

Researching Leadership For Learning in Seven Countries (The Carpe Vitam Project)

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Abstract

This article examines issues arising in the design and conduct of a research project spanning seven countries and five national languages. With a shared focus on leadership for learning among the participating twenty four schools and eight university sites, the challenge was to find a common methodology that would allow comparison across cultures with quite differing histories and working in different policy and linguistic contexts. The authors describe the quantitative measures which afforded a basis for comparison and discuss the challenge of bringing together findings from qualitative data derived from researchers bringing different traditions and cultural constraints to their work with schools. Treating differences as a potential strength rather than an impediment has allowed members of the research team to learn from each other and develop what is termed an 'emergent and eclectic' methodology.

The Leadership for Learning (Carpe Vitam) project: is an international research and development project funded for three years until December 2005 by the Wallenberg Foundation in Sweden, with further financial support from participating countries. The project is directed from the University of Cambridge by John MacBeath, and co-directed by David Frost and Sue Swaffield. Team leaders in other countries are: George Bagakis (University of Patras, Greece); Neil Dempster (Griffith University, Brisbane); David Green (Centre for Evidence Based Education, Trenton, New Jersey); Lejf Moos (Danish University of Education); Jorunn Møller (University of Oslo); Bradley Portin (University of Washington); and Michael Schratz (University of Innsbruck). Further details are available at: www.carpevitamlfl.net.

Introduction

The Leadership for Learning (Carpe Vitam) project is a three year international research project involving seven countries and eight different cities – Brisbane, Australia; Innsbruck, Austria; Copenhagen, Denmark; Oslo, Norway; Athens, Greece; London, England; Trenton (New Jersey) and Seattle (Washington) in the United States. It is a collaborative venture between academic institutions and schools within each of those sites, and among those colleagues internationally.

The main funding source is The Wallenberg Foundation which has already supported a stable of projects across the world under the banner of Carpe Vitam, all informed by a loosely expressed set of democratic values focussing on the role of education in social and cultural transformation. The project developed from a series of informal meetings of researchers who themselves had a history of working together and who shared interests and values concerned with leadership and learning. The initial conversations and ideas were crystallised at a meeting held at the 15th International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) at Copenhagen in January 2002 when the research team was formed. The Cambridge team set out a set of predispositions, previously enunciated in The Cambridge Leadership for Learning Network as:

- Learning, leadership and their inter-relationship should be our central concern;
- Learning and leadership are a shared, as much as an individual, enterprise;
- Leadership should be distributed and exercised at every level within a school and its community.

This expression of core values found resonance within all the partner university teams; it became the bedrock of the project and continues to be in the foreground of our discussions as a project team. Three key questions framed the research.

- How is leadership understood in different contexts?
- How is learning understood and promoted within 24 different schools and policy contexts?
- What is the relationship between leadership and learning?

The research project was an initiative of its time; the two key concepts – leadership and learning – were both acquiring a higher level of importance with governments around the world yet the link between

them remained rarely subjected to critical analysis. In order to achieve this, the concepts required further clarification but also needed to be made meaningful within and between very different cultural traditions and linguistic conventions.

International Collaboration

As researchers we brought to this inquiry a background of work in leadership and school improvement in each of the eight university centres but also with a shared recognition that we had much to learn about how these ideas played out in school practice within different cultural contexts and within a continuously evolving policy climate.

The research teams in each of the eight sites were responsible for the recruitment of three schools, selected purposively on the basis that they wished to challenge their thinking in relationship to learning and leading and to more strategically align their practice. In selecting schools in each site and bringing principals and teachers to Cambridge for a launch of the project in 2002, we embarked on a collaborative journey of inquiry, framed by a set of values held in common, and with the purpose of deepening our understanding across very diverse contexts and 'construction sites' (Weiss and Fine, 2000). Our premise was that the very different nature of these sites would of itself generate a cross-national dialogue and a quality of collaboration that would enhance our understanding of the connections between leadership and learning. We anticipated that despite language barriers and the geographical distance that separated us there would be opportunities to extend our mental repertoire and to imagine options that might be difficult to conceive in a single national context.

