

# a global - cohort based prof. D for teachers



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## Rationale and key issues

### OVERVIEW

#### A DOCTORAL PROFESSION

Learning has become **more complex**, and technological progress is **rapid**. This requires a **more reflective profession** with authentic research **in schools, by schools**. This project provides just that but deliberately models the **new learning** needed.

#### GLOBAL

Starting with a range of **countries and regions** helps vouchsafe sharing of the **most effective practice**. A triangle of support will link schools from relatively **developed** and **developing** economies.

#### WORK BASED

This is a **cohort based doctoral programme**. Teams will be located within schools. Cohorts will research, exhibit, work and graduate together in dialogue with students and parents.

#### SHARED HYPOTHESIS

The starting premise is of a shared hypothesis: **"our school can improve"**. Context, culture and circumstances make each research project an original contribution too.

### CONTEXT

**Teaching and learning are changing** everywhere. There are many well documented drivers for this change, from technological, social or economic ones to the huge driver of learners' own changing expectations. This needs an **evolution in the professional development of teachers** to support the greater level of reflection and iteration needed in evolving teachers' practice.

**Reflective teachers** are a valuable and scarce resource; they need to be nurtured and supported; potentially almost all teachers can be powerfully reflective, given the opportunity and support.

At the same time the teaching force suffers from a **perceived lack of esteem**; this is particularly acute in developing countries where a medical career rates as a far higher aspiration than a career as a classroom teacher. Many of the professional judgments of teachers are relatively undervalued by society, largely because those judgments are hidden - policy tells teachers what to do, teachers rarely directly influence policy. The recruitment of teachers worldwide suffers from this so that it is both **hard to attract, and to retain**, the best teachers. And judgment about the complexity of learning is undervalued because teachers are not seen as people with authoritative views. Noone returns from the dentist wishing it could be like it was when they were children! Learning in the 21st century requires that we do not wish this for our schools either, which requires new research; the root of that research is the school itself.

### PROPOSAL

This proposal is for a substantial pilot to progress the world eventually towards a **fully doctoral teaching profession**, with some consequentially radical approaches to teachers' career development. This is no simple "idea"; it is erected on a **number of clear certainties** emerging from large scale projects and is **complex**, with carefully developed detail.

Complex is not impossible however, and what is outlined here is **highly achievable** and built on certainty. The purpose of the pilot programme is to establish the necessary detail for worldwide scalability: the vectors, costs, rate and agility associated with increased global scale, and to do this in a way that **joins developed and developing world schools** to mutual advantage.

### FIRST STEP

The first key step is for the initial nations and regions, and their pilot universities or colleges, to come together to agree a timetable for progress. This short document is a precursor for that event. The event has been **generously sponsored by Microsoft** who also have a refreshingly un-proprietary passion to see learning move forward.

**Attendance at that event is essential and requires one each from policy and from HE in each participating region or nation; dates will be canvassed. We will meet somewhere pleasant and conducive to progress.**

## STRUCTURE

This initial section offers some of the **detail and structure** around which the proposal is built:

(1) Teachers, in this project they will already be graduates (but see elsewhere proposals for undergraduate cohorts of school classroom assistants and ancillary staff). They already spend a significant proportion of their initial teaching development in what might be characterised as "**pragmatic micro-research**". They explore much: children's changed behaviour on windy days; their learning on Mondays compared perhaps to Fridays; their ability to handle open ended tasks; their complex behavioural needs, the personalisation of their learning, the impact of their differing intelligences and expectations, and so on. Good teachers internalise answers to many complex practical questions about **how to teach well** and this reflection is very much at a post graduate level. However, typically schools don't learn so well; all the teachers in a school might be clear that children behave differently on windy days, but the school rarely learns well enough to create "windy day timetables" for example! Teachers become better teachers but schools do not necessarily improve. This existing reflection is important because it helps us to justify a "**faster track**" **root to the doctorate** for teachers who also remain in full time work.

(2) We know that building large scale communities of learners in the teaching profession can, when done "right", bring the **internal expertise of that community** to bear on the development of learning in a wholly positive way. Such learning communities serving as **communities of practice**, at the micro or macro level, can lead to significant and rapid advances in both our understanding, and the practice, of learning in schools. Having watched as my team created an on-line community of 21,000 headteachers for the UK government, **Talking Heads**, and associated communities, I was able to

observe this huge community of headteachers, and also of Fast Track newly qualified teachers, of aspiring headteachers, and others. In each case the community fed each others' understandings. **Successful communities need high quality facilitation.** The Prof. D project will need such communities of practice, but at a global scale. Those communities will need to be properly facilitated.

(3) In one such community of practice, the UK's National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), the gains were so clear that membership of the community, and completion of the course that it supported, **were made mandatory** for all aspiring heads. This sounds like a lot of extra work for teachers, but that is not the case. Those joining the community often worry, initially, that the burden of active membership may be too great, but quickly they report that the hugely supportive nature of a community of learners with a common purpose **leads them to question how they ever managed** to do their job before joining the NPQH programme. This frees, rather than constrains, teachers.

