Distributed Leadership to Enhance Participation in School Processes and Practices to Improve Learning: A Northern Irish Faith Secondary School Case-Study

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Distributed Leadership to Enhance Participation in School Processes and Practices to Improve Learning: A Northern Irish Faith Secondary School Case-Study

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Abstract: School leadership has two moral imperatives in Northern Irish schools. Firstly, there is the imperative to provide all students with equal access to a relevant pedagogical experience to achieve identified learning outcomes that link to full economic, cultural and political engagement in society. Secondly, there is an imperative to build community in the school and locale. A three-stage action-research project focusing on participation in school processes and practices was carried out in a Northern Irish Secondary School to address these imperatives. This paper reports stage one of the action research carried out by a School Leadership and Management Team (SLMT), in partnership with an Higher Education Institution research team. Evidence revealed students were positive about their overall school experiences whilst teachers were committed to a values-based approach to curriculum delivery. However, students would like to participate more and map their learning to their strategies to achieve their aspirations for future life styles in terms of economic, cultural and political societal engagement. The research found characteristics of good participation were relationships built on trust, respect, optimism, and the recognition of diversity.

Keywords: Distributed leadership, classroom practice, building school community, values education

Introduction

Student participation in school processes and practices has come under the microscope in Northern Ireland. School Councils are increasingly a feature of school life all across Northern Ireland and play a key role in many young people's early experience of democratic participation. Enhancing student voice can provide positive educational and social outcomes to pupils, schools and communities (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007). In June 2012, the Education Committee at Stormont commissioned a report into the effectiveness of student voice through well-resourced School Councils in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Education Committee, 2012, p.1): "the Committee was delighted to see that there are some great examples of School Councils in existence and pupils were very enthusiastic about being part of them and making a difference."

However, there is a danger that school councils can become tokenistic, which undermines how children perceive their rights and responsibilities and has implications for how students perceive their future economic, cultural and political participation in society as adults. Alderson (2000) reported that, during 1997-8, a survey in schools in Great Britain and Northern Ireland investigated students' views about children's civil rights. The civil rights take a humanistic approach which enabled students' thinking to focus on secular understandings of rights, though their thinking may or may not be influenced by their own non-secular values, doctrines and traditions. The booklet questionnaire presented component parts of participation or civil rights in the United Nations (UN) 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. The component parts were constructed as practical questions about everyday experiences in schools. Six groups of questions about school councils, included two about having a council or not, and about having a council which the pupils see as effective.

Students who thought their council was effective, generally had positive views about their school's social and academic activities, whereas the children who said their council was ineffective generally had more negative attitudes. Some schools found that creating an effective school council can considerably improve standards of behaviour, but processes and practices of participation have to occur on a deep level, and shape values if they are to involve further changes in systems, relationships and behaviour in the school. Simply introducing a token council can increase students' scepticism about, or lack of trust in, the purposes of the council and its benefits for them. Therefore there are potential benefits and challenges as School Councils increasingly become a feature of school life all across Northern Ireland. This is particularly so because they play a key role in many young people's early experience of democratic participation, and power sharing (political

engagement). However, participation in school processes and practices may need to take place beyond a school council remit that is more directly inclusionary of all, for all.

A professional challenge that this Northern Ireland case begins to address is how participation is understood in a secondary school that goes wider and deeper than a School Council. The focus is on three key objectives. The first objective is to examine the kinds of processes and practices in the school that influence participation. The second is to investigate how students and teachers engage with these different participatory processes and practices. The final objective is to reveal the kinds of institutional characteristics regarding participation that stake holders place value in. As detailed in the methodology paper of this journal, the action research is in three stages. The first stage is to gain an understanding of participation in the school. The second stage is to report the findings to the Leadership/Management Team and document the change strategies. The third stage is to reveal the impact of the intervention strategies by repeating the first stage of the action research and comparing the new findings to the findings before the change strategies. Part of the third stage is to produce a School and College Evaluation and Improvement Tool Box for end users and beneficiaries to underpin further research. Here end users are those that use the tools such as teachers and/or children. Beneficiaries are those that benefit from the research such as children, parents and the tax payer. Tax payers may benefit from the capacity building in the system that may lead to:

- Cultural recognition of diversity necessary for coherent societies;
- a more resilient and flexible labour market that may underpin economic growth;
- more politically engaged communities necessary for a democratic society.

This paper focuses on the first stage of the action research by addressing the aims and asks three key questions. First, what cultures practices and leadership systems influence the participation of different stake-holders in decision making in the institution? Second, how do teachers and students engage with different participatory processes? Third, in which institutional characteristics do institutional stake-holders place value?

Cultures practices and leadership systems that influence institutional participation

The Northern Ireland (NI) edition of the National Standards for Head-teachers emphasise that: "Effective relationships and communication are important in headship as headteachers work with and through others. Effective headteachers manage themselves and their relationships well" (2005, p. 6).