As a group of researchers who have worked across national boundaries before, we were aware of the potential pitfalls of 'policy borrowing', or 'cherry picking', a process that has in recent years endeared itself to politicians and policy makers but has led to the promulgation of simplistic solutions to complex issues (Robertson and Waltman, 1992). We also needed to remind ourselves of the insidious dangers of being too ready to see the familiar in the unfamiliar, particularly where cultural differences could be subtle yet substantive. In order to protect against either inappropriate policy borrowing or de-contextual assumptions about practice, the project has followed a number of disciplines.

First, starting at the launch of the project, we have been careful to ensure that the descriptions of the schools have been rich and illuminating. This has included both within school features and those from outside the schools (such as its local community). Descriptions of the schools exist in both web-based formats and as a part of local and national context papers.

Second, the project activities and schedule have ensured regular and sustained discourse across national contexts. This has occurred through both online communication and periodic conferences. The entire partnership has met annually, and the research team has met two or three times each year. This regular contact has given us the opportunity to re-examine and reframe our common understandings, and to keep in touch with national policies that are in constant flux and transition.

Third, given the combined experience of the team in cross-national work we were sensitised to issues in protocol design, particularly in relation to common questionnaire items where vocabulary was often contentious and some terminology was highly connotative (for example, the word 'leadership' in German or the word 'democratic' in Norwegian or Danish). It was important therefore not only to invest time in developing the questionnaire item by item, but also utilising strategies such as back-translation to decrease ambiguity and optimise comparability.

Fourth, description and dialogue formed only one means of developing contextual understanding of how policy and practice meet. In order to enhance understanding, contextual visits have been a part of the project design. This has taken two forms, visits to schools that have occurred in conjunction with the annual conferences (Cambridge, Innsbruck, Copenhagen, Athens) and further ad hoc school-to-school visits arranged by the schools and researchers.

Fifth, through opportunities afforded by the international conferences, participating schools and teachers have been able to reflect on their own practice through contrast and through the application of a variety of analytic frames provided by the research teams.

The challenge for all participants in the project, researchers and practitioners alike, was to step outside our own habitual cultural frames of reference but then to step back in with renewed insight and with strategic approaches to the embedding of changed practice. This was described by the Danish research team in the language of an experiential learning model (Richards, 1992) with three phases. First, is the

separation from the everyday practice, creating critical distance for example through systematic reflection, diarying, and receiving critical feedback from colleagues. Secondly, the encounter with new ways of doing things which challenges preconceptions poses questions and leads to reframing. The third phase is the homecoming, where the new conceptions and the new experiences are brought back into everyday practice and lead to a process of restructuring of practice.

This captures something of what happens in an international project although not in a simple linear sequence but in small cycles or eddies of dissonance and resolution, disequilibrium and stability. There are peaks of enthusiasm and the embracing of new ideas when school principals and teachers come together for extended conferencing and workshops to exchange stories and theories of practice. There are troughs when they return to their schools to be met with other pressing priorities and impatient government mandates.

Developing Leadership for Learning (LfL) Practice Through Critical Friendship

Kennedy (1999) has described 'the problem of enactment' as the difficulty teachers (and school principals) face in translating the ideas they have embraced into effective practice and coherent action. Black and Wiliam (1998) found that:

Teachers will not take up attractive sounding ideas, albeit based on extensive research, if these are presented as general principles which leave entirely to them the task of translating them into everyday practice (p15).

In recognition of this, the project design included the ongoing support and consultancy of a critical friend, one of the University team with the remit of helping to carry the momentum, acting as a bridge between the research and development processes. Drawing on the experience of other projects in which critical friends had worked alongside researchers (MacBeath *et al.*, 2000; Swaffield, 2004), the intention was to build a relationship of trust such that teachers would feel supported in critical analysis of current practice and feel confident in venturing into new ways of thinking about their roles as learners and leaders.

While the conception of the project was to separate the roles of critical friend and researcher, in many of the participating countries one

person played both roles, supporting and advising while also documenting and analysing in the tradition of action research.