(4) The cost of a content based, delivered, PD programme to take all teachers forward to a doctoral level would be prohibitive for any nation, and less than useful. The model here is for a **self regenerative** programme where the contributions, discourse and conclusions of each cohort become a key raw resource for subsequent cohorts.

**An initial set of "provocations" and resources will be needed**, and the programme will need to bear this **start-up cost**, but these start-up costs are not reflected in the marginal costs of continued roll-out. Each subsequent cohort increasingly relies on, and contributes to, the body of action research that previous "generations" of teachers have contributed. Even where past research explored somewhat "out-of-date" concepts the dimension of history as **current teachers look back at evolving practice**, makes all

contributions valued and valuable. And of course that increasingly large body of research comes to drive policy, parental opinion, media...

(5) Similarly the cost of training and developing a small army of tutors to "deliver" a taught doctoral programme would also be prohibitive. However, this proposal relies to a significant extent of the **accredited mentoring** of each "year" on the programme **by older teachers**. This is particularly important because often the very best older teachers have internalised their own excellence in a way that **makes it quite difficult to access by others**. They become excellent teachers but do not communicate well the details of, and reasons for, their excellence to others. By harnessing them as mentors they will need to vocalise details of their good practice. Building this level of support **between, rather than across, schools** vouchsafes some "**pollination**" of ideas and practice between schools too.

(6) There is much that we have yet to learn about learning and this research should reside most naturally in the various places, cultures and contexts in which that learning is happening. To take a simple example: many parents, teachers and children argue about whether music is helpful to study or during homework, let very few schools actually do the research to find out what aural ambience works best for **their learners in their cultural context**. Teachers and students exploring this topic may find the methodology, hypotheses and tribulations of prior researchers on the programme informative, but will need to test their own hypothesis (e.g. that gentle music helps, whilst loud music hinders), building on the preceeding work, in the unique context and reality of their own school and their own learners.

(7) The proposal here is not to create a single programme, tied to a single HE institution, but to define a **detailed, scaleable global blueprint**

for what works and to use that to reach out to further collaborating institutions wanting to participate in the scheme.

Initially we are seeking a small number of pilot HE institutions and regions /countries worldwide. This will grow to be significant, but not exclusive, work for them.

**The interchange of successful conclusions from effective action research, between nations and regions, between schools and between teachers lies at the heart of the project.** Please do not underestimate the significance of this whole development.

Although in time many tertiary level institutions will engage, the underlying principles and evolving iteration will continue to be held in trust (so to speak) from the centre to ensure that some elements (like the overarching community of practice) remain a shared resource across all participating programmes. For the pilot around half a dozen nations / regions each with one institutional partner, will be needed, Obviously each will require one or more participating schools; there will need to be enough schools and enough teachers to make a vibrant and engaging community from the start, both at the level of each institutional partner, and across the whole.

## QUALIFICATION

Although a **doctoral** programme this is most likely to be an Prof.D or maybe a Ed.D rather than a PhD. Whatever the nomenclature, successful completion will lead to the individual title of Doctor for all those graduating from the programme.

There is much to discuss around vocabulary, but perhaps the most urgent is what to call the more senior teachers who will, towards the end of their careers, be "putting back" and refreshing their own interest by mentoring teachers on the doctoral programme. If the gender was better we might call them **Master Teachers** but that clearly won't do. Probably "consultant" or "research" teacher would be suitable? It may be that

a language other than English offers better solutions.

A training programme for these "wise souls" will be necessary too, although in the fullness of time they will be recruited from a body of teachers who, having passed through the doctoral programme themselves, will need a lot less support for their mentorship role.

## FINALLY

There are **two key planks** in the proposal - these must not be varied, or deviated from:

(A) successful completion of the doctoral programme must be both signalled, and adjudged, by means of a **shared exhibition**; this is crucial both to the building of teachers' social esteem (as the complexity and detail of managing learning is given a broader audience), and to the building of a shared understanding throughout the profession as key research findings and conclusions, by teachers for teachers, are exchanged and given prominence. the exhibitions will be **both on-line and face to face** and will adhere to a common format, allowing the interchange of work freely across the different participating nations and regions. That format will certainly include multiple media.

With cohorts in the doctoral programme located together in schools their shared school-based exhibitions have the potential to ignite a **dramatic re engagement by parents too** in the notion of what makes for effective learning; for example the research might be focussed on initial parental reading support, or the impact of music on homework and quiet study, or the impact of gender based seating arrangements. There are few better ways to build parents understanding than to involve them in small action research projects that advance their own children.

(B) **The international start-up** of this project is essential. Each school will be part of a **triangle of support**.

Each school in "developed" economies will be paired with another elsewhere, but that pair will be also partners to a 'developing economy' school, thus completing the triangle. This is not a model of cultural imperialism, rather it recognises the value of different contexts, cultures and circumstances as fertile grounds for the exchange and interchange of understanding. We anticipate a clear mutual esteem within each triangle. The very different contexts help teacher-researchers to think "outside of the box" and bring really fresh solutions to the problem of how to improve learning and move their schools forwards.

But beyond that of course is the wider community of researching schools with everyone being connected to exchange great ideas, and **an evolving library of "exhibitions" of successful, researched, effective practice.**