[Headline]

Why is school-to-school collaboration important and how can we make it work?

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[Body]

Why collaborate?

Imagine a school leader who works in the education system you are most familiar with. Picture them in their office, at school.

Now imagine that they are facing an issue they've never encountered before, or a challenge they've been trying to address for some time, without success. Who do they turn to for ideas and support? The chair of the school's governing body or their supervisor at the district office may be ideal for supporting on some issues, but less so on others. For example, a head teacher might not want to reveal they are struggling to the person responsible for their performance management assessments. Or the challenge might just be something these people can't really help with, because they are not currently working in a school.

In many parts of the world, our imaginary school leader will turn to their networks for support on the tricky issues they face – their trusted colleagues in other schools who have faced similar issues, who can empathise and offer practical suggestions about what to do. These networks are often informal, based on professional friendships that develop almost naturally as we progress through our careers. In England, for example, it is common for head teachers to stay in touch with the other heads they met when studying for their National Professional Qualification for Headship.

Two points are important here. First, if your imaginary school leader does not have such informal networks to turn to, if their school operates in 'splendid isolation', then there will be limited opportunities for them and their staff to learn from practices in other schools, or to get emotional or practical support from their peers when they face a tricky issue. Second, if the networks your imaginary leader engages with are all informal and self-generated, with no coherent ways of working or supporting infrastructure, then there is a risk they will be limited in their scope and impact, and that they don't align with wider system priorities and forms of communication.

Networks, collaborations and partnerships between schools can take multiple forms and ~~can~~ achieve multiple objectives. This can make them hard to make sense of ~~,~~ and even harder to lead and manage. Nevertheless, the key message in this chapter is that policy makers should think carefully about where and how they want to encourage school-to-school networking as part of wider reform efforts, and what they need to put in place to make this happen successfully.

This is because school-to-school collaboration offers huge potential for sharing learning and expertise across systems, for providing support to schools that are struggling, for ensuring 'joined up' provision that meets the needs of all children, and/or for supporting innovation.[1,2,3,4,5] That said, it is important to note that the evidence on how networks and collaboration lead to impact is not consistently strong – partly because it is challenging to assess impact from more diffuse partnerships, for example where schools are working with other services or universities to 'join up' provision. The strongest evidence comes from formally brokered school-to-school support and federations, for example where successful schools support lower-performing schools to improve.[6,7]

It is also important to recognise that networks are not simple to manage and do not offer a panacea. For example, Greany and Higham[8] highlight that:

> Networks can develop equitable partnerships, but can also support asymmetric power relations in which particular members gain authority and secure unequal gains and this can erode trust.[9] Networks can be open and inclusive, but can also be closed and exclusive where members develop a preference to interact with insiders or seek to manage and restrict flows of knowledge.[10] Networks can be flat and horizontal, but can also contain their own internal hierarchies.[11] Further, while networks can be co-ordinated on the basis of trust, external risk, suspicion and fear can also motivate people or organizations to collaborate without trust.[12]

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[1] Armstrong, P. (2015) *Effective school partnerships and collaboration for school improvement: a review of the evidence*. London: Department for Education.
[2] Chapman, C. (2015) From one school to many: Reflections on the impact and nature of school federations and chains in England. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, Vol. 43(1) 46–60
[3] OECD (2015) *Schooling Redesigned: Towards Innovative Learning Systems*, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264245914-en
[4] Muijs, D., West, M. and Ainscow, M. (2010) Why network? Theoretical perspectives on networking, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 21:1, 5-26, DOI: 10.1080/09243450903569692
[5] Suggett, D. (2014) *Networking as System Policy: Balancing Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions*, OECD CERI - http://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/Suggett%20Networks%20paper%20formatted.pdf
[6] Muijs, D. (2015) Improving schools through collaboration: a mixed methods study of school-to-school partnerships in the primary sector. *Oxford Review of Education*, 41:5, 563-586, DOI: 10.1080/03054985.2015.1047824
[7] Chapman, C. Muijs, D. and MacAllister, J. (2011) *A Study of the Impact of School Federation on Student Outcomes,* Nottingham: NCSL.
[8] Greany, T. and Higham, R. (2018) *Hierarchy, Markets and Networks: analysing the 'self-improving school-led system' agenda in England and the implications for schools.* UCL IOE Press: London.
[9] Kamp, A. (2013) *Rethinking Learning Networks: Collaborative Possibilities for a Deleuzian Century*, London: Peter Lang Publishers.
[10] Hatcher, R. (2008) 'System leadership, networks and the question of power'. *Management in Education*, 22 (2), 24–30.
[11] Lieberman, A. and McLaughlin, M.-W. (1992). Networks for educational change: Powerful and problematic. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 73(9), 673-677.
[12] Cook, K., Hardon, R. and Levi, M. (2007) *Cooperation Without Trust?* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Despite these challenges, the majority of schools in England today engage in networks, and the development of school-to-school collaboration has been a significant feature of education policy since the early 2000s. This chapter outlines these developments and draws out some of the key learning from research and experience to identify implications for policy and practice.

