

Chapter 3

Leading learning in a world of change

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This chapter by John MacBeath examines the character of leadership in both a descriptive and ethical sense. Leading learning entails the constant endeavour to stimulate the desire to learn and sustain teachers' engagement, and requires quality of insight and "connoisseurship". Five principles for learning leadership are presented: 1) a focus on learning; 2) creating conditions favourable to learning; 3) dialogue; 4) sharing leadership through structures and procedures supporting participation; and 5) a shared sense of accountability. There is discussion about the leadership challenges of creating communities of learning, self-evaluation and inducting new teachers. The final section turns to learning leadership in non-formal settings and hybrids of formal and non-formal. These forms of learning environment are very promising for the future and have, par excellence, given more leadership to young people. But they represent significant challenges to professional practice and its understanding, dominated in the literature by "the place called school".

Introduction

This chapter examines the character of leadership in both a descriptive and ethical sense. “Leading” and “learning” are open to a variety of interpretations and are, in many policy contexts, devalued by too facile an association with principalship on the one hand, and attainment measures on the other. Leading learning relies on willingness and courage to return to first principles – to see both leadership and learning anew, examining ways in which schools may enhance or constrain the potential which children bring them. Leading learning entails a constant effort not only to keep alive children’s inherent desire to learn but also implies a sustaining of teachers’ idealism in the face of relentless pressures including competitive targets. It requires a quality of insight which grasps the nature of the force field that pushes teachers, students and parents back to the comfort zone of convention and conventional wisdom. Leading learning opens to question the locus for change and what it means to be a learning community. It defines the character and resilience which helps leaders and teachers to fly below the policy radar. The final section of this chapter turns to how learning has been led in exemplary ways both within and beyond schools, working across boundaries, entering the “dilemma space” in which certainty, consistency and conformity are exchanged for spontaneity, risk and autonomy.

The character of leadership

The term “leadership” is so embedded in the common sense of everyday discourse that it is difficult to perceive it anew, as it were for the first time. Our most common reference point is the individual at the apex of the organisational pyramid with a vested authority and mandate to act on behalf of others, with conviction and with benevolent intent. His or her warrant rests on the trust to act on behalf of those they lead, to do the right thing and to do things right.

So the character of leadership may be approached from two different directions. On the one hand, it is a descriptive term to refer to the characteristics of the role – “what leaders do when they accomplish well what is formally expected of them”. On the other hand, we understand “character” as having a strong ethical resonance. In a school context, it has been described as the conscience, or moral compass, of the community – doing what is right, just and equitable.

Leadership may be made plainly visible in the hierarchy of the school or, alternatively, may not be easy to perceive because it is dispersed, less invested in institutional authority than in shared endeavour, enacted spontaneously by those who singly or in concert take responsibility for their

fellow beings. These two forms of leadership, explicit and implicit, often exist in tension, defined by the structural order or expressed in the flow of activity in which members of the school community are engaged.

The questions “who are the learners?” and “who are the leaders?” may simply receive a default answer in the explicit structures of schools, made apparent in the everyday conduct of school life, in the arrangements of classrooms, and in the hierarchies of access and privilege. It needs no conversation for the new pupil, or the new graduate student, the new teacher or the visiting parent to know who learns, who leads, and who follows. Where there is failure to discern those explicit conventions, an apparent absence of clear demarcations between the leaders and the learners, it is likely to be a disturbing, but nonetheless an enlightening, experience.

The distinguishing character of those who lead well, whether with institutional or with personal authority, is connoisseurship – the ability to perceive what is salient amid the complexity and simultaneity of school and classroom life. As educational connoisseurs they have learned how to suspend preconception and judgment, knowing what they see rather than seeing what they already know. They have a deep understanding of the nature of learning – student, teacher, organisational and system learning – and they grasp the vital nature of their interconnections.

“Insight”, seeing into, as Abraham Heschel (1969: 3) describes it, is “the perception of things to come rather than the extension of things gone by”. The ability to see schools and classrooms with a focus on learning, with a focus on what might be, and not simply what is, brings with it a profound understanding of why our hopes for children so often fall short. With insight, leaders grasp the nature of the force field that pushes them back to the comfort zone of convention, persuading them to rely on what they already do rather than venture too far into the risky unknown.

As Hesselbein et al. (1996: 78) have argued in relation to exemplary school leaders, their distinguishing strength is the ability of push themselves out of their comfort zone into risky territory: “They are open to people and ideas even at a time in life when they might reasonably think – because of their success – that they know everything”. In situations where children know more about some things than their teachers, the latter require a measure of humility and willingness to learn from those younger, smaller and less powerful than themselves.

Seeing with a new clarity into our own practice is an uncomfortable experience because we may become too acutely aware of the gap between how things are and how we would like them to be. There are few leaders who would not like their schools to be better places for children and there are few teachers who would not like their classrooms to be more exciting places

for themselves and their students. Yet we confront the paradox that success, within the limitations imposed on senior leaders and teachers, can be the enemy of change. “Nothing fails like success”, wrote Peter Senge in 1990, pointing to the complacency that comes with competitive advantage, good reports, high marks and boxes ticked.