The account of methodology from Norway, for example, describes the management of the two roles when fulfilled by the same person and reflects on the possibilities and constraints as they move between the two roles of researcher and critical friend:

This gave us an opportunity for collaborative reflection on action as critical friends. We have been aware of how easy it is to ask critical questions and hold up a mirror to the principals and teachers, but we need help from each other as colleagues in the research society to be able to scrutinize what influenced our way of thinking. The research team has tried to meet regularly together each term to analyze and discuss the collected data in relation to the research findings.

(Møller, 2005:4)

In Austria and England the separate roles have been undertaken by different people. In England there were instances when a critical friend was able to work intensively with a school on a particular aspect of their development, at the same time generating data about leadership for learning practices, about the processes of change and development (MacBeath *et al.*, 2005), thus feeding the research agenda. In the three London schools a different critical friend was attached to each, the role and impact of their work playing out very differently in those three sites. This could simplistically be put down to the personality, intervention style and attitudes of those three very different individuals but one of the important learnings of the project was the dynamic interplay of the school's history, stage of development and expectations of the critical friend's work.

Austria's paper on methodology describes some of the dynamics that affect critical friends' work:

The collaboration with the respective critical friends works differently at the two school sites because of their different affiliations. One is head of the regional in-service training department and more a resource person than a 'critic'. The other is professor at the adjunctive teacher education college and has a vested interest in the co-operation with its practice school.

(Schratz, 2005:1)

It might be inferred that having the same critical friend in all three schools might have brought greater consistency both to the nature of the support and to the data gathering process. However, as we know from previous work with schools (MacBeath *et al.*, 2000), the 'same'

person may work very differently and with differential success in two similar schools. This reaffirms the importance of contextual factors, the dynamic in the relationship, the fragile nature of trust and communication which are fundamental to the effective work of a critical friend.

The range of perceptions and practices of critical friendship in each of these eight sites is one issue among many that is illustrative of the need for pragmatism and compromise in building a research coalition across countries as different in their historic legacies and cultural traditions as Australia and Austria, Greece and the U.S.

An Eclectic and Emergent Methodology

The collection and use of data served a number of purposes in the Leadership for Learning project. The collection, analysis and feedback of data played a key role in supporting project schools' developmental endeavours; it also provided fuel for the critical discourse afforded through the international conferences; thirdly, it enabled the research team to address the research questions established at the outset of the project. However, the research design was not cut and dried. The democratic values subscribed to when the international research team was formed led inevitably to ongoing debate and reshaping of our strategies and techniques. We came to describe the methodology of the Project as 'eclectic and emergent' (Frost and Swaffield, 2004), one that reflected the differing research traditions which each country site brought to their work with schools, but also our commitment to sharing our practice as researchers and to collective learning about research methodology as we progressed deeper into the process of instrument design, data gathering, data sharing, interpretation and meta analysis.

In the early stages of the project the debate focused on how to conceptualise the multi-purpose process described above. Should it be characterised as action research for example or is the idea of co-enquiry more useful? This debate continues in recent papers on methodology.

The emphasis on different research strategies from one country to another reflected particular expertise and interests. In Australia for example, researchers used discourse analysis to tease out how practitioners understood leadership for learning, and report how the schools and researchers identify particular projects to pursue for their development work (Johnson, Dempster, Watson, and Clarke, 2005). The

options are prompted by research findings and reviews of the literature, but the schools decide:

The schools took ultimate responsibility for choosing a particular course of action and 'conceiving' the most appropriate kind of development work in keeping with individual contexts.

(Johnson *et al.*, 2005:2)

In two sites, New Jersey and Oslo, researchers made explicit reference to action research. In Seattle it was the role of the co-researchers which was emphasised:

As co-researchers, the participants at the schools have helped to identify the inquiry foci of most meaning to them, have utilized both formal strategies of postgraduate research and the exercise of their professional roles in the schools, and have used their colleagues both within and without the school to check their understanding of the conclusions they are drawing.

