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**STORIES OF IMPROVEMENT:
EXPLORING AND EMBRACING
DIVERSITY**

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This paper draws on two international research studies recently completed. One was a three and a half year project Leadership for Learning, known as *Carpe Vitam* after its Swedish funders, the second - Bridges over Boundaries – was a two year project financed by the European Commission. What these two studies had in common was:

- their international focus
- their sensitivity to the political environment
- their central concern with learning as a multi-level concept
- the role of leadership in creating a learning-centred or self-evaluation culture

From both of these projects we learned a great deal about the process of improvement in very differing circumstances, constantly testing our preconceptions and bringing us back persistently to the question:

What is unique to specific national and local contexts and what do we hold in common that travels across national boundaries?

Leadership for Learning: the *Carpe Vitam* Project

The Leadership for Learning Project (known as *Carpe Vitam* after its Swedish commissioning body) was an international research and development project focusing on the process by which schools made, and then grew, the connections between learning and leadership. It was funded for three years (2002-2005) by the Wallenberg Foundation in Sweden, with further financial support from participating countries. The project was directed from the University of Cambridge¹ collaborating with eight different groups of university researchers and their nominated schools in eight cities - Brisbane, Australia; Innsbruck, Austria; Copenhagen, Denmark; Oslo, Norway; Athens, Greece; London, England; Trenton (New Jersey) and Seattle (Washington) in the United States.

¹ The Cambridge team: John MacBeath, David Frost, Sue Swaffield, Gregor Sutherland and Joanne Waterhouse. Team leaders in other countries were: George Bagakis (University of Patras, Greece), Neil Dempster (Griffith University, Brisbane), David Green (Centre for Evidence Based Education, Trenton, New Jersey), Lejf Moos (Danish University of Education), Jorunn Möller (University of Oslo), Bradley Portin (University of Washington) and Michael Schratz (University of Innsbruck).

The project was, like many other good ideas, conceived during an ICSEI conference (Copenhagen 2002). It arose out of a concern, shared among a number of countries that both learning and leadership agendas were being co-opted by increasingly interventionist and governments and that school principals and teachers needed not only to take back into ownership these key ideas but to explore the integrity of their relationship. We wanted to bring not only conceptual clarity to these ideas but to explore how they were made meaningful within very different cultural traditions and linguistic conventions.

As researchers we brought to this inquiry a background of work in leadership and school improvement in each of the eight university centres yet with a shared recognition that we had much still to learn about how these ideas played out in school practice within their own cultural contexts and within a policy climate increasingly driven by a common global agenda.

Each of the eight sites was responsible for the recruitment of three schools, selected purposively on the basis that they wished to embark with us on a collaborative journey of inquiry, framed by a set of values held in common. The assumption that a set of values was held in common was put to the test when the schools met for the first time in Cambridge to launch the project, to engage in dialogue across national borders and languages and, to test the extent to which superficial agreement on priorities actually concealed deeper differences. It was the first step in beginning to understand diversity as a prelude to finding commonality.

Representatives (on average three people) from the 22 schools came together four times over the life of the project – in Cambridge, Innsbruck, Copenhagen and Athens – conferences which stretched over four days and included visits to local schools. In the final, Athens, conference we characterised the improvement journey in four acts, in X's terminology as storming, norming, performing and reforming.

In Cambridge (Act 1) a predominating characteristic of the occasion was brainstorming, puzzlement, frustration over linguistic conventions, struggles with researchers' terminology and considerable reluctance to embrace the term 'research', trying to come to terms with different conceptions of learning and leadership let alone the link between them. A year on in Innsbruck (Act II), storming, although not left behind, had given way to greater 'norming'. There were beginnings of a common language and some notable

examples of sharing of practice. Teachers and headteachers began to share leadership dilemmas acting as critical friends across national boundaries. Incipient networks began to take shape and cross country exchanges and visits were negotiated, To depict a neat linear progression from storming to norming would, however be both simplistic. Many participants continued to struggle to make the leadership-learning connections and to see their applications within the policy context within which they worked.

We characterised Act III, one year on in Copenhagen, as ‘performing’. Participants brought to their third meeting experiences of inter-country exchanges and ongoing conversations. Workshops were led by teachers, documenting their learning, in an atmosphere of greater trust, opening up leadership issues to greater scrutiny, offering vignettes to illustrate the connection between learning and leadership. Visits to Danish schools had, for some, a profound impact on their thinking, evidenced in school leaders’ determination to return to their own schools with new vision and commitment to new ways of working.

Act IV, Athens, was portrayed as ‘reforming’. Change was tangible and exhilarating. Research was no longer something to be viewed with apprehension but rather as something integral to learning and leadership. The research teams’ ‘manifesto’, presented as our emerging theory, was dissected and re-presented by country groups with sharp and sometimes, for us, uncomfortable critique. Our emerging theoretical principles of leadership for learning, accepted in Copenhagen without much demur, were now shredded creatively and critically as each country group came up to present their views. The written reflections after each of these four conferences bear testimony to the impact of the intellectual distance travelled.

One of the most tangible exemplars of change was in the visit to Greek schools. An English headteacher who had visited one of the Greek schools two years before said this in a feedback session on the visits.

I could not believe this was the same school I visited a couple of years back. The change was phenomenal and visible everywhere you went. It was like people were speaking a different language, thinking differently, doing things differently. The whole ethos of the place had changed beyond recognition.

This process captures something of what happens in an international project although not in a simple linear sequence but in small cycles or eddies of dissonance and resolution, disequilibrium and stability. There were peaks of enthusiasm and embrace of new ideas when school principals and teachers came together for extended conferencing and workshops to exchange stories and theories of practice. There were troughs when they returned to their schools to be met with other pressing priorities and impatient government mandates.

Built into the project from the outset was the ongoing support and consultancy of a critical friend, one of the University team with the remit of helping to carry the momentum, acting as a bridge between the research and development processes. Drawing on the experience of other projects in which a critical friends had worked alongside researchers (Swaffield and MacBeath, 2005), the intention was to build a relationship of trust such that teachers would feel supported in critical analysis of current practice and feel confidence in venturing into new ways of thinking about their roles as learners and leaders.

Three research questions, derived from cross country conversations prior to the beginning of our study in order to reflect what for all of us were common concerns.

