

## **‘The International Teacher Leadership project’ a case of international action research**

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### **Abstract**

The paper arises from the International Teacher Leadership project, a research and development project involving researchers and practitioners in 14 European countries. The paper provides a conceptual exploration of the idea of teacher leadership and its role in educational reform, central to which is the idea that teachers, regardless of their level of power and organisational position, can engage in the leadership of enquiry-based development activity aimed at influencing their colleagues and embedding improved practices in their schools. The paper provides an outline of the project’s methodology which builds on that used in the Carpe Vitam Leadership for Learning project (Frost, 2008a). It is a form of collaborative action research which is highly developmental and discursive. It seeks to identify principles, strategies and tools that can be applied in a range of cultural settings. The paper includes a thematic analysis of the cultural contexts and policy environments of the participating countries in order to identify the obstacles to teacher leadership and to inform the nature of the support strategies employed.

**Note:** This paper is presented alongside another paper ‘Teacher Leadership in Action’ and includes some of the same text.

The initiative for this research and development project<sup>1</sup> came from David Frost at Cambridge ([www.teacherleadership.org.uk](http://www.teacherleadership.org.uk)) as a response to the interest shown by various researchers and practitioners in countries including Croatia, Greece, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Turkey. Colleagues in Australia, New Zealand and British Columbia have also expressed interest in participating through a networking relationship. David Frost has been developing models, strategies and tools for supporting teachers as leaders of innovation and change in number of contexts in the UK over the past 20 years, most recently in the context of the HertsCam programme. His research and development work has been conceptually located within the 'Leadership for Learning' work at the Faculty of Education. The idea of teacher leadership is linked to the LfL team's commitment to democratic forms of learning and leadership ([www.leadershipforlearning.org.uk](http://www.leadershipforlearning.org.uk)). The project builds on the methodology used in the Carpe Vitam Leadership for Learning project (Frost, 2008a).

### **Aims of the project**

The over-arching aim the ITL project is to build forms of support for teacher leadership appropriate to a range of different cultural and political settings and responsive to the particular challenges that arise in those settings. We set out to establish support programmes in countries such as those listed above and then to explore how the development of teachers' professional identity and their modes of professionalism can contribute to educational reform in a variety of cultural contexts.

In the long term we seek to:

- create a sustainable network of academics, policy activists and practitioners across Europe dedicated to the sharing of knowledge about how to develop teachers' professionalism

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#### <sup>1</sup> **Acknowledgments**

The initial stages of this project have been funded from a variety of sources including the Open Society Institute, The University of Peloponnese, Leadership for Learning (Cambridge), Canterbury Christ Church University, and the participating HertsCam schools (Birchwood, Barnwell and Sir John Lawes). Some individual team members have also contributed from their personal resources.

- create a sustainable network for teachers that would provide them with a forum for building their own professional knowledge – knowledge about effective teaching and learning and knowledge about how to transform and improve educational provision in their own schools and systems

It is hoped that in addition to fulfilling its central aims, this project will also provide opportunities for teachers to create networking opportunities for their students.

### **The project team**

The project is directed by David Frost and co-ordinated from Cambridge. The methodology of the project is both developmental and discursive. The project is conceived as a collaboration with research partners and practitioners. An action research methodology enables us to gather data that can be used to evaluate programmes and fed into an international discursive process. Members of the project team and the teachers and principals in the participating schools will be drawn into a process of discussion and collective evaluation in order to build our knowledge of how to support teacher leadership and to make this knowledge available to the wider professional communities in Europe.

The founders of the project occupy a variety of professional roles and in many cases have multiple identities. The project coordinator, David Frost, is an academic researcher who also leads a programme to support school improvement and teacher development in partnership with a large local authority district in the UK (The HertsCam Network).

The team also includes:

- full time teachers / senior leaders in schools who have experience of research and strong associations with the University of Cambridge
- civil servants employed by quasi-governmental agencies
- staff in NGOs

- full time academic researchers in universities and research institutes
- government employed advisers
- post-graduate research students

This multiplicity of professional identities ensures an appropriate range of expertise and perspectives on key areas such as educational policy, teacher development, school improvement and educational reform. What unites members of this team is their shared commitment to providing support for teacher leadership.