(Portin, 2005:4)

In Norway, the collaborative work is also characterised as 'action learning'. 'Action learning is about making the participant of a community more conscious about what they know and more attentive of their own experiences' (Møller, 2005:9). In Denmark researchers framed their activity in terms of 'collaborative inquiry' (Moos, 2005) in which there was a 'trading point' between practitioners and external researchers. Principals and teachers brought their own frameworks for attributing meaning and explanations to the world they experience, and researchers recognised that they have no legitimate monopoly on explaining or making sense of what is happening in a school:

The trading point implies focusing on stories in context. The practitioners may offer data and insight, and the external researcher may offer the story of action within a theory of context (Goodson, 1995). Both groups will bring to the situation different kinds of frameworks or different kinds of cognitive maps and language. Theories and concepts can make a substantial difference to what is seen. A connection between insiders and outsiders that integrates their different forms of expertise and different initial frameworks is needed in order to generate a third framework of the local situation. Critical subjectivity in this connection means that we accept the fact that our knowing comes from a particular perspective, and that we are aware of that perspective and of its bias. This process will ensure a plurality of perspectives, which is important to ensure critical examination of practice.

(Moos, 2005:3)

Some accounts of the methodology report ways in which the developmental process is informed by ongoing analysis of the data that is accruing. Norway is developing the portraiture that was a feature of the initial stages of the project for all sites, researchers in Greece write of 'exhaustive exploitation' of the quantitative data, and the Austrian account includes details of how analysis and the developmental process are integrated:

Further data analysis was more integrated into the development processes driving the schools' aims to learn from the feedback of the data. Since both researcher and critical friend have been involved in the developmental process, data gathering and analysis were often part of the ongoing work in schools.

(Schratz, 2005:3)

In all these ways, the work in different countries can be seen to contain elements of action research. It is collaborative and has a development agenda. One of the constant themes to emerge throughout the course of this project has been the need to interpret language and make sense of different contexts. Particular concepts and terminology have proven problematic to share and the ever constant need to check for meaning is amplified across nations. A review of how best the research can be characterised is as much about searching for shared terms that can be understood internationally and among researchers and school colleagues as it is about whether any one label fits most appropriately.

Despite the broad interpretations of action research; despite wide variations in political, social and economic context; and despite the variability in the research/critical friend interface, the intent was, none the less, to get as close as possible to a shared methodology. This was overarched by common questions about leadership, learning and their interrelationship, with all schools working on related development agendas. The schools were all located in urban settings and all but one include students aged 12 and 13 years. All schools agreed to participate in data collection that would provide a 'baseline' of current practice. To begin with schools were encouraged to produce, with the support of their critical friend, a 'portrait' as both a means of sharing information about themselves with other participating schools, and as a process of self reflection and evaluation. This was followed by a common survey involving the administration of staff and student questionnaires, complemented by interviews with principals, teachers and students, and the shadowing of principals.

Portraits

The notion of a 'portrait', with its visual connotation draws on work by Walker (1993), Schratz and Löffler-Anzböck (2004) and Fischman (2001):

In the domain of the social sciences the visual aspect has been largely excluded from the research discourse, although it would seem most apposite to the social sciences. Through their strong empirical orientation they have tended to adhere to the scientific criteria of objectivity, reliability and validity rather than developing their own methodologies of dealing with the social aspects of everyday life. Social scientists see photos somehow sceptically because they carry manifold meanings and can therefore be manipulated easily. For this very reason we think they are well suited to help in understanding the complexity of social relationship.

(Schratz and Löffler-Anzböck, 2004:146)

Each school started their project life with a portrait of their school (although in many cases this extended some time into the project) containing quantitative and qualitative data, painting on as broad a canvas as possible, including as wide a range of players as practical. These portraits comprised words and images composed by schools themselves, in some cases including data collected by the researchers together with student versions of their 'portraits' (generally in the form of photographs selected and composed by students themselves), offering a different lens on school and community and acknowledging that what a school 'is' depends on the vantage point from which it is viewed. While initial portraits tended to be largely descriptive, some schools, with support from their critical friend, opted for a more analytic view of their school, for example, a critique of their current practice with regard to leadership for learning. These more analytic and self-critical portraits helped to model the form of reporting from schools as they progressed in their thinking. We are also alive to the possibility that within any portrait there is as much hidden as revealed, given that the face that a school presents to the world is ultimately an amalgam, a synthesis, a beginning rather than an end point of inquiry.

