Chapter 2

Local Authorities and School-to-School Collaboration in Scotland

Joanne Neary, Christopher Chapman, Stuart Hall and Kevin Lowden

Abstract

This chapter explores the Scottish government policy drive for school improvement through processes such as distributed leadership, empowerment and cross-school collaboration to school settings. Compared to other nations, this shift towards collaboration has been relatively slow, but reflects the history of Scottish education, one where there is a reduced emphasis on individualist/competitive cultures and instead focuses on social justice and equity. This chapter discusses two programmes of work that were developed to foster school-to-school collaboration in the Scottish education system. In doing so, we comment on the conflict between national priority setting and the translation of this agenda at the local level by different local authorities.

Keywords: Collaborative enquiry; social cohesion; leadership; regulation; local authorities; Scotland; social regulation; impactful school-to-school collaboration; National Policy

Introduction

Recent policy developments in Scottish education reflect a wider global policy movement to re-professionalize teaching, support the active engagement of teachers in school improvement processes through, for example, empowerment, distributed leadership and cross-school cooperation (Torrance & Humes, 2014; Torrance & Murphy, 2016). Despite this enthusiasm at the policy level, impactful school-to-school collaboration in Scotland remains patchy.
In this chapter, we offer an analysis of the key developments in policy that have influenced this new direction. We then discuss two programmes of work developed by the Robert Owen Centre (ROC) at the University of Glasgow designed to promote more equitable school improvement through school-to-school collaboration. We suggest that the active role of the local authority, and the autonomy they possess to interpret national policy at the local level, has created variation within the system. We explore the impact of this variation in the roll-out and sustainability of the school-to-school collaboration programmes.

Building on the work of Douglas (1982), Hood (1998) and Chapman (2019), we use the two dimensions of social cohesion and social regulation to define sociocultural dimensions of education systems and argue that an egalitarian culture is required to support a self-improving system.

Where social cohesion and regulation are both high, hierarchical cultures prevail, and public service organizations tend to characterize their own cultures as those of hierarchical, bureaucratic, managed organizations. Here we see traditional structures in place, often centrally managed through power and position. Where social cohesion and regulation are both low, an individualistic (competitive) culture dominates. Here the market prevails, and we see the emergence of ‘independent’ state-funded schools operating outside of school district/local authority control. Where social cohesion is low, but regulation is high, fatalistic cultures prevail. Within these cultures, organizations tend to be unclear about the direction of travel and second guessing what the next initiative or policy is likely to be implemented on them. In systems where regulation is low but social cohesion is high, an egalitarian culture tends to dominate. Chapman (2019) describes in these circumstances:

Mutualistic, self-improving organisations work laterally, often with the support of the middle tier, collaborating with each other in networks to support joint improvement. This interorganisational support for improvement is in stark contrast to the bureaucratic, top-down, and producer-capture arrangements found in hierarchical cultures. (p. 557)

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<th>Low social cohesion</th>
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Fig. 1. Sociocultural Perspectives on Public Service Reform. Source: Chapman (2019).
An Overview of Policy

Scottish education has been a devolved power since the Scotland Act (1998). However, Scottish education has operated independently from Westminster (UK) control since the eighteenth century. This ‘independence’ is reflected in a number of ways including the Scottish curriculum, the relationship between schools and local authorities. For example, the English and Welsh systems tend to be characterized by ‘choice and diversity’, where the rise of neo-liberal market-based forms of regulation and competition (Arnott & Menter, 2007) has meant many schools opting out of local authority control. In Scotland, education remains largely homogeneous, with over 95% of schools managed by local authorities. The 32 Scottish local authorities work within a framework set by national policy, although each has their own identified priorities, develop local initiatives and produce guidelines for schools. Therefore, while educational policies are developed at the national government level, the translation and implementation of these policies, along with the responsibility for school improvement, lies with each local authority. This is the so-called Concordat approach (Cairney et al., 2016). While there is a considerable level of autonomy to interpret national policy at the local level, there is also a system of accountability outlined in the form of the National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education (Scottish Government, 2016b). This document details ‘Key Performance Indicators’, along with associated monitoring arrangements. Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspections help monitor the quality of education within this framework. Although a significant number of schools, 704 out of around 2,500, have not been inspected within the last 10 years. Furthermore, 1,685 have not been inspected for between five and seven years (Scottish Government, 2021).

