Theory to practice

A codified approach to implementing high-impact professional development at scale

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Steplab provides trusts and schools with professional development that really works. Over 400 school trusts and 100,000 teachers have already achieved impressive results with its Responsive Coaching model.

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Confederation of School Trusts

The Confederation of School Trusts is the national organisation and sector body for school trusts in England, advocating for, connecting, and supporting executive and governance leaders. Our members are responsible for the education of more than 3.5m young people.

Bringing together trusts from every region and of every size, CST has a strong, strategic presence with access to government and policy makers to drive real change for education on the big issues that matter most.

Opening the 'black box'

The Confederation of School Trust's conceptual model for trust-led school improvement acknowledges that whilst research exists into the efficacy of trusts as school improvers, there is limited evidence that explains how trusts improve schools.[1]

Consequently, CST called upon the sector to collect evidence, build knowledge and 'open the black box' of what is taking place within the domain of large-scale school improvement so groups of schools can learn from one another.

This paper responds to this call, exemplifying how trust leaders have translated the CST theoretical model into practice, combining curating clear goals; building capability and capacity, and implementing improvement initiatives, as part of a codified implementation model enabling the delivery of high-impact professional development.
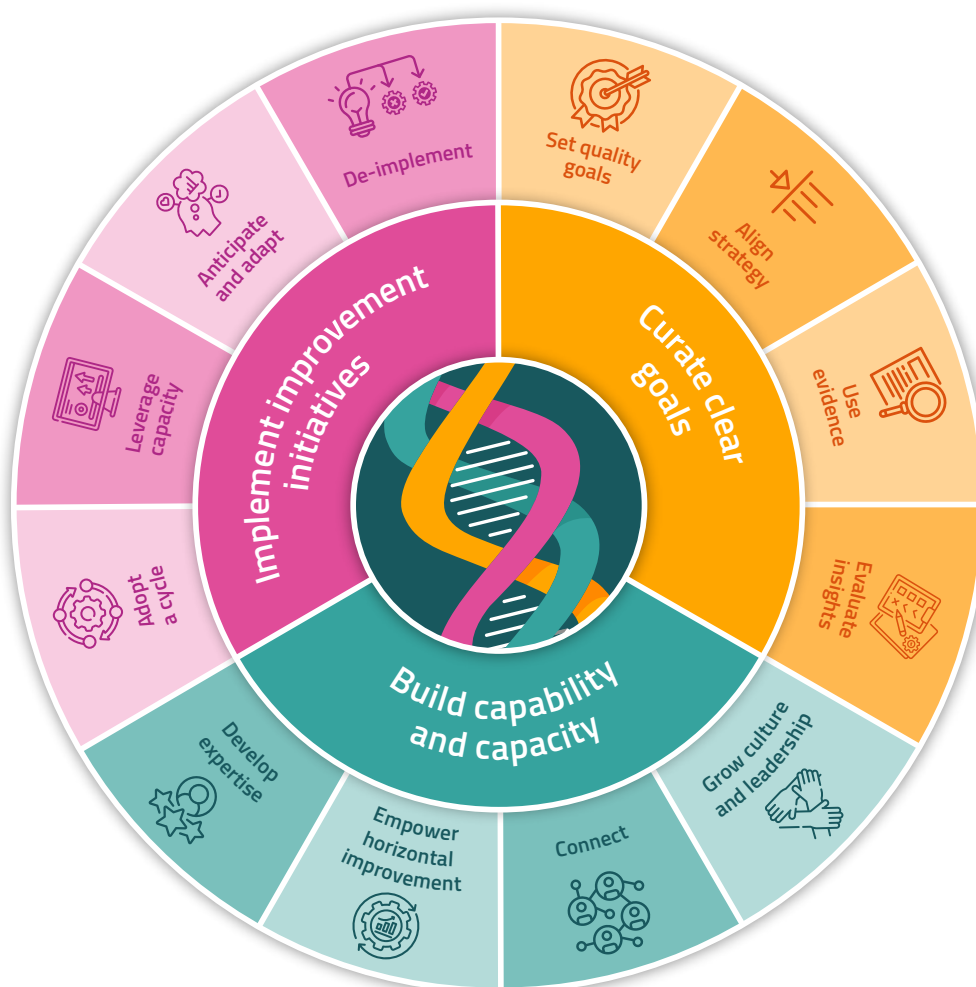
1   Rollett, S (2024) *The DNA of trust-led school improvement: a conceptual model*. Nottingham: CST. Hutchings, M and Francis B (2018) *Chain Effects 2018: The impact of academy chains on low-income pupils*. London: The Sutton Trust.