With insight comes a discriminating response to the vagaries of policy. In David Hargreaves’ words, it requires the ability and the courage to “fly below the radar”. A study of Scottish school leaders (MacBeath et al., 2009) identified five self-defined categories – the “dutifully compliant”, the “cautiously pragmatic”, the “quietly self-confident”, the “bullishly self-assertive”, and the self-confessed “defiant risk-takers”. In these latter categories were self-confessed rule breakers, driven by their conscience and what they believed to be right, leading their schools neither with subservience nor arrogance. They were prepared to do what they deemed to be the right thing in full knowledge of the risks and consequences of defying policy mandates. Their self-confidence (in the words of one head, “you can’t frighten me, I’ve got children”) gave them the conviction to see what matters and to navigate their way around impatient policy imperatives.

At the same time, adventurous leaders are acutely aware of the accountability they owe to their paymasters as well as to those over whom they exercise authority. It is in achieving the balance between external and internal accountability that leadership confronts its acutest dilemmas – addressing the constraining parameters which threaten ambition for transformational change. This dilemma was expressed in an English context by a principal attempting both to manage and to lead, juggling external pressures to conform with a principled stance which puts students’ needs first:

I have three pistols to my head: one is the need to prepare the school for another visit from the inspectors because we are in Special Measures, another is the need to present a case to the local authority which is threatening to close the school, and another is the need to improve the attainment figures so we can be lifted out of the status of being “a school in challenging circumstances”. And then there is the small matter of trying to lead and manage the school on a day-to-day basis and meet the needs of our students and the community (Frost, 2005: 76).

What students need is open to a variety of interpretations, and attempting to both define and cater to those perceived needs is an ambitious remit. “Needs” are not only complex, contradictory and contentious, but trying to meet them is also bounded by caution and compromise. However strong the impulse to put learning first, there can be a seemingly relentless tide pushing leaders back to the known and familiar, mediating aspiration, reminding them of the costs that come with daring to be different.

Understanding and leading learning, in its most profound sense, requires a return to first principles, or axioms, as to the nature, purposes, rhythms and contexts of learning, prompting the question: to what extent can such commitments be accommodated within the constraining influences of the institutions we call schools? It implies an ability to see the unseen, to question the unquestioned and to address the intergenerational legacy of school and of being schooled. Leadership implies not only profound personal insight, but an ability to help others share those insights and to be alive to insights which others bring.

Five principles of leadership for learning

Leadership for learning was the common theme in a collaborative study (MacBeath and Dempster, 2008) to which seven countries signed up in 2002 (Australia, Austria, Denmark, Greece, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States). Over a three-year period, five common principles took shape. Reframed in theoretical discussion and tested in school and classroom practice, these five principles proved to have powerful application, making the connections among learning and leading at individual, collective, organisational and policy levels.

The first of the five principles holds the key to the rest. A focus on learning is economic and powerful, challenging in its simplicity but far-reaching in its implications. Focusing on learning means putting learning at the centre of everything. This refers not simply to students but to every member of a school that aspires to be a learning community.

Where there is a focus on learning, a second principle follows naturally – creating conditions favourable to learning. The first principle presupposes a culture able to nurture learning for everyone, affording opportunities to reflect on the nature, skills and processes of learning and to vouchsafe the physical and the social spaces that stimulate and celebrate learning. Safe and secure environments enable everyone to take risks, to cope with failure and respond positively to challenges, equipped with tools and strategies to enhance thinking about learning and the practice of teaching.

The third principle, dialogue, is premised on the first two. A focus on, and a culture of, learning are generated and sustained by a quality of discourse in which Leadership for Learning practice is made explicit, discussable and transferable. Its impact is measured by active collegial inquiry in which a commonality of purpose is achieved through the sharing of values, understandings, and practices.

As a school develops as a community of learners it also becomes a community of leaders. So the fourth principle states that “leadership for

learning practice involves the sharing of leadership in which organisational structures and procedures support participation”. Shared leadership is symbolised in the day-to-day flow of activities in the school. Everyone is encouraged to take the lead as appropriate to task and context. The experience and expertise of staff, students and parents are drawn upon as a valued and dynamic resource. Collaborative patterns of work and activity across boundaries of subject, role and status are valued and promoted.

In such a collaborative climate there is a shared sense of accountability – principle five. Internal, reciprocal accountability is a precursor and precondition of accountability to external agencies, and national policies are interpreted, adopted or adapted to the extent that they accord with the school’s core values. The school chooses how to tell its own story, taking account of political realities with a continuing focus on sustainability, succession and leaving a legacy.

Embedding the five principles in a learning community

It is a fortunate beginning teacher who joins a genuine learning community, one in which the five key principles are embedded in the day-to-day realities of practice. In such a culture, a teacher’s own learning trajectory is recognised and supported, drawing energy and inspiration from an ethos in which learning is modelled and celebrated but also problematised and subjected to continuing inquiry. Newly-qualified teachers need, and benefit, from a quality of support which is able to enter into their intellectual and emotional frame of reference and is able to help extend the borders within which their experience is conceived.

