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**The legacy of the Carpe Vitam LfL project:  
helping schools to collaborate in a climate of competition<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

This paper provides an account of the way in which a group of schools in a single town in the UK have used the legacy of the Carpe Vitam project to aid them with their attempts to collaborate. The paper describes how the ‘tools for discourse’ that were developed through the Carpe Vitam project (for example a redesigned survey instrument, the portraiture strategy and the production of vignettes of innovative practice) have been used to further dialogue about leadership for learning across school boundaries. The schools’ move towards taking collective responsibility for educational outcomes in the community is seen in relation to a policy environment which, over time, has worked against collaboration.

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The challenge of any research endeavour must be the extent to which it has the potential to affect policy and practice. We therefore need to consider the nature of the outcomes and how these are represented are made public. Too often the outcomes of research are presented as a set of ‘findings’, published in the unrealistic hope that policy makers or practitioners will take notice and make changes. The legacy of the Carpe Vitam LfL project is of a different kind. This paper discusses this challenge and exemplifies the ways in which the project sought to address it by leaving a legacy which promulgates a continuing live discourse.

The Carpe Vitam legacy is not just a set of insights and recommendations as is often the case, rather it can be characterised as a set of intellectual and practical tools, to help people fashion their own discourse. The use of the word ‘tools’ here resonates with activity theory (Engestrom, 1999a), a way of explaining the socio-cultural world. In activity theory, we pursue our aspirations in respect of innovation through the use of ‘mediating artifacts’. Artifacts of various kinds help us, for example, to clarify our vision of possible futures, create strategic pathways and diagnose and explain our practices (Engestrom, 1999b).

In the Carpe Vitam project the tools we were seeking to leave behind included a set of principles for practice, a conceptual framework, developmental strategies and practical tools to support professional and organisational learning (see the paper presented by John MacBeath and Sue Swaffield in this symposium). The key principles for practice were offered as a framework for a wide range of discursive activities such as reviewing practice, consulting colleagues, students and other stakeholders or identifying priorities for development. Another key resource was the conceptual framework offered as a way of understanding the inter-relationship of learning and leadership, both conceptualised as agential activities. In addition a range of techniques and instruments were offered for use in situations such as professional development workshops and self-evaluation exercises.

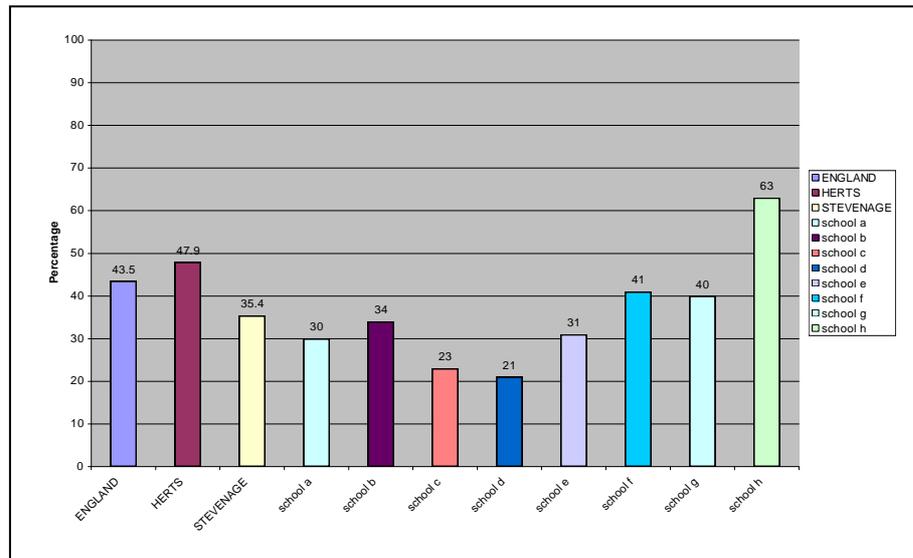
It was our hope at the conclusion of the project that, through publications such as our ‘LfL Making the Connections’ booklet, these tools would become available to teachers,

schools, and other educational communities who would use them to build discursive processes either independently or in partnership with Cambridge or any of the other universities involved. This was exemplified by the partnership created in 2006 with a group of secondary and special schools in the town of Stevenage, Hertfordshire. These schools opted to work with the Cambridge team to establish a project we call: 'The Carpe Vitam LfL Stevenage Extension project'. The project involves six out of the seven secondary schools and the two special schools in the town. The Stevenage Extension plays an important role in supporting the development of collaborative relationships between the schools.

