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Leadership Learning for Pre-Service and Early Career Teachers: Insights From Ireland and Scotland

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Abstract: *Teachers' leadership learning should arguably commence in the initial stages of their pre-service education. However, the scope for leadership learning in pre-service teacher preparation is questionably less prominent. This paper presents findings from the first phase of an ongoing qualitative research study that is exploring the extent of leadership learning in pre-service teacher education in three education systems (i.e. Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland). It discusses participants' receptivity and challenges of leadership learning at the pre-service and early career stages. The paper highlights the need for strengthening leadership elements in pre-service teacher education programmes and for developing supportive structures and cultures within and beyond schools, to promote leadership learning for teachers.*

Keywords: Leadership, leadership development, leadership learning, teacher education, teacher leadership

Introduction

In recent years the body of literature relating to leadership preparation has grown considerably, with a focus on principal leadership (Hallinger & Walker 2015; Walker, Bryant & Lee 2013), development of middle-level leadership (Harris, Jones, Ismail & Nguyen 2019) and teacher leadership (Nguyen, Harris & Ng 2019). Leadership, within the current paper, is defined as 'the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives' (Yukl 2013: 23). Yukl's definition highlights three hallmarks of leadership: firstly, leadership is influence-based, rather than authority-based; secondly, leadership is a social process in which individuals have reciprocal influences on one another to accomplish a goal; and thirdly, leadership is a directional or purposeful process in which individuals work towards a shared goal, reflecting the notion of leadership as an interactional

activity and practice which encourages teachers to use their individual and collective agency (MacBeath, Dempster, Frost, Johnson & Swaffield 2018).

The research shows that teachers, at any career stage, play multiple leadership roles, formally and informally. These roles range from leadership of school curriculum (Firestone & Martinez 2007) to professional learning and development of colleagues (Allen 2016). There is a range of evidence concerning the positive impact and influence of effective teacher leadership on teacher leaders themselves (Avidov-Ungar & Shamir-Inbal 2017; White 2014), on the other teachers (Supovitz, Sirinides & May 2010; Yost, Vogel & Liang 2009), on school culture (Beachum & Dentith 2004) and school reforms (Lai & Cheung 2015), and indirect influence on student learning (Sebastian, Allensworth & Huang 2016; Supovitz et al. 2010).

To support teachers' enactment of leadership, leadership learning should be promoted as an essential element of curricula for pre-service teacher education (Mowat & McMahon 2019; Pucella 2014). In the current paper, leadership learning refers to developing professional knowledge and skills to understand the leadership that early career teachers will experience and see enacted. Leadership learning also involves supporting these teachers with leadership knowledge and skills to practise leadership within and beyond their own classroom as part of collaborative professional practices (Hargreaves & O'Connor 2017; King & Stevenson 2017). Leadership learning is arguably the remit of all teachers as professionals (Department for Education Northern Ireland 2015; General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS) 2012; Teaching Council of Ireland (TCI) 2016). However, the scope for leadership learning in pre-service teacher education and in the early career stage is deemed to be less evident (Forde, Dickson & McMahon 2018; King 2017).

The current, ongoing study aims to investigate the scope of leadership learning of teachers across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. The study provides insights into leadership learning, which would give important implications for developing teachers' leadership knowledge and skills in pre-service teacher education programmes, in schools and the wider system. The study is also a welcome response to the calls (see Nguyen et al. 2019) for more cross-national studies to enrich the empirical knowledge base on teacher leadership across various contexts.

The first phase of this ongoing study that entailed participation of pre-service and early career teachers and other stakeholders elicited the perspectives and experiences of these participants concerning leadership learning in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. This current paper presents key findings of the first phase of the study. More specifically, the paper focuses on discussing the broad question: *What are participants' views on and concerns around leadership learning in pre-service teacher education across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland?* The next section presents the literature that informs the current paper.

