

Editorial

David Frost

Wolfson College, Cambridge, U.K.

It has been my privilege to get an early sight of the articles included in this journal issue. It is very encouraging to see scholars continuing to come forward to explore the multi-faceted phenomenon of teacher leadership.

The great majority of articles in this journal arise from the US context, so it is interesting to note that this issue has a more international flavour in that one of the three articles included focuses on teacher leadership in Qatar. In addition, as guest editor, I write from a British perspective. Multi-national perspectives enable us to reflect on what is different about these contexts and what is common ground. There are obvious variations regarding the national cultures and policy environments, but there is also a shared interest in teacher leadership in its many forms. Although the term “teacher leadership” originated in the USA, many of us have been happy to jump on that rhetorical bandwagon. It is clear from the growing literature on the subject that the boundaries of the concept have expanded. Teacher leadership is now an established part of the landscape of educational leadership throughout the world. I am not sure whether this is because of the influence of western scholarship or that the label teacher leadership is being attached to practices that have been developing independently in locations around the world.

Conceptual Difficulties

Whenever we write about teacher leadership, it seems inevitable that we will bump into two conceptual difficulties. One of these is the distinction between, on the one hand, the practice of leadership on the part of teachers and on the other hand, teachers being designated teacher leaders. The title of this journal includes the term “teacher leadership,” but many of the articles we publish are about “teacher leadership.” The same issue arises when we look at the excellent document published more than a decade ago under the title *Teacher Leader Model Standards*, the preface of which included:

Teacher leadership is a potentially powerful strategy to promote effective, collaborative teaching practices in schools that lead to increased student achievement, improved decision making at the school and district level, and create a dynamic teaching profession for the 21st century. (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011)

This document was extremely helpful in offering a guide to domains of action. For example, it says that teacher leaders should foster collaborative cultures and one way to do this is to employ facilitation skills. Easier said than done, of course. The aim of the document was to be an aid to dialogue, and it is an excellent tool for discussion and reflection. When addressing the tension between teacher leadership and teacher leader, it is helpful to think about the ideas put forward by Raelin (2011) who highlighted the concept of leadership as practice. This is about the behaviours of leadership and its operation rather than the position or role.

A related conceptual difficulty is the tension between the practice of leadership and the responsibility of management. In a recent piece I did for a handbook on educational leadership, I quoted Cuban who recognised the problem many years ago:

Schools as they are presently organised press teachers, principals, and superintendents toward managing rather than leading, toward maintaining what is rather than moving to what can be. (Cuban, 1988, as cited in Frost, 2023, p. 92)

This is increasingly true today as the culture of performativity (Ball, 2003) intensifies and permeates the global discourse. Those who occupy formal leadership positions of whatever kind are likely to find themselves under pressure to deliver predicted test results, however flawed the tests might be. This responsibility will always undermine their attempts to initiate and sustain innovation. When Jonathan Supovitz, a researcher at PENN, visited England a few years, he examined what he referred to as a lattice for school leadership (Supovitz, 2014). He admired the structure of leadership roles and the way leadership development is built into the system in England and Wales. However, my experience working closely with schools suggests that what he was seeing is still dominated by the responsibility of management. Those with formal leadership roles, whether they be at middle or senior leadership levels, struggle with the tension between the two dimensions of their role: the need to exercise leadership aimed at transformation while, at the same time, carrying out management tasks aimed at maximising test results.

Reading the three articles presented in this issue, I am reminded of more fundamental issues that pertain to the concepts of agency, scholarship, values, and social justice.