### **Stevenage: a socio-economic challenge**

What then is the background to this? After thirty years of educational reform there are still large numbers of children in the UK not able to access the cultural goods that the state school system has the potential to deliver. The 1960s policy of trying to create common, or 'comprehensive' schools as they were known, failed to solve the problem, as did attempts in the 1970s to establish a common core curriculum. The bringing in of a compulsory National Curriculum at the end of the 1980s was intended to guarantee every child's entitlement to a good education but for reasons too complex to examine here, a wide variation in educational outcomes persisted. Thus Stevenage 10 years ago found itself served by competing schools all struggling with an unfair share of the nation's challenging children. An examination of the indicators of academic performance over some years suggests that almost all of the schools in the town faced a common problem. The most commonly used indicator of educational outcomes in the UK over the last 15 years is the percentage of pupils achieving a grade between A\*-C in the GCSE examination they sit at the age of 15 or 16 years. In 1995 two out of the eight secondary schools in Stevenage scored in the low twenties, two more scored in the low thirties and two more in the low forties.

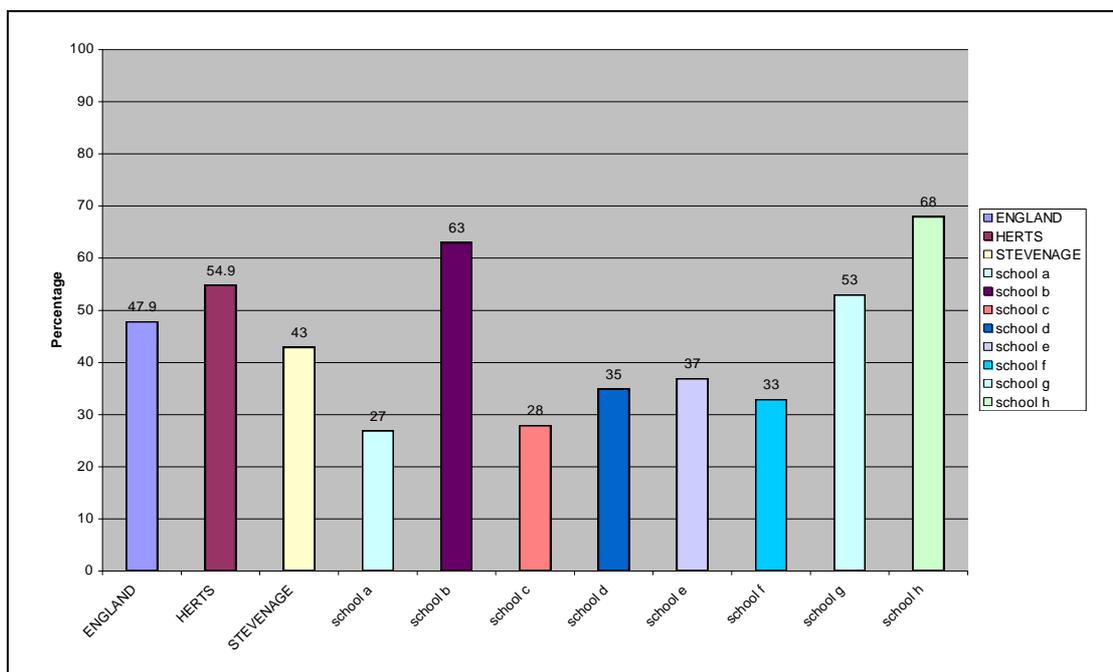
**Figure 1 Percentage of GCSE grades A\*-C in 1995**



Only one of the Stevenage schools scored above the national average and that school was the only one with a religious affiliation, the means to operate a degree of selection. This immediately brings into focus one of the major barriers to collaboration between schools in the UK system.

