1

Leadership for Learning

Sue Swaffield and John MacBeath

'Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other'

'Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.' So wrote John F. Kennedy in a speech to be delivered in Dallas on what turned out to be a fateful day in November 1963. But how are leadership and learning indispensable to each other? What is the nature of the relationship?

With a little thought, a number of 'common sense' connections between leadership and learning come to mind. Leaders need to learn and leaders learn as they lead. Leadership of others involves being first able to lead oneself, a crucial premise of self-directed learning. Leadership and learning also share common skills, such as problem solving, reflection, and acting on experience. In educational organisations such as schools, leadership is needed to promote learning. In schools, learning should be the prime concern of all those who exercise leadership, and learning should both set the agenda and be the agenda for leadership. Leadership and learning are mutually embedded, so that as we learn we become more confident in sharing with, and leading, others. And as we lead we continuously reflect on, and enhance, our learning. Guy Claxton has suggested the new 'four Rs' of learning: resilience, resourcefulness, reflectiveness and reciprocity (Claxton, 2002). These dispositions are all as relevant to leadership as they are to learning, both of which are as much a matter of character as of skill. In talking about learning Claxton says:

> Being able to stay calm, focused and engaged when you don't know what to do is not merely a matter of technical training … Of course learning capacity is partly a matter of skill. But we also need a richer vocabulary that includes words like attitudes, dispositions, qualities, values, emotional tolerances, habits of mind. (Claxton, 2006: 4)

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The same may be said of leadership. When thinking about the relationship between leadership and learning it is possible to start with either concept, and then work towards the other. For example, we may start with leadership, scrutinising leadership roles and activities for their learning content. Or we may start by focusing on learning, which raises questions about forms of activity and the creation and sharing of knowledge. In turn this raises questions as to responsibility, focus of initiative, and about individual and shared leadership.

Little words make a difference

In education we seem to have a penchant for joining two big words with a variety of little ones. So, for example, 'teaching and learning' are used to refer to planned activity in the classroom. 'Coaching and mentoring' are often presented as conjoined twins or even a single entity, perhaps indicating a lack of clarity about their differences. Assessment *of* learning, *for* learning and *as* learning are three importantly distinctive concepts, where the little conjunction renders different meanings (Harlen, 2006; Earl, 2003).

So too can leadership and learning be joined by a variety of linguistic connectives, for example leadership *and*, *of*, *as* learning, or leadership *by, with, from* learning. Each connecting word creates a different phrase, some of which may be familiar, while others may surprise us into new insights. The focus of this chapter is leadership *for* learning.

Another ingredient in the rich leadership soup?

How we construe 'leadership for learning' depends on our beliefs and understandings about leadership and about learning. If our conception of leadership is one that resides in a leader, and if we believe that knowledge is transmitted or delivered from teacher to pupil, then leadership for learning is about the school leader ensuring that the pupil learns what the teacher teaches. This appears to be implicit in the American use of 'instructional leadership', a mindset that may encompass the view that valued learning is measured by testing pupils and assumed to be a telling indicator of teachers' effectiveness. Leaders may be encouraged to act on this information, perhaps by awarding incentives and rewards for what is deemed to be 'successful' teaching and learning and taking remedial action when required. Another interpretation casts leaders as experts in fostering learning, proud of their hands-on expertise and deep pedagogic understanding. Others again concentrate more on putting in place structures and support for colleagues so that heads of department and team leaders take the direct lead in teaching and learning, while the principals prioritise shielding teachers from distractions to their focus on pupils' learning.

Leadership for learning viewed in this way is another category in the typology or 'alphabet soup' of leadership (Leithwood *et al*.,1999; MacBeath, 2003, 2004). It perhaps most closely resembles 'learning-centred leadership', resonates with 'principle-centred leadership' and 'moral leadership', and has similarities with 'instructional leadership' and 'transformational leadership' (Knapp *et al*., 2003; Covey, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1992; Southworth, 2002; Hallinger, 1992).

There are, of course, differences among these various forms of leadership (otherwise the diverse labels would not have been coined), but a number of common threads among them may be discerned. They are all concerned with learning, primarily of pupils, but also of teachers and other members of the community whose continuous learning is in the service of student learning. There is a focus on process as well as outcomes, and a commitment to practice that reflects values such as trust and respect. Commitment, obligations and duties arise from individuals' beliefs as well as from professional and community ideals. Building collaborative cultures and increasing capacity and capital also figure large.

