

Interrogating the concept of ‘leadership at all levels’: a Scottish perspective

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The concept of ‘leadership at all levels’ has gained currency in Scottish education in recent years following the publication of ‘Teaching Scotland’s Future’ (2010), a major review of teacher education focussing on teachers’ initial preparation, their on-going development and career progression. This paper traces the drivers of change that led to the recommendations in the review and subsequent developments and interrogates the concept through examination of the policy context. The paper argues that, whilst there have been many positive developments in advancing leadership and leadership education in Scotland, the concept of ‘leadership at all levels’ is problematic and there are many tensions which need to be addressed. In particular, the paper examines the tension between systems-led leadership development and that which focuses on the professional development of the individual, commensurate with the stage of their career, and argues that models that are more fluid and flexible allowing movement in, across and through the system are required.

leadership at all levels; leadership development; systems leadership; distributed leadership; power relations; equity

Introduction

Following the publication of Teaching Scotland’s Future (TSF) (Scottish Government 2010) written by former HM Senior Chief Inspector of Schools, Graham Donaldson, there has been an unprecedented focus on teacher education, career-long professional learning, high quality school leadership and leadership education in Scotland. One of the key concepts and recommendations to emerge from this review was the notion of ‘leadership at all levels’ (recommendation 50) - ‘a virtual college of school leadership should be developed to improve leadership capacity at all levels within Scottish education’ (p. 101). The Donaldson review argues for ‘a clear, progressive educational leadership pathway which embodies the responsibility of all leaders to build the professional capacity of staff and ensure a positive impact on young people’s learning’ (Scottish Government 2010, p.79) from initial teacher education onwards. Overseen by a National Implementation Board the new Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL) was launched in 2014 tasked with this brief. The call for ‘leadership at all levels’ continues to be reinforced through the work of the

International Council of Education Advisors, appointed by the Scottish Government in 2016, who identified ‘developing effective leadership at all levels in Scottish education – unleashing untapped potential within the system’ (p. 1) as one of three major priorities for the Scottish education system (International Council of Education Advisers 2017a). At an international level, the relationship between high quality leadership, professional development and school improvement is well established (Poekert 2012b, Schleicher 2012).

This paper sets out to interrogate and critique the concept of ‘leadership at all levels’ as it is articulated within Scottish Government educational policy; trace it through the literature, exploring how it relates to contemporary theories of leadership and the international/national policy context; place the concept within the broader quest for school improvement internationally; understand the drivers for change which have led to the ‘policy window’ (Steiner-Khamsi 2014) through which the policy has gained traction; and explore the implications of the above for leadership development and education policy in Scotland and beyond.

The paper will argue that the concept of ‘leadership at all levels’, both at an international level and within the Scottish educational policy context, is largely under-theorised. It has been forwarded at an international level (principally through Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports) and has become part of the (largely unquestioned) rhetoric of Scottish education policy, presented as a public good against which it is very difficult to argue. It resides within a policy discourse of school improvement¹ which is largely driven by neo-liberal policies and discourses. Whilst contemporary theories of leadership to which it relates (such as distributed leadership, teacher leadership, hybrid leadership, shared/collaborative leadership) have been theorised to varying degrees, there seems

to be a conceptual leap between these concepts and the notion that **all** teachers at **all** levels of the system (from Initial Teacher Education onwards) should exercise leadership beyond what would normally have been construed as their role within the classroom; should have the capability of exercising leadership; should have the opportunity to exercise leadership; that the culture at all levels of the system is such that they are enabled to lead effectively; should have a desire to lead; can accommodate it within their workload demands; and can accommodate it and maintain a work-life balance. This paper therefore examines the drivers for change across the system from the international to the national that position leadership in this way.

The above is dependent upon how leadership is understood, for example, as positional (associated with formal roles) or informal, ‘taking place in the interactions of people and their situations’ (Waterhouse & Møller 2009, p. 123). In order to gain insight into this, the paper poses a series of questions such as: ‘Who exercises leadership? Is it all, or a select few?’ ‘Who decides? Where does power lie? How does one come to be considered to take on the mantle of leadership?’

Further, we argue that the concept of ‘leadership at all levels’, as expressed through Scottish education policy (most recently in relation to the National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government 2016) and through the sentiment of school improvement being ‘the responsibility of all’ (Swinney 2017)), is predicated upon an hierarchical model of teacher development which has as much potential to constrain as to build leadership capacity. As such, our claim to new knowledge is to problematise a concept which, to this point, is largely under-theorised, and, specifically with regard to the Scottish context, to examine the significant implications of this for how leadership education is framed and therefore

conceptualised in Scottish education, with insights to be gained for other education systems across the world.

After an outline of the methodology adopted, we situate the discussion within the wider international quest for school improvement before examining the Scottish educational policy context. In order to understand the concept more fully, other contemporary theories of leadership to which it relates are briefly explored and the concept of ‘leadership at all levels’ is interrogated, in the process highlighting some of the tensions, constraints and limitations of the concept. We then analyse the drivers for change within the system (internationally and nationally) and issues around sustainability. Finally, we consider the implications for the professional development of teachers; leadership education; school improvement; policy makers and researchers.

Methodology

This paper is not a literature review: rather it is a critique of Scottish Government policy (and of international policy more widely) that draws from the literature to evidence its argument. The initial phase of enquiry involved a small-scale audit of the field in order to identify key and current themes within the literature and modes of enquiry pertinent to Scottish education drawing from selected academic journals that have a bearing on leadership but cast different lenses on it. Papers that had been published within the past five years were scrutinised and, by examining the abstracts and keywords, classified according to their principal themes and their prime focus (whether international, UK or Scottish). Themes to emerge were:

- the development of leadership capacities across the career trajectory – described by Donaldson as ‘leadership at all levels’;

- developing leadership capacities through communities of practice – learning communities;
- forms of leadership - distributed leadership; systems leadership; teacher leadership etc. – and the relationships between them;
- leadership to promote inclusive communities and for social justice;
- sustainable leadership;
- looking outwards – a global perspective – school effectiveness;
- change management.

