



## Research Brief 2

# The development of leadership capacities across the career trajectory: a focus upon leadership

Part one of this paper posed the questions **why leadership at all levels? and why now?** This paper develops this discussion further through examination of changing paradigms of educational leadership in relation to the policy context. The purpose of the paper is not to explore leadership paradigms (for example, distributed leadership) in depth but to examine the drivers for change. One of the most significant drivers for change has been in relation to how educational leadership in Scottish schools has been conceptualised over time, influenced by wider, international perspectives on the nature of educational leadership and the

changing policy context in which this has occurred. Gatherer traces how Scottish teachers and their leaders have been perceived over the centuries and draws from Humes (1986) who observes that little authority is assigned to teachers at large by the powers that be, other than to those who have made their escape routes from the classroom [1]. Humes talks about a 'leadership class' and an 'educational élite' who exercise undue influence on Scottish education (Ibid), achieved by means of *narrative privilege* (the power to create the story which is told) and the *power of discourse* ('the skilful use of language in promoting the ideas that shape and frame the

policy agenda') [2] (101-102), silencing the voice of the classroom teacher. According to this account, Scottish schools are by their very nature hierarchal institutions with a top-down approach to policy implementation and development (although the recommendations of the 2001 Teachers' agreement went some way towards flattening structures).

In the wider UK arena during the Thatcherite era (the 1980s) there was a tension between an overly centralist Government approach to educational policy (evidenced in 'increasing systems of accountability' [3]) countered by a movement towards non-

High quality leadership is crucial to improving the experiences and outcomes for learners. All teachers in all settings will have a role to play in leadership whether in terms of curriculum development, school management or working on discrete projects across a school or local authority area. Recently there has been greater recognition that all teachers undertake leadership roles, and also that those who occupy formal leadership positions need to give high priority to professional learning. [19] Point 51

## The Way Forward

The National Partnership Group [19] proposes three different ways in which leadership for all stages can be achieved: through leading change and improvement; leading a team; and participation in, or leading collaborative learning processes, and provides exemplifications of the above. (Point 53)

The shift towards career-long professional learning builds upon Forde and Reeves' model of professional learning focusing upon four aspects: reflection on practice, experiential learning, collaborative learning and cognitive development, relevant to all stages of career development (Figure 1 on next page, upper right).

## Reflection Points

*Do you agree or not with Humes's observations about a 'leadership class' and 'educational élite'? If so, what evidence would you bring to bear on your argument?*

*Do you agree or not with the argument that schools are, by their very nature, hierarchal institutions? Have you observed any changes in how your school has been/is being led which would lead you to believe otherwise?*



## Changing paradigms of leadership

centralisation seen most readily in the role which School Boards played in school governance in England, reducing the role of Local Authorities in the management of schools. These tensions are still being played out today (for example, the movement towards Free schools and Academies in England within the context of a centrally controlled National Curriculum). Whilst the devolvement of education to, formerly, the Scottish Executive and, latterly, the Scottish Government, may have protected Scottish education from these developments to a degree, it was not immune from them, as can be seen in the drive towards greater accountability [4]. Despite the devolvement of greater powers to individual schools in Scotland (as exemplified in devolved budgets), it was very much a top-down approach towards policy development and implementation which was adopted, traced from Government, through to Local Authorities, through to Headteachers and their Senior Management Teams and thence through the various layers of authority within individual schools. This top-down trajectory was further reinforced by the introduction of the National Priorities in 2000 [5] and the 'Standards in Schools etc. Act 2000' [6]. Within this context, schools (and their leaders and teachers)

were seen largely as passive recipients of policy, the only question to be asked was how, not why or should we be doing this at all? There was little sense in which it was felt that teachers at the chalk face could make a meaningful contribution to the development of educational policy other than the occasional opportunity to serve on national and local authority working parties to enact government policy or to be represented through their unions on public bodies and committees. Given the above, the role of the Headteacher was to ensure that policy was enacted at the local level which had implications for how leadership was conceptualised – the leader (certainly within the secondary sector, almost always male) was conceptualised as 'authoritarian' and, if the school was lucky, 'charismatic', able to persuade others and take them with him, or 'transactional' ("You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours!"). Why then have we moved towards a position which is so different from what has been described above within what would be regarded by many as a relatively short time-scale?

