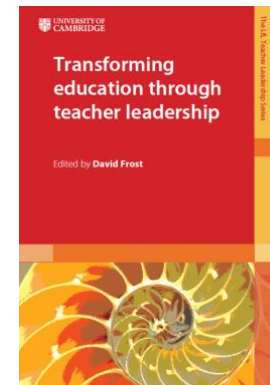# Chapter 18
A teacher leadership summit at Fruška Gora, Serbia Gordana Miljević , Clare Herbert and Sheila Ball

This text is Chapter 18 of 'Transforming Education through Teacher Leadership', a book edited by David Frost and published by LfL, Cambridge in October 2014.

Editor's introduction

In the early stages of the work documented in this book, some doubted that the concept of non- positional teacher leadership could travel. After all, the salient messages from so many sources tend to reiterate the same old assumptions from the Weberian perspective on organisations. This chapter surely shows that the way to transcend the limitations of outworn bureaucracy is to cultivate moral purpose by offering teachers a way to learn how to exercise leadership. Not only does the chapter affirm the viability of the approach, it also illustrates how the common experiences of teaching and leading change can enable people to network across national boundaries. In this account we see the joy that teachers can feel when they join with other teachers to talk about their common values and goals. The entrenched ethnic divides simply melt away. The story reveals that music, food and socialising played a significant part in building this sense of community but the real meat of the account is the crucial insight into how teachers can act as critical friends to each other in their pursuit of educational transformation. We see also a glimpse into the kind of processes through which teachers transcend their local circumstances and come to construct their identities as international.

Key lessons about teacher leadership

- The idea of non-positional teacher leadership is viable in a wide range of different cultural and political contexts.

- International networking can inspire teachers to expand their conceptions of their own professionality.

In May 2013 there was an extraordinary gathering of teachers, facilitators and researchers at a hotel on top of a mountain in the Vojvodina province of Serbia. The event was organised by the Centre for Education Policy (CEP) in Belgrade with financial support from the Open Society Foundation (OSF) in New York. Participants had come from various parts of Serbia and from other countries in the Balkans including Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Romania. There were also delegates from Portugal and the UK.

Participants spent a weekend nestled in the spectacular location of Fruška Gora, situated 20 kilometres from the city of Novi Sad (http://www.novisad.rs/eng). This exciting event was a key milestone in the International Teacher Leadership (ITL) initiative which many countries in the Western Balkans had joined in 2009 at a conference hosted by Gordana Miljević in Belgrade. ITL eventually involved a total of fourteen countries and with the support of OSF, facilitators and researchers from these countries had taken part in conferences in Mavrovo, Macedonia, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria and in Cambridge, UK. However, this event in Fruška Gora was a real breakthrough because, as well as a project team meeting, it also entailed a network event for teachers. This account touches on each of these dimensions.

Background to the ITL initiative

Back in 2008, representatives from a number of European countries participated in an initial exploratory meeting in Cambridge. This meeting was also attended by a representative from OSF in Belgrade – Gordana Miljević - who saw the potential in the HertsCam model to contribute to the realisation of that organisation's goals; these included the development of democratic civil society and inclusive educational practices. The group recognised the hazards of 'policy borrowing' (Phillips and Ochs, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004), that practice cannot be simply transferred to different cultural contexts. However, it was clear that the essential elements of the teacher leadership support programme, and the principles underlying it, developed in the HertsCam Network could be useful in different cultural environments.

Subsequently Gordana contacted trusted colleagues in countries across South Eastern Europe and invited them to a conference in Belgrade where members of the HertsCam Tutor Team presented an outline of non-positional teacher leadership. That was a very positive meeting which led to the formation of an international team of facilitators who would take the ITL initiative forward and establish programmes of support for teacher leadership in their countries. Some of those who met in Belgrade were academics: for example Jelena Vranješević, from the University of Belgrade and Petya Kabakchieva, a sociologist at Sofia University in Bulgaria. Some participants such as Viorica Postica from Chișinău in the Republic of Moldova had multiple identities; she was both a professor at the university and the director of a non- governmental organisation (NGO) called Pro Didactica. A much larger proportion of the participants worked in NGOs on a range of social actions, a few were from government agencies and two from Montenegro were practicing 'Pedagogues' based in primary schools. Regardless of their position and background, all were enthusiastic about developing support for teacher leadership and subsequently went on to establish successful programmes.

