

Evolving Perspective(s) of Teacher Leadership: An Exploration of Teacher Leadership for Inclusion at Preservice Level in the Republic of Ireland

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***Abstract:** There is an increasing body of literature that extols the virtues of teacher leadership despite the concept remaining underdeveloped and under-theorised (King & Stevenson 2017; Torrance 2013). Acknowledging the dearth of literature exploring the development of teacher leadership at preservice level, this article reports on results from a qualitative study which employed Bond's (2011) theoretical framework for preparing preservice teachers in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) to become teacher leaders for inclusion. This study adopted a self-study approach (Vanassche & Kelchtermans 2015) involving two teacher educators, in the ROI, where the researcher, being relatively new to teacher education, was supported by a critical friend in the design, implementation and evaluation of the modules. Results strongly indicate that student teachers felt prepared to exercise leadership for inclusion through lived experiences of leadership, understanding change, being research informed and having many opportunities for reflection. This article argues for unlocking the potential for leadership for inclusion to begin with student teachers and concludes by suggesting that this article may help to address the paucity of literature around teacher leadership at preservice level and in particular teacher leadership for inclusion.*

Keywords: teacher leadership for inclusion, teacher leadership at preservice level, developing teacher leadership, organic leadership, distributed leadership

Introduction

Across the globe there is increasing rhetoric and literature around teacher leadership despite the concept remaining underdeveloped, under-theorised (King & Stevenson 2017; Torrance 2013) and illusive (Forde & Dickson 2017). It is often described as a subset of distributed leadership which has gained significant prominence in recent years (Muijs, Chapman & Armstrong 2013). This article however aligns itself with a form of leadership that is more

organic where teachers can develop a collective responsibility for all pupils' learning (King & Stevenson 2017). This is especially important in the context of leadership for inclusion where social learning processes through collaborative practice are key (Ainscow & Sandhill 2010).

Additionally it aims to answer the call for further literature from teacher educators 'to clarify understanding of the teacher's role in teacher leadership' (Poekert 2012: 186). How teacher leadership is conceptualised arguably impacts on how it is enacted in practice. This article presents an evolving perspective on teacher leadership as explored in the context of leadership for inclusion by preservice teachers who undertook a major specialism in special and inclusive education.

While a plethora of research exists around teacher leadership, there is arguably a dearth of literature exploring the development of teacher leadership at preservice level (Forde & Dickson 2017). Perhaps cultivating teacher leadership at this level is not seen as important or possible. Therefore, the aim here is to explore to what extent and how teacher leadership for inclusion may be developed at preservice level.

Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership had its roots in the 1980s with various theories and conceptualisations evolving since then. Arguably one of the most prominent theories is that of distributed leadership within which teacher leadership often sits. Nevertheless, a lack of consensus about a definition of teacher leadership still prevails. However for the purposes of this article, teacher leadership has largely conceptualised leadership as influence and leadership as values.

In 1988 Cuban defined leadership as influence by referring to 'people who bend the motivations and actions of others to achieving certain goals (p. 193). Sixteen years later leadership is described as '... the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement' (York-Barr & Duke 2004: 287-288). Therefore, it is arguably seen as 'a relationship of social influence' (Spillane & Coldren 2011: 78) perhaps 'intentional influence' (Yukl 2002: 3) based on expertise rather than a formal position of authority (Timperley 2009). Accepting this stance situates teacher leadership squarely within the professional domain of all teachers and within the context of teaching and learning as a relational activity.

Teacher leadership may involve transforming teaching and learning both in and beyond the classroom to include the wider school and community (Crowther et al. 2002) as child development is shaped significantly by the mutual interactions between the child, family life and the community (Bronfenbrenner 1979). This view of teacher leadership may include teachers as leaders of innovation or change within and beyond their classrooms as part of professional practice (Frost 2012) regardless of formal roles in schools. However understanding the change process is essential for effective leadership (Fullan 2001) especially

for newly qualified teachers as their capacity to influence change may be ‘influenced by social relationships within schools and ... the degree of peer acceptance that is achievable’ (Hulme, Elliot, McPhee & Patrick 2008: 69-70).

