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## Abstract

Teacher leadership is a term which is increasingly being used in Scottish educational policy and the Scottish College for Educational Leadership has been tasked with supporting the development of teacher leadership across the system. The aim of this engagement was to explore the nature of teacher leadership, and the requirements for its development, with a widespread of teachers, and other stakeholders, in Scotland. A mixed approach was taken to this engagement with the inclusion of practitioner and student workshops, semi-structured interviews and an online workshop. Each of the engagement approaches were based on Theory U (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013) and the outcomes were synthesised and analysed. Eight themes arose from the engagement as consistent messages from across the system. The Scottish College for Educational Leadership is now undertaking activities informed by these themes to support teacher leadership.

## Introduction

At the Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL), we believe that all teachers can be leaders. But, what is effective teacher leadership and how can teachers be supported to develop as leaders? This was the fundamental question underpinning SCEL's teacher leadership engagement.

Much has been written about teacher leadership in educational policy and literature. The General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTCS) Standard for Full Registration states that,

*"All teachers should have opportunities to be leaders. They lead learning for, and with, all learners with whom they engage. They also work with and support the development of colleagues and other partners."*

GTCS (2012)

The GTCS Standard for Career-Long Professional Learning takes this further by stating,

*"[Teachers] will create knowledge to enhance, progress and lead the learning experiences of all their learners and work collaboratively with colleagues. The teacher as an adaptive expert is open to change and engages with new and emerging ideas about teaching and learning within the ever-evolving curricular and pedagogical contexts in which teaching and learning takes place."*

GTCS (2012)

The role of teacher leadership featured in the recent OECD (2015) report on improving schools in Scotland, and is also mentioned in the Scottish Government's National Improvement Framework, which defines school leadership as follows,

*"The quality and impact of leadership within schools and at all levels – including members of staff."*  
Scottish Government (2016).

Alma Harris and Daniel Muijs discuss the nature and role of teacher leadership at length in their 2005 book, in which they define teacher leadership as follows,

*“Teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher leaders and learners, and influence others towards improved educational practice”*

Harris and Muijs (2005)

This definition overlaps significantly with those outlined in both the OECD report and the GTCS Standards. However, despite this apparent consensus around the nature and importance of teacher leadership in literature and policy, to what extent is this understanding shared by the wider profession?

The purpose of our engagement work was to take this concept of ‘teacher leadership’ to as wide a stakeholder group as possible across Scotland. We were aiming to develop a collective understanding of teacher leadership, for both the participants and SCEL, whilst also using the opportunity to identify what participants felt was needed to support the development of teacher leadership in their contexts and across Scotland. We also set out to use engagement approaches which would, in themselves, be innovative and of potential benefit to those involved.

## Engagement



Figure 1 Teacher Leadership Engagement Process. Informed by Scharmer & Kaufer (2013).

The aims for participants involved in our engagement processes were to:

- *develop their understanding of teacher leadership and their role as teacher leaders,*
- *co-construct approaches to supporting teacher leadership which could be applied within their community, and nationally through SCEL,*
- *experience an innovative participatory workshop approach which they could develop and use in their own practice.*

Our approach to this engagement was informed by Theory U (Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013) and the open online course U.Lab, which the authors describe as a way of “transforming business, society and self...by co-sensing and co-creating the emerging future” (edX, 2017). The ideas in Theory U were therefore used to design a participatory workshop which might prove innovative and useful to the participants as a process. The workshop structure is summarised in figure 1. This opportunity was offered openly to schools, local authorities and others across Scottish education in November 2015. We then delivered a series of twenty

seven workshops in a mix of twilight sessions, in-service days and collegiate time across Scotland between December 2015 and March 2016. The workshops were very often either cluster based, or across a local authority, with a mixture of both primary and secondary teachers in attendance, however some sessions were specific to a particular school or service.

A modified version of the workshop to be used with students was also developed in partnership with national children's charity Children in Scotland, which was delivered to a class at Sandbank Primary School, Argyll and Bute, and a class at Preston Lodge High School, East Lothian. The full outcomes from both the pupil and staff workshops are all available at [scelengage.com](http://scelengage.com).

In addition to the workshops, a semi-structured discussion approach was developed which mirrored the workshop session. Notes of nineteen of these discussions were recorded with a variety of teachers and other local authority staff, as well as officers in a national education body and a third sector organisation. The questions used in these discussions are included below.

- *What have been the barriers to developing effective Teacher Leadership in the past?*
- *What are your primary purposes of education?*
- *What does effective Teacher Leadership look like today? Where have you seen it? How does it contribute to the purposes of education?*
- *What could effective Teacher Leadership look like in the emerging future?*
- *What could your role be in helping developing effective Teacher Leadership?*
- *How could the various agencies and stakeholders in Scottish education help develop effective Teacher Leadership?*
- *How will we know if we have helped develop effective Teacher Leadership?*

These questions were also made available online for individuals and groups to respond to, with two responses. A more interactive online version of the workshop was also made openly available with fifty-nine responses. The vast majority of participants involved were classroom teachers. Teachers, and other stakeholders, who work in rural, urban and island contexts were involved across the engagement, with involvement of over one thousand participants.