The development of leadership capacities across the career trajectory was identified as having considerable significance with regard to the Scottish context at that time. Thereafter, a thematic analysis of relevant international reports (such as those emanating from the OECD) and Scottish policy documentation was undertaken focussing upon this specific theme. This was achieved initially through searching for the word ‘leadership’ within each policy document, copying and pasting the relevant content within a table, then deriving themes from the content which were then clustered and analysed to generate broader themes, as illustrated in the extract below (cc. table 1).

GTCS. 2012. The Statement for Review of Professional Standards.	Key Points	Page/Section
<p>4. Leadership</p> <p>In Scotland, we expect all teachers to be leaders in a number of important ways. We expect them to lead learning for, and with, all learners with whom they engage and to develop the capacity to lead colleagues and other partners to achieve change through specific projects or development work. Therefore, leadership is explicit across the Professional Standards, with a focus on teacher leadership and leadership for learning and building leadership capacity in others.</p>	<p>A commitment towards developing leadership capacities in all teachers.</p> <p>Leading learning</p> <p>Building capacity through leading others & partnership working</p>	<p>Section 4</p>

Table 1: Initial stage of thematic analysis of policy documentation

The literature specific to this theme was further expanded by following up sources within the identified papers and by carrying out searches on ERIC using search terms such as ‘distributed leadership’, ‘leadership at all levels’ and ‘leadership at all stages.’ A set of questions to interrogate key understandings of leadership, relevant to the concept of ‘leadership at all levels’, were developed and these were applied across the literature studied:

- ❖ How is leadership conceptualised within this text? What is leadership?
- ❖ In which arenas is leadership exercised?
- ❖ How is leadership exercised?
- ❖ By whom? Who decides?
- ❖ Why now? What is the policy context?
- ❖ What are the tensions in exercising leadership?
- ❖ What are the implications for leadership education and development?
- ❖ How is the relationship between educational leadership and school effectiveness understood within this text?
- ❖ What methodology has been adopted within this paper?

Comparative critical frames were then used to compare and contrast the perspectives of the various authors, exemplified in table 2.

In which arenas?

Forde, McMahon and Dickson (2011)	Reeves and Drew (2012) [Chartered Teacher]	Forde, McMahon and Gronn (2013) [NFRH]	Crawford (2012) [SQH]
The interface between school, local authority and Higher Education	In relation to their own professional practice within the school setting but also in relation to the wider school arena in building capacity within the school.	In the interface between the school, the local authority and Higher Education.	The interface between school and professional training for Headship

Table 2: Extract from comparative frame of the literature

In synthesising the above, key themes and arguments emerged which were then used as the starting point for this paper. It can be seen that the above set of questions (or variants of them) are used to structure aspects of the paper.

In exploring the theme of ‘the development of leadership capacities across the career trajectory,’ it became evident that the scope of the work had to broaden and extend, particularly into the field of teacher professionalism. The initial phase of the work had been a small-scale scoping exercise whereas this phase needed to engage more deeply with a much broader literature cutting across disciplines – policy, leadership, teacher professionalism and school improvement. This was accomplished through scrutiny of a wider range of journals, encompassing the fields above. A process of best-evidence synthesis (Harlen and Schlapp 1998) was adopted to select the most appropriate literature drawing upon criteria such as the relevance, currency, reliability (peer-reviewed) and scope (international) of the papers in relation to the aims of the paper as set out in the introduction. The arguments generated within the paper derived from more holistic understandings of leadership and teacher professionalism and the relationship between them rather than a narrow focus upon

‘leadership at all levels.’ Through the review of the literature we sought to establish how ‘leadership at all levels’ was understood; how it related to other contemporary and related theories of leadership; how it related more broadly to the drive for school improvement at an international level; and what the drivers were within the system which led to the identification of ‘leadership at all levels’ as being an imperative.

Placing the concept within the international context

The drive for high quality leadership and for teacher professionalism can be located within a broader drive for social justice and ‘excellence’ which is clearly articulated within OECD reports (OECD 2016, Schleicher 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015). There is much criticism of this agenda which is often seen as part of a culture of performativity and is critiqued on the basis of a reductionist approach, driven by a neo-liberal, market economy (Brunila 2011, Grimaldi 2012), which does not reflect the complexity of school systems and the contextual and cultural boundaries in which they operate (Harris et al. 2015).

It could be argued that in advocating ‘leadership at all levels’ the Scottish Government is following international trends and practice. The strong pull from the OECD and the competitiveness which it engenders, through global benchmarking of pupil performance, makes it almost inevitable that this would be the case but how desirable (or indeed feasible) is it for policy to ‘travel’ across state boundaries? Bush (2012), amongst others, argues for the need for caution, citing four conditions of which account needs to be taken – the salience of the culture and context; the resources; the degree of centralisation in the education system; and preferences for certification, or leader choice (p.67). Comparative studies demonstrate that the cultural and political context is often ignored or underplayed when consideration is given to the ‘transfer’ of policy from one context to another (Feniger and Lefstein

2014, Mowat 2018, Steiner-Khamsi 2014): it is ‘deeply rooted in political, social, and economic decisions’ (Steiner-Khamsi 2014, p.162). Steiner-Khamsi identifies two key aspects of policy borrowing – the *reception* of the policy (the degree to which it attunes with current imperatives within an education system and can be accommodated) and the *translation* of the policy into practice (ibid). Much of the discussion to follow focuses upon the former of these – the conditions which made it more or less likely that the drive would be such that a ‘policy window’ would be created for ‘leadership at all levels.’

The Scottish Educational Policy Context

Within the Scottish educational context, high quality school leadership has long been recognised as central to school improvement (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education 2009). The TSF review (Scottish Government 2010) makes a strong case for ‘leadership at all levels’ across the Scottish education system arguing that ‘Scottish education needs to develop leadership attributes in all staff as well as identifying and supporting systematically its future headteachers’ (Scottish Government 2010, p. 79).

As previously intimated, SCEL was established for this purpose and tasked with taking forward the national strategy for leadership development, with responsibility for the development and endorsement of a range of leadership education programmes extending from teacher leadership through to a fellowship programme for experienced headteachers, working in collaboration with university providers and local authorities. The focus on promoting leadership at all levels was also reflected in the professional standards for teachers (GTCS 2012a, b & c) in which leadership features more broadly across all stages of a teacher’s career².

