



## **How can teachers be encouraged to raise standards and close the achievement gap by adopting a whole school strategy?**

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### **Summary**

In this research, ways of empowering teachers to work together are explored in an attempt to raise standards in a school. It contains many practical suggestions as to how to embed good practice and to empower teachers to think for themselves.

### **Context**

Cyfarthfa High is an 11-16 mixed English-medium community comprehensive School in Merthyr Tydfil. The school moved to a single site as a result of post-16 reorganisation in 2014. Currently there are 1,158 pupils on roll, compared with 1,446 two years ago when the school was an 11-18 school and included a sixth form. Sixty-three per cent of pupils live in the 20% most deprived parts of Wales. Nearly all pupils come from homes where English is the dominant language. The proportion of pupils who come from minority ethnic groups is around 3%. Twenty-eight pupils have English as an additional language. The rolling three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 17.3%, and this is in line with the Welsh average of 17.4%. Current figures place the total proportion of pupils on the special educational needs register at around 30.6% compared with 25.4% nationally. Around 1% of pupils have statements of educational needs, compared with 2.5% nationally.

PLCs have become a driving force in schools to implement change and directly address key priorities of school improvement. It is HOW this change can be successfully implemented, to ensure teachers are well-supported and that the right structure and organisation is in place, which is of greatest interest. A significant priority in our School Improvement Plan is to 'Raise the standard of teaching & learning,' with the aim of creating a new culture and climate in the school for professional development, and result in greater outstanding teaching practice. To address this an Outstanding Teaching PLC was created, with a range of teachers involved who have been trained by Olevi and the 'Outstanding Teaching Programme', who then could train and lead the school's teaching staff. The aims of the PLC were to support the development and implementation of other school

priorities, including LNF, digital learning, as well as addressing whole-school issues such as 'Raising Boys achievement' and 'More Able and Talented' pupils, and here was the greatest challenge.



The 'OTP' embodies the principles of self-reflection on teaching practice, and is structured to support teachers' in developing methods and strategies to use in the classroom to create the optimum learning outcomes. With a large number of teachers in the school, the PLC needed to embody and disseminate the key principles. A PLC team has emerged, involving eight other OTP trained colleagues who, through a model of distributed leadership, will support the implementation across the school. Our planning of the organisation of staff across the school was important in creating the right climate for effective collaboration of teachers, and this was the most crucial factor in achieving the aims of the PLC. **It was my aim to support and enhance teachers in improving classroom practice, and for teachers to 'share good practice' through engagement and collaboration.**

## INFLUENCES

As the leader of the OTP PLC, I decided to implement my training and expertise from the Olevi 'OTP' as the foundation of the development, structure and organisation of the PLC. The OTP has now emerged as a leading professional development programme, and having been one of the first trained teachers, I have first-hand knowledge and experience of the significant impact that the principles have on raising standards in the classroom and improving teaching practice. As an important development in the school, it was also important to have the expertise of an external person to the school in an advisory capacity. Therefore, an experienced and successful professional provided support in the planning stages, to talk through possibilities and create a detailed plan. Having also had 'Leadership' training, I embodied the principles of leading change in my school, and the importance placed on the collaboration of teachers as fundamental to the organisation and desire for success. However, it remains that the greatest influence remains the key priorities of the school, and in any planning and organisation, this remained the focus of all

decisions and conversations in this process, and continues to be at the core of the PLC.

### Methods/ Outcomes

The implementation of the structure and organisation of the PLC in school was fundamental to ensuring the success of the activity, and in the aim of creating a 'school-wide culture' with the focus on improving teaching and learning.

- I decided to use the model of the OTP to **structure teachers into 'Triads,'** and for them to undertake **a series of action-research projects directly linked to key areas of the OTP and school development priorities.**
- A '**plan, do, review**' process was implemented in line with OTP practice, to give teachers the opportunity to develop strategies and ideas, undertake 'learning walks' and review the process.
- To create the capacity for whole-school teacher involvement, it became **structured under the school calendar system**, as the impact that occurs by giving teachers time to collaborate outside lessons is of significant importance.
- The potential impact of the PLC in developing '**interactive communities of practise,**' **has been recognised by leading education figures as one of the leading strategies for reform.**
- Creating the opportunity for teachers to work together therefore provides the most productive climate by engaging with the language and practice of teaching and learning. It is in giving teachers the capacity to work together, that the foundation for effective change taking place in the school is created.

