



EARLY REFLECTIONS: LIONHEART'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE DfE'S TRUST-TRUST DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Reflecting on recent times, the ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, couldn't have hit the nail harder on its head with his contemplation that 'the only constant in life is change'. The tsunami of change that has crashed against the fabric of society over the past year and a half has been undoubtedly unparalleled. Not just change, of course, but the necessary changes to that change... that changed... and then changed and then changed again!

Reflecting on our role as educators in the midst of this change is interesting, however. Notwithstanding the phenomenon of the Covid-19 pandemic; rapid change is, ironically, something of a fixture in our business. Children change, qualifications change, policies change. Practitioners, buildings and leaders change in response. Indeed, the root word 'education' comes from the Latin Educere, meaning to nourish, to bring up, to draw out. To undergo a process of change. It is something we lean to, reach out for: facilitate. Notwithstanding the storm of the past eighteen months, and the turbulence that may still feature ahead, our ability to embrace change and understand its necessity as a vehicle for learning and progress is key to future success.

And so despite the shifting- at times- jolting, landscape we have been operating in, when Lionheart was asked to act as a Mentor Trust as part of the new DfE Trust to Trust Development programme, we felt confident that embracing the opportunity to engage in order to continue to reflect, collaborate, develop and grow was not only possible but also very important.

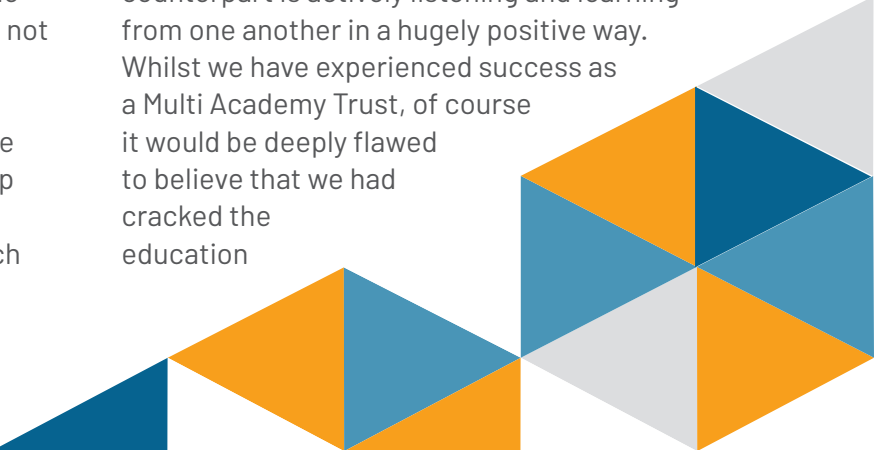
Whilst we were initially enthusiastic about the prospect of this new professional relationship and eager to learn about another trust, there was also a degree of trepidation. In times such

as these, with a myriad of pressing issues, where time is spent prioritising our priorities, we were keen to ensure investment proved fruitful for all. As our schools sought to rise strong from school closures, we considered our communities' contexts carefully, wanting to pour resource to support our local families and their environments.

But the essence of our goal as school leaders is to dig deeper- or more widely, than our own school gates. We were spurred on in this vein by our recent discussion as Executive Leaders and with our Trust Board around the importance of civic responsibility (following engagement with CST). We recognise and fully subscribe to the notion that our responsibilities do not end in the microcosm of our own schools. It became clear that taking part in the programme was the right decision. As the programme commenced, we were reassured by methodology of evidence-based approaches and the very useful MAT Improvement Capacity Framework.

COACHING VS MENTORING

Whilst we were labelled as the Mentor Trust and our partners, Cotswold Beacon, as the Mentee Trust we suspected from the offset that these were moveable badges that might become fairly interchangeable. In practice, we believe we have now seamlessly moved towards an evidence based coaching model where each counterpart is actively listening and learning from one another in a hugely positive way. Whilst we have experienced success as a Multi Academy Trust, of course it would be deeply flawed to believe that we had cracked the education



code and foolish to rest on laurels without yearning to adapt, develop and improve. What is most rewarding and has the potential to have the most impact, is gaining valuable insights into other contexts and models of working.