Two years later, the report of the ITL project (Frost, 2011) made the claim that non-positional teacher leadership has a significant contribution to make, not only to the development of teachers' practice, but to educational reform more widely by building professional knowledge from the ground up. Drawing from the large scale, collaborative action research process outlined at the ITL meeting in Belgrade in 2009, the report concluded with this statement:

> International partners have all expressed surprise and delight at what teachers have achieved and the extent to which the benefits of teacher leadership have been recognised and appreciated by school principals and policy makers in many of the participating countries (Frost, 2011: 57).

The report put forward evidence to support the claim that teachers in different cultural settings and education systems can exercise leadership and influence practice in their schools provided that they have the right kind of support.

We now give an account of the two dimensions of the event: the ITL team meeting and the teachers' network event.

Dimension 1: the ITL initiative team meeting

The gathering in Fruška Gora provided a rare opportunity for members of the international team of facilitators to come together to share their experiences and reflect on the impact of the teachers' projects. There were representatives from nine out of the fourteen countries which had taken part in the ITL initiative. At the outset we clarified our aims, which were to share our experience, review our practice as facilitators of teacher leadership and help each other to work out how to take the initiative to the next level. We would also try to create a vision of how we might extend the network and build the research dimension of our work.

As was usually the case with these international team meetings, David Frost and his team from HertsCam were asked to provide a framework for discussion. Consequently, all team members were asked to prepare an account of their teacher leadership programmes using these categories:

Support programmes
What groups? Who were the participants? Who facilitates the groups? Venue for group meetings. Resourcing / finance. Issues with the programme.

Tools
What has been translated / adapted from the HertsCam toolkit? Creation of new tools. Issues with the design or use of tools.

Teachers' projects
Type of project focus. Led by individuals or teams? Scope of influence / impact. Extent and type of changes brought about.

Knowledge-building
Sharing of stories of teachers' projects. Extent of networking beyond their school. Publication of teachers' stories on websites, in newsletters etc.

Evaluation
Methods of evaluation of the programme. Evidence of the benefits of teacher leadership. Issues arising from evaluation.

We were a large group that included in some cases three or four delegates from one country, so we formed small groups to enable all team members to share accounts of their programmes and provide each other with critical friendship. In a plenary session we identified some of the dominant themes and issues including the question of funding, the extent to which the capacity to facilitate teacher leadership has been built, certification and the role of school principals.

The funding issue: In the UK the programme is funded by schools which have control over budgets to support professional development and school improvement. In some countries partners have access to funds provided by donors; Macedonia and Bosnia & Herzegovina have been fortunate in this respect. In Serbia, linking to the EU funded APREME project had helped to achieve momentum. Although teacher leadership groups may be able to thrive without funding, it was agreed that a small amount of money would enable the vital element of networking. It costs money to hire a suitable venue and to provide for teachers' travel, catering and overnight accommodation.

The capacity building issue: Most people reported that amongst the first cohort of teachers to go through the programme, there will be some who can learn how to facilitate further groups. In Macedonia the funding they have access to enabled the team to train a wide range of people to become facilitators. It was recognised that for teacher leadership to flourish in the future we would all need to build tutor teams consisting of experienced people who have the know-how to facilitate.

The certification issue: HertsCam had recently taken the decision to abandon certification by the University of Cambridge and establish its own 'Certificate in Teacher Leadership'. Strategies had been adopted to ensure rigour and a consistently high standard in the future. In most cases international team members were able to report that they had established certification, which was recognised by local Ministries of Education and carried credits within national professional development systems. A concern was raised about whether accrediting bodies would try to impose control over the programme which might distort our aims. It was

proposed that we should try to explore the possibility of linking up our different forms of certification to establish a common or collaborative approach.

The role of the school principal issue: This issue has been discussed in the ITL team on many occasions. Some partners were able to say that their programmes had the full support and active involvement of school principals. In some cases, there was a lack of understanding of how to cultivate dynamic professional cultures. It was pointed out by Gordana Miljević , that school principals increasingly find themselves in rivalrous positions and so having a teacher leadership programme could be presented as an advantage to ambitious principals.

Preparing for the network event

The final section of the first team meeting was dedicated to preparing for the teachers' network event, which would begin the next day. The teachers would be making presentations about the projects they had led and, as facilitators, we would want to observe and reflect on the impact of these projects. We discussed the tool below, which drew from the categories arising from research into the question of how teacher leaders think about the impact of their development work (Frost and Durrant, 2002).

Impact

The focus of the development work - What was the concern? Why was this an important issue?