The project team met for the first time in Cambridge in November 2008 to agree on the basic principles and the project methodology. The team met for the second time in Corinth, Greece in May 2009 to work on the detail of the support programmes envisaged. Communication is maintained through a series of monthly bulletins posted on a project web forum. Ideas and resources are shared. As the practice of supporting teacher leadership develops it will be subject to critical discourse through structures discussion within this team. Funding is being sought to be able to stage a series of international conferences for researchers and practitioners.

At the beginning of the academic year, 2009-10, teacher leadership support programmes are beginning in Athens, Greece, Zagreb, Croatia, Minho, Portugal, Murcia, Spain, Istanbul, Turkey, Hertfordshire, UK (HertsCam) and South East England, UK (Cantarnet). At the time of writing we welcome new partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosova (as defined by UNSCR 1244), Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Moldova. In addition there is a linked programme in which support for teacher leadership plays a key role in addressing the challenge of participation in education of ethnic minority families. This project involves many of the SEE countries listed above and is funded in part by OSI (Open Society Institute) and we are hopeful that it will be also funded by the European Commission.

The project centres on practical work to create programmes of support for teachers who wish to redefine their roles and become ‘champions of innovation’ (Frost, 2008b). Data will inform the development of strategies adapted to each national and institutional context. 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.

### **Developing research agenda**

Since presenting a paper about the research agenda for teacher leadership at an ICSEI<sup>2</sup> conference (2003) David Frost and a number of colleagues have worked to develop their understanding of teacher leadership largely through action research. This has centred on the development of the HertsCam Network, created through a partnership between the local education authority for Hertfordshire and the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. The approach used there is referred to as ‘teacher-led development work’. The Cambridge team has also maintained a dialogue with colleagues in Kent, especially Judy Durrant who works in similar ways (Durrant, 2004; Durrant and Holden, 2006; Frost and Durrant, 2002, 2003a, 2003b).

Internationally, the teacher leadership idea has been explored as a dimension of the Carpe Vitam Leadership for Learning project (MacBeath *et al.*, 2006). This project enabled the team to explore teacher leadership in a variety of settings around the world. Workshops focusing on ‘leadership density’ (Sergiovanni, 1992) and the role of the teacher involved practitioners from Greece, Norway, Denmark, Austria, USA and Australia as well as the UK in reflection on teacher leadership. There has also been ongoing dialogue with like-minded colleagues in Sydney and discussions arising from the presentation of papers at conferences such as the annual meetings of ICSEI.

Over 15 years of work in these areas has generated substantial evidence that allows us to conclude that teacher-led development work can impact significantly on professional and institutional learning (e.g. Durrant and Holden, 2006; Durrant, 2004; Frost, 2004). The evidence is also abundant in the pages of the Teacher Leadership journal ([www.teachrleadership.org.uk](http://www.teachrleadership.org.uk)) where teachers’ voices are articulated and broadcast. In addition we can say that we have successfully developed a set of strategies to support

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<sup>2</sup> ICSEI – International Congress on School Effectiveness and Improvement

teacher leadership including the networking arrangements exemplified in the HertsCam Network.

### **A warmer policy climate?**

The traditional hierarchical structures of schools and top-down policy initiatives have arguably inhibited the development of teachers' modes of professionalism. However, there have been significant shifts in the policy environment over the past 2 or 3 years that are indicative of a climate more conducive to teacher leadership. Schools in the United Kingdom (UK) are increasingly expected to play a more proactive role in their own improvement, a fact underlined by several recent policy initiatives. For example the UK government has made radical changes to the inspection system and as well as to schools' relationship with central and local government. As a result, Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) teams no longer inspect and deliver a judgment on a school, but work with the school to validate the judgments the school has already made about its performance through rigorous self-evaluation carried out in partnership with their 'school improvement partner'. Levels of prescription in the curriculum have also been significantly reduced in recent years. Schools are now much freer to experiment with curriculum content and design than at any time since before the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988. For example, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) invites schools, via its website, to contribute to a debate about teaching and learning by submitting case studies of innovative practices they have developed (QCA, 2007). In addition, reforms to the vocational curriculum at Key Stage 4 (DfES, 2007) have given schools an unprecedented opportunity to collaborate locally in the design of curriculum and partnership arrangements.

