



TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION*

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Abstract. This national conference was arranged by the Ministry of Education to support the drive to modernise the education system as a whole. This paper is based on David Frost's presentation which explored the links between a transformative view of education, the nature of innovation and the need to develop teacher leadership. It is argued that, in transformative education, learning centres on the cultivation of capacities and dispositions. These are exemplified and illustrated. Key concepts such as agency, meta-learning, self-regulation and their link to citizenship are explained. The distinction is drawn between implementation and innovation as a process which is both long and arduous. It is argued that such a process of innovation demands learning at all levels (students, teachers, the school, the system), but teacher leadership is where the most potential lies. Stories of teacher leadership are used to illustrate what can be achieved and claims are made as to the benefits of teacher leadership. It is claimed that teacher leadership can mobilise teachers' capacity for leading change, improve quality in the system and build professional knowledge that teachers trust. The paper concludes by outlining the theory of teacher leadership promoted by the International Teacher Leadership project.

Key words: teacher leadership, educational innovation, citizenship, agency, meta-learning, self-regulation.

In many countries, there is tendency for teaching in schools to be based on the pre-eminence of subject teaching where the role of the teacher is to package, present and in some way, transmit domain specific knowledge. I want to argue that, although this approach has its place, it is nonetheless inadequate for the purposes of education in an ever-changing world. Rather, the challenge of learning for life, particularly in a society which seeks, through its education system, to create a transformative dynamic, is to focus on the development in young people of a suitable range of capacities and dispositions. Let me first clarify what I mean by a transformative view of education.

* *Note.* This article is based on a presentation I had been invited to make at the Conference on 'Innovation in pre-university education as an open system' in Belgrade on 29th November 2010.

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Transformative education

The purpose of education has been the subject of debate over many decades. For example it might be said that the point of education is to preserve and pass on the culture (Lawton, 1983); not the entire culture of course, but a selection based on ‘the best that has been thought and said’ as it was expressed by Matthew Arnold in the middle of the 19th century (Arnold, 1869). It has also been argued that education ought to be about the development of *mind* which requires a classification of the different forms of knowledge (Hirst, 1975). These distinctions are not entirely clear of course, but I want to argue here that, at the present time, we face enormous challenges that were not to the fore when the arguments I refer to above were being promoted. Now we struggle with fundamental questions of human survival, political upheaval and rapid technological advance. If we add to that the desire in Serbia to move closer to the centre of the European space, the need for a more explicitly transformative view of education becomes evident. I want to suggest that a transformative conceptualisation of education rests on four key concepts: citizenship, agency, self-regulation and meta-learning.

Citizenship. This is always going to be ‘a work in progress’ of course, but education is arguably the key to the pursuit of a sustainable, equitable and prosperous society in which all young people learn to take up their entitlements as citizens. This means being able to succeed as an employee or an entrepreneur; being able to relate to people and participate in society; being able to engage with the democratic process and to enjoy the benefit of being part of the various communities which go with our places of work, interests and where we live.

Agency. Having remained relatively hidden in social science texts for many years, this concept is increasingly finding its place in wider public discourse and inevitably takes on a variety of meanings. Agency is what distinguishes human beings from other life forms in that it is about the development of the power to make a difference in the world through intentional and purposeful action. I have written about agency and its relevance to learning and leadership elsewhere (Frost, 2006).

Self-regulation. Albert Bandura’s work has illuminated the human capacity for self-monitoring and to regulate our own emotional responses to challenges (e.g. Bandura, 1997). The key variable is how we deal, for example, with failure. In our inner conversation (Archer, 2003) we might tell ourselves that the lack of success can be explained by our inherent lack of ability or character. Alternatively we could explain our failure by telling ourselves that we used an unhelpful technique or behaviour (see Dweck,

2000). If we attribute failure to the wrong choice of strategy we are able to get our emotions under control and summon up the courage to try again, but if we attribute failure to a personal and immutable weakness, we are likely to descend into depression and ennui (Bandura, 1989). Almost any human endeavour depends on our self-efficacy beliefs which in turn rest on the capacity for reflection and self-regulation.

