

# Exploring the Potential of 'Bromance' to Promote Teacher Learning and Change

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# Mapping out the session

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## Teacher learning

Teaching and teacher learning are **cultural activities**. Some people think that teaching is an innate skill, something you are born with. Others think that teachers learn to teach by enrolling in college teacher-training programmes. We believe that neither is the best description. Teaching, like other cultural activities, is learned through **informal participation** over long periods of time. It is something that one learns to do more by **growing up in a culture** than by studying it formally (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, p. 86).

## Teacher change

- We're referring to change that is much deeper than the 'growth' that is normally associated with established teachers (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).
- We're referring to what Golding (2017) terms 'deep change', not the growth that derives, almost naturally, from teachers' extended experiences in schools.
- It is change that transforms both beliefs and practices.

# Teacher learning and change



**CHANGE IS  
THE END  
RESULT OF  
ALL TRUE  
LEARNING**

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Does learning necessarily lead to change?  
What is required for change to happen?  
Can there be change in practices without  
change in beliefs? Can change come to a  
stall? Can change be reversed?

**The relationship  
between  
teacher learning  
and change**

# Bromance: what is it?



- ‘Bromance’ derives from the blending of two words: ‘bro’ (brother) and ‘romance’.
- Bromance describes male homosocial intimacy with emotional and affectionate but not sexual connotations (Chen, 2012).
- The **homosocial man** likes to get away from the ladies to spend some time with his mates. They can often be found chatting and drinking in pubs and clubs, or binge watching sports.

## An intriguing story

**Storyline:** An experienced and traditional mathematics teacher begins to question and eventually to change his beliefs and practices after he starts collaborating and developing a deep friendship with the newly arrived Head of the Mathematics Department at school.

**Aim of study:** To explore the potential of bromance to promote teacher learning and change.

## Willingness to explore and understand



# The aim of the study

# Introducing John



- A mathematics teacher in his mid-40s.
- Spent one year as a 'supply' teacher before doing his initial teacher education (ITE).
- Graduated from a 4-year BEd (Hons) degree programme with specialization in mathematics education.
- Has taught mathematics at secondary school level (11-16 year olds) for over 20 years.
- Except for his first year, he has been teaching in the same school since he finished his ITE.
- Describes himself as someone with an innate inclination to seek change and improvement.
- Open to initiatives that, in his view, help to improve the teaching of mathematics and students' school experience in general.

**His story might look rather ordinary and consequently of no special interest. For us, however, John represents a very interesting case that offers varied opportunities for professional reflection leading to important insights into teacher learning and change.**

# The study



- Researchers and John knew each other well.
- Adopted narrative research.
- Met John at school to discuss ‘study’.
- Co-constructed a narrative with John through online conversations using Messenger, the instant messaging service of Facebook.
- In total, we amassed eight hours of chatting spread across six sessions over a five-week period.
- This online activity produced a 9,000 word narrative crafted from a carefully edited version, negotiated with John.
- Thematic analysis.



# John before Paul

- Viewed transmission approach to teaching as ‘normality’.
- ITE did not ‘change’ him (except: use of resources and technology).

<b>Before ITE</b>	<b>After ITE</b>
<i>I used to teach in a very traditional manner by writing on the board many examples and the students would copy ... then they would do classwork and after that I'll give them homework.</i>	<i>My teaching was traditional. I used to teach by first presenting students with examples, after that students would work on their own, and then I would give them homework.</i>

- Viewed teaching a simple technical activity.
- Lived an isolated professional existence.
- Considered professional development as something that teachers acquire as they ‘experiment’ on their own.
- Lived a tranquil and passive professional life.

# John and Paul

- John perceives Paul as his 'spark' towards change and improvement.
- Paul offers John a completely new 'vision' on teaching.
- They gradually build a trusting relationship (personal and professional).
- A collaborative environment develops within mathematics department.
- They and other colleagues collaborate on projects – international (PRIMAS) and within school (co-teaching; formative assessment).
- Occasions when collaboration involves just John and Paul.
- John gradually changes his beliefs and practices and becomes a promoter of inquiry-based learning.
- John and Paul share good practices and lead CPD sessions on a national level.
- Essentially, John feels reborn as a teacher and looks forward to further collaboration with Paul.

# John after Paul

- Paul changes career path and leaves school.
- John feels abandoned and a sense of mourning engulfs him.
- Thinks that no new Head of Department can ever be as good as Paul.
- Claims that collegiality and collaboration have ceased within his department (?).
- Expresses fear of going back to what he was before Paul's arrival.
- Interest in professional learning and momentum towards change decline.
- Steps back from leading CPD activities, both inside and outside school.
- One ray of light: Speaks enthusiastically about the possibility of a Lesson Study project that he and Paul were planning to do together in the future.

*I'm still in shock! I felt so down when he left ... I was truly devastated! I really miss him as there was this great bond between us! I continue to feel this big void in my life at school because we used to do so many things together. Just imagine what other things we could have done had he not left. Now I'm afraid that we'll fall back to the apathy we had before Paul came ... this thing scares me and really saddens me! I don't want to go back to how things were before Paul!*

John

# Linking bromance to professional learning

Both are, in our view, built on the notion of **camaraderie** (i.e., mutual trust and friendship among people who share a lot of time together). They are characterised by, for instance:

- a trusting relationship;
- ongoing interactions over a long period of time;
- support when and as needed;
- informal encounters in a variety of places and situations.



# Insights into teacher learning and change

Our case study suggests that:

- bromance can have an important positive impact on teacher learning and change;
- bromance, however, can also lead to dependence on 'another' and neglect of 'personal space' for professional development;
- the end of bromance can lead to psychological and emotional 'traumas' that in turn create 'barriers' to further professional growth.

# Conclusions

- Level of support needs to be well calibrated ... not too little, nor too much.
- Need to create balance between 'dependence' and 'independence' during professional interactions.
- Professional learning is both a 'social' and a 'personal' thing ... need to sustain both.

Unless the 'spark' leads to a strong, self-generating flame, darkness returns once the spark begins to fade.

# References

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