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# Introduction – ‘*we can if ...*’

We introduce this book by describing:

- what the story is about
- how the story is told
- how it can be used.

## The story

This book tells the story of how a group of primary schools transformed learning and teaching. It is a ‘warts and all’ story, which provides a fascinating insight into the day-to-day realities of trying to bring about school improvement. The book describes the wide range of practical strategies the schools used for supporting and enhancing:

- children’s learning
- teachers’ learning
- the schools’ capacity for learning.

It describes how the focus on learning led to significant improvements in children’s motivation, behaviour, engagement in learning and learning outcomes. It also illustrates how, through teachers learning with, and from one another, the schools’ capacity for sustained improvement was strengthened.

The book is based on an action research project entitled ‘Learning to Learn’ which concentrated on the development of children’s understanding, skills and attitudes about themselves as learners, and about the learning and thinking strategies they were currently using, and could use in the future.

Throughout, the book gives the children’s perspective on the impact that the project had on them. It describes what worked for the schools, and what did not. It draws out the main lessons learned for:

## 2

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# Getting started and keeping going

*A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step. (Chinese proverb)*

**We can get started and keep going if we:**

- **take time to get to know one another and share concerns**
- **take time to clarify the purposes of the journey (our learning intentions!)**
- **begin to learn how to learn from each other**
- **bring the rest of our travelling companions on board**
- **collect baseline data**
- **share 'highs and lows' along the route and support one another.**

The 'round-robin' which dropped on the desks of all Redbridge primary schools was tantalizing. It invited us to participate in an action research project. It spoke of 'a wish to support and promote good practice ... and raise the achievement of all pupils, particularly those with special educational needs'. The project was 'rooted in sound academic research' and a belief in the 'major impact it may have on teaching and learning'. It was anticipated that schools opting into the scheme would develop and gain a further understanding of: brain-based learning, theories of multiple intelligence, emotional intelligence, formative assessment, the behaviours of an intelligent school and strategies for accelerated learning. All this sounded promising and, at that time almost radical – rather like focusing on children's needs again, instead of responding to another centralized initiative: 'If you would like your school to be involved in this project, please return the slip etc. ... '.

So it was, that just five rather tentative headteachers turned up to find out exactly what all this might involve ... and how our children and our schools might benefit. This inauspicious meeting was the start of a long uncharted journey we were to take together. It began with the need for us to get to know and trust one another.