In other parts of the world there are similar signs of doubts about the benefits of the high-stakes testing approach and centrally mandated curriculum reform-. According to Andy Hargreaves, there is a momentum for change in the US that could lead to what he calls 'the age of post-standardization' (Hargreaves, 2008). In a brief article for Education Week he argues that some of the same policy makers who pushed for the creation of a high stakes testing regime are now calling for 'a major overhaul of the American testing industry' (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2007). The report of the New

Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce (NCEE, 2007) takes stock of the declining position of the USA in international league tables and calls for an emphasis on creativity and innovation. Hargreaves also points to successful policies in Finland and Ontario which have embraced 'post-standardisation'. This theory of change pays attention to developing teachers' capacities instead of the measurement of performance.

So we could say that the policy environment in some countries is warming up and becoming more fertile for teacher leadership. However, in these situations there is an urgent need to clarify how teacher leadership can be cultivated, how it works and the part it can play in reforming educational practice and improving school effectiveness. There is also a need to explore how teacher leadership can be cultivated within schools in a variety of cultural, social, political and organisational settings. In some countries the need for reform on a national scale is pressing and previous attempts have often faltered (see for example Opfer, Bolat and Frost, 2008). In these situations it may be possible to demonstrate the potential of teacher leadership to contribute to reform.

### **Rationale for teacher leadership**

The focus on teacher leadership arises from scholarship and experience over many years informed by a series of small-scale research projects (see Frost *et al.*, 2000; Frost, 2001; Frost and Durrant, 2002; Frost and Durrant, 2003a; Frost and Durrant, 2003b; Frost, 2005; Frost, 2008c). More recently, the success of the HertsCam Network in the UK and insights gathered from working with other teacher networks such as those sponsored by the National College for School Leadership, the General Teaching Council for England and the National Union for Teachers has led to the conviction that teacher leadership holds the key to educational reform. This conviction is underpinned by a careful analysis of the literature on school improvement leading to a conceptual framework which explains the linkages between the concept of teacher leadership and the development of the kind of professional learning communities that leads to school effectiveness.

The view of school improvement assumed here is that it is not a matter of organizational restructuring which might leave the quality of practice untouched (Fullan, 1993); nor

does it involve a focus on the proxy measures of student attainment which not only neglects the critical role that pedagogy plays but also distorts and inhibits the professional learning that teachers and schools need to engage in. Instead the conceptual framework employed here focuses on 'capacity building' as the key defining characteristic of the improving school (MacBeath *et al.*, 2007; Mitchell and Sackney, 2000; Gray *et al.*, 1999). Capacity building is about developing a professional culture in which self-evaluation, innovation and improvement are valued and operationalised such that the school has the capacity to change and improve itself (Lambert, 1998). Capacity building entails the mobilisation and enhancement of both intellectual and social capital (Hargreaves, 2003) to create a powerful engine for transformation.

Leadership is key to capacity building, and this has been underscored time and again by policy makers and researchers (eg Sammons, Hill and Mortimore, 1995). However, narrow conceptions of school leadership still persist and stand in the way of the development of the capacity for educational reform.

There is a reasonable level of agreement in the literature that leadership is essentially about influence (Yukl, 1994; Leithwood *et al.*, 2004), but there is considerable room for argument about the direction of that influence. For example, is the direction towards specific predetermined goals or more broadly towards a vision of a possible future? Alternatively, the direction of influence could be less specific but driven by a set of values that act as a guiding light. The question of the specificity of the direction of influence is directly related to assumptions about who exercises leadership. If leadership is associated with a the idea of a single executive figure whose authority is drawn from their position in the organization, it may also be assumed that effectiveness is maximized when there are clear and specific goals and where leaders either have the necessary personal traits and attributes (Bass, 1981) or they have been adequately trained for the role. However, there is widespread support for the view that this narrow conception of leadership does not best serve school improvement because it fails to build capacity for improvement and reform (Hopkins, 2001; Silins & Mulford, 2003; Gronn, 2002; Raelin, 2005; Spillane, 2006; Storey, 2004; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001).

This project assumes an alternative conception of school leadership that rests on the idea of distributed leadership (Gronn, 2000, 2002; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond,

2004; Spillane, 2006). This perspective recognises that leadership involves collaborative and interactive behaviour through which organisations are maintained, problems are solved and practice is developed. This corresponds with concepts such as ‘high leadership density’ (Sergiovanni, 1992) which refers to the extent to which members of a learning community take responsibility for quality and effectiveness. The idea of teacher leadership has been promoted in many forms over in the USA and the UK and is increasingly seen as crucial to educational reform. In the 1980s, major reports such as *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and ‘*A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the twenty first century*’ (Carnegie Corporation, 1986) called for a reinvigoration of the teaching profession in the USA. Teacher leadership was seen to be the key lever for this reinvigoration.