Despite a wealth of literature and a proliferation of adjectival prefixes, we believed there was more to understand about the nature of the links between leadership and learning. We saw leadership for learning not as an additional model of leadership competing for attention with a plethora of alternatives but as qualitatively different from other models. We hope to demonstrate that in the rest of this chapter.

Making the connections: an unfinished business

While the connections between leadership and learning may seem a matter of simple common sense and are taken as a given by policy makers, researchers will remain dissatisfied until they are able to identify an empirical validation of the inter-connections. The quest for solid empirical ground has generated a considerable body of studies and meta studies over the last decade (for example, Bell *et al.*, 2003; Witziers *et al.*, 2003; Leithwood *et al.*, 2004) yet without a definitive conclusion, as is evident from the subtitle Witziers *et al.* give to their paper: 'the elusive search for an association'. On the basis of her own extensive review Levačić concludes:

> Given the vast literature on educational leadership and management and the presumption of policy-makers that the quality of educational leadership affects student outcomes, the actual evidence for a causal relationship is relatively sparse. (Levačić, 2005: 198)

The multiplicity of studies over recent years, nonetheless, make widely differing claims as to the leadership 'effect'. One of these is Viviane Robinson's 2007 metastudy which identified 26 pieces of research as meeting the empirical criteria for inclusion. She identified 'effect sizes' in the 0.3 to 0.4 range, which she described as 'moderately educationally significant' (Robinson, 2007: 9). She concluded, however:

> … these connections need to be substantially strengthened if leadership literature is to deliver more reliable and more useful insights into the particular leadership practices that create the conditions that enable teachers to make a bigger difference to their students. (Robinson, 2007: 22)

The Australian literature is rich with studies. Reviewing these, Mulford (2008) finds a fairly strong body of consensus among them, confirming the indirect relationship of leadership

to outcomes, identifying the mediating factors as organizational learning, professional development, and a trusting, collaborative and risk-taking climate. This resonates with many other studies yet still leaves a number of questions unanswered, in particular the interplay of these within widely different cultural and political contexts. […]

Short of robust empirical data, what researchers can offer are 'strong claims'. In a metastudy for the National College for School Leadership, Leithwood and colleagues (2006) offered seven such claims.

- Claim 1: School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.
- Claim 2: Almost all successful (school) leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.
- Claim 3: It is the enactment of the same basic leadership practices – not the practices themselves – that is responsive to the context.
- Claim 4: School leaders improve pupil learning indirectly through their influence on staff motivation and working conditions.
- Claim 5: School leadership has a greater effect on schools and pupils when it is widely distributed.
- Claim 6: Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.
- Claim 7: A handful of personal 'traits' explain a high proportion of the variation in leader effectiveness.

These seven claims are, to a greater or lesser degree, problematic. For example, taken at face value and as a stand alone statement the first claim is clearly untenable, as we know from four decades of school effectiveness research that the most powerful influences on learning are parents and peers, generally in combination with other factors which lie outside schools (Jencks *et al.*, 1972). While the school context is perhaps taken as implicit in Leithwood *et al.*'s first claim, nonetheless the 'compositional' or 'contextual' effect (what Thrupp, 1999, terms the 'social mix') has been repeatedly shown to be one of the most salient factors in pupil achievement and in attitudes to learning (Gray *et al.*, 1990; MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001).

While the first claim would find support in effectiveness studies which give primacy to the classroom and teacher effects (see Luyten, 2003, for an overview of the literature), distinguishing leadership and classroom teaching as two separate effect sizes carries more meaning as a statistical abstraction than it does in the somewhat messier milieu of schools and classrooms.

