

## 7 **Enhancing capacity for learning**

For us, the way forward for schools and their larger communities is to focus hearts, minds and time on learning at all levels: pupils, teachers, leaders and the whole school as an inclusive, extended learning community. In particular, the agenda should be about all of the adults connected with schools working and learning together to support and enhance pupil learning.

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*Learning, I have always felt, is as essential as breathing.*

*Darling-Hammond (1997)*

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In this chapter we attempt to pull together all the pieces we have identified into a coherent whole. We start with the question: What is it that links all of these levels of learning? When learning truly permeates a school, what fuels this kind of learning? We would argue that it's the school's internal capacity: the power to get involved in and sustain the learning of everyone within the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing pupil learning (Stoll, 1999).

Philip Schlechty (2001) explains that when changes are started in systems without the capacity to sustain them, the changes are likely to disappear when the change agent leaves. Developing internal capacity depends on those both inside and outside schools.

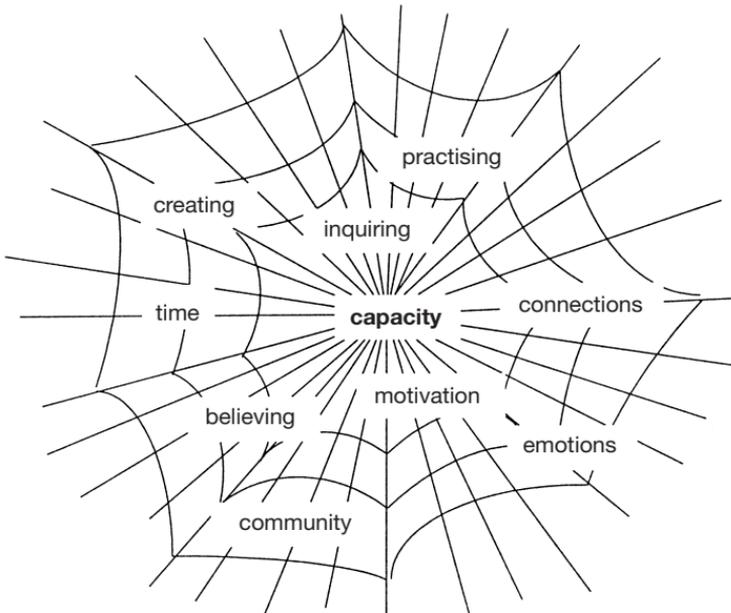
### **Enhancing capacity for learning from the inside**

First we look inside the school. We have identified nine themes flowing through the book that feed and nourish capacity for learning in schools. Each of these themes, or meta-learning, provides opportunities for

schools to enhance their own learning for capacity. We've used the spider's web analogy before (Stoll and Fink, 1996): if you touch one part of it, the rest reverberates because it is all interconnected (see Figure 7.1).

### **1 It's about believing in success**

Believing you can be successful is critical to internal capacity. In the same way that Senge (1990) maintains that schools create their own reality, so does each individual in schools. If pupils, teachers and leaders do not believe in themselves and their ability to be successful in what they set out to do, they can become locked in a cycle of despair and frustration. The moving school has a pervading 'can do' culture, a belief that it is always possible to do better, no matter what difficulties it faces, and that it feels it has the power to do so. It has a learning orientation whereby people believe that effort, rather than innate ability, leads to greater success. There is no evidence of learned helplessness in such



*Figure 7.1* Learning for capacity

a school. Invitational leaders ensure that everyone feels valued and competent to contribute to a shared vision of a better future.

## **2 It's about *making connections***

Successful schools depend on connections at all levels. Connections are central to learning, and play themselves out in many forms in this book. One example is the increase in number of connections between neurons when the brain is stimulated, as shown by brain scans; in other words, new connections are added to the wiring of the brain. This finding is not limited to early development. Another example is the connection of new information to old as the learner encounters new ideas. Furthermore, experts in areas as diverse as chess, physics, maths, electronics and history notice meaningful patterns of information not noticed by novice learners, and engage in 'chunking' – connecting and organising their knowledge around important concepts (see Bransford *et al.*, 1999). A third example is the networks that are an important feature of teachers' and leaders' learning, connecting them with other people and ideas. Fourth, there is the attention paid to patterns and interrelationships between activities and ideas as the school as a whole organisation is involved in collective learning.

## **3 It's about *attending to motivation***

Motivation affects people's willingness to devote time to learning. Without commitment, openness and a sense of purpose, real learning cannot take place. People may go through the motions and there may be an appearance of change but this change is likely to be shallow.

If one is motivated to learn, one is likely to work hard, to be persistent, to be stimulated rather than discouraged by obstacles, and to continue to learn even when not pressed to do so, for the sheer pleasure of quenching curiosity or stretching one's faculties in unfamiliar directions.

Gardner (1999a)

In the learning-oriented school, it is the challenge of genuine learning that is the ultimate goal, rather than purely performance or achievement.

Such learning is more likely to be lifelong because it is internally motivated: its rewards are intrinsic. It's not easily achievable and it depends on the school being focused on the needs of each learner, whatever their age and role, and oriented towards bringing out the best in all learners, individually and collectively. In short, the school is both learner-centred and learning-centred.

#### **4 It's about understanding and experiencing emotions**

It is clear that emotion and learning have a powerful relationship. The human dimension of learning is critical. It's not just a bonus to have good relationships in classrooms, playgrounds, staff rooms, governors' meetings and with parents: it is critical to fostering self-esteem and building the right climate for learning. Furthermore, there is a link between positive relationships between teachers and pupils and greater academic progress (Mortimore *et al.*, 1988). Some schools have therapeutic counsellors working in them, while other charities and organisations assess and provide support for at-risk pupils. On the website of Antidote, the Campaign for Emotional Literacy, Susie Orbach, the psychotherapist, explains that Antidote's aim is 'to create an emotionally literate culture, where the facility to handle the complexities of emotional life is as widespread as the capacity to read, write and do anything else'.