Meta-learning. This is increasingly taking the place of the term ‘meta-cognition’ to refer to the human capacity to reflect on how we learn and evaluate our actions as learners. In this way, we equip ourselves with the means to improve our learning capacity. Meta-cognition – thinking about thinking – has a more narrow focus whereas meta-learning enables us to focus on a much wider range of actions that play their part in learning. As Watkins put it:

I use the term ‘meta-learning’ to denote learning about learning. This is clearly a much wider set of considerations than just thinking, and encompasses learning about goals, strategies, feelings, effects and contexts of learning.

(Watkins, 2005: 39)

Learning how to learn is clearly related to the other three concepts outlined above in that becoming a citizen requires a strong sense of agency and the ability to regulate our own emotional responses.

Capacities and dispositions

There is of course too much knowledge in the world to allow for a feasible selection from what is known to equip young people for life, even if it were possible to transmit such a selection. What is arguably much more useful is to enable young people to develop the personal capacities that will enable them to respond to the challenges that lay before them. The concept of capacities may be compared to other similar categories including that of the key competences that are at the core of the Opening Minds curriculum put forward by the RSA in the UK. Their list of 5 key competences are: (1) citizenship, (2) learning, (3) managing information, (4) relating to people, (5) managing situations (RSA, 2010).

Similarly, there is considerable momentum behind the idea of ‘transversal competences’ and ‘key competences’ within the European Union’s sphere of influence and within OECD. According to the DeSeCo project, the PISA study is driven by a broad view of literacy which encompasses students’ capacity to analyse, reason and communicate in the context of prob-

lem-solving. In the DeSeCoprojects's definition of competence the rationale is clear and laudable.

Sustainable development and social cohesion depend critically on the competencies of all of our population – with competencies understood to cover knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.

(Rychen & Salganik, 2003)

It may seem churlish to complain about such rhetoric, but my difficulty with the concept of competence is the suspicion that it can lead to an assumption of the validity of a behaviourist approach where a specification of competence is related to a role definition and determined by someone other than the person who seeks to become competent. For me it is of paramount importance that the specification remains open; hence my preference for the language of 'personal capacity' rather than competences.

Inextricably linked to the concept of capacity is that of disposition which is essentially attitudinal and affective. It has been common within educational discourse to talk of motivation (e.g. Brophy, 1983; Dweck, 2000), but again this concept has its limitations. The main problem for me is the tendency to separate the task from the learner's willingness to engage with that task. Over many years the argument has tended to focus on the relative merits of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, but this does not enable us to penetrate the mysteries of the occurrence of learning. What that literature has clearly established is that there is a crucially important psychological dimension to our understanding of how learning occurs; emotional responses and self-belief are key features of this. Claxton's work has been very useful in that it has focused on the 'feelings of learning' such as 'excitement', 'fear' and 'anger' (Claxton, 1999). In his later work the emphasis is on disposition as the following extract illustrates.

Learning dispositions can be construed as default responses in the presence of uncertain learning opportunities and circumstances. Suppose that the idea of 'the effective learner' can be unpacked into a number of learning attributes: tendencies towards 'persisting', 'questioning', 'collaborating', and so on.

(Claxton & Carr, 2004: 88)

Meanwhile, in the US, members of the Harvard Project Zero team were working in particular on the idea of thinking dispositions (Perkins, Jay &

Tishman, 1993). In one important paper they use the idea of piano playing to illustrate the difference between capacity and disposition.

Can you play the piano? Do you play the piano? These are different questions, and your answer may well be ‘yes’ to the first and ‘no’ to the second. The first question asks about ability: If you sat down in front of a piano, could you play a tune? The second tacitly asks much more – it goes beyond ability and asks about inclination: Are you *disposed* to play the piano? Do you like to play? Do you play regularly?