The context of the development work - What kind of school context? What kind of professional culture? What kind of leadership structure? What circumstances in the country or locality?

The process of the development work - How was the project led? Who supported it? Who participated? What were the obstacles?

Impact on the teacher's classroom practice - Innovations? What new techniques or strategies?

Impact on their colleagues' practice - Which and how many colleagues? What improvements had been adopted by colleagues?

Impact on the teacher's identity/capacity - Any improvements in confidence, professionalism etc? Have they broadened their scope or role? Any development of new skills?

Impact on colleague's identity/capacity - Any improvements in confidence, professionalism etc.? Have they broadened their scope or role? Any development of new skills?

Impact on students' learning - Which students? Any evidence of improved attainment? Any evidence of improved knowledge or skills? In what curriculum areas?

Impact on students' disposition - More positive attitudes to school or particular subjects? Any improvements in motivation, confidence and self-esteem? Any improvements in behaviour?

Impact on students' learning capacity - Any improvements in students' self-awareness as learners or capacity to reflect on and evaluate their own learning?

Impact on the school as an organisation - Enhanced collaboration between teachers? New or improved structures or procedures? Changes to the professional culture? Improved capacity for innovation?

Impact beyond the school - Any participating in networking? Any contribution to advocacy? Any publications? Any engagement with the community?

It was agreed that members of the ITL team would use a standard *pro forma* to record their observations in the teacher-led workshops to follow in the next part of the event.

Dimension 2: the teachers' network event

The network event provided opportunities for teachers to share their projects and explore their experiences of exercising teacher leadership. Almost 100 teachers travelled from countries that included Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and the UK. The purpose of the network event was to build professional knowledge about teaching and learning. By sharing their experience and building knowledge together, we hoped that the teachers would develop collaborative links across national boundaries and come to see themselves as belonging to an international professional community. The structure of the event was very recognisable to those from HertsCam where all these elements are part of routine practice (see Chapter 13). Participants shared knowledge of their innovations and development work in a variety of different ways. Through a poster gallery and through teacher- led workshops, teachers told their stories of teacher-led development work.

Early in the morning, as posters were being assembled in the hotel lobby, it was clear that although these teachers had not previously met, they shared a belief in teacher leadership and were excited to find themselves part of a collaborative endeavour. Discussions in different languages bubbled around the posters which all celebrated teachers' projects and posed questions about impact. For many, the languages were similar and easily intelligible and some were able to use the *lingua franca* of English to communicate. However, there were significant language barriers for many. Nevertheless, with the aid of their colourful and well-designed posters the teachers were able to communicate. Initial anxiety gave way to genuine

excitement and engagement with the stories being shared and the affirmation that teachers can lead change.

When the formal part of the event began, there were over one hundred people sitting in the hotel's ballroom. There were welcoming remarks from Gordana Miljević , for the host organisation, CEP. She thanked the OSF for their support which was embodied by the presence of Aleesha Taylor of OSF who had travelled from New York to be with us. Gordana expressed special thanks to the teachers themselves, many of whom had overcome problems such as complicated visa applications and fear of flying and had endured arduous journeys at considerable personal cost to themselves. Aleesha spoke for a few minutes and said that it was a privilege to be associated with the ITL initiative. David Frost also spoke, drawing attention to the concept of extended professionality (Hoyle, 2008) and how the commitment shown by the teachers in coming to this event was a manifestation of the kind of professionality that had the power to transform education systems the world over.

Following these opening remarks, there was a series of presentations from the leaders of some of the facilitating teams. Ivona Čelebičić from proMENTE Social Research in Sarajevo, made a presentation about what had been achieved in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where they had established many teacher leadership groups. She told us about a network she had hosted in Sarajevo which enabled teachers from Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia to meet each other and share stories of their leadership of development projects.

Suzana Kirandskiska and Majda Josevka from Skopje made a presentation about how they had used the ITL approach as a key dimension of the support provided by the Step-by-Step organisation and funded by US AID. In Macedonia they have always tried to integrate the teacher leadership approach into wider initiatives funded by donors. For example, a new development, the 'Readers are Leaders' initiative does this. In Macedonia, the teacher leadership work had become central to their national efforts to transform teacher professionalism.

The third presentation from facilitators was from Rima Bezede on behalf of Pro Didactica, an NGO in Chișinău, in the Republic of Moldova. Like the others, this presentation described how Rima and her colleague Viorica Postica had developed their teacher leadership programme. She drew our attention to a book they had published in the Romanian language, which is spoken by the majority of people there.