For me, coaching really epitomises the Latin origin of educate as previously defined. Coaching, as a powerful educational tool does nourish and draw out; it opens doors. It is not giving answers, lecturing or sermonising but revealing a pathway to finding out answers perhaps undiscovered. I feel hugely invested in the philosophy of coaching and will always remember, when researching how best to launch and embed a successful coaching programme, how struck I was by Rosinski's definition as "The art of facilitating the unleashing of people's potential to reach meaningful, important objectives".

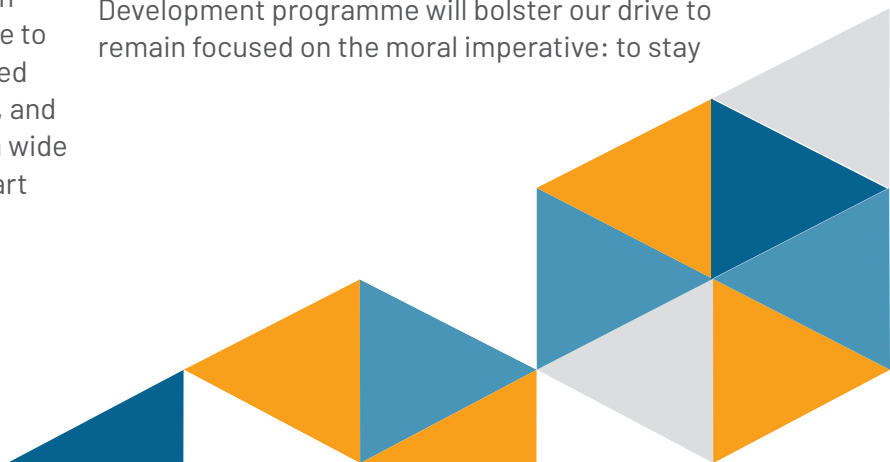
This approach has been immensely successful in our Trust schools and now feels the best way to forge our relationship and support the leaders of Cotswold Beacon in being able to plan a clear route through their upcoming challenges in their growth journey. A coaching approach has facilitated a richer, better quality, two-way conversation; we have established a mutually respectful professional dialogue and from this we are able to learn more about Cotswold Beacon whilst having the right experience to be able to ask appropriate probing questions which helps to highlight and subsequently navigate potential barriers to success. Our partners have spoken equally positively about the programme: "As a well-established but small trust, recently approved to open a secondary free school, we were keen to work with a larger trust to learn about their journey of growth as we continue to plan our own. We were pleased to be matched with Lionheart, given their context and size, and have begun a really useful dialogue across a wide range of trust matters," commented Dr Stuart Wilson (CEO).

PROGRESS AND GOALS

Like the green shoots of springtime, we are still in the relatively early stages of the programme which was launched in March 2021. What is evident though is that the commitment of both parties has been firmly established and a clear action plan, which is firmly rooted in the MAT Capacity Improvement Framework, has been formulated collaboratively. We have been able to match highly qualified and experienced leaders to support on each of the identified areas and our coaching approach and organisational humility has meant we have listened carefully to our partners to ensure our time is spent asking the right questions and pointing out useful suggestions or alternative models/approaches for consideration.

This quality time has provided an opportunity for our leaders to gain perspective regarding their own contexts and previous successes. All our leaders have spoken very positively of their engagement and some of our initial questions about whether our knowledge and experience would translate clearly have been quashed through a positive reciprocal relationship. We have been able to learn about education in a different area of the country, with different challenges to our own. Our engagement has been a catalyst for further reflection in our own organisation and reinvigorated our Trust commitment to coaching, mentoring and development, true tenets of our vocation to educate in a fulsome and holistic manner.

Whilst we can be sure that the educational landscape will perpetually rapidly change, and perhaps more rapidly than ever in the aftermath of the pandemic, our resolve to be both resilient and responsive to this change will remain strong. Moreover, I'm convinced that the experience of the Trust to Trust Development programme will bolster our drive to remain focused on the moral imperative: to stay



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true to the roots of what we believe- to nourish, nurture and draw out, tuning in to our real civic responsibility by seeking to positively impact the lives of all children, not only for whom we are directly accountable for.

Kath Kelly
CEO, Lionheart Academies Trust

ROSINSKI, P. (2003) Coaching Across Cultures: New Tools for Leveraging National, Corporate, and Professional Differences, London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