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*Connecting to our feelings is not soft;  
disconnecting from our feelings is not  
clever.*

*Antidote website*

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While some people may be right to be cynical about the dangers of managerial manipulation of emotion, the evidence from a range of sources is clear that experiencing and understanding emotions is essential to learning and to developing healthy people and society.

#### **5 It's about engaging in community**

Learning in schools takes place within a social context: the school community. It can be seen in co-operative learning, collaborative planning, peer observation and mentoring, leadership teams and other team work, collective learning and understanding, working parties and

shared vision building. As such, it depends on positive relationships, trust and respect. At its best, it can lead to a sense of belonging to a community of learners. As Brandsford and colleagues (1999) note: '[An] important perspective on learning environments is the degree to which they promote a sense of community. Students, teachers, and other interested participants share norms that value learning and high standards. Norms such as these increase people's opportunities and motivation to interact, receive feedback, and learn.'

## **6 It's about *inquiring***

Learning is about needing to know, even when what you find out is something you think you didn't want to know. It means reserving judgement and being open to new ideas, gathering the necessary information, and questioning and challenging your own beliefs and perceptions. Inquiring involves such things as pupils assessing their own learning to promote deeper understanding, and teachers interrogating different ICT teaching packages to understand which ones are most likely to promote real learning and support and enhance their other learning and teaching strategies. It also involves finding out about the community in order to make the necessary and meaningful connections.

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*I look on losing as research, not as failure.*

*Billie Jean King*

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Where necessary, it is also about challenging the beliefs and ideas of others, rather than taking them for granted. Finally, because learning is powerfully influenced by the contexts in which it takes place – classrooms, schools, the local community, LEAs, and the national policy environment – it is imperative to understand these contexts and, where they are found to be inhibiting learning, to question and challenge them.

## **7 It's about *creating***

It concerns us if people in schools tell us there are no opportunities to create and be creative. Learning has the potential to foster creativity and creativity is an essential feature of learning as we have described it. It is also critical in a changing world. Bentley (2000) describes creativity as

applying knowledge and skills in new ways to achieve a valued goal. Jaworski (1998) puts it like this: 'if individuals and organizations operate from the generative orientation, from possibility rather than resignation, we can *create* the future into which we are living, as opposed to merely reacting to it when we get there.'

A learning school is a creative school where: new ideas and taking chances are encouraged; people 'practise fearlessness' (Fullan, 1992); people feel empowered to take risks and 'think outside the box'; the aesthetic curriculum is viewed as important because of the potential it offers for the development of *learning to live together* and *learning to be*, as well as *learning to know* and *learning to do*; and the whole school community understands how it creates its own reality and has the power to change it and influence the reality of those outside.

'There is no use trying,' said Alice; 'one can't believe impossible things.' 'I dare say you haven't had much practice,' said the Queen. 'When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.'

Lewis Carroll

### **8 It's about *practising***

The thing about learning is you never stop doing it. As we have argued, it requires hard work, commitment and practice. New ways of learning or creating (as the quote from Alice in Wonderland shows) don't come easily: accommodation, as a process of learning, is actually a process of coming to terms with different ideas, different ways of doing things. This usually necessitates trying something out again and again, working at it, feeling uncomfortable for a while, and experiencing new responses. With learning, however, practice doesn't make perfect – or complacent – because there is always something new to learn: as we noted in Chapter 4, a new curve and another hill.

### **9 It's about *finding time***

Time has been the undercurrent flowing through this book. It is impossible to argue 'It's about learning' without thinking about time.

For a range of reasons, external pressure included, learning as described in this book is not the central driving force of many schools. It's about time it was; indeed, we would argue that in the twenty-first century, it's essential. But, we also know that real change and learning are not straightforward. They depend on belief, making connections, attending to motivation, nurturing positive emotions, building community, inquiring, creating and practising, and all of this requires devotion of time. Throughout the book we have offered various ideas for creating time, but time is one of the greatest challenges for schools, especially if they are faced with teacher shortages. Time for learning and development is so important that it can't just be left to schools to find time. In the next section, we look at learnings for those outside schools.

By attending to these nine themes and by enhancing learning in the ways we have described throughout the book, you are building your school's capacity for sustainable and continuous learning.

Tony Buzan (1988), the creator of mind mapping, describes it as a form of creative note taking. The idea is to use colours, arrows and other special codes to make connections between key words, showing where relationships lie.

Take an issue in your school (or a school you know), or an initiative you want to develop. Create a mind map, putting your issue or initiative in the middle (see Figure 7.2). Track through each of the nine themes in this book, asking yourselves, for example: 'What does this mean for community?' 'How do we go about creating community in relation to this?' 'What are the forces working in our favour and preventing us from harnessing community to its fullest in relation to this issue/initiative?' 'How can we draw on the positive forces and reduce the negative forces?'

## **Enhancing capacity for learning from the outside**

Having identified nine avenues for enhancing capacity from the inside, we now turn to enhancing capacity from outside schools. We have argued in this book that schools have the power to enhance their own learning. Our research and experience working in and with schools, however, also tells us that they can't do it alone.