The intensified focus on school leadership has continued in the years since the TSF report was published. Leadership is positioned as one of the six drivers of the National Improvement Framework for education (Scottish Government 2016) and a government consultation on school governance (Scottish Government 2017) has led to a set of recommendations which includes the strengthening of the role of the Headteacher (through a Headteacher Charter); the granting of additional powers to schools; and the establishment of regional collaboratives (overseen by a Scottish Education Council (Swinney 2017)) to drive school improvement and to strengthen the ‘middle’³ layer (ibid).

The renewed focus on leadership and leadership development can be understood in relation to the quest to build teacher professionalism in Scottish education, a process that began in 2001 with the Teachers’ Agreement: ‘A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century’ (SEED 2001). A wide range of initiatives arising from the recommendations of the TSF Report have been driven forward including, *inter alia*, the introduction of the ‘Scottish Framework for Masters in Education’ (GTCS 2014); formal partnerships between local authorities and teacher education institutions; revised national guidance on professional development and review (Education Scotland 2014b); and a professional update scheme for all registered teachers (GTCS 2014). Perhaps most important of all with regard to the focus of this paper was the introduction of a Framework for Educational Leadership (Scottish Government 2014), launched in 2015, with the intention of providing coherent pathways for leadership development.

All of these developments have taken place within a very fluid and dynamic political context characterised by a wide range of initiatives on a number of fronts. This level and pace of development within the fields of teacher professional

development and leadership is unprecedented within Scottish education and its realisation is dependent on national bodies working collaboratively together and with Teacher Education Institutions. Figure 1 sets out a model of the extensive developments which arose directly as a consequence of the TSF review, illustrating the complexity of the networks. It should be stressed that there are strong inter-connections between the policy developments taken forward by the various national bodies and initiatives should not be seen in isolation of each other.

‘Leadership at all levels’ as it relates to other contemporary theories of educational leadership

As previously discussed, the concept of ‘Leadership at all levels’ is largely under-theorised and it is therefore difficult to establish through the literature and policy context exactly what is implied by it. It is neither a leadership style nor a model of leadership but, rather, representative of a movement (in the sense of a disposition) towards leadership as being dispersed across organisations and a movement towards universality which can be seen more generally in education, represented internationally in OECD reports such as ‘Schools for 21st century learners’ (Schleicher 2015) and in Scottish education policies such as ‘Health and Wellbeing for All’ (Education Scotland 2014a).

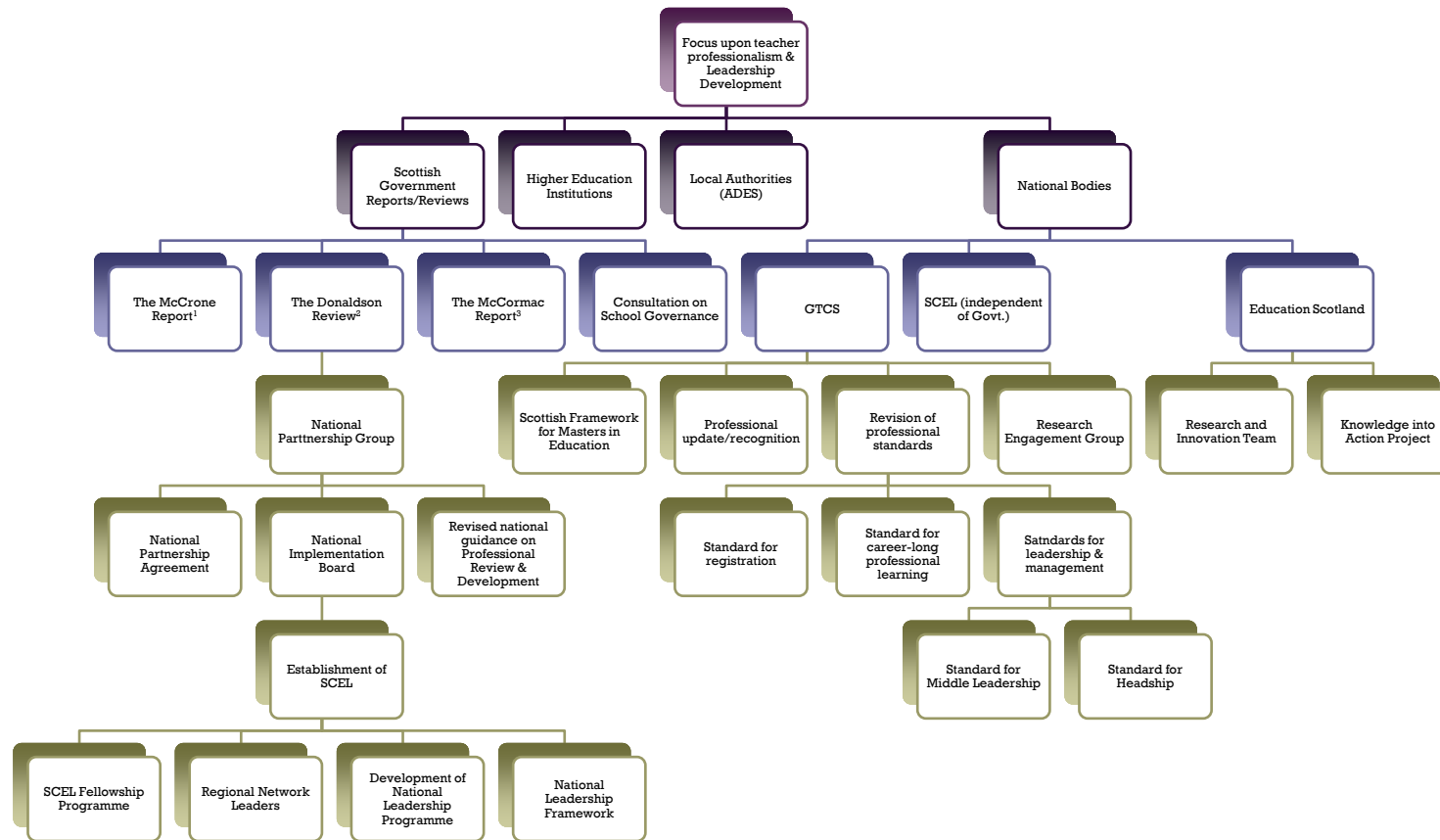


Figure 1: Illustration of ‘actors’ involved in the aftermath of TSF⁴

1. Scottish Executive Education Department 2001; 2. Scottish Government 2010; 3. Scottish Government 2011b.

One means of trying to understand the concept is to examine other contemporary theories of leadership that have a bearing on it. The concept of teacher leadership is of particular relevance (Alexandrou and Swaffield 2012, Collinson 2012, Frost 2012, Jacobs et al. 2014, Poekert 2012a) given its emphasis on sharing leadership in schools more equitably and democratically, as Harris (2010b) explains:

