Teachers - the ghost at the feast?
teacher voice, teacher self-efficacy and teacher leadership

John Bangs and David Frost
University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, United Kingdom

Abstract

This paper arises from the early stages of a project commissioned by Education International (EI) – a global association of teacher unions / organisations. The study, currently underway, is being carried out in collaboration with the International Teacher Leadership project based at Cambridge. The aim of the project is to investigate the extent to which teachers across the world have opportunities to influence the context and circumstances of their professional work. A survey of officials in teacher organisations and teachers themselves will yield data that will be analysed and used to assist teacher organisations in putting forward policies that could lead to the enhancement of the confidence, professional knowledge, self-efficacy and professional development of teachers.

Contact:
Katie O'Donovan
Leadership for Learning: the Cambridge Network
University of Cambridge Faculty of Education
184 Hills Road
Cambridge CB2 8PQ

Tel: +44 (0)1223 767621
Email: lfl@educ.cam.ac.uk
Websites: www.leadershipforlearning.org.uk
               www.educ.cam.ac.uk/lfl

Educational policy making is increasingly centralised and globalised. Governments are advised by organisations such as the EU, the World Bank and UNESCO to look to their competitiveness. Studies such as OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) provide the means for international comparison which has led to an increasing tendency among governments to look to adopting some or all of the policies of countries which occupy the above average quartile of the PISA ranking. The Finns, for example, are apparently overloaded with visitors bent on examining what they suppose to be the recipe for success. Policy frameworks are forged by organisations such as the OECD and the European Union's Commission. It is no coincidence that the scale of the World Congress of Comparative Educations Societies (WCCES) continues to grow. International comparison is big business.

The ghost at the feast

Some of the policy development discourses are informed by research, although detailed accounts of policy making suggest that this is marginal (Bangs, MacBeath and Galton, 2011). The teachers' voice is represented through their organisations, most of which are affiliated to Education International – 'The voice of educational workers worldwide' (www.ei-ie.org), yet there remains a concern that, when it comes to policy making at both national and international levels, teachers remain the ghost at the feast.

Teachers, their wellbeing, their professionalism and their professional development are critical in any discussion about how to improve educational performance. It is the quality of teachers and what they do that makes all the difference (OECD, 2005). This will be the core agenda at an international summit hosted by US Education Secretary in March 2011 where EI representatives will put the case for enhancing the teaching profession.

> The summit will be used to identify best practices worldwide that effectively promote, elevate and enhance the teaching profession. EI and its affiliates will use the opportunity to make the case for fully funded public education for all and ensure that teachers are recognised as integral to any development of education policies.

> (EI web site: www.ei-ie.org)

It is encouraging to hear that a powerful force such as the US government is taking steps to explore the future of the teaching profession, as reflected in the extract from the US Education Secretary's statement below.

> When it comes to teaching, talent matters tremendously, but great teachers are not just born that way. It takes a high-quality system for recruiting, training, retaining and supporting teachers over the course of their careers to develop an effective teaching force. This summit is a tremendous opportunity to learn from one another the best methods worldwide to address our common challenges: supporting and strengthening teachers and boosting the student skills necessary for success in today's knowledge economy.

> (US Education Secretary, Arne Duncan quoted on the EI website)

However, in the main, it remains the case that teachers are not central players in establishing educational policy, nor are they necessarily able to shape professional practice in their own schools. It is for this reason that the Education International Research Institute commissioned research on teacher self-efficacy, voice and leadership. The research is being undertaken by the Leadership for Learning group at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education in collaboration with the International Teacher Leadership project directed by David Frost (leadershipforlearning.org.uk). The lead researcher on the EI project is John Bangs who is both a Research Associate at Cambridge and a consultant with EI. The purpose of the research is to produce data about the current environment and existing opportunities for teachers to:

- exercise leadership,

- influence policy,

- shape professional practice, and

- build professional knowledge.

The research also seeks to identify the nature and potential links with teachers in other schools and with the wider community.

The outcomes of this project will enable us to make a significant contribution to the debate about the future development of the teaching profession. What follows is an outline of the thinking behind this investigation.

An agential approach to developing the teaching profession

The question of how teachers can make their voices heard on matters of policy and practice is inextricably bound up with the way we conceptualise professional development. We have an abundance of statements such as Arne Duncan's above which highlight the need for improved recruitment and professional development of teachers, but it is commonly assumed that the quality of what teachers do can be improved by people other than teachers themselves. Many organisations representing teachers have outlined policy proposals which are aimed at enhancing teacher creativity, responsibility and status within schools, but so far there is little evidence of the take-up or impact of such proposals. We argue here that it is time to consider approaches to teacher and school development which puts the teacher at the centre of the process. If this could be achieved, teachers would have enhanced opportunities to influence both policy and practice.