As McLaughlin and Talbert’s 2001 study reported, in such a community teachers tend to feel more empowered and see their work as meaningful. They testify to their affiliation with the school and have higher job satisfaction than teachers working in weak professional communities. There is ample evidence internationally to show that without the collegial support, without leadership able to foster conditions for professional learning, without a strong sense of reciprocal accountability, there are higher rates of stress, disaffection and attrition. Working together with a shared sense of learning purpose, teachers can more effectively rise to the challenges they face, while students experience at first hand the character of healthy interpersonal relationships when school staff are engaged in “a cohesive, co-operative organisational climate” (Ingersoll, 2003: 194).

The challenge for leadership is to help teachers to model for their charges what it means to be a learner, keeping alive the exploratory and creative instinct which children bring with them. Such leaders recognise that nurturing the resilience and optimism of children relies on teachers themselves also

having a reservoir of human and social capital on which to draw. They are also keenly aware that not all teachers have an equal capacity to sustain frustrated aims. Not all teachers are able to maintain a high level of energy over time, or to resurrect day after day the passion to deal with setback and disappointment. With awareness as to staff's needs as well as those of students, creating the balance of differentiated support and challenge assumes high priority and makes the case for distributed, collegial expressions of leadership.

While on entering the profession there is commitment and openness to becoming more skilled and effective, without the stimulus and reinvigoration of new challenges and new horizons it is easy for teachers to become resigned to business as usual and, with external pressure for compliance, to submit to the seemingly inevitable. It is in this respect that induction into the profession requires radical reappraisal as O'Connell Rust has argued, claiming that pre-service education tends to be ineffective in disturbing inert ideas. He argues that neophyte teachers "most probably leave our programmes with their deeply-held beliefs intact, ready to teach as they learned during their apprenticeships of observation" (1994: 215). The perennial problem is that these neophyte teachers are "insiders" (Hoy and Murphy, 2001), their views of teaching shaped by their own experience, so that they return to the places of their past, complete with memories and preconceptions often unaffected by their higher education or training college experience. They may feel they have no need to "discover" the classroom or to see it with new eyes because they are already so familiar with the territory – having spent the last dozen or so years of their lives in similar places (Pajares, 1993).

The enduring challenge for those who lead is how to address the disconnect between what teachers believe and aspire to, on the one hand, and what they actually do on a day-to-day basis in their classrooms. As Joyce and Showers (2002) point out, it is easy for teachers to know what they should do, harder for them to be able to do it, and most difficult of all for them to embed it into their daily practice. This is characterised by Mary Kennedy (1999) as "the problem of enactment" – the difficulty teachers face in translating into effective practice and coherent action the ideas they may have embraced yet struggle to make the connection between what seems to be right in principle and what is right in the circumstances. The disconnect is likely to remain without it being recognised, understood and addressed, unless teachers feel themselves to be part of a learning community in which these issues are made explicit and open to debate.

How then do leaders create a "community", a climate in which these issues can be explored? How can they bring to the surface the tensions and implicit theories that are not simply relevant for new teachers but may be even more deeply ingrained among long-serving staff who have done their time and for whom the "urgency to learn" has dissipated? How can the idealism

that brought them into teaching be sustained or, for others, re-ignited, engaging them in tasks that challenge and that extend their repertoire, and provide collegial support and inspiration? Many of those who come fresh to teaching are mid-career entrants with a background outside education, accustomed to working in teams and finding difficulty with the social isolation which so often cuts teachers off from the vital sources of support – their colleagues. When teachers shut their classroom doors and deny entry to their colleagues they close themselves off from their own learning and from their own professional enrichment. They close themselves off from sources and opportunities which have been found to be powerful in country contexts as diverse as Japan, New Zealand and Singapore.

As the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF, 2003) reported a decade ago, where there is a culture which creates opportunities for reflection, together with colleagues and with the support of skilled mentoring, teachers are more likely to stay in the profession, more likely to continue to learn during a critical transition time (during their first year when they are expected to take theories about teaching and learning and turn them into classroom practice), and will be more effective in helping students learn.

In Sweden, Birgitte Malm's descriptions of competences and qualities necessary for future teachers were taken as a starting point for a wider discussion on the crucial role of beliefs and emotions in being and becoming a teacher (2009). The six emerging competences she described as:

- developing teachers' capacities for creative and reflective thought
- enhancing critical thinking
- heightening teachers' philosophical and pedagogical awareness
- emphasising the cognitive as well as emotional aspects of teaching
- training teachers' capacities for empathy and interpersonal collaboration
- developing a personal understanding of the implications of teaching perceived as a moral and ethical profession.

This raises the question of leadership which is able to foster the quality of collegiality most likely to achieve these six aims. It prompts the question as to how teachers are, in the first instance, inducted into a profession and what measures leaders take to sustain their professionalism over time. Without opportunities to address the emotional intelligence of teaching, without opportunities for reflection and critical re-appraisal of conventional wisdom, teachers will simply replicate the *status quo*, or even more worrisome, regress to the didactics of a mythical golden age when supposedly standards were high, when teachers taught and children learned.

The critical and contentious issues for leaders is, in Hampden-Turner's terminology, to understand, and to manage, the "dilemma space" which occurs between the rock and the whirlpool, between the push of the known and familiar, on the one hand, and the pull of an uncertain future, on the other (2007). The rock values – consistency, reliability, performance, competition and transparency – he counterpoints with the whirlpool values of choice, diversity, dynamism, spontaneity and autonomy. Failure to address the tensions between certainty and uncertainty, between individuality and collectivity, the comfort of the past and the risk of the future is, he argues, a failure of forward-looking leadership.

