

Work, learning and professional practice: the role of leadership apprenticeships

People Involved

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Leadership development;
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Description

How leaders learn to become leaders has been an area of much research. When asked what were the key experiences in learning leadership, leaders often speak of the importance of 'on-the-job' experiences, yet these experiences are rarely fully detailed in the research literature. The importance of 'apprenticeships' and being attached to institutions for periods of time for learning and development purposes is well known and occurs in a number of occupations from beginning teachers to trades people. This project plans to investigate the range of 'on-the-job' experiences with particular reference to what might be termed 'leadership apprenticeships'. Drawing upon a recently completed evaluation of an innovative fast track leadership development programme called 'Future Leaders', the role and value for learning and professional practice of a year's residency in a host school, working with and for an effective headteacher, will

be investigated.

Numerous research studies into leadership development and training in schools, including those conducted by the proposer, have pointed to the key role that the workplace plays for the professional development of teachers and other staff. The human resource development literature often makes a distinction between the 'workshop' and the 'workplace' stating that the latter is much more powerful than the former in terms of people's professional learning and practice. Yet it is the case that the power of workplace learning for school leaders has not been analysed or theorised in any detailed manner.

Workplace learning can take a variety of forms for leadership development and includes both formal and informal experiences. Headteachers, for example, when asked what has been the single most powerful learning opportunity in their development as school leaders, often make reference to the significance of working with headteachers, noting the power of both positive and negative role models. Yet there are so few examples where working with headteachers (in their own school or elsewhere) is seen as a deliberate training strategy. Whether such schemes are more common in non-

education sectors would be part of the proposed investigation. Are there interesting and innovative professional practices taking place in the business world that the public sector might learn from? The proposal also wishes to document and categorise the full range of on-the-job or workplace experiences currently being deployed in schools and local authorities, such as school visits (learning walks), shadowing of heads, attachments to senior leadership teams and job exchanges.

However, the main focus of this proposal is to focus on what I have termed 'leadership apprenticeships' (a term not recognised by Google!). Currently there are two leadership development schemes in England that might be said to meet such a definition. These are the Headteacher Trainee scheme and the Future Leaders initiative, both of which are part-run (and funded) by the National College for School Leadership. In both cases prospective heads and/or senior leaders are attached to a school placement for a considerable



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period of time, usually one academic year. At a time when there are questions being asked about where the next generation of school leaders will come from in the light of a large number of retirements expected in the next few years, such apprenticeship schemes, although very expensive, have considerable appeal to policy makers and government departments. Both of the above leadership trainee schemes have recently been evaluated with funding from NCSL. The evaluation of the trainee headship scheme was evaluated by a professorial research fellow from LCLL, whilst the fast track leadership development programme, Future Leaders, was undertaken by a team from the Institute of Education, led by myself. The latter programme, which involved identifying a small number of qualified teachers with leadership potential, was based around a 12 month period of residency in an urban complex school that was deemed to be well led and managed. This evaluation is due to be completed by the end of September 2007. The residential period, although supported by an on-going training programme and external coaching, is crucial to the development of the individual Future Leader. It is during the residential that the FL (the apprentice) is attached to the SLT and provided with a range of learning experiences as a senior school leader. The person is also mentored within the school by the headteacher (a positive role model) and meetings are held regularly throughout the year. The initial findings of the FL evaluation are very positive and all but one of the 20 individuals (4 of whom are undertaking Masters degrees at IOE) have secured permanent posts, most of them at deputy head level.

There is an expectation that they will secure headships in challenging urban schools within four years.

However, the potential of the residency period for leadership learning has not been theorised in any significant way. It is therefore the intention of this proposal to consider the value of leadership apprenticeships and to analyse the complex relationship between the workplace, learning and professional practice as senior school leaders. Re-establishing contact with the 20 FLs and their residency headteachers (or a sample of them) after a period of time (over 6 months after completion of the apprenticeship) would be possible and it would enable reflections on the process to be made. Interviews conducted with participants would hopefully provide insights into the process of leadership learning and the crucial role that the residency can play in the development of leaders.

Methodology

The proposed methodology is two-fold: a review of the literature on work-based learning for leaders (both within and outside the education sector) and in-depth interviews with a sample of 'Future Leaders' and their headteachers to investigate their perceptions of the relationship between work, learning and leadership practice with particular reference to their 12-month period of residency in schools (leadership apprenticeship).

Dimensions covered: The project will emphasise the workplace as a site for learning, the use of new technologies (as a means of sharing experiences with other apprentices), and collaboration and partnerships.

The project covers aspects of formal and informal learning and the types of skills and knowledge developed. It will also address how CPD might be different from WbL.

Outcomes and deliverables

The main outcome would be a project report for the WLE Centre which will then be used as the basis for a number of journal articles and practitioner papers. It will also be used to inform our CPD provision for leaders and to ensure we are in a good position to support leadership apprentices.



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