off with 20 to 30 members. Most of the pilot schools reported some drop-out from these teams with other students joining at a later stage.

The range of students participating is diverse, including some very academically able, some with complex learning difficulties, some who had become disengaged with learning and some who lacked confidence in social situations. The evaluation in the pilot schools indicates that the Learning to Lead programme can work in different kinds of schools with a range of students. The deputy headteacher in a school in a relatively disadvantaged area said that:

This approach works with our students and they are tough kids.

Deputy Headteacher, School M



Students with ideas for action on posters

The teams set up in the pilot schools are quite similar to those at the Blue School in that they are in the main practically focussed and concerned with physical and visual aspects of the school environment. However, we are beginning to see movement towards the creation of teams that address curriculum, learning and issues beyond school. Generally schools aspire to encompass these, although most are not yet doing so.

The following vignette shows how Learning to Lead can be integrated into the curriculum.

Learning to Lead and Opening Minds

In one school Learning to Lead has been integrated into the Opening Minds programme which involves all Year 7 students. Opening Minds is a competencies based programme sponsored by the RSA which has aims that resonate well with Learning to Lead (RSA, 2008).

The Community Link teacher and the Director of Key Stage 3 collaborated to produce a scheme of work in which the Learning to Lead approach is mapped on to the Opening Minds curriculum. The scheme of work uses the Learning to Lead materials in the course of a series of 42 lessons over a 6 week period. It includes elements of subjects such as History and Science, but also more generic themes such as 'Building Learning Power'. The Learning to Lead techniques fitted into the scheme of work very well without the need for adaptations. In preparing to teach this scheme of work, a total of 31 teachers were inducted into the Learning to Lead philosophy of empowering pupils to make a difference in their everyday lives.

The Opening Minds / RSA series of lessons helps the new Year 7 students to adapt to their new school. They are asked to walk around the school taking photographs and making a note of the things that they want to improve. They also investigate teams that are already in existence in the school. Students are invited to present their projects to the whole year group for feedback and discussion. Proposals included: 'Recycling', 'A lunch base', 'A collection point for chewing gum', 'Anti-bullying support' and 'A comfy room'. The students are then asked to vote for the most important initiatives and they can then 'self-elect' or volunteer to join a team for further project work.

School N

Team training

The team training is a crucial element of the programme and in the majority of schools it is allocated half a day for each team. Students report positive gains: they learn to work as a team and use the Learning to Lead tools; they also develop their enthusiasm and commitment to making a difference. The training provides a foundation for the self-development that continues through their participation in the work of the teams.



Playing the Russian doll game during a team training session

Some schools were concerned about whether the training would suit their students and in some cases it has been shortened or significantly adapted. There is an emerging debate about whether all students should be given the opportunity to experience the training and if so, whether this should be in its entirety or simplified, in some cases, to make it accessible. The evaluation suggests that the training can work for most students, although where students have lower levels of concentration or confidence, there may be a need for more support and therefore the allocation of more staff time. At the Blue School, some students who do not engage with the training or attend meetings may nevertheless take part in practical activities through which they gain acceptance and become exposed to the values of Learning to Lead.



Students prepare for their Team Fayre

The following vignette portrays a typical training session led by the Community Link Teacher in one of the pilot schools.

A Learning to Lead team training session

This 2 hour training session for the Recycling Team takes place in the afternoon. There are only 6 students at the start of the session. Two more join later and explain that the notice had not been read out that morning so they only found out about the meeting at the afternoon registration session.

The Community Link Teacher leads the training session according to a predetermined structure. She starts by posing the questions: Why have you decided to join this team? What should be the purpose of this team? What should be the focus of our activity? In response to each question students share their ideas verbally and then are asked to write them on small hexagonal pieces of coloured paper – ‘hexies’ - and add them to the ‘sticky wall’ on to which a set of headings had already been attached.

The session features experiential learning, including the use of Russian Dolls to explore and experience working in a team. The students seem to be very able, using sophisticated language including terms such as ‘consultation’, ‘raising awareness’ and ‘strategy’.

During the session the students discuss possible obstacles and focus on the problem of students perhaps joining the team but only wanting to ‘mess about’. They wanted to find ways to restrict entry to the team but the Community Link Teacher deftly deflected them from this train of thought.

