



Langley Hall Primary Academy

Reflections on the Inset Day
Friday, 2nd September 2011



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September 2011



Reflective Accounts

This reflective account is based on a consultancy assignment undertaken by Jane James and Terry Ingham in August and September 2011. The purpose of the work was to help a new staff team who were setting up a new school in Langley, Buckinghamshire, England, to bond well together as a team ready for the new intake of students and their parents.

We invited them to use a systemic lens to look at a range of issues and opportunities. We utilised a number of tools and exercises that not only highlighted aspects of themselves as a group but could also be used by the teachers in their classrooms if they wanted to. We also used their experiences to show a new approach to working creatively together, which broke with the usual performance driven management approaches that are more common in educational practice.

All these thoughts and reflections, we shared with the school leaders.

Ad vitam paramus

The school's motto is '*we are preparing for life*'. We designed the day around a view that simply learning from the past is no longer enough for the next generation to live full and happy lives. We need to be creative and solution-focused to be guides for children facing an unknown and uncertain future - and they need to be creative too

- Not only about the creative curriculum of arts, performance, music but also about being creative with the curriculum
- Learning by its very nature asks us to look back to things and experiences that have already happened; creativity has a future focus
- As educators we need to be able to
 - Learn from the past
 - Focus on the future
 - Be in the present
- So we need the courage to travel in unknown territory – and stay there with all its discomfort – whilst we search for answers
- But it doesn't all happen 'out there' – it is as much an inner journey as it is an outer journey

We used a Collective Breakthrough Question to give direction to the work:

'How can we, as a staff group, release our creative potential?'



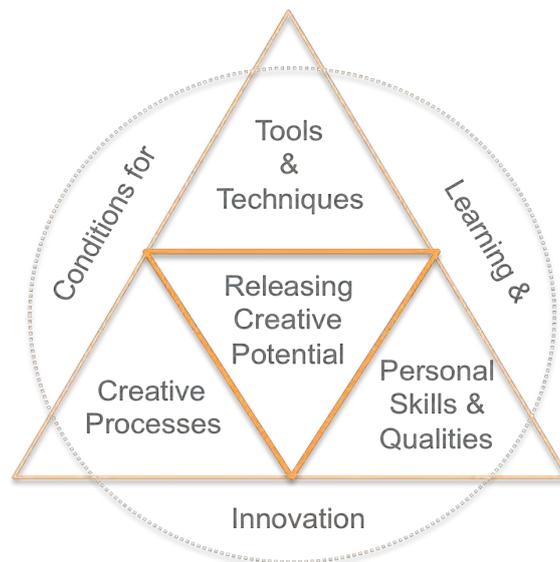


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The importance of using questions rather than statements and objectives in a creative endeavor is that it leaves us open to possibility, whilst providing an overall direction.

A guiding framework

Below is the diagram of a guiding framework we developed and used. It shows the four areas that we could see needed to be attended to in order to release their creative potential. Importantly, it is a collective effort, supported by the school leadership team creating the conditions in which individuals can shine.



Conditions for creativity

In bringing the team together, we began the day by experiencing ‘being still’ through a short, guided breathing and concentration exercise. It sounds paradoxical but we set out on to the busy journey into future activity by first of all putting the brakes on to our hectic lives through stilling ourselves. This quietening was all part of creating the conditions amongst us that were conducive to being creative. We also practised being a resource to each other – prepared to support and challenge each other as we explored and used our creative potential.

We continued to work together during the morning using tools (see diagram below) that helped us to get to know each other, feel safe and provide a sound stepping-off place for being creative. These tools of course can also be used directly with class groups.

We explored the need for, and some approaches to, providing mutual support – especially peer coaching groups of pairs or trios. Crucially, people have to find the courage to step into the unknown. Doing so can be an emotional rollercoaster – but it is better that we acknowledge our feelings to each other than try to pretend they aren’t



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there. We also explained a little about the use of a class Feelings Thermometer, which can be used with children to bring a helpful focus on the emotional climate of the group.



Creativity at LHPA

The journey began in earnest with work designed to clarifying intentions about what was needed. The school valued need to prepare children for an unknown future meant that creativity was not only an important aspect of the curriculum, but also of the school's ethos. We touched on common approaches to improving performance. Whether it is a whole school development plan or an individual performance appraisal, the normal route follows a fairly linear process involving objective setting, then later analysis and review. A downside of this approach is that it creates a culture of 'flat-lining'. There is little or no space for creativity.