The idea of teacher leadership was part of the developing discourse of professionalisation in the USA in the 1980s and 90s: Judith Warren Little had written a piece entitled ‘Assessing the prospects for teacher leadership’ (1988) and Anne Lieberman had addressed the question ‘Teacher Leadership: What are we learning?’ in 1992. However, significant breakthrough occurred a little later with the publication of the first edition of ‘*Awakening the Sleeping Giant: Helping Teachers Develop as Leaders*’ (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 1996). Subsequently, the ‘Teachers as Leaders Research project’ in Australia (Crowther *et al.*, 2002) illustrated what could be done to foster teacher leadership. In the UK, the National College for School Leadership sponsored useful work on distributed leadership (Bennett *et al.*, 2003; MacBeath *et al.*, 2004). Linked to this we have seen in the UK the provision of training courses and other forms of support focussing on ‘middle leadership’ and ‘emergent leaders’. These have tended to focus on building the capacity of heads of departments and other team leaders to manage their teams more productively (Naylor, Gkolia & Brundrett, 2006). There are considerable difficulties with this approach however. The creation of special roles of responsibility requires additional funding to enhance salaries and this is not easily found and in any case, it places a limit of the development of leadership capacity, reaffirming the view that the sort of professionalism that includes the exercise of leadership is only for the few rather than the many.

The focus of the ITL project differs significantly from the work described above in that it does not assume that leadership is automatically linked with positions in the

organisational hierarchy of the school but instead recognises the potential of all teachers to increase their leadership capacity as part of their role as a teacher. This view resonates with the work on ‘professional learning communities’ one of the defining characteristics of which is ‘reflective professional enquiry’ (Bolam *et al.*, 2005) which involves the ‘deprivatisation of practice’ (Louis *et al.*, 1995) through which tacit knowledge is converted into shared knowledge. Thus the ‘intellectual capital’ held by the staff is mobilised which is arguably a necessary condition for school effectiveness (Hargreaves, 2001). However, while the idea of enquiry is important, this account of professionalism is not adequate to secure educational reform. What it lacks is an account of leadership – the process whereby a teacher can clarify their values, develop a personal vision of improved practice and then act strategically to set in motion a process where colleagues are drawn into activities such as self-evaluation and innovation. This is truly about the enhancing of human agency and the development of a culture of shared responsibility for reform and the outcomes for all students.

### **The cultural / national contexts for the project**

Cultural contexts are different and we cannot assume that the same strategies and tools will be equally successful in every setting. The UK team have 20 years of experience in this field and have created a wealth of materials and approaches, but these can only constitute a starting point. In the early stages of the project we engaged in a cultural analysis exercise to inform the adaptation and development of materials to suit the particular circumstances of each national site. The resources that have already been shared include high quality workshop guidelines, tools to structure teachers’ reflection and planning, facsimiles of a wide range of documents that help teachers to imagine how they will lead development initiatives in their schools. These materials are being translated into the languages of the participating countries and then trialled and evaluated in those different contexts in order to discover what works. Materials will be adapted and shared throughout the network and new materials will be designed in response to what we learn about supporting teacher leadership in each cultural setting.

Educational reform is not simply an act of improving practice. It is, instead, social reform (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) and as such is affected by the social context in which it

is embedded. To understand educational reform we must therefore understand a country's wider educational context (Reezigt and Creemers, 2005). This section of this paper uses the imagined experience of a child, Loa, and a teacher, Sim, to explore the educational world of the ITL project countries. It considers the learners' experience of education, how teachers are trained before they enter the profession and how they are developed whilst fulfilling the teacher role. It moves on to examine the impetus for educational reform and to explore the part which teachers play in supporting the development of learning within their schools and more widely. It concludes with an analysis of the potential for teacher leadership to scaffold further the development of teacher agency and school improvement.

