Rethinking Educational Leadership

Mapping the terrain of leadership in learning organisations in conditions of complexity, diversity and change

The report of an Open Space Symposium held with the Bristol Leadership Forum at the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, 3rd & 4th January 2013.
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**Rethinking Educational Leadership: the purpose of the event**

The purpose of the Open Space Symposium was to provide experienced practitioners and researchers with an opportunity to bring fresh thinking to the current challenges facing school leaders and to generate new ideas about leadership development. The Open Space Technology provided a means of capturing the collective intelligence generated by the group in response to the core question. This report is the product of this Open Space Symposium. It is designed as the beginning of an ongoing conversation.

**Open Space Technology: harnessing collective intelligence**

Open Space Technology is an intentional leadership practice which can create an inspired community of practice, where people work together to create a synergy which is more than the sum of the individual parts. Participants created and managed their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme of strategic importance. The theme for this Symposium was:

*What are the Core Processes which Facilitate the Purpose of School Leadership?*

Open Space works best when the work to be done is complex, the people and ideas involved are diverse, the passion for resolution and change are high, and the issues are urgent. It's intentional self-organization and while Open Space is structured in such a way it supports, rather than blocks, the co-generation of knowledge.

The Symposium catered for all of the issues that were MOST important to the participants, and each issue was addressed by those most qualified and capable of responding to it. In just under two days the most important ideas, discussion, data, recommendations, conclusions, questions for further study, and plans for immediate action were documented and collected for this report.

The group was inspired by the process and elected to call itself *The Bristol Leadership Forum* since this Open Space Symposium created a conversation and a sense of community which we intend to continue over time and space.
Introductory Ideas

The Symposium began with some shared insights from current research at the Centre for Systems Learning and Leadership in the Graduate School of Education at Bristol.

- The development of children, young people and adults as successful self-directed learners; the relationships between teacher learning, leadership learning, wider community learning and student learning/outcomes in supporting the development of outstanding teaching, student engagement and the deeper transformation of schools.
- The application of systems thinking and processes to help resolve complex problems that may block the further improvement of standards in schools, including the development of schools as learning communities, improving student progress across key transitions and evaluating the wider outcomes of schools.
- International research on similar issues, including Bryk’s work in networked improvement communities (Bryk 2009; Bryk, Sebring et al. 2010), the Teaching for Effective Learning Programme from South Australia (Foster 2001; Goldspink 2010) and related practitioner studies from the new Masters programme at the Graduate School of Education: the MSc in Systems Learning and Leadership.

The purpose of the Symposium was to begin to rethink current models of school leadership and approaches to leadership development and, possibly, to generate ideas which reflect and interrogate a more complex, participatory paradigm of learning and leadership. It posed the question: has current thinking and practice got us as far as we can go in our efforts to raise standards in schools? We wanted to create a rich picture of the purposes and processes of school leadership, to map a complex terrain.

Creating Open Space Sessions

Participants were invited to propose a session on any topic which they believed to be relevant to the Open Space Symposium. They then identified a slot on the timetable of sessions which they would lead. All participants then selected which ones they would participate in. Leaders of Open Space Sessions committed to taking notes and returning these electronically to the co-ordinators within two days of the Symposium.
Open Space Session Records

The sessions were ‘topped and tailed’ with plenary sessions and participants proposed changes during the process as they saw fit.

The following sections report on each of these sessions, organised thematically. A second phase of thematic analysis was undertaken following a review by all contributors. The overall themes are presented in the final section, organised according to principles of systems designing.

The Internal World of the Leader

The session began with silence, which gave space for a pause before group members started to discuss the topic. Consideration was then given to thinking about the importance of leaders understanding their internal worlds. Leaders would benefit from being aware of the importance of leading the self and understanding what motivates their behaviour. What can the leader really control? Leaders usually think that they have to be in control of their working environments, which is impossible because of the complexity of the task. Therefore they need to learn to experience being in control of themselves and their responses to life and their contexts.

Leaders often do not feel in control because other people and systems are perceived to be in control e.g. systems such as Ofsted. The purposes in education are often contradictory and complex and often in conflict. Therefore these complex systems need to be led and managed by leaders. Leaders need to consider how their behaviour affects others. Leaders should lead by taking responsibility whilst recognising that they are accountable.

There is little congruence between the purposes of education as espoused by different people and groups of people at the different levels of the system e.g. children/teachers/Ofsted/Secretary of State. Accountability should therefore derive from a sense of professional responsibility. Leaders do have authority to influence systems even though they can't control them.