Change may begin with individual teachers seeing a need for change, for example, when their identity as a teacher is at odds with current teaching and learning practices or policy expectations and outcomes (Forde & Dickson 2017). Change can also happen where teachers’ practices are not aligned with their values and beliefs and, as such, teachers are experiencing a ‘living contradiction’ (Whitehead 1989). As professionals, teachers need to focus on the moral purpose of teaching and learning, the difference they are trying to make. This moral purpose keeps teachers closer to the needs of children and change enables teachers to develop better approaches to achieve their moral goals (Fullan 1993). This is echoed by O’Gorman and Drudy (2010) who argue that the ‘creative artistry of teaching is in responding to change with new and innovative approaches to the challenges presented to them’ (p. 165). Noteworthy is the link between leadership and change in the literature (Bush 2008) with calls for faculties of education to ensure that student teachers have the knowledge and skills to bring about meaningful change (Fullan 1993). Promoting teachers as leaders for inclusion is important to avoid reproducing the current inequalities in schools where teachers arguably become encultured into the practices and values of their schools as the impact of their teacher education may become ‘washed out’ after four or five years (Forde & Dickson 2017: 4).

This signals a need for teacher education programmes to have a more holistic approach to include the role of the teacher in the wider school community (Muijs et al. 2013) and to build capacity for change in all teachers where they not only change what is happening in their classrooms but in the wider school community to align with their moral imperative. Four key ingredients are cited by Fullan (1993) as necessary for building capacity for change; personal vision, inquiry, mastery and collaboration. Personal vision asks individuals to consider the difference they are trying to make. It is arguably linked to their identity as teachers and thus linked with leadership and values.

Inquiry involves continuous questioning of practice and continuous learning to achieve the goal or vision. This potentially could reflect the concept of teachers as researchers of their own practice and that of the wider school community (O’Gorman & Drudy 2010). Mastery also involves professional learning and development but requires teachers to become adept at the areas for change by drawing on their funds of knowledge or expertise in the teaching moment (Hegarty 2014). Such mastery is an important characteristic for teachers as change-agents aiming to influence others (van der Herijden, Geldens, Beijaard & Popeijus 2015).

Finally collaboration is an essential ingredient for building capacity for change especially leading change beyond the classroom to the wider school community. Developing teachers’ relational agency (Pantic & Florian 2015) or capacity to work purposefully with others as pedagogues (Forde & Dickson 2017) is essential for enhancing expertise and capacity for

change and in particular capacity for inclusive practice where teachers are encouraged to develop a collective responsibility for all students' learning (King & Stevenson 2017).

Importantly, enhancing human agency to enable teachers to mediate any impeding structures and demands in a bid to focus on what matters most impacts on students' learning (Frost 2012; King 2014, 2016). The strongest predictor of leadership behaviour comes from personal characteristics or personal factors such as teachers seeing themselves as a professional with a sense of professional agency (van der Herijden et al. 2015).

Teacher Leaders

Teacher leaders are often considered to be those with formal leadership roles. Many have additional qualifications and explicitly have sought teacher leader roles with some getting additional remuneration for this role. In the ROI the use of the terms teacher leadership or teacher leaders is not visible in policy documents or practice. There is however 'middle management' or 'roles or responsibility' which are formal roles and in the past had additional remuneration. Since the economic crash these roles have generally not been sanctioned in schools. Instead teacher leadership is seen within the context of distributed leadership and is situated within the school improvement agenda as can be seen on documents by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), the operational arm of the Department of Education and Skills. Additionally, much of the emphasis with the newly formed College for School Leadership is on principals and aspiring principals.

