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UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Developing People, Developing Schools

Bergamo

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***Learning-centred leadership:
Recent developments in England***

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Part A: Learning-centred leadership

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A changing discourse – from management to the leadership of learning

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Introduction

Global forces have created major changes in the education systems.

Schools must take the main responsibility for developing the quality, motivation and organisation of their people – for managing and developing their human resources.

Through school leaders helping to create a climate or *culture* which is conducive to learning – of both staff and pupils – schools can become *learning communities* where investment in people is given the priority it deserves.



Part A: Learning-centred leadership

A definition of leadership:

Leadership is a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. Successful leaders develop a vision for their schools based on personal and professional values. They articulate this vision at every opportunity and influence their staff and other stakeholders to share the vision. The philosophy, structures and activities of the school are geared towards the achievement of this shared vision (Bush and Glover, 2003, p8).



Five theories:

- *Trait theory* (leadership as an attribute of personality);
- *Style theory* (leadership as management style);
- *Contingency theory* (leadership as the conjunction of the person and the situation);
- *Power/influence theory* (a function of power and how it is exercised);
- *Personal trait theory* (effective leadership as superior individual performance).

To this list can be added a sixth – *learning centred leadership*



A changing discourse?

SMTs now increasingly referred to as the 'leadership group' and middle managers now seen as middle leaders

The new National Standards for Headteachers cover six key areas of headship:

- **Leading learning and teaching**
 - **Creating the future**
 - **Developing self and working with others**
 - **Managing the organisation**
 - **Securing accountability**
 - **Strengthening community through collaboration**
- (NCSL, 2004)



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The emerging theory of leadership is of transformational and instructional leadership or, more recently, ‘learning-centred leadership’.

The focus is less on the leader and more on the sharing of leadership throughout the organisation.

It is an *inclusive* leadership and one that is *distributed* throughout the school. ‘Learning-centred leadership’ also has close connections to learning and pedagogy

It is about *learning* - pupil, adult, organisational learning and leadership networks – and teaching.



It is part of the head's role to develop leadership capacity - and learning - within the school

- **to distribute or disperse responsibility**
- **to empower others to give of their best**
- **to keep learning at the centre of all activities.**

'I work with a lot of talented teachers, but the role of the head is an essential precondition. In any organisation, people can only work within the climate that is set. That's what leadership and management are about. I don't think you get good schools without good heads' (Sir Dexter Hutt, cited in *Times Educational Supplement*, 2 January, 2004, p10).



Learning communities

- **developing leadership capacity**
- **the single most powerful development experiences?**

A definition of a learning community:

‘a group of educators committed to working together collaboratively as learners to improve achievement for all students in a school. A learning community is one that consciously manages learning processes through an inquiry-driven orientation among its members’ (Cibulka and Nakayama,2000, p3).



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‘Imagine that you could become a better teacher just by virtue of being on the staff of a particular school – just that fact alone’ (Little, 1990).

Leaders in learning-centred communities promote a strong sense of shared vision for the future; they lead the learning, by being seen to be learning with everyone else; they share and distribute leadership and empower others; and collaboration and continuous improvement is built into the fabric of the organisation.



There are six inter-connected ‘levels of learning’:

- Pupil learning – *pupils tell us about themselves as learners;*
- Adult learning – *through joint work, adults teach each other the art and craft of teaching;*
- Leadership for learning and leadership development – *leaders coach and facilitate others to lead;*
- School-wide learning – *adults become better every year at supporting pupil learning, just because they work in this school and network;*
- School-to-school learning – *our schools learn more because they are learning together;*
- Network-to-network learning – *we feel part of a learning profession.*



Characteristics of learning communities

- Leadership in the learning community
- The culture of a learning community
- Professional development in a learning community
- Staff learning in a learning community



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Leadership in the learning community

- **Promotion of a strong sense of shared vision for the future**
- **Leading the learning, by being seen to be learning with everyone else**
- **Sharing and distributing leadership and empowering others**
- **Collaboration and continuous improvement is built into the fabric of the school.**



The culture of a learning community

- **A supportive and collaborative environment, featuring mutual trust and sharing of ideas**
- **Teachers are empowered to take a central role in their work**
- **Information is freely available and used to drive improvement**
- **A commitment to working together as learners, where teachers and pupils alike are seen as learners**
- **Staff and pupils have a sense of community and work together co-operatively.**



Professional development in a learning community

- **CPD should be fully integrated into the life of the school, not seen as something brought in from the outside by ‘experts’**
- **Clear and consistent means of identifying the need for CPD and assessing its effectiveness should exist**
- **A balance of the CPD needs of the individual and the institution**
- **A positive and participative attitude to CPD from school managers.**



Staff learning in a learning community

- **An acceptance of the need for continuous individual improvement and learning**
- **Opportunities to learn from colleagues on an on-going basis (e.g. mutual observations and reflective practices)**
- **Inter-school networking**
- **The development of common knowledge through informal interactions (e.g. in the staffroom)**
- **Where teachers can learn from each other with each other.**



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Principals and other leaders themselves need to be up to date and demonstrate a commitment to CPD, to be ‘lead learners’ promoting a learning climate or culture and monitoring and evaluating the progress of teachers’ and other staffs’ professional development. *This is the essence of learning-centred leadership.*

It is important to create a culture where learning is seen as central to everything that is done, where there is a *community of learners* or a *learning-centred community*.



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Modern notions of leadership, including distributed leadership, rely heavily on leadership, alongside effective management, being successfully demonstrated at the *apex* of the organisation.

Members of learning-centred communities, staff and students, are enabled to learn from each other. To quote the (draft) national standards ‘as the lead learner, headteachers should exemplify leadership that has learning at its heart’ (2004, p14). School leaders increasingly have to be improvement driven and ‘learning-centred’.



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