Introduction

Great teaching changes students' lives. But developing great teaching, particularly at scale, is fraught with challenges. School leaders need to actively tackle the barriers to teacher learning, caused by the 'noisiness'[2] of schools and conflicting priorities; time pressures and stress, unique training needs, limited resources, cultural barriers, or insufficient expertise. In 2023, our co-publication with CST explored how trusts can leverage their capacity to address these barriers and deliver effective professional development.[3] This paper expands on these ideas by illustrating the processes employed by high-achieving trusts to implement large-scale, high-impact professional development programmes that ensure all students have access to great teaching.

Selecting an evidence-based PD programme

An increasing body of research has highlighted how effective professional development (PD) can improve teachers' knowledge, teaching practices, and pupil test scores.[4] Evidence from replicated randomised controlled trials shows that effective PD programmes can have large positive effects on teaching and learning.[5] However, a great deal of PD is also ineffective.[6] Given the time, effort, and resources required for implementation, and the entitlement for teachers to have access to high quality PD, leaders need to ensure the programmes they offer to teachers contain the active ingredients that have the strongest chance of making a difference to teacher and student learning.

In 2023 the Education Endowment Foundation developed a framework of 14 active ingredients required for PD to be effective. These active ingredients are divided into four groups: building teachers' knowledge (for example, revisiting material over time), motivating changes in practice (setting goals around changing practice), developing new teaching techniques (feedback on teaching), and embedding new teaching techniques (practising in real classrooms)'.[7] This study demonstrated that the number of active ingredients embedded in a PD programme correlated with its positive effects on pupil achievement.

The trust leaders in this paper have identified an instructional coaching programme, featuring all of these active ingredients, as being the most compelling answer to the question: how can I provide effective, evidence-based PD at scale? However, devising and implementing a coherent PD programme that contains these active ingredients is difficult - even more so across a group of schools. There needs to be

2   Kennedy, M (2016). 'How does professional development improve teaching?' *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 945–980.

3   Goodrich, J and Hill, C (2023) *Leveraging trust capacity to deliver effective professional development.* Nottingham: CST.

4   Gonzalez, K, Lynch, K, and Hill, H C (2022) *A meta-analysis of the experimental evidence linking stem classroom interventions to teacher knowledge, classroom instruction, and student achievement.* Providence: Annenberg Institute, Brown University. Collin, J and Smith, E (2023) *Effective Professional Development: Guidance Report.* London: Education Endowment Fund.

5   Allen, J P et al (2011) 'An interaction-based approach to enhancing secondary school instruction and student achievement'. *Science*, 333(6045), pp. 1034 - 1037. Allen, J P et al (2015) 'Enhancing secondary school instruction and student achievement: replication and extension of the My Teaching Partner - Secondary intervention'. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 8(4), pp. 475 - 489. Clark, M et al (2022) *Study of Teacher Coaching Based on Classroom Videos: Impacts on Student Achievement and Teachers Practice.* Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

6   Collin, J and Smith, E (2023) *Effective Professional Development: Guidance Report.* London: Education Endowment Fund. Kirsten, N et al (2023) 'How effective is the professional development in which teachers typically participate? Quasi-experimental analyses of effects on student achievement based on TIMSS 2003-2019'. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 132, pp. 102 - 242. Harris, D N and Sass, T R (2011) 'Teacher training, teacher quality and student achievement', *Journal of Public Economics*, 95(7-8), pp. 798 - 812.