(Tishman, Jay & Perkins, 1993: 1)

The most important point is that, although we may be able to command, persuade or entice human beings to engage in a task that we hope will lead to learning, we cannot actually make them learn. Therefore, if we want to enable young people to leave school with the attributes that will enable them to continue to learn, we need to focus on capacities and dispositions. This might be best illustrated by taking a few examples to see how capacities and dispositions are linked (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Capacity and dispositions

Capacity	Disposition
<i>For learning</i> Study skills, literacy, numeracy, meta-learning	<i>For learning</i> Courage, confidence, curiosity, self-belief in efficacy
<i>For problem solving</i> Analytical thinking, domain specific procedures	<i>For problem solving</i> Courage, confidence, curiosity, self-belief in efficacy, willingness to accept difference
<i>For taking responsibility</i> Leadership, planning skills	<i>For taking responsibility</i> Courage, confidence, curiosity, self-belief in efficacy, willingness to accept difference and a sense of moral purpose
<i>For collaborating across boundaries</i> Communication skills, empathy	<i>For collaborating across boundaries</i> Courage, confidence, curiosity, self-belief in efficacy, willingness to accept difference, a sense of moral purpose and tolerance

Clearly this list of examples could be extended. The details included in each box are not intended as anything more than illustrative; what is more important perhaps is: (a) the broad distinction between capacities and dispositions and (b) the idea that dispositions are not specific to particular tasks, roles or capacities. A concrete example could be used to illustrate. Supposing that I climb the ladder into the loft of my house to look for something and discover a swarm of large insects that I have never encountered before. I may be surprised and a little fearful. Will I get stung? Are they damaging the fabric of the house? It might be helpful if I was a professor of entomology and knew the names and characteristics of all flying insects but an average person should be able to deal with the situation if they have problem solving skills and the ability to use the internet to identify the creatures and locate experts who can be called upon to exterminate them. More importantly is the confidence that comes with self-belief in the ability to solve problems and the resilience to persist in the face of the unknown.

I want now to highlight the moral dimension which has so far been absent from this discussion. In the table above ‘a sense of moral purpose’ is included in the dispositions column in relation to the challenges of ‘taking responsibility’ and ‘collaborating across boundaries’. Skill, competence, capability and capacity do not necessarily lead to actions that are morally sound. A frequently cited illustration of the role of moral choice in human action is the matter of driving a car from A to B without colliding with other cars, cyclists or pedestrians. Of course it takes skill to handle the car and knowledge of the rules of the road, but over and above all that, it requires a moral commitment to avoid doing harm to others. It is this disposition in particular that has to be cultivated if we are to rely on successive generations of young people to continue to transform, through the way they live out their citizenship, a society which is fair and just. To summarise so far: I am arguing that transformative education recognises the importance of human agency, self-regulation and meta-learning in the development of young people as citizens. This implies a commitment to the cultivation of the sort of capacities and dispositions illustrated above.

The process of innovation

If it is true that in Serbia, the subject focused, transmission model of education is currently dominant, and if there is a desire to move towards a more transformative model, it has to be recognised that the journey will be a long and arduous one. There are no quick fixes here. The journey will inevitably involve a process of relentless and skilful innovation. I want to emphasise

that this must be seen as a process rather than something that already exists and can be adopted or implemented. In his pamphlet about innovation for a large network of schools in the UK (the Specialist Schools and Academics Trust) David Hargreaves provided this definition:

The simplest definition of innovation for professionals in the education service is: ‘doing things differently in order to do them better’.

(Hargreaves, 2008)

This sounds straightforward enough, but might be interpreted as meaning that innovation is simply about exchanging one practice for another. In my view this would be unhelpful in that it fails to recognise the nature of educational change. I want therefore to make a clear distinction between the concept of implementation and that of innovation as a process. In Figure 2 (below) I compare some of the defining characteristics of each concept.

Figure 2: Comparing implementation and innovation

Implementation	Innovation as a process
Design at the centre	Distributed design
Behavioural specifications	Proposed principles
Hierarchical accountability	Professional accountability
Training is the mode of transfer	Practitioner-led, enquiry-based development is the mode of transfer

From a policy maker’s perspective, implementation seems a more attractive option in that it can be specified in advance and would seem to be a greater degree of control from the centre which is especially important where public money is being spent. The important question has to remain however: what is most likely to have a transformative effect in the long run? I want now to present a number of reasons as to why the concept of *innovation as a process* is preferable to that of *implementation*.