For leaders and managers to achieve such an approach and engagement with their community there is a need to move from a practice regulated by performance management processes and practices to one recognising the value of collaboration. However, balancing the notion of competition and collaboration, or pressure and support requires a shift in mindset and a movement in an challenging direction, and this takes courage (Hargreaves & Dennis, 2012). Pay scales are tied to individual performance, so incentivising collaboration presents a challenge.

Interrogating the literature reveals that distributed leadership 'means different things to different people' (Harris et al., 2007, p. 338). Therefore, leadership is not an automatic feature vested in a principal's position, or that can be taught. Rather leadership happens between leaders and followers, fluctuates over time and is recognised by particular characteristics. Leadership practice is an organisational phenomenon that is enacted differently in each situation by both formal and frequently informal leaders interacting with and influencing an ever changing set of circumstances (Brooks et al., 2007; Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995; Spillane, 2006).

Gronn (2000) further contends that effective leadership is neither the consequence of individual agency (Bass, 1985) nor the result of a system's design and role structures (Jaques, 1989). Significantly in the light of the present study, the act of distributing leadership will empower followers through democratisation. Gronn (2002, p. 657) posits three constructs for effective distributed leadership:

1. *Spontaneous collaboration* involving pooling of expertise and alignment of purpose for the duration of the task
2. *Intuitive working relationships*, as collaborators rely more and more on each other as trust and accountability become the norm
3. *Institutionalised practice*, as effectively designed groups mature to become high performing teams.

Spontaneous collaboration can develop into intuitive working relationships over time as respect for self and other is built, and relationships mature built on trust. Sahlberg (2011) argues trust is a vital component of the success of the Finnish education system in terms of learning, achievement and equity and states: "Trust can only flourish in an environment that is built upon honesty, confidence, professionalism and good governance" (Sahlberg, 2011, p. 130).

The characteristics of trust and respect can become embedded in an inclusionary cultural of a school as participants in the school processes and practices align themselves with these characteristics within a context of diversity. Indeed, Woods and Gronn (2009) contend that the concept of distributed leadership needs to be examined from the perspective of organisations that set in train activities that are democratic and respectful of the

human status of individuals in their community. Distributed leadership is very different from the leadership example where one principal is a 'super head'. The concept of being 'super' is exclusionary because only a few from a community might be defined as 'super' which poses problems if the 'super head' acts as a leader of one and the community becomes a group of passive receivers of directives. When the super head is not present, the community will not have learned how to make ethical decisions for themselves, or in other words will not have learned how to participate in democratic processes and practices, which undermines the authenticity of these processes and practices. Further, Gunter et al. (2013) argue that the role of head teacher is too big for one person.

Another problem is that if the 'super head' leaves the school, there will be no one to take his or her place and the systems may become worse than before the 'super head' took up post. Synergies from previous teams may have been systematically dismantled to make room for the new hierarchy as the new 'super head' may block the potential for creative contributions or constructive critical debate by practicing strategies of coercion (Swail, 2012). Brighouse in Wilby (2007) states that successful initiatives were always dated to before he joined the organisation so that he could share the credit and build the confidence of the participants in themselves and their organisations to build capacity for high quality learning and learning outcomes. Arguably a nation state cannot rise above the quality of the teachers, and if the teachers learn to become passive receivers and transmitters of knowledge in the form of facts, this way of being and doing will be role modelled to the young people. Active participation in processes and practices is important for full economic, cultural and political societal participation. Nanda and Roche (2014) state that 75 million young people are unemployed around the world, yet 40% of employers cannot fill first level jobs. There is a gap in the skills set, and perhaps what is missing is the ability to collaborate, or participate and be enterprising in problem solving activities. Such approaches leading to innovation may use discovery methods that are fun and educative (Pring, 2007) and draw upon people's rights (Alderson, 2000). Such approaches may enable young people to find their element, or in other words, what they are particularly good at and what they enjoy doing that informs their future pathways into Further Education, Higher Education and employment (Robinson, 2009).

Distributed leadership therefore needs to include the students and how they lead their own learning to realise their dreams of buying a home, having a family, and building a working life (Horizon, 2020). Their education therefore needs to connect with their aspirations for future life styles in terms of cultural, economic and political engagement with civic society.

Teachers and students engage with different participatory processes

Clement and Vandenberghe (2010) argue convincingly that teachers should have opportunities to engage in significant school decision-making. The improvement in personal significance and satisfaction that emanates from such a process contributes to teachers' willingness to engage in personal development. They further contend that such participation in decision-making encourages teachers to collaborate. Lieberman (1994) supports this proposition arguing that a collaborative school culture with shared leadership and professional networking holds the best prospects for the development of teachers' knowledge, beliefs and subsequent values' systems. Lieberman posits that the modelling of good practice in terms of trust and openness are crucial to the development of collegiality. In the school setting such collaboration might involve inquiry into classroom processes hallmarked by critical analysis of evidence, theory, and reflection leading to reflexive improvement in learning and learning outcomes (Taysum, 2012). Glickman et al. (2001) contend that an 'improving school' (p. 49) has a focus on improving student outcomes over time and they place distributed leadership at the heart of such improvement.