Regardless of titles or formal roles, teacher leaders can 'lead within and beyond the classroom, influence others toward improved educational practice, and identify with and contribute to a community of teacher leaders' (Katzenmeyer & Moller 2001: 6). Arguably this is the remit of all teachers as part of professional practice as discussed above. However teachers in their first year or early years of teaching may have little experience or reputational power to influence others (Forde & Dickson 2017). Interestingly, a study of second-year trainees (n=123) in the Teach First Alternative Certification Programme in the UK reported that these teachers were highly motivated and able to exercise leadership in their schools possibly due to having entered their teacher education programme with high levels of academic success (Muijs et al. 2013). This motivation or sense of commitment and self-assurance, along with resilience and passion to achieve their moral goals, has been identified by others as central to teacher leadership (Hargreaves & Fink 2006; van der Herijden et al. 2015). This echoes what Fullan (1993) says about change agency and moral purpose being closely aligned or similarly agency and identity being strongly linked (Forde & Dickson 2017).

Teacher Leadership for Inclusion

This article focuses on teacher leadership within the context of leadership for inclusion where it is argued that inclusion will be won in the heart or soul of individual teachers (MacRuairc

2016). Teachers need to be able to articulate 'personal and educational values which represent their moral purposes for their schools' (Day, Harris & Hadfield 2001: 53) as attitudes and beliefs about inclusion influence practices (Brown 2006). Teacher leadership for inclusion is the enactment of these values (Brown 2006), and where beliefs and values about diversity are challenged (Muijs et al. 2012).

Creating conditions where there is an alignment of hearts and minds (Bass & Riggio 2006) or furthermore hearts, minds and purpose is pivotal for realising inclusion (MacRuairc 2016). Additionally, a shared culture and ethos with teachers working collaboratively through teamwork and collaborative problem-solving approaches is a key tenet in realising inclusion in schools (Muijs et al. 2012). Individual actions are unlikely to overcome injustices with a call for actions to be grounded in a joint effort (Berkovich 2014). The challenge within and across schools may be the tension between equity and excellence, the 'struggle between commitment to moral values of inclusion and diversity with the dominance of the standards agenda' (Leo & Barton 2006: 167-168). However, recent findings from the OECD show that the best schools are the most equitable schools (Day & Sammons 2013).

Continuing professional development is important to get to the hearts of teachers (MacRuairc 2016) as they are the most significant influencing factor within schools influencing student achievement (Hattie 2009; OECD 2005). Therefore, teachers have a key role to play as leaders of inclusion (Pantic & Florian 2015) where teacher leadership is conceptualised as a professional commitment and a 'process which influences people to take joint actions toward changes and improved practices that enable achievement of shared educational goals' (Forster 1997: 88). This would suggest that all teachers are seen as being capable of exercising leadership despite the fact that some would argue that not all teachers want to lead or are capable of leading (Torrance 2013). In contradistinction to this, Bond (2011) posits that not only can all teachers lead but that they want to lead and should lead as part of being a professional and that this preparation for being a teacher leader should begin at preservice level.

Teacher Leadership for Preservice Teachers

Arguably the time to introduce the idea of teacher leadership to teachers is at preservice level when teachers are developing their own philosophies on education and their role within it (Bond 2011). Acknowledging the support for the development of teacher leadership to begin at preservice level (Muijs et al. 2013), the challenge for teacher educators is how to develop or unlock the leadership potential of student teachers. This should not be tokenism but rather to instil a commitment to leadership and a capacity to lead in student teachers (Forster 1997). Bond (2011), while accepting of a lack of consensus about a definition of teacher leadership, outlines the knowledge, skills and dispositions that teachers need to be teacher leaders. He speaks about teachers having a vision for leadership and how they can lead in their schools in myriad ways, arguably conceptualising teacher leadership as a change-agent role, as

teachers aim to align their moral purpose and practice (Fullan 1993), their hearts, minds and purpose (MacRuairc 2016). Noteworthy is that the starting point may not always be the 'change mindset' as teachers may use their agency to be innovative which may lead to change (van der Herijden et al. 2015).