Literature Review

Preparing and developing teacher leaders is an ongoing process that starts from early stages of pre-service teacher education (Forde et al. 2018; King 2017). To conceptualise this process, Quinn, Haggard and Ford (2006) propose a model of preparing and developing teachers for leadership activities and roles. This conceptual model comprises four phases, namely (1) cooperative, (2) extended, (3) mentoring, and (4) global. The first and second phases concern leadership learning and development of pre-service and early career teachers, respectively. The first phase – 'cooperative' involves developing skills of classroom management and instruction, for example, justifiable selection of pedagogical methods and materials, for teacher candidates in pre-service teacher education programmes. Skills of communication with colleagues, school leaders and parents should also be attended to in the curricula in this phase (Quinn et al. 2006). The second phase – 'extended' in this conceptual model suggests that early career teachers solidify classroom and instructional skills they learn in the pre-service stage. These teachers participate in professional activities beyond their classroom, for example, attending conferences and participating in professional groups within the school and beyond. This section presents literature around leadership learning in the first two phrases in the conceptual model of Quinn et al. (2006).

Leadership Learning for Pre-Service Teachers

The literature has argued for the introduction of leadership elements in the curricula of pre-service teacher education programmes (e.g. Neumann, Jones & Webb 2007; Pucella 2014; Quinn et al. 2006). Bond (2011) emphatically states that pre-service experience is important in forming and developing future educators' worldviews and perspectives. Appropriate incorporation of leadership elements in teacher education programmes would better prepare teachers for knowledge (e.g. basic theories) and skills (e.g. communication, teamwork) to enter their profession and to grow as leaders (Bond 2011; Neumann et al. 2007; Pucella 2014; Turnbull 2005).

The literature has suggested three approaches to promote leadership literacy and competences (e.g. skills, qualities and dispositions) in pre-service teacher education. A typical way is to include a course on leadership and management and action research/professional enquiry in a teacher education programme. Some universities have delivered a single elective course in Leadership for Learning (e.g. University of Glasgow) or a minor programme in Teacher Leadership (e.g. The Education University of Hong Kong). In Dublin City University, all pre-service teachers undertake a major specialism as part of their degree and the final module within this specialism in 4th year is on leadership (e.g. Leadership for Special and Inclusive Education, Literacy Leadership) (King 2017). Turnbull (2005) suggests requiring teacher candidates to conduct empirical enquiry on school-based management as part of their teacher education programme. Undertaking action research on school leadership and management would give pre-service teachers functional knowledge and experience of school leadership prior to entering their profession (Turnbull 2005).

Alternatively, or inclusively, leadership learning and teaching can be integrated and embedded across courses in teacher preparation programmes (Bond 2011). The argument for this approach is that leadership development involves a shift in teachers' vision and perspectives on the nature of ethical leadership (Xu & Patmor 2012) and requires teachers to articulate their values and beliefs related to their vision as these influence practices (Brown 2006; King 2017). This approach would arguably require the involvement of all teacher educators, rather than only those delivering leadership courses.

The third approach is to develop pre-service teachers' knowledge and skills through service-learning (Ado 2016; Bond & Sterrett 2014; Lundeberg, Tikoo, Willers & Donley 2004; Salam, Iskandar, Ibrahim & Farooq 2019; Stewart 2012). Service learning is an experiential education approach that aims to promote pre-service teachers' understanding of concepts and theories and to develop skills through community service and reflection (Jacoby 1996). Stewart (2012), in an empirical study in the United States, claimed that participation in service-learning activities would increase pre-service teachers' sense of servant leadership (e.g. emotional healing, persuasion) and sense of self-efficacy in pre-service teacher engagement, instruction, and classroom management. In another study, Lundeberg et al. (2004) revealed that pre-service teachers developed their leadership in technology and the classroom through supporting and teaching in-service teachers with technology skills in workshops.

Leadership Learning for Early Career Teachers

The empirical literature has shown two ways by which early career teachers learn and develop their leadership knowledge and skills.

Early career teachers continue learning and developing leadership knowledge and skills through formal leadership programmes (Harris & Townsend 2007; Ross et al. 2011; Snoek & Volman 2014). Many of these are postgraduate degree programmes with a focus on leadership learning. However, the evidence regarding the impact of these programmes on leadership remains modest or varies. A few empirical studies suggest positive impact of graduate programmes on preparation and development of leadership competences (e.g. Adams et al. 2013; Mongillo, Lawrence & Hong 2012; Snoek & Volman 2014). However, Leonard, Petta and Porter (2012) looked at 21 graduate programmes focusing on teacher leadership and questioned whether 'graduate education is the best route to teacher leadership' (pp. 200-201). Snoek, Enthoven, Kessels and Volman (2017: 26) maintain that 'strategic alignment and shared ownership between university and school' is important in developing teacher leadership through graduate education.