The first part of this discussion is concerned with the importance of teacher self-efficacy and the second with the centrality of leadership.

The importance of self-efficacy

The OECD's Teaching and Learning International survey (TALIS) explored teachers' reported self-efficacy and its connection to factors such as 'disciplinary climate'. However, the secondary analysis that followed said more about the potential that a focus on self-efficacy might generate.

> When teachers have a high sense of self-efficacy they are more creative in their work, intensify their efforts when their performances fall short of their goals and persist longer. Teachers' sense of self-efficacy can thus influence the learning and motivation of students, even if students are unmotivated or considered difficult (Guskey and Passaro, 1994). ….. most studies have found a positive relation between teachers' efficacy beliefs and several student cognitive outcomes, such as achievement in core academic subjects (e.g. Anderson, Greene and Loewen, 1988; Ashton and Webb, 1986; Moore and Esselman, 1994) and performance and skills (Midgley, Feldlaufer and Eccles, 1989; Ross, Hogaboam-Gray and Hannay, 2001).
>
> (Scheerens, 2010: 28)

The concept of self-efficacy is not a straight forward one (Tschannen-Moran, and Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). It is however an essential part of a theory of human development, the most prominent exponent of which is Albert Bandura.

> Human attainments and positive well-being require an optimistic sense of personal efficacy. … Self-doubts can set in quickly after some failures or reverses. The important matter is not that difficulties arouse self-doubt, which is a natural immediate reaction, but the speed of recovery of perceived self-efficacy from difficulties.
>
> (Bandura, 1989: 1176)

What is crucial here is the idea of belief in one's own efficacy. A teacher with strong beliefs in their own efficacy will be resilient, able to solve problems and, most importantly, learn from their experience. The concept of self-efficacy is linked to the concept of agency which is a fundamental human capacity which can either be enhanced or diminished by experience.

It is clearly important for the wellbeing of all human beings that they experience an enhancement of their agency, but particularly crucial when we consider what society needs from professionals such as teachers. The ability to make judgments, work to a set of principles, take the initiative, self-evaluate and be accountable to peers and stakeholders are all dependent on being effective as human agents.

> the exercise of personal agency is achieved through reflective and regulative thought, the skills at one's command, and other tools of self-influence that affect choice and support selected courses of action. Self-generated influences operate deterministically on behavior (in) the same way as external sources of influence do..… It is because self-influence operates deterministically on action that some measure of self-directedness and freedom is possible.
>
> (Bandura, 1989: 1182)

At first glance, this may look as if it is concerned merely with teachers' wellbeing which might be assumed to be at odds with the goals of improving teaching and learning, but self-efficacy is a key dimension of wellbeing. It is essentially about enabling teachers to develop themselves and their practice rather than be defeated by the challenges of their working lives.

In the UK, the concept of 'wellbeing' is the subject of investigation and development by some practitioner researchers who are interested in strategies to improve teaching and learning. Here a primary school headteacher explores the connection between teachers' wellbeing and student learning.

> My project on wellbeing does not mean that I am interested in some nebulous and well-meaning 'new age', 'pink and fluffy' world where staff are continually 'happy'. I do not mean to be romantic or sentimental about teachers (Hargreaves, 1997). Nor does it mean that I am marginalising the matter of the children's learning. ….. quite apart from staff wellbeing being a moral imperative and having a practical impact upon recruitment and retention, there is a direct correlation between teacher wellbeing and the social, emotional and academic development of pupils (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Dewberry & Briner, 2007; OECD, 2009).
>
> (Hannibal, forthcoming)

Once we have teacher wellbeing in our sights it is tempting to focus on the 'feel-good factor'. Leithwood's study for the Ontario Federation of Elementary teachers (2006) presents the idea that the way teachers feel affects their motivation to do a good job. The study identified the importance of 'internal states' that may shape the extent to which teachers are committed, enthusiastic and willing to perform. Bascia takes issue with the implication of this; she argues that the link between teachers' satisfaction and their effectiveness is more interesting than feelings and motivation; she argues that it is about how the nature of teachers' working conditions shape the conditions for student learning. Perhaps the most significant way in which this link is manifest is in the extent to which the teachers' working environment, in terms of the organisational context and the nature of the professional culture, enable teachers to develop positive self-efficacy beliefs.

