



Report on the 2014 Primary Pilot Conference

How can we enrich the quality of subject teaching in our primary schools?

2 - 3 October 2014

Held at the Ickworth Hotel, Horringer, Suffolk

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Context, aims and objectives

In June 2007, The Prince's Teaching Institute ran a seminar as part of its Residential Summer School for English, History and Science which provided an opportunity for primary teachers to consider how literature might contribute to the understanding and enjoyment of History. Whilst the day was deemed successful by those attending, the PTI has since then remained focused on secondary teaching with the principle aim of promoting the idea that subject knowledge, subject rigour and the enthusiasm for communicating them are essential requirements for effective teaching to children of all abilities.

In the years since that first exploratory seminar, the PTI has been encouraged by countless headteachers and teachers to extend its high quality subject-based professional development to the primary sector, and this Residential is a result of those requests.

This pilot Primary Residential Conference was attended by 13 headteachers who had been invited from differing types of primary school across the country and 2 delegates involved in School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT). The objective of the two-day conference was to answer the following questions:

- How can primary headteachers influence and enrich the quality of subject teaching in their schools?
- What leadership and staffing models promote high quality subject teaching?
- Can we devise practical, inspiring strategies as a result of our discussions at the Residential which can then be implemented in our schools?
- Would primary teachers benefit from subject-focused professional development offered by the PTI?

Key themes

During this two-day Residential, presentations and discussions were focused around three main themes:

- Developing an ethos and culture of high aspiration for all pupils
- Ensuring high quality specialist subject teaching in primary schools
- Providing effective professional development for primary school teachers and headteachers

Pupil panel

The conference began by asking a panel of three Year 7 pupils, who had just started in the same large comprehensive secondary school, to talk about their experiences at their three different primary schools - what had they liked and disliked?

Key points

They enjoyed:

- **A challenge:** They had felt frustration if limits were placed on what they could learn

- **Coherent subject teaching**, rather than a piecemeal approach
- Having **specialist subject teachers**
- **Having fun**, e.g. school trips,
- Learning through **hands on activities and practical subjects** such as Science, Music, Art

They felt disappointed:

- When **promises** were not kept

They felt frustrated:

- By not having a **pupil voice**

Conference speakers

Dame Alison Peacock DBE DLitt

Dame Alison Peacock is co-author of *Creating Learning without Limits*. She is Headteacher of The Wroxham School, a primary school in Hertfordshire, which was designated a School of Creativity in 2009 and as a Teaching School in 2011.

Key dispositions for leadership for learning without limits:

- Openness to a belief that everyone should have the opportunity to surprise themselves and others by what they may achieve
- Questioning
- Inventiveness
- Persistence
- Emotional stability
- Generosity
- Empathy

Jeremy Newton, CEO, The Prince's Foundation for Children and the Arts

Jeremy Newton has led the Regional Arts Board for the East of England, the Arts Lottery Fund, the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). He has chaired the Boards of two major UK arts organizations (English Touring Theatre and Youth Dance England) and now runs The Prince's Foundation for Children and the Arts.

Giving all children access to and engagement with high quality art and performance develops the essential life skills of:

- Communication
- Confidence
- Planning and problem solving

- Relationships and Leadership
- Creativity
- Resilience and Determination
- Managing feelings

Roland Chambers

Roland Chambers is the award-winning author of *The Last Englishman*, a life of the British children's writer, Arthur Ransome, which won the Biographer's Club prize for best first biography and a Jerwood award from the Royal Society of Literature. He is currently working with the charity First Story as a writer-in-residence at Pimlico Academy.