Wildman et al. (1989) presents a case study to support this proposition. He claims that colleagues and context are important determinants of the process of building a community of practice in the socialisation tradition in a particular school. Further, the particular leadership style and the collegial relationships among the school's teaching and support staff have a significant influence on the socialisation that develops (Leithwood, 1992; Staessens, 1993; Vandenberghe, 1992).

However, the new curriculum in Northern Ireland presents challenges to many teachers in terms of collaborative team work and deep thinking because the curriculum focuses on learning facts, and inspection regimes focus on meeting the assessment imperatives. The focus becomes directed at examination outcomes. The emphasis on skill development requires a change in the traditional assessment techniques. New 'controlled assessment' strategies have been introduced. The development of thinking skills in the curricular experience has helped students throughout Northern Ireland deepen the understanding and application of their ideas and to monitor and evaluate progress. However, now McGuinness (2012, p. 211) asserts that: "assessments continue to test the students' ability only to recall information and handle data".

Many of the other skills that the world of work requires are not formally assessed, are not factored into teachers' performance management related to

pay and job security, and therefore are not high priority. Teachers are positioned to teach to the test, so that skill development is limited.

One of the greatest challenges for leadership through all of the innovations has been the implementation of the Entitlement Framework (EF), which became mandatory through the Education (NI) Order (2006). It places a requirement on schools to offer greater breadth and balance in their courses.

In setting policy, The Department for Education Northern Ireland (DENI, 2009) expressed a vision for education: "DENI exists to ensure that every learner fulfils her or his full potential at each stage of development."

Around the vision there are four strategic themes:
- valuing education;
- fulfilling potential;
- promoting equality and inclusion;
- resourcing education.

These themes are developed through 'Every School a Good School' (ESAGS) (2009, p. 13), their school improvement policy, which expresses the core characteristics of a successful school in terms of:
- child-centred provision;
- high quality teaching and learning;
- effective leadership;
- a school connected to its local community.

Among the themes adopted by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and used in ESAGS (2009, p. 17) are:
- effective leadership and an ethos of aspiration and high achievement;
- high quality teaching and learning,
- tackling the barriers to learning that many young people face;
- embedding a culture of self-evaluation and self-assessment, and of using performance and other information to effect improvement;
- increasing engagement between schools, parents and families, recognizing the powerful influence they and local communities exercise on educational outcomes.

Unless careful planning intervenes, knowledge transmission may unwittingly replicate inequities through passing on traditions that include dominant ways of thinking and doing. Such dominant ways may be associated with compliance to a 'hidden' curriculum (Delpit, 1988). Gatto (2005, p. 440) states: "Although teachers do care and do work very, very hard, the institution is psychopathic-it has no conscience. It rings a bell and the young man in the middle of writing a poem must close his notebook and move to a different cell where he must memorize that humans and monkeys derive from a common ancestor."

The current study examines the extent to which systems are concerned with student compliance, which is a form of coercion and leaves no space for students to connect their own values systems with the one they operate within while at school. Therefore there is little space for the students and teachers to build pedagogical relationships where they can learn what is important for the self and for each other, and why. Such open communication may be an ideal (Habermas, 1979), but it may afford a group, or a class to come together and agree on some first principles whilst celebrating diversity in a potentially multicultural, intergenerational context. Moving towards shared first principles is a move towards cultural alignment in an educational experience. The approach includes sharing learning intentions that the students can map to the steps they need to take to gain the life styles that they want. Such sharing moves the classroom climate from compliance to collaboration, whilst an absence of such sharing implies the opposite. However, the young people will need to engage economically with society as well as culturally and politically, and they need to think through what life styles they hope for, that include engagement with the labour market. Thus the young people can begin to think what qualifiers they need so that they can imagine alternative futures to those that they might have assumed to function within the current system. Therefore full participation in classroom processes and practices may be a more meaningful experience that gently prepares young people towards a realistic future, and full participation in cultural, economic and political systems of production and exchange.

Mapping learning to future economic engagement with a changing labour market and systems of production and exchange

The Northern Ireland Curriculum, cited in Smith and Montgomery (1994), emphasises 'employability' as a curricular strand, arguing that it helps pupils investigate how the skills developed across the curriculum will be useful to a range of careers. It states also that it is about creating an awareness of employment opportunities within various industries. The aim is to ensure that: "all young people develop the personal qualities, skills, knowledge and attitudes which will give them a strong foundation for lifelong learning and for working in a rapidly changing economic environment" (1994, p.1).