How has policy in England worked to encourage school partnerships?

Most schools in England today are engaged in a range of partnerships, usually with other schools, but sometimes with other partners, such as universities. These partnerships range in their breadth and depth, but a combination of factors – mostly policy-driven – have served to increase the importance and strength of networks, starting around 2000, but particularly since 2010. Today, the partnership landscape in England is complex and disjointed, even within a single locality, resulting from historic patterns of competition and collaboration, as well as more recent developments and forms of leadership agency.

England's school system is frequently described in terms of 'high-autonomy high-accountability.'[13] This reflects the fact that, since the late 1980s, school leaders in England have had relatively high levels of autonomy to make operational decisions, for example in relation to staffing and budgets, whilst being held tightly accountable for school performance, as measured via standardised tests for pupils and school Ofsted inspections. Schools also compete with each other, in particular to attract pupils, with funding following parental choice of school.

In this context, research in the 1990s identified sharp competition and significant status hierarchies between schools, particularly at the secondary level.[14,15] Critically, although both Labour- and Conservative-led governments since that time have encouraged schools to collaborate, they have not dismantled the core 'high-autonomy high-accountability' framework, meaning that school leaders must maintain a focus on meeting their own institution's priorities, even as they also work in partnership. Thus, competitive pressures have not stopped, leading to arguments that schools are engaged in 'co-opetition.'[16]

Around 2000, the then New Labour government began to introduce various funding and policy incentives that encouraged schools to collaborate, both with other schools and,

[13] Greany, T. and Waterhouse, J. (2016) Rebels against the system: leadership agency and curriculum innovation in the context of school autonomy and accountability in England, in *School Autonomy and 21st Century Learning: special issue - International Journal of Education Management,* Vol 30, No 7.

[14] Gewirtz, S., Ball, S. and Bowe, R. (1995) Markets, Choice and Equity in Education, Open University Press, Buckingham.

[15] Glatter, R., Woods, P. and Bagley, C. (1997) *Choice and Diversity in Schooling: Perspectives and prospects*. London: Routledge

[16] Muijs, D. and Rumyantseva, N. (2014) Coopetition in education: Collaborating in a competitive environment, *Journal of Educational Change*, 15 (1): 1–18. doi:10.1007/s10833-013-9223-8.

sometimes, with wider partners. Evaluations of these initiatives reveal a range of important opportunities and challenges for partnership working, many of which are outlined below.[17,18,19,20,21] Perhaps the most successful New Labour initiative involving networks was the London Challenge, which had multiple strands but included a focus on brokering successful schools to support under-performing schools.[22,23] In subsequent years, this approach developed into the National Leaders of Education programme and the wider use of school-to-school support as a means of securing improvement in under-performing schools.[24]

Labour also established a legal framework for inter-school partnerships, as legislation passed in 2002 enabled maintained schools to federate together, with a single governing body (and, often, executive head teacher) overseeing two or more schools. This federation model provided the template for the later development of Multi-Academy Trusts, initially under Labour and then, after 2010, as a system-wide approach.

Several important lessons can be drawn from New Labour's approach to fostering partnerships. First, it is clear that some partnerships formed as a response to the specific funding pots available, but then all but dissolved once the funding stopped. Indeed, a popular definition of partnership at the time was 'the suppression of mutual loathing in the pursuit of public funding.'[25] Secondly, the multiplicity of programmes and funding streams under New Labour led to accusations of 'initiativitis' and a 'congested state', with evidence that some schools felt overwhelmed by the sheer range of partnership opportunities on offer.[26] Nevertheless, it could be argued that New Labour's investment in partnerships and networks served to shift the culture, making collaboration a core feature of the school system in England. For example, a survey conducted in early 2010 indicated that around three-quarters of head teachers were engaged in some form of school-to-school partnership at that time.[27]