By engaging the delegates in a trip down memory lane and encouraging them to write down their own stories, focusing particularly on sensory experiences, Roland illustrated how storytelling from a personal perspective can be such a powerful tool in:

- Making children believe their lives are important
- Showing pupils you are passionate about your subject

Peter Ransom, Immediate Past President, The Mathematical Association

Peter Ransom is a former President of The Mathematical Association and a global freelance Mathematics educator. He does some part-time work with Bath Spa University's School of Education PGCE and works with NQTs as part of The Prince's Teaching Institute. He is on the Education Committee of the London Mathematical Society, membership secretary of the British Society for the History of Mathematics, a Fellow of the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications and also belongs to the Association of Teachers of Mathematics.

Delegates were challenged in a number of engaging practical mathematical activities which clearly illustrated the national curriculum premise that the teaching of Mathematics should:

- Develop an appreciation of the beauty and power of mathematics and a sense of enjoyment and curiosity
- Not just be taken out of a book but linked to many other subjects
- Include taking risks
- Be fun!

Workshops

In small groups delegates discussed questions related to the key themes. The key points are summarised as follows:

What are the best primary schools doing that the education system at large can learn from?

They promote:

- Reflective, collaborative, aspirational practice
- Creative approaches to teaching
- Knowledge-rich inspirational learning

How can creative arts be used to develop ambitious teaching and learning?

Engagement with high quality creative arts:

- Creates pupils who are absorbed, confident, articulate learners, who develop rigour and discipline in the classroom
- Empowers learners to think, communicate or perform in confident, creative ways
- Gives access to a wide range of memorable experiences
- Develops, resilience, planning and problem solving
- Builds relationship, leadership and team building skills

How do you create good learning habits through subject inspiration?

- Developing inspirational subject specialists who create inspired learners in a community of trust and intrinsic motivation.
- Thinking creatively about the recruitment process

How can we promote and support high quality Mathematics teaching?

- Being creative in the selection and deployment of staff
- Promoting collaborative approaches to improve pedagogy and subject knowledge
- Ensuring a consistency of Mathematical language in classrooms
- Encouraging play and exploration in an environment of trust
- Ensuring teachers are supported by high quality CPD and resources

Plenary panel discussion

Panel members:

Bernice McCabe (Chair)	Co-Director, The Prince's Teaching Institute Headmistress, North London Collegiate School
Dame Alison Peacock DBE	Executive Headteacher, The Wroxham Teaching School Author of <i>Creating Learning without Limits</i>
Jo Newman	Head of Junior School, North London Collegiate School
Elizabeth Allen CBE	Academic Steering Group member, The Prince's Teaching Institute Former Headteacher, Newstead Wood School for Girls
Professor Robin Alexander	Chair, Cambridge Primary Review Trust Fellow, Wolfson College, University of Cambridge

The plenary session was chaired by **Bernice McCabe, Co-Director of the PTI**. The chairs of the three discussion groups, **Alison Peacock, Jo Newman and Elizabeth Allen**, were joined on the panel by **Professor Robin Alexander**.

Since 2006, Professor Alexander has directed the independently-funded Cambridge Primary Review, the biggest enquiry into English primary education since the 1960s. After 31 interim reports, the Review published its final report, *Children, their World, their Education*, in October 2009. In 2013, with renewed sponsorship and under Professor Alexander's chairmanship, it was succeeded by the Cambridge Primary Review Trust. This not-for-profit company is committed to building on the

Review's findings in pursuit of a generous vision of primary education realised through the highest possible standards of teaching and learning for all children.

After brief presentations summarising the main issues raised during the conference, Professor Alexander gave his insight into the issues raised and delegates were invited to engage in the discussion.