### **What is it like to be a learner in the ITL project countries?**

If Loa, our imagined child, were born in the UK she would begin her compulsory education at the age of 4 and be able to leave school at the age of 16. As a Turkish child, she would have to attend school between the ages of 7 and 14, whereas if she were Portuguese or Croatian she would need to be in class from the age of 6 to 15. In Greece she would start school at 6 but could leave one year earlier, at 15, whereas in Romania she could leave at 16. In Spain, her compulsory schooling would take place between the ages of 6 and 16.

The current success of the educational systems in countries in the ITL project is similarly variable in terms of assuring an adequate level of education for all children. If Loa was to be educated in Turkey and was able to read and write at age 15, she would be one of 87.4% of students to achieve this educational standard. In Portugal, the percentage rises to 93.8%, in Greece to 96%, in Romania to 97.3%, in Croatia to 98.1% and to 99% in Spain and the UK (United Nations Development Programme, 2007).

### **How do you become a teacher in the ITL project countries?**

If we turn our attention to the teachers who guide the learning of Loa and her peers, we find that they gain entrance to their chosen profession in varying ways across ITL project

countries. In Portugal, Sim, our imagined teacher, could train for four years at a variety of institutions, including universities and, in Greece, only in universities. In Croatia, Romania, Spain and Turkey, Sim's initial training would also take place within a university setting. However, despite this seemingly auspicious start, there are significant issues regarding teachers' pedagogic knowledge in many of the ITL project countries. In Greece and Turkey, for example, teachers enter the classroom with little practical understanding of how to engage students or effectively scaffold their learning (Tolkut, 1994; Bulut *et al.*, 1995). In the UK, in contrast, Sim's training would be fairly rigorous in terms of its pedagogic base, both theoretically and practically. This training could be undertaken through a number of different routes: a degree in education, a subject-based degree followed by a one year post graduate certificate in education or a choice of employment based routes where he would learn 'on the job' supported by a university and school-based mentor.

Teacher recruitment in the ITL project countries is often centralised and government controlled. If Sim wanted to become a teacher in Portugal, for example, he would be recruited through a bureaucratic system controlled by the Ministry of Education and subjected to an examination of his knowledge and competencies. In Turkey, his appointment would similarly be made by the central government. His experience in Spain would be similar if he wanted to teach in a public school although in a private school he would be selected by the Principal, a position similar to Croatia and the UK although here the Headteacher is supported in the selection process by the governors of the school. If Sim wanted to teach in Romania or Greece he would need to pass a national examination in both his subject area and in pedagogy. If he lived in Romania, all teachers' results would then be ranked and Sim and his fellow new teachers could choose, in order of the results they achieved in the examination, the school in which they wished to work. In Greece, he would be employed by the Ministry of Education but there is some choice about the school to which he is assigned .

### **The continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers**

The construction of teacher development as 'training' is a common tendency across ITL project countries. Teachers often take part in activities where they are 'instructed in' the

mechanics of a new curriculum, such as in Turkey and Greece, without any attention paid to how to engage professionals with the underpinning values or principles of what they are now being ‘trained’ to ‘deliver’ (Grossman *et al.*, 2007; Koc *et al.*, 2007). This technical approach to professional development does not acknowledge the need to build teachers’ capacity to lead and manage innovation, to have an active voice in change and to experiment with and reflect on their practice at school level (Güven, 2008). This delivery model of teacher development is, unsurprisingly, both unpopular with teachers and ineffective in changing practice (Sari, 2006). In Croatia, for example, dissatisfaction with outmoded forms of CPD is reflected in low numbers of teachers attending development events (OECD, 2009).

The focus of the professional development activity is similarly problematic. In many of the ITL project countries, teachers’ CPD revolves around extending teachers’ current knowledge and skills in their specific subject areas or re-training in other subjects. A traditional lack of pedagogic discourse in countries such as Greece, Romania and Spain, together with a top down change-management policy, contributes to the lack of impact of professional development initiatives.

Collaborative working is seen as the way forward in some countries. As a teacher in the UK, Sim would attend a programme of five, internally-run staff development days, provided by all schools for their teachers each year. These days increasingly focus on finding ways of sharing what the school collectively ‘knows’ and sessions are often led by teachers who are given a platform to share new practices they have developed to support the development of learning and teaching. In other countries, for example, Spain, instances of collaborative working are low (OECD, 2009).