Agency

These days we hear the term “agency” bandied about in the media ad nauseum. It is one of those ideas that have migrated from social science to popular discourse with the consequent fluidity of meaning and a variety of applications. I have found Bandura’s work within the field of psychology helpful in understanding the concept of agency:

The exercise of personal agency is achieved through reflective and regulative thought,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..... (so) some measure of self-directedness and freedom is possible. (Bandura, 1989, p. 1182)

It can also be approached from a sociological perspective; Structuration theory tells us that human agency is in dynamic relation to social structure (Giddens, 1984). Social structures are recreated in the specific moment of action, which means that we can choose not to recreate them but instead try to establish quite different norms instead. Giddens said the following:

Human actors are not only able to monitor their activities and those of others in the regularity of day-to-day conduct; they are also able to ‘monitor that monitoring’ in discursive consciousness. (Giddens, 1984, p. 29)

My colleagues and I in the HertsCam Network have drawn from these analyses to argue that agency is a crucial dimension of what it is to be human. It can be constrained and diminished, but it can also be enhanced. It is interesting to read Doyle Fosco et al.'s article about the connection between teacher leadership and wellbeing. It is not a simple or unproblematic one, of course, but their application of Seligman's PERMA model helps us to explore the connection. It seems evident that there is potential for the exercise of leadership to enhance wellbeing and to help address problems associated with teacher engagement, motivation, and retention.

DiLucchio and Leaman's article about teacher leadership and teacher research highlights a crucial issue concerning the exercise of choice. The research process involves teacher leaders being able to identify their own research questions that are invariably linked to their professional concerns. This links to the discussion about agency of course. This space for choice is clearly an important tenet in the academic programme that DiLucchio and Leaman provide, but this is not always the case. For example, in England, where schools belong to a cluster of schools, such as a multi-academy trust, the managers may identify a narrow set of development priorities that teachers in all the schools in the trust are required to pursue. This has negative implications for agency of course and, I would argue, for scholarship.

Scholarship

DiLucchio and Leaman's article also raises for me the question of the nature of scholarship and the part it can play in teacher leadership. It is not uncommon for university-based teacher educators to guide those who participate in their programmes to adopt a model of inquiry that is the norm in universities: literature review, research question(s), data collection, findings, and conclusions. However, this is not necessarily a good fit for teachers who are motivated to advance their practice. I am encouraged to read in DiLucchio and Leaman's account that they guide teachers to reflect on their practice to construct a research question. This is clearly an agential way to begin and relates to what DiLucchio and Leaman invite us to consider in their article about wellbeing and the importance of being able to exercise choice. DiLucchio and Leaman's article shows us how the process of inquiry can boost teacher leaders' confidence and intellectual capacity.

In my experience, it is possible to enable teachers to reflect on their professional concerns without it necessarily leading to a research question. In the programmes supported by the HertsCam Network, we guide teachers to move from the clarification of their values and their concerns towards consultation with colleagues and then to a plan of action. Such a plan will usually include an inquiry dimension but not one constrained by the normal expectations of the university. Our preferred construction was that of the development project rather than the research project. We write about this in a previous editorial for this journal (Frost et al., 2019).

In their article, DiLucchio and Leaman explain that, in their practice, they encourage teacher researchers to see themselves as scholars. I welcome this approach as it leads us to ask what form of scholarship might be most appropriate for busy professional such as teachers. That inquiry should begin with actual professional concerns is clearly wise, but I would suggest that we could explore further how a broader conception of scholarship can elevate not just the role of the teacher leaders but the role of teachers in general. In his seminal report about scholarship, Ernest Boyer found that in universities, a restricted view of scholarship was taking hold. He said that "basic research has come to be viewed as the first and most essential form of scholarly activity" (1990, p. 15). I suggest that for teachers, whether they have leadership responsibilities

or not, we need a view of scholarship in which we consult relevant literatures, not just to read about evidence of what works but to find the conceptual frameworks that help to illuminate pedagogical practice in order to consider what could be changed and how this could be pursued. Scholarship should also involve developing the capacity for analysis, critique, and argument. Again, a clear implication from DiLucchio and Leaman's article is that teacher leaders who engage in research feel better able to influential beyond their own classrooms and schools.