7   Collin, J and Smith, E (2023)

a 'shared understanding of what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters'.[8]
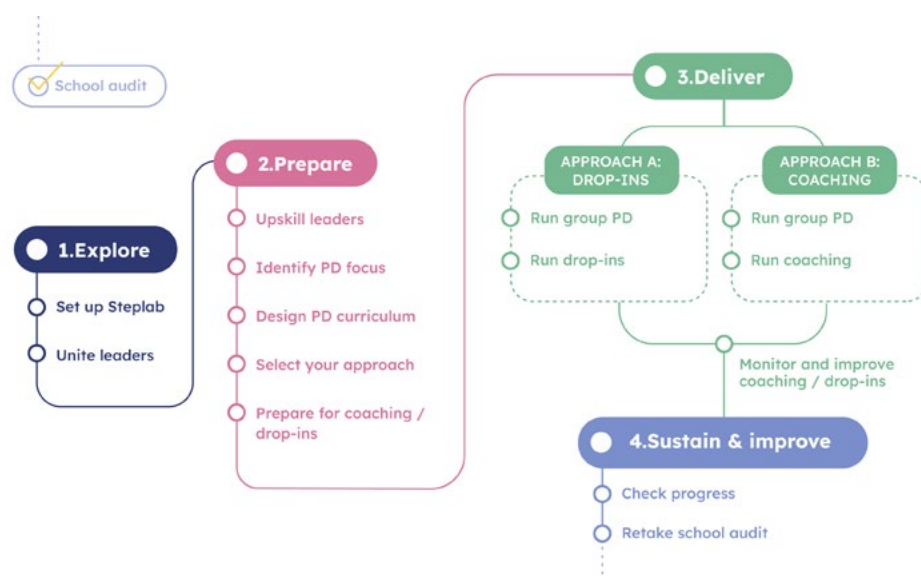
Codifying effective implementation

By drawing on research by the EEF and the conceptual model developed by CST, we can begin to codify how to design and implement high-impact, context-specific PD programmes.

The case studies that follow exemplify how trusts have employed this codified implementation model in practice. Creative Education united leaders around a shared goal and used this to help prepare for each stage of implementation. Star Academies upskilled leaders with a shared language for describing great teaching and, like Creative Education, supported them to visit lessons, use evidence to identify a PD focus and align their strategy. Both Orion Education and the Ted Wragg Trust developed expertise with the right training,

Steplab's codified implementation roadmap

resources and systems to run coaching across all schools, for all teachers. Academy Transformation Trust leveraged the capacity available to meet the contextual needs of each school to ensure expertise and resources were in place to prepare for coaching. Twyford CofE Academies Trust worked collaboratively across schools to design a PD curriculum and were intentional in de-implementing any initiatives that did not align with this curriculum. They then adopted a regular cycle of evaluation to check progress and tackle barriers.

From these examples, we can see how a codified model for implementation can provide a clear roadmap for leaders; equipping them with the support and tools they need to curate clear goals, build capability and capacity and implement improvement initiatives to successfully design and deliver effective PD at scale.

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8   Cook, C R et al (2019) 'Adapting a Compilation of Implementation Strategies to Advance School Based Implementation Research and Practice'. *Prevention Science*, 20(6), pp. 914–935.

Curate clear goals

School trusts are complex and varied organisations; implementing any initiative at scale is hard because implementation is fundamentally 'a collaborative and social process driven by how people think, behave, and interact'.[9] It requires a lot of people working in different contexts, who may have conflicting priorities, to align their thinking, actions and conversations. Uniting leaders around a shared goal is key to creating this alignment. For successful implementation, goals need to be co-constructed and communicated clearly throughout the organisation and conflicts with other goals need to be resolved.[10]

At Creative Education Trust, the overarching goal was for professional development to be centred on high quality deliberate practice and instructional coaching. Clear interim goals were required to support schools and their leaders to work towards this ambitious aim. The first goal was to ensure all leaders had a shared understanding of the most common PD needs across their schools. This would support their second goal of building a positive feedback culture through lesson drop-ins and celebratory 'shoutouts'. This would be the foundation for supporting teachers to share expertise and respond to feedback; both cornerstones for effective coaching.