Ethos and culture

- Delegates felt that to establish a culture in a school which is committed to providing **high quality subject teaching and high aspirations for all pupils requires energy, risk-taking, innovation, trust and collaboration.**
- The pupil panel had endorsed the view that lack of continuity, lack of challenge and less than rigorous subject teaching were disappointing and frustrating for pupils.
- Professor Alexander referred to the research from 1968 which also showed clearly that children want inspiration, a fair environment and teachers who know their subjects.
- A self-improving school can be a reality and need not be limited by any perceived constraints generated, for example, by Ofsted inspections, assessment criteria or changes in the national curriculum.
- The Cambridge Primary Review Trust (CPRT) is campaigning for excellent subject teaching in all subjects regardless of the time allocated to each subject in schools.
- Primary schools are still suffering from an historic legacy of compliance and dependency which has sadly resulted in primary teachers expecting to be told what to do.
- **Autonomy requires freedom of thinking and requires knowledge.**

Staffing models

- It is important to consider different staffing models to ensure excellent teaching across all subjects.
- It is not reasonable to expect one teacher to be an expert in all subjects, so this is likely to require some creative deployment of teachers which would extend beyond a one form teacher per class model.
- **It is necessary therefore to develop trust within schools, to play to individual teacher strengths and develop expertise.**
- It is not the intention to replicate the secondary school model but to make the best use of current resources given that staffing budgets are limited.
- Delegates gave examples of current good practice such as recruiting secondary subject specialists to teach primary children or employing graduates with no teaching qualification as teaching assistants before they engaged in formal primary teaching qualifications.
- Professor Alexander reported that many schools had now adopted a tiered structure of headteacher/subject leaders/class teachers.
- With the current academy chains and local cluster groups there is now better networking and more opportunity for sharing expertise.
- It is essential to have an open culture in schools so that teachers do not feel threatened.
- Research has shown that primary teachers may readily admit a weakness in some subjects eg PE and Music; however they were unlikely to do so in a core subject eg Mathematics.

Professional Development

- Headteachers and teachers need professional discourse rather than "training".
- Leaders need to be confident and visionary; peer mentoring can often empower them to be creative.

- Subject leaders need to be re-inspired to communicate their subject passion, engage in research and share their expertise.
- Professor Alexander agreed that we should talk about teacher education rather than teacher training.
- There is a difference between subject expertise and knowledge, compared with, knowledge of subject and the ability to teach it well. It is good teaching rather than a particular curriculum which raises standards.
- **Good teaching requires:**
 - Sufficient depth of engagement with a subject to take risks in the classroom
 - Quality and cognitive power of classroom dialogue to give a “courteous translation”
 - Quality of ongoing classroom assessment and feedback to and from children
- CPD should concentrate on the three qualities mentioned above.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the delegates felt that the opportunities for professional development which the PTI currently offers to secondary school Headteachers and to subject leaders, could address many of the needs identified at this conference and would be very positively received by those in primary education.

Conference participants

Headteacher leaders

Dame Alison Peacock DBE	Executive Headteacher, The Wroxham Teaching School Author of <i>Creating Learning without Limits</i>
Jo Newman	Head of Junior School, North London Collegiate School
Elizabeth Allen CBE	Academic Steering Group member, The Prince's Teaching Institute Former Headteacher, Newstead Wood School for Girls

Attendees

Mr Sahed Ahmed	Elmhurst Primary School
Mrs Jane Bass	Powers Hall Academy
Mr Nigel Beckett	Corfe Castle CE VC Primary School
Mrs Lesley Birch	Histon and Impington Junior School
Ms Rachael Carter	Sheringham Community Primary School
Ms Nicola Coupe	Burbage Primary School
Ms Elissa Douglas	Lena Gardens Primary School
Mr Gary Handforth	Bright Futures Educational Trust
Mrs Wendy Hick	Manorfield Primary School
Mr Peter Maunder	Oldway Primary School
Ms Jo Palmer-Tweed	Thames Primary Consortium SCITT
Ms Alysson Russen	Pimlico Primary
Ms Fiona Willett	Essex Primary SCITT
Mr David Williams	Whitehawk City Academy
Mrs Fiona Wyeth	Overton C of E Primary School

The Prince's Teaching Institute

Bernice McCabe	Co-Director
Christopher Pope	Co-Director
Barbara Pomeroy	Education Advisor
Sarah Darrall Shaw	Senior Events Manager