Teacher leadership essentially refers to the exercise of leadership by teachers, regardless of position or designation. In summary, teacher leadership is centrally concerned with forms of empowerment and agency which are also at the core of distributed leadership theory. (Harris 2010b: 316)

According to Harris (Ibid.), teacher leadership serves to promote learning communities, the purpose of which is to develop ‘social, intellectual and other forms of human capital’ (p. 321) in the furtherance of pedagogical improvement. However, it should be recognised that the relationship between teacher leadership and pedagogic and distributed leadership is not straightforward. Collinson (2012) and Frost (2012), for example, make a clear linkage between teacher leadership and pedagogic leadership (the latter of which is not clearly delineated from instructional leadership within the literature) whereas other authors position the former in relation to distributed leadership (Harris 2010b) (and indeed, other paradigms such as servant leadership (Stewart 2012)).

The relationship between teacher leadership and other forms of leadership, such as systems leadership (Harris 2010a), collaborative leadership (Hallinger and Heck 2012), shared leadership (Goksoy 2016) and hybrid leadership (Gronn 2009) also need to be examined. Further, within Scottish policy documentation the terms, ‘collegiality’, ‘distributive’, ‘distributed’ and ‘shared’ are used almost interchangeably which, together with competing expectations (as expressed within the documentation), has led to a lack of clarity as to what these concepts constitute and to

tensions within the field (Torrance 2013b). The above discussion highlights the complexity within the field, a lack of a clear delineation of concepts, and therefore, of a shared understanding of concepts.

Interrogating the concept of ‘leadership at all levels’

In giving consideration as to how ‘leadership at all levels’ is conceptualised within the literature and policy context, certain key questions arise regarding the exercise of leadership, who is involved and the arenas in which it is exercised. Issues of power, decision making and gate keeping are also important - how does one come to be considered to take on the mantle of leadership? And how is leadership at all levels enacted? Does it take different forms at different stages of the career trajectory? Perhaps an even more fundamental question is why ‘leadership at all levels’ rather than ‘leadership at all stages’ or, more simply, ‘leadership for all’? The following discussion seeks to address these questions.

Who exercise leadership, in which arenas, and who decides?

There has been a shift from conceptualisations of educational leadership as residing within the individual to one in which leadership is seen as an organic property of an organisation, resting within the collective. It has been established that the impact of distributed leadership across a school community is up to three times that of the sole leader (Dempster 2009). Yet, despite the prominence given to distributed leadership within the policy context and the fore-fronting of it in programmes such as the former Scottish Qualification for Headship, in a study of the experiences of novice Headteachers who had completed the programme, distributed leadership featured little in their accounts (Crawford 2012). Torrance (2013b) claims that distributed

leadership has served a political rather than an educational purpose in Scottish education and lacks an empirical evidence base.

However, this only goes so far in answering the question about who exercises leadership. Fundamental to this question are issues of power. Within a context in which distributed leadership is presented as an unquestioning ‘good’, and within a reductionist agenda in which ‘freedom equals the market’; failure arises from character flaws and in which democracy is equated with consumer choice (Apple 2013), is distributed leadership really about empowering others and developing leadership capabilities (if so, to what ends)? Or, is it about propping up a system in which the many conflicting and competing demands on schools are such that only a distributed model of leadership in which responsibilities are shared across the workforce can rise to the challenge?

A fundamental conundrum that lies at the heart of distributed leadership as it is enacted focuses on the following question: Is distributed leadership a form of empowerment in which it is seen that all have the capacity to lead in ways that are commensurate with their stage of development and experience and, through their own initiative, take the lead on more strategic initiatives within the school? Or alternatively, does a more paternalistic model of distributed leadership prevail in which it is seen that distributed leadership lies within the patronage of ‘the leader’ who bestows leadership on others and who therefore acts as a gateway to leadership opportunities? It was the latter model which emerged in Torrance’s study of how newly appointed primary headteachers and their staff made sense of distributed leadership in practice: ‘Teachers were still waiting for permission to act and then acting within agreed parameters’ (Torrance 2013b, p. 57). Within this context, strongly hierarchical models emerged (expressed both in discourse and structures) in

which distributed leadership was seen to be ‘in the gift of the headteacher’; in which headteachers positioned themselves in terms of ‘my staff’ and ‘giving staff responsibility’; in which distinctions were made between those in formal and those in informal leadership roles; and in which issues of power and authority emerged (Torrance 2013b).

The literature is equivocal as to whether all teachers have the capacity to be leaders or not and headteachers within Torrance’s study, whilst committed to the principles of distributed leadership, exercised discernment and judgement in relation to the degree to which leadership was invested in individual staff and the degree of encouragement and support offered and it was recognised that it is not something that all teachers, at all stages of their careers, welcomed. Indeed, for some, it was perceived as an, ‘added extra’, not an integral aspect of their role. Headteachers could ‘expect and encourage staff to lead but could not force them to do so’ (Torrance 2013a, p. 364). The ‘gifting’ of leadership did not automatically confer authority to the recipient – that person needed to have the credibility and respect of staff in order to lead effectively and those who did exert influence did not necessarily perceive themselves as ‘leaders’ (a finding replicated in Holmes 2017). Further, distributed leadership had to be planned for, nurtured and developed which often meant addressing cultural issues within the school, particularly when more authoritarian top-down approaches had previously prevailed. In the process, tensions and dilemmas surfaced, amongst which were ‘a lack of consensus as to: what staff meant by leadership and distributed leadership; what it means to lead colleagues; and what expectations could reasonably be placed on senior managers, teachers and support staff’ (Torrance 2013a, p. 366). As such, Torrance questions whether distributed leadership should be taken as ‘a given’ and, as practiced, be seen as largely

unproblematic (ibid.).