Four years later, in 1999 the situation had improved to some extent. Two schools scored in the high twenties, three schools scored in the thirties and one school scored in the sixties only five percentage points behind the school with the religious affiliation.

**Figure 1 Percentage of GCSE grades A\*-C in 1999**



This evidence of progress is to be celebrated of course, but nevertheless these figures are consistently below both the national average and the average scores for the county of Hertfordshire in which Stevenage is located. It is perhaps unsurprising that the socio-economic indicators reflect a similar pattern. Public records show that housing in Stevenage is predominantly ‘aimed at blue collar families’, that ‘residents are less well qualified’ than the majority of people in Hertfordshire, there are ‘worrying health characteristics’, ‘teenage conception is double the Hertfordshire average’ and ‘there are pockets of serious deprivation in the town’ (Stevenage Borough Council, 2006).

This challenging socio-economic environment combines with the effects of a policy climate that encourages competition between schools to make improvement trajectories fragile. In 2002, one of the schools, Barnwell, came under a lot of pressure from school inspectors because their levels of measured attainment had fallen to just 20 per cent from a high of 33 per cent in 1997. A more detailed account of the school’s struggle to improve can be found elsewhere (Frost, 2005) but it is interesting to note that the school was able to reverse this trend within three years. Meanwhile, one of the other schools within walking distance of Barnwell, Collenswood School, was not able to do this. In 1997 their results were very similar to Barnwell’s but from 2001-2005 their results steadily declined. The inspectors were not able to find evidence of the capacity for improvement and so the local authority decided to close the school. Some of the staff were interviewed for teaching posts at Barnwell School which was expanding to take in the children from the condemned school.

The kind of competition described above is problematic in all sorts of ways. Firstly, it exerts pressure on schools which can lead to short term tactical measures to try to improve the results. This was recently admitted by an arm of government in the UK when the head of the QCA, Ken Boston, said the following:

In many schools too much teaching time is taken up with practice tests and preparing for the key stage tests in English, mathematics and science - at the expense of actual teaching in these core subjects and other areas.

(Guardian newspaper, 11.8.07)

It is also evident that teaching strategies tend to be narrowed – emphasising transmission models - and curriculum restricted to the topics that teachers predict will be examined. Just one week after Ken Boston’s remarks, the front page of the Observer newspaper carried a piece in which the Deputy Head of the London Institute for Education, Dylan Wiliam, called for reform of the examination system because of the tendency to drill for tests that are too fact based and do not encourage critical thinking (Observer, 19.8.07). With the constant threat of censure and even closure hanging over the schools in towns such as Stevenage, how can Headteachers enable their teachers to focus on the development of long-term capacity and a better education for all students? Collaboration seemed to offer the best way forward so when the ‘Stevenage 14-19 Partnership’ was established under the Strategic Area Review the Headteachers seized the opportunity. Such partnerships were established in order to broaden the range of specialist courses that could be offered within the town (Secretary of State for Education and Skills, 2005) but in the Stevenage case, the Heads took the radical decision to appoint one of the Headteachers as a full-time coordinator.

### **The impetus to collaborate**

A website declares that the Stevenage 14-19 Partnership:

...brings together the town's six 11-19 community schools - Barclay, Barnwell, Heathcote, Marriotts, Nobel, Thomas Alleyne - North Hertfordshire College, Lonsdale and the Valley special schools and the Stevenage Education Support Centre. All these centres are working together and with our partners to transform the educational culture in the town and, through collaboration at 14+, to broaden and enhance opportunities and learning pathways for all young people.