## Teacher Leadership

In all aspects of the engagement teachers had the opportunity to explore, share and discuss their pre-existing understandings of the term 'teacher leadership'. In the majority of the workshops they then compared their ideas with those of SCEL's from the Framework for Educational Leadership as follows.

*"Teacher leaders are passionate about learning and teaching. Through informed and innovative practice, close scrutiny of pupils' learning needs and high expectations they play a fundamental role in improving outcomes for children and young people. Teacher leaders are effective communicators who collaborate with colleagues, demonstrate integrity and have a positive impact on their school community. They model career-long professional learning.*

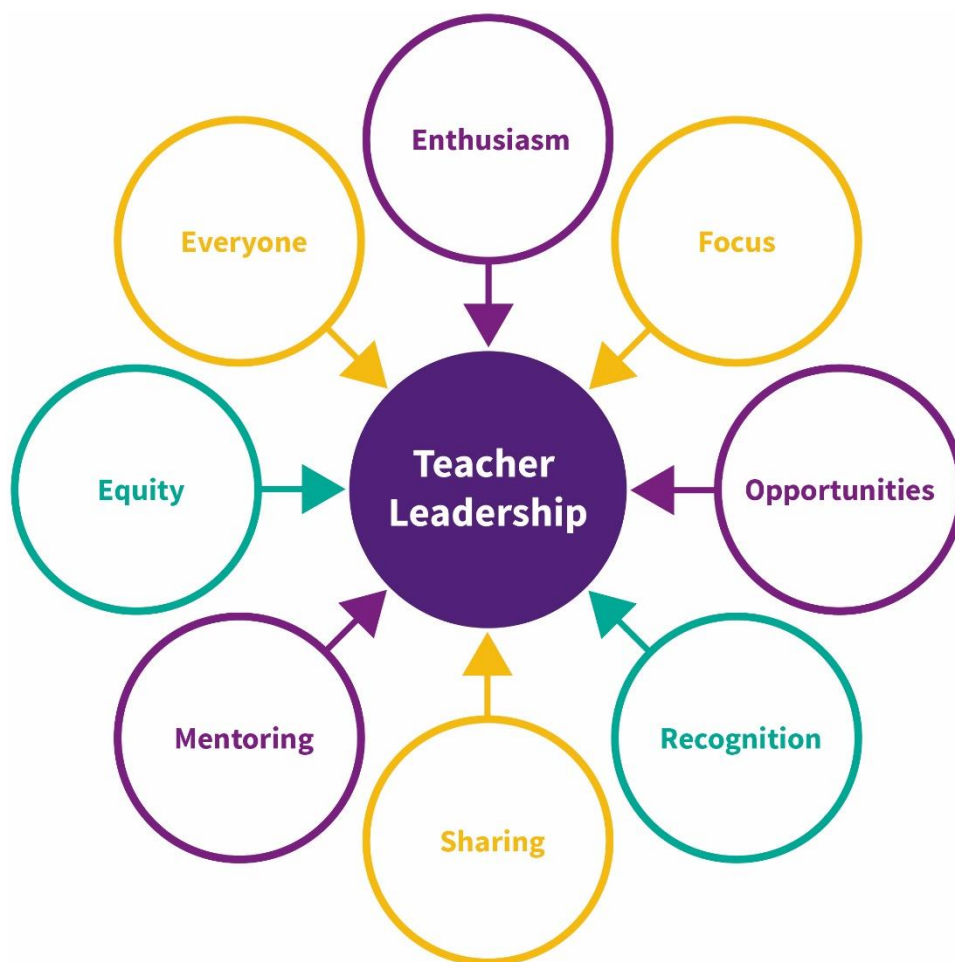
*Skills, qualities and professional actions demonstrated by teacher leaders can be identified under four main areas:*

- *Learning and teaching*
- *High expectations and ambition*
- *Communication and collaboration*
- *Values and commitment"*

SCEL (2016a) Full text available at [scelengage.com](http://scelengage.com)

For most of the groups in the workshop sessions, there was huge overlap between their vision of teacher leadership and those outlined in the Framework for Educational Leadership. Most of the groups who had not focused in on learning and teaching in the first part of the session liked this emphasis in SCEL’s definition. Despite some questions and recommendations for amendments, the vast majority broadly agreed with the vision for teacher leadership outlined in the Framework, in the workshops as well as in the online engagement. However, there was also general agreement in the workshops that whilst this is a vision for teacher leadership most can agree with, it is aspirational. For most teachers, this is something we are working towards in our professional careers, and the remainder of the session focused on what is needed in order to realise this vision.