Little research has been carried out to support this claim that DENI (2009) would present as axiomatic. Opinium Research (2011) carried out an online survey of 2,016 UK adults aged 18 and older. Results have been weighted to nationally representative criteria. Significantly, the youngest 18-34 year olds in the survey were keenest on a more job-oriented curriculum. Only 39% wanted a purely academic approach to school life, compared to 51% of

adults and 67% of over 55's. Also interesting, in the light of the focus of the present study on the importance of values in the curriculum, the demand for formal teaching of the morals, attitudes and behaviour needed for a successful career at work came 12% ahead of the second most popular option. On the other hand, it is predicted that 47% of current jobs will be automated in ten years time (The Economist, 2015). Therefore the kinds of skills that employees demand now, may not be good for future labour markets and there is a need to identify what it is about human beings' skills that are of value. In other words, what is it about human beings that cannot be replaced by a machine, or that can be enhanced when working together in synergy with a machine? Perhaps it is creativity that enables people to collaborate and face societal challenges. Maybe collaboration will be important to face societal challenges if facilitated by learning how to recognise diverse rich cultural traditions, and the ways human beings care for others that they are not genetically related to, or legally responsible for in any way (Gunter, 2010; UN, 1948).

The rationale underpinning the development of education for employability is the change in work patterns and trends in employment (see above). The rapidity of technological development demanding increasing levels of skills and knowledge from employees has accelerated the shift in Northern Ireland from manufacturing industries to the service industry. The imperative for the typical worker during the industrial era was to learn a relatively stable set of skills and use these through their working life. In contrast, the knowledge-based worker of today is required to engage in lifelong learning to maintain an appropriate set of skills, and competences underpinned by a reasoned disposition. By reasoned disposition we mean that individuals have had the chance to get to know more about themselves, and to have critically rationalised their habits, and the first principles that underpin these (Kant, 1803). In other words they have critically examined and reflected on why they believe what they believe, what counts as evidence to inform these beliefs and how the presence of these understandings of the world shape what they do (Sockett, 2012). The presence of these thinking tools or a presence of epistemology as Sockett calls it, are arguably emancipatory, which means the tools can set them free from a passive learned helplessness (Taysum, 2012). These thinking tools are not merely skills, they provide students with a way of being in the world that may contribute to them finding their element (Robinson, 2009). Those who are unwilling or unable to increase their skills set through such learning are at risk of being chained to marginalisation. The shift that is required may be to capabilities rather than competences in classrooms, hallmarked by participation in Learning to Critically Analyse and Reflect for Emancipation (CARE) (Taysum, 2012).

Allied to this is the drive to create an entrepreneurial culture in Northern Ireland. In the local economy, according to Invest NI statistics (North Eastern Education & Library Board, 2005) published before the current recession, there were approximately 84,620 businesses within which 99% employed less than 50 people and 93% employed less than 10. The recession has resulted in a massive decrease in such business activity. In 2012, there were only 67,480 businesses active in Northern Ireland and in 2013, there were 66,685, a continuing decrease of around 1,2%. Therefore there is much potential for schools to engage with Small and Medium Enterprises to support young people in gaining the knowledge, skills, and experience they need to contribute to economic growth and regeneration local to their areas. Articulating how the learning intentions map to the students' hopes for their realistic future life styles is important in this endeavour. Knight and Yorke (2003, p.8) summarise the key elements of the relationship between good learning and employability:"We take as a premise that there is no necessary conflict between employability and traditional academic values....a concern for employability is not inimical to good learning, but is supportive of it. The student learning that makes for strong claims to employability, and comes from years, not semesters; through programmes, not modules; and in environments, not classes."

Full participation in classroom practices and processes over time is therefore important, and the qualifiers that students are aiming for need to be meaningful to them in terms of their imagined future life styles.

Learning Intentions mapping to imagined future life styles, and inclusive societies

The Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2007) has placed emphasis on the need for the articulation of learning intentions prior to learning activities. There is the stated intent that learning intentions should be negotiated and agreed with students. In the real classroom with pressure for results, there is little time for such organised shared planning for commitment to learning experiences.

The DENI (2007, pp. 8-9) state that: "Learning intentions need to be shared with pupils before they begin an activity or lesson. For best effect, you should follow these five steps when using learning intentions to introduce a new activity:
- Identify what pupils will be learning (We are learning to ...).
- Explain the reason for the learning (We are learning this because ...).
- Share (and sometimes negotiate) the learning and the reason with pupils.
- Present the information in language that they can understand.
- Revisit the learning intention throughout the activity or lesson."

