

Supporting teachers to lead change in Bosnia and Herzegovina Ivona Čelebičić

I am a researcher in an organisation called 'proMENTE social research' based in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H). proMENTE undertakes research for both businesses and non-profit organisations internationally. It aims to promote the positive development of individuals and society and to further humanistic and democratic principles. Since one of our key objectives is to improve the quality of education, my colleagues and I at proMENTE have promoted teacher leadership both at home and abroad by participating in the International Teacher Leadership (ITL) initiative and the APREME project



Ivona Čelebičić & David Frost in Sarajevo

(<http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/lfl/researchanddevelopment/teachers/apreme/>).

We responded enthusiastically to the invitation to become involved in ITL because teacher leadership seemed to offer a new approach to reform which might be suited to the particular challenges of the B&H context. Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) is in the south-eastern corner of Europe bordered by Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. In 1992 B&H declared independence from what was then Yugoslavia. When the Dayton agreement finally brought the war to an end in 1995, it was agreed to retain B&H's international boundaries and create a joint multi-national, democratic government. The structure of government in B&H remains very complex. In addition to the state level, there is a second tier of government comprising two entities: the Federation of B&H and the Republika Srpska, each with its own legal system. There is also the internationally supervised district of Brčko, which sits between the two entities. The Federation of B&H is divided into 10 Cantons, each with its own government. The result is that B&H has 13 ministries or government departments of education; one for the Republic of Srpska, one for the Brcko District, one for each canton and a Federal Ministry of Education and Science which has a co-ordination role.

The country is home to three ethnic 'constituent peoples'; the largest of these being the Bosniaks; Serbs are the second largest group and Croats the smallest. There are also differences in religion - Bosniaks are usually Muslims; Serbs are usually Orthodox Christian and Croats are mostly Catholic - and they all have their own history and cultural backgrounds. Unfortunately, during the war which took place between 1992 and

1995, these differences were exploited by those who wanted to promote hatred and conflict. It is easy to see how this situation affects the education system with a tendency towards separation and segregation.

The challenge for the education system

In the past decade, the education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been characterised by a constant struggle for revitalisation and survival, political turmoil and, in the last five years, considerable change. Reforms include the transition to a compulsory nine-year education provision and the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream education. A review of the curriculum has led to the introduction of new subjects. These reforms brought with them a multitude of challenges for teachers and made demands on both initial and continuing education and training (Pašalić-Kreso *et al.*, 2006).

Ten years ago a report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2003) described the status of the education system, highlighting a range of issues for educational governance and management in Bosnia and Herzegovina as summarised below.

- a lack of policy leadership and administrative skills in education
- a lack of modern educational leadership skills on all levels
- a lack of awareness of the need for change resulting in little motivation to design or implement educational innovation
- a lack of participation by parents, communities, schools and teachers
- over-politicisation, leading to deadlock in discussions about interests
- ‘top-down’ decision-making

Recent research into the state of the education system and the professional development needs of teachers clearly indicates that existing provision does not correspond with teachers’ real needs or the need for reform as seen in the rest of Europe and beyond (Pašalić-Kreso *et al.*, 2006).

When we at proMENTE considered these issues, we concluded that there was important work to be done to enable teachers to address the need for innovation. Through our networks in the Western Balkans, we were invited to participate in a seminar that took

place in Belgrade in 2009 to introduce the International Teacher Leadership initiative launched in Cambridge, UK the previous year. This seemed to offer a way to enable us to address our concerns about the state of educational innovation. Through a teacher leadership programme we could contribute to strengthening the capacities of teachers and thereby improve the accessibility and quality of educational provision.

Teacher leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The conviction that it is teachers who make most difference to educational success was captured for me in this often quoted extract from the writing of Haim Ginott who set down his manifesto when he was a young teacher.

I've come to a frightening conclusion that I am the element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanised.

(Ginott, 1976)

The Teacher Leadership programme was first implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina in nine schools in the Sarajevo Canton in the academic year 2009-2010. The goal was to support teachers' capacities for leading change and enable them to gain insight by reflecting on this engagement. The existing guidelines and tools provided through our participation in the ITL project (Frost, 2011) were adapted for the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina and used to conduct each of the sessions in the programme.

Teachers were asked to identify a 'challenge' that they would like to overcome and then plan and lead a project centred on innovation to address that challenge. Through their projects, the teachers would lead processes of review and the development of practice in their schools. The development process would have an inquiry dimension in which the teachers would gather evidence and use it to bring about a re-consideration of pedagogical practice. In order to better understand the idea of teacher as an initiator and leader of change, teachers worked individually and discussed their initiatives in the group workshops. These teachers were, and most of them still are, involved in certain activities which contain elements of teacher leadership, so there were no obstacles or misunderstanding about idea of teacher leadership.