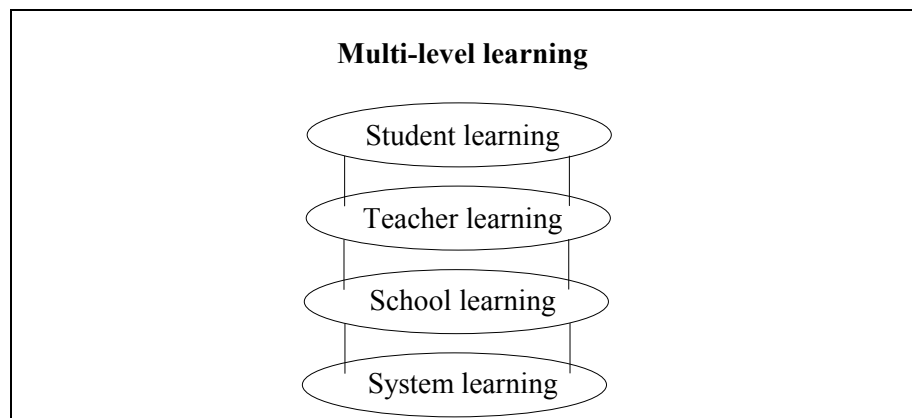
First, professional knowledge is ‘sticky knowledge’ (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) which is to say that it cannot simply be transmitted from one mind to another or from one school to another. There will be cultural obstacles which demand adaptation to local circumstances. There will be a need for practitioners to embrace the new practice and to reconstruct it in order to feel a sense of ownership. Related to this is the idea that educational change, and perhaps this applies to any professional context, has depth (Fullan, 1993). On the surface we might assume that it is about creating and distributing new materials – a textbook say – but these materials may demand a new

way of working and so the next layer down has to be concerned with enhanced skills and techniques. This will require a process of professional learning of course, but if this is merely technical and if the medium is ‘training’, the new practice may fail to become embedded because the underlying values remain unchanged. So, underpinning the distribution of new material and the training in new techniques is the matter of values. If practitioners are not challenged at the level of values, the practice may be adopted in tokenistic way without any real change taking place.

Let me illustrate the above with an example. This is where there is a desire to implement a new practice in classrooms as part of a drive towards more effective assessment practices. This is influenced by research which says that students can only understand assessment feedback if they are aware of the learning objectives of units of curriculum. At the first layer a team working for a government agency produces a booklet which specifies the learning objectives of every unit of work in each subject. Teachers are given the booklet, but the problem is that they have no tradition of making learning objectives explicit in their classrooms. They therefore tend to use these statements simply to guide their marking of students’ work. So the government agency then sets aside a large budget to run training courses for teachers where they are told that the learning objectives have to be communicated to students at the beginning of each lesson. Subsequently, school inspectors observe that teachers begin each lesson by telling the students to copy into their notebooks the learning objectives that the teacher has written with chalk on a blackboard. The inspector asks students questions like: ‘what are you trying to learn today?’ and they tend to get answers of the sort: ‘We are doing The Pyramids’ or ‘We are doing verbs’. The change in practice has not penetrated the value system at work in this classroom. Authentic and deep change will require learning on the part of the teachers which is also authentic and deep.

The challenge of innovation requires what can be represented as ‘multi-level learning’. The wedding cake metaphor in Figure 3 below. This diagram is used to try to convey the idea that innovation requires learning at all levels – that of students, teachers, the school as an organisation and the educational system within which that school operates. However a key component in the diagram is the connection between the layers. The little sticks that link one level to the next represent ‘leadership’.

