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Mission Possible: Will You Accept the Challenge?

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The new education landscape in Wales could look a little daunting to those of us who are perhaps a couple of decades into our educational careers whether that be as teacher or school leader. Let's just take a look at the horizon; Successful Futures, ALN reform, school to school working and the OECD heralding the age of the learning organisation. Perhaps one of these seminal changes would be challenging enough. But, in Wales, we like a challenge and we are doing all of these at the same time. The Central South Consortium (CSC) has been at the forefront of many of these changes and you could argue we created the school to school working agenda with the Central South Wales Challenge, which clearly predated the Welsh Government facsimile.

In many ways this is daunting. However, in some ways when viewed with one eye closed and from a low horizon; does actually make some sense. All of the changes will require one common theme, teachers examining their own practice, that of their colleagues and evaluating whether changes are having a positive effect for their classes and the school. Those schools who have embraced this change are already producing results both in terms of outcomes and in terms of developing and embracing new pedagogical approaches.

I have had the pleasure of working with and collaborating with some outstanding teachers and leaders. In many cases, when asked, these great professionals are often reticent to examine

what makes them great and in some cases are unable to pin-point the most effective aspects of their practice. In my opinion it is not disrespectful to describe this as an example of unconscious competence. In the new world order, surely it would be more powerful if these extremely competent colleagues became conscious of exactly what makes them great. What works for them and why? This requires us all to make research in our schools, collaborating with others and evaluating practice the very highest of priorities. Essentially making our schools learning organisations and our teachers true lifelong learners. These areas of action research are clearly mapped around pedagogy, the new curriculum and how best to share practice between schools and tiers of leadership within school and the wider system. That is the aim of my work within the research practice partnership group of hub schools, which is in its early stages of development at CSC. To date, we have engaged in high level discussions about partnerships with higher education institutions, how to broker these, considerations of their expertise and developing a focus within our own schools. Already, this is developing some interesting and worthwhile networking opportunities, leading the system in developing the capacity to become self-improving through inquiry-based approaches.

What is there to lose? A few grey hairs, lots of herd-like following of unproven and un-evidenced

teaching practice and some of our valuable time. In return for these downsides, we reclaim the most noble of professions, excite and engage all learners in our schools, staff and pupils alike, and create a school system that can hold its head high with the big hitters of global learning. That surely sounds like not just a challenge but also a Mission and a worthwhile one at that.