Compared to other systems, the ideas about who should be responsible for educational change and improvement and the pace of reform have been evolutionary rather than revolutionary as is the case in other parts of the United Kingdom. For example, when the ‘self-governing school’ was first introduced in Scotland in the early 1990s, there was pushback against the notion of a more competitive market-orientated system (Hartley, 1996; Murphy & Raffe, 2015; Riddel, 2016). Where education districts in Scotland were seen to be delegating responsibility to schools and away from local authorities, there was a distancing of ‘Scottish’ and ‘English’ practice:

fostering cooperating among schools, not competition between them [the Scottish approach], which has been a perceived and regretted result of Local Management Schools in some areas of England and Wales. (Strathclyde Regional Council, 1992, cited in Hartley, 1996, p. 133)

However, the Scottish system is, for a number of sources, typified by more than institutional cooperation. Indeed, many authors have also characterized the history of Scottish education as one with a strong Social Justice strand at least in comparison with other education systems. As Riddel (2009) has highlighted, Scottish government policy, particularly in education, has long stated an adherence to
the goals of social justice and equity and inclusion. Riddel rightly argues that these concepts are complex and interrelated. She stresses that while redistributive measures to tackle these issues will continue to be debated, an appropriate evidence-informed discourse in the education system is needed to facilitate more effective policy enactment to promote social justice in schools.

Empowering the System?

Over the course of the current administration, the concept of self-governance has once again become popular in Scottish policy circles with the idea of the ‘empowerment’, albeit one that remains within the oversight of a local authority. One of the first shifts in education policy was in Devolved School Management (DSM) schemes. While initially rejected in the 1990s, it is now seen as ensuring schools are ‘empowered to make the decisions that most affect their children and young people’s outcomes, while being part of a collaborative learning community, local authority, and working with others’ (COSLA, 2019, p. 7). This commitment to the concept of subsidiary includes control over spending, enabling schools to access a delegated budget that they control (rather than their local authority). This fiscal empowerment is also witnessed in the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) (Scottish Government, 2017). Introduced in 2017, PEF provides additional funding for students and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and is calculated using pupil census data relating to free school meal entitlement. It is specifically aimed at closing the poverty-related attainment gap and used to fund resources, activities or interventions that are additional to the existing curricular offer. Importantly, this additional resource is allocated directly to schools from the central government, by passing the local authority. The Educational Institute of Scotland (2017) published guidance suggesting head teachers should work collegiately with teachers within their school and with head teachers from other schools to identify the young people impacted by poverty, address their needs with regard to literacy, numeracy and well-being through the creation of targeted support that would have a positive impact on their learning experience. These cooperative and collaborative activities, driven by professional dialogue, acknowledge the importance of schools using their own knowledge and expertise to drive forward change for the benefit of pupils.

While policies suggest the market is less of a motivation behind recent attempts to regulate school governance (Arnott & Menter, 2007), the ability of schools to access direct funding can enable a more empowered system as decisions can be made closer to learning level. While the local authority maintains much of the control of budgetary decisions, these policies increase the capacity of school leaders and teaching staff to use their professional and contextual knowledge to enact change at the school level. Therefore, the relationship between local authority and school is shifting, albeit slowly in many cases so that schools make decisions based on the identified need of their local communities while the local authority provides support, monitoring and strategic oversight. Put simply, we are moving to a situation where schools are becoming responsible for self-improvement and the local authorities are responsible for ensuring this happens.
Distributed leadership, Professional Learning and Collaboration

Following publication of ‘Teaching Scotland’s Future’ (TSF) (Donaldson, 2010), a review of teacher education spanning initial teacher education, training and development opportunities for qualified teachers and career progression, there has been a significant focus on the need to build leadership capacity within the system. One of the recommendations from the review was the need for ‘a clear progressive educational leadership pathway…which embodies the responsibility of all leaders to build the professional capacity of staff and ensure a positive impact on young people’s learning’ (Scottish Government, 2010, p. 79). This reflected a broader policy consensus, which recognized the potential of teacher leadership to empower teachers (Torrance & Murphy, 2016) and the potential role all teachers within schools could make in empowered decision-making, valuing the knowledge and skills of teachers at all levels.

Over the past decade, there have been a series of policies that strengthen and extend leadership within the Scottish education system, including a discussion of leadership at all levels in the professional standards for teachers (GTCS, 2021), leadership identified as one of the six drivers in the National Improvement Framework for education (Scottish Government, 2016), and the importance of collaborative leadership instilled in head teacher training (Scottish Government, 2016). Despite these developments, there has been criticism of the ‘under-theorised’ nature of distributed leadership (Mowatt & McMahon, 2018) whereby much of the debate surrounding the concept has focussed on ‘the merits of programmes rather than the development of a cohesive leadership system’ (Hamilton et al., 2018, p. 73). In order to build a sustainable national strategy that strengthens leadership capacity, the authors argue it is important to balance the needs of the education system with the needs of the individuals’ professional development needs.