If inert ideas are to be confounded, insight cultivated, and energy and commitment revitalised, it will be in schools rich in opportunities for self-evaluation, reflection and celebration in which learning dispositions and behaviour are modelled, made visible and internalised. It is through a culture of inquiry and self-evaluation deeply embedded in the daily routines of classroom life, that schools gain the strength of conviction to expose what constrains authentic learning and, with an enhanced sense of agency, are able to show how things can be different (Aguerrondo and Vezub, 2011).

Self-evaluation: a hallmark of the learning community

The term "self-evaluation" has acquired so many different meanings, and been co-opted by so many political interests, that it rarely captures the depth of reflection and dialogue that is promised by such a powerful idea. In the best of practice, self-evaluation refers to the process by which leaders work to create a climate in which teachers and schools are enabled to make their intellectual and moral journey, measuring the distance they have travelled, not in the currency of summative measures that say little about deep learning. The tools of authentic, professionally-driven self-evaluation, by contrast, are set in a social context. They focus on learning and the conditions which promote it. They encourage dialogue. They enable critical reflection on the nature of leadership and accountability.

In countries where self-evaluation has taken root, it is by virtue of prescient leadership, in schools in which teachers feel safe to venture, confident in risk-taking and equipped with self-evaluation tools which serve a primarily formative purpose. Teachers are willing to adopt and adapt tools which they see as going to the heart of learning and teaching – congenial, flexible and adaptable to new situations and to emerging challenges. These tools are, however, not limited to what happens in classrooms nor only to students' learning. They apply to teacher, organisational and leadership learning. They measure how teachers are progressing in their thinking and practice and how the school is developing as a community of learners. Accountability is no longer something to be feared, but rather relished

because it is the platform for telling a story rooted in evidence of the most profound kind.

Self-evaluating teachers who, in Rousseau's aphorism "lose time to save it", take time out to explore with their students the nature, processes and mysteries of learning, finding that "lost" time is repaid by students' deeper grasp of how, when, where, with whom and why, they learn best. The "what" which has been the defining characteristic of learning and of teachers' subject identity, has by the inexorable impetus of social change given way to the "why" and "how" and even the "where" and "when". To ask the question "why?", which would in the past have landed the impudent student in deep trouble, is today a more legitimate and even welcome inquiry. "Because I told you so" is no longer a persuasive response.

Sometimes characterised as the "5Ws plus H", these six interrogative propositions provide a simple but highly generative framework for self-evaluation. In workshops with school leaders and teachers, asked to prioritise among the six, the "what" of learning is frequently ranked in last place. The "who" assumes perhaps the highest priority, not only referring to parents and teachers but to siblings and peers. The peer (or "compositional") effect is a well-researched phenomenon and "who you go to school with" has been repeatedly identified as a significant determinant of parental choice for their children. The "where" and "when", issues of social context, open to question the nature and constraints of classroom learning, the ecology of homework and the growing impact of anytime learning in the virtual world. This in turn brings into question the "how", the engagement with technology and lateral networked learning as against the prevalent transmission mode of classroom learning. And the much less frequently-asked question, but for some the most salient – why?

Exploring the "how" and the "why" questions, Geert Hofstede conducted surveys in school systems around the world to gauge the relative uses of institutional power, to measure the extent to which people in positions of leadership were open to challenge and willing to draw on both feminine and masculine aspects of their character (1991). He was interested in how different societies set the parameters of what may be asked, who may ask it, and what sanctions attend either the wrong answers or the wrong questions. A key aspect of leadership he described as "the ability to tolerate ambiguity" as against a need for the right answers. Living with uncertainty and ambiguity may be a painful experience but it can provide the impulse for self-evaluation. In the words of one school student, contrasting external inspection and self-evaluation, the latter "leads you to where the bodies are buried".

Attending to the student voice has been a growing feature of self-evaluation in a number of countries over the last two decades. In New Zealand (visited by the author as part of an OECD review, see Nusche et

al., 2011), students are seen as playing a key role in evaluating the quality of their school as well as contributing to external review. “Voice” is not simply giving rein to spontaneous or untutored feedback but as having a formative intent, helping young people to express their concerns with a deeper understanding of the language of assessment, evaluation and review and giving them opportunities to articulate their views with confidence and thoughtful critique. Evidence from New Zealand schools shows that these issues have been taken seriously and that staff have equipped their students with the skills and vocabulary to talk perceptively about pedagogy, what makes for good learning, and what makes a good school. The generally positive response to self-evaluation and external review by school staff and teacher organisations in that country may be explained by its non-threatening nature, its positive focus on good practice, receptivity to divergent voices, to the school’s own efforts at improvement and to the primarily formative character of self-evaluation.