To understand whether these goals were being achieved and the actions required to achieve them, leaders used data from drop-in feedback. In doing so, they were able to identify how regularly lesson visits were happening and what proportion of their staff were receiving celebratory shoutouts for different aspects of teaching. This allowed them to not only explore how a positive culture of feedback was developing, but also ask questions about common strengths and areas for development, building not only a better understanding of the individual needs of teachers and teams within the school, but also the overarching PD needs in each school. The data acted as a tool for constructive conversations around the effectiveness of implementation of lesson drop-ins and the successes and needs that arose from this evaluation at both whole trust and individual school level. This data-driven approach allowed leaders to identify the actions most likely to meet their goals and 'build momentum in the desired direction'.[11]

Nimish Lad, Head of Curriculum Development, from Creative Education Trust

However, the 'presence of a data gathering system alone doesn't guarantee it will be used'.[12] Leaders used these evaluative tools to help better understand the performance of schools through 'enabling constructive reflection and feedback rather than playing a punitive accountability function - it's about improving rather than proving'.[13] As Nimish Lad, Head of Curriculum Development, from Creative Education Trust explains, 'these insights provide a valuable way into data-led conversations around creating the right conditions for teacher development within our schools'. By curating clear goals and evaluating insights, leaders could respond to the often changing and varied needs of individual schools to drive their implementation of high-impact PD.

9   Sharples, J, Eaton, J and Boughelaf, J (2024) 'The EEF's new and updated guide to effective implementation: what's changed?'. London: Education Endowment Fund.

10 Rodgers, R, Hunter, J E, Rogers, D L (1993) 'Influence of Top management Commitment on management Program Success'. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 78(1), pp. 151- 155.

11 Rollett, S (2024)

12 Charlton, C T et al (2020) 'Interpreting Critical Incidents in Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports Through an Active Implementation Framework', *Exceptionality*, 28(3), pp. 161 - 175.

13 Van Geel, M, Visscher, A J and Teunis, B (2017) 'School Characteristics Influencing the Implementation of a Data-Based Decision Making Intervention', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 28(3), pp. 443 - 462. Moore, D et al (2024) 'Review of Evidence on Implementation in Education'. London: Education Endowment Foundation.

Case study: Star Academies

Star Academies serves a diverse range of 36 primary and secondary schools across Lancashire, West Yorkshire, Great Manchester, West Midlands and London. Director of Teaching Emma Starkey explores how the trust has taken a deliberate approach to aligning the purposes, strategies and goals required to implement high quality professional development (PD) across all Star schools.

Our STAR values - Service, Teamwork, Ambition, and Respect - define our strategy and guide our actions. These values are central to our commitment to staff PD. A key priority is 'Achieving Excellence', which we aim to attain through the high-quality teaching of a vibrant, knowledge-rich curriculum and tailored support to ensure all pupils succeed. We've codified what great teaching at Star is in our *Teach Like A Star* Playbook (our term for a PD curriculum).

Setting quality goals

We set ambitious goals while ensuring leaders focus on the granular details for sustainable improvements. This is supported by a three-layer PD model, with instructional coaching at its core:

- Universal: Whole-school systemic area for improvement (weekly goal, practice clinic and responsive coaching).

- Targeted: Departmental support for subject-specific areas (weekly goal, practice clinic and responsive coaching by the middle leader).

- Bespoke: Tailored 1:1 responsive coaching.

Each layer follows the same cycle, starting with diagnosing the learning problem using the Star Teaching Framework, grounded in a strong evidence base and supported by lesson visits. This framework creates a shared language for teacher improvement, which is further developed in the *Teach Like A Star* playbook. The playbook provides a sequenced PD plan to support improvements that positively impact pupil learning. After setting evidence-based goals, rehearsal and feedback occur weekly in group practice clinics for both universal and targeted elements. We analyse trends on Steplab to refine this process and inform future steps.

Emma Starkey, Director of Teaching, Star Academies

Align strategy

Trust leaders ensure alignment with the *Teach Like A Star* strategy by applying an instructional approach in all interactions. We invest significant time rehearsing the 'what' and the 'how' with leaders, always framing it within the 'why' - providing the evidence base for best teaching practices. Improving teaching requires teamwork at every level, consistently drawing parallels between pupil learning in the classroom and adult professional learning.