Bond (2011) argues for teachers to have knowledge of themselves as leaders as well as educators. He also emphasises the importance of knowledge of others, for example parents, students, colleagues, schools, and others in the wider community reflecting Bronfenbrenner's (1979) concept of the child's development being shaped by others in their family life, community and society. The significance of understanding schools as organisations is part of this as teachers may be in a school that aligns with or stands in contradistinction to their values and beliefs around inclusion. Learning how to lead change and mediate obstacles is an important aspect of leadership (Fullan 1993). Knowledge of teaching is also central to teacher leadership as teachers need to exemplify excellent practice in order to share their expertise with others. Being a lifelong learner can also support teachers in their endeavours to be recognised as teachers with expertise. Expertise is also necessary for identifying problems (van der Herijden et al. 2015) and becoming active researchers of their own practice and that of the wider school community (O'Gorman & Drudy 2010). Teacher leaders need to see themselves as problem-solvers and advocates both within and beyond the classroom and school which in turn requires them to develop their relational agency (Pantic & Florian 2015). This is especially pertinent for developing inclusive practices which rely heavily on developing social learning processes within and beyond the school (Ainscow & Sandhill 2010). Additionally, Bond states that teacher leaders need to have a positive disposition, be trustworthy and reliable and be confident in their abilities, resilient and above all, possess a sense of humour.

One of the few frameworks for developing teacher leadership at preservice level is that of Bond (2011) who suggests a developmental approach whereby the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions outlined above are interspersed throughout all modules from the beginning of student teacher education. Alternatively, programmes could have a discrete module on leadership if the programme had space for that. In concordance with others (Brown 2006; MacRuairc 2016), the importance of reflecting on attitudes and a vision for teacher leadership are also highlighted within the framework. Asking student teachers to articulate these over time enables them to develop their own philosophy of teacher leadership. It may be asking them to reflect on '[w]hat difference am I trying to make personally?' (Fullan 1993: 13). Affording student teachers opportunities to volunteer is also important to set them on their journeys to making changes happen as is participation in professional organisations to enhance their professional development through sharing of expertise.

Methods

Context

Teacher education in the ROI moved from a three year undergraduate bachelor of education (BEd) degree to a four year undergraduate degree beginning in autumn 2012 with the first cohort of student teachers graduating in 2016. Participants in this research were the first group of student teachers from this cohort (n=24) who undertook a major specialism in special and inclusive education which involved participation in six modules. The researcher was asked to design two of these modules, a discrete module on ‘collaboration’ for students in the third year of the BEd specialism (BEd3) and a further discrete module on ‘leadership for inclusion’ for students in the fourth year of the specialism (BEd4). The discrete module on leadership in fourth year was due to the structure of the BEd program in the college of education whereby all modules in fourth year were known as leadership for XXX. In designing the modules, the researcher’s aim was to support these student teachers to become teacher leaders for special and inclusive education. Using Bond’s (2011) theoretical framework for preparing preservice teachers to become teacher leaders, this study adopted a self-study approach (Vanassche & Kelchtermans 2015) involving two teacher educators, in the ROI, where the researcher was supported by a critical friend in the design, implementation and evaluation of the modules. Given the dearth of literature in the area of developing teacher leadership at initial teacher education level and the researcher being relatively new to teacher education, it was important to explore same. This article reports on findings of research which employed Bond’s (2011) framework for developing teacher leadership to answer the research question: *To what extent may teacher leadership for inclusion be developed at initial teacher education level?*

Methodology

Bond’s (2011) framework was adopted and implemented as outlined in Table 1 and explained in detail below.

Table 1: Links between theoretical framework and assessment

| Bond’s (2011) Theoretical Framework | Assessment |
|--|---|
| Knowledge, skills and dispositions woven throughout all modules from beginning / discrete module | BEd3 and BEd4 Blog Student presentations on journal articles |
| Reflect on attitudes and vision of teacher leadership | BEd3 – Blog during school placement BEd4 – Twitter #sie401 |
| Opportunities to volunteer | BEd4 – Professional Conference |
| Participation in professional organisations | BEd4 – Attendance at professional conference |

