

Teacher-Led Development Work

Guidance and Support

David Frost and Judy Durrant

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First published 2003 by
David Fulton Publishers
www.fultonpublishers.co.uk

Published 2013 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 1 84312 006 2
ISBN 978-1-843-12006-3 (pbk)

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Typeset in Great Britain by Keyset Composition, Colchester, Essex

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Foreword by John MacBeath

Teachers as leaders? It is a challenging notion at a time when teachers are reporting new levels of stress, disenchantment and 'deprofessionalisation' (Price Waterhouse Cooper 2001; Johnson and Hallgarten 2002; Galton and MacBeath 2002). What room is there for teacher leadership in a policy climate in which government dictates and teachers follow? A climate in which policy makers talk in terms of 'delivery', casting teachers in the role of ambassadors of government to the world of children. Teachers are struggling to come to terms with demands for accountability – not to the needs of children themselves or their parents, but to government departments and inspectors.

David Frost and Judy Durrant are optimists, possibly incurable, a condition brought about by their constant contact with teachers and classrooms on a week-by-week basis. They are acutely aware of the expectations and pressures that constrain the teaching task but they also observe how creative teachers can work in the spaces. They understand the paradoxes of school and classroom life – creative discontent, orderly chaos, confident uncertainty. They witness regularly how frustration can be turned into excitement and the infectious quality of that, not just within one classroom but across a whole school, beyond into local school clusters, and even across national borders. In the so-called 'information age', it is a startling insight that imaginative practice in one classroom can travel the world.

Good ideas and innovative practice do not, however, spread of their own accord; they require support, frameworks and critical friendship. They are embedded in principles of 'knowledge creation and transfer', inherently sceptical of simplistic notions of 'transmission'. Herein is the genius of this volume – a strong underpinning respect for good theory married to pragmatics and devilish detail. It is in the injunction to get the workshop setting right, to attend to the small things: the recalcitrant technology, the heating that the caretaker may have programmed to switch off at four o' clock, the glass of wine as more than a symbolic accoutrement.

Themes run through the book as continuous threads – telling your story, sharing, challenging, generating professional knowledge, increasing the stock of understanding and expertise. Discovering the treasures within the everyday, making the invisible visible, rendering the implicit explicit, taking the initiative, practising leadership by doing it; these are messages that are returned to persistently and are embedded in the cornucopia of exemplars and resources. The authors wish to dispel the myth that educational literature contains only 'theory'. In these pages the medium *is* the message. Theory in practice. There is nothing so practical as a good theory.

Dispelling myths is an important prelude to the many and varied activities contained in this book. This is sometimes described as 'reframing' or 'borderless thinking'. It challenges inert ideas. Leadership is exercised not simply at the apex of the organisation. Professional development is not an event. Improvement is not mandated by government. Good practice is not disseminated by the dead hand of bureaucracy.

And this is not a book – at least not in the sense of a good bedtime read. It is a guide on the side. It is like a Michelin travelogue that you peruse, flick the pages and alight on somewhere you have always wanted to go. The authors use words such as ‘reconnaissance’, ‘the terrain’, ‘exploring’, implying that teacher leadership is a journey, whose starting point is anticipation and adventure and its goal a new and wonderful place to be.

John MacBeath is Professor of Educational Leadership at the
University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.

Other perspectives

Lesley Saunders

This is a deceptive book: written in a tactful, meticulous and rather modest way, it is none the less quite radical in the propositions it sets out for teachers' professionalism and professional development and in the very proper presumptions it makes about the need for, and desirability of, teacher-led school improvement.

It is also very timely – there is undoubtedly a sense abroad amongst many policy-makers, practitioners and scholars alike that, without the engagement of the hearts and minds of teachers acting as leaders and agents of change, further educational reform will be stymied, and probably not even viable.

The authors say (on p. 13) that 'real improvement stems from participation in a discourse that is both critical and authentic'. If we add to that 'and is also creative and energising' then we have a very good idea about the tone and significance of this book. It is firmly rooted in the daily practice of the classroom and also in the best tradition of scholarly approaches to reflection and evaluation – but its branches spread out into the bright open air of the ideals and vision that attract most teachers to teaching in the first place.

Lesley Saunders was formerly Head of School Improvement Centre at the National Foundation for Educational Research, and is currently Policy Adviser for Research at the General Teaching Council for England.