A review of the impact of TSF (Scottish Government, 2016) found that there had been positive steps with regard to staff engaging in professional dialogue and learning suggesting a ‘cultural shift’ towards a more open and self-reflective practice, as well as evidence suggesting improved training and development opportunities regarding leadership at all career stages. Despite this, the review also described ongoing confusion regarding the different forms of leadership, particularly when staff still equated leadership with career progression and promotion. Linked to this was a criticism of wider leadership strategies of the lack of attention paid to the wider contextual and cultural boundaries within which these activities would be actioned (Harris et al., 2018; Mowatt & McMahon, 2018). For example, head teachers may still chose to task certain teachers with leadership ‘tasks’ and therefore act as a gatekeeper for opportunities, or junior members of staff may not be perceived by the wider school body as having the ‘authority’ to carry out certain duties.

Recent curricular changes in Scotland also underline the move towards a system where schools and teachers are more positively involved in developing curricula best suited to the children in their classrooms. The development of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), as distinct from the previous 5–14 curriculum, represented a move from a more prescriptive, centrally determined curricula to
one more locally led and focussed on the pupil as an individual learner. Rather than teaching from textbooks or pre-agreed resources, CfE enabled teachers to move beyond the prescribed methods and address the individual needs and learning styles of pupils. There have, however, been challenges of implementation of this approach particularly in the senior phase of secondary education where high stakes public examinations and accreditation still tend to drive the agenda.

**Partnership Working: Policy and Practice**

We now move onto discussing two programmes of work that were developed to foster school-to-school and local authority-to-local authority collaboration in the Scottish education system to support the cultural change necessary to shift the system towards more empowered and collaborative ways of working. We indicate how these initiatives map onto wider policy discussions, before providing a discussion of how the authors devised and supported these initiatives.

Partnership working, and the ability of educational professionals to work collaboratively within, between and beyond their own school gates, has been described as key to building capacity of staff, developing their professional autonomy and bringing school improvement discussions down to the local level. Through professional learning communities, teachers are able to collaborate with one another, conduct shared enquiry activities focussing on issues of practice and pedagogy and share collective responsibility for improvements in pupil learning (Hargreves & Fullan, 2012).

In 2013, the then Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning described partnership working as an important approach to tackle the link between socio-economic deprivation and low educational attainment in Scotland. Partnership working was also referenced in the National Improvement Framework in their discussion that successful professional development is most successful when it is well planned and takes place within, between and beyond school.

The ability of educational professionals to use attainment data in order to implement targeted intervention to raise outcomes for groups of children was described in the 2021 Scottish National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan (*Scottish Government, 2020*). The document described that ‘almost all schools have planned interventions in place … particularly to provide targeted interventions in literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing’ (p. 47). These interventions were described as existing both within school and between schools. It also highlighted the importance to ensure schools were able to develop robust procedures to tack and monitor impact and also the impact of working in partnership with other schools.

**Robert Owen Centre**

The Robert Owen Centre (ROC) at the University of Glasgow has had a key role in developing the research capacity of educational professionals to analyze their own data, implement targeted interventions and tracking and monitoring impact.
There are two key programmes of work which provide examples of how the research team were able to translate policy into practice and, in doing, drive future policy discussions. Both programmes were informed by the burgeoning model of international research linking school-to-school networking and system improvement (Ainscow, 2015; Armstrong et al., 2021; Brown & Poortman, 2019; Hadfield & Jopling, 2011; Madrid Miranda & Chapman, 2021).

Both programmes promote a model of improvement underpinned by collaborative enquiry (Bryk et al., 2011, Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Central to these programmes is the use of Collaborative Action Research (CAR), whereby schools are encouraged to critically examine their contexts by collecting and analysing data and using the knowledge generated to make changes. Schools are then encouraged to monitor the impact of these changes and adapt practice where appropriate. This forms a cycle of evidence-informed improvement. A number of quantitative and qualitative methods can be used in the CAR process, including surveys, lesson study, instructional rounds, staff visits, focus groups, interviews and pupil engagement activities. Our evidence suggests that by working together on shared issues, the burden of improvement moves from being the responsibility of one teacher to becoming a shared goal of the network. Also, by collectively sharing the roles and responsibilities required in the programme, the practitioners within the network gain confidence in leadership, and learning from this approach is mobilized across the network and ideally the wider system.