The leader has to manage both their internal world and the external world. How can these worlds be integrated? It was suggested that this is best done by regularly stopping and experiencing stillness for a short time. Good leadership is practicing leading from the inside out. There is a need to understand who I am. There is a need to appreciate the importance of the leader’s personal story and how this influences their decision-making. To learn effectively, leaders as well as students need to connect to their internal worlds. Therefore the leader has to model this understanding to all other adults and students.
Being given a common shared language for understanding our internal worlds is vital for both pupils and adults. The leader is the advocate for understanding the importance of the internal world. For example, understanding values such as justice. Justice is an underused value. Justice has two beautiful daughters - Anger and Courage. Anger at what injustices there are and courage to ensure they don't remain.

To say no to challenging people or circumstances requires a stable personal internal world - one that creates integrity and resilience. Family of schools e.g. Oasis schools, have core values that hold individuals and institutions together as a group and these values provide a space for conversation about what matters. The current political ideology of neo-liberalism, with its extreme individualism has created the background context in which leaders now work. Creating schooling systems which support people's 'inner worlds' is an important responsibility of school leadership.

A concern was expressed that, unlike some other professions, leaders in education do not have supervision. There is an urgent need for personal and network support for leaders. Leaders also need to put pauses into their day in order to connect with their authentic selves and to remain centred and calm, rather than stressed. Stress is linked to blame and anger which creates fear and more stress. A key skill of a leader is to be curious and to learn, which is possible when s/he is calm but not when s/he is stressed. Part of a leaders skill in learning is to be able to consider all aspects of evidence and not just focus on what can be easily measured.

Being able to lead one's inner world means a leader can demonstrate constancy of action and not over-react to challenges. For this we need access to a shared language with which to articulate and communicate our inner world and to enable others to do the same. One example of such a language is provided by Transactional Analysis (TA). Leaders need to be passionate, optimistic and hopeful. Fullan talks about the sacred heart of the leader.

The group thought that to access the wisdom of their internal worlds that leaders need to:

- Understand learning power (ELLI)
- Understand the psychological language of self e.g. Transactional Analysis
- Understand mindfulness/neuroscience e.g. how our minds work
- Understand the importance of values and determining appropriate behaviours that come from them.

Therefore to be an authentic leader there is a need to integrate the physiological/ logical/ emotional aspects of the self. There is an urgent need for leaders to have professional development that focuses on their internal worlds and how they contribute to sustainable learning systems.
The Virtues required for Leadership

Virtues are qualities that are manifest in the way a person habitually behaves, arising from their beliefs and values and their story. They are necessary for achieving a ‘good’ purpose: virtues for leadership are important for creating a sustainable learning community because they model what is required for success:

The main virtues of Headship include

1 Qualities of The Inner Self
   a. Self-awareness
      This includes the ability to know one’s strengths and limitations and areas in need of development. It implies an awareness of where the Head as a person fits into the organisation and how effective he/she is within it.
   b. Humility
      This is not exercising some form of low key role, but rather a disposition in which attention is given to “the other.” It may incorporate the concept of “servant leader” although there are other ways of demonstrating this disposition.
   c. “Wise selfishness” which incorporates the idea of taking care of one’s professional self, as well as the well-being of others. This includes the ability to have a deep reservoir of hope and inner well-being such that there is a deep well of nourishment that can be used to support and assist others.
   d. Releases the talents and abilities of others.
      This includes the capacity to appoint colleagues who will be challenging and offer different gifts to the school as an organisation. This is related to a generosity of spirit which serves others and is selfless in its service.

2 Professional Skills and Abilities
   a. The ability to be “bilingual” and able to understand the language of data and contemporary management, as well as the language of the inner self and of the human dimension of education. The effective leader operates effortlessly in both domains of professional activity.
   b. Cultural sensitivity which allows an awareness of the different views, expectations and beliefs which may arise in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic community.
c. **Charisma and Hope**

This includes the ability to articulate the vision of the organisation and its rightful objectives. It means giving others in the organisation reason for hope.

d. **Developing relationships and being connected to others**

This includes the ability to develop and foster cordial and healthy relationships across many individuals including those of different generations.

e. **Understanding and interpreting evidence**

The effective leader needs to be able to use evidence from different sources. This is part of an approach to “evidence-informed decision making.” The evidence is never to be ignored, but there can be occasions when there is good reason to take a decision that would not necessarily follow from the evidence. (This should be very rare.)

f. **Being attuned and aligned to the values and ideals of the organisation as a learning community.**

There is a need to be able to articulate these values and to know where others stand in relation to them. In many ways it is not the values themselves which matter, but the process of discussion and engagement which leads to the articulation of the values.

g. **The awareness to develop different leadership approaches.**

This includes the ability to develop professional learning in which new approaches are learned through experience. This needs to be managed with great care. It also relates to the development of personal knowledge of the leader through new or broader emotional and spiritual experiences.