At the end of the session they had covered the questions posed at the beginning and had made decisions about who to consult, the logistics and timescales involved. They had the outlines of an action plan. The Community Link Teacher said that she would type up the decisions made and circulate these to members of the team.

School I

Project teams at work

Each of the pilot schools set up about 4 teams in the first year and some have since set up additional teams. Many would have liked to establish more teams, but time is a constraint since each team requires a training session and ongoing support.



Students working on their ideas

Teams normally meet during lunch-times, which restricts what they can achieve, especially in schools where the lunch break is only 40 minutes. In some schools they are allowed time out of lessons to work on their projects, but in others, time out of lessons either for the team training or project work is a source of tension. It can be seen to be in conflict with academic study. In spite of this challenge, teams are working effectively, achieving results and gaining a great deal from the experience.



Students from the fund-raising team raising money for 'Heart for Africa' by selling cakes



Students present their ideas on recycling in school

A meeting of the 'Beautiful School Team'

The team meeting takes place during lunchtimes and students bring their lunch to the meetings. This team is well facilitated by one of the students who encourages others to contribute. Notes are kept using the Learning to Lead proformas provided.

The Beautiful School project aims to improve the ambience in the school hall by designing and painting a mural on one wall. The team are in touch with partner schools in Uganda, Germany and Spain and they are planning to include these schools' logos into the mural design. Team members are enthusiastic, keen to share ideas and become involved. Discussion focuses on the idea of organising a competition for the design of the mural and fundraising. The meeting with the Headteacher to seek approval is also discussed. One team member talked about her experience of the meeting and how successful she felt when the initial funding was agreed.

It was noted that the original plan had changed following the team's investigation into health and safety as well as the practicalities of painting the mural.

School I

Some teams have a very practical focus and do not have formal meetings. In some of the pilot schools, teachers were directing some of the activity, whilst encouraging students to make decisions within this more teacher led framework. At the same time the teachers themselves are learning and changing their practice, so that they feel more able to stand back and allow the students the space to take a lead. The Community Link Teachers demonstrate that they value the students' views and ideas and believe in their ability to make their own decisions and achieve the goals they set for themselves. This in turn is recognised and valued by the students.

The following vignette illustrates the inclusivity of Learning to Lead teams and the way project work can build commitment to moral purpose.

The Charity Team

The co-facilitators of the Charity Team say that they have people in their team who they would not have expected to get involved, but they feel that this makes the team stronger. As facilitators it is sometimes challenging to manage the meetings, making sure that everyone turns up, their views are taken into account and they get along with each other. They have learnt a great deal, developed confidence and believe that the team is working well.

The facilitators set the agenda for the meetings and take turns in writing the minutes. Their goal is to raise £1,000 within 6 months. The team is not just about giving money: they are keen to find out more about the causes they raise money for. For example, they telephoned a church in the town and arranged a visit to find out more about a charity working with people in Africa.

The facilitators noticed the positive effect on a couple of team members who they saw as the sort of young people who they would not have expected to make a positive contribution. These boys were shocked to discover that some people do not have proper toilets and became determined to do something to help. The Headteacher has also observed how students that might have been labelled as 'naughty' are now playing a full part.

School L

*He shows you respect
..... He always asks
your opinion before he
does anything.*

Students, School D

There is variation in the extent to which the teams use the Learning to Lead tools, but generally students find them useful and understand how the tools can help them. The following comment is typical.

*If we have a goal, we
can write it down and
work out how to make
it happen and then
say – let's look at the
checklist and see if
we've done what we
planned to do.*

Student, School G

There is a difference of view amongst Community Link Teachers about the appropriateness of tools that require record keeping, written plans and the like. Some feel that some students are discouraged by this and would much rather be engaged in practical work than participating in meetings. Other Community Link Teachers have been surprised by the active participation in team meetings of students who they would not have expected to get involved. Learning to Lead is keen to advocate that meetings and tools are only there to support practical activity and engagement, which is of paramount importance. The team training is key to enabling students to develop their understanding of the tools and how they can help them to manage the affairs of the team.

