

Developing High Quality Teacher Leadership in a Primary School

A Submission to the Scottish College for Educational Leadership Fellowship Programme

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12th January 2015

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Leadership is a word whose interpreted meaning differs depending on who you speak to, and the context discussions are framed in; it can describe a set of actions whose purpose is to develop and improve people or organizations. Leadership can also describe the level a job or post sits within a hierarchy.

The General Teaching Council for Scotland defines Leadership as the ability to:

“develop a vision for change which leads to improvements in outcomes for learners and is based on shared values and robust evaluation of evidence of current practice and outcomes” and the ability to “mobilise, enable and support others to develop and follow through on strategies for achieving that change”.

Teacher Leadership occurs when a teacher successfully leads (as defined above) the curriculum and students within their classes. I would define HQTL as leadership that impacts upon colleagues and students across, and potentially beyond the school or department setting. By applying a wider array of leadership skills and capacities teachers enhance outcomes for students and colleagues given the same, or fewer resources and these outcomes are sustainable. When teachers across the school exercise HQTL, a synergy effect seems to take place, adding yet more to leadership effectiveness.

I will argue that it is the duty of all teachers, regardless of rank or title to lead and that developing High Quality Teacher Leadership (HQTL) has a positive impact upon school improvement. I will also summarise how I sought to develop HQTL in my school setting and assess the impact this has had.

Why is it important to develop High Quality Teacher Leadership?

Developing HQTL facilitates the diffusion of leadership through Distributive Leadership (DL) and is necessary for schools to achieve genuine improvement (MacBeath 2004 and Smylie et al 2002).

Leading School Improvement in the 21st Century

In the paradigm of the digital age, change is not only constant, but is fast paced and unpredictable (Annan 2008, Carroll 2008, Clark 2014, Craw 2014, and Kinkaid 2020)

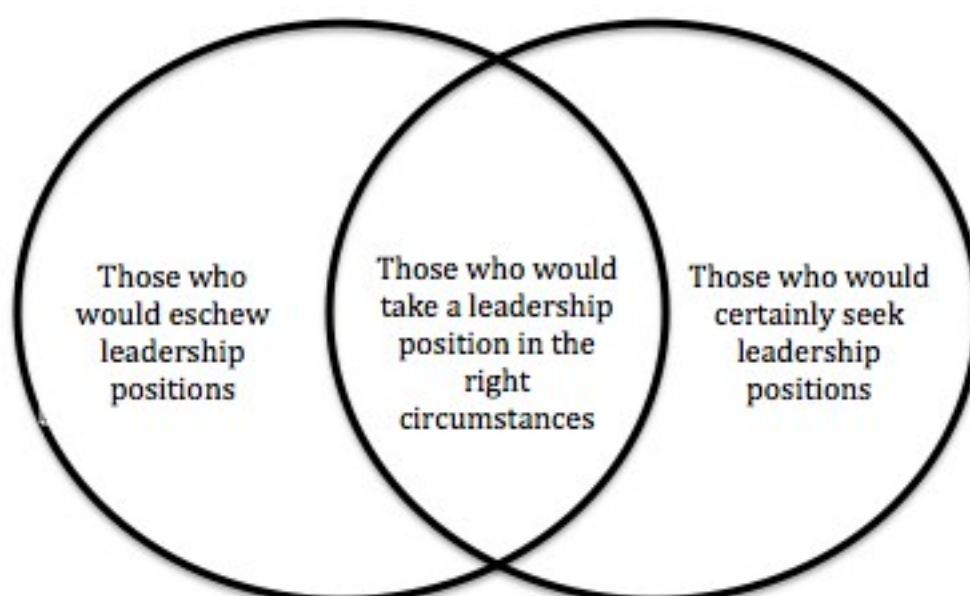
An organisation led solely by one individual is now less likely to be successful (Houle 2014) than those with DL which tend to be more agile and better equipped to change

and improve because more teachers have the requisite tools and permission to lead and make autonomous decisions.

The Leadership Gap

Currently, many areas in Scotland are experiencing difficulty filling vacant Head Teacher posts and contrary to prevailing trends making formal headship qualifications obligatory, fewer Local authorities are requiring applicants to have completed a recognizable preparatory qualification (Watt et al 2014).

At any given time in their careers, teachers will fall into one of the three sections of the Venn diagram below:



I recently posted a survey to teachers in my Local Authority and asked whether they would consider seeking promotion at some future point in their career.

Not at all likely	Unlikely	Possibly	Likely	Certainly
26.5%	38%	13.5%	15.5%	6.5%

This is a small sample of teachers (60) and it would be wrong to assume it is representative of the whole teaching population, but it serves to illustrate the point that there are some teachers who would absolutely eschew promotion and some who would certainly seek it.