Values

When teacher leaders are motivated by their own values, they are likely to be more committed to promoting change. Rania Sawalhi and Tasneem Amatullah's article draws our attention to the question of values, which is prominent in discussions about Islamic schools and their mission to inculcate Islamic values. This raises an important question about the origin of a teacher's values, and there is perhaps a difference in cultural context at work here. My own assumption is that a person's values are personal to them, and it is not feasible to mandate another person's values. Nevertheless, the task of school leadership is to try to build an organisational culture in which values are shared. As Sawalhi and Amatullah argue, it cannot be guaranteed that all teachers in an Islamic school will enact the values that fits the school's mission and identity, and this must surely be true of any school of whatever kind.

It would be interesting to compare what Sawalhi and Amatullah found with what we might find in the Catholic schools that I work with in the UK. They too have a responsibility to promote particular values throughout the school community, but the teachers are enabled to engage in a process of values clarification as part of the reflection, which leads to the identification of a professional concern. We have found that this process of clarifying values and concerns is highly effective in schools in England but also in many other parts of the world, including Egypt and Palestine (Eltemamy, 2019; Sawalhi, 2019). The advantage of this initial process is that it allows people to rise above what often remains tacit, to surface their values and examine them through dialogue with their peers. It also enables them to consider other value positions, whether they are those of other individuals or those expressed in the school's mission statement.

One of the most powerful outcomes of this reflection and dialogue about values is that it raises questions about equity in relation to student access to the curriculum and the extent to which all students' needs are being met. In other words, it brings matters of social justice to the fore.

Social Justice

Social justice is about the fundamental principles of fairness, equity, and inclusivity. These are matters that teachers readily address if the organisational conditions allow. In Sawalhi and Amatullah's article, we are introduced to the concept of "Tarbiyah," which is to do with the development of character. This is also discussed in the handbook on educational leadership I refer to above in which there is a connection between Tarbiyah and social justice. Samier and ElKaleh (2023) say that it is about "the process of becoming a more developed and better person ethically" (p. 321). This commitment to social justice was echoed in Amina Eltemamy's study in Cairo that was discussed in this journal just a few years ago (Eltemamy, 2019). Of course, Cairo, Egypt is a long way from Cairo, Illinois; however, while the cultural context might differ,

I suggest the challenge remains the same. It is to enable teachers to exercise leadership in which the principles of fairness, equity, and inclusivity are pursued.

There are parallels, I think, between the concept of Tarbiyah and the Aristotelian conception of the good life, which is one that is guided by virtues. The notion of ethics is common to both concepts, and this implies a need for reflection and inquiry. Whenever we contemplate exercising leadership, we must ask ourselves about our own moral purpose. Am I seeking to lead in order to improve the life chances of this or that group of students? How can I enable my colleagues to share my commitment? What is the ethical way to proceed? What do I need to find out in order to illuminate and inform the process of change?

Conclusion

The articles in this issue of the journal raise a host of important issues as I hope I have indicated above, and they also remind us of the difficulties associated with teacher leadership. One example of such difficulties is concerned with the nature of organisational cultures and the challenge to common assumptions about collegiality. Colleagues' beliefs about authority and legitimacy can lead to stress when it is perceived that a fellow practitioner appears to be adopting a superior position. This confirms for me that there are two different although related challenges: the first is the challenge of using one's authority wisely to carry out one's mandate as a formal position holder. This requires a skill set that takes time to acquire and a considerable degree of personal resilience. The second challenge is more concerned with the nature of leadership practice in which drawing upon the authority derived from position in the hierarchy is probably counterproductive. Leadership behaviours are complex and nuanced; they also need to be sensitive to context. If the goal is to influence colleagues, an individual needs to consider how to start a dialogue that is authentic and based on mutual respect and common interests. For example, a casual conversation during a coffee break maybe a better way to begin than scheduling a meeting with an agenda and so forth.

In my own endeavours in the field of teacher leadership, I have found that both teachers who have formal positions and those who have no position at all have a common need to tread carefully along the path of leadership (Frost, 2018; Frost et al., 2019). There is evidence in articles in this issue of IJTL of the enormous potential for teacher leadership to foster a stronger sense of belonging and collective efficacy. The challenge is to find the leadership techniques and strategies that will not only enable us to improve educational provision but will do so by enriching the professional communities we serve.

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