Collaboration can have a political agenda. In Portugal for example, The Technological Plan for Education includes a government commitment to improve teachers’ practice through allowing schools to work within networks and encouraging collaborative working at teacher level. However the current system of teacher evaluation, based on classroom observation and student achievement, perhaps runs counter to this collaborative intent. A similar paradox arises in the UK, with the government’s promotion of inter-school collaboration and networking to support professional development apparently at odds with its emphasis on schools becoming ‘specialist’ and

competing for position in national league tables. In other countries, such as Romania, opportunities for teachers to learn from one another remain scarce.

### **The impetus for change**

A view of education as requiring structural change predominates in many of the countries involved in the ITL project, both from those within and outside of the profession. In Turkey for example, 70% of the population identified education as ‘a very big problem’ (Pew, 2002, cited in Grossman and Sanders, 2008). In Greece, diminishing belief in the existence of a clear vision for the future development of the educational system underpins a general acknowledgement of a need for considered reform.

A need to conform to EU entry requirements is often a strong impetus for change, with the Copenhagen Treaty’s requirement that EU countries ‘establish education systems to achieve the strategic ends of the union’ galvanising governments into action (Aksit, 2007). Turkey, as a country seeking admission to the EU, has been challenged to respond by this dictate. A desire to improve a country’s standing in international comparisons of educational success is another acknowledged driving force. In Croatia, for example, low PISA results provide an impetus for the replacement of the current outdated curriculum with a competence curriculum based on clearly-defined learning outcomes ([www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)).

The need to respond to Government policy, expressed in the form of targets, is another driving force for change. In Portugal, for example, the aim of the ‘New Opportunities’ initiative is to ensure that by 2010, 650,000 adults take advantage of vocational courses to raise their level of educational competence to that required of students at the end of their basic schooling. In the UK, the government similarly wishes to use its policy of setting targets for student achievement and the concomitant publication of these achievements in the form of school league tables as a driving force for change.

Despite the prevalence of this acknowledged need for reform then, would-be reformists in many ITL countries face both structural and political impediments to change. In terms of structure, a high degree of centralisation in the education system is a dominant feature

in many ITL countries, restricting the impetus for and realisation of change initiatives. Attempts at decentralization are often met with strong opposition. In Turkey, for example, politicians opposed an attempt to decentralise the education system on the grounds that the Republic's future was closely connected to the centralist structure of the state (Buyukduvenci, 1994). In Spain, the opposite problem occurs. Separatist national policy and practice have increasingly become the norm but this means that it is difficult to reach a core educational policy and gain equity of opportunity for students in terms of their educational experience.

The political nature of the education systems in ITL project countries similarly militates against reform. The recruitment of Headteachers, for example, can become a highly political act. In Turkey, for example, Headteachers are selected through a combination of test and interview, with the attendant danger of subjectivity and political motivation of choices made (Goke, 2009).

Despite these structural and political obstacles, some change initiatives have been introduced. A focus on developing competency-based education is apparent in a number of ITL project countries. In Portugal, for example, a re-structuring of the curriculum has focused on the theme of the essential competencies to be achieved by the end of a child's period of compulsory education. In Turkey, a new constructivist curriculum has been introduced. Other major reform initiatives focus on school organisation. In Portugal, for example, the 'Full Time school' programme has extended the timetable in its first phase of primary schools from morning or afternoon only education for students to all-day sessions.

The reform agenda faces many challenges however. Reforms are often piecemeal and do not impact on core educational practices (Aksit, 2007). Moreover, curriculum change is often imposed from above and introduced with inadequate initial staff training (Korkmaz, 2008) and with little attempt to provide teachers with the opportunity to try something out, reflect on their practice and come together to share their experiences (Guyen, 2008). Spain, for example, ranks the lowest of all OECD countries in terms of the level of collaborative practices for professional development (OECD, 2009).

## **Teachers' roles in reform**

There is a shared understanding amongst the educational professionals involved in the ITL project that the basis for educational reform is flawed whatever the national context. Reform initiatives which adopt a big bang and top down approach, which depend on a delivery model of professional development and which do not address the challenges of a centralized structure have a weak base. Add to this a failure to acknowledge the key role played by teachers in successful change and these ill-conceived reforms are bound to fail.