In our Scottish examples, the role of the local authority acts as the key broker and facilitator. Another distinct feature of the model underpinning the two programmes is the role of university researchers working closely with teachers, schools and local authority leaders to research the process, facilitate collaboration, develop enquiry skills of practitioners and empower them to use the CAR approach. We begin by briefly detailing the programmes, before exploring the differences at the local authority meso-level and how these differences impacted the running of these programmes.

**Reflecting on the School Improvement Partnership Programme (SIPP)**

SIPP was designed by the ROC in 2013 and supported by Education Scotland in response to the Scottish government’s commitment to investing in leadership, enhancing the use of data and school-to-school collaboration. It created the mechanism to systematically implement an evidence-informed approach that encouraged the use of collaboration and practitioner enquiry to improve learner outcomes and classroom pedagogy (Chapman et al., 2015). The aim of SIPP was to support innovation to tackle educational inequity and reduce the achievement gap across classroom, school and local authority boundaries.

The SIPP approach encouraged staff to take leadership responsibility for embedding these new enquiry activities into their school practices and using CAR to experiment with pedagogy and evaluate the impact it had on learners.

During the period 2013–2016, 75 schools across 14 local authorities engaged in SIPP. These 75 schools did not work alone, but rather in one of eight
interconnected partnership projects. Within these projects, the rates of collaboration between schools and across local authority boundaries differed. For example, in three projects, schools collaborated within one local authority; in four projects, schools collaborated across two local authorities; and in one project, schools collaborated across three local authorities. Each project was devised by the schools and was informed by their assessment of local issues. Also, while both primary and secondary schools were invited to participate, the collaborative partnerships mostly focussed on primary or secondary issues, with only two projects spanning the primary/secondary gap.

The collaborative projects were supported by the ROC team, as well as staff from the local authority and Education Scotland. The role of these individuals was to provide advice and guidance on the CAR process and educational improvement, facilitated through regular face-to-face meetings and via email. A series of national events was also held to share knowledge and build the network. The aim of this support was to build capacity and confidence within the school partnerships, particularly with regard to research methodology and evaluation and do so in a way that was sustainable so that the approach would become embedded at school and local authority levels as the university and Education Scotland team withdrew at the end of the pilot programme. *Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective* (OECD, 2015) noted the contribution of SIPP:

> the School Improvement Partnership Programme which brings together local authorities and university researchers to address issues of educational inequity … All what GTCS referred to with us as the ‘Scottish Way’ – to have integrated partnership working at the strategic level which is then reflected in high quality delivery of teaching and learning at the sharp end of the system. (p. 138)

We now move on to consider the evolution of SIPP beyond 2016, into the Network for Social and Educational Equity (NSEE).

**NSEE**

NSEE was launched in 2017 and built on the work and conceptual framework of the SIPP programme. It used the CAR approach to embed enquiry, collaboration and evidence-based practices in school improvement. While SIPP piloted a nationwide programme of work using the ‘CAR approach’, NSEE developed this in a way that was more nuanced and focussed on co-developing strategies with local authorities and practitioners.

This programme of work involves the Robert Owen Centre working in partnership with a range of stakeholders including educational psychologists, local development officers, third-sector organizations and local authority leaders, as well as educational practitioners and school leaders.

At the time of writing, NSEE has engaged with 41 schools, 5 secondaries (pupils aged 11–17) and 36 primaries (pupils aged 5–11) across four local
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Unlike SIPP, which was a national pilot funded by Scottish government, NSEE required local authorities and schools to ‘buy-in’ to the initiative and fund the approach themselves. This shift in programme design also saw a shift in funding, from centrally funded, but locally implemented, to locally funded (albeit through Scottish Attainment Challenge or Pupil Equity Funding). The ability of local authorities or individual schools to fund this programme of work can be seen as a result of the empowerment agenda in Scottish education policy and the devolution of power from national government to local authority. This shift placed local authorities central in making key decisions in school improvement decisions.

Reflecting on the Role of the Local Authority in NSEE

In keeping with the flexibility at the core of the NSEE model, there are substantial variations in the ways that local authorities have adopted and utilized NSEE in their school improvement activity. Therefore, in understanding the role of the policy context in understanding how schools engage in collaborative activity, we must look both at the national and local levels.

Using grid group theory as outlined in Fig. 1, Table 1 maps the cultural engagement of four local authorities with the NSEE programme.