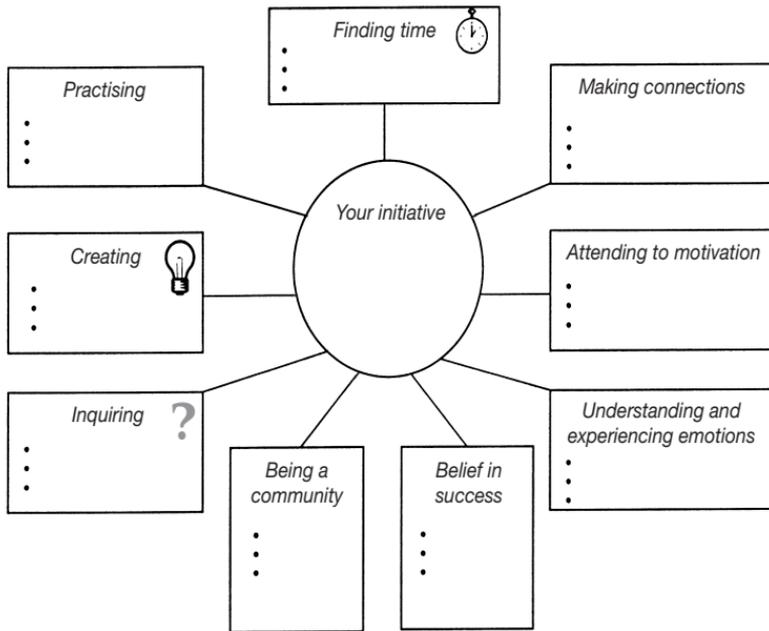


Figure 7.2 Mind map of your initiative

At the Fourteenth International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement in Toronto in January 2001, practitioners, local and national policy makers, researchers, non-government organisations and consultants representing 43 countries came together to discuss issues of equity, globalisation and change. A recurring theme was the importance of schools' local, national and, indeed, international context and, particularly, the role of the system in helping or hindering schools' ability to learn. Central external influences on schools' capacity for learning (Stoll, 1999 – see Figure 7.3) are:

- Their *local communities*. Pupils' background characteristics influence their schools' achievement, and parental expectations and aspirations often vary according to the type and location of school.
- The *broader community* (e.g. business, media, unions, university, etc.) and the expectations it has of them.

- *Political action and 'tone'* – teachers bombarded by unrelenting change can feel guilty, get exhausted, and find it hard to maintain energy, enthusiasm and willingness for change. Labelling 'failing schools' can also exacerbate problems of schools in difficulty, contributing to low morale and feelings of impotence.
- Whether the *professional learning infrastructure* in their area or region is well developed, for example access to outside ideas, universities, centres of school development, etc.
- The *global change forces* described at the start of the book shaping schools' daily existence, making it imperative that schools have the internal capacity to respond to such forces.

Some people maintain that schools need to be challenged to change. At times, this may be true for some schools, for example the cruising school. Unequivocally, however, to become and remain successful learning communities, and to improve learning standards, all schools

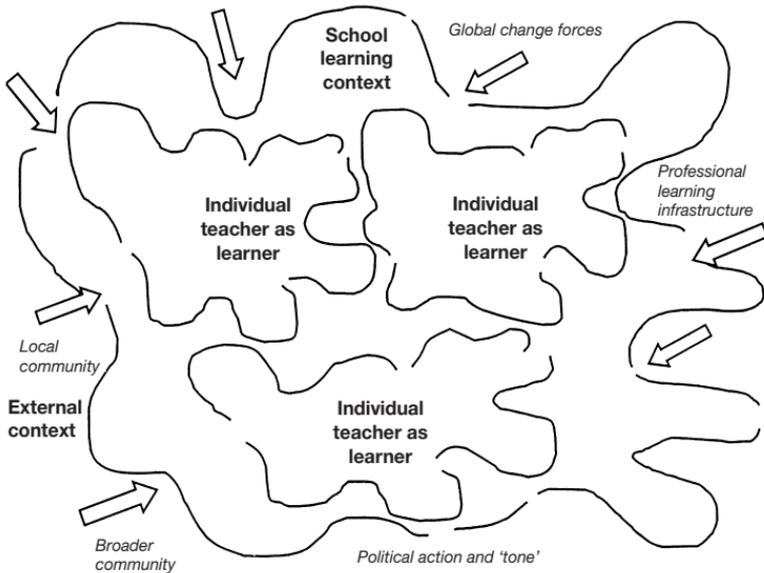


Figure 7.3 External influences on schools' capacity for learning

Source: Based on Stoll (1999)

require external support. Alma Harris (2001) describes this external capacity building as being 'concerned with creating the conditions, opportunities and experiences for collaboration and mutual learning'. This includes equitably and purposefully distributing resources: not only monetary resources but human, material and psychological support and, of course, time. Essentially, schools need an infrastructure of support from all groups with a responsibility for or interest in school improvement to develop capacity. Throughout this book we have proposed learnings for those located within schools. We also believe that there are learnings for those outside schools to take on board in order to provide the necessary learning support infrastructure. Here we propose eight learnings for schools' learning partners, including parents and carers, governors, the local community, LEAs, businesses, unions and associations, universities, and the government. These are different kinds of partners: some of them provide political support, some professional support, and others moral and emotional support. Some provide a combination of support. We have not differentiated our learnings for the different partners because we believe that all partners need to understand the breadth of external support needed.

### ***1 Recognise the importance of learning for all***

We are all learning for a different world. In this changed world schools can no longer afford to be sorting institutions to determine who can and cannot learn. They must be learning communities for one and all. Parents, quite justifiably, want the best for their own children. They also want their children to live in a world free of war, hunger and fear. As the world becomes more complex, it is in societies' best interest to have well-educated citizens. It is important for the public to support the improvement of *all* schools and help enhance their capacity for learning as a way of keeping the culture strong and prepared for an uncertain future. Teaching and learning aren't just up to teachers, support staff and leaders in schools. There is a collective external responsibility as well: it will take a concerted effort on everyone's part.

Learning provides hope. At the ICSEI conference in Toronto, Stephen Lewis, Canada's former ambassador to the United Nations, described recent trips to Rwanda. He told his audience that what struck him so forcefully was that wherever he went, no matter how adverse the

conditions, when he asked what was important to children the answer was school. When one of us worked in Hungary with largely eastern European teams supported by the Open Society Institute, we were given a book of poems written by children at the height of the conflict in Sarajevo. One, in particular, left a lasting impression.

‘HELLO MY FRIEND!’

My name is Mirela

I am seven years old girl.

My mother, father and old brother and sister are with me in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina

We are captured in our town. It was a very nice old town, which is destroyed now. We haven’t food, fruit, water, electric . . .

We haven’t happy childhood.

