

Professional Learning: Supporting teachers to lead by learning and learn by leading

In my last editorial in 2019 I spoke about professional learning and its potential ability to empower teachers to stay close to their moral purpose of teaching, to make a difference. Moral purpose is linked with agency (MacBeath and Dempster 2009) and leadership, as teachers enhance their capacity to make a difference (Frost, 2006). The importance of agency and leadership in teacher professional learning has therefore a central role to play if teachers are to make a difference. In this editorial I want to consider what support teachers need to empower them to use their agency and lead.

The role of principals in supporting teacher agency and developing and sustaining teachers' PL has been well documented. The first paper in this issue draws on the Austrian context where school leaders have recently become accountable for their teachers' PL. Jesacher-Roessler and Agostini highlights the importance of the role of the school leader in PL processes and calls on school leaders to create responsive interorganizational professional learning networks and sustainable learning environments.

Creating organisational capacity for PL and empowering teachers to create collaborative learning cultures are just some of the strategies previously espoused as central to developing a culture of PL in schools (King, 2011), and to supporting teachers to lead by learning and learn by leading (Collinson, 2012). While there are formal leaders in schools who may be involved in leading PL or supporting the PL of teachers, this editorial focuses on all teachers as leaders of learning, not just those in positional roles.

The second paper in this issue highlights the importance of principal leadership and professional cultures on "early-career teacher leadership aspiration, learning and development in the evolving hybrid of Western and Confucian cultures of Hong Kong" (Szeto). Early career teachers' aspiration of leadership is a new and emerging field of research. The author argues this warrants consideration at school level, through distributed leadership practices, and at teacher education level where teacher leadership development ought to be infused into the education and professional

learning of teachers and principals. This reflects findings by King et al., (2019) who highlighted the willingness and expectation of newly qualified teachers and early career teachers to lead, with many not necessarily interested in the formal role or position of leading, rather sharing their expertise with their colleagues in their schools and beyond. In short, they are interested in making a difference.

The third and fourth articles by Dodman, in the U.S. and Qanay and Frost, situated in Kazakhstan, also endorse the concept of non-positional teachers as leaders and call for support for leadership for all teachers as a dimension of teachers' identity and professionalism. Dodman sees teacher leadership and teacher learning as "a powerful intersection for transforming teacher identity and practices" and for teachers' sense of empowerment. Qanay and Frost argue for top-down leadership support to create organisational capacity for teachers to use their agency, to engage in meaningful PL, based on their identified needs and concerns, and to feel empowered to exercise leadership to make a difference. Both articles draw on the 'Leadership for Learning' (LfL) work at Cambridge (MacBeath et al. 2018) with Qanay and Frost highlighting that successful PL "both draws upon the learner's agency and enhances it" thereby supporting teachers to learn by leading and lead by learning. The five principles of LfL were used as the theoretical framework in the fifth paper by Chaaban, Sawalhi and Du who explored teacher leadership for PL in response to educational disruption in Qatar. The authors noted that the pandemic provided new opportunities for teachers to lead PL and they call for continued support for teacher agency in their own PL, that of their colleagues and students.

While policy rhetoric in many countries may be moving towards the idea of all teachers as leaders, there is arguably a values practice gap between the macro, meso and micro levels of the system with some leaders / principals reluctant to 'let go'. Despite a focus on distributed leadership, for many years, aimed at shared leadership in schools there still remains a hierarchy in many schools which has tended to result in 'licensed leadership' as distinct from a more organic form of leadership from below (King and Stevenson, 2017). However, Zhang et al., in the sixth paper highlight the role of middle leaders in supporting teachers' professional learning in China. They posit that "middle leaders can play a critical role in shaping the processes and outcomes of teachers' school-based learning" as they mediate the tensions between organisational and individual levels of PL. Middle leaders, they argue, can support transformation of learning by scaffolding teachers' learning

towards shared meaning-making. The importance of teachers developing a shared language and understanding was also highlighted by Earle and Bianchi, in the UK context, in the seventh article in this issue. They suggest a role for PL frameworks in developing teacher agency in subject leadership in primary science. Such frameworks, they argue, can support PL and critical reflection to bridge the theory practice gap. However, they may need the support of middle leaders as suggested by Zhang et al., to act as a boundary spanner to make such frameworks accessible and useful for teachers.

Staying with teacher leadership in STEM, Hite and Milbourne in their paper explore how, where, and when teachers seek opportunities to develop their teaching competencies and hone their leadership skills to become STEM master teacher leaders in the US. They highlight the importance of school culture and the STEM community, and access to professional networks/opportunities among some of the key influences in developing their leadership skills to become change agents.

Continuing on a similar vein, article nine, by Shavard considers the role of framing questions to structure teachers' collaborative professional learning in the Norwegian context. She argues that collaborative dialogue around student cases can support more discursive and problematising framing questions and suggests that facilitation or conversation protocols may be helpful in this regard. Affording teachers agency to to move towards a broader range of professional problems for PL was also highlighted.

Developing a supportive and collaborative context for PL is also the focus of article ten by Longhurst, Jones and Campbell, who consider mediating influences in PL in the US context. The need for time to engage cognitively as well as practically and to afford teachers' ownership of the PL process was highlighted as part of eight factors to support appropriation of new and effective instruction following PL. Sticking with the idea of agency in PL, dePutter-Smits, Nieveen, Taconis and Jochems in their article from the Netherlands set out to explore teachers' concerns throughout a professional development programme as an effective approach to teacher PL. They argue that working through teachers' concerns is an important influence for long term impact and change, once again showing the importance of teachers being able to use their agency to engage in meaningful PL, based on their identified needs and concerns. Affording teachers this agency will enable them to to feel empowered to lead by learning and learn by leading to make a difference. This editorial and several

of the papers in this issue focus on a key role for leadership and middle leaders in supporting teachers' PL, whilst also calling for a recognition of non-positional leadership as an essential dimension of teachers' professionalism.

References

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