The special school has adapted the tools to make them accessible to their students. The Community Link Teacher has created visual images which the students can relate to. Simplifying the case study examples and reading them as stories has also helped the pupils imagine what they would like to improve. Two teams have been formed and they are focusing on improvements in the playground and the library. The Community Link Teacher talks positively about how the programme gave the impetus to set up teams to make improvements that are relevant to the students.

Benefits and impact

The evidence from students, teachers, headteachers, and from observations by the research team is that the Learning to Lead programme has had an overwhelmingly positive impact on the young people who participate as well as on the schools more generally. Evidence from Ofsted inspections supports this view. Variations in the extent to which each of these benefits are experienced in different schools can be attributed in part to the degree to which the various aspects of the approach have been adopted.

This section draws from the evaluation study to highlight the benefits and impact of the Learning to Lead programme on students, on their schools and beyond.

Annual Review and Renew meetings

It is recommended that each team has an annual review led by the Community Link Teacher. This is an interactive session that helps teams reflect on their achievements and set goals for the future. It reaffirms their commitment and is a vital part of the process.

At the Blue School these are given high priority and, where they have taken place in the pilot schools, they have proved extremely valuable. However they have not yet been established in most of the pilot schools. Community Link Teachers express concern about the time required for these meetings, but nevertheless intend to arrange them in the second year of the operation of Learning to Lead.

Benefits to students

The evaluation team identified 11 specific but inter-related benefits for students. They:

1. develop a stronger sense of commitment to their own learning
2. experience a strengthening of their emerging sense of moral purpose
3. have an enhanced sense of belonging to the community of the school
4. value and look after one another
5. acquire skills, particularly social, communication and organisational skills
6. develop confidence as learners and members of society
7. enjoy learning and enhance achievement
8. become more aware of their strengths and talents
9. develop resilience and a positive approach to challenges
10. are more willing to take risks and try new things
11. experience enhanced agency

Each of these 11 benefits is supported by the evidence and they are elaborated below.

1. Students develop a stronger sense of commitment to their own learning.

Teachers talk about the positive transformation of students' attitudes which they attribute to participation in Learning to Lead. Students also express satisfaction about leading their own learning.

“(Being in a Learning to Lead team)... It's like our own little lessons.”

Student, School B

2. The activities strengthen and provide direction for students' emerging sense of moral purpose.

Young people's natural sense of concern with social issues such as the environment is nurtured and given a context within which they can be expressed and acted on.

“I've gained confidence in talking to people who have authority. Before I would sit back and let people in charge tell me what to do. I think this would continue in other ways, like with government, if they wanted to tear down a building say, I would try and do something to stop it happening.”

Student, School B

3. Students' sense of belonging to the community of the school is enhanced.

Some students talk about the way in which Learning to Lead has given them a reason for coming to school. Others highlight their renewed sense of pride in being part of their school.

“I've gained more respect for the school. I used to think about school – get it over and done with. I didn't think much of it. Now I am going out of my way to help the school rather than just turn up.”

Student, School G

4. Students value and look after each other. In a Learning to Lead team, students experience both acceptance and protection and this can promote positive attitudes to school and feelings of self-worth.

“There’s a feeling of inclusiveness. There are little things that stand out in my mind ... like one Year 7 student who was being really badly bullied. A Year 11 student, who was also in the energy team that he had just joined, turned round and said ‘what are you doing? That is such an unkind way to behave to somebody’. So there’s a sense of protection, a sense of belonging.”

Community Link Teacher, School B

7. Students enjoy learning and achievement is enhanced. Students enjoy being involved and their enthusiasm enables them to learn and achieve.

5. Students develop skills, particularly social, communication and organisational. Teachers observe that students are developing remarkable levels of capability in relation to organising meetings, carrying out practical tasks, facilitating each other and so on.

“I’ve gained lots of skills, confidence, and organisation. You’ve got to plan the meetings, write agendas, put reminders in registers. There’s lots of commitment to it, but it’s worth it.”

Student, School N

“We didn’t want to stop. We wanted to keep on going and going. We all had light bulbs on top of our heads that day.”

6. Students develop confidence as learners and members of society. Many students talk about how their participation in Learning to Lead activities has helped them to feel that they can solve problems and that they are capable individuals, whereas their experience of subject related learning can cause them to feel a sense of failure.