- How is leadership understood in different contexts?
- How is learning understood and promoted within 24 different schools and policy contexts?
- What is the relationship between leadership and learning?

A baseline questionnaire was constructed to give us a set of perspectives on schools at the outset of the project so that over time we might be able to assess changes in thinking about practice, re-administering the questionnaire three years on to give a picture of change. While subjecting questionnaire data to factor analysis, the validity of items and clusters of items really only began to be tested in the process of dialogue when findings were fed back to schools, to clusters of schools nationally and internationally at conference workshops. These held up a mirror to current practice setting in train a

dialogue and engaging differing understandings of school priorities within and between schools. Opportunities for reflection on the data allowed participating school staff to discover meaning in the bald statistics at school, school cluster and cross country levels. Problematising these data in conversations raised the question of whether these were measures of school effects or were indicators of something more deeply embedded in national and local cultures or in the nature of scholastic discourse in these varying linguistic contexts. While sense making came in part through interrogation of the data within and across country groups, an important complement to this were qualitative data – interviews, shadowing, portraits, workshops and school visits and recording of the discussions that took place at the four international conferences.

As data were gathered in five languages, each country research team analysed data in their own context, proving summary research reports for meta analysis within the Cambridge team. The methodology is described more fully in Frost and Swaffield (2004).

Bridges across Boundaries

Bridges across Boundaries was a two year project funded by the European Commission centrally co-ordinated by the University of Cambridge and led by Francesca Brotto from the Italian Ministry. Its purpose was to draw on and extend a European Project carried out between 1997 and 1999 which had involved 101 schools in eighteen European countries and had emanated in the book *Self-evaluation in European Schools* (MacBeath , Schratz, Jacobsen and Meuret, 2000).

Its influence on EU policy is evidenced by twelve recommendations to EU Member States (COM 2000, N. 523, 3/8/00) outlining action needed to improve the quality of schooling. Two in particular served to frame the Bridges across Boundaries Project.

Encourage school self-evaluation as a method of creating learning and improving schools, within a balanced framework of school self-evaluation and any external evaluations;

Encourage and support, where appropriate, the involvement of school stakeholders, namely teachers, pupils, management, parents and experts, in the process of external and self-evaluation in schools, in order to promote shared responsibility for the improvement of schools.

With new accession countries to the E.U. the project was designed to replicate the earlier study, adapting to school circumstances, the end product being new version of the book in the various national languages. Switzerland (who had not taken part in the original study) was now included along with two countries who had been part of the original study – Greece and Portugal.

In an early meeting of the seven countries objectives were framed by the participants, for example:

- To help Czech schools overcome the fear and uncertainty from self-evaluation and help them understand its processes
- To establish self evaluation as a habit in our schools in Switzerland
- To learn (with and from others) how to deal with self evaluation in Slovak schools
- To empower schools in Portugal to take care of a quality development policy, in an autonomous way (to have something to contrast to the mandated and formatted SE)
- To establish the idea that self evaluation is a process of growing collaboration, and not a product

Altogether 40 schools took part in the project: two in Switzerland, seven in the Czech Republic, four in Hungary, , 15 in Poland and 12 in Slovakia. Unlike the original European pilot project which engaged only secondary schools, some of the schools involved in *Bridges across Boundaries* were in the primary sector while the Slovaks also included two special schools. Greek and Portuguese schools, part of the original EU, were not an integral part but researchers and translators from those two countries were involved as the Greek and Portuguese versions of the book were in progress (and published in late 2005).

All 40 schools followed the same protocol as in the earlier European Project, that is, using the self-evaluation profile (commonly known as the SEP) to evaluate their school on twelve key indicators (described in full in MacBeath et al, 2000), then selecting one or two of these for deeper exploration and data gathering. The evaluation of their schools on these 12 dimensions was conducted by groups of teachers, students and parents, working first in cognate groups then collaboratively to engage with and understand differing perspectives, coming to see their schools through different lenses and different aspirations. Schools, it was learned, are different places for different people, depending on where you stand or sit.

As in the *Carpe Vitam* Project, sharing thinking and building learning networks across national boundaries and language barriers was a key element and, like that project, critical friends were appointed to work across country boundaries - Portugal with Hungary, Switzerland and Poland, Greece, with the Czech Republic and Slovakia. A surprising aspect of the latter critical friend relationship was for the Greek critical friend, George Bagakis, to discover the close and particular cultural affinity with those two countries.

Workshops for critical friends and translators were held in Budapest, Brno and Athens, not unlike the four acts of *Carpe Vitam*, experiencing an intensive storming phase in which people struggled to establish a common frame of reference and come to terms with concepts which made little sense in their own countries and within their own school conventions. Two years on at the final Budapest conference, which brought representatives from the participating schools together, there was a sense of euphoria at how far these schools had moved in their thinking and practice within a relatively short time frame. Teachers, principals and school students reported on their evaluation of their schools, on the follow-up in-depth inquiry, and six groups of students working across national boundaries presented their photo evaluations² of the conference itself.

Border Crossings

In many of the countries represented by these two projects 'school improvement' has little meaning except in the common sense notion of getting better. Many do not have the kind of whole school focus and reliance on data which the terminology implies nor can it be taken as axiomatic that 'school improvement' as understood within the SESI mainstream is an unconditional 'good thing'. For example, the item *Teachers have a commitment to the whole school as well as to their class* was deleted from the *Carpe Vitam* baseline questionnaire as being meaningless in some countries.

None the less both of these projects started from the premise that schools as communities, can learn; that a good or 'effective' school is greater than the sum of its parts; that thinking and practice are enhanced when teachers learn from one another and from their students; and that the challenges and insights that come from working across national borders helps to build intellectual and social capital. For many schools in both projects

² A description of photo evaluation can be found in Schratz, M. (2003) From Administering to Leading a school, *Cambridge Journal of Education* (2003), 33:3: 95-417

this represented a major challenge to thinking and practice, stemming as these precepts do, from a number of assumptions about leadership, culture and pedagogy.