Clarke (2001) supports this arguing that, without the (shared) learning intention, children are merely 'victims of the teacher's whim', or victims of a national curriculum based on performance management and payment by results with key performance indicators, that struggle to measure trust, respect, and the celebration of diversity for coherent communities (Ball, 2006). Further, the learning outcomes need to be culturally relevant to the students and be worthwhile in helping them move towards their own personal learning and career goals (Freire, 1972). Achieving cultural relevancy may mean a more participative approach to the formation and implementation of education policy (Bell & Stevenson, 2009).

Characteristics of participatory institutions that community members value

With regard to values based approach to learning, the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) Framework (1997, p. 28) states that it: "Does not set out an explicit set of values to underpin the curriculum. Rather, values are implied within the Educational (Cross-curricular) Themes and the Programmes of Study. It is proposed that the following non-statutory values which were consulted upon in the 2000 consultation and strongly endorsed, should underpin the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

- We value each individual's unique capacity for spiritual, moral, emotional, physical and intellectual growth.
- We value equality, justice and human rights within our society and our capacity as citizens to resolve conflict by democratic means.
- We value the environment as the basis of life and the need to sustain it for future generations.
- We value each individual's right to work and to earn a living in accordance with personal preferences and attributes."

Smith and Montgomery (1997, p. 1) highlighted that: "Teachers were generally supportive of the importance of a values dimension within the formal curriculum and constantly emphasised the importance of 'building into' what already exists in the curriculum."

Taysum (2013) argues that faith schools have a set of values that emerge from the traditions and beliefs of the faith that do not exclude those of different faiths. In her research Taysum reveals that the values connect with issues of equity. Purkey and Siegal (2003) argue that people have an intrinsic motivation, and are motivated to success when treated fairly and equitably. Further, motivation to success comes from within each person when they are treated respectfully and given responsibility; this intrinsic motivation may enable them to engage fully in accomplishing tasks. Tichy (1997) supports the views of Stoll and Fink (1996) who state successful leadership results

in having a clear set of values that inform decision making. They suggest there are four primary principles, respect, trust, optimism and intentionality which connects with the arguments presented by Gronn (2000). Novak (2002) adds a fifth principle, namely care. Lawrence (2006) contends that the intentional creation of an inviting and caring environment has the potential to generate higher achievement and attainment levels among students.

He further contends that where such a climate exists such that: 'interaction is positive the child achieves more and is better behaved' (Lawrence, 2006, p.67*)*.

Building communities characterised as caring

The important issue of schools engaging with local communities is high on the NI agenda. Such engagement not only aims to build social capital, but also raises the possibility of the school becoming a more vibrant and caring community. Desforges (2004, p.551) contends that: citizenship is conceptualized as a set of social processes in which individuals and social groups negotiate, claim and practice not only rights, responsibilities, and duties but also a sense of belonging which enables full participation within a multiplicity of 'communities'." Worral (2006) asserts that there is evidence of the importance of the family and the community to educational success. He posits that there is a high correlation between living in an effective community and high social capital leading to personal well-being, enhanced life chances and educational success. Curriculum reform focusing on community building in a post conflict society such as that in Northern Ireland is described by McGuinness et al (2013). He describes the moves by the Northern Ireland Curriculum Council towards cross-community understanding:"...to learn to respect and value themselves and others; to appreciate the interdependence of people within society; to know about and understand what is shared as well as what is different about their cultural traditions; and to appreciate how conflict may be handled in non-violent ways" (1990, p. 1).

Initially Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) was introduced to the statutory curriculum (Smith & Robinson, 1996). While there were many strategies to increase contact between children from different religious and cultural traditions through a range of activities, there was a feeling that such cross community contact was merely crude 'social engineering'.

McGuinness (2012, p. 226) reported that: "Over the past two decades there has been a drive towards ...a change of culture for post-primary schools away from competition and towards collaboration, (towards) the grouping of schools on a geographical basis.. Schools were required to form clusters and to devise plans to collaborate."

The process of collaboration and participation has been a challenging one for schools as all their efforts had been in the direction of competition with each other for the 'intake market', to improve the number and academic ability of their initial student intake so that their examination results would be better than their 'competitors', namely their neighbouring schools.

Methodology

The Methodology is explored in the research methodology paper in this journal which gives a full explanation of the development of the interview schedules and how these and the literature review informed the development of the questionnaire. This paper focuses on one Northern Irish faith school where the teachers' questionnaire was distributed to twenty teachers and the complementary students' questionnaire was distributed to sixty students. The feedback from the teachers was good as eighteen responded, while only thirty-six of the students responded.

Both groups were provided with the opportunity to make free responses on a series of issues and these responses were illuminating.

The issues directly investigated were to what extent:
- decision-making was shared with teachers and students;
- learning intentions were shared between teachers and students that mapped to cultural, economic, and political engagement in classroom and school processes and practices and as steps towards imagined future civic engagement;
- a values based approach to education was perceived and achieved;
- the concept of employability and meeting young peoples' desired life styles in the curriculum was perceived;
- the idea of 'community' in school and beyond school as an adult was perceived and achieved.
- students and teachers valued their experience.