Together

We explored a different kind of journey that allows and encourages creativity and innovation. In schools, a critical aspect of people making creative journeys is to travel together. Much of the traditional view of being creative is based on expectations of individual talent to paint pictures or write poetry. But we can be equally creative with our education practice: bringing new ideas and adaptations to classroom activities. And we

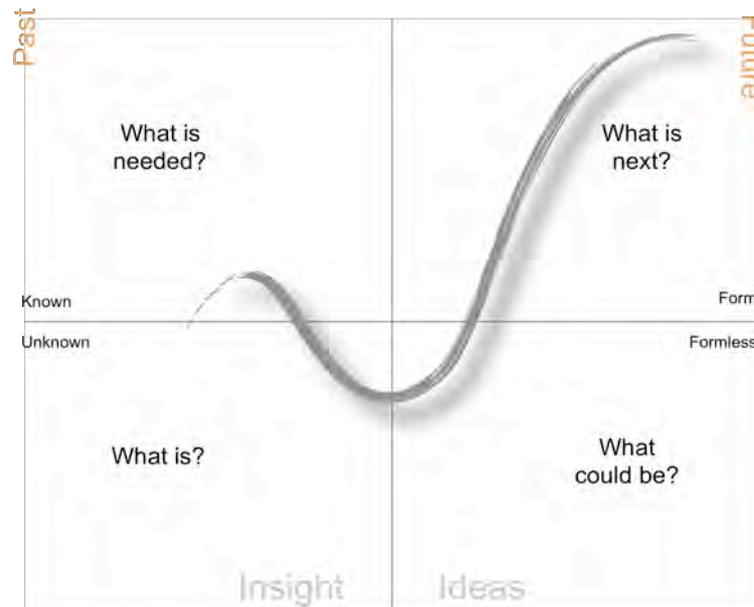


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can be creative together. In fact we can call this collaborative work co-creation. So we discover that, after all, everyone can be creative!

The process shown diagrammatically below enables people and especially leaders to know where each person is as they are travelling and exactly what kind of support is needed at each stage.

A creative process



Four questions

The creative process involves people holding four fundamental questions. Each prompts an exploration of a different part of the journey. The first two questions ask us to inquire, to understand better. They help to provide insights about the current situation. The third and fourth questions ask us to be creative in that we are in the domain of possibility, not reliant on existing knowledge but open to ideas and how they can be given form.

With all four questions, it is important to remember there are no right answers. The quality of what you find and what you create is bound to vary; indeed difference is to be celebrated. A good measure of success includes how simple or elegant the solution is.



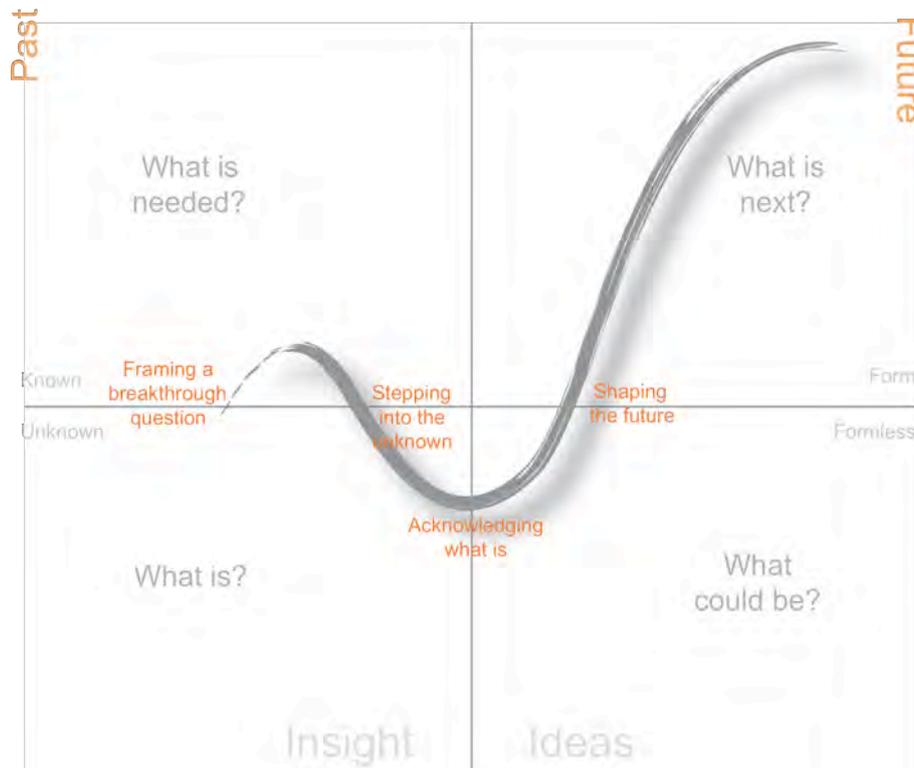


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Thresholds

Each stage of the journey is marked by thresholds as the journey takes us from one area to the next; each threshold confirms that that part of the work is done and you are ready to move on.