Graham Handscomb

This is a book of great value. It has the potential to become a seminal guide for teachers wanting to reclaim their sense of professionalism and to genuinely lead development in their own classrooms and schools. The book's particular strength is that it starts from the premise that teachers' lives will continue to be pressurised and that schools will remain complex change environments. With reference to recent research, the authors acknowledge squarely that ten years of 'top-down' reform has led to intolerable workloads and has inhibited teachers' capacity to initiate and sustain their own development activity. By providing this grounded and systematic manual, they seek to change all that.

The great merit of the book is that this practical set of development tools is thoroughly founded on carefully established theory of teacher development, drawing on key literature and the authors' own research and wide practice in schools. The net result is to inspire confidence and credibility in the approaches advocated and, most importantly, to inspire teachers and to convince them that development work is not only do-able but that it can significantly help to transform the quality of their worklife.

Graham Handscomb is Head of Best Practice and Research, Essex Local Education Authority.

Gary Holden

Over a six-year period in a Kent comprehensive school, my colleagues and I employed the methods and principles described in this inspiring book. For me, this volume sums up with passion, clarity and humanity the values, processes and outcomes of teacher-led development work.

I worked alongside teachers who followed the process described here and saw at first hand how they were enabled to take control of their own professional lives and to play a real and tangible role in school improvement. As a senior manager I saw these teachers become central figures in building the school's capacity to initiate, sustain and build on change.

David Frost and Judy Durrant provide us with an invaluable map of the values, principles and processes that underpin teacher-led development work, a map that unites practitioners, schools, districts and universities working in partnership towards a single destination: the creation of learning communities in our schools.

Gary Holden was formerly acting Deputy Head at St John's RC Comprehensive School, Gravesend, Kent, and is currently Deputy Head at Borden Grammar School, Sittingbourne, Kent.

Jane McGregor

This book acknowledges and celebrates the complexity of contexts for teacher-led development work. It engages with the web of relationships that comprise the school, within and beyond the institution, paying close attention to the type of interactions that create and sustain meaningful change and improvements in teaching and learning. A particular strength of the book is the authentic and practical support it provides, evolving from grounded experience, as a starting point for individuals, groups of teachers and wider networks involved in school-based development and enquiry. In emphasising the importance and realities of teachers' strategic leadership of such development, it addresses the form of collaborative and collegial relationships that are frequently invoked but rarely mapped out. The elegant but robust combination of theory and practice provides a framework that will be of use to teachers and those involved in arrangements to support teacher leadership. In providing practical suggestions for this support, the book makes a real contribution to the evolution of the dynamic and reflective communities of practice which can transform the teaching and learning relationships in our schools.

Jane McGregor was formerly specialist adviser to the TTA teacher research panel and is a member of the Networked Learning Communities programme team.

About this book

What is it for?

This book presents and explains an approach to school improvement that rests on the belief that it is teachers who are at the 'sharp edge' of processes of development and improvement (Bascia and Hargreaves 2000). Effectiveness in teaching and learning inevitably depends on their imagination, creativity, effort and commitment. It depends on their capacity to exercise leadership to bring about change. The approach to school improvement presented here integrates a number of elements that support teachers' leadership and professional action. This capacity is nurtured by management structures and professional cultures within schools, but these are developed most effectively and fully when teachers play an active part in their development. The capacity of teachers to make a difference is made more powerful through links between schools committed to learning together. It is also strengthened by the inclusion of an external dimension to the support as schools form partnerships and collaborative arrangements with other institutions and agencies. This approach is intended to contribute to the 'reprofessionalisation' of teachers, reinstating them as the key agents of educational change and improvement.

Who is it for?

The book provides practical guidance both for teachers who wish to initiate and sustain development work in their schools and for those who may want to provide a framework of support for those teachers. Specifically, it provides guidance for:

- teachers and others leading development work;
- head teachers/principals/senior managers promoting and supporting inclusive leadership;
- coordinators, facilitators, mentors, consultants, advisers and university staff supporting teachers' development work;
- organisations and agencies providing and coordinating schemes and networks that support teachers' leadership.

While the book has been written specifically with teachers and schools in mind, the framework can also be used within other organisations and professional contexts where practitioners want to lead change in their own professional situations.

What does it do?

