

## Editorial

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The commitment of this journal to enabling the teacher voice to be heard is undiminished. Teacher voice is a key issue for our times. In the face of global concerns about educational standards and the implications for economic competitiveness, policy makers are groping for what they imagine to be the levers of change. In the attempt to find the right lever we often see ‘education policy borrowing’ (Halpin and Troyna, 1995; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004) where top-down change strategies are used to try to implement practices that appear to have produced results in quite different cultural contexts. However, the relationship between reform and innovation is a complex one (CERI, 2008) and change that is centrally mandated often fails to make the difference that policy makers expect.

The body of evidence in relation to teacher voice and self-efficacy is growing. Research undertaken for Education International, the global association of teacher unions, indicates that amongst teachers everywhere there is an appetite for taking responsibility for educational change (Bangs and Frost, 2012). In addition, evidence presented in the report from the International Teacher Leadership project shows that it is possible, in a variety of cultural contexts, to enable teachers to act strategically to bring about change (Frost, 2012). These messages were shared and affirmed at a significant international seminar – ‘The Future of the Teaching Profession’ – in Cambridge in February 2012 ([www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/lfl](http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/lfl)). The event had been organised by the Leadership for Learning group at Cambridge, in collaboration with the Open Society Foundation, OECD and Education International. From there, key messages were conveyed to the International Summit on the Teaching Profession convened by the US Department of Education in New York on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of March. There can be no doubt that teacher leadership is on the march. It is against this backdrop that I am delighted to be able to present another excellent collection of accounts of teacher-led school improvement initiatives.

Given that this journal originated in the HertsCam Network it is not surprising that many of the accounts in this issue are from that source, but we also have one arising from the National Union of Teachers' 'Learning Circles' programme and another from a teacher leadership programme at Athens College in Greece. As always, we have two sorts of accounts: brief stories and more substantial articles. What is common to all ten accounts in this issue is that they feature the initiation, planning and leadership of a 'project'. Adopting a project based approach to leading change brings to bear a framework in which strategic planning becomes focused and powerful; consultation and negotiation with key stakeholders takes place; momentum is maintained and new practices become embedded in the fabric of the school.

Leadership is another common dimension of the work presented here; successful projects have benefitted from skilful, strategic leadership. For example, in Heather Mollison's project involving the development of the use of the 'Building Learning Power' programme, she exercised leadership as part of a strategic approach involving members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Similarly, when Sue Meaby wanted to develop the UK Resilience Programme in her school, she started with establishing the collaborative relationship and involved senior leaders in the endeavour. Vanessa Androutsopolou's project featured a strategic approach from the beginning, but in this case it could be described as straightforward collaboration rather than a strategy involving the organisational hierarchy. Vanessa simply persuaded a group of her colleagues to join her in tackling the issue of 'spelling' which was a shared concern.

In some cases the leadership dimension is not so explicit or to the fore at the beginning. Teachers often begin by focussing on experimenting with new approaches within the confines of their own classrooms; they tend to feel a sense of modesty about their own leadership. However, what happens quite typically is that, as their projects reach a level of maturity, the aspiration to share the benefits, spread the word and see the innovation grow throughout the school tends to become more manifest. This is very clear for example, in the case of Claire Simmons' project focusing on her use of the idea of 'Thanks'. This quite idiosyncratic initiative turned out to be very effective and, as momentum gathered, so did confidence in the idea which led quite naturally to a desire to share and integrate this into a wider range of practice in the school. We can see a similar pattern in

Carol Ringhoffer's project in which she developed a differentiated approach to the learning of German as a modern foreign language. What seems clear in these projects is that teachers are learning about leadership experientially – by doing leadership.

There is a good deal of common thinking about matters of pedagogy central to which is a focus on what we might call person-centred learning. For example in Gertie Bustard's project the breakthrough to learning came about when she discovered how to give her students a real sense of purpose by becoming authors and publishers. Their enthusiasm for writing was kindled by the opportunity to produce stories that became Christmas presents for their relatives. In Ase Welsh's work we can see the positive dispositions cultivated by enabling students to act as mentors to other students in the fight against bullying. A high point in Vanessa Androutsopolou's project was when the students created their own digital dictionary which became a service to other student groups in the school. This sense of purpose is a recurring facet of effective learning.

Purposeful learning is closely linked with personalisation which is evident in Carol Ringhoffer's project in which students' learning is focused on their actual level of attainment rather than on a judgement about the level of the class as a whole. The same principle is operationalised in the spelling project in Athens College where the whole class approach is abandoned in favour of a differentiated and personalised one. The intellectual open-endedness that is a feature of Claire Simmons' 'Thanks' project plays a vital part in nurturing students' agency. This is a fundamental human capacity which can so easily be diminished by the experience of schooling. This is why initiatives such as Sue Meaby's play such an important role, helping to build dispositions such as resilience and self-efficacy. In many of the accounts in this issue we see these dispositions being cultivated by drawing students into the process of improvement through consultation, evaluation and joint planning.

What all these accounts of teacher-led development work show is a high level of creativity in addressing professional concerns. This is particularly evident in Rebecca Kuberek's project in which she enabled children with special educational needs to engage with story telling through the use of a variety of sensory techniques. This shows us how it is possible to overcome the barriers to learning that stem from the students' 'moderate and profound learning difficulties'. Susie Bailey's initiative also addressed problems

arising in the context of special educational needs. Her endeavour – to shift the emphasis from care to learning for students with severe and profound learning difficulties – involved focusing on the professional development of Teaching Assistants. This project moved beyond mere training to a more profound reconstruction of professional identity for the TAs involved.

All of the work presented here could be said to be indicative of a significant change in teachers' professional identity. This is at the heart of Caroline Creaby's project in which she initiated and developed a teacher leadership support programme in her school. A recent report from Louise Thomas at the RSA (2012) suggests that, if school-based curriculum development is to be productive, we need to embrace alternative conceptions of teachers' professional identity which might be shaped by notions such as democratic professionalism and activist professionalism. I think that this issue of Teacher Leadership once again illustrates that teachers are developing a professional identity that corresponds with such conceptions and meets contemporary needs.

## References

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