

Preparing School Leaders for this: Developing Twenty First Century Leaders (Part 2)

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Abstract

This article builds on another in the previous issue of “Contemporary Educational Leadership” entitled: The Future is not what it used to be: School Leadership Today for Tomorrow’s World (Part 1). In that article a case was made for a different approach for leadership to the prevailing managerial norm, one which enables schools to prepare its students more effectively for life now and in the future. Such leadership needs to be developed and this article outlines the ways in which this can happen using on a transformative learning framework based on what we know about adult learning. The framework has been used and tested in a number of differing international contexts. Used well it offers a cohesive, coherent approach to planning, preparing, facilitating and evaluat-

ing the impact of programmes that seek to develop highly effective school leaders.

Keywords: leadership development, complexity, future, transformational, transformative, learning

Why develop school leaders?

If we want successful school leaders in the twenty first century, it is axiomatic that such leaders need to develop and supported in this. Despite this statement of the blindingly obvious, it must be recognised that leadership development, whilst being clearly linked to school improvement (Leithwood et al 2009), is very patchy both between nations and within them. There may be eloquent rhetoric in favour of leadership development but few counties have invested adequately or wisely in this important area. For example, in Eng-

land, the National College for Leadership (now the National College for Teaching and Leadership) was created in 2000 but has changed its remit significantly since then. The Austrian Leadership Academy was established in 2004 and projects such as “Time for Leaders” in Lithuania show a growing interest and commitment to the issue of developing leaders on a national scale. In continents such as Africa the context is very different to western nations. Often here resources are limited and leaders may have little or no training. These are clearly vital issues that need addressing and it is important to consider the best way to develop all school leaders to ensure limited resources are spent wisely.

The Clarifying terms

In an increasingly dynamic, rapidly changing, unpredictable world of education, leadership learning needs to be transformative. We need school leaders who are able to work with such complexity whilst remaining true to their values. Learning in relation to transformational leadership is an elusive concept. Language in this area can cause unnecessary confusion. The literature tends to refer to transformational as well as transformative learning. One way to see this is that learning is transformative and if this has a positive effect on leaders they can become transformational in their role and on the lives of those with whom they work.

There is a growing body of knowledge in relation to transformative learning. The

concept has been around for some time but it has recently come to the fore due to its resonance with current models of professional development and leadership.

All learning requires a change of state but not all change is transformative. Miller and Seller (1990) helpfully point out the differences between transmissional, transactional and transformational (transformative) education. These may be equated to knowledge transfer, sharing and creation. There is a place for passing on

(transmitting or instructing) information although it is not a simple process. There is also a place for transactional learning (training) which recognises that the learner is not a “blank canvas” and that experience and interaction with other learners is important. Although the differences between this and transformative learning are often blurred, the latter is more profound and deeper. Precey and Jackson (2010) suggest that “*Transformation involves people changing in order to succeed within shifting environments but in the process remaining true to their core beliefs and values.*” This builds on the work of Precey (2008) who further suggests that transformative learning is never ending and describes it as a “*deeply challenging, truly educational, intensely liberating process.*”

One of the most ambitious definitions of transformative learning, the precursor to transformative leadership is that of O’Sullivan (2003, p. 328) Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic prem-

ises of thought, feelings and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice, peace and personal joy. Transformative learning is a journey with no prospect of reaching a final destination. It is essential that our school leaders do embark upon it to shape their views of the world and of the schools that they run and the adults and children whom they lead if we wish for schools that enable people to develop more fully as human.

At least three interrelated theories within andragogy (adult) learning are important to this argument:

1. Boyatzis' model of self-directed learning (1982, 1995, 2005) emphasises the social aspect and co-construction of knowledge. It is founded on the notion of emotional intelligence that involves self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and managing relationships within the learning and thence leadership experience. It looks at what one would aspire to be, 'the ideal self' and the 'real self'. From this one's strengths are identified, where the ideal self and real self overlap, any 'gaps' where the real and ideal self differ are also identified. A plan may

be developed subsequently to build on the strengths and reduce the gaps. This may in turn be then tested through experimentation which may lead to a confirmation of new behaviour, thoughts and feelings.

2. Mezirow's (2000) theory of transformative learning, which is based on psychoanalytical theory (Boyd and Myers, 1988) is also helpful. Mezirow's approach is one based on a logical, rational, analytical deconstruction of experience.