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**The Clearness Committee: Building Ethical Courage in Community**

This is a process for creating a context in which a leader can explore a professional issue of concern and remain true to their purpose in times of uncertainty and crisis. It is a 400 year-old process originally devised by Quaker Communities to help couples decide whether they are ready to marry. The individual concerned becomes a Focus Person within a group whose purpose is to support that person in exploring the issue, clarifying their thoughts and feelings, and identifying a way forwards.
It supports the process of leadership because it reduces risk of losing sight of core values under external pressure. It reinforces intrinsic, not extrinsic discipline and bases leadership on identity, purpose and ethical values. It uses the power of being 'in community' not alone, with strategic purpose and builds responsibility rather than contests it (as business meetings can do).

A Clearness Committee has one Focus Person plus 4-6 supportive listeners acceptable to him/her. The Focus Person brings a critical question or decision about which 'clearness' is sought! The session starts with the Focus Person explaining issue, context and possible horizons. Listeners then ask open, honest questions, with no advising, fixing or helping allowed. Space and attentive silence are given for the Focus Person to introject and explore (aloud) the interior landscape of the issue before next question. The best questions are often figurative, inviting the Focus Person to build on what's already been said or look from a new angle (but without an agenda from the listener). Listeners record and give their notes at the end and finish with mirroring observations (optional) and affirmations. Maximum duration 2.5 hours.

Clearness Committees have been used many times in residential retreats (including as a component of ViTaL's 'Courage to Be...' Programme) to build capacity for personal/professional development and ethical leadership. They are invariably powerful and have a positive impact on both the Focus Person and the listeners. Very often, a sense of confusion and congestion is replaced by a new, clear-sighted recognition of, and commitment to a way forward, articulated, owned and believed in by the leader (Palmer 2004).

How do we develop schools that learn?

The most central theme that emerged was the need for leadership which could acknowledge that it did not have all the answers and wanted to learn. In contrast to leaders as super-heroes, all knowing and in total control, a learning school and 21st century school leadership needs people who can share roles and be seen as not knowing everything. Leaders are people who model the learning process themselves. For teachers to join this process and become learners again, leadership must give them some professional autonomy and the outcomes of their learning must be seen to be valued and used in school development.

Several people talked about versions of collaborative learning for school leaders. Examples ranged from internships to structured group visits, where several school leaders work
together to review and comment on another schools chosen issue or problem. “Leadership enquiry visits” became a term for this. These examples of collaborative learning also included the use of shared reading and reflection and think pieces.

This process of collaborative learning was thought to contribute to the need to develop leaders who can work within school chains or within alliances or co-operative trusts, which is a more complex process than one school.

For learning to be real schools need a clear purpose, which has long term life. The school’s own learning is a part of maintaining constancy of purpose, and acknowledges Deming’s comment that for transformation to take place new learning must come in from the outside. This then linked to a discussion about the role of Universities in supporting, or indeed generating, this new knowledge generation. The relationship between schools and universities for all sorts of continuing professional learning needs re-engineering. This requires partners in this collaborative work to be clear about each others’ roles and not for everybody to try to be expert at everything.

The Why of Education – when is the right time to develop a personal philosophy of education?

What is education for/Why do we educate? When do we make opportunities to discuss this? What would be the ‘class teachers’ experience of this?

Education has a responsibility to enable people to read, write and become numerate, but also to facilitate the development of a passion for learning. As humans we have the desire to develop and to get better at what we do. Education should help the individual be passionate about life and be energised by it. Schools should helping children to find ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) or their 'element' (Robinson 2009). There is still a tension between vocational and academic education and pressure to push children down an academic route. Is learning the holy grail or is accumulating a body of knowledge still important in 21st century.

There is a need to scaffold learning for professionals, share practice, engage in discussions about what matters throughout teachers’ careers, to create spaces to reflect on experience and to change in response to this reflection.
Conclusions

Teacher Education including continuing professional learning should provide opportunities for teachers to develop their ‘philosophy’ and reflect on and share their practice. Leadership development at all stages should encourage this.

What sort of leaders do we need, given the new educational landscape of Federations/Collaboratives/Chains of Academies and Schools/Teaching School Alliances etc.?

The discussion focussed on three sequential areas:

- an identification of the fragmentation of the state system of education
- the challenges posed by the new educational landscape
- the qualities and behaviours that leaders will need in emerging patterns of school groupings: federations, collaboratives, chains, networks and Teaching School Alliances

The emergence of new forms of schools such as University Technology Colleges, Studio Schools and Free Schools, coupled with the increasing drive from central government towards academisation is creating a new pattern of school provision. This diversification is taking place in the context of the diminishing role of the “second” tier of leadership, primarily local authorities. Increasingly schools no longer operate as single organisations but belong to a family or grouping of schools, such as Chains of Academies or Teaching School Alliances. Teaching School Alliances have six major areas of responsibility. They:

- play a greater role in recruiting and training new entrants to the profession (initial teacher training)
- lead peer-to-peer professional and leadership development (continuing/joint professional development)
- identify and develop leadership potential (succession planning and talent management)
- provide support for other schools
- designate and broker Specialist Leaders of Education
- engage in research and development activity

In what appears to be a fast moving fragmentation of provision we need to be confident that individual children do not fall between the gaps. This raises the question “Who has the passion and commitment to ensure inclusive access to quality learning for all young people across a geographical area?” One response to this is embodied in the role of the executive
headteacher/principal who holds leadership responsibilities that extend beyond one school and in some cases to many. In preparing future system leaders of federations, Chains of Academies/schools and Teaching School Alliances what qualities and behaviours do we need to foster?