“It feels like we’ve got the power to do something. ... We have a bit of power, but we use it in a good way.”

Student, School N

“The energy I felt from the team was really good. I was sitting there and feeding off the energy. We were laughing, smiling.”

Students, School M

8. Students become more aware of their strengths and talents. Students discover new skills and strengths when put into situations they have not encountered before.

“As a team we realised we’d made a mistake and knew what we had to do....as a team I think it’s made us stronger and realised, yes, we are learning all the time and we make mistakes in our lives and we can lead our lives how we want to.”

Student, School M

9. Students develop resilience and a positive disposition to challenges. Learning to Lead team work helps students to develop positivity.

“To make positive changes, you need to be positive about it, so if things go wrong, you say ‘this is where it went wrong’, but this is how we can improve it.”

Student, School M

10. Students are more willing to take risks and try new things. Learning to Lead is helping to broaden horizons and raise aspirations, which is particularly important in schools in disadvantaged areas.

“Life isn’t just about people. It’s about decisions that people make. If you make a decision, paths open to you. You can walk down a path that seems straight, that you know what’s going to happen or you can take a risk, take a leap into the unknown and have fun while you’re doing it.”

Student, School M

11. Students’ agency is enhanced. The sense of empowerment and purposeful engagement is experienced as transformative. This contributes to all of the above.

“It’s made a difference because you ain’t just effecting yourself anymore, you’re effecting everyone else, like you’re getting involved with others to make a difference and like you ain’t just an individual anymore, but you recognise you’re part of everything else.”

Student, School M

A student team discussing ideas with a teacher



Evidence from the evaluation shows how the Learning to Lead activities are helping to address the aims of the QCA's 'personal, learning and thinking skills' (PLTS) framework as illustrated in the following table (QCA, 2008).

Mapping Learning to Lead on to personal, learning and thinking skills

The QCA's framework for personal, learning and thinking skills aims to develop 'successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens'. It is evident that Learning to Lead addresses these aims.

Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills

How these skills are developed through Learning to Lead

Independent enquirers

All the project teams go through a process of investigation in order to plan what to do and how to do it.

Creative thinkers

The Learning to Lead approach includes tools and processes to help students generate and explore ideas and different ways of tackling issues and problems.

Reflective learners

The reflective process is continuous and facilitated by the supportive relationships. Students are encouraged to learn from mistakes.

Self-managers

Students make a positive choice to join a team and the experience is challenging, requiring them to take initiative, develop new skills and organise themselves.

Effective participators

The teams provide the opportunity for students to play an active part, achieving real change and improvements in the school or wider community.

Team workers

Students take responsibility for running the teams themselves. They take on different roles, learn to negotiate and work together to achieve their aims.

Benefits to the school

Learning to Lead activities can contribute to transforming the relationships within the school. The following are 7 of the benefits identified:

1. The development of more respectful and collaborative relationships between teachers and students
2. The development of respectful and collaborative relationships between students
3. Improvement in the school environment and facilities
4. Contributions to the improvement of the quality of learning and teaching
5. Teachers are becoming more aware of their students' potential
6. Participation is seen as more attractive
7. Students play a part in building capacity and sustaining the work in the future

These are more fully described below.

1. More respectful and collaborative relationships between teachers and students are developed.

Teachers report that Learning to Lead creates a more positive sense of collaboration. There is a change in the dynamic when the differential in subject related expertise is taken out of the equation.

“In the school council the teachers treat you with respect. They are doing it because they want to. They trust you and believe you can do it.”

Student, School A

2. More respectful and collaborative relationships between students are developed.

Being in a team with students of different ages and working together for a common cause strengthens solidarity and empathy.

“We socialise with people we don't normally talk to around school.”

Student, School M

3. There are improvements in the school environment and facilities.

The Learning to Lead approach enables students to improve many aspects of school life, for example by creating a more effective system of recycling in the school.

“It has given a buzz around the school. People can see results. It's visible.”

Head teacher, School D

“Vandalism and graffiti have been knocked on the head.”