(Stevenage 14-19 Partnership website)

This response to a series of policies which have created an education market place (Husbands, 1996) has grown in momentum since the early 1990s and has more recently become, somewhat paradoxically, part of government policy. The Stevenage 14-19 Partnership has been supported under policies designed to make the best use of curriculum resources and to provide new types of vocational educational programmes (Tomlinson, 2004). It is interesting however, that the statement on the Stevenage

website uses such expansive terms. Transforming ‘the educational culture in the town’ and enhancing ‘opportunities ... for all young people’ suggest much more than collaboration for the purposes of the provision of particular specialist diplomas. The Headteachers in Stevenage had higher aspirations.

An opportunity arose for the Cambridge LfL team to support this work and add further impetus to the move towards collaboration. One of the schools, Barnwell, had become involved in the original Carpe Vitam LfL project as an ‘Associate School’; members of staff had participated in the international conferences and senior staff had visited New Jersey to explore collaborative links with that District. The senior leadership team at Barnwell had fully embraced leadership for learning principles and valued the link with the University. At the conclusion of the Carpe Vitam project the Headteacher invited the Cambridge team to put a proposal to a meeting of the Headteachers at one of their regular 14-19 Partnership meetings. It was a modest proposal: to use one of the main data gathering instruments, the questionnaire, in all of the schools in the Partnership so that we could build a discussion about leadership for learning across the town. It was agreed that we would proceed from the beginning of the 2006 academic year, each school having identified a project coordinator and been provided with a critical friend to help interpret the survey data and support subsequent planning. Thus a team was formed consisting of myself as a researcher, a critical friend (Amanda Roberts, a consultant who used to be a Hertfordshire Headteacher and now works for both the local authority and the University) and a member of the senior leadership team from each of the schools. The chair of the 14-19 Partnership, the second Stevenage headteacher to fill this full time coordinator post, attended all the team meetings and negotiated contracts with the Cambridge team.

### **The Carpe Vitam LfL: Stevenage Extension project**

This group met to be briefed on the nature of the original Carpe Vitam LfL project and to discuss strategies. In advance of this meeting a small group of senior staff had met with members of the Cambridge Carpe Vitam project team to look carefully at the

survey instrument used at the start of the original project. It was a significant review that led to the commitment to revise the instrument in the light of what we had learnt during the three year life of the project. Perhaps even more significant though was the fact that colleagues from one of the schools had participated in a discussion which, in the original project, had involved only members of the research teams. This collaborative ethos was carried forward to the first project team meeting where the discussion moved from an interest in a survey to collect comparative data, towards an interest in taking collective responsibility for educational outcomes in the town as a whole. The vehicle for this would be the nurturing of a pedagogic discourse stimulated and framed by the Leadership for Learning project.

At the first project team meeting there was substantial discussion about the re-design of the survey instrument, tapping into the school coordinators' local knowledge about the language that students and teachers would respond to, and strategies for administering the survey. Then we began to address the question of how the project would be launched in each of the schools. Would there be a presentation to staff? Would there be a leaflet for every teacher explaining the aims of the project? No. The school coordinators argued that a 'project launch' would be counter productive because of the innovation overload that has been noted in so many documents and public presentations. The Chief Inspector of Schools said this in his annual report for example:

Over the years, we have learned about the dangers of innovation overload. Headteachers now, and rightly in my view, are more selective in the developments they choose to pursue at school level.

(HMCI, 2004: 2)

In addition to the innovation overload experienced by the profession as a whole, the teachers in the Stevenage schools were also suffering the fatigue that arises from the relentless pressure of external inspection and local authority target setting because of the historic pattern of low attainment described above. The school coordinators knew their schools and wanted to avoid the layering on of what would be seen to be 'yet another project'. It was suggested instead that the LfL initiative could build on current initiatives and coordinators began to contribute anecdotes about innovative projects already underway in their schools. It rapidly became clear that, as a group, we had a

major resource if only we could mobilise it. In the terms that David Hargreaves' used when he addressed one of the Carpe Vitam conferences, we were recognising with considerable excitement, that the Stevenage schools already had *intellectual capital* in abundance.

Intellectual capital is one of the invisible assets of an organisation and complements its financial capital and physical assets. Schools are evidently rich in the intellectual capital of the teachers and staff, but also of the students, their families and communities.