In Hong Kong where, in an educational context, power distance has witnessed a progressively shrinking gap, this is owed in large part to the embedding of self-evaluation in school practice and to the honouring of student voices. A continuing process over a decade has witnessed acknowledgement of the insights which students can bring. With 360 degree self-evaluation embraced, students’ feedback to their teachers and teachers’ feedback to their senior leaders has produced both soul-searching and transformation of pedagogy. The best of schools are now distinguished by collaborative lesson planning, lesson study, peer evaluation supported by School Improvement Teams composed of a cross section of teachers, middle and senior managers (and sometimes students) – collegial leaders of learning. (MacBeath, 2009)

A Hong Kong principal talked to me about using his first year in post “to listen and learn, to feel and experience the culture”, to engage in dialogue with a range of stakeholders, each day inviting a different group of students or teachers to conversations over lunch in his office. Only when he felt he had gained their trust, did he begin to encourage teachers “to venture forth”, to learn from their colleagues and from their students. Professional development grew from an identification of what were described as the “satisfiers” and “dissatisfiers”, those aspects of school and classroom life that enhanced learning and those that eroded motivation and engagement. With deeper understanding of these counteracting impulses, self-evaluation tools were developed to take account of the nesting of teachers’ experience – within their own classrooms, their departments, their schools, their local neighbourhoods, local policy and national politics and the international standards agendas which touch, however invisibly, teachers’ daily work.

In Pasi Sahlberg’s recent book *Finnish Lessons* (2011), he points to the critical nature of the teacher collective, their receptivity to challenging their

practice and the preconditions essential to pedagogic intercourse. He argues that Finland's high-performing education system is owed to adopting policies counter to those of most Western education systems built on standardisation and prescription, transfer of models of administration from the corporate world, high stakes accountability policies, and control and punitive inspection.

As Finnish teachers were exploring the theoretical foundations of knowledge and learning and redesigning their school curricula to be congruent with them, their peers in England, Germany, France and the United States struggled with increased school inspection, controversial externally-imposed learning standards, and competition that disturbed some teachers to the point that they decided to leave their jobs (Sahlberg, 2011: 5)

Changing contexts for learning

How we view the concept of a “high-performing system” depends on what we see as the purposes of education and the expectations we have of children and teachers. As contexts for learning broaden and diversify, what counts as valued performance is bound to change. With reference to the changing contexts of learning and teaching Mayer, Pecheone and Merino write:

Challenging curriculum expectations and more diverse learners mean that teachers have to be more sophisticated in their understanding of the effects of context and learner variability on teaching and learning. Instead of implementing set routines, teachers need to become ever more skilful in their ability to evaluate teaching situations and develop teaching responses that can be effective under different circumstances. (2012: 115)

As the information explosion accelerates and paths of entry to information become more and more accessible, the role and expertise of the teacher shifts from knowledge (or information) provider to mediator and learner. In what is referred to as “the knowledge society”, the emphasis is on the skills that are needed to create new forms of understanding.

These are skills such as problem solving, communication, collaboration, experimentation, critical thinking and creative expression. These skills become curricular goals in themselves and the objects of new assessment methods. Perhaps the most significant aim is for students to be able to create their own learning goals and plans – to establish what they already know, assess their strengths and weaknesses, design a learning plan, stay on-task, track their own progress, build on successes

and adjust to failures. These are skills that can be used throughout a lifetime to participate in a learning society. (UNESCO, 2012: 17)

“Under different circumstances” is a telling phrase because it challenges the contained setting of the classroom. It challenges the comfort zone of those who know telling those who don’t know. It opens to scrutiny the nature of behaviour settings and “construction sites”. The former refers to the conditioned response of human beings to the physical environment in which they find themselves. The latter refers to ways in which intelligence is “constructed” by the places and people whom we congregate with, who either constrain or enhance desire and determination.

Learning beyond schooling

Success in school does not, contended John Dewey, vouchsafe “the capacity to act intelligently in new situations”. “How many students were rendered callous to ideas? How many lost the impetus to learn because of the way in which learning was experienced by them?” (1938: 7)

The most conspicuous failure of schools as we know them has been to isolate and insulate learning so that school learning stays obstinately within classrooms while learning for living is what happens outside. Dewey’s prescient comment is now supported by empirical evidence as to the “special skills” that children acquire in order to navigate the peculiar territory that is school. Evidence shows that this navigational know-how is one the most significant factors in discriminating between those who succeed in school and those who fail. It was described by Gray and colleagues (1999) as “tactical learning”, a surrogate for deep and meaningful learning.

In 2010 at a conference in the United Arab Emirates, the Oxford scholar Baroness Greenfield reported how eleven-year-olds spent their time: over the course of a school year, 900 hours in school are overshadowed by 1 277 hours spent out of school and 1 934 hours in the virtual world. More important perhaps than the relative amounts of time in different settings, however, is the nature of the learning activity in differing contexts. Learning in informal environments, when compared with classroom learning, reveals a primarily social, spontaneous and exploratory character. Learning to swim, ride a bicycle, play the piano, read a map, navigate unfamiliar terrain, lead a team, solve a problem, all benefit from certain common features – they are embedded in relationships, learner-centred, concerned with skills and dispositions, contextualised, enjoyable but risky, supportive but challenging, relaxed but alert, age blind.

As Gardner, Perkins, Dweck and others have shown, transfer of learning from the structured teacher-directed ethos of the classroom to an unstructured

ambiguous “open field” has a very low success rate. This is due, argued David Perkins in a lecture at Strathclyde University in March, 2008 to three key factors. One, students have to be able to spot the problem. Two, they need to be motivated to want to engage with the problem. Three, they then need to have the ability to select and use the most appropriate tools to solve the problem. In his book *The Unschooled Mind* (1991), Howard Gardner reported similar findings with college students. He found that physics students could not solve the most basic problems if posed in a context slightly different from the one in which they first encountered them. Even successful students responded to problems with the same confusions and misconceptions as young children, reverting to their own implicit theories formed in childhood.