Table 1. Grid Group Theory and Local Authority Culture.

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<tr>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Drivers of Programme Adoption in Locality</th>
<th>Other Stakeholders</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Individualistic</td>
<td>Instigated and driven by schools, little involvement by local authority</td>
<td>Attainment advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Hierarchical</td>
<td>Instigated by local authority, encouraged schools to participate but with moderate accountability and tight–loose structures/programmes of work</td>
<td>Attainment advisor, educational psychologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Egalitarian</td>
<td>Instigated by local authority but with high level of autonomy for schools</td>
<td>Attainment advisor, local authority officer, educational psychologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Fatalistic</td>
<td>Instigated by local authority, nominated schools to participate with strong accountability</td>
<td>Attainment advisor, Education Scotland, local authority advisor</td>
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Where the local authority had a role in instigating the adoption of the NSEE programme in their school improvement plan, they also offered support in terms of coordination of schools, provided additional professional learning opportunities that supplemented the work of the ROC team, supported event organization, allocated additional resources (either in terms of buying-in resources or ensuring teachers had time out of school to attend training workshops) and ensured the lessons could be embedded in policy and practice in their locality.

In Table 1, local authority B is hierarchical in the sense that it adopted the NSEE approach and had a moderate accountability mechanism built in but invited schools to participate. This is similar to local authority C, who also adopted the NSEE approach but were more egalitarian in their approach due to higher levels of autonomy for any school that self-selected to participate.

In contrast, local authority D nominated schools they felt would benefit from this approach. Therefore, the schools in local authority D experienced a sense of fatalism in their experience of the programme. These contrasting approaches meant the ROC team experienced different levels of initial buy-in from the schools involved. While authority B had initial buy-in from head teachers and therefore had a general enthusiasm for the approach, authority D faced a level of initial scepticism from some schools. In authority D, a number of schools initially felt that, despite the best intentions of the research team, the approach was being done ‘to them’ rather than being done ‘with them’. This created an initial tension, as the ROC team’s ethos and the NSEE model stresses a collaborative, co-constructed approach.

In local authority A, where there was low engagement with the local authority, the schools formed their own collaborative network and instigated contact with the ROC team. This guaranteed initial buy-in from schools and an impetus to engage with the CAR approach and develop an enquiry-based focus to their school improvement plan. However, the lack of local authority ‘middle-tier’ support meant there was additional strain placed on the ROC team and the schools to coordinate and maintain the programme impetus. Ultimately, without local authority support, schools became solely responsible for sustaining the initiative, and this relied heavily on the leadership capacity of individual schools.

However, despite variation in the level of local authority support, across all four authority areas, there were additional stakeholders who supported the development of the programme. For example, an Attainment Advisor\(^1\) in each local authority provided supplementary support to schools, which enabled additional reinforcement for schools. This support may also include additional input to understand datasets (although in the case of areas B and C, this support was offered by Educational Psychologist) as well as advise on curriculum design.

\(^1\)Attainment Advisors are members of Education Scotland staff who provide support and challenge to local authorities and focus on issues of educational equity.
Lessons Learned

Both SIPP and NSEE have a strong focus on promoting school-level change with the support of the middle tier. Involving this middle tier as a key partner has maintained the impetus to move from individual-level classroom or school research activity to embedding the learning across and at times between local authority education systems.

This can particularly be seen in the NSEE examples, particularly the differences between areas A (individualist, school led) and B (hierarchical) and C (egalitarian). While the schools in area A were enthusiastic about using the approach to promote school improvement, we found there was little potential for knowledge mobilization across the wider system or to embed the approach further within schools. In areas B and C, the local authorities adopted the approach but offered optional participation to the schools. In having the local authority at the centre of delivery, it allowed for resources to be located, information shared and lessons learned informing wider educational planning and practice. In area D (fatalistic), while the programme was adopted enthusiastically by the local authority, it lacked the local buy-in of schools compared with Areas B and C. Instead, it mandated participation in the schools they felt would benefit from learning about evidence-based enquiry and collaboration. This led to a slower process, with some schools slower to engage as the benefits of participation were unclear. Here the ROC team had to overcome initial reticence among school staff and build relationships.