Common reasons given by teachers reluctant to seek promotion are a feeling of unpreparedness and a misunderstanding of what it means to lead.

By developing HQT, an instructional leader empowers teachers, giving them a sense of efficacy, control and fulfillment in performing leadership responsibilities. They

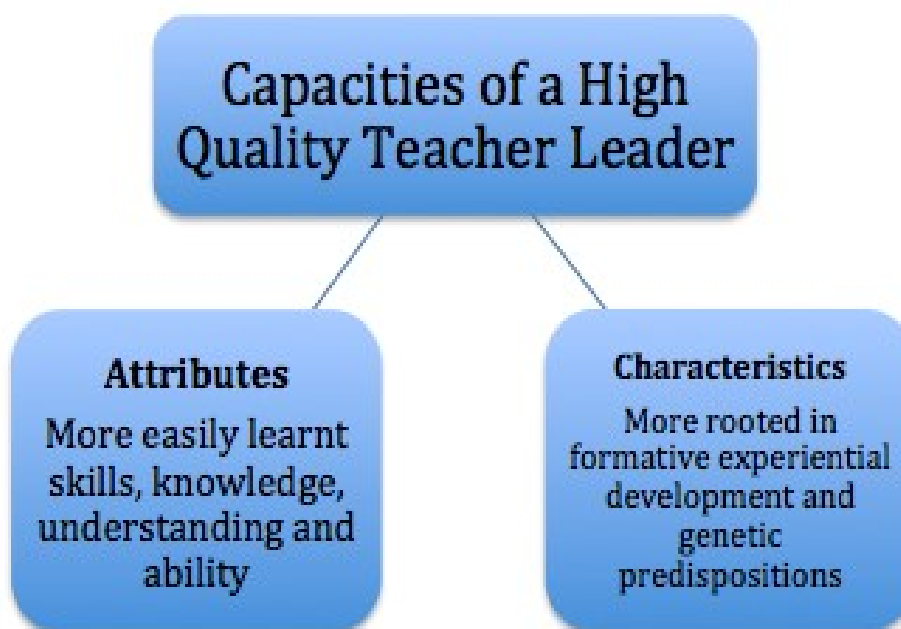
see that leadership is about setting direction and vision, not about blindly following paper trails; moreover they feel that they are developing the skills needed to take up Promoted Leadership (PL) posts.

Hence Developing HQTTL benefits the school as well as increasing the potential pool of skilled and willing recruits to PL posts.

If an establishment is truly going to disperse leadership so that all teachers are part of a leadership gestalt, then all teachers need to understand and develop the requisite capacities for leadership and these are best developed from the earliest stages of a teaching career (Watt et al 2014; Donaldson 2010).

Teachers who lead understand that their job is not to merely replicate accepted practice, but it is to inform the development of future practice. The development of leadership capacities must begin during the period of Initial Teacher Education (Donaldson 2010; McMahan et al 2013; Pachauri and Yadav 2014) and should develop knowledge of leadership theories, the ability to lead projects and the ability to alternately follow and lead others.

A range of views exists on whether various aspects of leadership are traits, characteristics, attributes or qualities. Within the available literature, these are not consistently defined, and are often inter-used, despite their different meanings. I will use the term capacities as a catch-all, with the sub categories of Attributes and Characteristics.



Many systems around the world have developed leadership frameworks or standards. These differ in approach from descriptions of professional practices to rubrics of specific behaviours and success criteria. (See GTCS's Standards for

Leadership and Management , AITSL's Professional Standard for Principals and the NHS's Leadership and Management Framework). From these, and other literature on high performing leaders (Kapur 2014, Ivers 2014, Quong and Walker 2010, Gentry et al 2007, Goleman 1998 and 2002, Dimmock 2012) it is possible to draw together a list of capacities that are important to both high performing teachers, and high performing leaders. These then can be used as development drivers for HQTL. It is possible for a teacher to demonstrate leadership with competency in some of these capacities, but teachers competent or masterful in the full range of capacities are able to demonstrate HQTL.

Capacities associated with teacher leadership	
Attributes	Characteristics
Ability to develop a plan/strategy	Possess and demonstrate an awareness of the needs and emotions of others
Ability to follow and adapt plans as necessary, reviewing, learning from experience and critically reflecting	Demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity
Ability to motivate and inspire others	Demonstrate self-awareness – understand how their values, prejudices and emotions influence behaviour, judgement and self-belief
Involve and include others in developing and carrying out plans (e.g. negotiate, reach consensus, communicate etc.)	Have a sense of moral purpose – why are you here? What do you want to achieve?
Mentor/coach/advise	Learn from tacit experience through honest reflection
Use systems thinking to align problems and solutions and see how different parts of a system are interdependent	Integrity
Develop others	Commitment to continuous learning
Use evidence from research to improve own and others' practice	courage

Further to these capacities, HQTL is the result of teachers learning from tacit experiences and developing the ability to make balanced judgements and timely decisions.