The developing understanding in the United Kingdom of the key role which teachers can play in educational reform (Frost and Durrant, 2003a; Durrant and Holden, 2006) is also shared by ITL project members. Teachers, as the final brokers of reform initiatives, are key to real reform which impacts positively on student learning (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001). For many of our international partners this relationship is yet to be formally acknowledged, however. Turkey is unusual in that Ataturk, the first president of Turkey and a military commander, recognised the significance of teachers' roles in shaping the new Turkish state early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Having convened the Education Congress in 1921, attended by over 250 teachers, he left the battle front to inaugurate the meeting, describing teachers as the 'distinguished pioneers of the Turkish state' (Uygun, 2008: 11). However, unfortunately this early promise has not yet been realised.

Teachers' dominant identity as the deliverers of the dictates of others presents a fundamental obstacle to the development of teachers' agency (Frost, 2006). The status, and consequent salary, of teachers in many ITL countries is low. Working conditions are often poor and teachers feel that they lack support. This can lead to a sense of low morale and self-esteem, which potentially undermines teachers' sense of their own professionalism. Teachers in Spain and Portugal, for example, appear to struggle to attain the level of self-efficacy and job satisfaction reported by colleagues in other OECD countries (OECD, 2009).

Attempts to change this situation can bring their own problems, however. In Portugal, for example, teachers' careers were regulated by 1990 legislation which was premised on the notion of a 'single career', with all teachers proceeding along an identical path to

reach the highest point of their career. The principles of differentiation in career path, with attendant teacher evaluation, although apparently more progressive in nature, brought with it accusations of hierarchy and favouritism and led to teacher strikes (Flores and Ferreira, 2009).

So what hope is there for the development of teacher leadership in the countries participating in the ITL project? In short, a great deal. Many teachers in the ITL project countries are crying out for change. They know that there is a better way and are open to developing their own understanding of what that better way might be. They also know that they wish to play an active role in the development of their own practice and of the educational system in their country.

### **Promoting teacher leadership**

In order to promote teacher leadership, we need strategies to support its development. There are at least four dimensions to this:

- appropriate methodologies for teacher leadership
- partnerships with external agencies
- deliberate cultivation within the schools
- appropriate contexts for knowledge building.

*Appropriate methodologies:* The idea of teacher-led development work (Frost and Durrant, 2002, 2003a) provides a step-by-step approach in which particular materials and techniques are used to model and guide a process of values clarification, reflection on development needs, consultation with colleagues about development priorities, negotiation of strategic action plans and the leadership of development work. This is just one approach and is being constantly refined and developed. It remains to be seen whether this can be adapted to different cultural settings.

*Partnerships with external agencies:* Arguably support from external agencies is important whether this be the local authority, professional associations or national agencies for school improvement or quality assurance. Arguably, university

departments of education have a special role to play because of their independence, access to literature and skills for guiding reflection, but any external support has to be mediated through genuine partnership arrangements so that external agencies do not simply replicate their normal habits of thought and operation.

*Deliberate cultivation within school:* Teachers are unlikely to sustain their capacity for leadership or successfully undertake a development project unless they have active support from their colleagues and in particular from the senior leadership team. There is a growing body of evidence that illuminates the role of senior leaders in facilitating teacher leadership (Andrews and Lewis, 2004, Mylles and Frost, 2006). There are very specific things that head teachers do such as making additional time available or helping to facilitate opportunities for collaboration, but the more fundamental task is concerned with culture building or creating the conditions in which teacher leadership can flourish (Frost, 2004).

*Appropriate contexts for knowledge building:* The nature of professional knowledge and the means by which it is generated are crucial in shaping professionalism. If teacher leadership is agential – if it is about the role of the teacher being extended such that all teachers can contribute to the development of professional practice - then it has to have a knowledge creation dimension. Support for this can be provided through networks and communities which exist to enable teachers' accounts of their leadership or development work to be articulated and broadcast. One example is the HertsCam Network in which a partnership between schools, the local authority and a university provide a context within which teachers can share their practice, engage in dialogue and publish authoritative accounts (Frost, 2008c). Other examples would include CANTARNET led by Judy Durrant and the Coalition of Knowledge Creating Schools led by Susan Groundwater-Smith in Sydney, Australia.

The ITL project enables us to examine, through a process of action research, a range of support strategies to see what is efficacious in a variety of cultural settings. What might emerge is a set of principles for practice which could inform the development of teacher leadership globally and a bank of strategies, techniques and materials that could be adapted for a wide range of settings.