(Hargreaves, 2003: 4)

How could this knowledge and intellectual capital be made liquid? One of the strategies employed in the original Carpe Vitam project was portraiture.

... 'portraiture,' the term I use for a method of inquiry and documentation in the social sciences. With it, I seek to combine systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor.

(Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997: 3)

In the original project we had invited the schools to create for themselves portraits of their schools in the round, perhaps drawing a wide range of colleagues and students into a process of gathering perceptions and contributing text and images representing a multiplicity of voices. We adapted this and focused it on innovative practices that corresponded with the LfL principles. It was agreed that the project's critical friend would visit each of the schools and produce a Visitor's Portrait drawing on her conversations with project coordinators. These conversations were framed by the LfL principles; the dialogue made them real and led to the publication across Stevenage of a collection of brief but vivid portrayals of practices that reflected leadership for learning aspirations. Each of the key principles was illustrated and exemplified by several vignettes; for example, the shared leadership principle was reflected in the following:

One aim of the redesigning of the meeting structure at The Barclay School was to allow staff at all levels of the school to take the lead in developing and monitoring their own work. Regular Cluster Meetings are a good example of this policy in action. Made up of 10 Form Tutors and two attached Learning Mentors, Cluster Groups set their own agendas and chair their own meetings.

Such vignettes were assembled in a visually appealing way with text boxes, graphics and the schools' logos. The textual content of the booklet was sent to each school coordinator to check for integrity and the resulting booklet - *Exploring LfL Activity* - containing more than forty vignettes was made available to all staff in the eight schools. The booklet also included guidance on a strategy that had proved to be so useful for examining practices from other schools – the 'Connect Extend and Challenge' routine. This had been offered to us by David Perkins from the Visible Thinking project, also a Wallenberg Foundation funded project. He had explained this routine to us at our final international conference and offered it as a framework for viewing visual displays put up in the 'Gallery Walk' (Perkins, 2003). The 'Exploring LfL Activity' booklet also included advice to help the schools design their own portraits.

### **Redesigning the questionnaire**

The qualitative reconnaissance activity described above proceeded in parallel with the survey. In the initial discussion with colleagues from Barnwell school, the school which had participated in the original *Carpe Vitam* project, it had become clear that the survey instrument would be more useful if it were to be redesigned to reflect the principles that had emerged through the *Carpe Vitam* project. The principles, together with the conceptual framework, thus became a theoretical framework which underpinned the questionnaire. We generated two sets of questions for each of the five key principles: one for staff and one for students. We sent the first draft of these questions to the school coordinators and relied on their insider knowledge to help us refine the language used. We asked them to identify additional questions and eventually added a set of questions that would tell us about the extent to which collaborative practice across Stevenage was valued and was evident in practice.

When it came to the formatting of the new questionnaire, a key methodological issue arose: should we disperse the questions throughout the questionnaire to avoid one question influencing the responses to the one that follows it, or should we group them

overtly so that they might be cumulative? Since our purpose was to stimulate reflection and open up the discourse, we decided to set aside any concerns about validity of responses. Rather than seeing this cumulative effect as contamination of the data we chose to see it as deepening the reflection. To further enhance this effect we added headings and instructions such as:

*In the next section we would like your views about how learning and leadership are talked about in your school.*

We intended that these headings would shape respondents' thinking by helping them to focus on the overall theme and see the connections between the questions within a particular section.

Another significant issue in the design of the survey instrument was the language used in the questions. In the original Carpe Vitam project we had wrestled with the challenge of translation into different cultures and languages, but in this case we were more focussed on intelligibility in a very local sense. We also wanted to have a close correspondence between the questions for staff, the questions for students and the LfL principles. We devised a table so that we could read across from a principle to staff questions to student questions. We relied upon our school coordinators to tell us how the students and staff were likely to interpret the questions. Not only was this insider cultural knowledge vital for the validity of the data, but it also played an important part in developing our discussion about the principles. Our dialogue became so much richer because of this focus on these questionnaire items.