The desirable qualities of leaders of academies and schools are already well-documented, but there may well be a need to reframe them with emphasis on particular qualities and behaviours or indeed identify new aspects relevant to the pluralistic role of an executive headteacher or principal.

The intrinsic shift from leadership of a lone institution to that of leading a multiple organisation leads to a distinct reduction in individual positional/referent power and places greater emphasis on particular qualities and behaviours:

- the ability to influence astutely in the complexity of the new landscape therefore takes on a higher order, as do communication with high levels of political awareness and contextual sensitivity
- moral integrity that is inclusive and has high sense of social justice
- social entrepreneurship
- accountability for both the whole organisation and the constituent parts
- the ability to work with new forms of governance, including with a much smaller and strategic group
- building relational trust across academies/schools/alliances
- personal resilience and conflict management
- coping with the inherent ambiguity and complexity of a multiple organisation
- building high performing teams, talent spotting, and succession planning across institutions
- deploying talent to achieve the best outcomes for all pupils/students in an organisation and its constituent parts
- creating and sustaining internal capacity to support other academies/schools, whether within or without the organisation
- creating opportunities for joint professional development across institutions
- the ability to facilitate continuous improvement

The list above identifies those qualities and behaviours that emerged corporately during the course of our discussions and are not intended to be either exhaustive or hierarchical. They are, however, an important early step in identifying some of the specific qualities and behaviours that relate to the role of an executive headteacher or principal who is leading more than an individual institution.

A range of other leadership issues emerged during the course of our discussions raising such questions as the possible need for preparation and support for directors of chains, for those leading large chains of academies and for those leading Teaching School Alliances.
Harnessing Collective Intelligence:

The challenges of complexity and uncertainty in leading sustainable learning communities mean that leaders need to find new ways of capturing and harnessing evidence of success in terms of a wide(r) range of student outcomes and in terms of the generation of knowledge which emerges from professional learning that takes place within and beyond their organisation.

This means that there are several different types of knowledge – and therefore intelligences - available to leaders who need to be literate in understanding them and assessing the weight of evidence that can be attributed to different forms of knowledge. It’s about applying professional discernment to complex data sets rather than following a formula or focusing on a single variable, or set of variables, to the exclusion of the big picture.

For example, how does a leader weigh up the significance of a set of stories of significant change from students in year seven compared with a large quantitative data set which identifies contextual value added scores for each student? What is the balance between the tacit knowledge of teachers, teacher handbooks and a research report?

To understand and manage complex data, leaders need to find ways of synthesising and representing it, so that it is useful and timely. The visualisation of knowledge, in real time and in rapid time, is an increasingly important skill in using data for developing a sustainable learning community. The current gap between research outputs and publications and what is required in practice is too great to be useful in practice.

At a system level there is a need to harness the collective professional intelligence that emerges from the professional learning of a school or a group of schools through teachers committed to their own professional enquiry aligned with the school’s shared purpose.

Bryk’s model of Design Educational Engineering and Development, using rapid prototyping around a shared complex problem, informed by a disciplined, standardised evaluation framework is a promising model, already being piloted with the Hampshire Teaching Schools Alliance, and is the modus operandi of an extant ESRC Research Bid. This approach has a lot in common with the UoB Engineering Systems Centre’s approach to complex systems designing as a way of improving socio-technical systems. It also chimes with the National College of School Leadership’s ideas about ‘Joint Practice Development’ – where teachers lead on disciplined enquiry into issues of shared concern, supported and enhanced by academics and researchers (Hargreaves 2012).
Codifying and diffusing explicit knowledge is easier than codifying and diffusing tacit knowledge. One of the key roles of a research-intensive University in contemporary society is to support the process of knowledge co-generation and dissemination. To do this successfully in a particular domain, such as education or engineering, there needs to be a core of leaders across stakeholder domains who are multi-lingual in the languages and discourses of practice, research, policy and commercial enterprise.

**Methods**

Open Space Technology is a way of capturing the learning from a group such as this (or a school team, or leadership team). Stafford Beer’s Syntegration process was developed to enable a conference to occur with people in a particular place and over time and space.

With partners from the Knowledge Media Institute at the Open University, the Centre for Systems Learning and Leadership has developed an Evidence Hub in which practitioners, researchers and policy makers can contribute shared knowledge, stories, evidence, ideas and resources. One of our partners will be funding an Evidence Hub for Systems Learning and Leadership which will facilitate this agenda.