For the research teams in both projects, being steeped in a language and canon of literature was more of an obstacle than a help when confronted with the diversity in three significant dimensions of national cultures:

1. Linguistic and conceptual
2. Historical and cultural
3. Structural and functional

1. Linguistic and conceptual

An integral part of the *Bridges across Boundaries* study was to translate the self-evaluation text into the six different languages represented in the project. To this end we organised a series of translators' workshops to explore meaning behind, for us, essential concepts such as 'intelligence', 'ability', 'effectiveness', 'improvement'. This proved hazardous enough without even broaching terminology such as 'value added' and 'accountability' which, for English language speakers, trip so easily off the tongue. And while it is possible to explain these words they make no sense without a grasp of the context in which they are situated.

Some words proved to be 'faux amis' (or 'false friends', as we learned at school). Ethos, for example, is a Greek word but is a source of complete bafflement to the Greeks when used in the sense of climate or culture as its Greek meaning is closer to 'ethics'. A dramatic example of how false friends can seriously mislead comes from an OECD study (MacBeath and McGlynn, 1995) in which the questionnaire response category 'quite important' was rendered as 'bastant importante' (Portuguese) and 'bastante importante' (Spanish), but quite significantly different in meaning.

In the Carpe Vitam Project an intensive weekend was spent with researchers from the seven countries trying to render into four languages the translation of the English baseline questionnaire. Few concepts travelled self evidently, particularly in the two key areas of our research – 'learning' and 'leadership'. For example, in German the word for leader is 'Führer', a term so loaded with historical and political significance that is not an equivalent to 'leader' in English. In Greek 'leadership' carries the notion of power over.

In other countries where the term does not exist the English word 'leadership' is used with whatever interpretation one cares to give to it. In the U.S. the term 'administrators' refers to school principals while in Britain it refers to office staff. In Norway the questionnaire item *senior management communicates a clear vision of where the school is going* was omitted as it did not make sense in a Norwegian context. The item *I would recommend this school to a friend or neighbour* was also removed as it proved puzzling to countries in which there was a school 'market' with parental choice informed by performance tables.

'Concepts that look alike but are actually structured of quite different elements' are described by Moos and Moller (2003, p. 360) as 'cultural isomorphs', deceptively similar but essentially different. As Moos and Moller argue, most educational publications are produced in the UK and USA and as research findings are accessible only in the English language, Nordic countries find themselves not only adopting the language but also its underlying constructs. Recasting these with local cultural and semantic interpretations erects a barrier to understanding of the essential differences that lie beneath the words.

Language is co-opted as an agent of ideology.... So participatory discourse becomes **overshadowed** by an administrative discourse, and is distorted into a technology of control. Traditional norms of democratic accountability are open to question while the tenor of debate about democratic leadership undergoes gradual change (Moos and Moller p.361)

Historical and cultural

Language is inextricable from the culture in which it resides and the stream of history which created it. Both *Bridges* and *Carpe Vitam* presented researchers and school staff with lessons in cultural sensitivity and an appreciation of history, ignorance which have long proved traps for the unwary as evidenced by two of the most famous of anthropologists, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict. For the research teams even after two or three years of working with other cultures and ways of thinking there were always still surprises and disturbances to our mental models. Swedish commentators write about their national culture in terms of 'lagom', a trait that would not be easily perceived by the outsider especially in projects represented by the exceptional rather than the 'typical' Swede. 'Lagom' is typified by Swedish writers in these terms:

Sweden has almost no poverty and there exists a national respect for what the Swedes call Lagom, which roughly translated means 'sufficiency in life'. So powerful is this belief in lagom that Swedes

almost religiously subscribe to a self disciplined lifestyle that eschews excesses and where striving for individuality is looked upon as being socially inappropriate. In manner and thought, Swedes value an economic and social system of checks and balances, free from the generated inequalities of unrestrained capitalism or the waste and mistakes of rigidly focused authoritarian, centralised planning. For the Swede, lagom and 'the middle way' represent the best that society has to offer. (Wallenberg, 2005)

This presents a vivid contrast to the United States culture as described by Larry Cuban. (2001). He calls it a 'Godsaker culture' (for God's sake do something') and writes:

Acknowledging that many situations are intractable and require managing through negotiating trade-offs goes against the cultural grain and creates guilt over failure to remedy problems. Americans have a hard time with the idea of intractable or insoluble problems. (p.16)

Democracy in the new accession countries of Eastern Europe expresses itself in fundamentally different ways than democracy in the USA. It has a long history, and both the embrace of, and resistance to, change can only be understood within that history. Geert Hofstede's (1980) work on differences among national cultures defines five broad salient factors which resonate with the range of countries included in these two studies in which people perceive large variations on each of these dimension but within as well as between countries.

Power Distance – demand for egalitarianism as against acceptance of the unequal distribution of power

Individualism-Collectivism - interdependent roles and obligations to the group as against self-sufficiency

Masculinity-Femininity - endorsement of modesty, compromise and co-operative success as against competition and aggressive success

Uncertainty Avoidance - tolerating ambiguity as against rules and set procedures

Long term orientation- perseverance and risk as against fulfilling obligations

Structural and functional

Structures of schools look remarkably similar from one country to the next but their very similarity may blind us to some of the norms and functions which they conceal. Although all countries share common conventions - cohorts of same age children progressing

through a standardised curriculum, for example - what is seen as appropriate at any given age differs, most sharply exemplified in approaches to the teaching and testing of literacy for example in Nordic countries where formal schooling starts later and there is not the same pressure and anxiety over early indices of attainment. In England the notion of 'key stages' and 'levels', now applied earlier and earlier, is so deeply rooted in the structures of schooling that it has become firmly embedded in teachers' mental models and professional discourse .

Transition from one stage of schooling to the next are also founded on both convention and underpinning beliefs about age appropriateness and notions of readiness. In Denmark the Folkskole is a ten year school taking children from six to sixteen, often with one teacher for that entire time span. In the U.S. middle schools provide a transitional bridge between childhood and adolescence. In England the '11 plus' watershed between primary and secondary schooling, with its deeply symbolic history, continues to frame conceptions of a what is 'primary' and what constitutes a 'secondary' education, the onset of adolescence seen as the proving ground of the 'academic' and 'non academic'. Each stage or phase of schooling carries within it a cluster of inert ideas about age and stage appropriateness for learning, ideas which have proved highly resistant to fundamental change.