The researcher was cognisant of the importance of weaving the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions as recommended by Bond (2011) throughout all modules and, therefore, these were considered at the outset of the design of the collaboration module for the BEd3 cohort, as collaboration is an essential aspect of leadership. As part of this collaboration module, the students engaged in a private blog, during school placement for ten weeks, to reflect on their knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes towards special and inclusive education. Blog postings were in response to prompts around identifying and reflecting on collaboration, collaborative practice and curriculum and pedagogy related to special and inclusive education. Students engaged with each other on the blog while the researcher and critical friend engaged in challenging the students' attitudes, beliefs and practices and supported them in collaborative problem-solving related to identified issues. On return to college, the students had to reflect on the experience of the blog as a model of professional development and learning through using King's (2014) evidence-based professional development (PD) evaluation framework. This was to support their ability to articulate their vision and thinking about special and inclusive education while also highlighting the importance of professional development and learning in their journey of lifelong learning. It was hoped that they would be leaders for professional development and learning among their colleagues going forward.

Building on this, a number of these students the following year (BEd4) had to act as 'leaders' for the next cohort of BEd3 students as part of their module on leadership for inclusion. Their role was to challenge the BEd3 students' attitudes, beliefs and practices thus affording the students in BEd4 a lived experience of teacher leadership, aligning with Dewey's (1938) concept of experiential learning focusing on learning by doing. Students were also afforded an opportunity of continuous reflection on their attitudes and vision of teacher leadership for inclusion through engagement in Twitter (#sie401) as part of their assessment for the leadership for inclusion module.

Opportunities to volunteer were somewhat addressed through assessment by providing a lived experience of attending a professional conference. Students were allowed to attend the conference free of charge in return for volunteering to help out at the conference. However, not all conference directors required the students to volunteer. Nevertheless, it did also facilitate the participation in professional organisations (Bond 2011) which was important for engaging the teachers with the wider community in education. The researcher wanted the students to have lived experiences to help differentiate between conceptual knowledge (Theory – big T) and perceptual knowledge (theory – little t) (Korthagen, Loughran & Russell 2006) or to connect theory and practice (Brown 2006). Lived experiences of collaboration and leadership included engaging with the blog, twitter and attending conferences to support them in their journey of lifelong learning where they would hopefully engage in same or similar as part of a community of learners with a common focus, in this case, special and inclusive education. Participation at the conference was also linked with an assessment which required reflection related to their professional learning, once again using King's (2014) PD

framework as a reflection portfolio. All of the above arguably reflected the components of Bond's (2011) framework for developing teacher leadership at preservice level.

In addition to these aspects, all students were required to engage with assigned literature around collaboration and leadership for inclusion in a bid to support student teachers in being research informed. To support their learning in this regard, students were assigned to groups as part of the BEd3 module and presented an assigned article to their peers in a way that was accessible to all learners, thus reflecting teaching for special and inclusive education; another lived experience. These articles related to collaboration, curriculum and pedagogy and change.

The following year a number of the students as part of the BEd4 module then had to exercise leadership by presenting the same journal articles to various cohorts, for example, the Teaching and Learning Committee of the college, a group of postgraduate students and their own class group of 400 students. Another aspect of leadership in the BEd4 module involved taking part in a debate with fellow students, lecturers and experts in the field of special and inclusive education, in front of the class group of 400 students, organised by the coordinator addressing special and inclusive education across the BEd programme. In summary, exercising leadership in the BEd4 module comprised either leadership on the blog for the BEd3 cohort, leadership in terms of presenting journal articles, or finally, leadership through debate.

Data were collected from multiple sources including student teachers' PD reflection portfolios, student evaluations of the modules through a choice of questionnaire or focus groups along with a video session (V) with students and staff sharing experiences of the modules. Other data included the researcher's reflections and observations following each class along with the reflections of a critical friend.

Results

A process of deductive coding was used based on Bond's (2011) theoretical framework along with inductive coding of the data for any additional insights into supporting teachers' development of teacher leadership. Thematic analysis was employed to read, code and generate themes from the various data sources. Results from the data are outlined under the following headings: concerns, turning points, exercising leadership and self-efficacy for leadership.

Concerns

Concerns were expressed by the researcher following week 1 of the BEd4 module on leadership for inclusion.