The Evidence Hub is a customizable ‘shell’ for a knowledge-building community to create a structured website to build evidence collectively. Funded originally on the Hewlett Foundation OLnet project (joint IET/KMI, 2009-12) to create the Open Education Evidence Hub (ci.olnet.org) KMi has subsequently developed it into a tool for any community.

An Evidence Hub might be deployed for knowledge sharing in a professional context, or for academic purposes, to scaffold students’ capacity to critically interpret online resources, build evidence-based arguments and make scientific/scholarly claims.

- Website: http://evidence-hub.net (+ links to all other public Hubs)
- Movies: http://evidence-hub.net/demos
Leadership as Creative Learning Design

If learning communities are complex places and the process of becoming self-organising and thus sustainable is a complex, dynamic process, then there is no single formula, or leadership style or strategy which will work in all contexts. Rather than seeing leadership – or teaching – as following a script provided by an external party (however reputable) command and control we need to understand leadership and learning as a ‘creative design’ process.

Each context is different and unique and cannot be controlled. Even if we could control all the contextual variables which shape practice we would not want to do so because our learners, like our teachers and leaders, need themselves to become ‘self organising systems’. This is not achieved through external control. At best, leaders create the conditions where great learning can take place – for the community, the teaching team and the students.

Leaders work with a set of ‘design principles’ and a particular, unique and complex human context with its own technologies, history and story of the future. Leaders have a purpose – which is to ‘raise all students to distinction’. These form the basic materials for creative designing. It is creative, because although the success criteria may be identified as part of the process, the outcome is actually unknown until it is achieved.

The implications of this for leadership is that leaders need to be able to analyse their context – the learning system for which they are responsible – identifying its complex ‘architecture’ and the processes which achieve its purpose. From this understanding they are better equipped to design interventions that enable success and to identify
measurement models that provide data for evaluation and informing change. At heart, this is organisational learning.

Leaders thus need a range of disciplined strategies, skills sets and styles to respond to their context and the unpredictable interactions between people and processes. It requires, more than ever, leaders who are psychologically healthy, humble and balanced and are able to create a community in which trust is a core resource for learning. Trust is a function of people’s perceptions of benevolence and competence: a sustainable learning system has high levels of trust – which enables people to be open to learning. High levels of fear close people down to learning.

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Creating and leading a healthy learning system requires leaders who can work with a range of variables and ways of knowing and who are capable of learning themselves, in order to create a sustainable (learning, adaptive) system. To be sustainable and viable a systems needs to be adaptive – the system needs to learn. A leader has to enable it to be adaptive. For this there need to be no barriers to co-operation, to trust, to learning or to innovation etc.

Leaders are creative, learning systems designers, attending to multiple internal and external systems. In this way they are creating the future. In terms of complex systems designing this is Viable Systems Model level five (Stafford Beer). Another metaphor for leadership is ‘authorship’...leaders are co-generators and guardians of a community story, which is enacted as well as told and creates a particular climate. Part of the task of leadership as authorship is in facilitating the 're-writing' of community and individual stories, where existing stories lead to low aspiration and engagement.

A community story becomes a vehicle for critique - a means of evaluating governments 'next big thing'. Open critique is a sign of a healthy community and is core to organisational learning and adaptation.
A holistic systems perspective is a fundamentally different paradigm from a reductionist, neo-liberal paradigm. Paradigms, by definition, are deeply embedded and the process of change is uncomfortable and challenging. Many professional educators have two things going on...they comply with the external agenda and at a deeper level they know there’s something wrong with it.

The discussion was summarised by identifying the core educational leadership responsibility for Co-creating sustainable learning systems.

How do we create the conditions for deeper learning by students, staff and leaders?

What is ‘deeper learning’ and how is it developed?

Student perspective:

- Recognising the emotional and spiritual dimensions of being human and being a learner and, as a result, being internally motivated
- Deeper learning is the ‘stuff you don’t need to revise - because it’s in your brain’; ‘it’s not being made to do things’
- It’s skills and abilities developed through programmes like the Extended Project Qualification
- However, deeper learning is not all about personal choice of what you study, aspects of learning need to be prescribed/negotiated to extend learners’ horizons
- Teachers and learners need to plan learning opportunities thoroughly for deeper learning
- Deeper learning empowers learners and gives them self-confidence so that they will achieve more (question: is this an assertion or is it based on evidence?)

Teacher perspective:

- It’s easier to teach for shallow learning, resorting to prescribed schemes of work and set resources; also, in the eyes of some teachers, prescription aids class control
- Have we ever been good at deeper learning as teachers? Are we better or worse now?
- Teachers need to understand that deeper learning is a key component of transformation; students must want to learn and be intrinsically motivated
- Focused CPD is needed on spiritual development and its relationship with deeper learning
In the end, leaders must demand that teachers change their practice, doing things differently and using evidence-informed approaches to curriculum planning and learning. Teachers must also be expected to demonstrate changed practice, not just make an intellectual commitment to it. Deep learning often happens quietly, under the normal radar of assessment, and at different paces for different learners. How do we assess and evaluate the quality of deeper learning? By listening to pupils talking about their experiences of learning; to do this we may need a richer, shared language about learning across the school.