Coaching is vital in that it drives both teacher development (Hooker 2013) and school development as a learning organization (Egmir and Yoruk 2013). This helps teachers to find answers from within and enhance learning from their tacit experiences, as well as to redefine goals and set next steps for development. Coaching is also an important part of the school leader's repertoire of skills.

By focusing on leadership development from the early formative stages of teaching, we are serving the two desirable outcomes of developing teacher leaders by encouraging them to form part of teams that drive school improvement. We are, at the same time, preparing teachers for promotion when opportunities arise. Consequently, developing leadership capacities in all teachers will serve the partially exclusive aims of furthering school improvement and creating a larger and more skilled pool from which future head teachers and senior leaders might be selected.

How can High Quality Teacher Leadership be Developed in a School Setting?

In developing teachers' leadership capacities in a Scottish Primary School of six classes, we used a four-part model:

1. Identify a context and focus for leadership development – an area teachers would lead matched to the school's improvement plan and to an individual's current skills or professional aspirations
2. Teachers work with a 'knowledgeable other' to plan the area of development they are to lead
3. Teachers carry out their plan with an increasing degree of independence
4. The success of the plan and the leadership capacities developed are reviewed

At the outset –as head teacher- I sought to identify what aspects of improvement and development teachers already performed. In my own setting, I found that teachers were confident in making autonomous decisions and readily used initiative to identify and solve problems, but that leadership remits for non-promoted teachers were not clearly defined other than that teachers led curricula in their own classes. This led to a variation in understanding of leadership and its role in school development.

Setting Leadership Contexts

After a deep and wide consultation and self-evaluation, I worked with all teaching staff to identify the key areas for school improvement based on perceived areas of relative strength and weakness. Including the staff at this stage allowed me to begin to match specific areas of school development to the strengths and interests of members of the team. Then, during professional development conversations, I was able to assign key areas to individual team members to lead. Thus each had a clearly defined aspect of school development to lead in.

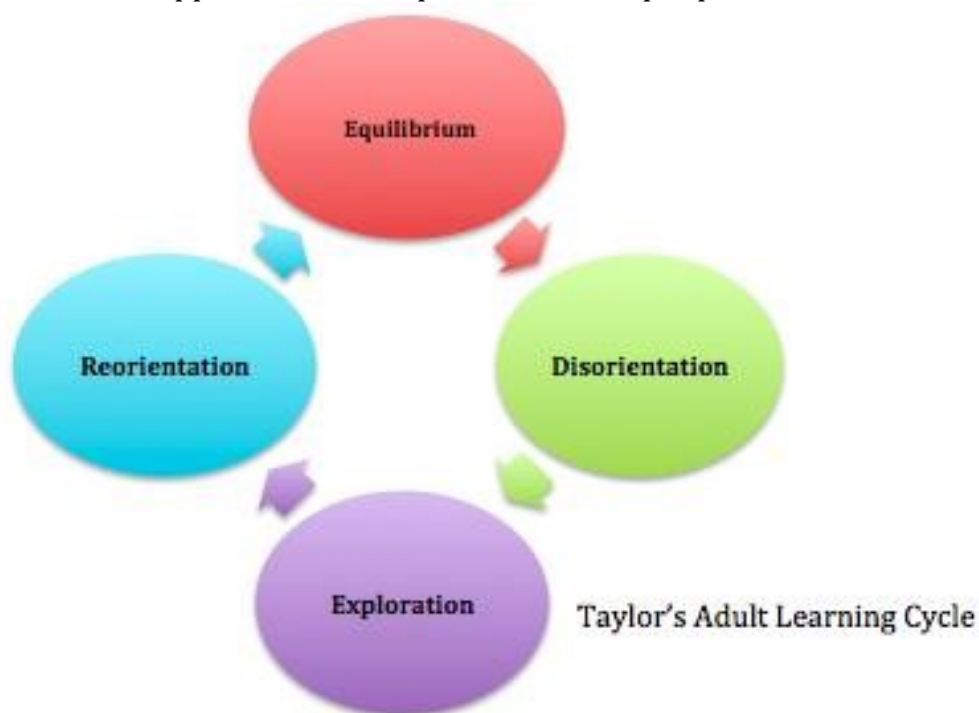
During Professional Review Discussions with teachers, I framed a conversation around the following points:

Previous experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways do you already lead? • What attributes and characteristics does this require you to demonstrate?
Current aptitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What areas of the School Improvement (SI) agenda do you think you have strength in? • What areas of the SI agenda do you think are a personal area for improvement?
Aspirational targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What area of School Improvement could you lead in? • What attributes and characteristics would you need to develop to be successful in this?
Developing a plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we work together to develop these so that you can successfully lead this development?