Am I pushing them too far in the various 'leadership of inclusion' assessments—presentations, debates and panel, twitter and blog? ... Assessment is complex and

given I feel I have a strong rationale for each one, I am torn between what I expect of them and what I want for them in terms of their own learning. It is like I can see the big picture with this and they can only see each piece in isolation. (Researcher Reflection (RR), week 1)

Some students also had concerns at the outset of the module as reflected by a student who completed a questionnaire (Q) at the end of the module.

At first I was unsure how we would explore the topic of Leadership over the full semester ... reflecting back on the course it enabled us to see leadership as change, and how to implement it successfully into schools ... Opportunities were provided [through assessment] to experience first-hand the importance of leadership. (Q: Student (S)20)

Similarly, another student who was involved in presenting an article to the class group of 400 students stated:

What made it worse was my own year..... first of all, but then like, it was such a great feeling when you actually did it... (Focus Group (FG): S4).

Overall fears were allayed as reported by a number of the students in the focus group at the end of the module.

I also think that this module is far ahead of every other module in the college, in terms of assessment. I know there's only 25 of us in the class, but in terms of the way we are assessed, as in it's not a written exam, and it's continuous assessment, I think it's far better. (FG: S3)

It was not only the continuous aspect that appealed to the students. 'I genuinely was learning while I was doing the assignment' (FG: S1). 'It wasn't just kind of like "oh, it's your last year we'd better talk about leadership for a bit". Like... it was definitely like.... I just thought we really actually all learned about it' (FG: S3). This student summed up her experience of one of the leadership assignments: 'Leading through student presentations: Challenging, enjoyable' (Q: S9). On reflection linking leadership with the assessment of the modules to afford students lived experiences of same worked well as 'we can talk about collaboration, we can talk about leadership, but unless you actually get to experience it, you don't connect with it in the same way' (V: Researcher). While the students and researcher demonstrated concerns at the outset, the turning points appeared in week 2 of the leadership module.

Turning points

Having spoken with the students in week 2 of the module, the researcher reflected: 'I was more reassured after today's session that they will manage the assessments assigned' (RR). This was further reinforced having observed a group of students between week 1 and week 2 of the module present their journal article to a cohort of 55 postgraduate students who are all teachers in the area of special and inclusive education.

My thinking has certainly changed regarding pushing students too far with presenting their articles. Wow they were great at presenting and well able to field questions and comments from the teachers...One postgraduate student commented on two of the presenters being future principals/leaders. Another commented publicly about how great it is to see these students going out to schools with leadership roles in mind. (RR, week 2)

Furthermore, one postgraduate student asked the student teachers to explain their assessments for the module and 'the students were able to articulate a rationale for this [each of the assessments] which was nice to see' (RR, week 2). This turning point was also evidenced by students themselves. One typical comment made in the questionnaire:

I was part of the student presentations group. Initially I felt that we'd been given the hardest task. Having to stand up in front of our whole year and present was a terrifying prospect for me. After our first presentation, however, I felt that we were being given such a wonderful opportunity to share our learning and lead in that area. The feedback we got from the presentations was really empowering and it helped us see what we can gain from sharing our experiences with others. It's sometimes easy to assume that because we are still student teachers that teachers, principals and lecturers may not value what we've to share, but this experience proved different. (Q: S14)

This arguably reflects teachers wanting to lead and exercise leadership as part of professional practice (Frost 2012).

Exercising leadership

Both the researcher and critical friend reflected on the student teachers' capacity to exercise leadership which Forster (1997) argues is important to instil in preservice teachers:

Having looked at how the students are moderating on the blog I am once again astounded at how they are 'leading change' by supporting their fellow students (BEd3) and pushing them forward in their thinking. (RR, week 3)

The researcher's critical friend (CFR) responded:

Yes...they are leading... they are clearly showing the capacity to lead, with some already exceeding my expectations... I'm thinking of one student who has spoken up in class relatively infrequently but comes across as having a much stronger presence in the blog. (CFR, week 3)

Similarly, one student teacher found the blog as an opportunity to exercise leadership. 'I was remembering how I was feeling last year and how I would have liked to be supported. I was kind of trying to do that for somebody else' (FG: S2). Interestingly many of the students linked the idea of leadership to reflection, perhaps helping to answer Poekert's (2012) call for understanding the teacher's role in teacher leadership.