These tensions are played out at a national level also. The promotion of leadership at all levels in policy documentation is often devoid of reference to power and authority and pays insufficient attention to the unequal power structures which can operate at formal and informal levels within schools and which are often part of the hidden culture and 'ways of doing things' (Busher 2006). It is widely recognised that one of the reasons for the demise of the Chartered Teacher programme (Scotland's scheme for recognising and rewarding accomplishment in teaching) was the placing of power with the individual who was able to apply directly to university for entry to the programme whilst Local Authorities then had to 'pick up the bill' as Chartered Teachers advanced through the pay scale at an accelerated rate. This led to concerns about the quality of applicants (Scottish Government 2011b) and represented a significant paradigm shift and challenge to cultural norms which prevailed within schools and to the hierarchical forms of power which, to that point, had placed the Headteacher and Local Authorities as being the principal gateways to power and reward. It could be argued that the programme threatened existing power structures which those in power did not want to relinquish but it also created a state of disequilibrium in the teaching force, leading, almost inevitably, to the demise of the programme.

The Chartered Teacher initiative provided a prototype for a new model of pedagogical leadership, defined within a Standard for Chartered Teacher, where Chartered Teachers were expected to lead learning (Scottish Executive 2002) and to be at the forefront of critically engaging with practice, acting as change agents (Scottish Government 2009). However this model was problematic from the outset, not least in the way in which it collided with the more hierarchical structures and

cultures which prevailed in many schools. There was conflict between the model of collaborative professional development and enquiry underpinning the programme and the more centralised school agenda for school improvement which reflected wider national priorities and which constrained the space for teacher innovation, giving little scope for it: ‘Their work was not valued or it was seen as somehow counter to the improvement agenda of the school’ (Forde et al. 2016, p. 32).

Chartered Teachers were positioned by the programme as ‘activists’ and change agents with a focus on personal growth (Reeves and Drew 2012) but this very positioning could have put them in conflict with the norms which prevailed in schools at that time, leading to a blame culture in which Chartered Teachers were perceived not to be performing as they should, rather than examining the hegemonic systemic failures which ultimately led to the demise of the scheme.

Important messages can be learned from the above: it is not enough to focus at the level of the professional development of the leader: a focus at the systemic level is also vital.

What’s in a name? The forms that ‘leadership at all levels’ takes

There has been a considerable shift in the literature on educational leadership in recent years to include a focus on collaborative as well as positional leadership though there is still a tendency to focus on leadership as ‘headship in waiting’ (Forde et al. 2011, Forde et al. 2013) or on novice headteachers (Crawford 2012, Torrance 2013a, b). Both within the literature (Forde et al. 2011, Forde et al. 2013) and the policy context, there has been a growing recognition that leadership should be integral to all stages of a teacher’s career from Initial Teacher Education (ITE) through to headship. This presents as a challenge, as leadership education is seen, by many, to pertain only to the post-qualification level: ‘Many early career teachers ... had very little

awareness of leadership expectations and pathways’ (Donaldson 2011, p. 58). A focus upon leadership education within ITE has the potential to impact in a wide range of ways such as promoting teacher agency and advocacy; constructing professional identities; building collaborative skills and self-efficacy; and fostering a sense of active participation within schools (Forde and Dickson 2017). However, the extent to which this has been realised in Scottish education is limited (ibid.). This layering of leadership is complex and the connection between the various layers is crucial (Forde et al. 2011), the headteacher playing an important role in fostering connections within and beyond the school (Forde et al. 2011, p. 57).

This raises questions about how leadership is positioned in relation to the above and how this shapes understandings of the role of the leader, with implications for leadership education. If it is argued that leadership should be potentially open to all, as represented in the statements below, then why ‘leadership at all levels’ rather than ‘leadership for all’?

High quality leadership is crucial to improving the experiences and outcomes for learners. All teachers in all settings will have a role to play in leadership whether in terms of curriculum development, school management or working on discrete projects across a school or local authority area. (National Partnership Group 2012, Point 51)

In Scotland, we expect all teachers to be leaders in a number of important ways. We expect them to lead learning for, and with, all learners with whom they engage and to develop the capacity to lead colleagues and other partners to achieve change through specific projects or development work. (General Teaching Council for Scotland 2012, p. 2)

Further, whilst a focus on ‘leadership at all levels’ may lead to almost identical classifications as ‘leadership at all stages’ (cc. figure 2), it could be inferred from ‘leadership at all stages’ that the prime focus is on the development and personal growth of the ‘leader’, akin to the model of professional learning initially forwarded by Forde and colleagues (Forde, McMahon, and Dickson 2011), as represented within the

Framework for Educational Leadership (cc. Annexe C), whereas ‘leadership at all levels’ might be seen as placing more of a focus on the needs of the system, in the process reinforcing the hierarchies on which it is built and, as set out in the introduction, placing a ‘ceiling’ on the ways in which leadership is expected to be understood and enacted within each of these levels.