This was achieved through the organisation of the triads, though the potential impact of people and staffing needed to be considered, as it was fundamental to the outcomes achieved. This structure needed careful organisation to bring together teachers of different disciplines and specialisms, which in turn impacts on the learning environment created. A questionnaire completed at the end of the triad project which evaluated the teachers' thoughts and feedback from the work undertaken revealed that over 85% at least 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that working in a triad was 'beneficial' to them.



OTP Triad Planning

The importance of providing training for teachers to raise their expertise in the area of ‘teaching and learning,’ occurred through specialising in areas of development of key value and priority to the school. Effective change and improvement therefore became ‘Collective’ and shared leadership in the PLC led to more worthwhile outcomes. An internal change agency therefore emerged, with teachers at every level working together to develop key strategies and resources to support the triads. **Resource booklets were created for staff** with key information **on each focus area**, accompanied by examples, models and electronic templates which could be adapted and modified.

## Findings

In the triad questionnaire only 2% of teachers found the supporting resources and training sessions delivered by the PLC to be of no benefit to them. The overwhelming feedback has emerged that across all focus areas, some element of the training or resources has had an impact on every teacher involved, where a strategy has had an impact on their classroom teaching practice. Further support emerged in the form of a regular OTP newsletter, giving further resources and links to websites that could be instantly accessed and used by teachers to widen their knowledge. A HWB staff OTP PLC page was created that contained all the resources and supportive material used, as well as a calendar of events, and internet feeds, etc. Triads therefore were immersed in the climate of change for ‘teaching and learning,’ with support in many forms resulting in highly positive feedback from staff, with real changes in practice identified. For a minority of teachers, triad working was less successful where triad members were not available for the full cycle of triad work with their group, or that a teacher felt that the focus area was ‘not relevant’ to them. Triad working was a key element of the OTP, and was organized for the activity to engage all staff with teaching and learning. An issue over this is maintaining the engagement of all teachers in the school over this period, particularly when there are other deadlines and commitments. The structure of meetings and training therefore needed to be flexible and adaptable as situations changed or issues arose.

Documenting the triad work proved an important factor in the process, as a tool in ensuring effective planning and reviewing could take place. The PLC agreed a

format and structure for recording this information, which continued to embody the OTP principles. Evidence from the planning form indicates where triads have adapted and developed a key strategy across their own subject areas. This planning form encouraged triads to work in this format, with a focused approach. The design of the layout of the forms proved vital to ensure that triads worked in this format, and that their work centred on the key principles of OTP, the 'DR ICE'



A training session took place to embed the principles to all teachers, and then become a key focus of triad development. The organisation and leadership of the Triad action research to improve the standard of teaching and learning was fundamental, and a calendar of meetings was organised for the training and planning time needed to introduce and develop ideas for each focus area. **This contact time of an hour after school was crucial in focusing on school priorities, as it gave the activity a high level of status across the school.** Planning forms structured the Triads thinking and action points, and these reveal that all teachers engaged with whole school development priorities, linking with 'Literacy,' 'Numeracy' and 'Tackling boys' underachievement.' All planning forms were detailed and demonstrated a range of personal triad and teacher development of teaching and learning priorities. By working in triads, specialist teachers from these school priority areas could support other staff in the school.

Outstanding Teaching Triad Planning Sheet

**Deepening Thinking**  
**Role-modelling Learning**  
**Impact on learning**  
**Challenge**  
**Engagement**

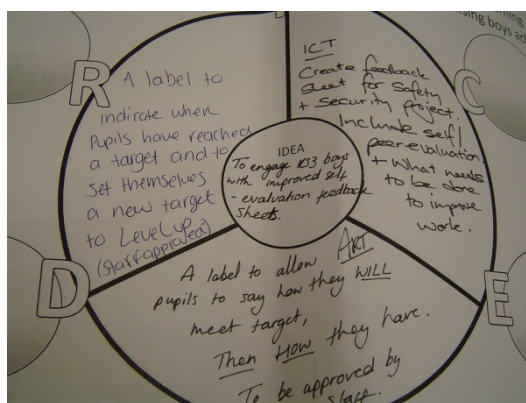
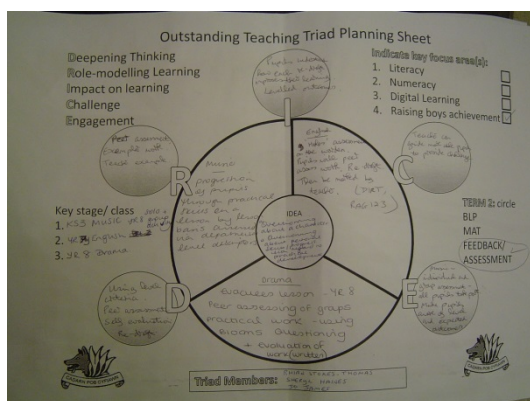
**Indicate key focus area(s):**  
 1. Literacy ☐  
 2. Numeracy ☐  
 3. Digital Learning ☐  
 4. Raising boys achievement ☐