The Questionnaire

The baseline questionnaire was a common instrument designed to give us a set of perspectives of each school as it was seen at the outset of the project so that over time we might be able to assess movements in perception and practice. It also provided the schools with data that could

inform their developmental goal setting. The design of the instrument followed a familiar and widely used format with its double-sided structure, each of its forty or so items requiring two responses – one in terms of perceived importance (the X axis), the other in terms of perceived satisfaction (the Y axis). While the X axis is a balanced scale with two negatives and two positives, the Y scale is skewed (not important, quite important, very important, crucial) in order to produce finer discriminations among what are nearly all positive factors in school improvement. This protocol has been used in different contexts with varied purposes and different targets (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001; James *et al.*, 2003) and has given us a better grasp on items that discriminate best, those which appear to travel, and items that generate most dialogue and challenge thinking and practice. A key idea underpinning the use of this instrument is that at the very heart of school culture, school change and school learning is the explicit confrontation of people's differing understandings of school purposes, priorities and values (Hall and Hord, 1987); another key idea is that the distance between practice, on the one hand, and individual and shared aspiration, on the other, is critical to inquiry and self-evaluation.

We approached the use of the questionnaire instrument with some ambivalence, recognising that such instruments are rarely greeted with enthusiasm by teachers and that the validity (and reliability) of responses are problematic. The validity of items and clusters of items, while subject to factor analysis, really only begins to be tested in the process of dialogue when findings are fed back to schools.

The data generated by the questionnaire presented the research team with a substantial analytic task. Data aggregated up to whole project level from twenty four schools in eight regions (seven countries) provided a complex picture. Data at whole project level presented such an undifferentiated 'soup' that sense could only be made of this with each finer disaggregation down to country level school level and ideally down to teacher and student level and by respondent groups, for example by gender, ethnicity or by status. As Senge (2002) has counselled, the further we aggregate away from the source of the data the less meaning we can attribute to the findings. This is why respondent validation assumed importance, not simply to give some credibility to the data but in order to generate a dialogue around the meaning of the data, to set it in context and to 'thicken' its descriptive power.

There were myriad possibilities for feeding data back to the schools. The aim was to open up discussion by focussing on key aspects of the data; this would help the schools to identify potential growth points, throw light on our research questions and help us to tease out some key principles of leadership for learning. Among ways in which data were presented to participating schools were:

- Frequency tables showing mean scores for each item on scale X and each item on scale Y;
- Mean scores for each questionnaire item. Given a perfect score of four and a low score of one response to items could be ranked on both scale X and scale Y;
- With mean scores on both scales a gap measure could be presented by subtracting the mean on X from the mean on the Y scale.

This could be shown for teachers' responses and for students' responses on separate tables. Given that we put many of the same questions to teachers and students, comparison could be made between these two groups, for example:

- Comparison of teachers' satisfaction (scale X) and against those of students;
- Using the mean score to rank teachers' priorities (scale Y) comparing with rank ordering by students;
- Comparison of gap measures on selected items by teacher and student responses.

Enriching insight through problematising the data was carried out at three levels – individual school, cluster of schools and in mixed national groups at conferences. This both exposed the discomfort of some participants in dealing with quantitative data and the potential richness of the data for others.

While disaggregation and exploration of the data are essential to achieving more fine grained insights into school and country differences the overall data did reveal some common features across all countries. There were items to which teachers and students gave a common measure of consent and others where there was a consensual low rating. For example, the item, 'We get frequent opportunities to go outside school to learn' was ranked by students 4th overall in order of importance but 34th in terms of current practice, and differed little country by country. The item, 'Teachers talk to us about their learning'

was commonly greeted with the lowest rating on both current and desirable practice, again with only minor differences between countries.

Given what has been said about aggregation across cultures, subjecting such a data set to factor analysis was embarked on with some caution. By dichotomising all items related to 'leadership' and all items related to 'learning' it was, however, possible to arrive at a number of robust factors which did cluster together. Twelve factors emerged which were categorised under students' model of leadership, students' model of learning, teachers' model of leadership, and teachers' model of learning. These are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1
Factors for Students' and Teachers'
of 'Actual' Leadership and Learning Practice

Students' Model of Leadership

Factor 1: Teacher leadership to promote student participation in their own learning and assessment.