Leader perspective:

- Leaders must understand the nature of learning and what characterises deeper learning.
- Leaders must apply these insights to their own learning and to their leadership of learning across the school.
- We considered several examples: at senior level, groups of Heads visiting each other’s schools, spending some time observing teaching and learning (ideally 2 or 3 days) and then commenting on what they’ve observed. This can be a helpful approach to dealing with a complex issue like enabling deeper learning. For staff and leaders it could be purchasing good resources about learning and leadership and ensuring that they are used. There could also be a different approach to whole staff CPD based on Think Tanks and an open agenda for learning.
- An understanding of deeper learning should be a core component of succession planning programmes and the development of future leaders.
- There should be clarity about relevant values and expectations for all leaders and staff, regularly re-visiting the principles and processes of deeper learning. Leaders must show that they mean it!

In the light of the new paradigm and the changing context of schools, how does leadership development need to change?

Central ideas are the ‘leading learner’ and ‘leadership as the co-creation of learning systems’.

We may be considering a paradigm shift in our understanding of school leadership and leadership development, particularly in the light of the need for ‘single organisation’ (i.e. school or academy) leaders and system leaders (e.g. responsible for groups of
schools/academies or Teaching School Alliances). A new paradigm would embrace important aspects of the current paradigm but also let go of some aspects, re-emphasise underdeveloped elements and re-frame our conceptual understanding of leadership in the light of recent research. However, leadership development should continue to bring together ‘leadership’ and ‘management’ and not separate them.

**Learning by being authentic:**

- Leaders need to be hugely self-aware to release the creative potential in others and in the organisation (Collins and Porras 2004) they also need a well-developed ‘reflective capacity’, e.g. try starting meetings with silence, then more chance of speaking from the heart not the ego.
- Explore the idea of the ‘invisible leader’ who focuses on meta-perspectives, building teams and taking responsibility - and not trying to do it all; we must continue to challenge the model of heroic (‘do it all’), ego-driven leaders; related to this idea, the leader as ‘enabler’ and not necessarily as ‘initiator’; also, the need for personal qualities like modesty, discipline and restraint.
- Leaders must constantly seek out and engage with new knowledge, especially about the brain and learning, and learn to change themselves (Siegel 2010).
- The above implies the need for leadership development opportunities that foster reflection and authentic behaviour and develop ethical courage, e.g. story-telling, dialogues, (note: Maggie Roger will let us have a recently developed audit tool for new approaches to leadership development).
- Leadership development for aspiring leaders (succession planning) must be based on a new paradigm that sees leadership as a whole school or system function, involving students, staff and other key stakeholders, and is not based on positional power. It starts with ‘leading the self’, (see Deming’s ‘System of Profound Knowledge’, proposing that the transformation of organisations starts with self-awareness and listening to the voices of others).

**Learning by doing** (an approach to senior leadership development that has worked well)

- Undertake an improvement project on site, for senior leaders at strategic level (one model based on 6 to 8 sessions over 6 to 8 months; face-to-face sessions help to reinforce learning).
- Introduce different investigative and analytical tools to be used on projects, e.g. systems thinking, data analysis (including causes of variation); levels of abstraction. This helps in the development of a shared language.
- Two purposes of project: first to add value to the organisation; second to generate personal learning – if the learning is good then it becomes self-sustaining.
- Evaluating the learning from project: what have I learned? What am I going to do about it? How will I judge the impact of change? Key question – has training changed
my behaviour? What am I doing differently? (Notes: People often find it hard to let go of things that aren’t working; the culture of an organisation is an emergent property of the interactions between people; to change the culture, the nature of the interactions needs to change

- The above model for training can also be used with middle leaders but focusing the project on a team task rather than a whole school task)

Learning through coaching and mentoring

These should be core processes to support any leadership development experience

Qualities and behaviours for effective leadership

During the workshops we identified two sets:

- **Virtues for leadership** - see notes from Bart McGettrick’s session, including the ability to be bilingual, speaking the language of measurement/performance and the language of values/purpose
- **Qualities & behaviours for leading federations, academy chains, teaching school alliances** – see notes from David Anderson’s session

Examples of leadership development that might offer interesting insights and approaches

- Navy Submarine Commanders: who need a combination of ‘compliance’ and ‘divergence’ and also learn from international experience
- SAS leadership development with the idea that ‘anyone can be a leader at any moment’ (see ‘Elite’ by Floyd Woodrow)
- Learning from and with other sectors, particularly the NHS and the police who both face very similar challenges to schools/education
- Harnessing new technologies for leadership development, e.g. Skype-based coaching