The teachers' were motivated by the desire to improve their professional practice as well as to bring about the development of teaching methods that would enhance the quality of

students' learning and their enthusiasm for particular subjects like mathematics. Teachers also emphasised the importance of sharing knowledge with other colleagues.

Teachers were expected to document their development work on individual and school levels in the form of a portfolio. They were invited to participate in a discussion on a web forum and to upload materials and documents that would be useful to other teachers. They were also asked to write stories about their own development work.

Focusing on inclusion

In the further development of the teacher leadership programme we focused on addressing the key challenges to education in B&H. The legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina allows each individual to have equal right of access to education and equal opportunities for participation in the appropriate provision, without discrimination on any basis. The objectives of the current education reform which includes the commitment to 'eliminate discrimination in education', gave us a firm basis for the development of the programme. During the academic year 2012-2013, inclusion was put at the centre of our programme and was titled: 'Teachers as agents of change for education without prejudice'. The programme was implemented in four schools in two cantons: two in Mostar (Herzegovina Neretva Canton) and two in Tuzla (Tuzla Canton). The aim of the project was: 'Enhancing the quality of educational processes, providing equal education for all children regardless of their ethnic background and belonging, and in accordance with their special educational needs'.

The teachers' projects were mostly focused on teaching and learning in the classroom. The focus of each teacher's project was closely related to the problems they were facing at school every day. The teachers were very clear that their projects had to result in improvements in practice that would have the most benefit for their students. The titles of some of the teachers' projects were:

- Developing partnerships with parents for the purpose of improving cooperation and communication
- Developing a strategy for increasing the number of students who do their homework independently
- Developing a strategy for improving students' working habits
- Developing a strategy for social integration of students through extracurricular activities

- Developing a strategy to promote cooperation through art and music activities with students
- Developing a strategy for the improvement of hygiene and the health habits of children with special educational needs
- Online psychological-pedagogical counselling for teachers in mainstream schools

During the whole programme the emphasis was on teachers' leadership skills and how to exercise these in taking the initiative and leading projects that will bring about change. Teachers developed awareness of their own capacity for leadership and they became more confident about leading change. They contributed to professional knowledge in their schools on different levels: among their colleagues, sharing information with the Class Council and informing school management. Teachers expressed gratitude for the opportunity to work together in a group with teachers from other schools because, in every-day work, they have a very few opportunities to meet each other and exchange experiences in work.

As for the media, all relevant information about the programme was regularly published on a regional web page dedicated to teacher leadership www.nastavnickovodstvo.com. This was created for several countries from the region (B&H, Serbia, Croatia and Monte Negro). The main purpose of the website is networking and knowledge building. It provided a forum for teachers from each of the countries to discuss, exchange experiences and provide each other with help and support. News from each country about topics such as network meetings and school visits was uploaded together with documents, articles, videos and links to other sites where teachers' stories of good practice could be found.

Making a difference to practice and beyond

Through group work, teachers identified how their development projects would have impact on their own work, on their schools, on other schools and on the network of teachers involved in the Teacher Leadership programme.

The impact of the programme on professional development and growth was recognised by teachers. In feedback to us they mentioned outcomes such as the following:

- finding the ways to improve the teaching process
- applying new techniques and methods
- documenting the working process

- applying leadership ideas
- setting higher goals in work
- getting out of routine
- encouraging to more creativity
- better cooperation with parents

The teachers also recognised the impact of the programme on their schools in terms such as:

- improvement of teamwork and cooperation between home-room and subject teachers creation of better work environment
- enhancing teachers' motivation
- better use of students' potential and interests
- strengthening teachers' competencies through co-operation and exchange of experiences

Networking of teachers from different parts of B&H had a special purpose for us which was to create a network of ITL schools able to cooperate on different levels of activity, creating a network of teaching professionals who, through the exchange of experiences and support, would promote equal rights for all and the values of multicultural society.

Taking into consideration that the communication between schools and teachers in different parts of B&H is very poor, the networking of schools and teachers was a particular challenge for our programme. The aim was to gather teachers from different schools and geographic parts of B&H in one place and so they could share their experiences of solving problems and the practices they use in their schools. At the network meetings, teachers met their colleagues from other parts of B&H, presented their projects, discussed the problems they face in their everyday work and the ways in which they solve them. This dialogue focuses on what teachers like to talk about – their professional practice – but it also opens up the possibility of overcoming prejudices and moving beyond stereotypes about each other. This has implications not only for the teachers involved but also for their students, colleagues, the school and the wider community.

References

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