While 'leadership' and 'management' are a common feature of all schools in the Austrian context they play out quite differently in practice. There is no formal middle leadership in secondary schools – no subject or year leaders with designated leadership or managerial responsibilities. The principal makes final decisions while consulting with staff informally to get buy-in and ownership.

Local management of schools is another example of a global trend which conceals dissimilarities in meaning. In evaluating the Carpe Vitam project the Seattle team commented:

Descriptions (in the terminology of their own national context) were both limited and sometimes confusing for participants. For example, when a British school spoke about 'local management' of the school, that policy was immediately reinterpreted by US participants on the basis of what it was assumed to mean in their own national context. When the schools began to engage in longer-term discussions as the project was underway, it became clear that local assumptions, mediated by their own national policy context, was leading to assumptions about practice in other contexts.

What appears common to school everywhere is a struggle to find the time for learning or reflection on learning, as teachers in Greece, the Czech republic and the U.S.A. complain in similar ways about curriculum and assessment pressure as leaving little time for reflection and discussion, and they similarly puzzle over how to engage young and restless minds with scientific method, mathematical formulae or medieval literature and other subject matter which have proved highly resistant to radical reappraisal.

IN SEARCH OF COMMONALITY

The distinctive character of both these projects is the wide cultural range they present ranging from new accession countries in Eastern Europe, still with lingering vestiges of Communist regimes, to 'blue' dissenting American states which did not vote for their current President. Yet all live within remarkably similar policy environments, connected by global exchange among policy makers and under the shadow of OECD international performance measures which exert a powerful influence on educational policy making.

Political and policy factors

During the life of the Carpe Vitam project elections in Austria, Denmark and Norway all brought a swing to the Right accompanied by a strong emphasis on leadership, less concerned with learning than with New Public Management. In the U.K. and the U.S. the Carpe Vitam Project was set within the growing Bush-Blair alliance, the advent of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation in the States and *Every Child Matters* in England. Australia saw the re-election of a Howard government but without major repercussions at school level while in Greece the election of a centre-left coalition was greeted by school staff with a sigh of relief not only because the party in power influences the appointment of school principals but, as elsewhere, government intervention in education is becoming increasingly politicised. The following comment from an English headteacher had an alarmingly familiar resonance with schools in many other countries.

I have three pistols to my head: one is the need to prepare the school for another visit from the inspectors because we are in Special Measures, another is the need to present a case to the local authority which is threatening to close the school and another is the need to improve the attainment figures so we can be lifted out of the status of being 'a school in challenging circumstances'. And then there is the small matter of trying to lead and manage the school on a day-to-day basis and meet the needs of our students and the community. (quoted in Frost, 2005 p.72)

In the U.S. the Seattle research team wrote:

These schools exist in a noisy policy and accountability environment. Multiple demands, expectations, and reform efforts contribute to this noise which manifests itself as possible directions to pursue, priorities to set, and challenges to undertake (local report)

The U.S. and U.K. political environment share a common aspect, described by Eric Alterman in the U.S. as the ‘post truth political environment’ (2004) and by Peter Osborne in the U.K. as ‘the rise of political lying’ (2005). These combined critiques expose remarkable parallels in two political administrations conjoined in lies, ‘damned lies and statistics’³ within which so much of educational policy is carried through.

Social and economic factors

While growing up in Krakow, Innsbruck or Trenton would appear to have few common features, aspirations and needs (primary as well as manufactured) begin to edge ever closer in the Network Society (Castells, 1996), and the passage from childhood to adulthood is fraught with common obstacles. Many of the newly discovered hazards of childhood and adolescence are familiar in every country touched by these two research projects. Depression, addiction, attention deficiency and bipolar disorders appear as new phenomena among children and young people, to some degree only now recognised but also seen as emergent in response to a changing social fabric. Research by Abela (2003) finds that clinical depression in the young is a phenomenon of the last two decades, attributing increasing rates of depression among the young to growing materialism, fixation on financial success, physical appearance and social recognition, a more fragile sense of self in proportion to self worth being judged by attaining external goods and pursuing extrinsic goals (within which we might include obsession with school performance). He concludes that as societies become more materialistic, depression rates rise in tandem. It is now known, claims The World Health Organisation (2005), that many mental disorders seen in adulthood have their beginnings in childhood and

³ Wrongly attributed to Disraeli by Mark Twain the phrase ‘lies, damned lies and statistics’ was coined in the late nineteenth century by one J. A. Baines who was standing for election in New England in 1892.

adolescence.

The World Health Organisation (2005) estimates that eight per cent of all girls and two per cent of all boys in the U.K. show symptoms of severe depression. In the 5-10 age group, 10 per cent of boys and six per cent of girls are affected, and among the 11-15 age group, 13 per cent of boys and 10 per cent of girls. The Mental Health Foundation estimates that 15 per cent of pre-school children have mild mental health problems, and seven per cent more severe mental health problems (p. 25).

The WHO report figures such as these as common to all European countries. They estimate that some two million young people in the European Region suffer from mental disorders ranging from depression to schizophrenia, increasingly marked in adolescence. Many of these young people receive no care or treatment, their conditions often barely understood by teachers, parents or social services. Depression is associated with suicide in the young, the third leading cause of death among young people. The highest rates in the world are found in the European Region, particularly in Eastern European countries.

These are disproportionate in their effects on disadvantaged neighbourhoods, with the highest rates of mental disorders occurring among children from families where no parent has ever worked. The data show a clear link between mental disorders and rates of smoking, alcohol consumption, and cannabis use, most prevalent in the most economically deprived areas. Poorer people are also six times more likely to be admitted to hospital with schizophrenia, and ten times more likely to be admitted for alcohol-related problems. (p. 127-202)

Common to European countries, as the report data show, is the growth of inequality, applying in particular to families with children and adolescents for whom access to quality health services, information, education, decent housing and adequate nutrition continues to be difficult. Inequities in health and in access to health care between different groups are shown to be both socially divisive, contributing to social instability. The poorest segments of the population suffer high mortality rates and underlying conditions such as malnutrition are not only prevalent in the poorer countries but among disadvantaged groups in more affluent countries, such as the United Kingdom. Across Europe child poverty ranges from under 5% in Scandinavia to over 15% in Ireland, Italy and the United Kingdom.