During these conversations, the capacities for HQTL, as identified earlier, were used to help define areas for individual leadership development. Each conversation was very different and the questions above were not necessarily asked in a linear fashion. Some teachers required a less structured conversation than others. Every contracted teacher was involved regardless of experience or how many days per week they work. At this point, an agreement in what constituted an outcome of HQTL was agreed upon. This outcome must include the application of a number of the capacities outlined above to achieve improvement and outcomes for colleagues and students across the whole school.

Supporting Leadership Development

It is recognised that teachers will reach different levels of expertise at different rates and that this, in many cases is not related to age or the number of years' experience a teacher has (McMahon et al 2013). Factors such as personal circumstance, health, current professional commitments and confidence were taken into account as teachers were supported to develop their leadership capacities.



After identifying contexts for leadership development, teachers worked with a 'knowledgeable other' (head teacher, principal teacher, lecturer etc.) to develop a plan with identifiable measures of success and strategies for achieving these. This was an important step as it allowed the knowledgeable other to model, not only the specific expertise of the school development area, but also the leadership capacities. These partnerships were carefully considered and 'knowledgeable other' was chosen on the basis of their experience and expertise within the area of development as well as for their ability to coach and mentor the teacher. The result of this planning provided teachers with the tools to take forward the following step, which was to carry out the plan with growing independence. This was, for some a daunting experience as it invariably involved managing, directing and developing others. At the point when most teachers were embarking upon this aspect, we used an Adult Learning Cycle (Taylor 1986) to illustrate and road map each individual's learning journey. This helped provide a language for teachers to use when sharing their learning experiences with one another and many reported finding this useful.

The final stage was for teachers to review and evaluate their leadership development to date. This happened with the head teacher at a subsequent PRD meeting. Due to the different starting points, pace of learning and the differing nature of the areas teachers were leading, the progress to date differs for each teacher ranging from complete projects to projects in the formative stages of development.

Throughout all of the stages of the model coaching was provided by the school leadership team - as and when needed - to all teachers. There were times when teachers found it difficult to balance their leadership role with the high demands of the classroom. Coaching was effective in helping teachers to revisit purpose and redefine targets, as well as to streamline practice.

In our quest to develop HQTL I found that it was first important to develop TL and the first step of this was to help teachers understand the ways in which they lead in the classroom every day. Teachers who lead curricula and students in their classrooms everyday demonstrate many, but not all, of the capacities listed above. Once this was pointed out to teachers, and they reflected honestly upon their strengths and areas for development using these capacities, we were able to turn the focus to HQTL that is using a wider range of the capacities so as to turn the focus of TL toward whole school and colleague development.

Conclusions

Though it is not possible to draw definitive system-wide conclusions from this relatively small sample, feedback from teachers, and evidence from school Standards and Quality Reports indicate that the school has improved in a number of significant areas as a direct result of HQTL.

Teacher Feedback was sought through a brief questionnaire and through more in depth discussions both prior to, and after developing HQTL. Teachers were asked to consider how their thinking had shifted since we started developing HQTL. All staff who took part felt a greater sense of themselves as agents of change and improvement. All teachers reported an increased awareness of the importance of leadership skills for class teachers, two thirds reported that their confidence as a

leader had increased and third reported that they would now consider applying for a PL post at some time in the future having previously considered this undesirable and that this change of view came about as a direct result of developing their leadership capacities. A natural progression for the school would be to formalize the leadership of teaching support staff and develop High Quality Para Teacher Leadership as well as continuing to support teachers' leadership development.

Implications

It is essential that schools work to enhance HQTL as it has demonstrable benefits to a school's capacity to continuously improve as well as a system's capacity to recruit high quality promoted leaders. Placing the development of HQTL at the heart of a school's improvement planning does not add a target that will take time, money and energy away from other school developments; rather it increases the human resource capacity on leading other developments, hence providing a net addition of resource. In enhancing HQTL, headteachers will need to consider budget implications as some redirection of funding was necessary to provide time and, to a lesser degree external training to teachers.

Moreover, headteachers who are committed to developing HQTL, and thus DL for transformational change need to have the courage to take risks, placing the best interests of their students ahead of other demands such as pleasing inspectors and they need to be prepared to risk lowering their own profile in order to promote DL for the purpose of transformative change and improvement (Dimmock 2012).

A school system committed to DL and HQTL would help by clearly stating its position and providing permission and support to headteachers to shift their own position from being leaders of schools and teachers to being leaders of leaders – a position that may require a different set of capacities to be developed. Such leaders of leaders could use a set of leadership capacities (as above) to help teachers examine the ways in which they currently lead and provide areas of CPD focus to develop a wider set of capacities. The development of more capacities, in the context of colleague and whole school, or departmental wide development is the key to turning TL into HQTL.

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