The second and third claims refer to effective leadership practices as fairly consistent but in acknowledging their responsiveness to context it leaves open to question ways in which context may actually reconfigure and reshape what leaders do and the kind of leaders they become. The fourth claim, which reasserts a fairly consistent finding of leadership studies, also tends to suggest a unidirectional flow of influence. Further, are the fifth and sixth claims reconcilable with the seventh, which refers specifically to the 'traits' of the school leader? While the ontological basis for 'trait' theories is dubious, we do know that the attitudes, competences and effectiveness of school leaders do not remain stable from

one context to another and that an effective leader may not be equally successful in one school as in another. In schools with widely shared leadership a singular research focus on the individual may, in fact, divert attention from the internal dynamic and complexity of effects. As Levačić (2005) reminds us, most studies assume a one way relationship between leaders and learners whereas the effects are reciprocal. That is, leaders learn from students and from teachers, the subtleties of this process requiring fine grained qualitative study. Leithwood *et al*. (2008) acknowledge that we still have a lot to learn about the patterning of relationships which explain achievement.

While the evidence strengthens the case that some leadership distribution patterns are more helpful than others, it sheds little light on the range of patterns that actually exist in schools and, most importantly, the relative effects of these patterns on the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement (Leithwood *et al.,* 2008: 35).

It is the continuing pursuit of effect sizes that highlights one of the inherent problems with findings and claims derived from quantitative studies. This is because in order to measure 'effects' both leadership and learning have been subject to some form of quantification so that the qualities or competences of head teachers 'stand in' as proxies for leadership while student 'outcomes' are measured by tests and examinations. Thus, the best that can be offered is whether certain traits of head teachers can be tied in some way to student performance in examinations.

The equation is narrowed still further, however, by a general penchant for measuring curricular subjects that lend themselves most easily to quantification, hence mathematics becomes the most readily available proxy for learning, and is also preferred because it is less 'contaminated' by the home effect than other subjects. As music, art, drama, dance and other so-called 'creative' subjects prove too difficult to quantify they are, in general, simply ignored. Subjects that are most measurable are then adopted as indicators of school effectiveness and in the process assume high stakes status, so perverting the core purposes of the school and narrowing the curriculum, producing what O'Neill (2004) describes as 'perverse indicators'.

So it is argued (for example, Labaree, 1997; Lewis, 2007) that what tests purport to measure may in fact be anti-educational. They may be the products ot tactical measures to push up a school's overall scores, often at the expense of those judged to be beyond redemption, while high stakes pressures can tempt teachers into cheating (Haney, 2000; Leavitt and Dubner, 2005; Nicholls and Berliner, 2005).

While attainment data are now generally complemented by attitudinal data through the use of student and teacher surveys, these are notoriously difficult to interpret without qualitative forms of follow-up which explore the ambiguities in interpretations of language and the researcher's intent. Claims for connecting leadership and learning will derive their greatest value from studies which go beyond the quantitative and venture deeper into the hidden curriculum and the underlife of the school. Failure to take cognisance of the submerged body beneath the waterline risks sabotaging researchers' carefully planned direction of travel.

As schools respond to the rapidly changing social currents, the nature of both leadership and learning requires radical rethinking. Both need to be understood as diffuse and distributed concepts. In England the trend towards extended and full service schools is breaking,

or at least fracturing, the mould of the nine to four school. The remodelling of the work-force has led to a proliferation of leadership roles within the school and the community, extending leadership and the very nature of leadership into new arenas and new forms of activity. We have come to understand leadership as embedded in actions taken both individually and collectively within cultures that encourage and promote shared agency. Leadership activity may be actively promoted by the head teacher but may occur irrespective of the head by dint of a strong collegial culture and/or a core of committed change agents (MacBeath and Stoll, 2001). Connections need to be explained in qualitative terms, in what has been called 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973), a form of narrative which captures the texture of a school's activities, the dynamic of interpersonal relationships, the 'flow' of learning and the unpredictability of life in schools and classrooms. Lieberman and Friedrich (2008) consider the issue in these terms:

> In many studies of leadership, one of the problems is that leadership is daily and takes place amongst a myriad of activities and actions that accrue over time. Typical data collection strategies – interviews, surveys, or even observations and focus groups – often fail to show the interconnections and variety of activities, strategies and tactics that people come to learn over time when they take on leadership responsibilities. (Lieberman and Friedrich, 2008: 39)

Reframing and revisiting leadership and learning

As critiques of quantitative research reveal, both learning and leadership are contested and complex notions. Bringing them together entails more than an act of addition, or utilising one in the service of the other. However, before considering the connections let us first reframe and revisit the two key elements of leadership for learning. Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal (1991), the leading exponents of reframing, describe four frames, but here we confine ourselves to two which we call simply the 'old' and the 'new'. Taking leadership first, the 'old' frame is characterised by a charismatic individual in a high status position, directing many others. In the 'new' frame leadership is viewed as activity, both individual and shared, influencing and serving others, taking the initiative and making decisions for the greater good, whilst modelling learning and being sensitive to context (see Table 1.1).