Neglected and necessary areas for leadership development

- Principals who have been through *Future Leaders* programme and may have gaps
- Principals generally and Directors of Education for academy groups, TSAs

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**Grand Curriculum Design: Curriculum Leadership and Systems Thinking**

This session explored the importance of Curriculum Design skills and the (new) pedagogical knowledge required by leaders in order to develop Enquiry based projects within the curriculum which is responsive to the local community. Such skills include pedagogical
knowledge about deep learning, an approach to teaching as learning design (rather than following a script) and how to ensure intellectual rigor in knowledge co-construction when the outcome of the curriculum may not be known in advance. It also explored the different modes of teacher/student relationship which scaffold such enquiry - coach, mentor, expert, counsellor and co-learner.

Systems thinking has a lot to offer this approach to the curriculum, because, by definition, it is about thinking in wholes as well as parts and attending to improvement in authentic contexts.

Whilst there are many radical changes taking place in provision which are unsettling for the profession, there are also significant positive opportunities for localised, self-organising curriculum development which is responsive to local communities. This approach to learning as enquiry, in which the learner takes responsibility for the purpose of the learning and negotiates a meaningful pathway through the curriculum, is something that is as relevant to adults in a school, as it is to students.

Reference was made to several initiatives, including the RSA Opening Minds, the Learning Futures Project and other funds of professional knowledge which support this agenda. The key to system wide implementation is in ongoing teacher education and school improvement as joint practice development.

Overall Themes Emerging from the Open Space Sessions

The following themes were identified by a thematic analysis of the contents of the Open Space Sessions. Key ideas were highlighted and abstracted from their context, coded on post it notes and collected together. These were then organised into overall themes which cut across most or all Open Space Sessions and framed using the principles of Systems Designing from the University of Bristol Engineers - in which purpose defines the how and the what of any system (Blockley 2010).

The increase in the complexity of education - structural, political, economic, personal, technical and social - means that control is an illusion for educational leaders. This means a reduction in the positional/referent power of the leader and a focus on intra and interpersonal qualities and skills, which the leader draws upon in each unique context in order to achieve a shared purpose. A command and control model of leadership will not work - except in dire emergency. There is no single formula for success which can be applied 'from the top down' since all educational contexts are different, and since sustainability requires participation, self-organisation and the alignment of responsibility with purpose at all levels - leaders, teachers, community and students.

There are however, some disciplined design principles which leaders internalise, embody and model, and design into each system as part of the process of ongoing sustainable improvement in learning processes and outcomes for all. Design principles are essential.
characteristics of a learning system which are all crucial for the system to achieve its purpose, and which provide a disciplined framework for leaders to draw on, interpret and apply as they take responsibility for leading a community towards a shared purpose in a particular place and context.

At the heart of these design principles is (i) a focus on deep learning - adaptation and change through meaningful feedback - at all levels of the learning community. (ii) a recognition that a learning community operates at different levels: students, teachers, leaders and community - individuals, teams, organisations and community. (iii) an understanding of dynamic process - change, lifecycle, movement or journey - at the heart of the system.

These design principles are articulated here from the perspective of leaders - however they could equally apply to individual students, teachers or parents.

Developing and maintaining constancy of Purpose

Developing and maintaining a locally derived and shared educational purpose within a particular place is the primary task of leadership. An educational leader takes responsibility for maintaining constancy of purpose within the community, whilst recognising that they are publicly accountable. The responsibility of educational leadership extends beyond the individual school to a whole community, including children at risk of ‘falling between the cracks’ in provision, parents and the wider community. Understanding WHY we educate and aligning educational performance to shared purpose is a core educational task and needs to be integrated into teacher education from ITT through to Executive Principal development. The alignment of purpose to performance is key to individual and team engagement and thus to sustainability and quality.

Leadership which Learns

Maintaining constancy of purpose means that leadership (not just the individual leader) needs to be continually learning - with the shared purpose providing the evaluation criteria for success. For leadership which learns, leaders and schools need a significant degree of autonomy, albeit within a common framework, so that they can adapt authentically in the light of their learning and serve the particular needs of diverse communities. Continuous organisational learning for the improvement of student learning processes and outcomes is the responsibility of leaders. An organisation that learns needs to be populated by people who learn - thus deep learning needs to be taking place at all levels of the organisation. Such learning is deep learning because it generates real change, aligning shared purpose with performance. It is authentic because it is self-organising (rather than externally imposed) and it is meaningful in the lives of the learners involved.

Redesigning Curricula for Deep Learning: 'Learning Architectures'

How schools go about the core business of curriculum, assessment and teaching and learning reflects what matters more powerfully than anything else. The processes of curriculum design, assessment and pedagogy should be aligned to the learning community's
core purpose, rather than seen as an 'add on' which is externally imposed. There is more freedom in the current (English) curriculum framework than is often recognised. The metaphor of 'architecture' for deep learning is useful because it incorporates design purpose, structures, processes, aesthetics, location and technical, human and emancipatory interests.