It is noteworthy that Leithwood cites a study that identifies the kinds of working environment associated with teacher self-efficacy beliefs (Tschannen-Moran and Barr, 2004). These include 'participation by teachers in decisions affecting their work' and 'collaboration among teachers'. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that the report recommends that teachers should build their own professional networks and be proactive about their own professional development. What is disappointing however is the recommendation that teachers should 'expect effective leadership from your administrators' (p. 76) with no suggestion that teachers should themselves exercise leadership. What this neglects is the possibility that how we conceptualise school leadership is a crucial determinant of the way we conceptualise professional development. For Education International, the idea of distributed leadership seemed to hold the key.

4

Distributed leadership and teacher leadership

A distributed leadership perspective recognises that leadership involves collaborative and interactive behaviour through which organisations are maintained, problems are solved and practice is developed (Gronn, 2000, 2002; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004; Spillane, 2006). A salient message of the OECD's 'Improving School Leadership' report (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008) was that schools need distributed leadership. However, the implied approach was unhelpful as this extract from the Executive Summary illustrates.

> The increased responsibilities and accountability of school leadership are creating the need for distribution of leadership, both within schools and across schools. School boards also face many new tasks. While practitioners consider middle-management responsibilities vital for school leadership, these practices remain rare and often unclear; and those involved are not always recognized for their tasks.
>
> (OECD, 2008)

The report goes on to talk about 'organisational structures', 'incentive mechanisms', middle-level management' and 'modifying accountability mechanisms'. The view of distributed leadership implied here is a restricted in that reflects the situation in the UK where the concept of leadership has been tangled up with the development of schools' organisational structures. Roles such as 'Heads of Departments' and 'Heads of Year' were common in secondary schools in the 1980s and this pattern of organisational structures/roles has since been overlaid with roles such as 'Special Educational Needs Coordinator' (SENCO), 'Key Stage 3 Coordinator', 'Learning Leader' and the like. The National College for School Leadership has sponsored useful work on distributed leadership (Bennett *et al*., 2003; MacBeath *et al.,* 2004), but its provision of training courses focussing on 'middle leadership' and 'emergent leaders' has tended to focus on building the capacity of middle leadership post-holders to manage their teams more productively (Naylor, Gkolia & Brundrett, 2006). Not only does this not guarantee the development of leadership of those middle managers, it also denies the entitlement of all teachers to exercise leadership and to develop leadership capacity.

Education International has responded positively to the idea of distributed leadership because of its potential to foster collaborative professional cultures within schools which can unlock untapped potential in teachers and in doing so, increases the capacity of schools to meet the needs of pupils and to enhance educational achievement. This is a contentious claim of course since hard evidence of a link between distributed leadership and measurable effects is lacking (Hartley, 2007), but recent studies are beginning to find positive links between collaborative forms of leadership and improved student outcomes (e.g. Hallinger and Heck, 2010).

Distributed leadership also has the potential to shift principals and their senior teams away from micro-management of staff and towards providing developmental support for teachers. In this environment, a climate of trust between the formal school leadership and classroom teachers can flourish. So the idea of distributed leadership is appealing, but it carries with it the hazard of being interpreted as a strategy whereby principals simply distribute management responsibilities within schools rather than engineer changes in culture which expand the capacity of teachers to lead.

In contrast, a key characteristic of the ITL project's view of distributed leadership is that all teachers are entitled as professionals to initiate and lead change, contribute to knowledge building and to have influence, both locally within their own schools, and more widely through collective action. It is essentially about voice, but not merely with teachers as the subject of consultation from above, rather it implies the right to set the agenda and to both create and validate solutions to educational problems. As is explained in another paper presented in this symposium (Frost *et al.*, 2011), the ITL project's approach to teacher leadership invites teachers, regardless of any rank, position or delegated responsibility, to join a programme which provides support in the form of tools for reflection and planning together with a forum where teachers can discuss and share their experience of leading innovation.

The secondary analysis of the TALIS data talks of professional development that is integrated in everyday school practice and encompasses teachers' roles in 'secondary processes' through which they make their contributions as members of 'modern professional organisations'.

> This additional emphasis on secondary roles is also promoted as part of the modernisation of the teaching profession. They include teachers as researchers, as receivers of feedback from colleagues, as innovators, as active colleagues, as collaborators of principals, and as manifesting what is sometimes called 'teacher leadership'.
>
> (Scheerens, 2010: 191)

This is where we see the joining up of the idea of an agential approach to teacher and school development with a view of distributed leadership that is not only more democratic in nature but also carries with it the potential to build teachers' self-efficacy and so enhance their effectiveness.

