

Ljubica Petrovic's Development Work **Building Teacher Leadership** in Croatia

Ljubica has had a successful track record as a student in school and later in university but her experience was of limited pedagogical practice dominated by traditional transmission models of teaching and rote learning. Critical thinking was not encouraged. She left school determined to be a teacher because she believed that things could be done differently. Her experience of initial (pre-service) teacher training was also limited, focusing on the content of a lesson rather than on topics such as relationships with pupils and parents or how to develop critical thinking. The schools she taught in were similarly limited as professional learning communities having little funding to allow teachers to participate in continuing professional development activities. Collaboration and knowledge sharing within the school tended not to happen because of the prevailing 'egg carton' organisational structures (Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2001 after Lortie, 1975). She found the development of teachers' practice being further undermined by the relatively low status of the teaching profession in Croatia reflected in the level of salaries which have been relatively low.

In spite of this rather negative picture however, Ljubica is optimistic about the future. She is aware that there are many teachers who she believes are highly motivated and have the potential to influence their colleagues and the educational system itself although they would not currently see themselves as 'leaders'. Similarly there are creative and committed headteachers who would like to move the system forward. Ljubica's own research gave her insight into the way headteachers' roles are constrained by the environment in which their schools operate. The problem is that improvements in practice rely on the actions of individual teachers and headteachers without the benefit of a shared dialogue about school improvement or a systematic approach to professional development for teachers or headteachers. Paradoxically perhaps, this is also the solution. Ljubica draws attention to the fact that there are individuals, whether they be teachers or headteachers, who have a clear moral purpose and the creativity to make a difference and it is these individuals who will build a new professional culture through their strategic action.

Ljubica joined the recently formed 'International Teacher Leadership' project because it offers an approach to providing support for these individuals. This research and development project also involves researchers and practitioners from Greece, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Turkey and the UK, with colleagues further afield in Australia, New Zealand and British Columbia participating through a networking relationship.

In her research into headship in Croatia it was clear that headteachers see the barriers to reform as being the teachers: their current professional identity, capabilities and dispositions towards change and improvement (Petrovic, 2008). Currently there is a lack of support for teachers who want to change things and there is no systematic training which might equip teachers and headteachers with leadership skills and knowledge of organisational learning. Ljubica sees the international project as offering a way forward because it can fill these gaps and activate teachers who are willing to lead change and help to create the conditions in which teacher leadership can flourish. The aim is to establish programmes of support for teacher leadership in the countries 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 settings. The methodology of the project is developmental and discursive, involving practical work to support teachers in their attempts to redefine their roles and become 'champions of innovation'. Data will be used to inform the development of strategies adapted to each national and institutional context.

Ljubica is collaborating with Ivana Cosic who works for the Department for secondary education at the Croatian Ministry of Education, and Iris Marusic, a researcher from the Institute for Social Research. All three of them participated in the first meeting of the research team which took place in Cambridge in November 2008 and they will be taking part in the second meeting in Corinth, Greece in May 2009. As the project gathers momentum, teachers from all the participating countries will be drawn into the process through international conferences and web-based platforms.

Ljubica is typical of so many young teachers and researchers across the world who are seeking new ways to release the massive potential that teachers have to create educational reform from the bottom up rather than waiting for policy makers to dictate it from the top down.

References

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- Spillane, J. P., Halverson R. & Diamond, J. B. (2001) Investigating School Leadership Practice. *Educational Researcher*, April, pp. 23-26.