



Worshipful Company of Educators

Education Committee

Discussion Evening, Tuesday 20 February 2018, Anglia Ruskin University London Campus

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING WITHOUT LIMITS

Dame Alison Peacock

(Chief Executive, Chartered College of Teaching)

Although Dame Alison had originally intended to deliver a prepared presentation, she decided to adopt a more informal approach so that Educators and their guests could be fully engaged in a wide-ranging discussion about the current educational scene.

Alison started by showing a video clip of a very articulate five year old expressing clear views about the responsibilities of the Prime Minister in looking after less fortunate people. She pointed out that it was all too easy for teachers to become cynical and forget the capabilities of children. Learning should be without limits and teachers should not set a ceiling on children's learning and ambition. We should allow children to surprise us, set them challenges and keep the door open to opportunity. She went on to explain that she had developed her ideas about learning when she was appointed the headteacher of a Hertfordshire primary school that had been in Special Measures for three years. Within ten months the school was removed from the category. When she first went to the failing school she had asked the teachers *why* the school was failing. From that early analysis she was able to identify exactly what needed to be done to enable the school to improve and to create a culture of learning without limit. She noted that it was vitally important to get the input right, then output would follow. In the next three Ofsted inspections the school was rated as Outstanding. At the school Alison developed '*Learning without Limits*',¹ a creative and inclusive approach to school improvement which has attracted worldwide interest and frequent international visitors to the school.

The principles which she developed while at the school she has applied in her role as Chief Executive of the Chartered College of Teaching, notably for leadership:

- Inclusive culture – trust, partnership, listening
- Pedagogy that 'finds a way through' for everyone
- Offering an inclusive curriculum
- Engaging in a dialogue that informs future learning
- Empowering teachers' agency through professional learning

¹ See for example: Swann, Peacock, Hart and Drummond (2012) *Creating learning without limits*. Maidenhead; McGraw-Hill/Open University Press; and Peacock, Alison (2016) *Assessment for Learning without limits*. London; McGraw-Hill/Open University Press

Currently, there is a culture of blame in schools and headteachers have become like football managers waiting for the next set of results. There is a need for research-based approach to pedagogy. One of the tasks she was given when she arrived at the Chartered College was to establish a peer-reviewed journal and the forthcoming edition is devoted to research on pedagogy². There is a need for class teachers to be scholars but this is not currently available to all teachers. The College is offering Chartered Teacher status following detailed assessment to those teachers who want to progress further. Teachers want to be involved in researching the realities of pedagogy and life in classrooms and the College is offering those opportunities. There is clear evidence that teachers want to co-operate and work together. That there are already over 10,000 members of the College is testament to this.

Part of the vision of the Chartered College is that it should be an authoritative voice on pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and leadership.

Alison also considered that there was a pressing need to raise the status of teachers who needed to be perceived as experts in their own fields. Teachers are highly regarded in the community but too often talk themselves down. Good teachers are highly skilled in connecting with people.

The Chartered College of Teaching³ aims to be ‘The professional body for the teaching profession – dedicated to helping teachers to be the best they can’. Teachers are encouraged to join

- To be informed
- To be connected
- To be recognised
- To be inspired
- To be an agent of change

Members are offered a regular journal, *Impact*, the opportunity to achieve Chartered Teacher status, extensive access to research, networks, events and evidence informed teaching toolkits.

Alison then led a wide-ranging discussion. In answering questions about the membership of the College she emphasised that teachers joined as individuals and not as the collective staff of a school, although some form of group membership might be a feature in the future. The aim was to ensure that membership was highly sought after. One questioner wanted to know if there were an ideal footprint for teaching and whether the College was primarily for those working in primary or secondary schools. Alison explained that currently the College covers those who teach in the 0-19 age range but other interested professionals can join as affiliate professionals. The College is keen to share ideas and collaborate and the further education sector is very much part of that.