Another important form of leadership learning is through 'leading by learning' and 'learning by leading' (Collinson 2012). More specifically, early career teachers can develop their leadership knowledge and skills through in-school professional learning activities where they are mentored by senior colleagues (Gul, Demir & Criswell 2019) and lead their peers with expertise (Gao, Wong, Choy & Wu 2010).

In a growing field of literature on educational leadership, leadership learning in the pre-service stage is still limited. This paper contributes to this body of literature in reporting on an ongoing study of pre-service leadership learning across three contexts. The next section outlines the process of data collection and analysis.

Methodology

The current paper draws on a complete analysis of six focus group interviews as part of an ongoing study that explores leadership learning in pre-service teacher education in three jurisdictions: Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. This research was funded by SCoTENS (The Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South) which is 'a network of 24 colleges of education, university education departments, teaching councils, curriculum councils, education trade unions and education centres on the island of Ireland with a responsibility for and interest in teacher education' aiming to support collaborative research projects and practices in teacher education in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (SCoTENS 2019: para 1).

In Northern Ireland, Qualified Teacher Status can be achieved through a four-year undergraduate degree. Alternatively, a one-year postgraduate qualification can be undertaken, which is the course completed by the Northern Ireland participants in this study. In Scotland, pre-service teacher education comprises either a one-year postgraduate programme qualification or a four-year undergraduate programme. There is an option in both instances to complete a further year of study to receive a Master's Qualification. A four-year undergraduate degree in teacher education was undertaken by the pre-service teachers and early career teachers who attended the focus groups in the Republic of Ireland. Teachers may choose to undertake a two-year post-graduate Master's qualification.

A qualitative case study approach was adopted to explore each jurisdiction (Stake 1995), namely Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. A qualitative case study approach allowed for in-depth exploration from a variety of sources and perspectives (Yin 2014). Ethical approval was granted prior to data collection and plain language statements and informed consent forms were obtained from each participant prior to data collection. In each of these three jurisdictions, an invitation to participate was extended to teaching staff and academics within the participating universities[1], pre-service teachers and early career teachers along with various stakeholders in education at national level.

A two-day meeting was held in each jurisdiction for gathering and sharing of information in terms of the policy context at national level and policy and practice at university level in relation to leadership at the pre-service stage. The team reviewed pre-service teacher education curricula, policy guidance, teacher professional standards and codes, where

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[1] Dublin City University, University of Glasgow and Ulster University

applicable, in each of the three participating systems, which informed the design of interview protocols. Data collection took place during these two-day meetings and involved focus group interviews. Overall, six focus group interviews were held with 31 participants across the three jurisdictions: five pre-service teachers, three early career teachers and 23 various stakeholders, which included representatives from Teaching Councils, Teacher Unions, Teacher Educators, Government Departments of Education, Leadership bodies and various Teacher Support Services.

The process of collecting and analysing this set of data involved four iterative stages. In the first stage, the research team conducted two focus group interviews in the meeting in Scotland in November 2018. These focus group interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. A thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke 2006) was used to analyse these two focus group interviews. Initial themes and patterns were identified, which informed subsequent data collection in the Republic of Ireland context in the second stage in March 2019. Another two focus group interviews were conducted in this jurisdiction, followed by transcription and thematic analysis of these data. The findings from this second stage similarly informed preparation for data collection in the third stage. A similar procedure of data collection and analysis was carried out in Northern Ireland in June 2019.

Upon data collection and analysis in Northern Ireland, another round of thematic data analysis across six interviews was undertaken in the fourth stage. This iterative process allowed for moving back and forth through the data, questioning and challenging previous emerging codes and themes.

Findings

The current paper presents the participants' views on and concerns around leadership learning in pre-service education across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. This section outlines three key themes emerging from the data, namely (i) implicit and explicit elements of leadership in pre-service teacher education, (ii) evolving professional identity and self-efficacy; and (iii) concerns about system readiness. Selected responses from participants are included, for the purpose of exemplification, in the following section with participants indicated by their position (PT pre-service teacher, T teacher and ST stakeholder – as outlined in the methodology section) and their jurisdiction by NI (Northern Ireland); RoI (Republic of Ireland); and SC (Scotland).