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[17] Ofsted (2003) *Excellence in Cities and Education Action Zones: management and im*pact. London: Ofsted.
[18] Ofsted (2008) *Implementation of 14–19 reforms: an evaluation of progress*. London: Ofsted.
[19] Rudd, P.; Holland, M.; Sanders, D.; Massey, A.; White, G.; (2004) *Evaluation of the Beacon Schools Initiative: Final Report 2004*. NfER:
[20] Sharp, C., Pye, D. Blackmore, J. Brown, E. Eames, A. Easton, C. Filmer-Sankey, C. Tabary, A. Whitby, K. Wilson, R. Benton, T. (2006) *National Evaluation of Creative Partnerships Final Report*. NfER
[21] Jackson, D. and Temperley, J. (2006) *From Professional Learning Community to Networked Learning Community.* Conference paper for International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) Fort Lauderdale, USA, January 3rd – 6th 2006
[22] Ainscow, M. (2015) *Towards Self-Improving School Systems: Lessons from a City Challenge*, London: Routledge.
[23] Baars, S., Bernardes, E., Elwick, A., Malortie, A., McAleavy, T., McInerney, L., Menzies, L. and Riggall, A. (2014) *Lessons from London Schools: Investigating the Success*, Reading, UK: CfBT.
[24] Hill, R. and Matthews, P. (2010) *Schools Leading Schools II: The growing impact of National Leaders of Education,* Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.
[25] Glatter, R. (2003) Collaboration, collaboration, collaboration: the origins and implications of a policy. *Management in Education*, 17/5, 16-20.
[26] Skelcher, C. (2000) Changing images of the state: Overloaded, hollowed-out, congested. *Public Policy and Adminstration*, 15 (3): 3–19
[27] Hill, R. (2011) *The importance of teaching and the role of system leadership: a commentary on the Illuminas research*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.

The Conservative-led governments in power since 2010 have built on this platform, seeking to develop what they call a 'self-improving, school-led' system,[28] and have argued that 'partnership and collaborative working between schools is an essential requirement for realising this vision.' Indeed, a series of influential think pieces written by David Hargreaves for the then National College for School Leadership argued that all schools must collaborate in 'deep' partnerships for a 'self-improving system' to succeed.[29,30,31,32]

Two initiatives have been central to the government's approach in this area. The first is 'system leadership' and school-to-school support, where high-performing schools and school leaders can volunteer to be designated by the government (as either a Teaching School or National Leader of Education), with a remit to develop networks (called 'Alliances') and support improvement in other schools. The second, more significant initiative has been the development of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). A MAT is a charitable, non-profit company with a board and CEO ~~which~~ that operates ~~a number of~~multiple academies via a funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education.[33] The growth of MATs has been rapid, with around 1,200 MATs now operating 7,600 academies (~~that's~~ accounting for more than a third of all schools and~~, who educate about~~ around half of all pupils in England), with each MAT responsible for between two and more than forty academies, sometimes operating over a wide geographic area.

In addition to ~~its~~ developing~~ment of~~ 'system leadership' and MATs, the government has ~~also largely~~been dismantling~~ed~~ the educational oversight role of England's 152 local authorities since 2010. Local authorities had provided a key vehicle for reform implementation and school improvement support under previous administrations, but have now been largely replaced by MATs. In so doing, the government argues that it has reduced hierarchical oversight and freed up schools to individually and collectively 'self-improve'. In practice, however, as the following section sets out, the picture is considerably more complex.

School partnerships in England

Greany and Higham analysed the various ways in which schools in England collaborate within the context of wider policy-driven reforms that have been underway since 2010.[8] Their study

[28] Department for Education (2010) *The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper*, London: DfE.
[29] Hargreaves, D. H. (2010). Creating a self-improving school system. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.
[30] Hargreaves, D. H. (2011). Leading a self-improving school system. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.
[31] Hargreaves, D. H. (2012a). A self-improving school system in international context. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.
[32] Hargreaves, D. H. (2012b). A self-improving school system: Towards maturity. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.
[33] West, A. and Wolfe, D. (2018) *Academies, the School System in England and a Vision for the Future: Executive Summary*. Clare Market Papers No. 23.

Commented [ab1]: A 2016 DfE source was also referenced here, but didn't appear in the references list.

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Correct ref should be:

House of Commons Education Committee (2013) 'Written evidence submitted by the Department for Education', para 3. Available at: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmeduc/269/269we03.htm

includes detailed case studies of local clusters (primary and secondary) of varying strength, depth and breadth.