Use evidence

The integration of Steplab has transformed our strategy, strengthening the evidence base for goal-setting. Access to richer data ensures we set clearer, more precise goals which are aligned with classroom realities. Steplab enhances evidence-gathering following coaching cycles, allowing leaders

to collect qualitative data through lesson visits. This ensures rehearsals translate into practice, which reinforces our evidence-informed approach. The platform's analysis tools track trends in teachers' strengths and areas for development, supporting responsive leadership. By integrating Steplab, we combine global research on effective teaching with real-time classroom evidence, enabling targeted and responsive PD.

Evaluate insights

At trust level, we evaluate insights from Steplab to understand performance across schools. This data-driven approach empowers schools to use their own insights, identifying areas for improvement. For example, if many schools set 'Classroom Culture' as their weekly goal, we respond by aligning PD efforts. By evaluating the quality of coaching, we provide targeted support, offering additional workshops if the rehearsal phase is a common area for development. Access to qualitative data has increased our ability to hold ourselves accountable and assess performance. This process enables us to refine our approach continuously, providing more effective support.

Conclusion

At the heart of our approach is a shared belief that professional learning must be purposeful, impactful and deeply embedded in practice. Our commitment to codification provides a common language and a clear model of excellence. By using evidence, fostering responsive leadership and continuously evaluating insights, we ensure our PD is aligned with the needs of our schools, supporting long-term improvements. This collaborative, data-driven approach enables us to make a meaningful impact on teaching and learning across the trust.

Build capability and capacity

Harnessing collective expertise and knowledge across a trust can play a significant role in implementing professional development that leads to sustained school improvement - not just one school at a time but across schools simultaneously.

CST's conceptual model describes this as horizontal improvement: 'cutting across schools and internal trust boundaries, allowing us to plan and implement improvements that leverage the collective capacity of the trust'.[14] Trust leaders are able to create the conditions - through policy, systems and resourcing - which both effect structural change and support meaningful connections being formed across the organisation, enabling teachers and leaders to benefit from shared expertise and collaboration. This can enhance both the effectiveness and equity of PD offered by a trust.

Three years ago, leaders at Orion Education identified instructional coaching as not only being widely regarded as the best evidenced form of effective PD but as also allowing them the flexibility and scalability required to meet the individual needs of their schools, from the smallest infant school to their largest secondary.

Leaders knew that launching an instructional coaching programme across their trust meant ensuring they had the culture, capacity and calendars to ensure coaching happened and was of high quality. This meant investing in training at a range of different levels, and making changes to schools' timetables to ensure that coaches could both coach and receive on-going coach training.

Orion Education placed 'expertise and professional learning at the heart of [their] improvement model' and as such, all headteachers were designated 'Lead Coaches' and every school's PD leader undertook Steplab's Certificate in Coaching Leadership. Director of Professional Growth Olivia Page highlights how this 'signalled the status and priority given to PD across the leadership team in every school' and ensured there were 'skilled and empowered people who could support implementation'.

Drawing on expertise across the trust, cross-phase teams defined and codified their vision of excellent teaching from early years to sixth form. This was then aligned with their coaching curriculum, to transform their vision of excellence into high quality enactment in every classroom. These collaborative processes allowed leaders to sense check plans from different perspectives, ensuring that their 'horizontal' approach to school improvement would meet the varied contexts of each of their schools whilst maintaining core principles for teaching excellence.

Trust-led system and policy change defined a 'culture where leadership and teaching [could] flourish'. Performance management was decoupled from pay; the trust moved to a non-graded drop-in approach to observation which focused on improving not evaluating teachers. All teachers were given allocated coaching time, and the trust ensured alignment of teacher allocations and PD entitlements across their eight schools. In doing so, the trust repurposed existing systems and structures rather than bolting on new ones, ensuring they were fit for purpose in supporting the changes leaders hoped to influence. This supported 'horizontal improvement' across all eight schools simultaneously; implementing a school improvement model that acted as a 'rising tide' that 'raises all ships'.