Explanations of rising inequality, as concluded by National Statistics (2005) in the U.K., appear to be apply more widely although differentially in their weighting in different socio-economic and cultural contexts.

- An increase in the gap between wages for skilled and unskilled workers in part due to skills-biased technological change and a decline in the role of trade unions
- Growth in self-employment income and in unemployment
- A decrease in the rate of male participation in the labour market, often in households where there is no other earner
- Increased female participation among those with working partners, leading to an increased polarisation between two-earner and zero-earner households

Many of these same trends apply in the U.S. where data on childhood depression apply in similar measure and suicide is reported s the third most prevalent cause of death in young people . 1997 research by Schoen, Davis, and Scott found one in four girls reporting depressive symptoms and one in eight boys. 50 per cent of girls of school age were reported at risk from some form of mental health problem, while 58 per cent reported wishing to leave home because of violence or sexual abuse.

Despite improved access to formal education for more young people, initiatives to close the gap have continued to be frustrated by factors lying largely outside schools yet with significant impact on within and between school variation. It is a lesson we have learned from four decades of school effectiveness studies since the first shot across the bows from Coleman and Jencks, in 1966 and 1972 respectively.

School and community factors

The search for common principles and practices has to be applicable to school and community contexts not only widely different but, in many cases, in a constant state of flux. The monocultural schools in Innsbruck, Locarno or Oslo present stark contrasts with schools in Brisbane, London and Trenton. These schools serve local communities with a highly diverse ethnic mix with concomitants of poverty endemic to such socio-economic profiles. Among young people in a Brisbane school 55 different languages other than English are spoken with birthplaces that extend to 60 countries other than

Australia while certain parts of the city continue to attract students from Pacific Rim countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, China, Vietnam, Japan, European countries such as Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary and Poland, as well as from troubled African countries such as the Sudan. In a Tower Hamlets school in London 55 per cent of the school population have English as an additional language while 35 per cent are on the school's register of Special Educational Needs.

And the intake's changed over the years. The school is one of the few schools in Tower Hamlets that's still multi-ethnic and actually reflects the nature of the borough. There has been a change. Over the years we've moved from a majority white population to a majority Bangladeshi population, although we've still got strong numbers of white pupils. And slightly more Afro-Caribbean than perhaps we've had in the past. And obviously 'cos we're a small school, from year to year you get odd things like ... one year all your bright kids might be Bangladeshi girls, which is wonderful 'cos you're guaranteed results! Another year, like our current Year 11, all our bright pupils are actually white boys, which has all sorts of problems! So you have to change what you do. We change our pupil grouping. We try not to just be set in our ways. This constant reflection. And so I think that's part of the learning and constantly looking at what we're doing, and do we need to change it?'
(Deputy head teacher)

In this school the shift in balance from a majority of Bangladeshi girls (*'wonderful 'cos you're guaranteed results'*) to a predominance of white boys (*'which causes all sorts of problems'*), requires a constant readjustment of focus and strategy. The culture is depicted as fragile, on the edge of chaos, imported by students, by media and by disgruntled or demanding parents. Some minority groups are distinguished by high aspirations and high achievement while others traditionally fail to thrive in conventional school arrangements. In official government-speak these are described as 'challenging circumstances', but circumstances which never stand still long enough to furnish evidence of continuous improvement.

I think the nature of the challenging circumstances that we work in mean that we do have to be constantly reviewing what we're doing, evaluating and responding to the changing nature of the community we're working in. (Deputy Headteacher)

The Nordic, Greek and Austrian and Seattle schools while serving less diverse ethnic communities, share many of the aspects of a global culture in which the prescriptions for school learning seem increasingly out of touch with the society in which young people are growing up. All experience the tension between political pressures on attainment and their educational commitment to a broader set of goals for their students. All participating

countries are touched by PISA comparisons, increasing the pressure on school performance. Accountability demands, framed in terms of test and examination performance, are the corollary of devolution, power pushed down with tighter external control and accountability pushed up.

STORIES OF IMPROVEMENT

It is with this as a backdrop that we approach stories of improvement. Among the range of responses that a school can take to this 'busy' environment is to locate an activity or initiative that can serve as a central organizer for multiple aims. When the right opportunity presents itself, it can serve as a centre around which a number of activities can coalesce. Both the *Carpe Vitam* project and *Bridges across Boundaries* served as a coalescing agent for multiple activities. Stories of improvement in each of these projects allowed us to tease out some common propositions. Some or all of those which follow may be described as 'principles' as in the *Carpe Vitam* project but are stated here as propositions as, however empirically grounded, they are articles of faith that still need to be tested in different contexts

1. There is a focus on learning
2. Learning flows across boundaries or role and status
3. Leadership is an activity which grows organically from a learning focus
4. Leadership is attuned to different voices and differing bandwidths
5. Leadership creates time and space for what matters
6. Leadership has a breadth of compass – locally, nationally and internationally

There is a focus on learning

In the *Carpe Vitam* project a focus on learning was a first principle. However, the problem with such a statement is that it can be taken as too self-evident. That is, after all, what schools are for, yet the language of learning has proved to be as much an inhibitor as a facilitator of shared understanding. This is not simply by virtue of the different conceptions brought by different languages but by co-option of language by policy

makers, by performativity agendas which treat learning and measured attainment as synonymous and by an intensification of teaching which leaves little room over for a deep learning discourse. Without support and challenge from collegial networks, from critical friendship and educationally subversive research projects, schools and teachers are overwhelmed by the 'grand narrative'. But, writes Giroux (1992) 'There is no grand narrative that can speak for us all' and counsels that:

Teachers must take responsibility for the knowledge they organise, produce, mediate and translate into practice. If not there is a danger that they come to be seen as simply the technical intervening medium through which knowledge is transmitted to students, erasing themselves in an uncritical reproduction of received wisdom. (p. 120)

A salient strength of the two international projects was growing evidence of a deeper learning discourse. Questionnaire and interview data reveal how far some schools have travelled while others are still in the foothills of that challenging journey. A *Carpe Vitam* questionnaire asked school staff to rate their improvement trajectory on 20 questions including *The nature and process of student learning is a focus for discussion among staff*. On this item positive responses among the 22 *Carpe Vitam* schools ranged from 9.8 to 78.2 per cent. In this latter school, interview data added the meat to the bones of the statistical data. The positive perceptions of improvement was accounted for, in the view of the deputy headteacher, by a concerted attempt of the senior leadership team to 'lift up learning' and to make it visible in the day-to-day life of the school. This was effected through learning conversations. One teacher described it as 'the structure, the ethos, the systems, the environment of the school.... so that all our conversations are about learning'. These took tangible shape in both formal and informal situations, managed both through formal allocation of time, and in the spontaneous exchanges that took place over coffee, in staffrooms and at the photocopier. Alongside this approach of cultural infusion, there were structured opportunities for staff to share ideas and practices. Learning was a standing item on all meeting agendas with a rota giving responsibility for different teachers on each occasion to take colleagues through some learning initiative they had led.