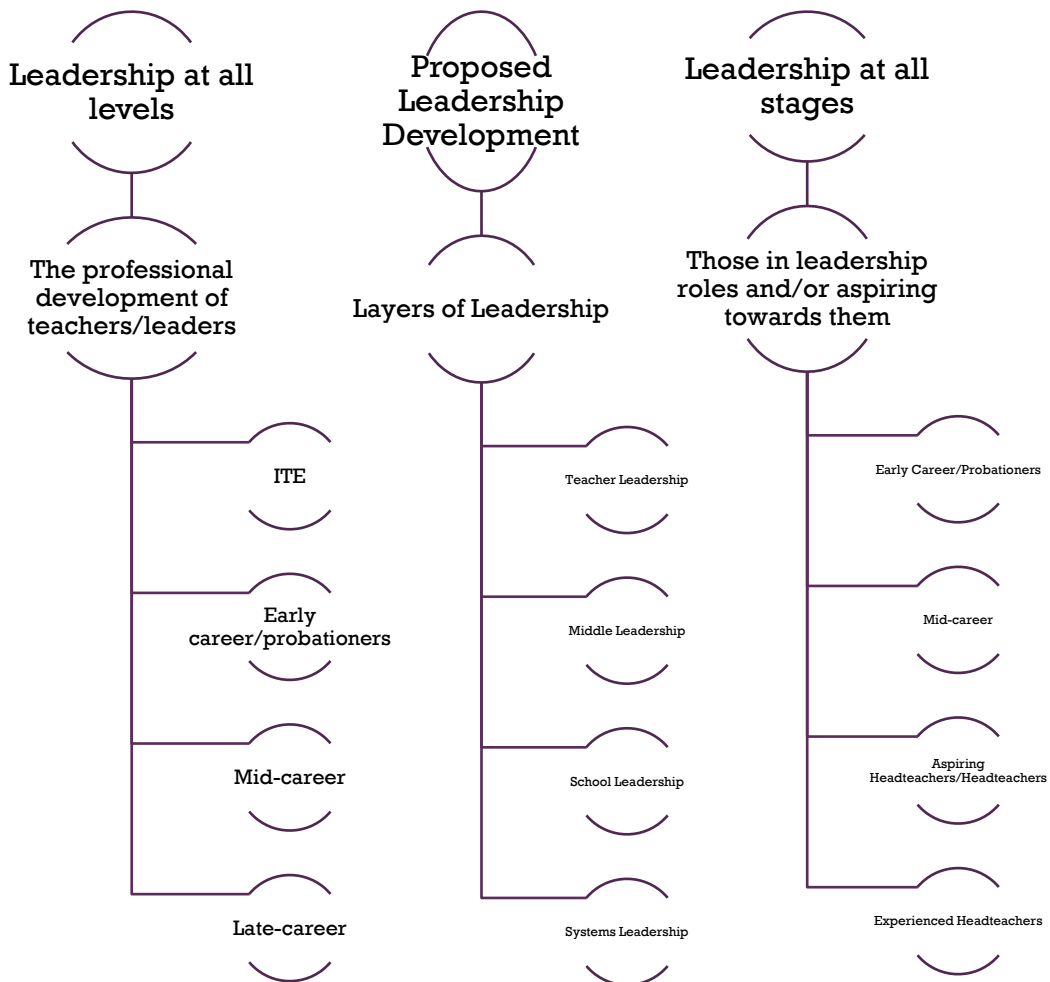


Figure 2: Illustration of the delineation between ‘leadership at all levels’ and ‘leadership at all stages’ related to leadership development

Within predominant models of teacher professional development (approached from a range of philosophical and theoretical perspectives and underpinning theories of learning) the concept of teacher agency (whilst implicit and expressed in different ways) is central to the models, positioning the teacher at the centre (Boylan et al. 2017).

Boylan et al. argue that a limitation of all of the models is a failure to focus upon the trajectory of professional learning over the life span of a teacher’s career.

Within the Scottish context, teacher agency is one of three conditions cited as being essential if the professional standards are to be realised (Forde et al. 2016). Whilst it is understandable that the GTCS professional standards will seek to make a distinction between expectations of teachers working at different levels of the system, there may be dangers within this approach. Table 3 exemplifies the expectations of teachers at different levels of the system with regard to their engagement with policy:

Professional Standard	Expectation
Provisional/Full Registration	Develop/have an understanding of the principal influences on Scottish education and develop an awareness of international systems
Career-long professional learning	Actively consider and critically question the development(s) of policy in education
Leadership and Management	Draw on policy to support school improvement in a variety of ways

Table 3: The expectations of teachers and engagement with policy as expressed through the Professional Standards.

Arguably, each of these would be appropriate for *all* teachers at *all* levels, whether in formal role positions or not, and at different stages of their professional careers, particularly within the context of a masters-level profession (one of the recommendations of TSF).

Further, with regard to the arenas in which leadership is exercised and its sphere of influence, developments such as the SCEL Fellowship programme position experienced headteachers as shapers and influencers of the system (although the extent to which this becomes a reality is yet to be ascertained) but should we not be seeing *all* teachers at *all* levels of the system and *all* stages of their professional careers as change

agents (a key aspect of Donaldson's review) not just within narrowly defined spheres of influence (as implied by the graduated GTCS professional standards) but more broadly in influencing national and local policy?

Forde et al. (2011) draw attention to an inherent tension between whether leadership development programmes should focus on the needs of the individual or the system/institution and also to a lack of an evidence base of the impact of leadership development programmes on pupil learning (Guskey's 5th (and final) critical level of professional development (Guskey 2000)).

A more holistic understanding of leadership may see it as something which is fundamentally the same but exercised in different ways by individuals at different stages of their career whereas a focus upon 'leadership at all levels' and upon teacher leadership, middle leadership, headship preparation and systems leadership will almost inevitably tease out and differentiate between leadership at these levels. This will have a profound impact upon how leadership education is understood and delivered. What the above should indicate is that there is a lot at stake – it is not just a matter of semantics. Table 4 delineates 'leadership at all levels' from 'leadership at all stages' as it could be construed.