Olivia Page, Director of Professional Growth, Orion Education

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14 Rollett, S (2024)

Case study: Ted Wragg Trust

The Ted Wragg Trust serves 17 primary and secondary schools across Exeter, Plymouth, Crediton and East Devon. In this case study, Executive Director of Education Siobhan Meredith explains how the trust has built capability and capacity to support every teacher's improvement.

At the Ted Wragg Trust, our mission is to transform lives and strengthen communities through excellent education. We believe sustainable continuous improvement relies on shaping people, culture and capacity at all levels within our schools. By embedding deliberate practice and leveraging tools like Steplab, we ensure that every teacher has the skills, confidence and support they need to excel.

Develop expertise - professional learning at the heart of improvement

When reflecting on our professional development (PD) approach, we identified key challenges that required a trust-wide shift in culture - from a top-down approach to a partnership model, where teachers refine their craft through manageable, actionable steps. Steplab became the engine of this transformation for our teachers, enabling us to create structured coaching cycles focused on pedagogy and addressing fundamental learning problems.

We've all seen how traditional one-off away days leave barely any traceable impact. Shifting to regular coaching cycles and deliberate practice allowed our teachers to internalise new habits and strategies for immediate impact in the classroom.

Horizontal improvement

The introduction of the Ted Wragg Institute, trust-wide networks and shared PD priorities connected educators, allowing them to collaborate, share expertise and align practices. Coaching Leaders worked across schools to develop a coherent, impactful system, ensuring that every child benefited from the same high standards of teaching, regardless of which school they attended.

Consistent teaching methods within and across schools has ensured structured learning environments. Our children tell us that they like the fairness and consistency in our classrooms; they know what to expect.

Steplab also allows us to monitor progress at individual and school levels, identifying areas for additional support while celebrating successes. This approach aligns with our Ted Wragg Standard, ensuring PD is not only consistent but also deeply connected to our trust's values and expectations.

Connect

Traditional PD methods can be fragmented and inconsistent; teachers and leaders working tirelessly but frequently in silos, limiting the collective impact of their efforts and wasting time evaluating instead of developing. Instead, we have embedded an always coaching culture underpinned by partnership.

Coaching is purposeful, addressing specific needs and equipping teachers with necessary skills. It's also personalised, allowing teachers to tailor their learning journey. What's more, it's shifted our professional culture – stronger relationships have emerged based on trust and collaboration. Embracing vulnerability has allowed teachers to learn from each other. And a consistent approach across schools fosters alignment under a shared vision for quality.
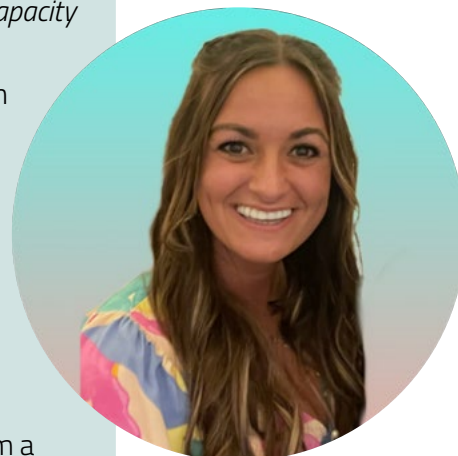
Siobhan Meredith,
Executive Director of
Education, Ted Wragg Trust

Grow culture and leadership

We have prioritised growing culture and leadership. Leaders were supported to model behaviours that inspire trust, foster belonging and drive improvement. Some teachers were initially cautious about coaching; leaders participating in coaching themselves has led to whole-school buy-in. Coaching conversations shifted from evaluation to growth, creating an environment where staff feel empowered to experiment, reflect and are always seeking to improve.

Conclusion

The results have been transformational. Teachers now work as part of a united professional community, with coaching driving sustained improvements in teaching quality. Disadvantaged pupils in our primary schools outperform their national peers, while secondary schools have seen significant Progress 8 gains. Staff also report increased confidence and feel valued, buoyed by regular 'shoutouts' celebrating their successes.

The journey of building capability and capacity has reinforced the importance of creating a culture where every teacher and leader is eager to improve. At the Ted Wragg Trust, this means remaining ambitious, selfless and collaborative in our pursuit of excellence - principles that underpin everything we do.