Factor 2: Student leadership to promote revisions to teachers' practice and to promote students' learning.

Factor 3: Teacher leadership to promote discussion of learning.

Students' Model of Learning

Factor 1: Teacher directed and facilitated learning and assessment i.e. teacher-centred learning.

Factor 2: Student directed and facilitated learning and assessment i.e. semi-autonomous learning.

Factor 3: Co-operative learning among students in small groups or whole class exchanges of opinions.

Teachers' Model of Leadership

Factor 1: Senior management leadership to promote teacher and student participation in learning.

Factor 2: Parental and student involvement in school decision-making and pupils' learning.

Factor 3: Leadership that promotes professional development and classroom practice to achieve learning outcomes.

Teachers' Model of Learning

Factor 1: Teacher directed learning opportunities and guidance to promote student engagement with schooling.

Factor 2: The teacher as learner deriving knowledge and experience from his/her colleagues and peers.

Factor 3: Student participation, experimentation and autonomy related to learning situations.

This process was useful in providing yet another data source which contributed to the teasing out of leadership for learning principles. Further, factor analysis also fed in to the redesign and re-administration of the questionnaires two years later. It was possible in the redesign to make the questionnaire shorter, using key discriminating items and adding a new section which asked people to comment on the direction, if any, of change, including items such as:

- The culture of our school encourages everyone to be a learner;
- Leadership encourages teachers to be adventurous and risk taking in teaching and learning;
- As a staff we recognise that everyone has the potential for leadership.

These change items (which in general show a progressive and positive shift) require further unpacking with respondents but begin to put to the test some of the key principles of what it means to be a Leadership for Learning school.

Interviews and Shadowing

Interviews were carried out as part of the baseline data collection, and again in the final year of the project. Principals, teachers with various roles, students, and in some cases groups of parents, were interviewed by the researchers. A common interview schedule was designed to elicit understandings and practices about leadership, learning, and their interrelationship. At the beginning of the project the principals were also shadowed for a day, which afforded researchers rich insights into the schools and a context for the interviews. The interviews at the end of the project followed a similar pattern of seeking the views of different members of the school community about our three central themes – leadership, learning, and their relationship. However, the three years of collaboration between the schools and the universities meant that these interviews were subtly different. Their content was negotiated in advance with the schools, so that while the project's common themes were explored with everyone, particular issues, events or developments pertinent to the school or interviewee were also discussed. Interviewees who had been involved with the project throughout its life were encouraged to reflect upon the learning journey, on significant events, and on changes in perception and practice. A number of principals, teachers and researchers had shared common experiences, attending conferences, visiting schools in different countries, and working

together on developments. This familiarity with context, personality and experience influences the discourse and the nature of disclosure. By contrast, some of the interviews were with people the researchers had not met before, as part of seeing the extent to which understandings and practices about leadership for learning had penetrated the school more widely and moved beyond those people centrally involved.

Transcriptions of taped interviews, or records from notes taken, were generally returned to the respondents for validation. The richness of data generated through the interviews was a major source for the research, and the data were analysed in the local language by the national team of researchers, drawing upon their particular strengths such as discourse analysis and grounded analysis.

The Process of Analysis

Our 'eclectic and emergent' methodology embraced the different processes of inquiry and analysis used by the constituent national research teams, grounded as they are in the different academic traditions and political and social contexts. We accepted that the process in each of the eight research sites would have its local characteristics in terms of:

- the way the university works with the schools;
- the kind and quantity of data collected;
- the ways in which data are collected and fed back to schools;
- the analytical techniques used to address the research questions.

Nevertheless, our goal was to devise an analytical process that would have sufficient commonality and coherence, one that would be adequate to the task of answering our research questions and could be regarded as sufficiently robust for our purpose. There was a need on the one hand to be flexible and pragmatic, on the other hand to establish a set of core criteria for the collection, analysis and reporting of data. These decisions were not entered into lightly and not without considerable time invested in regular meetings of the international research team to find a common language and common ground.