He suggests that this can happen through a series of phases that begin with a disorientating dilemma and include self-examination, critical assessment of assumptions, recognition of shared transformations with others, exploration of new roles and actions, development of a plan of action, acquisition of new skills and knowledge for putting the plan into action, trying it out, developing competencies and self-confidence in new roles of the reintegration into life on the basis of new perspectives. Mezirow (2000: 8) describes transformative learning as often involving "deep, powerful emotions or beliefs, and is evidenced in action." Critics of Mezirow's ideas claim that they are too rationally driven (Taylor, 1998). Some see transformative learning as an "intuitive, creative and emotional process" (Grabov 1997:90). Others believe that it is a symbiotic process of rationality and emotion Boyd and Myers (1988), for example, state that this process hinges on the notion of discernment, which is composed of the three activities of receptivity, recognition and grieving.

First an individual must be open to receiving “alternate expressions of meaning”, and then recognise the message as authentic. Grieving is the critical phase of discernment and hence transformative learning when an individual realises that the old ways of seeing and dealing with the world are no longer relevant and they moves on to adopt new ways and finally integrates the new with the old.

2. Critical social theory (Scott, 1997) is important and this has three common themes – the centrality of experience, rational discourse and critical reflection. It is also illuminating in relation to understanding the importance of critical theory and adult learning. Scott asserts that critical reflection on experiences is necessary for individuals to change their meaning schemes (specific beliefs, attitudes and emotional reactions) and this can, in turn lead to perspective transformation. The meaning schemes of individuals change routinely through learning as individuals most usually add to or assimilate ideas within existing schemes. Deeper perspective transformation leading to transformative learning occurs much less frequently and is usually the result of a “disorientating dilemma” which is triggered by a major (life) crisis or transition although it may result from the accumulation of transformations in meaning schemes over a period of time (Mezirow, 1995). Leaders usually need to step outside the complexities of their situation to understand these concepts.

Transformative learning theory is one which describes a process that leads the learner via critical reflection to re-evaluate past beliefs and experience and consciously make and implement plans that redefine their worlds.

Transformative Learning Experiences Explained

How then can we support the professional development of leaders through transformative learning experiences in practice? There are proven ways. Burbules and Berk (1999) emphasise practising criticality as essential in educating leaders who might build learning communities and take the risks necessary to foster democracy and social justice rather than “those teachers who play it safe by simply massaging the rhetoric” (Greenan and Dieckmann 2004: 242). They stress four components to such learning; the ability to think outside conventional frameworks and to analyse across disciplines; maintenance of the essential tension of controversy; an interactive collaborative construction of meaning; and fallibilism (as with Ellsworth’s (1989) inability to know fully). Darder supports the idea the transformative development is possible by suggesting that in fostering a cultural critical pedagogy “Students can learn to make problematic views of life; search for different ways to think about themselves; challenge their self-imposed as well as institutionally define limitations; affirm their cultural and individual

strengths; and embrace possibilities for a better world” (1997:342). Transformative learning acknowledges the experience of leaders in the workplace as an integral element in the learning process. It enables leaders to work comfortably with uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity (Radford 2008) whilst allowing them to be engaged in creativity and innovation. Transformative learning also recognises that for current and future leaders the development and sustaining of relationships is imperative and therefore needs to be an integral part of the learning experience. Using the complex working environment in which leaders find themselves is critical for those who design leadership learning programmes.

In exploring what it means to be a twenty first century leader there is a need to consider the learning process alongside the content. The learning process needs to embrace concepts that ensure the process is co-constructed, uses meta-cognition practices, criticality, embrace powerful questions, probes and offers reflective feedback. Thus trust and criticality and are essential to underpin the learning process.

Trust needs to be established quickly through skilful facilitation enabling the co-construction of knowledge through groups, the development of a community of learners and peer support, and collaboration. Carl Rogers (1983) the humanist psychologist, considered that “facilitation of learning” with a focus on interpersonal relationships between the learner and the facilitator based on trust, “empathic

understanding” and genuineness on the part of the facilitator, is the key to effective learning. By establishing trust, skilful facilitators create an environment where criticality can take place, conditions that allow participants to question and reflect more deeply and facilitators to enquire and probe responses at a level that enables much deeper learning.

Critical perspectives, although often resisted, are essential for effective transforming leaders and their development (Scott 1997, Darder 1997). Moreover for the integrity of such professional development they need to be based on values, beliefs, language and actions that are inclusive. Dialogue, questioning and critical analysis inevitably raises the issue of power and some (those wedded to transactional approaches) might argue that there is no place for criticality in school leadership. Their view might be that the role of schools in western society has been and is to enculturate and socialise youth. Certainly the notion of leaders critically questioning in some cultures would not be encouraged. In some countries those elected to power in government feel that they know best and school leaders need to do what they are paid to do unquestioningly.