Leadership is an area closely linked to reflection, and this course has emphasised the importance of being a leader figure and taking initiative and risks. From trying new methods and strategies, we then need to reflect and see what went well and what could be improved on, and this is evident in the CPD portfolio [reflections on conference attendance and blog] and the blogs. (FG: S8)

The assignment on Twitter also ‘was actually really good, as a kind of reflection’ (FG: S3) arguably supporting Bond’s (2011) and Brown’s (2006) call for having a vision for teacher leadership. Similarly, S6 in the video session highlighted the importance of reflection on practice along with having a vision, another important component highlighted as necessary for building capacity for change (Fullan 1993).

It has become apparent to me the importance of having courageous conversations so that positive changes can be made to our teaching and school environment. To develop these changes, we need to have experienced reflecting on our practice, have a vision and collaborate with others for development. (S6)

Noteworthy is the emphasis on courageous conversations, perhaps reflecting MacRuairc’s (2016) notion of challenging beliefs and attitudes which is also evident in what S20 (V) says:

I now appreciate the high levels of responsibility teachers have and the importance of intrinsic motivation to meet the needs of students. The ability to foster change and leadership in an inclusive and supportive learning environment. We have engaged and have been supported through group discussions on numerous topics...with our classmates, lecturers and guest speakers. Examining a range of perspectives especially when we were on school placement via the blog was beneficial for extending our own thinking and supporting each other. This is something that we have been encouraged actively to do, through a range of mediums. This underlines the benefits that effective communication and collaboration has to offer for both teachers and students. This is something that we can do in our own classrooms and schools in the future as it inspires leadership.

Of interest is both S20 and S6 above referring to changes to the school environment, reflecting the wider school and community as espoused by Crowther et al. (2002) and Muijs et al. (2013). Many of the students saw leadership as linked to change, being a leader of change and motivated to make a difference thus focusing on the moral purpose of teaching (Fullan 1993). A typical comment was that by S23 in the video session:

Leadership is not a word I would have thought had much to do with primary school teaching before this course. I had never seen myself as a leader before and didn’t realise how important it is to be a leader and be able to implement change as a leader. Teachers must be motivated to make a difference and accept change.

S7 in the FG also looked at leadership as influence (OECD 2005; Spillane & Coldren 2011; York-Barr & Duke 2004):

I suppose it's just a thing that as teachers, we have ...non leadership roles but like we can make such an influence, bring so much change to children's lives, that was a big thing. Never thought about teachers being leaders before.

Having experienced a discrete module on leadership for inclusion in BEd4 as distinct from leadership being woven from the beginning of the BEd degree, the concern was that these student teachers may not feel confident in their abilities to lead change. However, findings from the data demonstrate student teachers' sense of efficacy regarding exercising leadership.

Self-efficacy for leadership

Student teachers demonstrated not only an awareness of the importance of leadership but a belief in themselves as leaders. 'I have learned a lot about leadership and my own abilities to make change. This module has taught me the importance of leadership in schools and has given me the necessary tools to take risks to make change' (V: S11). This self-belief was further reflected in S16's comment on the video: 'We will be future professionals within the schooling system, who I see as having the "expert" knowledge.' The leadership module made S18 (V) realise that:

... on completing this degree I will be regarded as a professional and it will be up to me to stand up for what I believe and advocate for change. With the knowledge and experience I have gained from this course, I feel more confident in my own ability as a teacher, a leader, a collaborator and a professional.

This arguably supports the strongest predictor of leadership behaviour with teachers seeing themselves as a professional with a sense of professional agency (van der Herijden et al. 2015). Meanwhile, S6 (FG) felt that 'we're all capable of being a leader then and also working with others as well, taking them along with us', indicative of Yukl's (2002) intentional influence. When pressed by the interviewer (Critical Friend) about how you know if you are capable, S6 replied:

I think it's just been the whole motivation, or self-esteem, kind of built throughout this module, then the CPD [reflection] or the professional development courses [conference attendance] as well they're great for developing your expertise in areas and making you feel that you are capable of leadership.