Implement improvement initiatives

As has been indicated in a variety of contexts, the 'train-and-hope' approach to professional development does not appear to work.[15] Instead, the successful implementation of PD at scale requires trusts to adopt a cycle of evaluation and iteration, alongside leveraging capacity, to support continued improvement. In so doing, trusts need to attend to contextual factors and be responsive when confronted with challenges that impede implementation. Indeed, the EEF's recommendations for effective implementation highlight the need for a trust to provide an 'overall direction' supported by the relevant 'infrastructure' whilst attending to 'contextual factors'. Implementation should be responsive and recognised as an 'ongoing process of learning and reflection': 'reflect[ing], monitor[ing] and adapt[ing] to improve'.[16]

Harris emphasises the importance of capacity building across an organisation to drive improvement.[17] Accordingly, CST's conceptual model highlights the need to match improvement initiatives with the capacity to deliver. Catherine Rushton, Director of Academy Transformation Trust Institute says ATT leverages their capacity to match both the common improvement priorities of the trust and the capacity available at each school. This enables them to 'attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation',[18] ensuring capacity and resources are tailored to specific contexts.

When implementing PD strategies to drive improvement, ATT acknowledged the unique starting points of each of their schools. Whilst common goals were shared across the trust, leaders recognised that improvement is 'highly contextual' and therefore implementation foci varied significantly depending on each individual school context.[19] It was therefore crucial that school leaders - especially principals and PD leads - possessed the expertise needed to interpret trust-wide initiatives and could translate them into balanced, sequenced, and achievable implementation plans tailored to their school's specific needs.

Because knowledge building is a key lever for improvement,[20] ATT created conditions that enabled leaders to fully understand the rationale, research and evidence base underpinning instructional coaching in addition to the trust's improvement strategy. Leaders were also exposed to a range of resources to enhance their expertise: case studies, Steplab Coaching Hub visits, training, and the latest educational research. By establishing a shared understanding of what constitutes high quality PD, their leaders were better positioned to invest in the process and were driven to implement and sustain improvement. Facilitated by the trust's professional learning communities, leaders ensured the right people were in place to lead and influence implementation.

To enable leaders to apply strategies effectively within their unique contexts, the trust ensured they had a strong, flexible understanding of both effective professional development mechanisms and the implementation cycle. Recognising the importance of establishing 'communities of improvement'[21] because

Academy Transformation Trust

Catherine Rushton, Director, Academy Transformation Trust Institute

15 Stokes, T F and Baer, D M (1977). 'An implicit technology of generalisation'. *Journal of Applied Behaviour Analysis*, 10, pp. 349 - 367.
16 Collin, J and Smith, E (2023)
17 Harris, A (2011). 'System improvement through collective capacity building'. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 49(6), pp. 624 - 636.
18 Collin, J and Smith, E (2023)
19 Mason, M (2008). 'What is complexity theory and what are its implications for educational change?' *Educational philosophy and theory*, 40(1), pp. 35 - 49.
20 Bauckham, I and Cruddas, L (2021) *Knowledge building: School improvement at scale*. Nottingham: CST.
21 Rollett, S (2021) *Communities of improvement: School trusts as fields of practice*. Nottingham: CST.

implementation is 'an ongoing process of learning and reflection'.[22] ATT facilitated collaboration between leaders to share knowledge and experiences to address challenges and sustain progress. Professional communities allowed the time and space to focus on what matters most and encouraged the exchange of ideas where commonalities existed.

Catherine concludes that 'the trust's collaborative approach to implementation ensures collective knowledge is both built and utilised to support enduring success'.

Case study: Twyford Church of England Academies Trust

Twyford Church of England Academies Trust serves five secondary schools across West London. In this case study, Deputy Head Millie Denby explores the key role of staff professional development (PD) in the trust's improvement cycle.

Twyford Trust's mission is to enable children to live life in all its fullness. Our trust has an excellent reputation for student progress, with average KS4 progress measures consistently placing us in the top 1% of trusts. We believe that education plays a central role in social mobility and that excellence is achieved through a culture of continuous reflection and improvement. When teachers constantly reflect on and develop their practice, we are able to provide high-quality teaching that has the most positive impact on students.