In much of the problem-solving in classrooms, it is the teachers who present the problems, and often also provide a method for solving them. Psychologist Robert Sternberg describes students who arrive in college bright, well-schooled, and examination-smart but without what he called the practical, creative and successful intelligences that really matter in life (Sternberg, 2007). Gardner, revisiting his own well-known seven intelligences, added a further eighth to the list which he calls naturalistic (or environmental) intelligence, finding your way and negotiating a path in the complex social world beyond the cloisters of the classroom.

To be truly skilful outside of school, children and young people must develop situation-specific forms of competence. In school, learning is more generalised, creating a situation whereby “very little can be transported directly from school to out-of-school use”, writes Carol Dweck (1986). She makes the following contrasts:

- individual cognition in school versus shared cognition outside
- pure mentation in school versus tool manipulation outside
- symbol manipulation in school versus contextualised reasoning outside
- generalised learning in school versus situation-specific competencies outside (1986: 12).

The more we learn about the nature and processes of learning that take place out of school, the less we are justified in the pretence that schools and teachers alone can repair the impact of society and the economy on the lives of families and on children as yet unborn. As the political imperative grows to make schools more effective, more accountable and more transparent, so the burden falls more squarely on school leaders to demonstrate that it is teaching, not environment, not family, not socio-economics, not culture, not history, that makes the difference. At the same time they recognise the critical importance of cultivating opportunities for “other learning experiences”.

In Hong Kong where 15% of the curriculum must now be devoted to “other learning experiences” (OLE), teachers attest to a profound impact on their knowledge and professional expertise when they work with young people in unfamiliar or less tightly structured and prescriptive contexts than the classroom, such as in community projects, visits to Macau, Singapore or mainland China. It is, as in other examples, a liberating experience not to be cast in the teacher/teller role but to be free not to know, not to be the expert or the ultimate authority. The evaluation of OLEs found that the key distinguishing feature of school leaders was the ability and insight to see “other” learning experiences not simply as an additional curricular activity, or at worst, as a tedious distraction from the real business of the school. Rather the best of leaders saw OLE as the vital spark, stimulating curiosity, invention and renewed motivation, and re-invigorating classroom learning.

The evaluation brought to light one of the inherent paradoxes of school and out-of-school learning. Senior students in their final two years of school were asked their opinions of OLE, resulting in mainly negative comments. They were then asked to review their last school week, drawing a horizon line across the middle of a landscape A4 sheet, and writing in, above and below the line, their most engaging learning experiences as against those least engaging. In the great majority of cases the “above-the-line” entries all referred to aspects of OLE. Brought to consciousness it came as a surprise to these young people. For a minority, however, they had made the connections, attributed in large part to the quality of leadership in their schools, not only of their senior managers but by virtue of the leadership of teachers and students themselves. They also understood the concept of “deep learning” and were able to speak with confidence about their own meta-cognitive activity and about education without “containing walls”.

Schools without walls

Twenty years ago, before the invention of the virtual world, the world beyond the school offered an alternative arena for lifelong learning. Parkway in Philadelphia was an iconic demonstration of a powerful alternative to desk-bound learning. Parkway, the central artery which runs through the heart of the city, offered the learning space for a whole curriculum, centred on the agencies which compose the life of a city. With no school building, the classroom was the city and the hidden resources for learning were at first hand. This not only saved millions on school buildings, textbooks, administration and all the paraphernalia that consumes the lion’s share of the education budget but also was able to show that young people have a much greater capacity for initiative than schools give them credit for.

The Parkway model inspired an initiative in the 1970s in two secondary schools in Scotland. Two classes of young people enjoyed the experience of learning in and around the city of Glasgow for the third term of their third secondary school year, never touching down at school but trusted to make journeys on their own across the city to learning destinations chosen by them. These included the AA (Automobile Association), the ambulance service, hospitals, car workshops and car markets, manufacturers, shops and farms, the Scottish National Orchestra, the Glasgow University Observatory, the Royal Navy, the zoo, the Glasgow Museum, and art galleries. These sites not only hosted young people but, together with them, built coherent, structured, individualised educational programmes.

A radical extension of learning without walls is exemplified in another Scottish venture. Now in its fifteenth year, the *Learning School* brings together students from schools around the globe, provides a four-week induction in the Shetland Islands and then sends these young people off on a nine-month exploratory journey, on their own and teacher-less, around the world. Their task is to evaluate school life and learning in countries which have, over its 14-year lifespan, included Germany, Sweden, the Czech Republic, South Africa, South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand and the United States. In each country, these young people live with host families for a four-week period, experiencing neighbourhood and community life, shadowing their peers as they go to school and then, armed with a toolbox of evaluation strategies, compiling and presenting a report back to the school at the end of the stay.