Children don’t want the war.

My friend and me have our way to fight against the war.

We learn.

Best regards.

Mirela

Open Society Fund (1994)

While there are common elements to learning, as we have noted, people bring their unique differences to the learning process. This means that, whether you are thinking about pupils, teachers, other support staff, leaders, parents or anyone else, the keys to unlocking and enhancing the learning process vary from individual to individual. Just because something worked for you when you were at school, it doesn’t mean that this will be right for all learners or for the current times. The importance of learning for all also includes the ongoing learning of those outside schools, whether through one’s local school, as described in Chapter 6, being enrolled in adult education or Open University courses, or attending family learning weekends. As Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (1998) assert, educational partnerships ‘must be actively committed to social justice by agitating for changes that favour all students, not just the highest achieving or more privileged ones who promise the biggest success and corporate return’.

## **2 *Respect and promote professionalism***

We have argued that being a teacher today includes more than teaching and related responsibilities. It also means: working with others as part of a larger learning community; being collectively responsible for all pupils, engaging parents, carers and the community in meaningful, and sometimes different, ways; taking personal responsibility for continuing professional development, supported by the school; and being inquiry-oriented. If this is necessary for teachers in today's world, then teachers need to be afforded the respect that accompanies such demanding and important responsibilities.

In 1998 Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan 'told society' that 'until it realizes that the quality and morale of teachers is absolutely central to the well-being of students and their learning, all serious reform efforts are bound to fail'. Teachers' conditions of service are critical. It is encouraging to hear of schemes to increase teachers' pay and help them pay back student loans, but if teachers do not feel valued, this significantly reduces the impact of increased pay or, for that matter, any other incentives. Pay has been found to be a relatively unimportant factor in relation to teacher morale, motivation and job satisfaction (Evans, 1998), which is not to say that teachers are adequately paid for their work.

Teachers, however, need time to learn and implement their learning, assess and evaluate, plan, and collaborate with colleagues, parents and others. They also need funded learning and administrative support so that they can focus on enhancing pupil learning. Most important, they need recognition that they are doing a good job, particularly those who work in challenging areas. Award and other merit schemes for teachers provide one kind of recognition, but teachers also feel recognition from direct contact with satisfied parents, letters from former pupils thanking them for making a difference, and small but significant successes on a daily basis. In stark contrast, blame, from whatever source, doesn't reach the 'hearts and minds' of those needing to be reached for change to occur (Stoll and Myers, 1998).

Supporting and promoting professionalism may also require a greater focus of unions' energies around the professional aspects of teachers' work that enhance learning. There are already many positive examples, including support for a study of school self-evaluation in England (Bangs,

2000; MacBeath *et al.*, 1996), conferences run by professional associations on topics such as ‘Why Learn?’ (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 1996), support of unions for schemes such as Investors in People, and the development by the National Education Association in the USA of a data-driven local school improvement process called KEYS (NEA, 1996). Louis and colleagues (2000) note that this ‘new unionism’, as they describe it, requires systemic effort: resources, individual advocates, and leadership, as well as efforts to encourage and reward locally initiated change and re-educate the membership. They conclude: ‘It will also require patience and time if we are to see the benefits of new unionism in improved schools and learning opportunities for students.’

### ***3 Support continuous professional learning***

All professions need to invest in development. Continuous learning is every teacher’s, leader’s and support person’s business, but they can’t be expected to do it on their own. In his foreword to *Learning and Teaching*, the document outlining the government’s strategy for professional development (DfEE, 2001), David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education, in writing about the challenges and pressures brought about by change, concluded: ‘it is necessary to offer the maximum support to teachers in achieving the highest standards possible, and taking on this challenge of change’. A variety of funded initiatives are aimed at developing, enhancing and sharing excellent practice and placing professional development ‘at the heart of schools improvement’. The initiatives include: research scholarships, international study visits, professional bursaries, sabbaticals for teachers (particularly those working in deprived areas) early professional development for teachers in their second and third years of teaching, and individual learning accounts, where for a small personal investment, teachers can get discounts off learning and development opportunities.

If systems to support professional growth are intended to sustain their learning, they must, however, help schools develop as learning communities where educators collaborate to enquire critically about their own practice. Encouragingly, the national strategy recognises the importance of the school as a learning community, and aims to provide increased time for whole staffs to work together developing their learning community.

The National Staff Development Council in the USA has worked with a large number of national associations and many individuals to create consensus on the kinds of staff development that ensure that all students and staff are learning and performing at high levels (Hirsch, 2001). Their 12 standards for staff development are grouped in three categories, all of which are prefaced by the phrase 'Staff development that improves the learning of all students':

- **Context** – where adults are grouped into *learning communities*; with school and external *leadership* to guide continuous improvement; and *resources* to support adult learning and collaboration.
- **Process** – where adult learning priorities, progress and sustained improvement are *data-driven*; *evaluation* guides improvement and demonstrates the impact of staff development; educators learn how to make *research-based* decisions; *design* of learning strategies is appropriate to the intended goal; knowledge about human *learning* and change is applied; and educators are provided with knowledge and skills for *collaboration*.
- **Content** – where concerns about *equity* ensure educators are prepared to understand and appreciate all students, holding high expectations for their achievement; *quality teaching* is emphasised through deepening of content knowledge and use of research-based learning, teaching and assessment strategies; and educators are provided with knowledge and skills for enhancing *family involvement*, as well as that of other stakeholders.

#### **4 Get to know your school(s)**

Essentially, the best way to know how to support a school is to get to know it. This means learning about it. Can a school's local community answer the question, 'How good is your local school, really?' (Stoll, 2001). There is a lot of information around about schools, but some of it may just be folklore. Other information, such as league tables of results, may not take into account the background of the pupils who attend the school and the actual value the school has added. Schools receive considerable data from the DfES and, where relevant, the LEA to help them understand the school. Many also now ask their pupils to complete questionnaires on their attitudes to learning and school and

their academic self-concept. Schools also produce newsletters and handbooks that describe their programmes, successes and preferred futures. These are helpful indicators that aren't found in league tables.