Posters and teacher-led workshops

Following the facilitators' presentations, the second part of the morning was dedicated to the Gallery Walk. Over 50 colourful posters adorned the hotel lobby, representing the scope of

projects and the teachers' commitment to their development work. Whilst sampling an impressive array of Serbian refreshments, teachers mingled around the posters, supporting each other in translating the various languages displayed.

Afterwards, Ivona Čelebičić facilitated reflection and discussion drawing parallels between different development projects. Listening to the presentations and viewing the posters, the teachers understood that they were part of something important, an international movement. The sense of pride and excitement was clearly visible on the faces of members of this audience. This was borne out by comments made in the plenary session immediately following. Comments reflected massive enthusiasm and recognition that teachers everywhere are striving to solve similar problems.

In the afternoon, there was a programme of more than 20 presentations all led by teachers. Each one was chaired by a member of the ITL team and in many cases volunteer translators worked alongside the teacher presenting while others sat alongside members of the audience, whispering an interpretation. The programme was divided into five sessions clustered around themes which enabled participants to build upon each other's contributions, draw similarities and acknowledge similar challenges. These themes included:

- cooperation between school, family and community
- innovative teaching methods and new technologies in teaching
- improvement of pupils' learning in various curriculum areas
- fostering intercultural education and social integration
- taking into account the individual needs of students

The workshop sessions were phenomenally successful. Language barriers were overcome and teachers were visibly fascinated and moved to hear about what were in many cases heroic endeavours. Teachers who had presented expressed considerable satisfaction and pride in having done so. For most, leading a workshop was a new experience so it was perhaps unsurprising that some of them tended to be rather modest in their narratives, focusing on what they had done in classrooms rather than emphasising their influence more widely.

Relationships are a core ingredient of effective networking. As Church *et al.* says:

> A network is based on the relational. This is the process that gives the network its strength. The common purpose is what makes it a network, not simply networking. We are in pursuit of something joined, something together. And then we are doing, we are engaging in an effort to realise that goal. It is the joint activity that gives us edge and power (2002:15).

Although there was a growing realisation that we were all in pursuit of teacher leadership, in Fruška Gora, some relationships needed time to develop. However, it was through the networking activities, the posters and the workshops that those relationships were being built.

More importantly, trust, the glue that keeps networks together and builds social capital was emerging: trust based on companionship, competence and commitment (Swan *et al.,* 1999). Teachers from the Balkan region in particular had years of conflict to overcome and we were happy to see these ethnic divides fade away in this event.

At the end of the afternoon the teachers went down the mountain to explore Novi Sad while the ITL facilitators reconvened their team meeting.

Returning to Dimension 1: the ITL team meeting

At the end of a day of intensive networking, the ITL facilitators' team reconvened to discuss what they had seen in the networking activities. Having expressed delight and satisfaction at what we had seen and heard, we talked about issues such as the reluctance of many teachers to talk about the leadership challenges they had faced and how they had been overcome. We recognised that the teachers gathered at this event had barely had time to get to know each other and we know that trust has to be built before people risk talking about matters of leadership. It was noted that the British teachers seemed more comfortable talking about themselves and their attempts to influence their colleagues. Perhaps it was more difficult for teachers in the Balkan countries to accept the legitimacy of their leadership. Perhaps it seems too presumptuous to talk of deliberate attempts to influence colleagues. Our discussion helped us to identify a few points that could be feedback to the teachers when they returned to the main hall after breakfast the next day.

Celebrations and community building

It is tempting to gloss over what happened in the evening on the grounds that it was merely relaxation, but the evenings' activities were significant beyond measure. Over a hundred people shared a splendid Serbian meal and then returned to the hotel ballroom for an epic evening of musical entertainment. It began with folk music from across the Balkans and progressed to contemporary Karaoke. The tracks played alternated between much-loved traditional ballads and drinking songs and universally recognised pop standards. People took turns to get up and sing along to the musical backing tracks. Mostly people formed teams to perform which led to some light-hearted rivalry between people from different countries, but as the evening wore on the singing teams tended increasingly to be cross-national. This seemingly frivolous activity was actually a powerful way to come together and build bridges between different cultures.