Figure 3: Multilevel learning

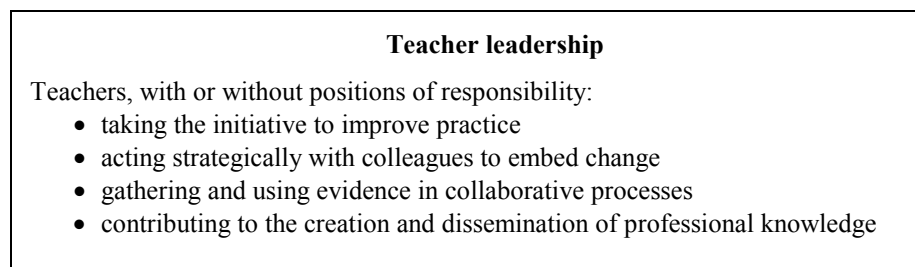


There is a broad consensus amongst scholars of leadership that it can be defined as exerting influence in particular directions (Yukl, 1994). I think it is helpful to unpack this as having three essential components: first the clarification and expression of values, second the expression of a vision or, in other words, the imagining a more desirable state of affairs, and third, strategic action to initiate change. Defining leadership in this way makes it an inclusive concept, that is to say that leadership can be seen to be a human capacity that can be exercised by anyone. In the context of education, this could mean students, teachers, school principals, parents and so on. In his opening address to the conference referred to at the beginning of this article, President Tadic said that it is necessary to mobilise everyone to support innovation. This is very true. However, I think that teachers have a special role to play and one which has been neglected hitherto. I would go so far as to say that teacher leadership is in fact a sleeping giant that we must waken without delay. This way of expressing the opportunity was used by the authors of a book about teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2003) as a way to capture the idea that there is a massive untapped potential here that, once mobilised, has the power to transform our education systems.

The idea of teacher leadership is often associated with that of 'distributed leadership' (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2006), but in any case, the way it is conceptualised varies around the world. For some it is about giving some teachers special roles and responsibilities perhaps attached to increases in salary and linked to a career ladder. This view of distributed leadership is one that is reflected for example in the OCED report called 'Improving School Leadership' which encourages distributing leadership (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008), but I am concerned that the way it is

expressed in that report will encourage the replication of a structural approach which can lead to a sharing of the burden of administration through the creation of ‘middle management’ without necessarily enhancing anyone’s capacity for leadership. This approach misses the opportunity to mobilise the leadership that all teachers can exercise regardless of special roles and responsibilities. In the HertsCam Network in the UK we have worked for some time with a more inclusive definition represented in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Defining teacher leadership



This view of teacher leadership has now been adopted by the International Teacher Leadership (ITL) project, a research and development project initiated and led by David Frost at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education with the help of a team of practitioner researchers from the HertsCam Network. In the ITL project, members of the team develop practical programmes of support for teachers who wish to develop their leadership capacity; they then evaluate these programmes in action. There are now more than 50 team members including academics, officers in NGOs, government employees and advisers and practitioners who operate the project in 17 sites in 15 countries. Although there are branches of the project in locations as diverse as New Zealand and Portugal, there is a preponderance of sites in the South East European region which is attributable to the involvement of the Open Society Institute Education Support Programme which sponsors the project. The aims of this project are probably best communicated by illustrative examples. The example below is drawn from Zagreb in Croatia. Ana is a teacher in a grammar school who belonged to a teacher leadership group which met at the school and was facilitated by Ljubica Petrovic, a founder member of a small NGO in Zagreb - EduConnect.

Figure 5: A vignette, teacher in Zagreb

Improving relationships in a secondary school in Zagreb

Ana teaches in a grammar school in Zagreb and she belongs to a teacher leadership group. She was concerned that bullying was undermining some students' enthusiasm for going to school. She talked to her students about this and gave them a questionnaire so they could make anonymous comments about the problem. She assumed that the students would give her examples of student-to-student bullying, but there were many more examples of teacher-to-student bullying. Students felt valued because they were asked for their opinion on such an important topic. Ana gave a questionnaire to her colleagues and found that they thought that there were no instances of bullying although some felt that they had been bullied by their students. Ana then talked with a school psychologist who understood the concern. They decided to draft a code of ethics to govern relationships between teachers and students, and between students and students. They explored ways to consult both their colleagues and students about the drafting of this document. They plan to present the final draft to the next school meeting in December and to lead a discussion about the way forward.