Other qualitative indicators may be picked up by visiting schools, watching lessons and offering assistance, for example listening to pupils read or helping them with ICT during their lunch break. As outsiders consider what they read, see and hear, they may want to ask themselves to what extent this evidence suggests that the school is a learning community.

### ***5 Understand that all schools are not the same***

If you get to know schools, it won't take very long to realise that they are all different from each other. Schools embark on their learning journeys from very different starting points; indeed, some find it enormously difficult to get off the starting block. This, we believe, is because of differences in their internal capacity: some schools are more 'ready' than others to deal with and work through the challenges associated with learning. They have the resources, resilience and will to engage in and sustain continuous learning of teachers, leaders and the school itself, and have a clear vision of its primary purpose as enhancing pupil learning.

As we have described, influences on a school's internal capacity operate at the individual teacher and leader level, the school level (and, in secondary schools, also at department or faculty level) and external level. The capacity of schools differs as a result of different patterns of influences. For example, schools differ in terms of their leadership, motivation, prior learning experiences, support infrastructure, and particular blend of pupils. Finding out particular patterns of influences on a school's internal capacity is essential because these influence the school's readiness to engage in learning as well as its ability to sustain learning and enhance learning outcomes over time. Schools also exist within a wider social context, and disadvantage has a significant impact on schools (Mortimore and Whitty, 1997). As results are coming through on the mapping of the human genome, and we hear that humans have far fewer genes than previously expected (estimates suggest between 30,000 and 40,000), the influence of social context may assume even greater importance.

It is vital to vary learning support strategies for different schools. What works in one school, with a particular pupil population and at a particular stage of development, may not work in another. A cruising school in an affluent leafy suburb has different learning and development needs from a struggling school in the inner city, and that latter school may have different needs from a struggling school in an area of rural deprivation. Certain government initiatives already take context into account, for example Excellence in Cities. Others take more of a blanket approach to improvement, although it is encouraging to see increasing recognition of the importance of school differences. Some schools have greater need for extra external resources and support, while others may need greater external pressure for change, and they may not always be the schools highlighted by the media as schools in difficulty. Fullan (1999) argues: 'there never will be a definitive theory of change. It is a theoretical and empirical impossibility to generate a theory that applies to all situations . . . each situation will have degrees of uniqueness in its history and makeup which will cause unpredictable differences to emerge.'

Schools in disadvantaged areas, in particular, need co-ordinated support strategies involving education, health and social services agencies working with local communities and school psychologists. One such example is the Healthier Schools Partnership, started in three London boroughs, Lewisham, Lambeth and Southwark, which has now been extended nationally.

A collaborative three-year programme involving Essex LEA's development advisors, educational psychologists and special needs support service, the University of Cambridge School of Education, and 22 primary and junior schools highlighted several important lessons for the working practices of multi-disciplinary teams (Kerfoot and Nethercott, 1999). These were:

- time for teams to develop mutual respect and confidence in each other
- secure individual knowledge
- the professional confidence of a range of school staff
- complementary skills with clearly defined roles, negotiated and accepted by all
- ability to network and provide perspectives on an issue

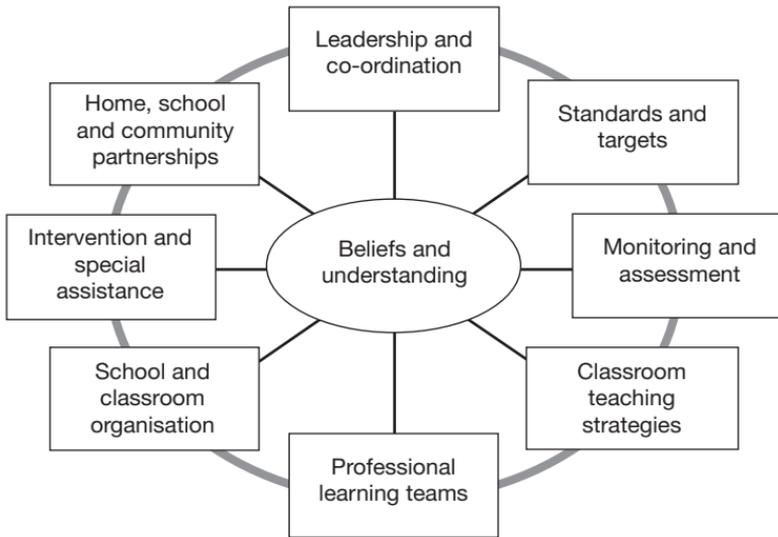
- a clear team focus
- support and challenge appropriate to the school's context
- schools having the primary responsibility for their own development
- the team bringing in 'added' value that is clearly defined, supports, complements and, when appropriate, challenges
- a 'mature' approach to problem solving, based on a recognition and confidence from each individual in their own knowledge, skills and contribution, shared with others as well as received.

### ***6 Create new designs for working with and networking schools***

We hope we have made it clear that learning in schools depends on many different things coming together. Research has been useful in highlighting the different conditions under which schools are likely to improve (see Hopkins, 2001a for a summary). It has also provided evidence on successful approaches to enhancing pupils' learning in a range of subjects (e.g. Marie Clay's work on *Reading Recovery*, 1993). Over a number of years there has been an emergence of 'design' programmes in different countries. Peter Hill and colleagues in Australia describe these as taking a more holistic approach to change and learning than just emphasising the specific change focus. For example, in Victoria, schools participating in their Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD) project don't just study and develop appropriate strategies for teaching adolescents; they also pay equal attention to a range of conditions related to improved learning outcomes (Hill and Russell, 1999 – see Figure 7.4).