In the new frame two fundamentals of leadership – purpose and agency – are implicit, and are revisited later in this chapter. There is a third fundamental, namely the significance of context. Both the micro-context of relationships, organisational structures and micro politics, and the macro-context of government policy, priorities and resources exert powerful influences on behaviour and decisions.

Tom Sergiovanni (2001) argues that behaving rationally involves taking account of context, something to which leadership needs to be acutely sensitive. The same actions may have completely different effects in different contexts, depending on the people involved, their view of the world, previous experiences and current circumstances.

Table 1.1   The old and new frames of leadership

Leadership – The old frame	Leadership – The new frame
Leadership as …	Leadership as activity …
The few leading the many	Influencing others
Larger than life individuals	Taking the initiative
High status	Offering a service
Appointed or elected roles	Taking decisions on behalf of others
Characterised by a set of special competencies	Modelling learning behaviour
	Making moral choices for the wider good
Control	Adapting to circumstance
A few 'best practice' model approaches, applicable to all situations	Sensitive to, and influencing, context

According to Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *The Tipping Point,* 'the power of context says that what really matters is little things' (Gladwell, 2000: 150). He illustrates this with the observation that most people behave differently in a clean street than in one strewn with rubbish and daubed with graffiti. Michael Fullan provides an educational example, pointing out that generally we 'will pay attention to the plight of individual students if those around us are doing so' (Fullan, 2003: 2). However, we are not restricted to responding to context; we can also help shape it, especially at the micro-level of our immediate sphere of influence. The effect of context is what makes it such a strong contender for consideration by those exercising leadership – changing the situation can be both a stimulus and a support for altering behaviour.

Learning, like leadership, can be viewed through different frames (see Table 1.2). The old frame in its simplest form is represented by the naïve statement 'Teachers teach and pupils learn. It is as simple as that' (Woodhead, 2002: 15). By contrast, Elliot Eisner's first lesson in his 2000 paper 'Those who ignore the past …: 12 "easy" lessons for the next millennium' is that 'students learn both less and more than what they have been taught' (Eisner, 2000: 343) – a truism which resonates with teachers everywhere, all too aware that teaching does not always result in learning. We also know that the traditional or 'old frame' view of learning as being synonymous with schooling is flawed.

Table 1.2   The old and new frames of learning

Learning – The old frame	Learning – The new frame
Learning as …	Learning as activity …
What happens in classrooms	Posing questions
Conducted by teachers	Analysing for understanding
Transfer of information from those who know to those who don't know	Testing ideas
	Portraying thought and feeling
Reproduced in tests and exams	Thinking about thinking
Compliance	Developing a learning identity
	Making moral decisions

The old frame of learning has a tenacious hold on the public, policy makers, and some educators, perhaps worn down, blinded or inoculated against their experience and understanding by the dominant discourse. This is despite more enlightened views of learning than those represented by the 'old' frame having been promulgated from Socrates and Plato onwards. Every day we continue to learn more about learning, through technical advances such as neuro-imaging and through open-minded and thoughtful observation of young people in authentic situations (for example Carr, 2001; Drummond, 2003). Nevertheless we agree with David Perkins' contention that we are still in the foothills of our understanding of learning.

Learning viewed through the new frame reflects much of this richer understanding, and recognises that learning, experience, emotions, identity, meta-cognition and decision-making are all inextricably linked.

