

The International Teacher Leadership project

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This issue of inFORM coincides with the publication of a report on the ITL project: 'Supporting teacher leadership in 15 countries - the International Teacher Leadership project, Phase 1'.

In the spring of 2008, Ljubica Petrovic and Ivana Cosic were two masters students on the Educational Leadership and School Improvement course co-ordinated by Sue Swaffield at the Faculty of Education. Ljubica and Ivana attended my seminar on the subject of teacher leadership. The session focused on the strategies, tools and techniques developed over a period of some years in the context of the HertsCam Network. This teacher leadership programme was based on the principles of leadership for learning with particular emphasis on democratic schooling and shared leadership. During the session, these two young Croatians declared their enthusiasm and their belief that this approach to supporting teacher leadership could play a significant part in building democratic schooling in post-conflict societies such as theirs. Following the session we met to discuss how the HertsCam approach could be adapted for use with teachers in Zagreb. This breakthrough moment coincided with enquiries from academics in other countries so it seemed worthwhile to try to launch an international project.



In Bucharest, teachers from the north of Romania and across the border in Moldova came together to share accounts of their leadership of development work. Mona Chiriac, a teacher in Stevenage but a Romanian national, worked with a colleague in Bucharest to facilitate this 2 day event.

Almost three years later we are launching a report documenting what has been achieved. The International Teacher Leadership (ITL) project is now an established research and development project with a project team consisting of over 50 experts from 15 countries supporting around 1000 teachers in around 150 schools. So what does that report say? It begins by explaining the origins and aims of the project and exploring the cultural contexts in which this distinctive approach to supporting teacher leadership was implanted. It goes on to discuss teacher leadership as a concept and the distinctive approach used in this project. The methodology of the project is presented in outline with the main sections of the report making the project activities visible and presenting evidence of impact.

Origins and aims of the ITL project

The genesis of this approach to supporting teacher leadership began in 1989 when I was struggling find a way to support teachers who had registered on a university-based postgraduate diploma course focused on school improvement. The key question was: how could their professional learning be connected to the development of practice in their schools? Since that time I have worked with a variety of colleagues including teachers and university academics to develop models, strategies and tools for supporting teachers as leaders of innovation and change (Durrant, 2004; Hill, 2011; Mylles & Frost, 2006). These have been refined and evaluated in the context of the HertsCam Network.

By the autumn of 2008 we had identified potential partners in Croatia, Greece, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Turkey. We invited them to an exploratory meeting in Cambridge at which we discussed our aims. These were discussed further in a subsequent meeting in Corinth, Greece, but were significantly extended at a third meeting hosted by Gordana Miljevic in Belgrade. On behalf of the Open Society Institute, Gordana had asked us to induct new partners from a variety of countries in south eastern Europe. Originally, the focus was on the role of teacher leadership in educational reform, but our collaboration with OSI brought the development of

democratic civil society and inclusion into sharper view. It became clear that the project could make a difference not only in post-conflict contexts, but also in countries where it might be assumed that democracy is already well developed. The aims as they emerged in the first year of the project include:

- to establish programmes of support for teacher leadership that are appropriate to a range of different cultural / national settings and responsive to the particular challenges that arise in those settings
- to explore how the development of teachers' professional identity and their modes of professionalism can contribute to educational reform in a variety of cultural / national contexts
- to create and/or enhance knowledge networks for teachers;
- to create and/or enhance a network of experts (academics, local government staff, NGO staff, policy activists, experienced teachers and school principals) who can continue to provide support for teacher and school development
- to promote and foster inclusive educational practices
- to contribute to the development of democratic civil society

An additional emergent aim was to engage with policy making in a direct and immediate way, in the flow of the project rather than relying on post hoc reporting.

At the present time the project partners include colleagues from the following countries:

Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, New Zealand, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Turkey & UK.

We also have strong links with colleagues in Western Australia, Queensland and Hong Kong following fact-finding missions by colleagues in those places.