(Referring to toilets)

Head teacher, School L

4. There are contributions to the improvement of the quality of learning and teaching. This is in its infancy, but it is evident that Learning to Lead is beginning to impact on what happens inside the classroom. Some project teams address aspects of teaching and learning and some teachers are using the Learning to Lead tools in the classroom. Students are making the connection between Learning to Lead and learning in the classroom.

“It helps with English because it is expanding our minds and with Maths because if we plan to do something it costs money and we have to work this out.”

Student, School D

7. Students contribute to building capacity and sustainability. The deep understanding of leadership, teamwork and the need to think ahead is combined with a commitment to the school and fellow students.

5. Teachers are becoming more aware of their students' potential. When teachers see how students respond to the challenge of project team activity, they tend to form a more positive view of what students are capable of.

“You see this grumpy attitude in the classroom and then you get them in this situation and they're completely different.”

Community Link Teacher, School L

6. Participation is seen as more attractive. Whereas many students saw involvement in activities such as the school council as 'uncool', participation in Learning to Lead activities is proving more attractive to a wider range of students.

“The best moment was when I saw the names (of students wanting to join teams) and realised how many people want to make a change.”

Student, School M

“We have the feeling that we will pass it on. We start things up for others to carry on.”

Student, School I

“We're changing stuff and doing this for other generations who come to this school as well. This will stay. It won't finish when we leave.”

Student, School M



The Learning to Lead notice board at one of the pilot schools.



Students liaise with a supermarket about the sale of bananas during Fair Trade Fortnight



Benefits beyond the school

There is evidence of:

1. contribution to positive changes beyond the school
2. projects contributing to improvements in relationships with the wider community
3. students inspiring others to participate in the Learning to Lead programme

These are more fully described below.

1. Some teams focus on matters beyond the school.

Some project teams focus on raising money for charities and some are concerned with 'Global Links and Fair Trade'. One school in a disadvantaged area has recently formed a team called 'Building a Better Community' which aims to tackle racism and increase people's pride in their community.

“People think if they live (here) you can't achieve anything; 'who cares what we put down, it's not going to be read by anyone'. This made us more determined. Some people are starting to see that (this place) is not so bad.”

Student, School M

2. Some project work contributes to improvements in relationships with the wider community. Learning to Lead provides opportunities for good publicity to challenge the negative stereotype of young people and improve the reputation of the school. Where the work of a project team involves charitable efforts in the community, teams may decide to contact the beneficiaries and find out how the money is being used. Other teams draw on the expertise or ideas of community members. The leader of a local Chernobyl charity spoke of his experience of working with a Learning to Lead team at the Blue School.

3. Students inspire others to participate in the Learning to Lead programme. Students have spoken at events outside school to celebrate and publicise their achievements and this tends to encourage other students and teachers to take up the challenge of Learning to Lead. For example, students have talked to year 6 students at the primary schools and have helped to run the Year 6 Induction Day. In some cases teams from different schools are meeting to share ideas.

“We sat with the Fundraising Team and gave them a report and pictures and had a question and answer session – they were just throwing ideas out and within a week they’d had a mufti day and raised £1,000. The kids were totally involved. They look after different parts of the school....If you’ve got kids like that fantastic. It took us both by surprise at the number of ideas – some of the children are not very old – the ideas they came up with – Can we get them an ambulance for transport from hospital to the countryside? They all came up with different ideas – all very sensible suggestions. We were skipping when we left...We’re excited, really excited to be working with them.”

Leader of a local charity



Students in the Badger and Spoon team at the Blue School show the chickens to Year 6 students during an induction day.

Challenges for the future

For schools interested in adopting the Learning to Lead programme there are a number of challenges and issues that have arisen in the evaluation study. These need to be considered.

The level of participation

Potentially all students in a school can participate in Learning to Lead or at least be touched by it, but it takes time to develop this level of participation. Some team activities inevitably involve the whole school, for example when the Fundraising Team runs a non-uniform day. Students have a vital part to play in promoting Learning to Lead and in some cases there are teams which have taken on this task.

Protecting the principle of choice

The defining characteristics of the Learning to Lead programme are the principles of student choice and invitational leadership. However, school timetables tend to allow little space for optional, student-led activity. Project work is often limited to lunch breaks and at the end of the school day. In some schools Learning to Lead is built into the timetable which seems to be a positive step as the tools and ways of working can be of value in whatever situation a student chooses to use them. However there is a danger that the voluntary principle may be violated if students are required to join a team because it has become part of the formal curriculum.

