

EFFECTIVE HEADS OF DEPARTMENT

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EDUCATION

EFFECTIVE LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP

Foreword

A teacher's task is much more ambitious than it used to be and demands a focus on the subtleties of teaching and learning and on the emerging knowledge of school improvement.

This is what this series is about.

Teaching can be a very lonely activity. The time honoured practice of a single teacher working alone in the classroom is still the norm; yet to operate alone is, in the end to become isolated and impoverished. This series addresses two issues - the need to focus on practical and useful ideas connected with teaching and learning and the wish thereby to provide some sort of an antidote to the loneliness of the long distance teacher who is daily berated by an anxious society.

Teachers flourish best when, in teams or departments (or more rarely whole schools), their talk is predominantly about teaching and learning and where, unconnected with appraisal, they are privileged to observe each other teach; to plan and review their work together; and to practise the habit of learning from each other new teaching techniques. But how does this state of affairs arise? Is it to do with the way staffrooms are physically organised so that the walls bear testimony to interesting articles and in the corner there is a dedicated computer tuned to 'conferences' about school improvement, the teaching of English etc, and whether, in consequence, the teacher leaning over the shoulder of the enthusiastic IT colleagues sees the promise of interesting practice elsewhere? Has the primary school cracked it when it organises successive staff meetings in different classrooms and invites the 'host' teacher to start the meeting with a 15 minute exposition of their classroom organisation and management? Or is it the same staff sharing, on a rota basis, a slot on successive staff meeting agenda when each in turn reviews a new book they have used with their class? And what of the whole school which now uses 'active' and 'passive' concerts of carefully chosen music as part of their accelerated learning techniques?

It is of course well understood that even excellent teachers feel threatened when first they are observed. The constant observation of the teacher in training seems like that of the learner driver. Once you have passed your test and can drive unaccompanied, you do. You often make lots of mistakes and sometimes get into bad habits. Woe betide, however, the back seat driver who tells you so. In the same way the new teacher quickly loses the habit of observing others and being observed. So how do we get a confident, mutual observation debate going? One school I know found a simple and therefore brilliant solution. The Head of the History Department asked that a young colleague plan lessons for her - the Head of Department - to teach. This lesson she then taught and was observed by the young colleague. The subsequent discussion, in which the young teacher asked,

"Why did you divert the question and answer session I had planned?"
and was answered by,

"Because I could see that I needed to arrest the attention of the group by the window with some hands on role play, etc."

lasted an hour and led to a once-a-term repeat discussion which, in the end, was adopted by the whole school. The whole school subsequently changed the pattern of its

meetings to consolidate extended debate about teaching and learning. The two teachers claimed that because one planned and the other taught both were implicated but neither alone was responsible or felt 'got at'.

So there are practices which are both practical and more likely to make teaching a rewarding and successful activity. They can, as it were, increase the likelihood of a teacher surprising the students into understanding or doing something they did not think they could do rather than simply entertaining them or worse still occupying them. There are ways of helping teachers judge the best method of getting student expectation just ahead of self-esteem.

This series focuses on straightforward interventions which individual schools and teachers use to make life more rewarding for themselves and those they teach. Teachers deserve nothing less for they are the architects of tomorrow's society and society's ambition for what they achieve increases as each year passes.

Professor Tim Brighouse.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is quite simply to support Heads of Department in getting the best from their team and in so doing enhance the performance of the students they teach. The contents may also be of interest to Senior Managers who are endeavouring to support the development of key members of their school's middle management.

As schools become ever more accountable, so an increasing challenge is placed on those in key roles in schools to perform at even higher levels. The Head of Department occupies one of those roles.

These demands, coupled with a rapidly changing curriculum, have resulted in the need for Heads of Departments to be proficient in a much wider range of management skills than ever used to be the case. The following lists of questions taken from interviews for Head of Department posts in 1976 and in 1996 illustrate the point well.

1976	1996
Tell us about your style of working by describing a development you have been involved with.	What do you see as the main factors in the successful management of change?
What are your views on mixed ability teaching?	How would you monitor the effectiveness of mixed ability teaching?
What links would you try to create with primary schools?	What part can you play in promoting the school in the community?
What would be the main spending priorities on behalf of your department?	How would you judge the cost effectiveness of your spending decisions?
Now that you have looked around the department what would you wish to change?	How would you conduct a departmental audit?
How would you set about establishing a team spirit among your staff?	How would you create a shared sense of purpose and direction for the team?

The content of the 1996 questions clearly demonstrates the need for today's Head of Department to be an effective manager regardless of which department he or she manages. The concepts of 'management of change', 'monitoring', 'evaluating', 'effectiveness' and 'audit' are firmly established as key features of the role. This book aims to support Heads of Department in the development of these and other skills, so that they may become more effective as managers, to the benefit of their colleagues and students.

Section One

Effective Departmental Planning

In Section One you will learn that:

- ☛ ***Planning is vital to a successful department***
- ☛ ***Both the curriculum and the development of the department need to be planned***
- ☛ ***Planning needs to take place in the short, medium and long terms***
- ☛ ***Departments have to plan learning experiences and learning intentions***

Effective planning is a vital component of the successful department. The right planning processes form a key element in the drive to guarantee quality. Equally importantly, they provide an effective way of managing change. At their best, the ways in which a department plans can provide the security that staff need, in order to know that they are delivering what is expected and that the department is moving in the right direction. When planning processes are faulty or insecure, consistency is hard to maintain and much staff time and energy can be wasted on low and disparate priority issues. This causes frustration and that demoralising 'not coping' feeling.

There are two key dimensions to department planning:

- ☛ Curriculum planning
- ☛ Development planning

Curriculum Planning

Curriculum planning is the process by which the department ensures that all students receive the curriculum teaching to which they are entitled. Planning will be based initially on the need to deliver several key elements which could include:

- ☛ Programs of study
- ☛ Examination syllabus requirements
- ☛ Cross-curricular elements agreed within the school
- ☛ Any other specific areas of content or process deemed by the department to be important
- ☛ Whole school and departmental targets
- ☛ Provision of differentiated learning targets

In order to be effective, the Head of Department needs to ensure that each of these has been considered in terms of three stages of planning:

- Long term
- Medium term
- Short term