As at the beginning of this chapter we noted the relationship between leadership and learning, so too we may note similarities between the new frames of leadership and learning, and perhaps between the learner and the led. Both have to be active in their roles and to exercise agency. Leaders often talk of 'empowering others' but in a statement that challenges much received wisdom George Binney and Colin Williams declare:

> You can disempower somebody but you cannot empower them. They will really begin to change, take initiatives, take risks, provide real feedback, learn from mistakes and accept responsibility for what they are doing when they feel sufficiently confident to do so and are provided with a clear framework. (Binney and Williams, 1997: 69)

Implicit in this statement is a sense of agency, a human drive that is released when the climate is such that leading and learning are natural bedfellows. […]

Our developing understanding of leadership for learning

Definition

Through a discursive process developed in the Leadership for Learning (LfL) Project (see Swaffield and MacBeath, 2009), we developed our understanding of leadership for learning and have come to define it as follows:

> Leadership for learning is a distinct form of educational practice that involves an explicit dialogue, maintaining a focus on learning, attending to the conditions that favour learning, and leadership that is both shared and accountable. Learning and leadership are conceived of as 'activities' linked by the centrality of human agency within a framework of moral purpose.

We have sought to represent our developing understanding, ideas and applications in a number of ways, including various diagrams and models. All are somewhat unsatisfactory to a certain extent due to the difficulty of representing in a static diagram what we conceive of as a dynamic process. This may be partly due to the limitations of a two-dimensional paper representation but owing more to the complexity of the interrelationships among key elements and to our continuing quest for deeper understanding. Nevertheless, these models both reflect and help shape thinking, and provide a route to connecting theory with practice.

Levels of learning and leadership

One model that we found helpful and has remained as a leitmotif is the so-called 'wedding cake' model of Michael Knapp and colleagues (Knapp *et al.,* 2003).

Our adaptation, adding a fourth tier to the 'cake' (Figure 1.1), draws attention to the inter-related nature of learning, and the integral relationship between student and professional learning and the wider system in which they are located. Leadership is the connecting tissue which infuses learning at every level and makes the connections a practical reality.

The critical element in the four-tier model is the vertical connections which attempt to illustrate the flow of activities within and across the school in which learning is the central focus. Just as learning is the province not only of students but also of teachers, other professionals, schools and systems themselves, so too is leadership exercised in each sphere of activity. This is one important way in which leadership for learning is qualitatively different from other conceptions of leadership. It does not see leadership as synonymous with the
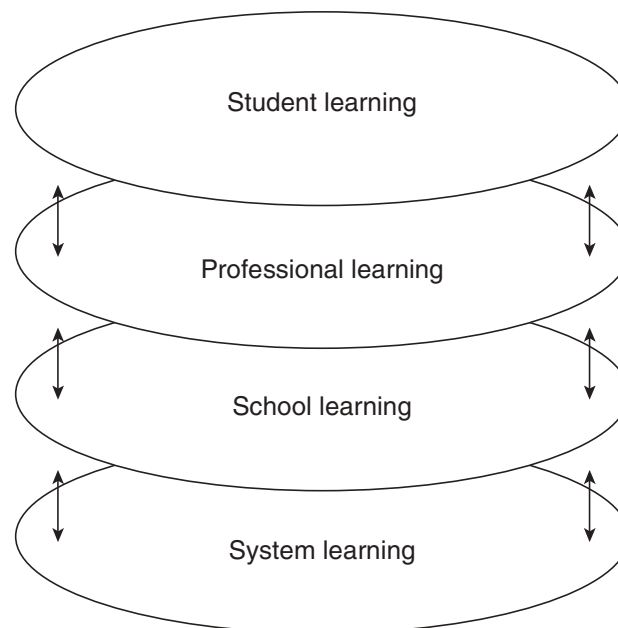

Figure 1.1   Interconnected levels of learning

individual at the apex of the school, whose influence extends 'down the hierarchy' from 'senior leadership teams' to 'middle leaders' and others with formal roles and responsibilities. 'Teacher leadership' (Frost and Harris, 2003; Lieberman and Miller, 2004) and 'student leadership' (MacBeath and Sugimine, 2003; Fielding and Bragg, 2003; Ruddock and Flutter, 2003) have both come to prominence, acknowledging the contribution of these as playing a vital part in fostering learning and sharing leadership.

Distributed perspectives on leadership and learning

Sergiovanni (2001) writes about leadership density as a measure of how far leadership extends within a school. Similarly, Coral Mitchell and Larry Sackney refer to a community of leaders and 'leader-rich' cultures (Mitchell and Sackney, 2000: 97). In the LfL Project these ideas prompted us to devise tools which would provide a measure of the extent to which different groups within the school community exercised leadership, and what it was that lent focus to their leadership activity. While leadership as 'distributed' is often taken to mean that the head teacher or senior leaders 'hand out' or delegate certain roles and functions to others who carry out the work on their behalf, it is implicit in leadership for learning that people take on leadership as a right and responsibility rather than it being bestowed as a gift or burden.