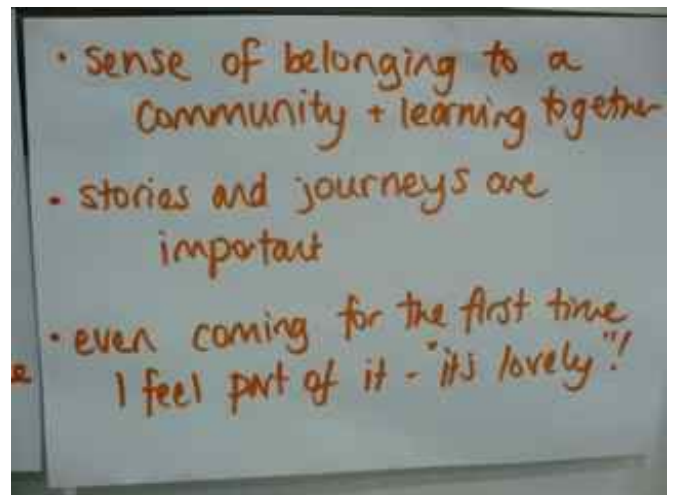
This flip chart, from one of the international team meetings held in Corinth, Greece illustrates how we have developed a shared theory about teacher leadership. It is generated, refreshed and refined through intense discussion drawing on our practical experience in 15 countries.

Cultural contexts

We were aware that 'policy borrowing' across cultural and national boundaries can be hazardous and ineffective (Phillips and Ochs, 2003, Steiner-Khamsi, 2004), so the first step was to devise a framework which enabled all team members to carry out an analysis of their national and local contexts. This would inform their adaptation of the model and underpin intervention strategies. These cultural challenges were discussed at our team conferences. Foremost among them was the idea that, for many of the participating countries, democracy is very much 'a work in progress'. This may assumed to be an issue that is particularly relevant to the post-Yugoslavian countries, but it became clear that for all participating countries 'the existence of formal democratic rights doesn't necessarily translate into much substantive democracy in people's everyday lives' (Zakaria, 1997). In many of the educational systems we are working with, teachers' experience is characterized by hierarchy and authoritarianism rather than collegiality and mutual respect amongst professionals. A related study commissioned by Education International enabled us to ask teachers in 20 countries for their views on the extent to which they had a voice and played a part in determining their professionalism. The general picture globally seems to be one in which teachers see themselves as 'voiceless', as one teacher put it. The policy environment in most cases is one in which teachers remain 'the ghost at the feast' (Bangs and Frost, 2011). Centralist approaches to reform tend to be driven by governments' need to increase their country's performance in rankings such as PISA which inevitably leads to top-down change strategies based on low expectations of teachers. Those attracted to the ITL project are seeking an alternative perspective which recognises that teachers' sense of self-efficacy and empowerment are the key to innovation and improvement.



A visit to a school in Istanbul was part of a critical friendship visit which featured a major network event involving 600 teachers and local politicians. Teacher leadership has been warmly embraced in Turkey.



This flip chart arose from an activity at one of the meetings of the international team. It illustrates the role of community building as a strategy for engineering discourse.

Conceptualising teacher leadership

Teacher leadership is seen as a key lever for developing teachers' professionalism and supporting educational reform; it is supported in many parts of the world, particularly in the USA (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). However, the dominant approach assumes that such leadership is only undertaken by individuals with special aptitude who are selected for designated roles as teacher leaders (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011).

The concept of distributed leadership now has wide currency (Bennett *et al.*, 2003; MacBeath *et al.*, 2004; Spillane, 2006) and has been recommended by the OECD (Pont, Nusche & Morman, 2008), but in practice an approach based on assumptions from organisational science tends to restrict the exercise of leadership to those with formal positions. In contrast, the distinctive approach taken in the ITL project assumes that all teachers have the capacity to lead innovation, that they are entitled to exercise leadership (Lambert, 1998) and that leadership can be cultivated in all members of the teaching profession, if they are provided with appropriate support.

In the ITL project, it has been demonstrated that it is possible to build 'professional learning communities' (Bolam *et al.*, 2005) in which teachers lead processes of enquiry-based development generating shared knowledge about pedagogic innovation. This approach focuses on enhancing human agency and the development of a culture of shared responsibility for reform and successful learning outcomes for all students. In the ITL project there is a shared assumption that all members of learning communities have some capacity for leadership which does not depend on designated positions of authority. The concept of teacher-led development work provides a framework which enables teachers to initiate and lead projects that can be enacted over the course of an academic year. In the HertsCam programme this is explained in a power point slide in Figure 1 below.



Jo and Val are both teachers in HertsCam schools. Jo Mylles is an assistant headteacher at Sir John Lawes School and Val Hill is an assistant headteacher at Birchwood High School. They are practitioner researchers and experts in supporting teacher leadership. They designed and led the workshops at the most recent international team meeting in Bulgaria

Another key assumption is that, in order to be able to exercise leadership, teachers need deliberate and sophisticated scaffolding and support. This may take the form of guidance materials, programmes of workshops and tools for planning and reflection. Support can be provided through partnerships between experienced / senior teachers in schools and external agents such as university based academics or activists within NGOs.