The process that Ana initiated and managed is ongoing. It has already resulted in changes in the quality of relationships between students and their teachers and between students and their peers. More importantly perhaps is the way it has contributed to a culture of enquiry and self-evaluation.

Ana was one of 13 teachers who came together in October 2010 to present accounts of their projects at a network event with an invited audience of around 80 people. The event was held at the grammar school and the school principal said a few words of encouragement. I also gave a brief address to celebrate the teachers' achievements and make the links to the growing international network. The presenters were drawn from two school-based teacher leadership groups, one led by Ljubica Petrovic and the other led by Vlasta Vizek and Iris Marusich from the Social Research Institute in Zagreb. At their event they were joined by 5 teachers from the HertsCam Network in the UK who participated by presenting their stories and listening to the Croatian teachers' presentations. The dialogue that flowed from this was illustrative of the way teachers can build professional knowledge together, sharing and offering a critical perspective. Ana is just one of approximately 300 teachers who had been supported by the teacher leadership programmes affiliated to the ITL project in the academic year 2009/2010. During that year, a third of the participating sites had begun their programmes. In the current academic year, all 17 sites, including Serbia, are actively supporting teach-

hers, so we expect that number to be closer to 1.000 this year. This is still be a very small number, but the ITL project will publish accounts of what these teachers have achieved and accounts of how they were supported; we are therefore confident that the experiment will turn into a major reform movement.

An emerging theory

The claims that we feel able to make at the moment may seem precocious. Nevertheless, we have good evidence from experience in the HertsCam Network over many years and from the first year of experience in several other countries to be able to identify some clear benefits for teacher leadership as a strategy to support innovation.

- Teacher leadership can mobilise teachers' capacity for leading change. It can release their energy, ingenuity and moral commitment to improving the effectiveness of their practice and practice in their schools more widely.

- Teacher leadership can improve quality in the system by enhancing professionalism. This includes the capacity for self-evaluation and professional accountability.

- Teacher leadership can build professional knowledge that teachers will trust because it is derived from tried and tested practices related to actual and familiar contexts.

Those who are more accustomed to a more scientific approach to research may want to wait for harder evidence to emerge, but in the ITL project we are both researchers and practitioners and feel able to proceed to action on the basis of a reasonable hypothesis. Our experience so far leads us to believe that teachers – not special or extraordinary teachers, just teachers – can:

- lead processes of innovation or development effectively
- build professional knowledge that is both valid and trusted
- develop their leadership capacity
- influence practice in their schools

However, we do not believe that teachers can do these things without supportive structures and strategies. What do these supportive structures and strategies look like? First and foremost, teacher leadership requires well-designed programmes of support for reflection, planning and sharing of experience. Second, teacher leadership flourishes within professional cultures which encourage innovation and distributed leadership. Third, in order to

build credible and valid professional knowledge teachers require opportunities for networking beyond their immediate school contexts.

The creation of the conditions which allow teacher leadership to flourish is a significant challenge for policy makers and school principals. Policy makers can make funding available so that programmes of support for teacher leadership can be created. School principals need to develop their schools as learning communities in which leadership is distributed and teachers feel able to innovate, collaborate and articulate their professional concerns. Educational systems must create the space within which teachers can engage in networking and knowledge building.

The future of the International Teacher Leadership project

Currently the project has an international team of over 50 activists. It is providing support for over 1000 teachers in over 100 schools in 15 countries. It is generating evidence of what can be done and how it can be done. It is doing this on a small budget provided largely by the Open Society Institute but with some financial support from the universities, NGOs and government agencies involved. We are actively exploring the possibility of funding from the EU and other sources. However, in the long term, it is envisaged that the project will establish ways of supporting teacher leadership that become embedded in the systems of the participating countries. We hope that this project will make a significant contribution to the development of teachers' professionalism and to educational reform in Serbia and in all the participating countries. It is envisaged that the ITL project will also leave a legacy of sustainable networks that will continue to support teacher and school development, but will also provide opportunities for students to learn from each other across national and cultural boundaries.

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