One of products of their experience is their co-authored book “Self Evaluation in the Global Classroom” (MacBeath and Sugimime, 2003), in which they describe some of the challenges they faced in two key respects. On the one hand, critical accounts of learning and teaching told from a student’s eye view could be welcome and enlightening but also discomfoting for teachers to hear in feedback sessions from these acolyte researchers. Even harder to deal with was the challenge of how to deal with values and expectations of the families, which could be disturbing. For example Sophie, who lived with a black family in the South African township, recounts the shock on the first day when the daughter of her own age expressed her dislike for white people, a shock for Sophie, who had never before had to face such explicit racism. This experience was instrumental in helping Sophie reflect on her own prejudices, acknowledging her own ignorance as a root of bigotry, and coming to value harsh experience, as she later wrote, “an important lesson for life”. Jolene, 16 years old, summarised her experience in these words – “I have probably learnt as much in these ten months as I did in thirteen years of school”.

Who leads learning in these very diffuse and fluid contexts? One of the most profound lessons we have learned from the Learning School is the

hidden capacity of young people to rise spectacularly to the challenges of leadership in the most challenging and unpredictable of circumstances. The bold architect of the programme, Stewart Hay, had a vision plus an incredible act of faith, believing that young people, entrusted with agency and ownership, would quickly learn to lead and to share leadership when faced with new and sometimes formidable obstacles. The situations they encountered and the obstacles they surmounted required them to reframe their identities, to see themselves not simply as students and the “consumers of other people’s wisdom”, but as leaders of their own and of other students’ learning.

In every new challenge or crisis, encountered on an almost daily basis, they found their own solution in a pragmatic exercise of shared leadership. Over 14 years, involving over 150 young soon-to-be leaders of learning, as Stewart Hay testified, no one ever let him down or betrayed the trust invested in them. A 16-year-old student from Shetland wrote, in summary:

This year has been a massive education to us all, an almost vertical learning curve. I often worried that I was not using this opportunity to learn as much as I could, but now after having stepped back indefinitely from this particular journey I can see how by watching and feeling another culture from within you cannot help but learn infinite amounts. It is the greatest educational tool ever to have at one’s disposal. Teaching things schools will never be able to teach, through first-hand experience, feeding a desire to understand the world in which we live. This year has given me a real thirst to continue to test myself academically and to become more aware of different societies, cultures and people, as I am sure it has to everyone who was a part of Learning School 2. (Colin, in MacBeath and Sugimine, 2003: 36)

“Feeding a desire to understand the world” is a profound statement, a counterpoint to these young people’s school experience that at best had offered a vicarious view of the world and always attended by the need to reproduce a condensed version for the benefit of examinations. A 16-year-old Korean student, speaking emotionally at a Cambridge conference at the culmination of Learning School 3, described how, for the first time, he had found his own voice after ten years of school. Preoccupation with hard work, after-hours cramming and swotting for exams, had left neither time nor incentive to think for himself, nor to question received wisdom from his teachers.

A university for children

The power of learning beyond school is nowhere better exemplified than in the Children’s University (CU). Now its fourth year it describes itself on the website like this:

The Children's University aims to promote social mobility by providing high quality, exciting and innovative learning activities and experiences outside normal school hours to children aged 7 to 14 (and 5 and 6 year olds with their families) and engaging the wider communities as learning partners in the realisation of this. At the heart of its work is the ambition to raise aspirations, boost achievement and foster a love of learning, so that young people can make the most of their abilities and interests, regardless of the background into which they were born. (www.childrensuniversity.co.uk/about-us/)

The aim is for children to engage voluntarily with a variety of high quality learning activities, outside school hours. These activities, which take children into new learning sites and new experiences, are known as "Learning Destinations". These are validated by the Children's University following a national framework, *Planning for Learning*, which provides a guide to quality assurance in informal environments such as art galleries, docks, stations, airports, stately homes and gardens, DIY superstores and urban trails (MacBeath and Graus, undated). Children are in charge of their own learning and accumulate credits towards "graduation". Mick Waters, former director of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England emphasises the voluntary and active nature of learning in the CU in an unpublished interview for Bangs, MacBeath and Galton (2010) (quotation reproduced in MacBeath, 2012: 18).

Children's learning is best when they do the natural things and we help them to cross thresholds as a result. They make, do and mend, they have adventures, they produce plays and shows, play instruments, speak different languages, and they grow things, care for creatures and have collections. All of these are gateways that teachers make into turnstiles to a brighter future. The Children's University is committed to offering children a brighter future by showing them how learning can be a challenging but enjoyable way to organise time and can make the changing horizon irresistible.

By April 2012, there were 80 local CUs in the U.K., accounting for 3 000 schools and academies and over 100 000 children, with a total of just over 2 million hours of attendance. Visits to the 175 learning destinations across the country are validated by stamps on children's passports, accumulating credits for graduation which take place in universities presided over by the Vice Chancellor celebrating 30, 60, 90, or 120 hours of credits gained. These formal occasions introduce children and their parents, from disadvantaged backgrounds, to what a university is and the route to this previously undreamed of destination. The loss rate among the 250 000 passports issued is around 2%, comparing favourably with the 17% adult loss rate of their actual international passports.