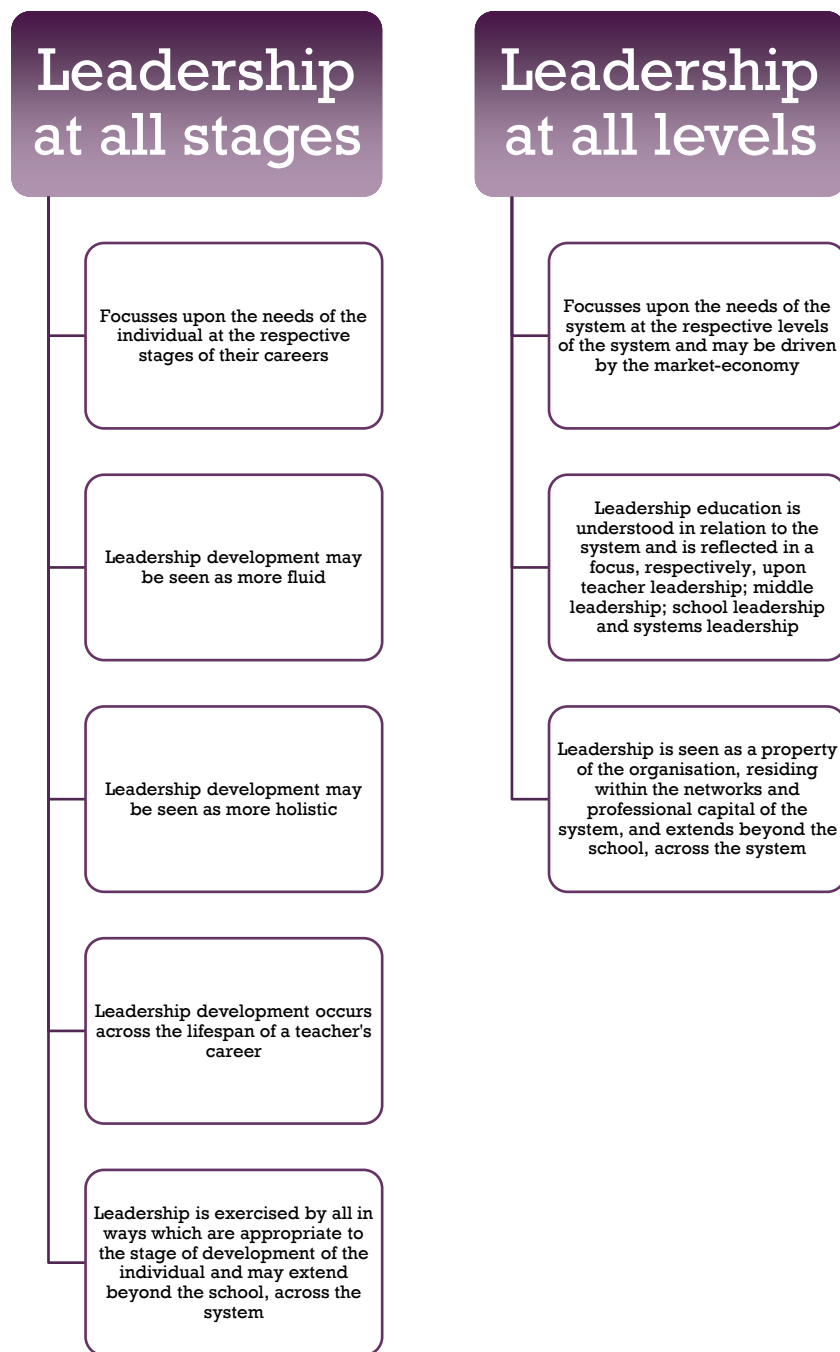


Table 4: a delineation between ‘leadership at all stages’ and ‘leadership at all levels’

Why ‘leadership at all levels’ and why now?

The developments previously described lead almost inevitably to the two questions posed above. This discussion examines the drivers for change that have led to the focus upon ‘leadership at all levels’ within the TSF review, drawing from a range of

relevant Scottish educational policies and national and international reports that have been instrumental in shaping the context.

A key driver is the *perception of leadership in crisis*. These perceptions are global (Bush 2012, MacBeath et al. 2009, Schleicher 2012) and relate to concerns around teacher demographics, specifically the age profile of headteachers in post (Forde et al. 2013); difficulties in recruitment and retention of high quality school leaders (Robertson, Christie, and Stodter 2013); and untapped potential and flattened hierarchical structures limiting opportunities (Christie et al. 2016). Headship is not perceived as an attractive option for potential recruits (Tomsett 2014, Watt et al. 2014): teachers balanced their desire to remain in the classroom against perceived demands such as bureaucracy and management accountability (MacBeath et al. 2009).

Related to this are perceived inadequacies in headship preparation programmes internationally (Bush 2012, Fluckiger et al. 2014) with considerable variability in provision between nation states (Schleicher 2012). Whilst a review of headship pathways in Scotland indicated a high degree of satisfaction with headship preparation in general, a lack of cohesion and progression across the system as a whole was identified (Watt et al. 2014). The review argues for a more progressive approach, developing over the span of a teacher's career, rather than a 'dash' to headship with all of the pressures that this brings. The above has acted as a catalyst for the development of new leadership pathways, replacing the multiple routes to headship with the Specialist Qualification for Headship, part of the Framework for Educational Leadership (to which reference has already been made).

The most recent OECD report on the Scottish education system acknowledged the progress which had been made in taking this agenda forward and re-iterated the

call for ‘leadership at all levels’ as one of 12 policy axes for ensuring equity (Scottish Government 2015, p. 72).

A further driver is the *quest for excellence, equity and inclusivity in education internationally*. There has been an increasing recognition of inequities in educational outcomes associated with a range of factors such as poverty (Gomendio 2017, OECD 2016, 2017, Schleicher 2014, Scottish Executive Education Department 2007, Scottish Government 2015). Equitable and successful school systems are characterised by systems-led approaches to improvement which emphasise teacher capability, autonomy and agency (Harris 2010a, Schleicher 2012). This, in turn, is dependent on distributed leadership, effective leadership programmes, and appropriate support and incentives for school leaders (Schleicher 2014). Within such a context, teachers can take on appropriate leadership roles, with teacher leaders playing a key role (Schleicher 2012).

High quality leadership is central to school improvement (Education Scotland 2017, Mourshed et al. 2010, National Partnership Group 2012) and there is a correlation between the quality of leadership and pupil learning (Bush 2012, Hallinger and Heck 2012, Hallinger and Huber 2012). Insights into the impact of leadership at the whole-school level indicate that it is highly contextualised and culturally specific (Bush 2012): a focus on leadership alone, without attendance to the culture of the school, will not bring about improvement (Hallinger and Heck 2012). The implication of the above is the need to invest in the teaching force and build capacity within the school, highlighting the importance of ‘leaders as learners’ (Aas 2017).

Torrance (2013b) identifies a drive towards greater inclusivity in which all members of the school community can play a more active role in steering the direction and enactment of school policy, in keeping with a quest for distributive

justice more widely in Scottish society, represented within education in flatter school structures and the advocacy of distributed leadership in a wide range of Scottish policy documentation.

‘Leadership at all levels’ is also representative of a *paradigm shift in how leadership is understood*. There has been a gradual movement away from understandings of leadership which see leadership as residing within the individual, represented in discourses of leadership styles (Alexandrou and Swaffield 2012), to understandings of leadership as residing within the collective and within networks at the horizontal and vertical levels (Forde et al. 2011, Harris 2014, Spillane 2013, Waterhouse and Møller 2009). This is represented in more recent conceptualisations of leadership such as distributed and systems leadership (and also in concepts such as professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012)) which do not negate the leadership of the individual but recognise it is how individuals collaborate together towards a common purpose which is of the essence (Hallinger and Heck 2012). This is in keeping with Donaldson’s call for teachers as change agents and for leadership to be exercised at all levels of the system.