Implicit and Explicit Elements of Leadership Learning

Pre-service teachers in the study believed that 'the seeds [of leadership] need to be planted in pre-service education' (PT, NI) reflecting findings in the literature (Neumann et al. 2007; Pucella 2014; Quinn et al. 2006). Many felt that leadership learning was implicit in the pre-service phase, especially in Scotland and Northern Ireland. However, they felt it needs to be explicit and focus not only on the school but the wider education system (Bond 2011). Some

confusion was evident, related to the definition of leadership, with one participant asking, 'Are we using leadership as a proxy for professionalism?' (ST, SC). Many participants agreed that leadership and professionalism are very similar but suggested the focus in pre-service seemed to be on preparing teachers as professionals but not as leaders.

Within each jurisdiction there was agreement on the need for explicit and implicit leadership learning in pre-service education to create an expectation of leadership as reflected by one stakeholder in the Republic of Ireland, '... to incorporate leadership learning' from the outset. Another stakeholder in the Republic of Ireland felt pre-service teachers need 'opportunities for stepping up within pre-service education in tutorial groups ... responsibilities ... experiencing leadership'. One stakeholder in Scotland recognised leadership as 'taking responsibility and stepping up'. This concept of stepping up (Buchanan 2015) was mentioned by several participants with a stakeholder in the Republic of Ireland stating that teacher educators of pre-service teachers need to be explicit in developing 'an attitude of stepping [up] to leadership ... which is not entirely about their own classroom'. Overall participants' perceptions show that teachers may evidence leadership of student learning, their own learning (Allen 2016), leadership with parents (Quinn et al. 2006) and teaching assistants within their classrooms and that this is largely done collaboratively as they interact with others to enhance professional practice (MacBeath et al. 2018). Perhaps leadership is about the collaborative interactions taking place as distinct from where they are taking place.

Several examples of lived experiences of and an explicit focus on leadership within pre-service education were cited by pre-service and early career teachers and those working in HE in each of the three contexts. One newly qualified teacher who had undertaken the module on Leadership for Inclusion as part of a specialism argued that 'content knowledge can only get you so far ... [need] competencies of a leader as well ... [to] try and overhaul the system ... I think I would feel confident enough to try and change things' (PT, RoI). This endorses the point made by a stakeholder in the Republic of Ireland who stated that recent research (Hick et al. 2018) showed that those who undertook the specialist pathway in Special and Inclusive Education as part of their pre-service education felt better prepared and more confident to narrow the knowledge practice gap between pre-service education and what is happening in schools.

This expectation to practise leadership is set from the beginning, to support teachers in enhancing their professionalism by focusing on their individual and collective agency and advocacy (King & Stevenson 2017) to support their students' learning. This sense of agency helped the pre-service teachers in their evolving professional identities and self-efficacy – our second key theme – to which we now turn.

Evolving Professional Identity and Self-Efficacy

Within each of the jurisdictions, participants believed that encouraging pre-service teachers to articulate their values and beliefs could help them to develop their professional identity

and prepare them for leadership (ST, SC), supporting previous research on leadership learning (Bond 2011; Brown 2006). Indeed, a number of respondents suggested that 'values' were one of the differentiators between professionalism and leadership: 'we don't necessarily say "you are being prepared for leadership"… it is the dispositions and values … [we] don't explicitly use [the term] leadership' (ST, SC). Similarly, 'what differentiates ideas of leadership from professionalism [is] around duties, values, beliefs … for everyone in the profession' (ST, SC) and there is an emphasis on 'actually understanding that ... you're always … leading by ... your values, your practice' (ST, NI).

Developing a sense of self-efficacy as a practitioner equipped with leadership learning is considered an important feature of pre-service teacher education. This can be a challenge and some pre-service teachers felt that it is best achieved during school-based placements as it is '… hard to prepare until you get out there' (T, RoI). An approach adopted by some institutions focused initially on developing individual leadership skills to promote self-efficacy. There was an attempt to build from 'leadership of self … in terms of your own professional learning, your own professional development in your own pathway through the programme' to '… leadership of others in the context of what the student [pre-service teacher(s)] would do in school, with their own class, the children that they're working with [and then] in the community, in terms of volunteering activities' (ST, NI). A growing self-awareness of their identity as well as their self-efficacy is similarly argued to be important. They need to know '… who they are as people, where their strengths are, [and] where the areas are that they need to work on' (ST, NI).