Returning to Dimension 2: reflections on what we had learnt

Delegates gathered together on Sunday morning to reflect upon what they had learnt. David Frost made a brief presentation to give the teachers feedback on the presentations we had seen the day before. Speaking on behalf of the ITL facilitator's team, he congratulated them and thanked them for their hard work and dedication. He drew attention to the ingenuity and creativity that shone through their presentations. Most importantly he talked about the strong sense of moral purpose that had been abundantly evident not only in the posters and presentations, but in the discussions as teachers interrogated the stories they had heard. David went on to make some suggestions for the future. His comments were made in the spirit of critical friendship, not wanting to diminish the praise but hoping to push everyone forward. He suggested that, in future, our narratives could:

- focus more explicitly on issues of social justice
- overcome reluctance to discuss the school context
- talk about the process of development, the journey
- reflect more on the impact on ourselves
- be more confident about talking about influencing our colleagues
- discuss explicitly how to develop students' learning capacity

The main event of the morning was a workshop activity designed to support reflection. Facilitators from HertsCam placed large sheets of paper around the conference room, each with a question to prompt discussion and interaction. Four sheets were depicted as 'locks and keys' posing questions around recurrent challenges which had emerged in discussions over the weekend. The other four sheets were displayed as 'light bulbs'. These questions prompted participants to think about new knowledge, shifts in thinking and connections they had made over the last couple of days. Below are the questions and a selection of some of the insights offered by participating teachers.

How can I unlock ways to express the impact of my project on me and my colleagues?

Have the courage to stand up and be counted. You don't have to shout – just be consistent in your story. I have learnt not only to think about the results but about myself in leading the development process. Seize opportunities to highlight, share and celebrate the good work happening in schools.

How can I unlock time to develop my project?

Be guided by your passion and you will find time. Afterwards, you will wonder how you did it. Make contacts. Work as a team. Pick a project that you are passionate about and that deals with issues you face frequently.

How can I involve colleagues more in my project?

Take every opportunity to sell your project. Grasp any offer of help.
Two, three, four, eight pairs of eyes, ears and hands have more chance of success than one, no matter how dedicated he/she is. One has to initiate change, get out and listen, especially to the children.

How can I seek support during my project?

Find people who are interested in the same idea and struggle with the same concern. Expand your communication, ask/talk to different teachers, different professionals – seek advice. Husbands make good sounding boards even if they do not quite understand what it's like being a teacher.

What have I learned about learning?

Learning is a constant and ever-changing process. Everybody can learn; the only thing we need to do is tickle their interest.

What have I learned about leadership?

I learned to recognise the leader within me and for me that is priceless. It is a privilege, but also a responsibility.

What have I learned about making an impact?

One should be brave and responsible. Don't make excuses, saying that somebody else should do that. I am the one who should do that - make an impact, change ourselves and others. Influence develops self-confidence, creativity and joy.

What have I learned about cooperation?

Exchange of experience guides us in further work and brings ideas for new projects. We are stronger together.

What is interesting about the statements above is that without the reflection activity, these statements would not have been voiced. Secondly, the fact that this was a collaborative reflection with participants writing their reflections on flipchart paper and circulating around the room meant that people could read each other's reflections and use them as a stimulus for their own reflection thus enabling a deeper level of thought and self-awareness. What is also interesting is that the collaborative reflection resulted in the building of organisational or collective self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Making leadership visible in this way is vital if we are to realise the potential that lies within all teachers to lead change. The reflections cited above demonstrate the power of teacher leadership to mobilise teachers to lead change regardless of the cultural contexts they are working in. The attitudes apparent in the statements above reveal some profound insights into leadership.

As the weekend concluded and teachers departed to return to their respective countries, there was an overwhelming sense of optimism and achievement. Despite the context of an increasingly global trend towards top-down, managerialist intervention and control, we

rekindled the determination that there is also the possibility that teachers can see themselves as members of a global profession in which they can act strategically to create their own professional knowledge and cultivate their own capacity for leadership.

Goodbye to Serbia

Once the conference was over, the ITL team stayed on for further discussions about what we had learned from this event and our future strategy. Everyone expressed the need to maintain and build the network in the future. When this final meeting was concluded, those whose travel plans allowed it enjoyed an excursion to Novi Sad culminating in a celebratory dinner at the Kovačević Winery.

A bus had been arranged to take us back to the hotel but when we came out of the Winery, we found that the bus was parked facing down a hill with stationary cars immediately in front of it. The starter motor had jammed and so the bus could not start. There was only one thing to be done. We all put our shoulders to the bus and pushed it uphill until the engine turned over and the vehicle could move without our help. This served us well as a metaphor for our commitment to support and advocacy for teacher leadership.

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