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Teacher-led development work

Teachers, with or without positions of responsibility:

- taking the initiative to improve practice
- acting strategically with colleagues to embed change
- gathering and using evidence in collaborative processes
- contributing to the creation and dissemination of professional knowledge

Figure 1. Teacher-led development work

The establishment of networking arrangements through which teachers can share accounts of their leadership experience and inspire each other are also helpful. In addition, it is assumed that teacher leadership will only flourish when there is a willingness to develop the organisational conditions within the particular school. This demands that members of the project team engage in dialogue with headteachers / school principals in order to support them in their strategies for developing the school culture.



The backdrop for our team meeting in the mountains of Mavrovo, Macedonia helped to stimulate our imaginations and recognise the value of international collaboration.

Project methodology

It is appropriate that a project that seeks to support teacher leadership should draw on the experience and expertise of teachers in leading the project as a whole. Although the project is co-ordinated from Cambridge, it is led by a team of practitioner researchers who are members of the HertsCam Tutor Team. These individuals are graduates of the HertsCam MEd in Leading Teaching and Learning and have taught on both the masters and certificate level programmes as well as maintaining their senior leadership positions in their schools. The full international team includes some with academic backgrounds and some teachers, but the majority are activists from NGOs such as 'Educational Center Pro Didactica' in Moldova or 'proMENTE social research, Sarajevo'.

The skills and perspectives of teachers are particularly helpful in our full team conferences which have now occurred on 5 occasions since November 2008 in Cambridge (UK), Corinth (Greece), Belgrade (Serbia), Mavrovo (Macedonia) and Veliko Tarnovo (Bulgaria). Team meetings, involving up to 35-40 people, normally take place over a two day period in a hotel or university building. The travel and accommodation costs involved are considerable¹ so it is vital to maximise value by designing activities which are productive and have tangible outcomes. Discussion is usually intense and features the sharing of experience and collective evaluation as well as reflection on reports of data analysed or fresh insights. Discussion activities are highly structured and the overall effect has to be inspirational in order to support action back in our local contexts.

Each event is carefully documented using a range of both visual and textual material in order to help team members to maintain their connection to the process. This also serves to include team members who were not able participate in the conference. Between meetings, collaboration between members of the ITL Project Team is maintained by using the University of Cambridge web-based facility, CamTools, to distribute monthly bulletins and share resources and papers. Members of the Cambridge team also provide mentoring for the project partners largely through email but also involving

¹ We gratefully acknowledge the generosity of the Open Society Foundations in covering these costs and funding other dimensions of the project.



Majda Josevska is a young researcher who has helped to provide support for teacher leadership in Macedonia and is now part of the Cambridge research team. At the recent conference in Bulgaria she worked with Caroline Creaby and James Underwood from Cambridge in a research capacity.

visits to the participating sites. So far there have been such visits to Ohrid (Macedonia), Athens (Greece), Istanbul (Turkey), Pristina (Kosovo), Zagreb (Croatia), Sofia & Veliko Tarnovo (Bulgaria), Niksic (Montenegro), Bucharest (Romania) and Belgrade (Serbia).

The methodology of the project builds on that used in the Carpe Vitam Leadership for Learning project (Frost, 2008a) and may be described as collaborative action research in that it is both developmental and discursive. It involves practical work to create programmes of support for teachers who wish to redefine their roles as 'extended professionals' (Hoyle, 1972) or 'champions of innovation' (Frost, 2008b). Data are used to inform the development of strategies adapted to each national and institutional context. As with the Carpe Vitam (LFL) project, principles and dilemmas are processed through critical discussion both within the project team and more widely through international conferences and networking for the participating practitioners.

Members of the project team design programmes of support for teacher leadership by collaborating with schools and other local partners who may have the capacity to provide support either practically or financially. The design of these programmes is informed by an analysis of the cultural contexts both nationally and in respect of the particular schools involved. Strategies, tools and materials developed in the UK are offered to all ITL participants for possible adaptation to the national context. Once underway, the support programmes are monitored and evaluated using data collection tools provided by the Cambridge team.

Developing practice and insights are subject to critical discourse through the project team meetings as outlined above. In addition, it is a key goal of the project to arrange international conferences for researchers, school principals, teachers, local authority advisers, NGO staff and other stakeholders in order to engage in reflection and debate about the outcomes of the project.

A key goal is to build capacity by identifying those with the potential to facilitate teacher leadership and providing induction and support that enables them to become effective providers.



Paul Rose is an assistant headteacher from Stevenage. Here he is sitting with Jelena Vranjesevic in Belgrade discovering the folk music of the Balkans following a network event.