The key role of teacher educators in developing self-efficacy was widely articulated. Teacher educators have to demonstrate their own '… confidence … to use skills [the tutor has] to bring that confidence out in other people so that they can use the skills that they have' (PT, RoI). The tension between over-direction and independence was deftly captured by one respondent: 'If too much structure then that is not the conception of leadership. If too much agency aren't you entitled to some direction in where you take your project?' (ST, RoI). It was commonly agreed that there was a need to model leadership with pre-service teachers: 'What are our expectations for students, [pre-service teacher(s)] how do they see leadership enacted in their lives? [We] should model it' (ST, RoI) and 'it is about getting that message across to them as best as we can … modelling in our classes subliminally each day and just show them what we perceive a leader to be' (ST, NI). Also, 'it's great to tell them how to be a leader, but if they're not seeing that practice in the lecture theatre … "go do this, go off and do that" but if they're seeing somebody who's quite didactic at the front, who isn't actually doing … leadership … the implicit is what they pick up from your behaviour' (ST, NI).

In all jurisdictions, relationships with schools and mentors were considered particularly important. A feeling expressed by a number of the pre-service or early career teachers was that, as a pre-service teacher on placement, they were 'low on the food chain' (T, RoI). Additionally, 'because you're a learning teacher, the other teachers obviously are going to have more experience than you. And it depends on how much they let you do or their control

of you over the class' (T, NI). Even after formal qualification as a teacher, mentoring can be challenging: 'How can you ensure that the people who are mentoring them when they get out of their teaching practice and then into their first jobs, are capable?' (ST, NI).

When mentors and schools were encouraging to pre-service teachers in their placements, this helped promote self-efficacy. Both pre-service and early career teachers reflected on disparities in placements: 'When I was on [one] … I remember the teacher was quite controlling and didn't give me much room … [which was] undermining … after that I had a teacher who was so confident in her own teaching, she gave me more room … she allowed me to grow as a teacher' (T, RoI). Another commented: 'My teacher let me make mistakes. She would sit down and say, "this didn't go well, what could we try, what will work?" [While she] did not give me total rein … she gave me confidence to try things out' (PT, RoI). Another pre-service teacher, reflecting on one of her placements, noted: 'If the Head of Department had more of a hierarchical view … then [I] wouldn't have felt as comfortable. Whereas there was no kind of feeling of hierarchy and it was all very open. We share if you have an idea' (PT, NI). Pre-service teachers can develop self-efficacy prior to their placements. One considered that:

> The thing that helped me a lot this year … especially at the start, was just instilling you with confidence that you can actually be a teacher … I didn't know if I could actually be a teacher … whereas if … you're instilled with confidence through peer teaching and things like that … and you're like, 'oh, I actually can do this', then you go in and can provide ideas that they didn't already have. (PT, NI)

There is a need for a pre-service teacher to have a level of leadership readiness and confidence, and teacher educators have an important role in helping to develop that. The need for leadership learning to equip pre-service teachers for occasions when they might encounter resistance or opposition was also highlighted as was the need to 'prepare' actors within the system for pre-service and early career teachers who are more 'leadership aware'. There is also a need therefore for the wider systems and schools into which these early career teachers move to be ready to adopt and support them to exercise leadership. A need for system readiness emerged as an important third theme in our study which is explored below.

Concerns About System Readiness

A particular issue to emerge from the data was a concern that the 'system' was not yet ready to embrace these early career teachers who had experienced leadership learning. Arguably these teachers are more articulate and knowledgeable about leadership practice and potentially can be more assertive in the exercise of their own leadership and in their critique of others' leadership. 'System' in this context refers to 'micro system' (i.e. classroom and school) and 'macro system' (i.e. local/regional and national level) (see O'Brien, Murphy, Draper, Forde & McMahon 2016).