This is what Jim Spillane proposes in his distributed perspective on leadership – 'a framework for thinking about and analysing leadership' (Spillane, 2006: 10). For Spillane, leadership practice from a distributed perspective is 'a product of the joint interaction of school *leaders, followers*, and aspects of their *situation* such as tools and routines' (Spillane, 2006: 3) (italics in original). […]

In his discussions of distributed leadership Spillane draws on activity theory (Engeström, 1999) while not specifically referring to it, while for Peter Gronn activity theory is explicitly referred to as a 'promising approach to the study of the work of leaders' (Gronn, 2000: 326). This promise is due to certain characteristics of activity theory, particularly that it takes a holistic perspective, has the division of labour as a central feature, and uses collectively performed activity as its unit of analysis. Adopting activity theory as his analytical framework, Gronn argues that 'leadership invariably takes a distributed form' (Gronn, 2000: 333). It is a form, he argues, whose time has come, and that will become more and more prevalent due to developments in technology that are increasingly facilitating collaborative work.

Activity theory is helpful in reframing our understanding of leadership as a distributed activity but is equally applicable to learning. There are important parallels and synergies to be found in research into distributed cognition and distributed intelligence (Pea, 1993; Cole and Engeström, 1993; Salomon and Perkins, 1998). David Perkins, for example, argues that 'human cognition at its richest almost always occurs in ways that are physically, socially and symbolically distributed' (Perkins, 1992: 133), and gives examples of each category, including notes, portfolios and computers; learning in groups, pair problem solving and Socratic teaching; diagrams, concept maps and tables. In his book *King Arthur's Round Table,* Perkins relates the story of how the crew of the USS *Palau* used distributed cognition to bring the ship safely to anchor despite losing all power whilst in a

busy narrow channel (Perkins, 2003). Disaster was averted by both parallel and coordinated thinking by many members of the crew. […] Leadership, followership, learning and intelligence were all distributed.

Whilst rarely having to deal with an incident as dramatic as a ship underway with no form of steering, brakes or propulsion, it may also be a telling metaphor for schools adrift, having lost both the rudder of leadership and the compass of learning. Schools function best when all their members work together through a process of distributed cognition and distributed leadership. We are beginning to understand that the strength, resilience and capability of a school lie in its distributed intelligence, its shared leadership and its communal learning. This is what James Coleman (1988) described as 'social capital'.

Social capital

The concept of social capital adds richness to our developing understanding of leadership for learning in its emphasis on social networks and connections. It involves norms such as trust and collaboration, and varies in form depending on the frequency and quality of contact and the strength of bonding between people. Social capital theorists (for example Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 1999; Szreter, 2000) describe three forms of social capital – bonding, bridging and linking. Bonding social capital is characterised by relatively few, strong connections among people, creating strong groups but also leading to insularity. With bridging social capital the links are relatively weaker, but more-numerous, having the advantage of being outward looking, connecting people with others beyond their immediate reference group, opening up new ways of seeing, relating and learning. Linking social capital is a form of bridging but instead of being collegial and 'horizontal' it is 'vertical', linking with others on different hierarchial planes, making connections between people with differing degrees of power and authority. It brings us back again to the wedding cake model and the horizontal and vertical linking which is fostered by a quality of leadership in which the social capital is what is shared within communities of learners. Leadership for learning is concerned above all with keeping alive bridging social capital because it is the many and weak links that provide the scope and space for the exercise of agency in respect of both leadership and learning.

Agency

In further developing our understanding of leadership for learning we found the concept of agency helpful – in a sense the missing link between leadership as activity and learning as activity, leadership as dispersed and learning as distributed. Agency can be taken straightforwardly to mean 'the capacity to make a difference', but in his paper 'The concept of "agency" in leadership for learning' David Frost offers a fuller explanation.