Writers such as Shor and Freire (1987) and to an extent Cherryholmes (1988) who advocate more radical leadership with social justice at its core, go onto acknowledge the limits of education on the political transformation of society. They also recognise that in the classroom the transformative focus may be more in relation

to developing a critical lens and practicing application to hypothetical situations rather than actual life situations. This is particularly important today with the ease of electronic access to exponentially increasing information. However, school leaders have opportunities to put ideas into practice albeit with external political, social and economic constraints. Critical thinking is essential to becoming a leader alongside being a reflective practitioner, particularly one with a passion for social justice and equity however unpopular this stance may be with others. It is argued that leaders need to want and be able to question previously uncritically accepted assumptions, beliefs, values and perspectives in order to make them more open, accessible and validated. Freire's (1998) concept of "conscientization", Mezirow's (1978) theory of perspective transformation and Habermas' (1996) "emancipatory action" domain of learning resonate with Cranton's (1997) view that "Perspectives transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about the world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings" (1997:22).

Our current understanding of transformative learning is helpful when considering leadership approaches such as adaptive leadership and resourceful lead-

ership, which suggests that as there is no blue print for the situations we face. We need to ensure leaders have the skills and demonstrate appropriate behaviours to deal with whatever they face. Taking leaders through concepts and processes such as Grint's (2008) 'wicked issues and tame solutions' are important as they frame their responses appropriately to those challenges.

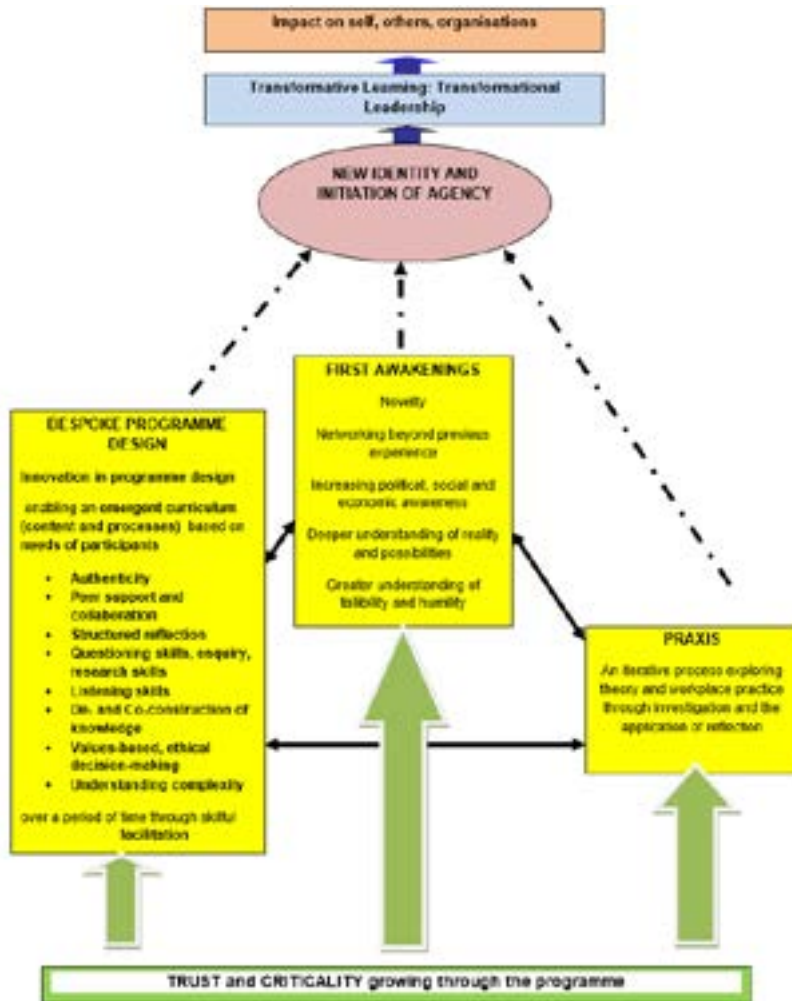
A Transformational Leadership Development Framework.

Precey and Jackson (2008) have developed a framework for transformative learning (see Figure 1) which draws particularly on the work of Greenan and Dieckmann (2004). It also builds on the extensive knowledge of andragogy and leadership theory some of which has been outlined. It emphasises the need to live out and model the principles that it professes through its learning processes. Moreover, it provides a framework for the whole process of transformational learning from planning to preparation through facilitation to evaluation and back to planning. It is highly relevant to how we can effectively develop our leaders in schools and elsewhere. The framework is founded on a belief that how we learn seriously affects how we behave.