System readiness depends on the nature of the partnership that underpins the relationship with pre-service educators, placement schools and local authorities; a shared understanding of the conceptual model of the teacher; and the extent to which placement schools and partners are co-designers and co-constructors of pre-service programmes (Snoek et al. 2017). For one participant the '3Ps' are at the core: 'placement, partnerships and pedagogy' (ST, RoI). Teacher educators have an important part in this relationship, together with school-based mentors and placement tutors (Ying & Ho 2015). However, enduring cultures and perceptions of the role and place of pre-service and early career teachers may act as inhibitors to the enactment and exercise of leadership (Nguyen et al. 2019). This requires a shift in how leadership is understood and shared across the school so that leadership learning is about 'leadership for a wider role in the life and work in a school, which may prepare them for more formal leadership at a later stage' (ST, RoI). The responsibility for this shift is seen to extend beyond teacher education with 'responsibility on the other side too' (ST, RoI). 'Young teachers with wonderful initiatives/electives [need] to be embraced and accepted and showcased and the expertise accepted' (ST, RoI) with a need to 'educate current school leaders about young teachers' (ST, RoI). While principals have a critical role in setting the culture and climate in their school, a concern was expressed that delegation of day-to-day responsibilities for pre-service and early career teachers to a senior teacher 'who is already overwhelmed with duties' may impact negatively (ST, NI). Nonetheless, the role of senior leaders in the school was seen to be important as 'Senior leadership [make] the link between what they [pre-service teachers] are doing in the classroom and collaborative leadership' (ST, RoI). Indeed, the role of others in the exercise of teacher agency was seen to be critical as 'agency has to be mediated by others in school' (ST, SC), (Priestly, Biesta & Robinson 2015).

It is important therefore to be 'careful in managing the expectations of student [pre-service] teachers, to prevent them from being deflated and to recognise that they can make changes within their career, but they won't change things in their first year' (ST, RoI) (Turnbull 2015). The need for early career teachers to have a critical awareness of the systems that they were entering was underlined by a number of participants (for example, ST, RoI) but there was also recognition that those systems could be dysfunctional. A trade union-led 'work to rule' policy in Northern Ireland during the course of the study impacted on the potential and scope for new teachers to engage in collaborative leadership (PT, NI), raising concerns from some participants that new teachers were experiencing negative contexts and role models for leadership in schools (ST, NI). There was a concern that the wider political system did not currently offer good examples of leadership: globally and locally, especially in the Northern Ireland context where the jurisdiction was without a locally devolved administration for over two years (ST, NI).

Findings from the analysis of six focus groups underline the complexity of the education sector that pre-service teachers and new teachers are part of. It is a multi-level system with a range of actors and stakeholders. For early career teachers this is complex terrain – they encounter not one but many systems, cultures and subcultures and leadership learning can

help them develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions to navigate and make sense of this. While this may help new teachers to become more 'system ready' the extent to which the system is ready for them remains a concern.

Discussion

The findings on participants' perspectives and experiences of leadership learning in pre-service teacher education suggest teachers' receptivity of leadership learning and enactment and highlight their challenges in learning and exercising leadership.

Pre-service and early career teachers articulated their receptivity of leadership learning opportunities and willingness to get involved in leadership activities. These teachers felt that sharing expertise with colleagues is a form of leadership, which is instrumental in developing their own leadership skills. They were particularly interested in sharing their expertise on curricular and instructional areas. This perception of peer sharing as a form of peer leading and learning reflects the method of 'leading by learning' and 'learning by leading' (Collinson 2012). In particular, this form of leadership is perceived to occur from the early stage of pre-service teacher education. The aspirations and willingness to practise leadership of pre-service and early career teachers have also been evidenced across contexts, for example, in England (Muijs, Chapman & Armstrong 2013), in Hong Kong (Ying & Ho 2015), in the Republic of Ireland (King 2017) and in the United States (Reeves & Lowenhaupt 2016).

Although the receptivity, aspirations and willingness are necessary, pre-service and early career teachers would benefit from greater support from teacher education programmes and systems. The findings evidence some confusion and dissonance related to the definition and the presence of leadership learning in the curricula for pre-service teachers. Participants came to a shared understanding of leadership as influence, with a focus on collaborative practices (Hargreaves & O'Connor 2017; King & Stevenson 2017; Yukl 2013) regardless of where they are taking place. There was a perception that leadership is not only part of teaching professionalism but also an additional 'stepping up' (Buchanan 2015) beyond that zone. It is argued that a teacher could be professional and be missing leadership competences (Harris & Townsend 2007). An approach adopted by some institutions focused initially on developing individual leadership skills to promote self-efficacy. A growing self-awareness of their identity as well as their self-efficacy is similarly argued to be important. They need to know '… who they are as people, where their strengths are, [and] where the areas are that they need to work on' (ST, NI).