This motivation and self-assurance for teacher leadership has been highlighted as central to teacher leadership (Hargreaves & Fink 2006; van der Herijden et al. 2015). S5 (FG) added to this by saying, 'how do I know I'm going to be a leader? It's not that I know loads of knowledge, I don't know all the expertise but I nearly know ways that I can research it' arguably reflecting the emphasis on problem-solving through collaboration and being research informed through engagement with journal articles for the student presentations and debate. Noteworthy is one student's comment: 'I think it was really well...like the literature was intertwined into it, not just thrown at you' (FG: S4). Another student also felt it wasn't all about expertise and experience:

I think the whole module has made us all a bit more confident and made us feel like... 'Oh yeah, we don't necessarily have to have 20 years' experience to be a leader'. You can lead in your own way, working with other people... Like just talking with my mum, she did a leadership course last year, and she's a principal, and she was like.... 'I never..... it took me 20 years to figure out this stuff!' (FG: S2)

Overall, the commitment to exercising leadership for inclusion was palpable as espoused here by S7 (FG):

I suppose another thing that kept coming up was that motivation, and that you want to be a leader; and I think from this module alone you could see that, 23 of us were in there wanting to be leaders.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research described the development of teacher leadership for inclusion at initial teacher education level in the ROI using Bond's (2011) framework for developing teacher leadership at preservice level. Given the paucity of teacher leadership research at preservice level, this article set out to explore to what extent and how teacher leadership for inclusion may be developed at preservice level. Analysis of data from multiple sources shows that student teachers felt prepared to be leaders for inclusion through lived experiences, linked to assessment, which allowed them to connect conceptual and perceptual knowledge of teacher leadership (Korthagen et al. 2006) linking theory and practice (Brown 2006). The experiential learning (Dewey 1938) affording opportunities to lead inclusion in a variety of contexts, along with reflecting on attitudes, beliefs and vision of leadership for inclusion supported their self-efficacy around teacher leadership for inclusion (Brown 2006). Collaboration was central to all activities thus building student teachers' relational agency (Pantic & Florian 2015) and capacity for change (Fullan 1993). Being research informed through engagement with the literature also played a role in teachers' sense of self-efficacy and agency related to their professional role as teacher leaders.

While the above findings have informed an evolving perspective of teacher leadership as experienced in one context, they may be useful in helping to clarify the teacher's role in teacher leadership for inclusion (Poekert 2012). This role is arguably one which is collaborative, reflective and influential and involves change aligned with a personal vision and commitment to inclusion. Furthermore, it is conceptualised as being wider than the classroom to support a collective responsibility for all pupils' learning (King & Stevenson 2017).

Overall, Bond's (2011) framework for preparing preservice teachers to become teacher leaders was instrumental in the student teacher's journey towards teacher leadership. Interestingly, the module on teacher leadership was a discrete module which built on previous modules of collaboration and curriculum and pedagogy as distinct from leadership being woven throughout all modules from the beginning of the degree. Being immersed in leadership for

their final module in BEd4 arguably situates the student teachers well positioned to engage in teacher leadership on entering their schools.

Nevertheless, this article argues for unlocking teacher leadership at preservice level where teacher educators can win student teachers' hearts, minds and purpose for inclusion (MacRuairc 2016). It evidences teacher leadership as a professional commitment (Forster 1997) to enacting one's values. What remains to be seen is whether or not these teachers in their first year of teaching will have sustained this commitment as beliefs are 'hardy and highly resistant to change' (Brown 2006: 703) or indeed if the power to influence others in schools is totally dependent on experience and knowledge (van der Herijden et al. 2015), reputational power (Forde & Dickson 2017) or peer acceptance (Hulme et al. 2008). Having positive experiences in their schools where organic leadership is allowed where they are encouraged to initiate change from below with support from leadership from above (King & Stevenson 2017) will enable these teachers to mediate barriers along the way. The question may be if schools are ready for these teacher leaders.

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