Similarly, elementary (primary) schools involved in Chicago's Center for School Improvement's School Development Program, while focusing on literacy as their key lever for change, all pay attention to:

a myriad of concerns that impinge upon children's well being and ultimately their learning. These include: renorming the school environment to educate and care for all children; coordinating and managing academic and social services so that students' social, physical, health, and emotional needs are better met; strengthening school community leadership to broaden participation and sustain



*Figure 7.4* Whole-school design model for school improvement

*Source:* Hill and Crévola (1997)

a focus on the needs of children; and building the analytic capacities within schools to engage in continual improvement.

(Bryk *et al.*, 1996)

Perhaps the best-known example currently in England is the Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA) programme (Hopkins, 2001b; Hopkins *et al.*, 1994), a network of schools, supported by colleagues in a range of universities and by their LEAs. The IQEA team identified a set of enabling school-level conditions for school development – staff development; involvement; ‘transformational’ leadership; effective co-ordination; enquiry and reflection; and collaborative planning – and a complementary set of classroom conditions – authentic relationships; rules and boundaries; planning, resources and preparation; a broad and appropriate teaching repertoire; pedagogic partnerships; and reflection on teaching.

All the elements in a learning-centred school are interrelated and, as Clive Dimmock (2000) explains, ‘the design needs built-in flexibility for

continuous evolution and adaptability in fast changing environments'. Dimmock also highlights the need to emphasise the interconnections between all parts of a school, and that no single blueprint of school design is appropriate for all schools, despite general approaches which can provide guidelines.

Networking is increasingly being seen as vital to extending and deepening teachers', support staff's and leaders' learning (Lieberman and Grolnick, 1996; Stoll, 1996; Earl and Lee, 1998). One of us established a school improvement network, bringing together people engaged in school improvement to share and discuss experiences, debate issues of mutual concern, reflect on their learning, solve common problems and further refine improvement strategies (Stoll, 1996). The National Writing Project (NWP) in the USA is based on the notion that teaching requires a continuous circle of learning, trial and evaluation. Teachers articulate their own dilemmas and find ways to resolve these. Through regional and national networks, as teachers are working on their local problems, they reach beyond their schools to connect with other teachers, give and receive ideas, support and critique. In their evaluation of NWP, Lieberman and Wood (2001) found that 'by connecting learning, community, and efficacy, NWP provides teachers with a variety of opportunities not only to shape ideas for use in their own contexts, but to take leadership in and become members of a larger professional community'. Some of the specific ways in which teachers learn in this network are by:

- teaching other teachers
- making their work public and having it discussed and critiqued by a group of peers
- agreeing that feedback from colleagues will be non-judgmental and non-ideological, even if views about issues such as phonics or whole language are different
- learning to accept and discuss openly the 'messiness' and 'uncertainty' of teaching, which is often dealt with privately by teachers
- taking different roles and seeing the world through different perspectives
- taking leadership learning back to their peers in their school, by setting up similar environments for them.

## **7 Offer critical friendship**

People within schools don't always see everything that is going on. External eyes can often pick up what is not immediately apparent to those inside a school. Critical friends are people who watch, listen, ask challenging questions, and help those in schools sort out their thinking and make sound decisions. Sometimes they help by providing coaching support. What is particularly important to this relationship is that it is one built on trust and support: critical friends don't bring their own vested interests. They will, however, tell people in the school when they consider that expectations are too low or interpretations are 'off track'. Such difficult messages – while uncomfortable and, sometimes, painful to hear – are more likely to be accepted and addressed because those in the school know that the critical friend is fundamentally 'on their side'. This requires enormous sensitivity and diplomacy on the part of the critical friend.

An example of this can be seen in the comments of a headteacher of a primary school in the ISEP project, describing the benefits of their critical friend:

He appeared to value each individual situation and what each person had to offer to that situation . . . He helped us to keep focused and positive about the situation here. After the initial results the staff morale in the school sank and the staff were zonked. The critical friend quickly brought us back to looking at the positives and look at what we were actually doing and not at what we were not doing . . . He helped us to be reflective, how we could improve our own practice . . . He was not judgmental . . . He respected people's point of view.

Critical friends' work changes over time. For example, sustaining improvement is particularly challenging. After the catalyst promoting the decision to change, there is a surge of energy as people become actively involved in the early stages (Earl and Lee, 1998 – see Figure 7.5).

Initial 'excitement', however, wears off as teachers are faced with other demands, as well as inevitable difficulties presented by both the innovation and the school's internal capacity: for example, overload, complexity, internal power struggles, or an impending inspection. The

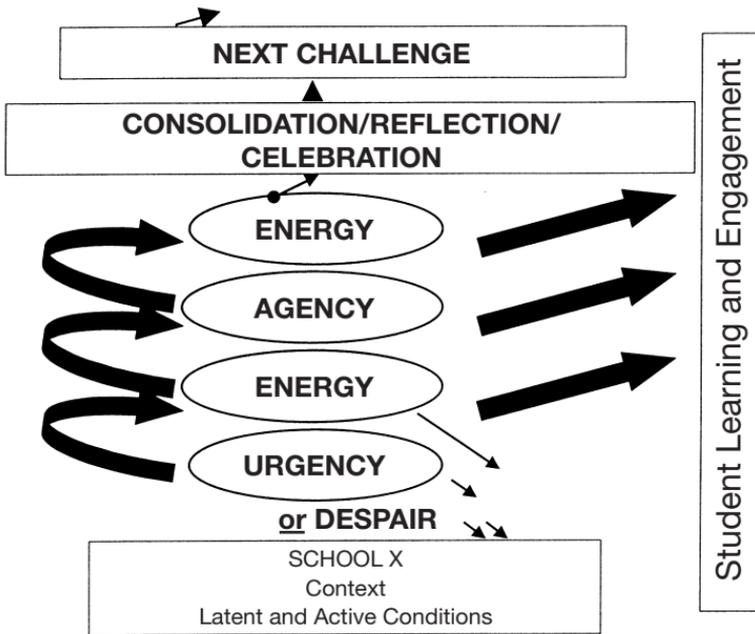


Figure 7.5 Spiral of school improvement

Source: Earl and Lee (1998)

school, or at least the intended improvement focus, faces turbulence (Huberman, 1992) and without ‘agency’ – internal resources or access to appropriate and timely support (Earl and Lee, 2000) – change may be modest and uninspiring. The critical friend needs to know how to vary the relationship and provide the right support at different times.