An important principle of the Children's University is that participation is voluntary. It is intentionally something other than school – with a distinctive ethos, different kinds of activities, often with different staff members and peer group membership. The ultimate testament to the effectiveness of the Children's University is that young people give up their time to attend and that they begin to realise that learning can be “a satellite navigation system to better places in life”. As children's participation and commitment continue to increase, they begin to play a more proactive role in generating ideas for future activities and grow greater confidence in assuming leadership. However, as long as the Children's University is seen as a contrast, a counterbalance or an alternative to school the less scope there is for systemic change. A critical measure in the evaluation of the success of the CU has to be the extent to which it feeds back into the classroom experience and helps to build the bridges between learning and leadership in and out of school.

The more the potential to learn in sites outside school is opened up, the more imaginative and unexpected the result and the greater the challenge to the nature of children's classroom experience. One of the latest additions to the repertoire of learning destinations which have fed back into classroom inquiry is a cemetery. What questions might be provoked and pursued by structured and focused explorations in a cemetery? Family histories, changing family size over the years, child mortality, changing life expectancy and advances in medical care, are just some possible examples.

Each CU site is linked to a “grown up” university which may offer its own programmes and lectures on, for example: how insects see the world, pyromania, the truth behind *Finding Nemo*, “the Mummy Project” led by a leading world expert in Egyptology which offers hands-on activities such as making a mummy, ancient Egyptian gods, writing in hieroglyphs, the Egyptian number system and Egyptian jigsaws. On Saturday mornings, a do-it-yourself superstore offers its own lectures and workshops. In communities around the country, local libraries sign up and display the *Learning Destinations* logo, crediting children's reading and peer book reviews together with engaging activities such as Eat Your Words Edible Poetry, Kid's Poetry Tea Party and Kids' Poetry Treasure Hunt, in which children hunt for individual lines of poetry and use them to create their own poem. (MacBeath, 2012: 15)

As the evaluation of the Children's University (MacBeath, 2012) shows, where there is imagination, inspiration and the revitalisation of learning it is owed to exemplary leadership, inspirational people who refuse to be captive of limiting boundaries and conventions. What the evaluation also highlights are unforeseen opportunities to complement and enrich classroom learning, proving to be life changing for teachers as well as for their pupils. Disillusion can become ambition and failure may be turned to success. The escape from the classroom allows teachers to engage with children in different

environments and to listen, free from pressures of time and targets, leading to a new understanding of children's lives and learning. For parents too there are beneficial returns resulting from their children's motivation and as they gain new insights from their offspring.

A set of propositions and principles for leading learning and learning leadership arise from these various initiatives and from the national evaluation of the Children's University:

- The scope for learning without being taught complements and enriches children's learning and teachers' teaching.
- Recognising that learning is a social activity requires attention to ways in which children and young people are able to support, share and challenge one another.
- Engagement and ownership are fostered in contexts where opportunities for learning are scaffolded so as to promote inquiry and discovery.
- The potential of sites for learning ("construction sites") is still largely unexplored but have a major contribution to make in bringing learning to life.
- Classroom learning has to be seen not as the whole but as the complement to what is learned outside school, both drawing on and feeding into what is learned elsewhere.

These principles and propositions assume that school will still be with us for the foreseeable future. Schools may, however, assume less of a monopoly and play a role more as hubs or agencies, defining what schools can do best and what is best learned in other contexts and through other agencies. Herein lies a leadership challenge, looking outwards as well as inwards, loosening rather than tightening the scope of learning from the "closed" to the "open" classroom. We can say with some confidence that, with prescient leadership, learning in the captive classroom will increasingly be challenged and complemented by other pathways, sites and forms of relationship. We can assert with some confidence that the nature of teaching will be shaped and enriched by the sources and possibilities that progressively open up.

The greater the opportunities that arise to exploit learning sites beyond the classroom, the more it will demand of those who lead learning in whatever capacity they hold within a school or within associated agencies. It will require them to help teachers to extend their repertoires individually and in concert. The more children and young people assume control of their own learning the greater the pedagogic insight and adaptability it will require of teachers and teacher leaders. The more children and young people become independent and interdependent learners the greater the strategic resourcefulness it will imply for those who lead and shape children's

learning. The more there is a genuine sense of agency among learners, the greater is the need for an enhanced capacity on the part of teachers to steer, guide, intervene or stand back as the occasion demands. This does not preclude conventional teaching strategies – question and answer sessions, demonstrations and direct instruction, for example – but these will become a smaller and complementary part of the teacher’s repertoire and rest on a fine judgment as to when, where and how to intervene in the learning process and to what end.

As young people are exposed to a range of “construction sites” there is an obvious corollary for those who teach them. Teachers who live out their entire careers within the four walls of their classroom may be deprived of the kind of wider experiences which their students enjoy, trapped within a limited and limiting version of “real life”. With opportunities to move beyond the classroom, teachers may be encouraged and enabled to travel across different sectors of the economy, to experience different working environments, to learn from team working, from opportunities for individual and shared leadership, from new forms of incentives and rewards. Coming to recognise and live with change as a constant, can revitalise teaching and learning. Leaders of learning may then look forward to a new and challenging age.

Note

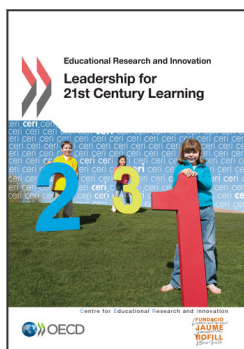
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