Sustainability and capacity building

The successful adoption of Learning to Lead has depended on the commitment and enthusiasm of one or two Community Link Teacher(s). The work is time consuming and challenging, but very rewarding. If the programme is to be sustained, it needs not only to be relatively self-supporting through the power of student leadership, but also to have practical support from other members of staff and active support from senior managers. In some schools there are growing links between subject areas and the work of particular teams.

Coherence and the role of management and governance

Many schools have yet to establish the structures of management and governance. Experience of the programme as it developed in the Blue School suggests that these structures help to create coherence and to embed the programme in the life of the school. The meetings of the Management Team ensure that key elements of the school's management arrangements can be mobilised in support of the work of project teams and the potential synergies between them are husbanded. The Governance Support Team ensures that the students' activity is acknowledged and supported as part of the overall vision and plan for the school. As the number of teams grows, it becomes increasingly necessary to establish these structures.



The link between representation and practical action

The Learning to Lead programme can enliven student participation and engagement in a way that the traditional representative school council often failed to do. However, if the recommended governance structures are not effectively established, the representation of the student body and a key strategy for student voice may be lost. The Forum ensures that the work of the project teams is opened up to scrutiny by the student body and facilitates communication between the teams.

The tension between alternative pedagogic codes

The values and pedagogical assumptions implicit in the Learning to Lead approach can be at odds with the dominant pedagogic codes of the school.

Learning to Lead pedagogy	Traditional pedagogy
Student-led agenda	National curriculum-led agenda
Student-led activity	Teacher-led activity
Assessment of learning implicit in review & reflection	Assessment of learning explicit and determined by curriculum related criteria
Focused on practical action	Focused on academic learning

There are signs that the introduction of Learning to Lead is contributing to the development of a pedagogy that is more personalised and recognises the need to enhance students' agency, but some students are frustrated by the difference between the rules that apply in the classroom and those that determine the way a Learning to Lead project team works.

Ownership of the agenda

The Learning to Lead programme has the potential to enable students to pursue activities that are meaningful to them. Students are consulted, but the tools used to survey the students' views tend to point towards a particular range of themes: for example, 'Recycling', 'The Beautiful School' and 'Healthy Eating'. As the programme gathers momentum and Community Link Teachers feel more confident, students are being encouraged to set up teams focussed on what might be seen as more challenging issues such as those concerned with teaching and learning.

Physical space for project work and administration

About half the schools have a Learning to Lead office where the students can use the phone, computers and connect to the internet. Most of the others are working towards this or have this aspiration.

Conclusion

The portrait offered here is a very positive one. The recommendation comes both from the Learning to Lead strategists, but also from the evaluation team at the University of Cambridge. Those contemplating the adoption of the Learning to Lead programme will want to make themselves aware of the challenges and issues referred to above. Developing this programme inevitably demands an investment of time to plan and implement it and to connect it with the broader aspirations of the school. The challenges that have been highlighted are being addressed and as the approach spreads, processes and solutions are evolving and are beginning to be shared between schools by both students and staff.

We have no hesitation in saying that the Learning to Lead programme has enormous potential to transform the experience of school for young people and in so doing transform the school itself. It will be interesting to see how the trends in levels of measured attainment fare as Learning to Lead becomes embedded in the participating schools over the next few years, but the evidence so far is that the programme is making a huge contribution to building capacity for learning. The qualitative evidence points to radical shifts in student dispositions, marked improvement in the quality of relationships and the development of participative school cultures which enable young people to flourish and achieve.

By inviting students to exercise leadership in the way that the Learning to Lead programme does, we take a major step towards the restoration of trust in young people. This is badly needed in order to mobilise the energy, creativity and moral purpose of students for the benefit of their own education and for the benefit of their schools and communities.

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Learning to Lead

The Story So Far

Illuminating the nature, benefits and challenges of the Learning to Lead programme

Further copies of this document and the evaluation report can be downloaded from both the Learning to Lead and Leadership for Learning websites listed below.

www.learningtolead.org.uk

www.leadershipforlearning.org.uk

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