Adopt a cycle

Our trust has established structures for improvement planning, in which leaders across the trust's schools collaborate to discuss emerging needs and identify priorities for the following year. Priorities are refined and shared with schools and leaders. Because we believe professional development is a key lever for improving student outcomes, trust improvement objectives include PD goals.

Having reflected on the Education Endowment Foundation's report into effective PD, we decided to invest in instructional coaching as the most effective model of staff development.[23] Coaching and coaching improvement goals have been integrated into our annual trust development plans. Because we acknowledge coaching as the vehicle to achieve implementation of other priorities (e.g. core classroom routines defined in training and embedded through coaching), we include targets specific to coaching engagement. Each of the trust's schools have committed to instructional coaching as Twyford Trust's approach to PD.

De-implement

We soon recognised that PD across the trust was not exclusively focused on improvement plan priorities. Coaching was not yet fully embedded nor accessed by all staff across schools and the quality of coaching was not consistently high.

In response to this, and because Assessment for Learning (AfL) - specifically in-class assessment loops and adaptive teaching - was one of the trust's new development foci, coaching and group training became exclusively focused on this. We also set about developing staff as effective coaches. We removed training or initiatives not explicitly linked to AfL or improvement of coaching.

Leverage capacity

For our PD approach to be effective, we needed to unite leadership teams and

Millie Denby, Deputy Head, Twyford Church of England Academies Trust

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22 Sharples, J, Eaton, J and Boughelaf, J (2024)
23 Collin, J and Smith, E (2023)

build both belief in the value of coaching and knowledge of effective coaching within our leadership teams.

We shared the evidence-base for instructional coaching with leaders and asked them to approve PD time being dedicated to coaching training as well as coaching feedback. We supported leaders who deliver group training in each school to ensure that all training would utilise specific coaching action steps and also use core coaching mechanisms such as modelling and group rehearsal.

Introducing this approach to school training and using it during our trust conferences helped us to build a culture of coaching across the trust and reinforced development of coaching skills in our staff.

Anticipate and adapt - know the pitfalls and prevent/react

In order to ensure coaching was focused on AfL (as our priority area), we created a bespoke PD curriculum on Steplab which was curated and agreed by a team of leaders from across the trust's schools. We worked collectively to customise this to mirror trust language and our specific trust expectations of effective practice in AfL. This trust-led approach ensured that we could all make progress with our shared improvement priority, but that the steps were broad enough to be appropriate to each school's context.

Creating bespoke PD curricula focused on our priority area is now a core part of our staff development approach. We deploy a small group of leaders who are experts in coaching from across the trust to do this in preparation for each academic year. This year, for example, we are focused on classroom routines so the expert group engaged a wider working party of leaders in the design phase. This enabled us to unite pastoral, curriculum and staff development teams across our trust around our common goal. This has ensured each group is empowered to collaborate on implementing initiatives in their area (for example, trust pastoral leads collaborating to create student and parent-facing resources to reinforce our work with staff on routines).

Conclusion

Implementing highly aligned and consistent approaches to staff development, aided by high-quality coaching, have undoubtedly contributed to improvement in the quality of teaching in our schools. Focused learning reviews have seen substantial, tangible progress in precise areas of assessment for learning and embedding consistent start and end of lesson routines across our trust.

Conclusion

Teaching is complicated. Teaching teachers is arguably even more complicated. And teaching teachers across multiple schools with varying contexts is particularly complex.

Research is clear that some professional development (PD) is more effective than others, but how to effectively implement impactful PD is less well evidenced.

CST's conceptual model provides a useful framework for exploring examples of implementation in practice to support 'knowledge building' for the sector.

By drawing on this framework and sharing the successes and challenges of implementing PD across large and varied trusts, we can begin to codify implementation so that every teacher has access to great PD and every student has access to great teaching.

School Improvement Hub

CST and ImpactEd Group are working together to collate examples of school improvement practices used by trusts, freely shared to help schools across the country. If your trust has work that aligns with our conceptual framework for trust-led improvement, please visit the website for details of how to work with us to develop and share a case study, and help all our schools to keep getting better.

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