## **Our methodology**

Having conducted an initial cultural analysis and reflected on this in our project team meeting, we turned our attention to the cultural context of the schools we planned to work with. It is impossible to understand the schools without having considered the economy, the political system, the policy environment and other cultural dimensions.

The next task was to try to explore the obstacles we face by making a more focused assessment of the conditions in our project schools. A comprehensive survey of the views of all teachers and all students would not be practical given the resources to hand - the tasks of design, translation, data collection and analysis would be very labour intensive. Therefore we must use more practical methods whereby data can be easily collected from a sample of people and can easily be validated through discussion with people we have easy access to. In addition to helping us understand the challenges we face our initial exploration of the school conditions could also help to engender a dialogue with senior leaders and teachers about the conditions that favour teacher leadership as part of the development of our programmes. The approach we are using is based on the idea of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997) which has echoes of both ethnography and school self-evaluation (MacBeath, *et al.*, 2000). It does not imply a judgement about the effectiveness of the school or its leadership. The idea is to collect views from teachers, students, headteachers and others about the nature of the school as a learning community. A number of tools can be used to collect these views. Then, a researcher uses this data to sketch an initial portrait which might include images as well as words. The portrayal is then fed back to significant groups and individuals and adjusted to take account of their reactions. The process is one that shapes the portrait but also provokes a dialogic process that can lead to change.

The portrait is not a reliable interpretation of hard data. It is assumed that it will be difficult to collect good quality data from a valid sample of teachers and students. The validity of the portrait is ensured by the artfulness of the researcher in listening, interpreting and writing up their understandings and by the extent to which the researcher can get feedback on the initial sketches in order to produce a more reliable

portrait that is acceptable to a wide enough range of people. The main tool for gathering the views of a range of people within the school is the Audit instrument which draws on a number of sources including the literature on Professional Learning Communities (Bolam *et al.*, 2005), the Leadership for Learning principles (MacBeath *et al.*, 2006) and the Developing Teacher Leaders project (Crowther *et al.*, 2002).

Having conducted the school portraiture exercise, the next task is to set in motion a programme of support which can then be monitored and evaluated as it proceeds.

### *Monitoring and evaluating teacher leadership programmes*

In some contexts the word ‘monitoring’ has unhelpful managerialist connotations. It is used in this context to refer to the way in which we can look at a process in action by gathering data continuously or at regular intervals. In order to do make sure that we can evaluate our programmes, we need a good supply of data that will challenge our personal perceptions and enable the participants to play their part in the evaluation of the programme. We have designed a set of data collection tools which can be used as part of the action to support the teacher leadership programme. For example, a tool which supports a teacher leadership group members’ reflections about the impact their projects are likely to have on practice within the school and the perceived obstacles to that will also generate useful data which will help the group facilitators to evaluate their practice in supporting the process.

Our action research methodology enables us to gather data that can be used both to evaluate programmes and also to feed the international discursive process. Members of the project team and the teachers and principals in the participating schools will be drawn into a process of discussion and collective evaluation in order to build our knowledge of how to support teacher leadership and to make this knowledge available to the wider professional communities in Europe.

## **Conclusion**

The optimistic view expressed by the founder members of the project team about the possibilities and potential for teachers to become more influential in their schools and

their educational systems has met with encouraging waves of enthusiasm. We have found that teachers, advisors, school principals, policy activists and researchers in many countries can see the sense in the idea that educational transformation can be taken forward by mobilising the energy and creativity of teachers, enabling them to lead processes of innovation and development in their schools.

The professional knowledge arising from the flowering of teacher-led change is twofold: first there is knowledge about how to teach and facilitate pupils' learning. This is grounded knowledge, tried and tested in the field; knowledge that is trusted by other teachers who respect its authorship. Second, there is knowledge about how to initiate change, manage processes of innovation and develop practice; not just that of individual teachers but that which becomes embedded in the life of the school.

With the right kind of support teachers are able to exercise leadership, becoming more influential by acting strategically to embed new and improved practice in their schools. Thus improvement and innovation is not reduced to the idea of implementation led from the top but is seen instead as an outcome of teachers' leadership in which they persuade their colleagues to collaborate with them. This is not to say that top-down policies and change strategies have no place in educational reform. Far from it. But, it does imply that policy makers will need to focus more on the art of support and orchestration rather than the pseudo-science of design and 'roll out'.

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