The findings from the pilot study are tentative, and a fuller study would enable the concepts to be proved.

Findings

Culture practices and leadership systems that influence participation

Findings are presented from the questionnaires. Due to issues of length and to comply with the journal requirements of length of papers, we are presenting the quantitative data as summary statements rather than as tables. We present the responses to the four open ended questions as quotes.

Most teachers were enthusiastic about participating in school processes and practices and being consulted. A quote that represents these teachers' position is:

> ...to be more involved – to be consulted about decisions that affect me and my department

Staff felt that communication was important. Two indicative example responses are:

> ...when submitting proposals to be discussed at senior management meetings, to be consulted about the outcome.

> ...decisions made at senior management meetings to be forwarded to the staff when they are made.

Initial questions to teachers were concerned with the extent to which they were involved in decision-making in the school. Outcomes were strongly indicative of a strong bias towards the distribution of decision-making.

With regard to question 1 teachers answered that they participate in decision making about things that happen in school as follows: 10 stated Almost Always, 4 stated Often, 3 stated Sometimes and 1 stated Rarely.

With regard to question 2; teachers answered that they knew the roles and responsibilities available to them in decision making in school as follows: 12 stated Almost Always, 4 stated Often, 1 stated Sometimes and 1 stated Rarely.

With regard to question 3; teachers answered that the leadership team encouraged them to be involved in decision making in school as follows: 11 stated Almost Always, 3 stated Often, 2 stated Sometimes and 2 stated Rarely.

With regard to question 4; teachers answered that they participate in decision-making about students' learning as follows: 11 stated Almost Always, 6 stated Often, 1 stated Sometimes and 0 stated Rarely.

The findings reveal that teachers participate in decision making in school with the Senior Leadership/Management Team and in students' learning. This corresponds with the kind of participation identified in the construct of distributed leadership presented in the literature review (Woods & Gronn, 2009).

Initial questions to students concerned with the extent to which they were involved in decision making in school demonstrated different outcomes to that of the teachers.

With regard to question 1; students answered that they participate in decision making about things in school as follows: 1 stated Almost Always, 5 stated Often, 12 stated Sometimes and 18 stated Rarely.

With regard to question 2 students answered that they know the roles and responsibilities available to them to be involved in decision making as follows: 4 stated Almost Always, 15 stated Often, 12 stated Sometimes and 5 stated Rarely.

The findings reveal that the distributed leadership found in the teachers' collaborative approach was not echoed in the students' decision-making and relationship to knowing their roles and responsibilities.

Thus, there are barriers within the school processes and practices that enable students to participate in leading their own learning. Students' chances to make decisions to realise their dreams for their future lifestyles in terms of cultural, economic and political engagement within the classroom are limited. Further research is required to find out if this lack of collaborative shared participation impacts upon the students' learning identities, and their learning outcomes.

Teachers and students engage with different participatory processes

The second set of questions to teachers were concerned with the extent to which they shared learning intentions with students to empower students to manage their priorities.

With regard to question 5 teachers answered that they have opportunities to develop their students' management of priorities for learning as follows: 5 stated Almost Always, 11 stated Often, 2 stated Sometimes and 0 stated Rarely.

With regard to question 6; teachers answered that they have opportunities to discuss with students how their learning connects with their further and higher education as follows: 6 stated Almost Always, 7 stated Often, 3 stated Sometimes and 2 stated Rarely.

The evidence reveals that there are differences between teachers within the same school and indicates a lack of a systematic approach to providing opportunities to share intentions in the learning with students that might map to students finding their element (Robinson, 2009).

Learning and developing understandings of economic participation

The students were asked to what extent they understood how the learning mapped to their hopes for the kind of job they wanted when they left school. Just over half, 60%, felt that they were supported by being given opportunities to discuss matters relating to future employment, and that they were motivated to succeed in school.

Teachers were asked to what extent the learning opportunities provided to students connected with the students' prior knowledge and they responded as follows: 9 stated Almost Always, 5 stated Often, 4 stated Sometimes and 0 stated Rarely.

Teachers were also asked if they have opportunities to discuss with the students how their learning connects with the kind of job they would like. The teachers responded as follows; 9 stated Almost always, 5 stated Often, 4 stated Sometimes and 0 stated Rarely.

Several teachers commented when addressing the open-ended questions of the questionnaire, that their greatest personal motivation came from seeing 'Pupil Success'. Others provided similar comments asserting that personal satisfaction came from:

- Playing a role in allowing pupils to reach their potential in education.
- Making a contribution to the lives of young people I teach and work with.