Rather than impose a uniform approach we chose instead to respect our differences and to commit ourselves to learning from each other as research collaborators. Over the three year span of the project we have been able to draw upon our collective knowledge and insight in respect of methodology, content and context. We have shared our practice and exposed it to critique among ourselves and more widely as members of

the research team have submitted journal articles to peer review, and subjected methodology to critique at national and international conferences (for example AERA, Chicago and Montreal; BERA, Edinburgh; ICSEI, Sydney, Rotterdam and Barcelona; NERA, Reykjavik and Oslo; ECER, Crete). Operating in a sense as collegial critical friends to one another we have been able to offer alternative interpretations of the evidence presented, as well as identify areas where we consider evidence to be weak or missing.

Data sets collected in each country included questionnaire data, shadowing and interview transcripts, as well as summaries of meetings, conference and workshop data, school documents and profiles, critical friend notes of visits, interviews with critical friends and researchers' reflections on development activities. Coding of interview transcripts was carried out using computer software packages such as Atlas although this has not been logistically possible on every site and given the large data sets gathered in national languages, it was not practical to translate transcripts into English. These data were analysed in each case by the national teams using their preferred approach and the reports arising provided the basis for the meta-analysis or an 'analysis of analyses' (Glass, 1976:3).

In order to achieve sufficient comparability, we established through team discussions a set of criteria for methodological robustness taking account of guidance such as the framework for quality in qualitative evaluation (Cabinet Office, 2003). Our criteria comprised the following:

- Data are available from at least two out of the three schools in each country site;
- An explicit system of analysis is used consistently and rigorously;
- Adequate validity checks with the schools are carried out;
- The common framework of analysis is used;
- The report produced for sharing with the international research team is written in English;
- The report includes a full account (including justification/rationale) of the methodology used;
- The report includes a description of the scope and range of the data.

Each country team of researchers has subjected their data to analysis and reported against these criteria.

An Analytical Framework Expressed as Principles

The international project research team agreed to use a common framework for analysis but the challenge was to devise a method that reflects our partnership with the practitioners in the schools. Mid-way through the project we decided to adopt a method based on the idea of 'principles of procedure', a concept which Stenhouse (1975) had borrowed from R.S. Peters, a pre-eminent philosopher of education in the 1960s and 70s, to define and describe educative processes. The values, concerns and questions set out at the beginning of the project had been shared among the members of the research teams and among the principals and teachers participating in the project. The practitioners had been developing their practice with the support of the critical friendship offered through the project. A set of principles that collectively describe and define 'leadership for learning practice' would enable us to explore our research questions in a practical way and in a way that could engage all project participants in the discourse.

An initial draft of the principles was devised from an analysis of qualitative data gathered during the first year of the project and matched against the literature on learning and leadership. The draft LfL principles were agreed, tested, revisited, and revised through discussions both within the international research team and through the international conferences involving the principals and teachers. The following example of a principle illustrates the nature of the statements:

Leadership for learning involves creating a culture which facilitates the learning of *all* members of the school community.

This principle was one of approximately 20 items in the first draft. It would be premature to publish these principles here; at the time of writing they are yet to be subject to a further round of scrutiny and revision but they will be a key outcome of the project.

Through a series of different kinds of workshops, participants were invited to test the principles against their experience. Having gone through the mill of international discourse, the revised principles were used as a basis for a coding frame for the analysis of the final round of qualitative data.

At our final conference in October 2005, we will be able to explore and test out a revised set of principles which has been subject to a rigorous examination through the process of meta-analysis. What will emerge is a robust set of principles each of which is supported by evidence and illustrated by rich accounts of practice.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the project we hope to be able to share the insights developed about leadership for learning practice through this international, collaborative process of research and development. We also look forward to being able to characterise what we have discovered about how educational knowledge can be created and developed across national boundaries and how universities and schools can collaborate to pursue such fundamental questions. Increasingly, we inhabit an environment where educational policy is subject to global pressures and where the alignment of practice in different parts of the world moves us towards a uniformity that corresponds to a positivistic mindset. There is widespread view that the tyranny of performativity must be resisted but such a stance requires robust and persuasive research that can be seen to be relevant in variety of national contexts. We believe that the Carpe Vitam Leadership for Learning project has the potential to indicate a way forward.

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