## Themes



*Figure 3 Summary of the themes arising from SCEL’s Teacher Leadership Engagement.*

The outcomes from our teacher leadership engagement work can be summarised into the eight themes shown in figure 3 and outlined as follows.

### **ENTHUSIASM**

One of the primary themes arising from the engagement was the enthusiasm and receptiveness of the participants involved for both the engagement process and the teacher leadership agenda. The majority of the workshops were held as twilights on dark winter nights, and yet teachers, and other stakeholders, turned up in significant numbers and with a clear willingness to engage constructively with professional learning in relation to teacher leadership for the most part. It is important therefore to acknowledge this enthusiasm as one of the themes arising.

## **FOCUS**

The issues of lack of time and increased workload came up consistently. Participants frequently reflected that there is a need to reconsider what time is currently being used for and if the tasks which teachers are completing are actually impacting upon learners, or helping develop them as teacher leaders. Many teachers felt that they needed support to address their issues of time and workload in order to allow them to be able to develop as leaders.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

There was often a sense that there are a lack of opportunities to develop leadership skills. Either through a lack of formal professional learning opportunities, or through a lack of access to experience and promotion opportunities within schools. Many teachers felt that SCEL could be working with partners to provide a progression of professional learning opportunities to support teachers to develop as leaders of practice. A number of teachers commented on the potential for online learning and the dissemination of research summaries. Many participants commented on the potential for SCEL to improve communication of opportunities to teachers and to help raise the profile of teacher leadership.

## **RECOGNITION**

Lack of recognition came up frequently, but often in different contexts. Some felt that we need the return of financial recognition in the form of Chartered Teacher or Assistant Principal Teacher roles. Some would like the return of at least the status and/or time elements of these past structures. However, there was also frequent mention of the need for teachers to be thanked for their efforts and that practice could be recognised through being encouraged and supported to share.

## **SHARING**

The need to see what is happening in other contexts came up consistently. Teachers suggested that this could be in the form of case studies, shadowing, networking and observation. There was a strong sense throughout the engagement that this is not currently happening as much as it could be, and that more time could and should be prioritised to allow this to occur. Some groups suggested that teachers being encouraged and supported to share their practice with others could also act as a form of recognition.

## **MENTORING**

The need for mentoring and coaching beyond the probation year, with a particular focus on supporting the development of leadership skills, came up very frequently. This was often seen as a generic need, but it was sometimes raised from the perspective of those with a particular interest in developing as leaders. Some groups suggested that a role mentoring others on teacher leadership could provide an opportunity, and recognition, for teachers not pursuing promotion.

## **EQUITY**

There was a general desire that professionalism, autonomy and risk-taking needed to be valued and nurtured equitably across the system. A number of teachers expressed the view that opportunities need to be constructed in such a way that they are accessible to all and that school senior leadership teams should be supporting the development of leadership skills in all of their staff.

## **EVERYONE**

Many responses highlighted the role that SCEL can play in influencing the development of teacher leadership at all levels. This includes working with classroom teachers, but also with Initial Teacher Education, local authorities, Head Teachers, Scottish Government and other national organisations. Participants frequently suggested that those in senior leadership positions in Scottish education needed to prioritise the development of teacher leadership and create the conditions for this to occur.



## Next Steps

In the report of the engagement (SCEL, 2016b) SCEL committed to act upon the themes outlined above in order to support the development of teacher leadership nationally, by working in partnership to develop and endorse programmes for teacher leadership as well as offering events, masterclasses and further enhancing our professional learning activities already available through the Framework for Educational Leadership.

One of the key activities which we have undertaken since the engagement has been to co-evolve an online prototype teacher leadership programme with practitioners. This programme is informed by literature in the sense that it aims to support teacher leadership as rooted in classrooms, pedagogy and collaborative professional learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, Harris & Muijs, 2005, Forde *et al.*, 2011, Ryan *et al.*, 2016) and takes an enquiring approach to supporting teachers to develop leadership (Lambert, 2003, Baumfield *et al.*, 2013, Ryan *et al.*, 2016). However, our programme approach is also heavily influenced by the themes arising from the teacher leadership engagement. By providing this professional learning opportunity and making it open to all we aim to support teachers to develop and share their practice whilst also offering the chance for experienced teachers to take a mentoring role for participants. This prototype programme is currently being delivered with 40 participants with plans to increase participation in future cohorts.

## Further Information

This paper was adapted for the International Teacher Leadership Conference in March 2017 from the full report of SCEL's teacher leadership engagement. The full report can be downloaded here:

<http://www.scelscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/SCEL-Developing-Teacher-Leadership.pdf>

All of the outcomes from the engagement workshops can be accessed here:

<https://scelengage.com/tag/workshops/>

The resources used to facilitate our engagement workshop are available for download and use here:

<http://www.scelscotland.org.uk/exploring-teacher-leadership/>

For additional information regarding the Scottish College for Educational Leadership's support for teacher leadership please contact us using the following details:

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