The National debate which took place in 2002 [7], a full consultation on the nature of schooling in Scotland, marked a sea change in how policy was developed and enacted within Scotland and led to the

development of 'Curriculum for Excellence' [8]. For the first time, a real attempt was made to reach out to a wider audience of teachers, parents and young people to which there was a total of 1517 responses, but it is notable that of 650 responses from individuals (representing 43% of the total), only 49 of these were from individual teachers. Humes [2] notes the lack of critique of 'Curriculum for Excellence' (with the exception of a few notable individuals – Paterson, Gillies and Priestley *et al.*) and Gillies [3] observes that, despite the avowed intentions of 'Curriculum for Excellence' (enshrined within the four capacities – Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors) there has been little shift from the neo-liberal policies of the Thatcherite era with its emphasis upon education serving the knowledge economy with its concomitant stress upon attainment and certification.

Perhaps the biggest driver for change was a recognition that the above approach was not bringing the desired effects. Within a context in which international comparisons (for example, PISA) were assuming increasing importance, it was recognised that a different approach was needed. The OECD Report on quality and equity in Scottish Education [9] indicated that, whilst there were many strengths in Scottish Education, there were also significant weaknesses, such as the widening achievement gap between children from more affluent homes and those from homes associated with poverty and deprivation. Findings from the school effectiveness movement demonstrated that, whilst the 'school effect' was important in effecting improvement, the 'individual teacher effect' was greater [10].

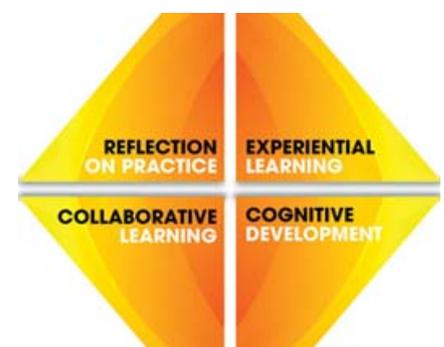
This was paralleled by a growing international literature on educational leadership that was bringing to the fore new conceptualisations of leadership which were not founded on top-down approaches [11, 12]. Further, examination of school systems which were achieving success (such as those of Ontario and Finland) demonstrated systems-led approaches towards school improvement that emphasised teacher capability, autonomy and agency [13]. There was also a growing recognition of the importance of high quality leadership in effecting school improvement and a new discourse around leadership became evident in Scottish Executive/Government/HMI(E) reports. Programmes such as the Scottish Qualification for Headship embraced concepts such as transformational leadership and distributed/distributive leadership; and the importance of teachers' collaborative learning through participation in Learning Communities and activities such as Learning Rounds became established and have now become the orthodoxy. This is reflected within the series of reports on leadership – the Leadership for Learning series [14, 15] and the Improving Scottish Education series of reports emanating from HMIE [16].

A key aspect of this was a recognition of the centrality of the individual teacher (working collegially and in collaboration with others) in effecting school improvement and a recognition of the need to invest in the professional development of **all** teachers (not just those in or aspiring towards leadership roles) if they are to be able to rise to the challenge.

It is also important to recognise that leadership at all levels of professional development does not just extend to

staff within the school – it also embraces pupils and partnerships with parents, giving parents a greater role in the life of the school [17]. The principal drive with regard to pupils is to ensure that they can make meaningful choices and decisions about their learning and are involved in self-evaluation through Personal Learning Planning. The increased focus upon pupil voice and pupil participation is also a manifestation of a drive towards enhancing pupils' leadership capacities [18].

Figure 1: A Model of Professional Learning



## Reflection Points

*How would you characterise leadership within your school? What evidence would you bring to bear in support of your argument?*

*How can we rise to the challenge such that we can create the time and space in which busy teachers can reflect upon their practice and engage with wider educational matters?*

*Do you agree that Scottish education is driven by a neo-liberal agenda in which education serves the knowledge economy (as argued by Gillies) rather than being of worth and value in its own right?*

*To what extent do you participate within the wider life of the school?*

## Key Messages

- ❖ Understandings of leadership are in a state of constant flux and reflect the political, historical and societal contexts in which they reside.
- ❖ The need within Scottish policy to get the balance right between direction from the centre and autonomy at the level of the individual school and teacher.
- ❖ The need to recognise the centrality of the individual teacher (working collaboratively and collegially with others) in effecting improvement and to have an effective infra-structure in place to invest in the professional development of teachers.

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## Reflection Points

*How does your school engage with parents such that they can play a meaningful role in the life of the school?*

*How does your school promote leadership capacities in pupils, promote autonomy in learning and engage pupils in discussions about teaching and learning?*

*How do you promote leadership capacities in pupils?*

*How do you ensure that the approaches adopted are not tokenistic and lead to improvements in teaching and learning across the school?*

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