> Being an agent or having agency involves having a sense of self encompassing particular values and a cultural identity, and being able to pursue self-determined purposes and goals through self-conscious strategic action. (Frost, 2006: 20)
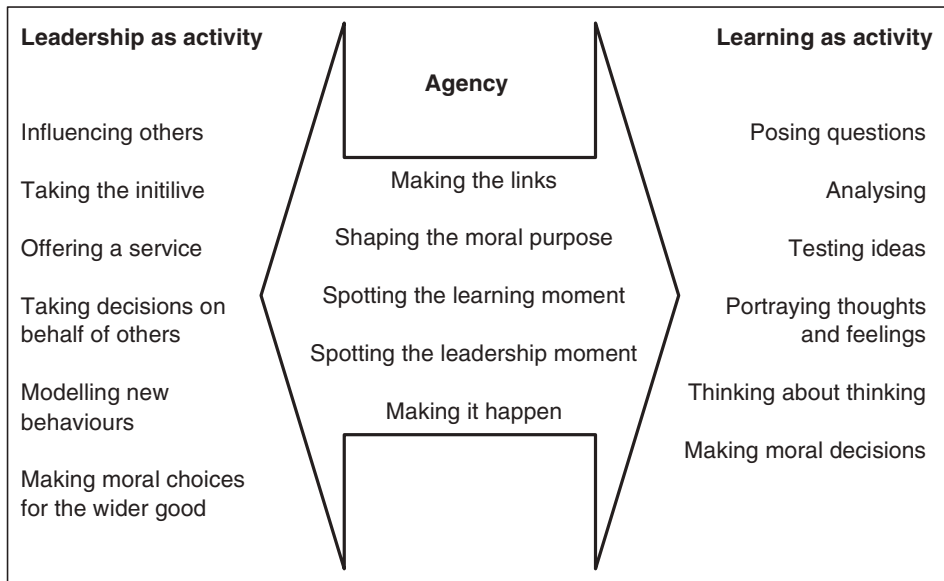
Leadership as activity	Agency	Learning as activity
Influencing others		Posing questions
Taking the initilive	Making the links	Analysing
Offering a service	Shaping the moral purpose	Testing ideas
Taking decisions on behalf of others	Spotting the learning moment	Portraying thoughts and feelings
Modelling new behaviours	Spotting the leadership moment	Thinking about thinking
Making moral choices for the wider good	Making it happen	Making moral decisions

Figure 1.2   Agency linking leadership and learning

He then goes on to discuss agency in relation to learning, free will, self-regulation, and self-belief, the essential characteristics that allow learning to occur and which characterise leadership. True learning, he argues, involves volition and purposefulness, and agency, whether exercised in learning or in leadership, involves moral choice as a corollary of free will. Anthony Giddens' theory of action posits a two-way relationship between individual agency and social structures and norms so that taking charge of one's own learning or influencing the learning of others is underpinned by a willingness to engage with the social or political structures which often serve to constrain and limit potential. The exercise of agency includes the monitoring, regulation and evaluation of how we learn and how we lead and the extent to which we push against the boundaries of conventional inhibitions.

When an individual or group grasps a sense of their own agency they may take the initiative to draw attention to something meaningful. They may spot the learning moment, helping others to see significance or new meaning in routine behaviour. They may discern leadership in the smallest classroom incident and celebrate it publicly. They may make learning or leadership visible to others. They may create a dialogue around those moments of insight or use them as something on which to plan and build alternative practices. Agency may take many forms with varied purpose. It may be exercised for good or for ill. As educators, however, we believe that as leadership and learning alike are infused with moral purpose, agency is the key ingredient that helps to share and shape that moral purpose. This is shown in Figure 1.2.

Moral purpose

Agency involves free choice, and as such is a moral issue. As Sergiovanni observes, 'Whenever there is an unequal distribution of power between two people, the relationship

becomes a moral one' (Sergiovanni, 2001: 13). Not all leadership is 'good', nor is all learning. Neither is all leadership associated with valued learning. The actions of oppressive political leaders have caused suffering throughout the world, and young lives are blighted by gang leaders who exert a strong influence on adolescent culture. Even leadership of a less obviously malevolent nature may be exercised in the pursuit of undesirable ends, such as excessive consumerism or the cult of the celebrity. Much of what is learnt, formally and informally, detracts from rather than contributes to the individual and greater good.