The current study: aims and approach

The overall purpose of this project is to collect data, the analysis of which will enable Education International to develop and put forward policy recommendations aimed at the enhancement of the teaching profession. The data will be essentially qualitative collected through a survey of and the views of two groups of people: a) officials in a sample of teacher organisations across the world and b) teachers invited to participate in focus group discussion sessions in the same countries.

The sample of teacher organisations will be drawn from the 462 organisations affiliated to Education International. The intention is to achieve a reasonable spread of countries including both developed and developing. The semi-structured interviews with officials from the teacher organisations will be conducted on a face-to-face basis where possible and by telephone when not. The focus group sessions will be convened and facilitated by the teacher organisations. Both data collection activities will be guided by a common set of themes, for example:

- Teachers' role in curriculum specification / development

- Teachers' role in the specification / development of pedagogy

- Teachers' influence in decision making at school, district and national levels

- Professional knowledge and the teacher

- Factors that contribute to teachers' self-efficacy

- Models and approaches to professional development

- Opportunities for support, representation, networking and knowledge building beyond the school

The questioning and discussion around these themes will explore both the current environment as well as teachers' aspirations and expectations regarding the scope of their professional roles. Focus group facilitators will be provided with detailed guidance and the tools to support activities that will enable the participating teachers to reflect on their experience and articulate their views regarding their present circumstances and their hopes for the future.

The data generated through these research activities will enable the LfL team to draw conclusions about patterns of distribution of leadership and responsibility; about the conditions that shape self-efficacy and professional development, and about the factors that contribute to the enhancement of the teaching profession.

The role of teacher unions

The research outlined above will enable teacher organisations to speak for teachers in terms that some commentators may be surprised by. Teacher unions have always existed to represent and defend the interests of their members and it may be assumed that is about matters of salary, workload, performance management and the like. Bascia has observed that the negotiations between policy makers and unions have traditionally been locked into an industrial model where a concern for a concern for teacher's working conditions is seen to be at odds with a concern for teaching and learning (Bascia, 2010). This negative view of the role of teacher unions is widespread, for example one of President Obama's educational advisers, Geoffrey Canada, has warned the British Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, that unions can inhibit innovation (Vasagar, and Stratton, 2010). In the USA the view that unions will always oppose improvement was fuelled by Myron Lieberman's book, 'The Teacher Unions: How They Sabotaged Reform and Why' which stated the principle that: 'Collective bargaining is inconsistent with democratic, representative government' (Leiberman, 2000: xi). There is no doubt that this negative view holds sway in many parts of the world, but it is open to question as Ben Levin pointed out in a recent blog.

A lot of education rhetoric these days includes mention of the supposedly negative impact of teacher unions on reforms. For a few commentators, eliminating union opposition is one of the most essential, or even the most single, most important component in creating improvement, while for many others it is part of the package. But here is an interesting observation. Virtually all the top-performing countries on international education measures have strong teacher unions, including Finland, Korea, Japan, Canada, Australia and others. Of course, such a relationship does not imply causation but it does suggest that there is no necessary conflict between strong teacher unions and good outcomes. More over, some countries or sub-national units that took steps to weaken the influence of their unions did not demonstrate any subsequent improvements and, in some cases, such as England, later had to take many measures to improve the situation of teachers to get an adequate supply and, thus, improve student results.

(Levin, 2010)

This is an interesting observation that suggests the possibility that the concern for improving teaching and learning, and the concern to enhance the environment in which teachers operate, do not have to be in opposition.

We hope that project outlined here will make an important contribution to Education International's efforts to shape the debate about the future development of the teaching profession. As Ben Levin has argued, teacher organisations have an important part to play in enhancing the professional role of teachers. Despite the growing number of studies on teacher leadership and teacher self-efficacy, a policy framework for their promotion, which teacher organisations can draw on in discussion and negotiation, has yet to written. This research provides an opportunity for just such a policy framework to be drafted. It is hoped that the proposals within the completed study will trigger debate internationally.

References

Anderson, R., Greene, M. and Loewen, P. (1988) Relationships among teachers' and students' thinking skills, sense of efficacy, and student achievement. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research,* 34, 148–165.

Ashton, P.T. and Webb, R.B. (1986). *Making a difference: teachers' sense of efficacy and student achievement.* New York: Longman.