**Key stage/class**  
 1.  
 2.  
 3.

**TERM 2: circle**  
 BLP  
 MAT  
 FEEDBACK/  
 ASSESSMENT

**Triad Members:**





Similar 'review' forms were designed in an easy to use format, with a structure focused on impact in the classroom related to DRICE. All triads identified outcomes of their joint planning, and examples of strategies/ resources created were:

- Bloom's wheels
- Aurasma evaluation tool
- Differentiation points grid
- Takeaway homework tasks
- Challenge 'menu.'

This form completed the process, with time for triads to reflect at the end of each focus area on the successes and areas for development in their group. Opportunity for this evaluation provided vital feedback to current provision and future planning of the OTP, revealing some key points. One example was the minority of teachers who undertook Learning Walks, due to time-constraints or organisational issues. This presents a continual issue to address, to engage all staff in the opportunity to observe their colleagues in a mutually agreed format.

This has therefore emerged as a key priority for the future OTP development, with the school developing the use of IRIS camera technology. This will then allow teachers to share clips of part or the whole of their lesson with their triad or OTP

group, with the aim of evidencing and consolidating more of the work being undertaken.

## Conclusions

Further evidence on the impact of the triad collaboration can be derived from our school's recent HMI Estyn Inspection. Here are some statements taken from our Inspection report March 2016:

*'In many lessons, teachers plan a wide range of engaging activities that interest and motivate pupils and meet their needs well.'*

*'Leaders have successfully developed a culture within the school of a strong Professional learning community, with staff showing considerable willingness to contribute to and develop new and different aspects of their role.'*

*'In many lessons, teachers plan activities well to meet pupils' needs and have a clear understanding of the capabilities of the pupils that they teach. They provide a wide range of engaging activities to interest and motivate pupils. These tasks challenge pupils effectively.'*

It is pleasing to see that the Learning culture and community that had been the focus of the OTP PLC had now been identified by Estyn. The shift in the collaborative culture is having an impact across the school, with recognition of the strength of the PLC. Further impact is evidenced in the lesson feedback, with 'engagement,' 'challenge' and 'motivate' as key words. This directly relates to the focus areas, and some of the strategies and activities that have been developed by the triads. Key principles of the focus areas have clearly manifested in some of the lessons observed, with positive comments on their effectiveness on the classroom. This can be related back to the positive feedback from the triads to the benefit of their collaboration, and the impact on teaching and pupils' learning. However, there are still a few teachers for which the impacts are not evidenced in their lessons; therefore the OTP PLC has to address the areas identified as a whole-school focus for next year, as part of our 'post-inspection' action plan.

## The showcase



To celebrate and conclude the triad action research in the three different focus areas, it was agreed that triads should share in their findings with evidence of best practice. A number of conversations took place as to the best method of achieving this, to achieve the greatest impact. The decisions centred on a 'marketplace' concept for triads to 'pitch' their ideas to each other. A calendared meeting slot after school created the opportunity for this event to take place, and the decision was made in the PLC meeting that all triads would present on the night on rotation. Triads were informed to select their best evidence of triad working, and that they could present in any format that was clear to the viewer.



The night included a wide variety of presentations with examples including displays, pupils' work, and hand-outs, demonstrating the diverse range of approaches and outcomes. The evening was made a social occasion with drinks and snacks, and additional resources and materials were laid out for teachers to take away if they found them of interest. I felt it was important for teachers to have a lasting reminder of the focus areas, and a summary 'newsletter' was developed for each one in a common format. Teaching and learning displays on important current and future developments enhanced the event, as it became a celebratory occasion, with visual stimulus in abundance. Of particular interest was the use of interactive



presentations by triads, where teachers could experience the learning, and this was seen as highly effective by other teachers. A competitive element was placed on the event with a prize for the 'best strategy/idea' and 'best presentation,' with teachers voting in the event.