Deep learning has been described as 'the stuff you don't need to revise'. Deep learning requires an 'architecture' or a 'systems design' that recognises and is designed to enable the individual or team to identify their own purpose, to take responsibility for their own learning journey, including both their personal learning power and their knowledge co-construction, as well as identifying and achieving their negotiated learning outcome. Such learning can never be confined only to the classroom or lecture theatre - it is engaged, applied, integrated across traditional disciplines and generative in the life narrative of the learner. Traditional curricula, pedagogy and assessment technologies require some redesign if all students and teachers are to experience such learning: however this would enhance and complement, rather than replace, traditional, subject based learning. There is disciplined pedagogical knowledge and know-how which is required in order for teachers to facilitate such learning.

Deep learning is an entitlement not only for students, but also for teachers and leaders. Deep learning for teachers is the engine of school improvement.

**Co-creating Sustainable Learning Systems**

There is no single formula for success in leadership because each context is different and needs to be self-organising in order to be sustainable. Therefore leaders need to be able to allow local solutions to emerge from the interactions and relationships in their contexts. These cannot be defined or controlled in advance. The implications of this are that leadership needs to be capable of understanding and rapidly evaluating a range of types of evidence, within a disciplined evaluation framework against success criteria which are aligned with the organisations shared purpose. Leadership need to be multi-lingual in terms of data - using large quantitative data sets, alongside qualitative and narrative data and experiential knowledge - in order to make decisions about quality and direction, taking into account a wider range of student outcomes than those that are easily measured and standardised across populations. Leaders also need skills of integration and synthesis, integrating the differing discourses and demands of practice, research, policy and social enterprise. Such skills include the ability harness collective intelligence, to re-present and communicate complex data and to understand the importance of patterns and relationships in data as well as the more traditional approach of measuring the impact of one variable on another.

**Deep Listening**

Deep listening to the 'other' is at the heart of this approach to leadership. Creating a self-organising learning system begins with attention to the voice of individuals and groups within the community. Deep listening creates trust because it facilitates genuine participation and enables leadership to release the talents of other members of the learning
Deep listening should be afforded to all stakeholders - the community, the teaching team and individual students - in order to invite and generate intrinsic motivation and responsibility for change. It can be structured into the 'learning architecture'. This includes a process of deep listening to the needs, aspirations and stories of the wider community. A self-organising learning system is contextually sensitive to the place in which it is located. Coaching is a core vehicle for deep listening, attuned to the needs of the 'other' which facilitates self-organisation.

**The Inner World of the Leader**

All of these design principles require leaders who are aware of and take responsibility for nurturing and extending their 'inner worlds' - including their own personal development, learning and professional vision and values commitments. This is the source of their energy for leadership in self-organising systems - rather than the external worlds of micro or macro politics. It allows leadership to be self-organising and provides an important reference point in times of complexity, ambiguity and change. Leaders need to integrate their internal and external worlds, as authentic, reflective individuals and teams, leading from the 'inside out'. Centred and calm leaders are open to learning - and model this principle for teachers and students. Stress and fear generate blame and close down deep learning, even though they also lead to compliance. A focus on the personal qualities of leaders - rather than positional power referents - is thus key within this model of leadership, and suggests the idea of 'virtues for leadership' - habitual ways of behaving which are necessary for achieving a particular 'good' purpose. Perhaps the most key virtue is 'humility' - the awareness that, quite often, we simply don't know.

**Creating Trust within Community**

Trust is a core resource which is necessary for the successful deployment of all of these 'design principles'. It is challenging to define. It is about high levels of benevolence and competence on the part of leadership and the deep knowledge in all, that their relationships can 'withstand the challenges of risk, uncertainty, difference and inequality' (Bond 2007). At its most basic level, it is the awareness of each member of a learning community 'that I am OK it's OK for me to be here'. High levels of trust is like oxygen for athletes - the more we have the better our performance.

**Conclusions**

The Open Space Symposium was designed to offer a space for experienced practitioners and researchers to bring fresh thinking to the current challenges of educational leaders and to generate new ways of articulating leadership in this context. There are of course, as many ways of defining leadership as there are gurus, and our intention was not to compete with or replace any existing models - rather to recognise the radically changing world in which we educate and seek to articulate a narrative for leadership which is inclusive and capable of bringing together the best of what we know - whilst challenging worldviews which no longer serve us.
Another key purpose was to re-write the worn out scripts of training and development for leadership, in a way which is more consonant with what we know and are seeking to achieve in terms of deep learning and engagement. There are many implications of this document for leadership development which have yet to be articulated and enacted.

This is the beginning of a conversation, rather than a definitive statement. We invite you to join in.

References used in Open Space Sessions