There was another question about whether the College will have opinions. The College was in the process of building towards being a membership body which can reflect members’ views based on research evidence. Once the College is financially independent it could offer views based on evidence, for example how policy might affect pedagogy.

A member of the audience raised the question of the role of the Department for Education. Alison explained that the DfE supported the view of the College as a forum for professional debate. The

² Impact (Journal of the Chartered College of Teaching) Issue 2, Spring 2018: The science of learning – classroom insights from neuroscience and cognitive psychology

³ <https://chartered.college>

College was working with other professional bodies to ensure that member elections were fair, transparent and not characteristic of any particular ideology.

There was a query about the incentive for a teacher to gain Chartered Teacher status. Alison stated that teachers are saying that they want professional recognition and status. That became clear when the route to Chartered Teacher status was first offered and was immediately oversubscribed. It was clear that the profession is ready for this. There was a definite need to showcase what schools and teachers do well: 'We're not good at this', commented Alison. There has been a negative narrative about schools and teachers in recent years.

A comment was made that there are teachers who are passionately committed to research-based curriculum design and pedagogy. Alison responded that while this was acknowledged there was still a need for teachers to earn professional status.

The Master noted that the Worshipful Company of Educators had been started, and why she had joined, to ensure that teaching was seen to be amongst the best professions and trades. There were others in the room who had joined the Company for the same reason. Both the College and the Company were concerned to raise the status of teaching and teachers.

There would be no upper limit to membership of the College or the numbers achieving Chartered Teacher status. The process of achieving Chartered Teacher status must be demanding and rigorous and seen to be so. Alison remarked that education and teaching need to be increasingly valued. The College would work if people wanted it to do so.

A comment was made that education was a cradle-to-the-grave process and that the College should reflect that. Trust was an important leadership principle which should be recognised as part of human endeavour. Alison acknowledged that respect and trust have to be earned at all levels and that there was no quick fix.

The role of the College in recruiting beginning teachers was raised. The College was connecting with students as they started their training and free membership was offered. This helped to promote a sense of an educational community and a pride in the teaching profession. We should make people proud to be teachers.

Alison was asked whether there was a risk that teachers would enter the profession to gain particular skills and then leave for other jobs. She thought that it should be possible to pause a teaching career and flexible working for teachers should be developed. There was a need for a changing professional culture so that the door could be kept open for these opportunities. She also noted that there were opportunities for retired people to become involved in schools and they were often able to share valuable knowledge and life experiences.

Were Chartered Teachers, asked one questioner, the top 5% of teachers and how did the designation relate to the Teacher Standards. Alison described the process and assessment model for achieving Chartered Teachers status which also included the use of mentors as well as assessors. The process involved a sustained high quality of professional learning which had to be related to individual teaching contexts and she emphasised that the current process was at a pilot stage. Responding to a further comment, Alison stated that teachers and schools needed to have the professional courage to speak out based on expertise and research evidence.

An audience member who had considerable experience of running a senior scientific body asked whether the College had a relationship with professional science and technology bodies, many of which had sub groups for teachers. Alison confirmed that the science community understands that

science teachers need to bring other teachers with them and that there are considerable benefits to be gained. The latest edition of the College's journal *Impact* on the science of learning had been sponsored by The Wellcome which had recognised this connection. The College was also working with a range of learned societies to develop links and to explore ways of working together.

One of the Educators present had attended a recent Chartered College event and had found it inspiring. He spoke of the need for the College to promote the credibility of teachers and teaching. Alison was very pleased to hear this positive view of the conference and went on to speak of the children and young people who were at the heart of teaching and how this energised the aims and mission of the Chartered College.

Martyn Coles (Middle Warden) thanked Dame Alison for an inspiring and authoritative presentation. Her passion for education and teaching shone through and was evident in her leadership of the Chartered College. Many of the aims of the College and the Company were similar and there was the potential for the organisations to collaborate in the future. The applause of those present demonstrated the audience's appreciation of the talk and endorsed the Middle Warden's sentiments.