Bandura, A. (1989) Human agency in social cognitive theory, *American Psychologist* 44 (9) pp 1175-1184.

Bangs, J., MacBeath, J. and Galton, M. (2011) *Reinventing schools, Reforming teaching: From political visions to classroom reality*, London: Routledge.

Bascia , N. and Rottman, C. (2010) *What's so important about teachers' working conditions?* unpublished paper, OISE & University of Manitoba.

Bennett, N., Wise, C., Woods, P. and Harvey, J. (2003) *Distributed Leadership: A review of literature carried out for the National College for School Leadership*, Nottingham: NCSL.

Birch, S. H. and Ladd, G. W. (1998) Children's interpersonal behaviors and the teacher-child relationship, *Developmental Psychology* 34 (5) pp. 934-946.

Dewberry, C. and Briner, R. (2007). *Report for Worklife Support on the relation between well-being and climate in schools and pupil performance.* London: Worklife Support.

Frost, D. with Bagakis, G., Durrant, J., Flores, M. & Viana, I. (2011) *The International Teacher Leadership project two years in,* a paper presented within the symposium: A 'Leadership for Learning: the Cambridge Network' symposium 'From political visions to classroom reality (and vice versa?)' at ICSEI 2011, The International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement, Limmasol, Cyprus, January 4th-7th

Gronn, P. (2000) Distributed Properties: A New Architecture for Leadership, *Educational Management and Administration*, 28 (3) pp. 317-38.

Gronn, P. (2002) Distributed Leadership as a unit of analysis. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 13, 423-451.

Guskey, T. R. and Passaro, P.D. (1994) Teacher efficacy: A study of construct dimensions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 31, 627-643.

Hallinger, P. and Heck, R. (2010) Collaborative leadership and school improvement: understanding the impact on school capacity and student learning, *School Leadership and Management* 30 (2) pp. 95-110.

Hannibal, P. (forthcoming) *Staff wellbeing: a collaborative development project to secure the sustainable wellbeing of staff in an Infant and Nursery School* Unpublished MEd Thesis, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.

Hartley, D. (2007) The emergence of distributed leadership in education: Why now? *British Journal of Educational Studies* 55 (2) pp. 202–214

Leiberman, M. (2000) *The Teacher Unions: How They Sabotaged Educational Reform and Why*, San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books.

Leithwood, K. (2006). *Teacher working conditions that matter: Evidence for change*. Toronto: Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario.

Levin, B. (2010) *Education This Week – Canadian Edition*. 'Let's Stop Blaming Teacher'.

MacBeath, J., Oduro, G. & Waterhouse, J. (2004) *The Distributed Leadership Toolkit*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.

Midgley, C., Feldlaufer, H. and Eccles, J.S. (1989) Student/teacher relations and attitudes toward mathematics before and after the transition to junior high school. *Child Development*, 60, 981-992.

Moore, W. P. and Esselman, M.E. (1994). *Exploring the Context of Teacher Efficacy: The Role of Achievement and Climate*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.

Naylor, P., Gkolia, C. and Brundrett, M. (2006) Leading from the Middle: an initial study of impact. *Management in Education*, 20 (1).

OECD (2005) *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*, Paris: OECD.

Pont, B., Nusche, D. and Morman, H. (2008) *Improving School Leadership, Volume 1: Policy and Practice*, Paris: OECD.

OECD (2009) *Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First results from TALIS,* Paris: OECD.

Ross, J.A., Hogaboam-Gray, A. and Hannay, L. (2001) Effects of teacher efficacy on computer skills and computer cognitions of Canadian students in Grades K-3. *The Elementary School Journal*, 102, 141-156.

Scheerens, J. (2010) *Teachers' Professional Development: Europe in international comparison. An analysis of teachers' professional development based on the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Union.

Spillane, J. (2006). *Distributed Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Spillane, J., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. (2004) Towards a theory of leadership practice: a distributed practice. *Journal of Curriculum Studies,* 36 (1), 3-34.

Tschannen-Moran, M. & Barr, M. (2004). Fostering student achievement: The relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 3*, 187 - 207.

Tschannen-Moran, M. & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001) Teacher efficacy: capturing an elusive construct *Teaching and Teacher Education* 17, pp. 783-805.

Vasagar, J. & Stratton, A. (2010) 'Geoffrey Canada Warns Michael Gove That Teaching Unions Kill Innovation'. *The Guardian* 5th October.