They found that informal networks – most often centred on local clusters – remain important to schools, but that many of these informal networks have worked to become more formal and structured, usually by adopting one of the government's preferred models (by becoming a Teaching School Alliance and/or ~~a~~ MAT). The increased importance of networking for schools is driven by a view, reported by one primary head teacher in the study, that collaboration is 'more and more something we *need* to do'. This perspective reflects a mix of factors, but particularly the loss of support from local authorities, coupled with the need to respond to significant national policy changes and new accountability requirements.

The research indicates that primary schools collaborate with an average of nine or ten other schools, while for secondary schools, the number is usually between ten and 13. Collaboration is most common with schools in the same phase and is often long-standing (five years or more). Most schools have a smaller number of long-term, more intensive ties and a larger number of newer, less intensive connections. In a national survey of head teachers, conducted as part of the same study, just two per cent of respondents stated that their school did not collaborate with any other school in a meaningful way.

In terms of the nature and focus of collaborative activity between schools, Greany and Higham show how this ranges from a local cluster that does little more than organise an annual inter-school sports day, to partnerships involving staff at multiple levels that impact on virtually every aspect of life and learning within member schools.

Primary school clusters had usually originated in previous local-authority-led initiatives, but those that had survived and developed had often been overlain with other initiatives and aims over time. Membership in these local clusters was usually voluntary and often fluid, but was generally drawn from a distinct local area with neighbouring or partly neighbouring schools. These clusters rarely had formal governance structures, with shared decision-making usually sited informally within a head teachers' group. Common activities within stronger local primary clusters included head teacher meetings, curriculum or subject leader networks, assessment and moderation groups, peer reviews, research projects and joint practice development or shared professional development for staff, and providing joint extra-curricular provision.

By contrast, secondary schools tended to collaborate in different ways, often over wider geographic areas, reflecting the fact that they are more likely than primaries to be in competition with neighbouring secondary schools.

Where local clusters and partnerships chose to formalise their partnership, for example by becoming a Teaching School Alliance or MAT, this was generally driven by a desire to access funding and increase sustainability. However, adopting these models inevitably meant that the partnership changed as a result. This is most evident in the case of MATs; once a school has joined a trust it ceases to exist as a separate legal entity, and the head teacher is line managed by the CEO of the MAT or by another member of the central team. While most MATs do seek to encourage some level of collaboration between schools in the group,[34] a MAT is, thus, not a 'partnership' in the usual sense of a voluntary collaboration between 'legally autonomous organizations that work together.'.[35]

Greany and Higham conclude that the 'self-improving school-led system' is a development of, rather than an alternative to, England's pre-existing 'high autonomy high-accountability' – or New Public Management[36] – policy framework. Thus, while it is true that school partnerships and networks have become more important since 2010, these collaborative arrangements do not represent a 'self-governing' alternative to hierarchy and markets. A consistent view is that the government's agenda has created a more fragmented system in which there are 'winners and losers', with a sub-set of higher status schools, often 'system leader' schools, seen to be gaining new opportunities and resources, while lower-status schools face overlapping challenges, including higher levels of deprivation and pupil mobility. In this context, the extent to which a strong and inclusive partnership develops in any given locality depends on a complex array of factors, including the history of local relationships between schools, the context of individual schools, and the agency and values of local actors.[37]

Lessons for successful school-to-school collaboration

This final section draws out a set of overarching findings on the factors that support successful school-to-school partnerships, with a focus on governance and leadership. These findings come, in part, from the research and evaluations referenced above, while also drawing on wider research into partnerships, including those beyond the education sector.

First, we can say that strong networks and partnerships generally reflect a shared goal or interest. Provan and Kenis[35] note that organisations join or form networks for a variety of reasons, including to gain legitimacy, serve clients more effectively, attract more resources or address complex problems, but that all network organisations seek to achieve some end they could not achieve independently.[34] In education, partnerships generally focus on

[34] Greany, T. (2018) *Sustainable Improvement in Multi-School Groups.* London: Department for Education.
[35] Provan, K. and Kenis, P. (2008) 'Modes of network governance: Structure, management, and effectiveness. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory,* 18 (2), 229–52.
[36] Hood, C. (1991) A public management for all seasons, *Public Administration*, 69 (1): 3–19.
[37] Greany, T. (2020) Place-based governance and leadership in decentralised school systems: evidence from England, *Journal of Education Policy*, DOI: 10.1080/02680939.2020.1792554

improving the quality of education for children, although day-to-day partnership activity might be on 'upstream' issues, such as training new teachers. As we have seen, competitive pressures in a system can make working in partnership more challenging, while providing funding to incentivise partnerships may not lead to sustainable models in the absence of shared goals and values. So, there is a need to focus on how partnerships come together initially to identify a shared vision and set of priorities.