The book sets out a systematic process, developed and refined over a ten-year period, through which teachers can lead development work in their own schools. It helps them to pursue initiatives arising from their own professional concerns and responsibilities within the context of school development priorities. The complexity of school change is acknowledged and leadership issues are addressed. Collaborative working, the use of evidence, action planning and review are emphasised to ensure that the work has maximum impact. Critical reflection and evaluation are central to the process so that both personal professional development and the school's organisational learning are enhanced. We offer this approach as a strategy for enabling teachers not only to make more of a difference in their own schools, but also, through networking and participation in a wider professional discourse, to contribute to the development of professional knowledge as a whole.

Following a rationale for this approach, the guidance is presented in the form of brief explanations, checklists and other practical materials. Formats, facsimiles, vignettes and case studies are provided to help teachers plan and document their development work.

How is it organised?

There are seven parts to this book:

Part A A theory of teacher leadership

This section provides a brief overview of the theory which underpins this approach to school improvement and sets out a rationale for the particular focus on teacher-led development work.

Part B Establishing partnerships and networks to support teacher-led development work

Part B contains guidance for school leaders and external agencies on the establishment and operation of school-based and school-focused partnerships, initiatives and networks designed to support teacher-led development work and school improvement. This includes examples of a number of projects illustrating applications of this approach in different contexts.

Part C A framework for teacher-led development work

This part presents and explains a framework to guide teachers' planning, leadership and evaluation of development work. It provides a rationale and structure for the practical guidance in subsequent sections.

Part D Leading development work in schools: a guide for teachers

This section contains detailed guidance to support individual teachers through the stages of leading development work in their own professional situations. It includes materials to support the planning of development work and evaluation to maximise impact.

Part E Supporting development work in schools: a guide for external support

This provides detailed guidance for those supporting teachers' leadership including facilitators, tutors and mentors. Practical issues and professional dilemmas in supporting teachers as leaders are discussed. Guidance is given on providing academic supervision in the context of award-bearing programmes.

Part F Workshops

This section presents a series of workshops and activities that can be used with groups to support different elements and aspects of the process of teacher-led development work.

Part G Resources

The final part contains a range of resources such as formats for planning documents, briefings and discussion papers, examples and facsimiles, checklists and review guides. These materials can be photocopied for use within support groups or by individuals.

We hope that colleagues will find the ideas and materials in this book useful, but we expect that users will want to develop them further to suit their own contexts. We would be very interested to hear from anyone who has been able to do this so that we can continue to develop the approach and learn from a wide range of experience.

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Part A

A theory of teacher leadership

In this book we focus on how teachers can take the lead in improving the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning. We believe that this is a neglected perspective in the study of school effectiveness and the pursuit of school improvement.

Teacher leadership and capacity building

Whether the impetus for change springs from national reforms or from the perception of a single teacher that something could be better, improvements in teaching and learning ultimately depend on the action taken by teachers. Of course with 'top-down' initiatives, the compliance of teachers can be secured – as recent UK numeracy and literacy strategies have demonstrated – but real and lasting improvement depends on individual teachers' commitment and enthusiasm for improvement and this cannot simply be dictated from above. So, we are centrally concerned here with the capacity of individual teachers, with or without formal management responsibility, to exercise leadership and take greater responsibility for the development and improvement of professional practice.

This is not to argue for a return to some kind of mythical golden age of teacher autonomy. On the contrary, our view is based on the clear understanding that teachers are members of teams and organisations dedicated to public service, and so are properly accountable to a range of stake-holders. However, the organisational capacity of schools depends on the personal and interpersonal capacity of teachers (Mitchell and Sackney 2000), that is, the extent to which they can develop their professional knowledge and skill, and form and sustain collaborative relationships with their colleagues. It is through collaboration that schools can develop the coherence of values and the consistency of practice that characterise effectiveness (Sammons *et al.* 1995).

The organisational conditions in schools are not simply created by head teachers or principals, rather they are the product of interactive processes. Theories that assume a hierarchical model of organisation suggest that these conditions are the result of the resolution of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' power. The assumption within this view of organisations is that head teachers and others with management responsibility (now often called 'the leadership team') take strategic action and teachers respond by exercising 'bottom-up' power. On the one hand the response may be compliance, perhaps because there is a high level of trust between the teachers and their managers or because there happens to be a very high level of consensus within the school. On the other hand, teachers may resist change by passive inertia or perhaps by articulating and voicing their opposition to practices introduced precipitously by those in formal leadership positions.

Teachers may not recognise these responses as the exercise of power, but head teachers and principals who have attempted to lead their schools through a process