The project activities

At the outset of the project it was agreed that each participating site would seek to work with at least three schools, a goal which has been exceeded by a considerable margin. The first challenge was to establish partnerships in order to be able to provide the support and to find schools amenable to what, for some, was a courageous experiment. Some colleagues reported that school principals were initially fearful because of the possibility of weakening their authority and opening up the school to criticism from the authorities. In many cases a somewhat euphemistic title for the programme was adopted – for example in Turkey, '21st Century Teachers', in Bulgaria 'Active Teachers Club', in Montenegro 'Teachers of the Future'.

In most cases, programmes consisted of a series of two hour meetings for groups of volunteers at the end of their school day. Sometimes the groups came together to share experience and, in a minority of cases, the meetings were held on Saturday mornings. The meetings featured workshops that enable teachers to reflect on their concerns and values, to plan development projects and to share experience of their leadership of those projects. A collection of tools developed in the HertsCam programme were shared and adapted for use in the workshops. In some cases the tools exemplify and illustrate the action the teacher might take. A vignette based on another teacher's experience might be used to help teachers imagine their own intervention; an example of a teacher's action plan might help teachers to plan their own projects. Other tools might provide a structure for a conversation or a format for a record of participation. The process through which teachers were supported can be represented as a series of steps set out in the box below.

- - Step 1 Values clarification
 - Step 2 Identification of professional concerns
 - Step 3 Negotiation and consultation to clarify agenda for development
 - Step 4 Action planning
 - Step 5 Negotiation and consultation to clarify action plan
 - Step 6 Leadership of enquiry-based development work
 - Step 7 Networking to contribute to professional knowledge



Teachers across the world are addressing similar challenges. At this network event in Bucharest a teacher has represented her project on a poster.

Leading these workshops is an art that corresponds with a facilitative view of pedagogy rather than one which is a matter of instruction or training.

Teachers in all the participating sites found that they were able to lead development projects and compile evidence of this work in portfolios. These could then be assessed for the purposes of the award of a certificate. The idea of a portfolio of evidence was a challenge where the tradition had been to assess knowledge through some kind of written test. Nevertheless, it is clear that this approach to certification is viable whatever the cultural context. In a number of sites, the project partners were able to come to agreement with the ministry of education such that the certificate could be awarded by the partner organisations, for example an NGO, in association with the ITL project itself; it could then be counted as worth a particular number of credit points within the official career development system.

Accounts of teachers' projects were shared on web sites and through a variety of face-to-face network events. Such events have been well established in the HertsCam context for some years and so it was satisfying to see how quickly they could be developed in situations where they were a novelty. The point about inspiration illustrated below was a recurring theme.

The teachers presented their action plans, talked about challenges they face, asked for ideas and help from the others.... They were really enthusiastic and asked for more network events. They were inspired and encouraged.

(Report from Greece)

There have been successful events in most participating sites and in some cases they involved teachers from more than one site coming together to build their professional knowledge through such story telling. In Bucharest for example, teachers travelled from Moldova and from the north of Romania to exchange accounts and discuss ways to improve teaching and learning.



Teachers are encouraged by the award of a certificate. Here David Frost helps with the prize giving in Nikšić, Montenegro.



The project is led by a team from HertsCam. Here they are working closely together to support an intense process of discussion and action planning at a recent international team meeting in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria.

Assessing impact

Teachers who participated in the various programmes affiliated to the ITL project were able to make a difference to practice in their classrooms and schools through their leadership of development projects over the course of the academic year. Most of these projects were focused on teaching and learning in classrooms, a typical example might be 'Developing active participation in reading lessons to improve children's reading' (Bosnia and Herzegovina) or 'How to make written feedback more effective for students' (Macedonia). Some projects focused indirectly on students' learning - for example, 'The new student in the class and how to overcome the negativity of others' (Bulgaria) but were nonetheless valued.

The reports from partners document the different ways in which participation in the programme has made a difference to the teachers who participated. The key theme in the evidence presented is teachers' beliefs in self-efficacy and how their participation has enhanced this. This is illustrated by this extract:

At the start teachers were sceptical about the idea that they can change schools.... At the end of the sessions most of them said that change could be achieved, and it is teachers who can make that change.

(Final Report, July 2011, Montenegro)

The impact went far beyond the way teachers felt about themselves as professionals. Vignettes describing the teachers' projects show wide ranging impact on classroom practice and school cultures. These are being assembled and edited for a special issue of the Teacher Leadership journal (www.teacher.leadership.org.uk). This comment included in the report from Moldova is typical.