The Improving School Effectiveness Project (ISEP) distinguished phases of the relationship as critical friends work in schools (Doherty *et al.*, 2001).

#### INITIAL CONTACT

Early stages are important times for establishing ground rules for future operations, agreeing broad parameters within which the school and critical friend will work and, particularly, creating a ‘mutual comfort

zone'. Developing a spirit of trust is important in enabling people to speak openly and share thoughts, ideas and concerns with others. Listening, openness and availability all feature in developing such a trusting relationship.

#### THE FIRST HURDLE

Feeding back data can be a sensitive task, but the situation is eased if critical friends are totally familiar with the data and comfortable with handling it and its interpretation within the particular school's context. After being presented with data, a few ISEP schools were reluctant to continue their involvement with the process. Attempts were then made 'to enter the school by "another door"'. It is important to explain data clearly and unambiguously, leaving no room for confusion. Furthermore, valid interpretation is necessary, to enable schools to see the realities of their own situations objectively. This requires careful listening, reflecting on issues raised, reformulating interpretations, picking out positive aspects, and encouraging people to reflect on how these can be built on.

#### WHERE NEXT?

Most notably, this is the time when the critical friend begins to move from the role of friend to that of critic. There isn't one pattern for working with all schools, or a single path to take. It depends on each school's comfort level and readiness for change. Respect for individual confidentiality continues to be important at this stage, as is the ability to: help others to self-evaluate; present examples from elsewhere in such a way that teachers can reflect on the relative merits of each; challenge people to broaden and extend their self-perception; 'referee' discussions; encourage, praise, clarify and revisit issues to help people maintain momentum; and, where necessary, play the role of confidant(e). In all they do, more effective critical friends are aware that they need to leave schools more self-sufficient in their own learning processes. In moving towards disengaging from the school, the critical friend helps people move to a reflective, dialogic approach that incorporates greater openness to questioning and a respect for evidence: 'The question "how do you know?" eventually ceases to be put by the critical friend and becomes a routine way of thinking' (MacBeath, 1998a).

John MacBeath has summarised the formal and informal aspects of the critical friend's agenda (see Table 7.1).

Coaching can be seen as one form of critical friendship and is also a valuable form of support for schools, particularly school leaders. While sports coaches may have a very clear strategy or game plan for their team to execute, the kind of coaching we are referring to is one where the 'client' – the school or particular person within the school – decides

Table 7.1 Critical friend's agenda

<i>Formal</i>	<i>Informal</i>
<i>Introduction</i> Clarifying roles, agreeing parameters	<i>Background reading</i> Documents, contextual information, getting to know the school
<i>Gathering data</i> Interviews, observation, group activities	<i>Familiarization</i> Making contacts with staff and pupils, building, confidence
<i>Organizing data</i> Making sense of and systematizing data	<i>Negotiating a role</i> Establishing style, listening mode
<i>Feeding back data</i> Building alliances	<i>Building alliances</i> Moving out of the comfort zone, beyond the management team
<i>Making sense of data</i> Helping the school to understand and define issues	<i>Facilitating</i> Entering into discussion, raising questions, offering suggestions
<i>Considering the options</i> Working within the school's agenda, planning priorities, target setting	<i>Monitoring</i> Reflecting on actions taken, evaluating self; record-keeping, reviewing
<i>Supporting initiatives</i> Sitting in on working groups, working alongside teachers (e.g. co-operative teaching)	<i>Challenging</i> Broadening and extending the school's self perception
<i>Embedding</i> Helping to develop structures and procedures to sustain long term growth	<i>Maintaining momentum</i> Encouraging, praising, clarifying, revisiting issues
<i>Evaluating</i> Identifying achievement	<i>Disengaging</i> Removing crutches

Source: MacBeath (1998a)

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*Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.*

*Whitmore (1996)*

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on their own agenda. Jenny Rogers (2001) endorses the need for coaching to start and finish with the client's agenda: 'This is because coaching is about change', and we have already highlighted that change involves motivation. If change

really is to come from within (Barth, 1990) then those in schools really have to want to change.

Ultimately, the most effective critical friendship helps a school enhance its own learning, as was discovered by the Improving School Effectiveness Project in Scotland (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001), in which one of us was involved: 'There is one touchstone question for the critical friend, which is not too far away from what a teacher would, or should, ask in relation to the class or individual learner: "Will this help to develop independence, the capacity to learn and to apply learning more effectively over time?"' (MacBeath, 1998a). Such friendships are critical.

### **8 Time for deep learning**

We have shown that deep and meaningful learning is complex. You can have higher expectations of pupils and offer them greater support, but if the back-up home support isn't there, it will take longer, and sometimes the most dramatic changes aren't seen for a while.

Dick (1992) poses a question about Chinese bamboo: 'When you plant it nothing happens in the first year, nor in the second or the third or the fourth years. You don't even see a single green shoot. And yet in the fifth year, in a space of just six weeks, the bamboo will grow 90 feet high. The question is, did it grow 90 feet in six weeks or in five years?'