The evidence reveals that student understanding arises from the active construction of meanings. Such construction requires high quality classroom instruction together with the creation of learning environments that requires incremental self-theories and a commitment to organised planning for learning, and self-motivation. The teachers may be moving towards having a presence of critical analysis, reflection and a range of social practices that enables them to identify what counts as evidence when they develop understandings of the world and others, and their relationship with the world and others, which enables them to share these ways of thinking and doing with the students (Sockett, 2012; Taysum, 2012). Thinking about students' employability is fostered by effective teaching approaches founded on a values approach. When teachers engage students in a values' based school climate using an appropriately constructed curriculum, they intuitively improve the potential for student employability. This connects with Gronn (2000) argument about moving towards mature relationships by building intuitive relationships characterised by trust. The findings connect with Knight and Yorke (2003) summaries of the key elements of the relationship between good learning and employability that is built over years and developed in environments of participation that foster strong relationships through good communication

Characteristics of participatory institution that community members value

There were particular characteristics that community members valued, the first of which was respect.

Students were asked if they respected their teachers, they learn better and they responded as follows: 18 Almost Always, 13 Often, 4 Sometimes and 1 Rarely.

The students were also asked if they trust their teacher they learn better and responded as follows: 12 Almost Always, 13 Often, 8 Sometimes, 3 Rarely.

Questionnaire Data from teachers indicated that they too were clearly committed to the concept of values-based learning with almost all of the teacher respondents supporting the need for a) two-way trust and respect in the classroom, and b) believing strongly that a commitment to such an approach would facilitate learning. When asked if the learning is better in the classroom if conflicts are resolved peacefully teachers responded as follows: 12 Almost Always, 4 Often, 0 Sometimes and 0 Rarely.

In discussion of the success of the Finnish education system in terms of learning, achievement and equity Sahlberg (2011, p. 130) reasons that: "Trust can only flourish in an environment that is built upon honesty, confidence, professionalism and good governance". He goes on to explain that placing such trust in schools and teachers is a consequence of a well-functioning civil society and high social capital. The present study looks at society in terms of the school and its community. Sahlberg emphasises the significance of a values-based education system citing 'honesty and trust' as the 'basic building blocks' of Finnish society (ibid.). In the present study, the construct of fairness.

When teachers were asked if the learning is better if everyone is treated fairly, they responded as follows: 14 Almost Always, 3 Often, 1 Sometimes, 0 Rarely.

The outcomes indicated a strong values-based ethos in the school with a focus on trust, respect, and operating fairly (Sahlberg, 2012; Gronn, 2000; Taysum, 2012, Taysum, 2019).

Building Community

In such a climate, schools, governors, staff, and students need to raise their eyes to have a vision of a local community of schools working collaboratively for the greater good of the area. Yet when teachers were asked if they get involved with their community outside school they responded as follows: 4 Almost Always, 5 Often, 6 Sometimes and 3 Rarely.

When students were asked if their learning opportunities help them with groups they are part of outside of school they responded as follows: 5 stated Almost Always, 9 stated Often, 9 stated Sometimes, and 13 stated Rarely. This is an outcome that is challenging since an imperative of Northern Ireland Education Committee (2012) is to build community in the locale.

A similar result emerged when students were asked if their learning will help them get involved with the community in the future and they responded as follows: 5 Almost Always, 8 Often, 9 Sometimes, and 14 Rarely. The findings reveal what might be construed as a minimalist view of the significance of the community outside the school when there was such a positive, inviting ethos in the school community itself.

The students were asked if they talked with their teachers about how their religion or faith or no faith helps them with their learning in their faith based school, and they responded as follows: 4 Almost Always, 7 Often, 8 Sometimes, 17 Rarely. A reason for this disconnect between the students' learning and their faith or no faith may be that in school there is an implicit values-based approach, but there is no government education policy that requires explicit articulation of how faith and reason connect in a diverse classroom with different world views (Pring, 2018, 2019, Taysum, 2019, Taysum, 2020). Further research is recommended into this.

Most of teachers, when asked if their faith connected closely with their reason for teaching, stated it did.

The evidence reveals that a culture of performativity and a school system built on market forces is presenting a barrier to connecting faith and no faith and reason in the classroom, and to having time to engage with the community. This presents a barrier to achieving the Northern Irish imperative to build community in the school and locale. The findings agree with Hargreaves and Dennis (2012), Ball (2006) and McGuinness (2012) who present arguments regarding the challenge of collaboration within a system that rewards winners in a culture of competition. Such a culture separates the winners from the losers and ensures the gap between the winning schools and losing schools widens as schools compete for the most able students who are pooled into the best school (Taysum, 2012)

How leaders negotiate policy, or even advocate for policy and an environment that supports teachers in endeavours to act as role models to students by participating in community needs to be further explored in the full research project.

What students and teachers value about the school experience

Students were extremely positive about the school experience, citing 'friends' and personal significance, 'I feel important', as key aspects. One articulately expressed her stance regarding what is important to her as:

> What I learn, who teaches me, their attitude and the fairness of my school community.