A focus on learning means making learning visible and explicit. The work of *Carpe Vitam* work was greatly influenced by David Perkins' critical friendship to the project and his ability to illuminate theory with examples of visible thinking routines rooted in classroom practice (Perkins, 2003, Ritchart and Perkins, 2003), learning becoming visible and audible in classroom conversations as described by a teacher in an English school (Johnson, quoted in Frost, 2005).

We now have a culture where it is not unusual for students to discuss their learning with both their teachers and their peers. One teacher reported that she often hears students talking about what they have done in lessons, how they prefer to learn, what they have found interesting and she finds this exciting as she has never worked with students who are so enthusiastic about their learning. (p. 83)

In Seattle a strategy for making learning visible lay in the creation of schools within schools. This helped to bring student learning into sharper focus as reported by the Seattle research team:

The small school was seen as a means to deepen the work of collaboration around student learning, engage students more in their learning and create a context to interact with all students, but particularly students in a pattern of failure, in different ways. The small school emerged as a community based on the ideas and principles that had emerged over the two years of working in the Carpe Vitam Network. It was intended to be place where the type of collaboration around student learning discovered in the past two years would be a natural feature. It was also intended to be a place where the teachers could explore ways to undo the pattern of failure that many students experienced. The students in the small school were randomly assigned and the intent was to build this community with a diverse and representative group of students. (Local analysis report)

In a New Jersey school a principal described how student work is used to focus the learning conversation.

Once a month at grade level meetings, teachers bring examples of student work and we discuss them. We developed a protocol that they use. Some of those meetings are done very well: teachers ask one another very good questions. It is wonderful to see a team of teachers who can look at student work and can ask good questions of other teachers, without 'attacking' the teacher, but in a helpful way ... asking them to think about the assignment that they'd given, for instance. Teachers have good conversations about student work, both within and across grade levels. (Principal interview)

In the *Bridges* Project learning was made visible through the engagement of students, teachers and parents in the school self-evaluation profile which set in train a dialogue among those three groups, open to critical examination as to the purposes, processes and impact of learning and schools as places of learning.

Learning flows across boundaries or role and status

Shifting the focus from student performance to organisational learning and communities of practice puts other groups into the foreground, seeing them as the oxygen of a school's

capacity for learning, 'a kind of living entity' (Garavan, 1997 p. 18) composed of people who learn. A model that has helped to frame thinking within the project is one developed by Michael Knapp and his colleagues (2002) at the University of Washington. It proposes a three layer ('wedding cake'), of student learning, professional learning and system learning, each layer interconnected through the flow of opportunities across people, classrooms and school structures. In this model student learning is dependent on professional learning while professional learning is enhanced by listening to students' accounts and the diversity of styles, preferences and strategic learnings. System learning is in turn dependent on, and feeds into, professional learning.

Learning conversations and collaboration grow informally and organically but, as the Austrian research team report, in everyday work like-minded teachers are liable to cooperate more and learn with and from one another, exchanging experiences and materials but not wanting to spend too much time dialoguing with colleagues who have different opinions of teaching and learning at large. It points to a need for a wider leadership for learning focus, open and inviting of conflict, believing that schools grow as much through vigorous debate as through easy consensus. As has been argued in the epidemiological model (Gladwell, 2000, Hargreaves, 2003) new practices 'stick' when there is a nurturing culture supported by a prescient leadership.

It is now increasingly common for schools to institute a cross-disciplinary group of staff such as a school improvement group, a teaching and learning group, or school evaluation group, entrusted with the task of evaluating, planning for and/or implementing change. A group of six to eight staff may include learning support assistants and other school staff such as caretakers or catering staff. Such a group, representing different experiences and viewpoints can serve as a reservoir of expertise and tools of evaluation and provide an important lever of school improvement. Its strength lies in its diversity and challenge to a too easy a consensus.

Conversations about learning involving all stakeholders is exemplified by one Danish school in which a meeting was held with seven elected parents, two teachers, the Vice principal and the principal to discuss the future of their school and the contribution made by each of these stakeholder groups to a learning agenda. They arrived at the following consensus:

The teacher as an academic coach, guiding students through learning situations, more than teaching in the more common sense of the word. The plays a part in the upbringing of the child, helping him relate to the world around him, interpersonally, socially, culturally and politically, promoting wonder, seeking out problem solving methods in order to gain new knowledge.

The student is cast as academic explorer, learning in various contexts, dividing study time between knowledge centres, the home class and different study groups in accordance with the project he is investigating. The student navigate her way in an information-society, using knowledge to influence and take responsibility in the world around him; locally as well as globally.

The parent helps a child meet the demands of participating in the group environment of school, participating actively in a cooperative spirit with the professional teaching team that coach his child, co-responsible for the development of that child socially, academically and in interpersonal relations.

These three ‘learning agendas’ are embedded in the wider contexts of family, community and policy accompanied by five areas for action. As Trenton School Superintendent Lyttle puts it:

Unless you value adult learning...and demonstrate that, it’s pretty hard to claim that you value child learning...unless we are all doing this together....Nothing keeps you closer to what it’s like being a student than being a student yourself. (quoted in Trenton local report)

Leadership grows organically from a learning focus

When learning becomes a source of conversation, with the character of ‘dialogue’ (in the Greek dia logos ‘meaning flowing through it), grasping the moment and assuming leadership is hard to resist. Taking the lead, creative discontent and challenging inert ideas all require initiative and action. So leadership arises spontaneously and organically out of close encounters with learning. When this happens schools become, in David Green’s (2002) words ‘leaderful communities. These are schools in which scaffolding and everyday support are provided for individuals and teams to take responsibility. One of the first priorities in creating leaderful communities was to recognise the important role of teachers who were informal leaders. As a Trenton principal put it:

I wanted to put in place some structures that ensured that the people who had been doing a lot of the informal leadership in the school had an opportunity to have that acknowledged so we had some leadership density” (Principal interview, May 2003).