A key lesson was about the time it takes to build professional networks and the time it takes for these networks to function without support of key intermediaries. SIPP was a three-year programme, with the first year designed to develop professional relationships and the trust between practitioners to allow for open and honest discussions to take place and to build confidence and a baseline capability in terms of understanding and skills. NSEE also operated as a three-year programme of work, with the first year devoted to relationship building and initial testing out of different methods. Teachers are encouraged to start small and focus on their learning rather than of the outcomes of their collaborative work. The ROC team’s work is front-loaded, with a great deal of training and support offered in the first year. By the third year, the ROC team have a consultancy role, where the collaborations and enquiry projects are well defined, and can run with minimal input from external voices.

The training of teachers in research methodologies and evaluation was an empowering example of CPD. In an evaluation of SIPP, teachers described their increased confidence in being able to assess school-level data and using this to identify target groups, implement interventions and assess impact. They also suggested that as teachers’ knowledge of link between disadvantage and educational outcomes improved, so did their ability to adapt classroom activities and learning approaches to support all learners. In NSEE, teachers described examples of CAR projects developing from a one-classroom exercise to becoming an ethos embedded within the whole school. The sustainability of this approach can also be seen in accounts of teachers training new staff in how to develop enquiry
approaches to school improvement, ensuring the learning continues beyond the engagement of the NSEE team.

In addition to positively impacting on teachers’ professional learning and skills, the SIPP and NSEE programmes of work have demonstrated a positive impact on learner achievement, aspirations and outcomes, although there have been variations across the different partnerships (Chapman et al., 2016).

Discussion

This chapter detailed some of the more recent developments in Scottish education as they relate to distributed leadership and cross-school collaboration. Compared to other nations within the United Kingdom, this change has been relatively slow, with policymakers keen to lay a path that empowers schools to make decisions that impact their pupil needs but also maintains notions of social justice and equity at its core while rejecting notions of competition seen in other nations. In terms of the grid group theory, we can view Scotland as high cohesion, high regulation system, as a relatively hierarchical culture with bureaucratic educational organizations. In a sense, it is a relatively traditional education system where power and position tend to equate with decision-making power. However, this chapter has illuminated ways in which the role of the local authority blurs or complicates this characterization, especially as there is a considerable level of autonomy at local authority level to interpret national policy.

In doing so, this complication also offers nuance to the question posed by the book: how does wider policy context influence whether, and the extent to which, schools engage in meaningful collaborative activity. What we have seen is that nationally, there are simultaneous agendas towards empowerment and schools working in partnership to support improvement and use of data. On the other hand, we see local authorities working in different ways to interpret these agendas. By providing four examples of NSEE case study sites, we have highlighted the importance striking the balance right between local authorities driving the improvement agenda while involving schools and educational professionals in these conversations. Through these examples, we can see at both ends of the spectrum, there are few opportunities for sustainable collaborative engagement though we have signalled the potential for local authorities supporting an egalitarian culture, which we consider necessary to promote a self-improving educational system.

Systematic and deep-rooted school-to-school collaboration in Scotland is in its infancy and varies across the system. The speed to which schools are able to build their professional networks, even with the scaffolding provided by the ROC team, Education Scotland and attainment advisors, reflects the variations in experience and expertise in this way of working. While the ROC team has been central in developing the professional learning for teachers to begin to work collaboratively with one another, our role is front-loaded. This meant in the beginning stages we provided intensive support, and as the teachers grew in confidence and ability, the team withdrew and became more ‘arms-length’, allowing them to drive the agenda. Key in the development of the networks
was time, particularly time to build relationships and trust between stakeholders. This is particularly the case where individuals see collaboration as threatening their autonomy and where they were asked to invest resources (teacher time and expertise) for uncertain returns. This uncertainty as to the benefit of this approach meant that while the local authorities in all but one of our examples had ‘bought in’, we also had to ensure that all teachers saw the value and translatability of the approach.

Key to the SIPP and NSEE approaches was the inherent flexibility of the approach. We offer schools frameworks for change and a toolkit of methods they can utilize in creating small interventions focussed on improving aspects of their classroom with the aim to reduce the achievement gap. By offering flexible approach rather than a prescriptive model, we ensure that the participating teachers feel trusted and that their expertise was valued. We do not instruct them how to collaborate to improve practice and outcomes, but rather help to build their capacity to critically appraise data and undertake meaningful changes to their day-to-day practice. In this way, we empower teachers to use evidence and their professional judgement to make decisions about how to improve their classrooms and schools. However, as this chapter illustrates, local authorities (and other stakeholders) have a key role to play in creating the conditions to empower teachers. At best, they can facilitate and accelerate the process, and at worst, they can inhibit the process through power, control, and mandate. The Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change will continue to work to support the system to ensure that the former scenario prevails.

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