Transformational leadership development seems to us to rest on 4 core interrelated elements:

- A **unique structure** that is designed for each particular group of indi-

Figure 1. Conditions and Processes for Transformational Learning



Source: own research

viduals.

- **Praxis**
- **Awakenings**
- **Foundational Conditions** –these include **Trust** and **Criticality** developed throughout the programme in order to foster **Meta-cognition**, **Self-reflection**, **Curiosity**, and the growth of a **Collaborative Community of Practitioners**

1) **A unique structure** that is designed for each particular group of in-

dividuals’ needs. Such an emergent curriculum has to be based on the needs of participants now and in the future. For transformative learning to take place such bespoke programmes (rather than standardised “one size fits all”) need to be founded on the principles and processes indicated in the Framework.

Examples of learning strategies that help this with highly skilled facilitation are:

Table 1. Examples of learning strategies that help this with highly skilled facilitation

Elements of Transformative Learning	Examples of Learning Strategies
Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of real situations e.g. • case studies • scenarios • participants keeping a reflective leadership learning journal (RLLJ) • focussed study visits (intra- and inter-school including international) • internships
Peer support and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action learning sets • Appreciative enquiry • Reciprocal focused study visits • Learning walks
Structured reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study groups • RLLJ
Questioning, enquiry and research skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action learning sets • Appreciative enquiry • Individual and group Leadership Challenges that enable the exploration and improvement of practice in participants' work settings • Photomontage
Listening skills	<p>Through agreed, clear protocols in group work such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action learning sets • Action Learning Sets • Graphicing and Gallerying
Deconstruction and co-construction of knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study groups • Action Learning Sets • Critical Incident Analysis • Photomontage • Gallerying
Understanding of values-based leadership and ethical-decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching about ethics • Use of scenarios • Action learning sets • Critical Incident Analysis
Understanding of complexity in leadership	<p>Teaching about complexity theory and its application in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenarios • Case studies • Action learning sets • Decision-making critical incidents

Source: own research

2) **Praxis** - This is “*the intentional capacity to identify and implement alternatives*” (Miron and Lauria 1998). It is an iterative process exploring theory and work place practice through investigation and the application of reflection. Praxis enables grounded theory to become a reality, for all those involved enabling them to co-construct on-going learning experiences leading to:

3) **Awakenings** - This is the transformation of learners through the concepts explored, and the personal and institutional knowledge constructed leading to the reconstruction (or even confirmation) of identity (the way the leader sees her/himself in the role). They are light bulb, sense-making moments when the world is seen more clearly, afresh and perhaps, differently through the concepts explored, and the personal and institutional knowledge gained on the programme. Within education, this means a clear focus on student learning processes and outcomes. Such awakenings include:

- novelty - with new ideas/experiences for example through group development
- networking beyond previous experience- within the group, on study visits
- increasing political, social, economic and psychological awareness – study visits outside of participants’ own context and culture especially international ones
- broader and deeper understanding of reality and possibilities – though the group, study visits and internships
- greater understanding of fallibility and humility (in some cases) - for exam-

ple through action learning sets

The framework has been used to plan, facilitate and evaluate a number of leadership development programmes across the world and much has been learnt from these experiences. The formative and summative data gathered for these programmes from interviews, questionnaires, presentations by participants and surveys both during and after the events over a number of years provide convincing evidence of the power of the framework used on the programme both in terms of facilitation of leadership development programmes and impact on the quality of teaching and learning. This framework has also been tested and refined in Europe, China, England, Rwanda and Pakistan on other programmes (Precey & Jackson, 2009). The results indicate that using the Framework to plan, prepare, facilitate and evaluate programmes that wish for transformational leadership learning is very helpful. A clear yet flexible structure ensures that the main ingredients for successful learning are in place and not overlooked. It is also vital for such leadership development programmes to model inclusive practices if they are to have integrity and thus credibility and stand most chance of being effective. This requires skilled facilitation that has an awareness of the elements of the framework combined with an ability to work with them and develop a climate of trust and criticality. Evidence suggests that programmes that use the framework, based on what we currently know about adult learning, do indeed lead to signifi-

cant shifts in leaders' thinking and, more important, their professional behaviours.

So what?

In summary, the education of our young people is essential to their and all our futures. Leadership is a critical factor in terms of making this education successful. It is imperative that resources are invested in developing these leaders in our schools. To not do so is foolhardy and irresponsible. Since the future is so complex and dynamic we need to train leaders to operate effectively in this climate. To do otherwise would be costly and cruel. The framework for transformative learning for transformational leadership offered in this article is a tried and tested way forward that is most likely to develop leaders fit for this essential purpose.

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