> One warned of the tedium of note-copying when she emphasized what she valued.

> Enjoying school instead of writing of work (sic).

Encouragingly the teachers' responses were completely 'student-centred'. Evidence strongly supporting this emphasis include a focus on:

> Welfare and progression of my pupils' and 'Pupil success.

They saw their position as:

> Playing a role in allowing pupils to reach their potential in educa-
> tion... Making a contribution to the lives of young people I teach and
> work with... Ensuring that the pupil is the focus.

Advocacy by institutional leaders

What will be explored in the second stage of the research is how educa-
tional leaders advocate for participation in school processes and practices.
West-Burnham (2012) highlighted the issues for school leadership around
several propositions regarding future understanding of leadership in edu-
cation. These issues focus on collaboration, values and community-building
that resonate with this study:

(i) Replacing autonomy with collaboration requires a fundamental change
in the psychological contract we work through.

(ii) Securing equal access to effective learning and the curriculum is pri-
marily a moral activity. Trust may be the single most powerful factor in
securing sustainable improvement.

Thus the educational leaders involved in this study, and the reader are
invited to examine the extent to which the leadership attempts to distribute
several of its functions to teachers and to staff and why. Such an approach
requires courage and confidence, particularly if time is going to be invested
in linking with the external community.

Conclusions

Cultures, practices and leadership systems that influence the participation of different stake-holders in decision making in the institution

The study examined the perceptions of students and teachers regarding
their participation in school processes and practices and characteristics of
participation that they value. Outcomes indicated that cultures, practices and
leadership systems enabled teachers to participate in processes and practic-
es through engagement with the Senior Leadership/Management Team and
having autonomy in decision making regarding their own classrooms, and
the learning. However, students wanted to participate more. There was a
strong perception of a moral climate in the school and characteristics of
trust and mutual respect were evident in the responses from students and
teachers alike.

While there was a strong indication of a positive attitude with regard
to the processes occurring in the classrooms, a further longitudinal study

would be required to determine whether there was actual improvement in academic outcomes over a period of time.

The challenge for the government and the education authorities in Northern Ireland is to raise awareness among school leadership of the primacy of systems that support participation, and to support them away from the 'performativity' agenda that many find as their default position (McGuinness, 2012).

Teachers' and students' engagement with different participatory processes

The findings indicated patterns of engagement in terms of shared learning intentions. While such engagement has been encouraged by the Department of Education, and has been embraced by the teachers in the study, a modest proportion of the students felt included in the process. This is connected with the emphasis on values-based pedagogical relationships characterised by trust, respect for the self and other, an ethic of care, ideal speech, friendliness, and peaceful resolution of conflict which were given affirmation by teachers and students (Taysum, 2012a; Gronn, 2000).

The study indicated a strong positive engagement with processes connected to the employability agenda. However, how leaders/managers advocate for how students further map their learning to their aspirational future lifestyles will be explored in the second and third stages of the action research.

The study indicated ambiguous attitudes to engagement with community. Such ambiguity may be related to the perception of students and teachers of the meaning of the term 'community'. The meaning of the internal school 'learning community' would carry no such ambiguity and evidence from the study suggested a strong and positive attitude to this concept. The external 'community' is a term replete with meanings. It can mean the locale of the school; it can refer to the Area Learning Community (McGuinness, 2012, p. 226) which is a mandated group of local schools; it can even refer to the 'other community' in the Northern Irish context of Catholic and State (predominantly Protestant) schools. It is argued that a further study be carried out to investigate this ambiguity.

Institutional characteristics do institutional stake-holders place value

The characteristics that the students and teachers valued were those of trust, respect for the self and other, an ethic of care, ideal speech, friendliness, and peaceful resolution of conflict which were given affirmation by teachers and students (Taysum, 2012a; Gronn, 2000).

The findings have been fed back to the school Senior Leadership Team (SMT), in the second phase of the research, and a return visit to the school

arranged to determine what meaning the SLT have made of the impact of the findings, and whether they have determined to weave any evidence-informed strategies into their School Development Plan (SDP). The third phase of the research will be to re-administer the data collection tools to enable the SLT to understand the impact of their plans and strategies. Thus the emerging themes presented in this study are significant in terms of the emerging imperatives for strategic planning for educational leaders and managers to develop, and to embed in the school's own practice.

When the several pilot case-studies have been completed the research design will be revised and, it is hoped, several extended studies will be funded to include parents, governing bodies, school boards and a range of schools. The research project will offer an open invitation for school leadership/Management/Administration groups who use these tools to publish their change strategies on the website. This has the potential to build system capacity. There are also possibilities for partners in the research to act as brokers of knowledge and to provide consultancy support. The reader is invited to contact the author to find out more about this research and to receive details of the findings of future research.

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