This event provided good insight to the range of outcomes from the triads, and areas of strengths and weaknesses could be identified. It took a great deal of organisation, but it provided a good platform for effective sharing of ideas and strategies. Teachers participated in voting, gathered any hand-outs and photographed anything of interest, and this evidenced their overall positive engagement. However, of most surprise was how the culture changed in the room, as the majority of conversations were about teaching and learning, even from some teachers who I would least expect due to previous disengagement. However, there was also evidence of where triads had not undertaken a similar concept or idea and had developed ideas on more of an individual level. Here in lies the challenge for the future, in continuing to promote the values of triad working, and having a closer monitoring of what the triads were doing over the course of a term. This provided evidence on the constraints of teachers, and where time and pressures on teachers at various times in the year are a factor in the standard and quality of the outcomes produced.

### Results and conclusions

- Leading the OTP PLC as a whole-school drive requires effective leadership, as my decisions and actions have direct impact on the outcomes of the project.
- Having effective distributed leadership is fundamental in sharing this role, as having different expertise and skills enhance the focus on teaching and learning.
- Triad working has now become established in the school, and while there will always be the challenge of motivating all staff, evidence from the showcase

indicates that at least working together means that the language and stimulus is on teaching and learning.

- There are changes to be made for the future, to give more depth and development to key focus areas by reducing to two over the year.
- It is also important to feed-back and embed in to departments, and this will further enhance the productiveness and effectiveness of the outcomes.
- The need to provide the structure, support and resources will continue to be fundamental to future success in the form of providing training and creating the time and environment for this to happen.
- I would also like to build on the expertise of the PLC, and for them to share ideas from their OTP training and for them to also undertake their own action research on key areas of teaching and learning as good examples to other triads.

The importance lies in ensuring that the triad work has impact in the classroom and on learners. Therefore it is crucial that as a PLC we are 'raising the bar' in ensuring we celebrate outcomes from our own findings and disseminate this effectively. Ultimately it is the effect and impact in the classroom that is of key importance and relevance, and therefore further research is needed to find this out. Gathering evidence from pupils and data from results will be crucial in this, and will give further insight into which strategies and ideas developed in triads have the greatest impact on learners. This can only lead to effective feedback for teachers, and continue to raise the standard of teaching and learning and outcomes in the school.

## References

[Judebrigley.co.uk/blog](http://Judebrigley.co.uk/blog)

[Jeanmcniff.com](http://Jeanmcniff.com)

<http://www.olevi.com/our-programmes/the-outstanding-teacher-programme-otp/>

## Outstanding Teaching Triad Planning Sheet

**D**eepening Thinking  
**R**ole-modelling Learning  
**I**mpact on learning  
**C**hallenge  
**E**ngagement

Indicate key focus area(s):

- Literacy ☐
- Numeracy ☐
- Digital Learning ☐
- Raising boys achievement ☐

Key stage/ class

- 
- 
-

TERM 2: circle  
 BLP  
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Triad Members:

## Outstanding Teaching Triad Planning Sheet

Deepening Thinking

Role-modelling Learning

Impact on learning

Challenge

Engagement

Indicate key focus area(s):

1. Literacy ☐
2. Numeracy ☐
3. Digital Learning ☐
4. Raising boys achievement ☐
5. MAT ☐

Key stage/ class

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Triad Members:

TERM 1: circle

BLP

DIFFERENTIATION

CHALLENGE/

ENGAGEMENT



## Outstanding Teaching PLC Triad Review Questionnaire

In your review meetings please complete the following questions to evaluate your action research and teaching and learning 'learning walks.'

TRIAD MEMBERS \_\_\_\_\_

KEY FOCUS AREA(S) \_\_\_\_\_

What was successful?

What was less successful?

Focus area(s):

(circle)

1.Literacy

2.Numeracy

3.Digital learning

Strategy or Activity Created

Detail of learning walk(s):

Further Developments

Resources to include in the teaching and learning toolkit:

What impact did the strategy or activity have on:

<b>D</b> eepening Thinking	
<b>R</b> ole-model learning	
<b>I</b> mpact on learning	
<b>C</b> hallenge	
<b>E</b> ngagement	

Please tick

yes

no

partly





***Please could you provide evidence to the PLC of any resources, worksheets or outcomes to be included in the development of our 'Teaching and Learning Toolkit.'***

***Thanks!!***