The leadership and learning that we are interested in are not just neither malevolent nor neutral. They are positively benevolent. Leadership for learning is driven by moral purpose, based on values that underpin learning and infuse leadership. These are made apparent through behaviours and actions, and the conditions we create for students, teachers and parents.

Exploring *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership* Fullan states that:

> … the moral imperative of the principal involves leading deep cultural change that mobilizes the passion and commitment of teachers, parents and others to improve the learning of all students, including closing the achievement gap. (Fullan, 2003: 41)

He argues that the culture of schools and of the wider school system needs to become one in which sustainable, continuous improvement and reform are built in. This has resonances with John Dewey's view of learning as continual growth and the educative experience as one that promotes the possibility of having desirable future experiences (Dewey, 1938).

The learning that we value and promote is evidenced by the cultures we create. Fullan maintains that principals need to build new cultures based on trusting relationships, disciplined inquiry and action. He is careful to distinguish between a culture of discipline and disciplinarian leadership, and draws on Jim Collins's 2001 book *Good to Great* which identifies three aspects of a culture of discipline – disciplined people (which dispenses with the need for hierarchy), disciplined thought (which dispenses with the need for bureaucracy) and disciplined action (which dispenses with the need for excessive controls).

All three of Collins's disciplines infuse our actions and demeanour. We all make a difference to those around us, for good or ill, consciously or unconsciously, planned or by default. Our 'inner compass' (Covey, 1994) or sense of purpose can guide us if we continually ask ourselves the questions: Why did I become an educator in the first place? What do I stand for as a leader? What legacy do I want to leave (Livsey and Palmer, 1999, cited in Fullan, 2003)?

Distinctive features of leadership for learning

Grasping what leadership for learning means in theory and in practice has been, and will continue to be, a developing narrative. Concepts such as activity, agency and moral purpose each contributed something important to our understanding. We now see it as comprised of a number of distinguishing features (Figure 1.3).
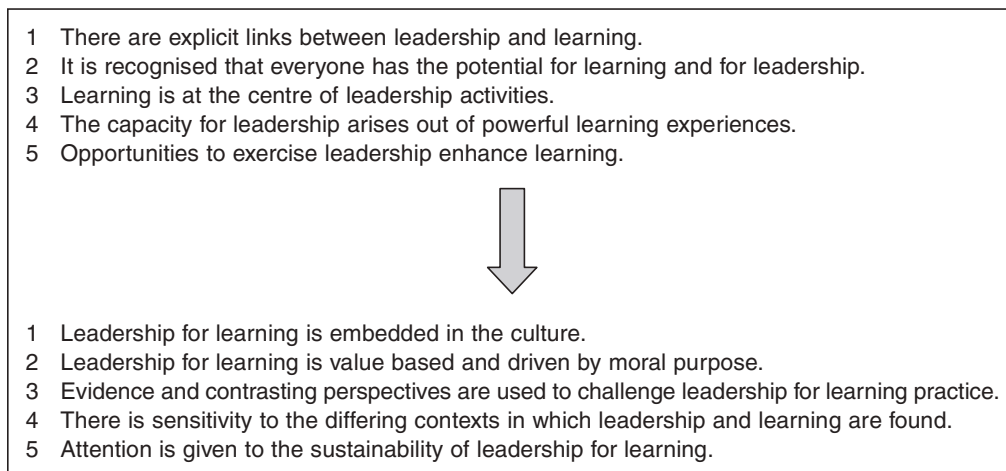
1   There are explicit links between leadership and learning.
2   It is recognised that everyone has the potential for learning and for leadership.
3   Learning is at the centre of leadership activities.
4   The capacity for leadership arises out of powerful learning experiences.
5   Opportunities to exercise leadership enhance learning.

1   Leadership for learning is embedded in the culture.
2   Leadership for learning is value based and driven by moral purpose.
3   Evidence and contrasting perspectives are used to challenge leadership for learning practice.
4   There is sensitivity to the differing contexts in which leadership and learning are found.
5   Attention is given to the sustainability of leadership for learning.

Figure 1.3   Connecting leadership and learning

As we continue to reflect, analyse data and engage in dialogue, we will further refine our ideas and understanding, as continuous inquiry and reframing are intrinsic to the very nature of leading and learning. […]

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