In response to the social forces we described in our introductory chapter, policy makers throughout the world have initiated dramatic – indeed some might say revolutionary – changes in state-supported education. What has emerged is what Hargreaves, Earl and colleagues (2001) have called 'the new educational orthodoxy'. This 'new orthodoxy' advocates higher standards of learning, deeper learning, centralised and often standardised curriculum, a focus on basics such as literacy and numeracy, and accountability procedures that drive

teaching and teachers practice. In practice, however, there is considerable evidence (Fielding, 2001a; Hargreaves *et al.*, 2001; Tye, 2000) that ‘the new orthodoxy’ can create fragmented, ‘hurried’ (Elkind, 1997) curricula unresponsive to differences in children and contexts. Rather than deeper learning it can create pressures on teachers and pupils to cover volumes of often undigested content to meet the requirements of tests and exams. Judith Warren Little (2001) explains how ‘Reform environments tend to be volatile, fast-paced, and public, while learning may require sustained concentration, gradual development, and opportunities for relatively private (“safe”) disclosure of struggles and uncertainties’. Perhaps a rather linear, technicist approach to educational change may be a necessary stage in the evolution of educational systems and schools towards the ‘deep’ kind of learning that this book advocates. The second meaning of our title is that *it is about time* that systems and schools move beyond the ‘new orthodoxy’ to embrace ‘deep’ learning for understanding. As Hargreaves and Fink (2000) state:

Increasingly, educational reformers want more than improved achievement results of any kind. They want deep, powerful, high performance learning-for-understanding that prepares young people to participate in today’s knowledge or informational society.

Learning for understanding is not just a cognitive and psychological matter, though. It involves more than constructivism, multiple intelligences, metacognition, or problem-based learning. Deep learning and teaching are also cultural and emotional processes. They entail contextualizing students’ learning in what they have learned before, in what other teachers are also teaching them, and in students’ own cultures and lives. This deep contextualization of learning which gets students engaged in it, is a cultural and not just a cognitive task.

It may be possible to change teachers’ behaviour by making them do things in different ways. Nonetheless, even if they can be persuaded that the change is worthwhile and makes a positive difference (which is not always guaranteed), bringing about that change is hard work. Given the complexity and challenge of learning, it is critical that all interested stakeholders, whether parents or the broader community including politicians, respect that such development can’t occur without

a significant investment of time. For pupils this means time for them and their teachers to explore ideas in depth rather than rushing through a crowded curriculum. It also means time for them to gain an emotional as well as a cognitive understanding of their new learning (Hargreaves and Fink, 2000). It means less testing time and more time for assessment *for learning*. It also means parents devoting time to their children's learning, through reading with them, talking with them and discussing ideas, and taking them to places they haven't been before. For teachers it includes:

- planning time
- time for learning new teaching techniques, and particularly time for processing and integrating learning from professional development experiences
- time for observing lessons by peers and trying out new practices
- time for researching one's own practice
- time for reviewing data and ideas, reflecting, arguing and clarifying the next steps
- time for working collectively and creatively as a whole school community to ensure that each pupil's learning is as enriching as it can possibly be.

It also means that external consultants supporting schools, whether university- or LEA-based or freelance, need to be able to offer 'just in time' support (Earl and Lee, 1998) that matches the needs of schools and their stage of development, and leads to deep learning.

Speed is a defence against depth and meaning. Nothing important happens quickly. Choose quality of experience over speed. The world changes from depth of commitment and capacity to learn.

Block *et al.* (2000)

Earlier in this chapter we indicated that the external learnings were for all stakeholders outside schools. Policy makers, however, have a unique and powerful opportunity to shape the support infrastructure for learning. We suggest that it is time to look beyond the 'new orthodoxy' to an educational system truly built around learning. To this end we offer the following policy suggestions:

- Define curriculum in terms of learnings, not subjects, and empower schools to address these learnings across the school. We recommend that the organisation and at least 30 per cent of the curriculum be designed locally to respond to the contextual needs of different communities.
- Design assessments that assess pupils' learning in authentic ways. If the number and volume of national assessments is reduced, resources can be mobilised to 'evaluate what is valued'.
- Develop inspection systems that provide support, guidance and critical friendship (Learmonth, 2000).
- Build teachers' and leaders' professional development around sets of learnings such as those described in Chapters 4 and 5. While ongoing professional learning shouldn't be optional for teachers and leaders, they should be able to exercise considerable professional discretion in determining how they achieve these learnings.
- Invest in significant dedicated professional learning time as a vital prerequisite to achieve vibrant learning communities. Invest in long-term sustainable capacity building for all schools rather than 'quick fixes' and short-term expedients (Stoll and Myers, 1998).

Create a second mind map, again placing the school's issue/initiative in the centre. This time work through each of the external learnings that would need to be in place to support the school's learning. Ask yourselves similar questions to the previous mind map questions.

### **It really is about time**

For anyone who thinks we are just a bunch of idealists and 'it's about time' we got real and remembered the constraints and pressure people work under in schools, we do. We'll reiterate a story we've told before of the parent complaining to the teacher on parent's night about the new ways of learning in schools. The sub-text here was 'Why isn't it more like the way I was taught in school? It worked fine for me' (although this parent may not remember or know that it didn't 'work

fine' for a number of his peers). The teacher replied: 'I have a choice. I can either prepare your child for your past or her future. Which would you prefer?' Making these choices means deciding what you will give up doing as well as what you will start or keep on doing.

For anyone who thinks we think that what we are suggesting is easy to do, we don't. Learning is extremely hard. It takes energy, commitment and openness, and requires the support of other learners. But it is also hopeful, forward looking, and gives us all the best way of trying to create our 'preferred futures'. After a primary headteachers' conference at which she spoke, a head came up to one of us. 'I'm going to send you a poem I've read to the kids at assembly,' she said. 'I think it captures what you've been saying to us.' We do too.

'The Door'

Go and open the door.

Maybe outside there's  
a tree, or a wood,  
a garden,  
or a magic city.

Go and open the door.

Maybe a dog's rummaging.  
Maybe you'll see a face,  
or an eye,  
or the picture  
of a picture.

Go and open the door.

If there's a fog  
it will clear.

Go and open the door.

Even if there's only  
the darkness ticking,  
even if there's only  
the hollow wind,  
even if  
nothing  
is there,

go and open the door.

At least  
there'll be  
a draught.

Miroslav Holub  
(Trans. Ian Milner and George Theiner)

Learning is about enhancing our capacity for a complex and changing future and it's about time we took this seriously so each of us can learn *to know, to do, to live* and *to be*, and help young people do the same. That's what's really in it for schools.