As in the original project, the questionnaire was administered to all Year eight students in six schools. The remaining two schools were not able to participate fully at the beginning of the year but were able to carry out the survey subsequently. There is always a danger with surveys of this kind that, if there is a significant time lag between the administration of the questionnaire and the availability of the results, the fast moving pace of events in the school may well render the survey redundant. We therefore moved quickly to carry out the analysis. This was undertaken by a member of the LfL team, Ros Frost with assistance from a research student. At the next meeting of

the school coordinators we presented a booklet containing a variety of tables and graphs, including:

- Chart showing, item by item, teachers' view of the extent of practice compared to its value
- Chart showing, item by item, students' view of the extent of practice compared to its value
- List of the 5 most and least evident practices (teachers' view)
- List of the 5 most and least evident practices (students' view)
- Chart showing, item by item, teachers' view of the importance of practices compared to its prevalence in practice
- Chart showing, item by item, students' view of the importance of practices compared to its prevalence in practice
- List of the 5 most and least important practices (teachers' view)
- List of the 5 most and least important practices (students' view)
- Chart comparing staff and student's views about the extent of collaboration between Stevenage schools
- Chart comparing staff and student's views about the importance of collaboration between Stevenage schools

Our critical friend explained each output in the booklet and facilitated a discussion about the different ways in which the data could be used. What emerged from this discussion was the identification of further outputs that the coordinators believed would be useful. In particular the idea of a summary sheet for staff in each school and a differently worded one for students was requested. The outputs listed above were of interest to the coordinators and to their colleagues on senior leadership teams but, even to those accustomed to looking at data outputs, they are quite challenging and require time to study them properly. The critical friend visited schools to support the discussion with senior leaders about the implications of the data, but the audience for these outputs remained restricted. In contrast, the simple sheets exemplified in Figure 11.3 were more immediately accessible and could be used in a wide variety of team meetings and staff development contexts. They constituted an effective tool for stimulating and nourishing a wider discourse about leadership for learning.

Figure 3: Data output sheet for staff

What did you tell us?

**The Carpe Vitam LfL project: The Stevenage extension**

Six schools in Stevenage are working together to learn more about the type of leadership which supports good learning in your school.

We wanted to start by discovering more about what you think about learning and your school. You helped us to do this by completing a questionnaire in the Autumn Term.

In the questionnaire you were asked to tell us about what was really important to you compared to what you thought was happening.

For example, you might think that it is really important to have occasions when staff can learn from one another across faculties but in reality, this hardly ever happens.

**You told us these things were really important to you:**

- Providing students with feedback that helps them to improve their work
- Making systematic efforts to ensure that the school has the capacity to improve and be successful in the future
- Encouraging everyone in our school to be a learner
- Having a culture which nurtures the learning of everyone
- Setting learning tasks that provide students with the right level of challenge

**You told us these things were not very important to you:**

- Talking explicitly about the relationship between learning and leadership
- Everyone in the school sharing a concern with the link between leadership and learning
- Extending self-evaluation to include the parents and community
- Exploring practice through links with researchers
- Networking with practitioners in other countries and other cultural contexts

# Update for staff

**You told us these things happen a lot in your school:**

- Systematic efforts to ensure that the school has the capacity to improve and be successful in the future
- Encouraging everyone in the school to be a learner
- Members of the senior leadership team see themselves as learners
- Building a culture which nurtures the learning of everyone
- Collaborating with other schools in order to secure the best possible education for all youngsters in Stevenage

**You told us these things don't happen very much:**

- Setting learning tasks that provide students with the right level of challenge
- Creating physical and social spaces that stimulate and celebrate learning
- Networking with practitioners in other countries and in other cultural contexts
- Drawing upon the experience and expertise of staff, students and parents as resources for learning
- Everyone in the school sharing a concern with the link between leadership and learning
- Extending self-evaluation to include the parents and community

What is interesting about this?

What do you think should happen now?