Second, successful networks generally share attributes, such as solidarity, altruism, loyalty, reciprocity and trust, and these take time to build. The circumstances around how a network is formed – for example, whether or not schools are mandated to join a particular group – will influence the development of these attributes. Hargreaves argues that 'deep' partnerships require strong ties between staff at multiple levels across schools,[29] with close and frequent interactions and high levels of relational trust and reciprocity.[38] However, Wellman argues that, in modern society, weaker ties of less intimate but more numerous interactions are more typical.[39] Subsequent research has shown how weak ties can allow information to flow and problems to be solved in distributed networks that do not rely on high levels of trust.[40] These findings are perhaps reflected in the nature of school partnerships in England, as outlined above, where most schools have a smaller number of long-term and more intensive ties and a larger number of newer and less intensive ties. The – admittedly somewhat gnomic – implication for policy might be that the approach to fostering partnerships should be neither too tight, nor too loose.

Third, many networks develop formalised governance and management structures as they grow over time, believing this will improve efficiency, but this can risk reducing levels of ownership for (some) members. Provan and Kenis[35] identify three typical models of governance:

- 'Shared governance networks' – are governed equally by all network members
- 'Lead organization networks' – are governed by one network member, acting as a centralized network broker
- 'Network Administrative Organizations' (NAO) – are networks governed externally by a separate administrative entity, often with a formal Manager or CEO.[34]

Provan and Kenis[35] also argue that, while many networks begin with informal 'shared governance', as they grow, they commonly evolve towards a 'lead organization' or 'NAO' structure.[34] This, they argue, is because finding consensus, sustaining trust and organising activities becomes more complex and burdensome in larger networks. However, Milward

[38] Bryk, A. S. and Schneider, B. (2002) *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement*, New York: Russel Sage Foundation.
[39] Wellman, B. (1983). Network analysis: Some basic principles. *Sociological Theory*, *1*(1), 155–200.
[40] Little, J. W. (1990). The persistence of privacy: Autonomy and initiative in teachers' professional relations. *Teachers' College Record*, *91*(4), 509–536.

and Provan acknowledge that lead organisation networks can become dominated by the lead organisation, while NAOs can create a complex governing administration, with increased costs and decreased transparency.[41] In both cases, this can precipitate declining commitment by members.

Once again, the implications for policy makers are not straightforward. It is often necessary to stimulate the development of networks where they do not currently exist, for example by funding an external facilitator (or, in England's case, by designating and funding Teaching Schools to lead the development of Alliances). Developing formalised governance structures, in these ways, can support sustainability and avoid too much reliance on individual relationships. However, too much structure can stifle the ownership that can make partnerships powerful.

Fourth, research highlights several design principles or features that are important for networks to be effective, including having shared goals, engagement at appropriate levels from within partner organisations, sufficient resources (including time) and shared protocols and routines that guide action, structure knowledge mobilisation and support impact. Hargreaves, Parsley and Cox[42] provide a useful synthesis of these principles, arguing that it is important to establish clear expectations in terms of member participation and accountability and that, according to Evans and Stone-Johnson, 'networking can be learned.'[43] The implication for policy is that network leaders need to be helped to understand and develop these protocols and routines, through a continuing process of professional development and support, often provided by partner universities.

Fifth, education networks are invariably focused on 'moving knowledge around' between schools,[22] but doing this successfully requires sophisticated skills, backed by supportive processes. The challenge is not only to share knowledge and expertise between teachers and classrooms, but to ensure that the resulting practices are actually more effective than what went before – that is, to avoid recycling low level practices. Many networks identify 'lead or expert practitioners' who are charged with facilitating these processes, but an approach that is founded on a one-way transfer of knowledge (from the 'expert' practitioner to their, by implication, 'less expert' peers) is likely to excite resistance and risks trying to 'drag and drop' practices without consideration of how they might need to be adapted for different contexts.

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[41] Milward, H. and Provan, K. (2006) *A Manager's Guide to Choosing and Using Collaborative Networks*. Washington, D.C.: IBM Center for the Business of Government.