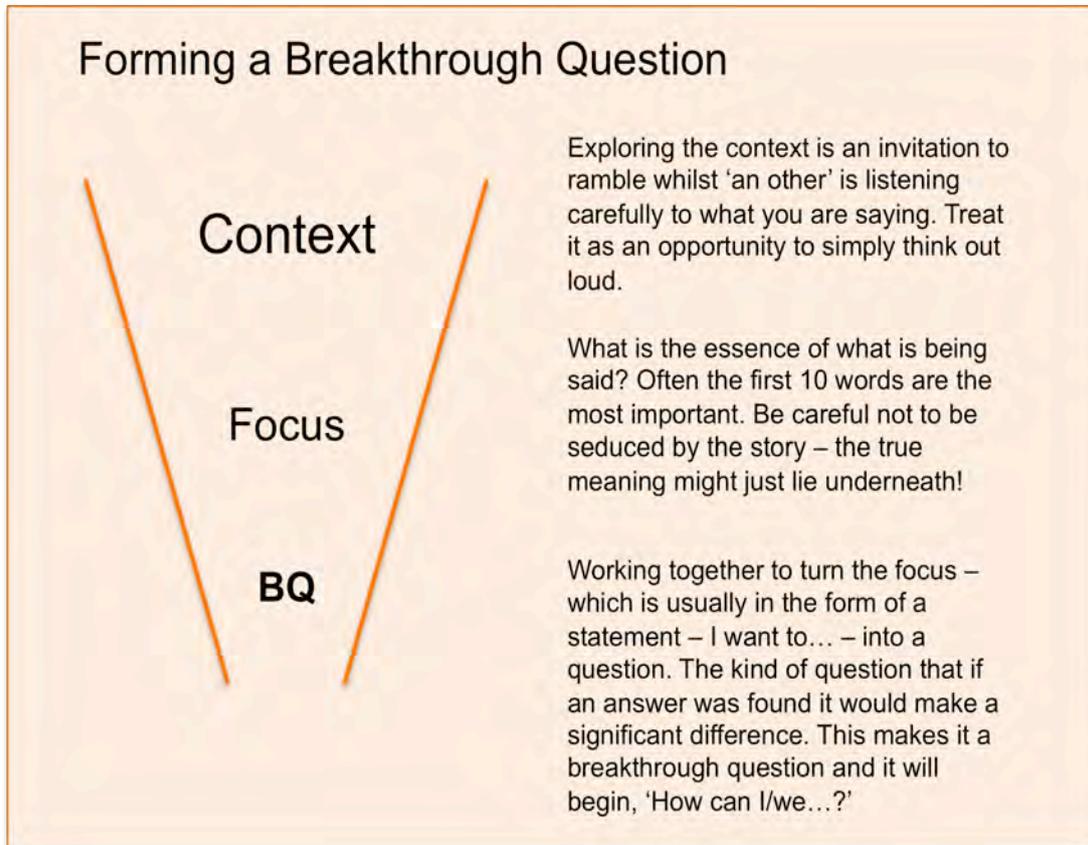
A creative process: 4 thresholds



On the INSET day, we worked at a personal level and moved into a place where the team were helping each other develop ideas that would help them achieve something new. Hopefully these ideas and motivations could be picked up as the new term (with all of its uncertainties) settles down.

Breakthrough Questions

Everyone worked on individual Breakthrough Questions (BQs) using each other as a resource. Usually the shorter the question is the greater the energy it will hold. We used a simple three-step process described in the diagram below.



Mapping

Having identified the BQs, we used a simple mapping technique using post-it notes to gain more insight into the nature of the issues and opportunities the staff members were facing, by placing the question and an overall goal in relation to two other elements – 'obstacle' and 'support'. Again working in pairs, it was possible for everyone to literally and metaphorically 'look down on' their question and start to see the aspects which might get in the way or be helpful to the process when moving forward.





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Moving forward

In summary, we focused on a number of key processes on September 2nd:

- Helping them, as a newly formed staff team, get to know each other better
- Giving an opportunity to work together in new ways – supporting each other with developing ideas and intentions, and taking on challenges
- Demonstrating through experience that there is no such thing as uncreative people!
- Furnishing each person with a BQ which can form a focus for their professional and performance development for the year if they wished
- Giving the Leadership Team some points of reference, through the BQs, for reviewing professional and performance development throughout the year
- Introducing some tools and techniques you can use in the classroom

As you can see, much was covered during the day. We closed for the day using the Spider's Web as a way of seeing and feeling connections to both the old and new.



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