The final driver is that of ‘leadership at all levels’ as being driven by *economic imperatives*. Collinson et al. (2009) draw from Drucker’s concept of the knowledge economy as being a key driver in educational change, fuelled by international comparisons. As previously intimated, such policies are driven, some would argue (Bell et al. 2003, Brunila 2011, Grimaldi 2012), by a narrow, reductionist agenda founded on neo-liberal principles and a market-economy representative of policy making within the UK since the Thatcher era (Smyth and Wrigley 2013). Crawford (2012) describes the Scottish policy context as being characterised by competing accountabilities within a turbulent environment and Gillies (2013) observes:

There is little evidence of any political swing away from continued sympathy with the neo-liberal ideas that currently influence conceptions of the public sector, view the purpose of education as subordinate to the knowledge economy and hence stress academic attainment and related certification. Future political debate seems much more likely, therefore, to centre on means to improve or achieve in these areas, rather than about the value and force of such ends in the first place. (Gillies 2013 in Bryce et al. 2013, p. 117)

A wide range of commentators express concern about the detrimental impact of such policies on educational systems, leading to the commodification of children and young people (Ainscow et al. 2006, Bell et al. 2003, Brunila 2011, Connell 2013, Gillies 2013, Smyth and Wrigley 2013). This underlines the need to give consideration to not only how ‘leadership at all levels’ can be furthered within the Scottish education system but to what end.

Brief Summary

This discussion has centred on the drivers for change which have led to a focus upon ‘leadership at all levels’ as being central to school improvement. It identified a wide range of factors which have acted as catalysts for change, but, perhaps, one of the most important issues to emerge was the need to focus not only upon the ‘how’ of educational leadership but the ‘why’ - is it solely about the uncritical enactment of policy based on unquestioned (and often hegemonic) assumptions or is it about something much greater? This taps very much into the focus within TSF on teachers as ‘change agents.’

‘Leadership at all levels’ – an enduring concept?

The Scottish Government review of progress since the publication of ‘Teaching Scotland’s Future’ (Black et al. 2016) highlights many positive changes with regard to the professional development of teachers but the emphasis within the initial report on teachers as ‘agents of change’ and on leadership at all levels of the system is not as strong as within the initial report which raises issues about the Scottish Government’s

commitment towards this concept on an ongoing basis. However, the more recent report emanating from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (Education Scotland 2017), does stress the importance of leadership at all levels as being 'key to achieving the progress and success that our learners deserve' (p. 57).

Conclusion

This paper has examined some of the tensions around the concept of 'leadership at all levels' and established that there is a lack of a theoretical basis for, and clarity around, the concept and the model of teacher professional development which underpins it. Despite the increasing focus upon dispersed forms of leadership internationally, as Torrance's study demonstrated, hierarchies are deeply entrenched. This is represented, in Scotland, in a compartmentalisation of leadership education into distinct stages (as illustrated in Fig. 2), which, as previously argued, has the potential to constrain leadership development and which is implicitly based upon the unquestioned assumption that leadership is fundamentally different at each and every stage.

There is a potential for conflict between models of teacher/leadership development which place the individual at the centre and models which place the needs of the system at the centre. However, as illustrated through the Chartered Teacher programme, it is necessary to reconcile the needs of the individual with the needs of the system. Further, attention needs to be devoted to the cultural context and norms (and the underlying values, assumptions, prejudices and beliefs) that prevail, not only at the level of the institution but more generally across the system as a whole. Have we invested sufficiently in building the culture at all levels of the system such that teachers (at all stages of their careers) are able to exercise agency and autonomy and work collaboratively together within a supportive and facilitative environment?

We would argue that without sufficient attention to creating a ‘growth culture’ (Dweck and Elliot 1983, Dweck 2000, 2006), an aspect of capacity building, attempts to foster ‘leadership at all levels’ could ultimately fail.

A trend that has become evident is a tendency to position ‘leadership at all levels’ as pertaining principally to teacher and distributed leadership. ‘All levels’ should imply a continuum from Initial Teacher Education to experienced headteachers, extending beyond to the ‘middle’ layer and to the leadership exhibited at the level of government. This is as much concerned with systems and collaborative leadership (within and across institutions and organisations) as with other dispersed forms of leadership. However, focussing overly upon systems and structures can hide the fundamental issue, which is the purpose which leadership serves which relates, in turn, to the philosophical underpinnings of the education system.

The implications of the above for school improvement and policy makers are the need for greater understanding in framing concepts in a careful and clear way such that they do not constrain thinking around leadership and leadership development; of the need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the potential facilitators and barriers (including those pertaining to cultural understandings) to policy enactment and the complexities (including power relations) of the system; the need to frame leadership within the context of social justice to a much greater extent than has previously been the case; and, following on from this, the need to focus on the ‘why’ of leadership as well as the ‘how’.

The implications for the profession are the need to broaden leadership education to encompass initial teacher education; to reconcile systems demands (as represented within ‘all levels’) with the professional needs of individuals at different stages of their professional career (represented within ‘all stages’); and to raise

awareness in all teachers of the ways in which they already exercise leadership in their roles and how they might potentially develop their understanding further of leadership, their capacities for leadership, their capacities to foster leadership in others and their capacities to influence and shape policy, ultimately to the benefit of children and young people.

Finally, given that we have argued that this concept is under-theorised, there is a need for the research community to engage at a theoretical and empirical level with this concept and to critique public policy from the international to the local level pertaining to it.

Notes

1. This is not to imply that the school improvement movement in general is narrowly construed.
2. The professional standards were reviewed in 2011 in light of the TSF and are currently under review as part of a quinquennial review cycle.
3. One of the key recommendations from the International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA) (International Council of Education Advisers 2017b). The 'middle' refers to the level between schools and government, occupied by local authorities in Scotland who play a key role in school governance.
4. We would like to acknowledge the work of Dr Anna Beck who traced these developments within her PhD study published at the University of Glasgow.

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