[42] Hargreaves, A., Parsley, D. and Cox, E. K. (2015) Designing Rural School Improvement Networks: Aspirations and Actualities, Peabody Journal of Education, 90:2, 306-321, DOI: 10.1080/0161956X.2015.1022391

[43] Evans, M. P., and Stone-Johnson, C. (2010). Internal leadership challenges of network participation. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *13*(2), 203–220.

Research on knowledge sharing[44] suggests that knowledge is not simply 'transferred' from one context to another, but rather continuously reviewed and transformed as it is taken into different settings, although there are differences between tacit and explicit/codified knowledge. Networks can benefit from fostering 'joint practice development'[45] routines and approaches that support the articulation and sharing of knowledge as teachers engage in addressing shared problems of practice.[46,47] Policy makers should encourage network leaders to clarify their theory of action in relation to knowledge mobilisation, and should facilitate this through the provision of a robust knowledge and data architecture that supports evaluation, benchmarking and sharing between schools and networks.

Lastly, leading and managing networks requires sophisticated 'network competencies', but such skills and agency are not universally present. This can be particularly true in the context of schools, which tend to be relatively hierarchical and internally focussed organisations, meaning that few senior leaders have significant experience of the kinds of lateral 'systems leadership' required.[48] Popp et al argue that network leaders must nurture a network culture that 'addresses competing interests, politics and power differentials; and that promotes trusting relationships, curiosity, conscious interest in gaining different perspectives, and respect for diversity of views among organizations.'[49] However, according to Vangen and Huxham, gaining and maintaining momentum in networks can require a degree of 'collaborative thuggery', where network leaders need to manipulate agendas or play the politics in order to move things forward.[50] With this in mind, policy makers should be prepared to invest in developing and deepening these skills over an extended time period, potentially by linking networks to appropriately skilled universities.

Conclusion

Returning to our imaginary school leader at the start of this chapter, it is clear that if they are part of a mature, high-trust network, they and their teams will be able to turn to their partners for ideas and support, as they address their tricky or intractable challenge.

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[44] Hartley, J., and& Benington, J. (2006).Copy and paste, or graft and transplant? Knowledge sharing through inter-organizational networks. *Public Money & Management, 26*(2), 101.

[45] Fielding, M., Bragg, S., Craig, J., Cunningham, I., Eraut, M., Gillinson, S., Horne, M., Robinson, C., and& Thorn, J. (2004). *Factors influencing the transfer of good practice*. London: Department for Education and Skills.

[46] Greany, T. (2015) 'How can evidence inform teaching and decision making across 21,000 autonomous schools? Learning from the journey in England', in Brown, C. (Ed) (2015) *Leading the use of research and evidence in schools*, London: IOE Press.

[47] Greany, T. and Maxwell, B. (2017) Evidence-informed innovation in schools: aligning collaborative Research and Development with high quality professional learning for teachers, *International Journal of Innovation in Education* (IJIE) Vol. 4, Nos. 2/3, pp. 147-170.

[48] Uhl-Bien, M. and Arena, M. (2018) Leadership for organizational adaptability: A theoretical synthesis and integrative framework, *The Leadership Quarterly,* 29: 89–104.

[49] Popp, J., Milward, B., MacKean, G., Casebeer, A. and Lindstrom, R. (2014) *Inter-organizational Networks: A review of the literature to inform practice*. Washington, D.C.: IBM Center for the Business of Government.

[50] Vangen, S.,- and Huxham, C. (2003) Enacting leadership for collaborative advantage: dilemmas of ideology and pragmatism in the activities of partnership managers. *British Journal of Management, 14*, 61–76.

Networks, partnerships and collaboration between schools, thus, offer the potential for significant benefits in terms of knowledge sharing, innovation and the achievement of shared educational goals. The key lesson is, perhaps, that networks cannot be seen in isolation from other aspects of system reform.

Furthermore, we've seen that policy can support the development of successful networks, although doing so requires a sophisticated, long-term approach that goes beyond simply providing funding or mandating participation by schools. England's 'self-improving, school-led system' reforms provide many lessons here, both in terms of more and less successful approaches. Getting the balance right between individual school autonomy and accountability, together with network-level collaboration and equitable outcomes, may be key to inclusive improvement that meets the needs of all schools. Or, as Suggett concludes:

> Exposure to networks alone does not do the hard work of school improvement or transformation – even when they are well-resourced. Collaboration and relationship building open the door to an agenda for change and professional learning but it appears it is at the whole school organisational level where engagement and collaboration needs to gain traction to impact on school improvement.[5]

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