The teachers' projects made a difference not just to classroom practice, but more widely. It made a difference to their colleagues' capacity – their teaching, their understanding, their dispositions and their work motivation, in spite of teacher low status and salaries in our country.

(Final Report, July 2011, Moldova)

Participation in networks has a powerful effect where teachers have been used to a restricted outlook and subject to centrally determined expectations.

I caught myself participating in discussions with all my heart, getting excited about the most ordinary talk between

colleagues from our school and the colleagues from Hrasno. Exchanging ideas, listening to each other with respect, giving support to each other, one gets tremendous self-esteem, and that is all I need. So I managed to go beyond the limits of my previous work, I set my goals on a higher level. Having seen the results of what I initiated with my idea in cooperation with my colleagues, I am encouraged to make new ways to continue something that improves the quality of work with children, which encourages me personally, thereby making me happier.

(Teacher quoted in Bosnia and Herzegovina Final Report)

The language used here reflects the essence of the ITL approach which is to help teachers to take the initiative, to lead change and build professional knowledge together through networking and mutual support. The full report published this month indicates that these activities are beginning to make a significant contribution to educational improvement but also to the development of a more democratic way of life in schools and communities around the world.



Here the team who facilitated the international team meeting in Mavrovo celebrate the success of the conference. The team includes teachers, academics and an administrator from the Faculty of Education. Close cooperation with the local Macedonian team was essential.

Principles for practice

Our experience of adapting, developing and evaluating our own practice in supporting teacher leadership enables us to put forward a set of principles which might guide others who wish to follow a similar path.

Principles for supporting teacher leadership

Principle 1: A partnership between schools and external agencies

Such agencies might include university departments of education, government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Principle 2: Mutual support through membership of a group and a network

Support groups can be established within single schools or within clusters of schools and these can be linked through networks.

Principle 3: Collaboration with school principals

Dialogue with school principals can help to build support for teacher leadership

Principle 4: Opportunities for open discussion

Teachers need to be enabled to think critically about values, practice and innovation.

Principle 5: A project-based methodology

Teacher leadership is enacted through the initiation and leadership of development projects.

Principle 6: Enabling teachers to identify personal development priorities

This releases passion, concern and moral purpose.

Principle 7: Tools to scaffold personal reflection, planning and action

Well-designed tools scaffold, exemplify and illustrate teacher leadership.

Principle 8: Facilitating access to relevant literature

This enhances the knowledge arising from teachers' development work.

Principle 9: The provision of guidance on leadership strategies

Expert guidance and mutual exploration strengthens leadership capacity.

Principle 10: The provision of guidance on the collection and use of evidence

Systematic enquiry is a democratic and collegial leadership strategy.

Principle 11: Mobilisation of organisational support and orchestration

School principals can support teachers' development work and ensure coherence in the school.

Principle 12: The provision of a framework to help teachers document their work

A structured portfolio enables teachers to plan, record and reflect upon their development work and can be used as evidence for certification and the like.

Principle 13: The provision of opportunities for networking beyond the school

Teachers derive mutual support and inspiration when they network with other teachers. Moral purpose is cultivated throughout the system.

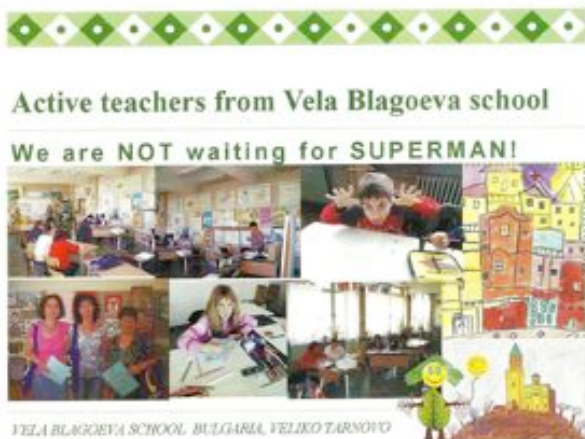
Principle 14: Recognition through certification

Teachers' leadership of innovation can be recognised through certification provided by universities or partners of other respected organisations.

Principle 15: Professional knowledge arises from accounts of teacher leadership

Teachers can build professional knowledge through collaborative and critical discussion and exchange of ideas.

We hope that, where these principles resonate with others, they will get in touch to explore the possibility of engaging with the ITL project. We remain open to further networking and collaboration.



Teachers participating in the project in Bulgaria presented this card to David Frost when he visited their schools. The slogan 'We are not waiting for superman' has been widely adopted within the project as a useful way to express the idea of distributed leadership.

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