Leadership density refers to Sergiovanni's concept (2001) of leadership reaching down through layers of school hierarchy or, in Spillane's terms (2004) 'stretched' across the organisation. The restructure, guided by the principles of middle schooling achieved closer relationships through breaking the school into four sub schools focussed on providing curriculum leadership and engagement with learning.

I think any instant where you go to another teacher for advice is an example of leadership. Whether its like, I've got this pupil and he's causing me problems, or she's causing me problems, what do you think I should do?

Katzenmeyer and Moller, (2001) reference to 'awakening the sleeping giant of teacher leadership. The metaphor is an apt one as it captures both the dormant qualities of an under estimated and undervalued profession and the massive potential for leadership lying unexploited. Notions of 'leadership' are so imbued with mental models that teachers are often reluctant to see themselves as leaders or as exercising leadership. Even when they do exercise initiative beyond their own classrooms it tends to be described in a different language. Yet leadership is expressed in a variety of ways, informally and formally, supporting, helping and guiding others. As a teacher in the *Carpe Vitam* project put it :

I have gained an understanding of the way of conceptualizing leadership with a focus on many people [who] can take part/initiate leadership in many contexts, and that leadership is focused on the core activities within the school, i.e. learning. Learning happens in the interaction, and that's why sharing is so important.

When there are greater opportunities for learning conversations in classrooms leadership stretches to students as well as teachers. In Brisbane, for example, the opening up of opportunities for student leadership was linked to increased pupil attendance and growing evidence of greater pupil engagement. In the Brisbane local report on teacher focus-group discussions at the end of the project, teachers spoke of student leadership in these terms:

For a kid to stand up in class and say how about we do this, that's exercising leadership

Or [in] little group you know work there's always someone who sort of seems to lead the group

I think that this whole process is actually producing leaders

Evidence from student focus groups in this Brisbane school illustrated a range of ways in which students were exercising leadership, from initiatives in classroom learning to being

band leaders and setting up study-groups. The role of students as consumers was depicted as moving to one in which they were seen as resources for learning for their teachers.

Leadership is attuned to different voices and differing bandwidths

Organisations are generally less intelligent than their individual members, claims Argyris (1993) because they do not have, or have not found, ways to bring to fruition the hidden capital of their staff and students. Students are the school's largest untapped knowledge source in a school, says SooHoo (1993) 'the treasure in our very own backyard', arguing that a school which overlooks that intelligence source is inevitably poorer as a consequence. Historically they have been the last to be consulted about school quality and effectiveness yet, as a developing literature attests, they may get closest to the heartbeat of the school (see for example Rudduck and Flutter, 2004) and teachers attested to just how rich pupils' insights could be and what could happen when that trapped energy was released. Many of the participating countries in *Bridges* and *Carpe Vitam* shared an interest in student voice and some of the schools in both projects made this a strategic priority in their improvement planning.

There is a danger of student voice at one extreme being merely tokenistic and, at the other, enjoying a privileged status as against the voices of teachers or parents or others with an equal right to be heard. Nor, as some of the *Bridges* schools found, can it be assumed to be naive, authentic and untrammelled by convention. What is expressed by a child or young adult may be spontaneous or may be a studied choice with an acute grasp of audience. Voice needs, therefore, to be heard intelligently and with discrimination, as schools are places in which there are many voices which carry, and carry in differing bandwidths (Qvortrup, 2001). There are voices which demand to be listened to by virtue of their status. Some voices have an inherent authority. Some are powerful because of their emotional resonance while others, reasoned and rational, fail to infect attitudes or practice. Voice is both an individual and collective phenomenon. It is verbal and non-verbal. It is neither constant nor without contradiction. It is highly responsive to context, politically sensitive and socially conscious.

Parental voice is often the most difficult for schools to hear. In the Polish context Maria Mendel (2003) describes schools as typically speaking to, rather than listening to, them, holding parents at a distance:

School speaks to them with a code of regulations and restrictions: at school everyone 'must do' and rarely 'can do' something voluntarily and for fun. (p. 70)

Nalaskowski (quoted in Mendel, 2003, p.67) describes school spaces as 'saturated with immaturity', not only infantilising children but parents too, whose reluctance to return to classrooms is explained by their reaction to the uncongenial places in which they were taught. When parents and teachers meet in the context of parent evening, often held in the classroom, 'saturated with immaturity', with the teacher behind the desk and the parent perched on a low chair, there takes place an exchange of views about a child's behaviour, learning and persona. Exploring this *Essential Conversation* in depth Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (2003) has described the meeting as marked by decorum and politeness, wariness and defensive postures, both sides of the table 'wracked with anxiety'. She describes these meetings as infused with histories on both sides of the table, occasions in which parents call up references to their own childhood experiences while teachers fall back on their adult experiences in the classroom.

They sometimes lead to important breakthroughs and discoveries in the conversation, and at other times force an abrupt breakdown and impasse. But for the most part, these meta-messages remain hidden, inaudible, unarticulated. They are the raw, unvarnished subtext to the ritualized, polite, public text of the conversation. (p. 33)

'La qualita non e un punto da vista' (quality is not a point of view) - the subject of debate in debate in a recent Spanish research forum (MacBeath, 2005) - was put to the test in the *Bridges* project in which groups of students, parents and teachers met together to evaluate the quality of their schools as prelude to choosing a focus for further inquiry. The ground rules required them to listen to points of view which differed for their own, to suspend judgment, to appeal to evidence, nor to settle for compromise or accept the lowest common denominator. At the end of the project a Czech teacher presented the evaluation of the impact in their school at the final conference in Budapest. Students reported that:

- They have welcomed opportunities to express their opinions openly
- They experienced greater support and understanding from their teachers
- They have learned to cooperate in groups
- They have started to apply more self-reflection
- Communication and relationships with their teachers have improved
- They have learned to talk about things that were previously hidden or 'secret'

Gains made by teachers were reported in overwhelmingly positive terms:

- We have realised our share in the wider educational process
- We have reached a better level of understanding with our students
- We have witnessed students' enthusiasm for researching learning and teaching
- We have learned a massive amount about student learning and school learning
- We have understood students' individuality and needs more than before
- We have gained a lot of experience in researching learning
- We have developed professionally and improved our teaching styles
- Self-evaluation is a useful and effective antidote to professional rigidity and deformation

Parents too reported that the project had helped them to rethink relationships between teachers and students and their own role in the education of their children.