**The project schools**

Blahdiblah School  
 Blahdibli School  
 Blahdiblon School  
 Blahdibblue School  
 Blahdibly School  
 Blahdibling School



### Making innovative practice visible

The survey was seen to be of considerable value, but looking at the booklet containing the initial portraits led us back to the question of how we could make innovative

practices visible; not so these practices could be simply mimicked but because educational ideas travel well when represented in tangible activities and materials. We wanted to nurture a dialogue about leadership for learning amongst staff, students and others within Stevenage as a whole and we believed that we needed to make visible those practices that corresponded with the LfL principles and to represent them in such a way that people would be able to talk about them and subsequently adapt them for use in their own contexts. The aim is deeper than that though. It is not simply a matter of transfer of practices, strategies, techniques; it is also about the pedagogical ideas that are embedded within them. Our 'Exploring Leadership for Learning' booklet had given us more than 40 brief vignettes, mere glimpses of the innovative practices already in use, but they were scant and superficial. We needed richer accounts of those practices, 'fatter' vignettes, more detailed and nuanced and these could be created by eliciting accounts from key individuals or groups involved in, or touched by, the practices concerned. Members of the research team were subsequently invited to visit three of the schools to trial this strategy.

The cases we agreed to examine in the first instance were: the 'Partners in Learning' project at Nobel School, the development of 'Vertical Tutoring' at Barclay School and an innovation in assessment for learning techniques at Barnwell School referred to as 'Response to Learning'. We began with a simple series of questions:

- How did this practice originate? What problem was it intended to respond to?
- What is the scope of the activity – who is involved, when, where?
- How does it work? Who does what? What does it look like?
- In what ways does it correspond with the LfL principles?
- What conditions make this practice possible or what conditions enhance it?
- How effectively does it work and what needs to be done to make it work better?
- 

From these questions we developed interview and observation schedules and asked our researcher to visit each school to try to capture a rich portrayal of the practice concerned. We were seeking 'thick description' in the ethnographic tradition. It is

interesting to note in passing that the researcher in this case, Ozgur Bolat, was a research student from Turkey; this brought a fresh perspective to these practices in English schools. In each case we produced a report for the schools concerned. These were between two and half and four thousand words long with headings such as:

- Aim of the innovation
- How it works
- Benefits for teachers
- Benefits for students
- Benefits for the whole school
- Developing the project
- Challenges and issues

The research team showed draft reports to the school coordinators and asked them how they might be used. These documents were seen to be very helpful to the teachers who were directly involved in the practices – serving as evaluative feedback – but, in order to nurture the LfL dialogue across the schools, we needed something that could easily be accessed by very busy teachers. We then drafted summaries, sufficiently brief to be able to fit on one side of A4 paper (see example in Figure 4 below).

These summaries were to be distributed throughout the project schools so that any teacher who recognised the potential of the practice described in outline there could ask for a copy of the full report and make contact with the staff directly involved in the particular practice. Within the team we discussed strategies for using the summary sheets, for example by sending them to particular individuals or committees or by distributing them to all staff and inviting responses.

### **From data to discourse**

After six months of the project's existence we had a great deal of quantitative data and examples of what we believed to be very useful qualitative data. We had also developed

an intense dialogue within the project team that included a coordinator from each school and the Cambridge staff. The challenge was to draw teachers into a Stevenage-wide discourse and beyond that, the students, parents and other community stakeholders.

**Figure 4: Case study summary sheet**

**The Carpe Vitam Leadership for Learning project: Stevenage Extension**  
*Portraying innovative practice in Stevenage Schools*  
**The Case of 'Partners in Learning' at Nobel**

**What is it?**  
 Students observe lessons and give teachers feedback.

**Why?**  
 To support teacher self-evaluation by providing relevant feedback and foster student voice.

**How it works**

*Selection of participants*

- Announcement in assemblies, invitation to participate
- 25-30 students selected
- Both experienced and newly-qualified teachers

*Training*

- Building social bonds in relaxed, surroundings (hotel) with casual clothes
- Team building games and activities
- Students and staff discuss worries/concerns
- Practice observation using videos
- Code of conduct discussed
- Training in giving constructive feedback