Many participants in this study (Scotland and Northern Ireland) felt that leadership learning was implicitly incorporated in the curricula of the pre-service teacher education programmes that they had experienced or were experiencing. Some argued that they had been prepared to be a teacher but under-prepared to be a leader. These teachers called for a more explicit focus on leadership learning alongside an inclusion of the language of leadership in the curricula for pre-service teachers. However, some concerns were raised regarding an already

overloaded curriculum for pre-service teachers and teacher educators alike. Nevertheless, experiences of leadership while on school placement as a pre-service teacher or mentoring as an early career teacher (Gul et al. 2019) were cited as important for promoting self-efficacy and confidence to practise leadership.

Strong and explicit embeddedness of leadership learning into pre-service teacher education programmes would be helpful in developing teachers' leadership knowledge and skills (Bond 2011; King 2017; Xu & Patmor 2012) and in promoting their identities and efficacy of leadership that is a critical aspect of leadership development (Poekert, Alexandrou & Shannon 2016). In addition, this study reinforces the need for teacher educators to model leadership in their practice with pre-service teachers, and to be explicit about identifying it and naming it (Bond 2011; King 2017; Ying & Ho 2015). This stronger embeddedness would arguably reduce early career teachers' tensions and issues in leading colleagues as a result of uncertainty and unpreparedness (Nguyen et al. 2019) and reflects Bond's (2011) call for leadership learning to be integrated and embedded across courses within programmes.

Alongside a more explicit focus of leadership learning in pre-service teacher education programmes, a more supportive system is critical in nurturing teachers' leadership aspirations and motivations and promoting their leadership development. At the micro level of system, supportive and positive school structures and cultures are seen as a crucial condition for genuine teacher leadership (Cooper et al. 2016; Ghamrawi 2010; Woodhouse & Pedder 2017). Early career teachers in this study emphasised the need for a structure and culture that is ready to embrace their initiatives and their engagement in leadership activities and roles. At the regional and national levels, there is an expectation that all teachers are leaders within the Scottish *Professional Standards for Teaching* (GTCS 2012) and the Irish Teaching Council's *Framework for Teachers' Learning* (TCI 2016) where teachers are expected to be leaders of their own classrooms, their own learning and that of their colleagues through mentoring and induction. However, the findings suggest that teachers have experienced major challenges in meeting this expectation of acting as both teacher and leader. Early career teachers' leadership roles are generally less visible and explicit in policy documents. This variation in the emphasis on leadership roles for early career (and pre-service) teachers across the jurisdictions may well have an impact on its practice. These challenges suggest the need for stronger support from pre-service teacher education programmes in getting their pre-service teachers better prepared to enact leadership in a multi-level system.

Conclusions

The current paper evidences the views and concerns of educators and other stakeholders around teachers' leadership learning in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. The findings were drawn from an analysis of six focus groups with pre-service teachers, early career teachers and other stakeholders in the three jurisdictions. It should be acknowledged that this sample may not be representative of larger numbers of educators in

these systems. However, the detailed analysis of these focus group interviews enables us to raise implications for teacher education and future research.

While pre-service and early career teachers are receptive of leadership learning and willing to assume leadership, they face challenges and tensions. Leading the learning of others is arguably challenging in a culture 'where isolated practice still predominates' (O'Sullivan 2011: 112) and little leadership learning happens at pre-service education (Forde et al. 2018). Pre-service teacher education programmes are critical in promoting leadership learning for future educators. They should play an active role in developing teachers' leadership knowledge and skills and nurturing their aspirations and motivations for leadership. The findings suggest a need for a more explicit focus on leadership learning in pre-service teacher education programmes. From study of the three systems reported in this paper, an explicit focus was evident in only one – the Republic of Ireland. Arguably the focus on leadership learning needs to be both explicit and implicit for it to be effective and result in self-efficacy and identity as a leader. Therefore, appropriate incorporation of leadership learning into the curricula is of great importance. A systematic review of current pre-service teacher education programmes, with consideration of contexts and cultures, would inform the extent and methods of such incorporation.

Future empirical research on leadership learning in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland, using a greater sample and alternative methodologies for verification purposes, would be helpful in informing teacher education programmes in these systems. Looking forward, research on this significant topic across more systems and societies would provide a more holistic picture of leadership learning at the international level.

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