*Observation*

- Teacher and the student observer negotiate lessons to be observed
- Students often observe same teacher in different lessons
- Negotiated focus
- Some use pre-designed observation sheet
- Frequency of observations not fixed - 6-9 lessons a term

*Feedback*

- Immediately after the lesson or during a break time or lunch time.
- Meetings last between 20 and 30 minutes.
- Feedback directly to teacher, verbally and in confidence, sometimes written feedback
- Sometimes teachers give feedback on the students' feedback

**How does it help?**

- Self-awareness of and reflection on classroom practice
- Awareness of students' learning needs
- More relevant feedback
- Student voice
- Student exercising leadership and taking responsibility for their learning
- Students understanding of teaching and learning process
- Confidence building, improved behaviour, trust building

**What are the issues?**

- Providing feedback to students about their feedback
- Time for feedback sessions
- Students missing classes
- Staff meetings to maximise teacher learning
- Widening participation

**Find out more**

Contact Barry Burningham at Nobel School

BarryBurningham@nobel.herts.sch.uk

A conference was proposed and dismissed as being too costly and likely to be seen as an unwanted intrusion. Instead it was suggested by one of the coordinators that teachers

could be invited to engage in inter-school visits. We had learnt the value such collaborations in the original Carpe Vitam project. An integral part of every international conference (Copenhagen, Innsbruck, Athens) had been a programme of visits to local schools; subsequent networking and exchanges between schools had taken place on an ad hoc basis. In the Stevenage context we examined other approaches including the 'Learning Walk' approach promoted by the National College for School Leadership. Our proposal sought to avoid any impression of being a sort of reciprocal inspection but had the following key characteristics:

- focussed on particular innovative practices
- collaborative rather than individualistic
- illuminative rather than judgemental
- uses LfL principles as a lens through which to observe practices
- raising questions and identifies issues

We wanted to extend what the earlier research visits had generated and make a wider range of practices visible so that they could be shared, adopted and adapted. Clearly, those individuals participating in the visits would come away with a good understanding of the nature of the innovative practices they have seen but we needed to spread the knowledge more widely. We therefore needed each visit to result in materials that could be used to support ongoing collaboration. Each visiting team would be provided with guidelines to structure their enquiries and the resulting report.

Progress with the inter-school visits programme was interrupted by the announcement of a reorganisation of secondary schooling in Stevenage in the summer of 2007. This was seen by many as an exciting first step in a process that would see new schools built and a more rational provision across the town. For some it was deeply threatening. At least one of the schools would have to close. One teacher commented: 'well that's knocked collaboration on the head hasn't it?' There is no doubt that collaborative projects such as the provision of the new vocational diplomas will proceed because there is so much at stake, but in other ways it seems that the reorganisation has put a break on the rate of progress towards collaboration.

At the time of writing the trial of the inter-school visits proceeds although it is being driven by just two of the schools where there has been strong tradition of collaboration already established.

## **Conclusion**

The story outlined above is of just one year in the life of the Carpe Vitam LfL: Stevenage Extension project. We are confident that we have been able to take the tools for discourse bequeathed by the original Carpe Vitam project and use them to support the collaboration agenda of the schools in the 14-19 Partnership.

We have discussed the possibility of building into the project a programme aimed at developing leadership capacity across the town but, as with the original project, it is difficult to predict the direction in which the project will unfold because the strategy is quite properly an emergent one. The headteachers have oversight and their appointed school coordinators play their part in the direction and planning of the project. The proposals for the reorganisation of secondary schooling in Stevenage referred to above will take advantage of the Building Schools for the Future programme and will inevitably impinge on the way the legacy of Carpe Vitam continues to be used.

What we hope this story illustrates is that the Carpe Vitam LfL project has no single, fixed or immutable legacy. Rather it offers a set of tools for discourse which may be taken up in many different ways. What we hope is that those who pick up these tools and use them will allow us to learn from their experience.

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