Leadership has a breadth of compass – locally, nationally and internationally

Extending and broadening lines of sight is described by Cheng (1999) as 'interface leadership', looking outwards from the school and not simply inwards to its immediate and transitory clientele. It is an approach which sees parents as learning partners and co-educators, works together with other social agencies to create conditions for family, community and professional learning, while keeping in view shifting national policy and trends on the international stage.

Getting a fix on national policy can be difficult when there is no wider contexts in which to place it. By virtue of going out and looking back in policies could be seen in a new and parochial light, with an anthropological perspective. As Richards (1992) comments, knowing yourself as an individual or an organisation proceeds through three stages - first, separation from everyday practice, creating critical distance for systematic reflection; secondly, an encounter with new ways of doing things; thirdly, the 'homecoming', in which new conceptions and the new experiences are brought 'home' (in both sense of that word). This happened both for school receiving visitors from other countries and for visitors crossing new geographical and intellectual thresholds. As *Carpe Vitam* and *Bridges* participants consistently reported, viewing ourselves from the outside can be a

salutary and formative experience. Reflecting on the challenge of other schools and her own journey through the Carpe *Vitam* project, a Norwegian teacher writes:

I have become more focused on learning in my own teaching, and I know that influences my work. I have also seen how important it is that we as teachers have time and space for discussing our teaching with colleagues, with a focus on learning. So much time is used on organization, administration and frustration. I think at my own school we focus too much on problems instead of opportunities and solutions

Visiting a school in another country shakes the foundations of our ‘thought world’ (Douglas, 1987) - ‘a set of basic assumptions that are taken as axiomatic; that is, it is assumed that they exist, that are shared by the majority in the field and their presence is evoked whenever a practice is challenged’ (quoted in Czarniawska, 1997, p.68). An Australian principal describes this aspect of the teachers’ journey as ‘*a significant change in their mindset about being in the school and what’s important*’, explaining that since the start of the journey, “*curriculum and pedagogy and focussing on that as our interest and supporting that through our new leadership structures has been the main priority of ... staff every year*” (Principal interview, May 2005).

In Seattle the research team reported that, two years into the project, intercultural travel, geographical and intellectual, had helped participating principals and teachers to grasp the common principles which underpinned differing conventions and *modus operandi*.

By the time of the Copenhagen conference [2004], enough exchange and interchange had occurred to allow the schools to see both their own and other schools’ experience in relation to a more developed set of principles. The examples provided were around how their schools, and others, compared and differed from principles rather than cursory practice-to-practice comparisons.

An English Deputy Head said in interview:

The kind of sparks we’ve picked up from people, when we’ve been at Innsbruck and Copenhagen ... It’s pushed our thinking on in terms of perhaps challenging the way things are done.

Such reframing does, however, depend on a way of seeing and an ability to see perceptively within a new frame. We have some evidence of differing responses to visiting schools and classrooms in other countries. On the one hand we have witnessed teachers measuring a school, both negatively and positively, against the benchmark of

their own schools, and on other occasions being open to and attempting to understand difference and diversity. Scaffolding those visits to schools plays an important part in focusing attention on what might otherwise not be seen or discussed, and on challenging what assumptions are brought to what is 'seen' and the way in which it is judged.

Czarniawska (1997) writing about 'outsidedness' says:

It aims at understanding not by identification ('they are like us') but by the recognition of differences – 'we are different from them and they are different from us; by exploring these differences we will understand ourselves better.' (p.62)

Recognising the difference was for an English deputy headteacher when the pieces 'fell into place.

I think the key for me was ... in Denmark when it all started to fall into place. And there were three schools in particular that we've taken ideas from, two Norwegian schools and one Danish school, from all the workshops and our visits as well. And it's this sort of Scandinavian way of learning which is much more about learning than teaching that we are extremely impressed with. (end of project interview 2005)

These homecomings with new vision and new will, disturbing of the equilibrium and flow of school life, could only retain their momentum where there was a leadership astute enough to create space for it to grow and committed enough to the notion of leaderful communities.

. Leadership creates time and space for what matters

As explicitly acknowledged by principals in Greece, Australia, the U.S., England, the Nordic countries and the countries of 'the New Europe', the priority task for leadership is to manage time more proactively. This means creating the temporal space for thinking and planning, for observation and for extended learning conversations. As one headteacher concluded:

If you really want to try and effect change. You've got to get good people doing it, but you've also got to give them the time and space to make it happen.

The pressure on time increases for staff the attraction of direction, structure and simple solutions as evidenced in highly prescriptive government strategies and ready-made

packages which bypass the leadership potential of the teacher even within his or her own classrooms. Schools, it was said, need champions:

Our experience is, if you want to make an initiative happen. You want to move something forward. You've got to create somebody within the institution who. For whom that is their priority. Because then, when it comes to deciding priorities. That doesn't drop off the bottom, because that's at the top. And I think we've found that in other things that we've done. (Interview with English headteacher, 2005)

While, as another English colleague argues, this only happens when senior leaders stand back and create the space for others to lead.

I think one of the biggest things is for people in the senior leadership position to have the confidence to allow others to lead and if your own need for affirmation and your own self-esteem requires you to be constantly lauded and feted as a great leader then its very hard to allow anybody else to take up a leadership role. I think one of the biggest things within schools is being able to enjoy other peoples success and as a headteacher that is absolutely crucial and one of the things that gives me most pleasure is when you see people taking which, something that you know, originally stem from you and running with it and it becomes theirs.

The paradox as discussed in a meeting of principals and deputy principals at the *Carpe Vitam* conference (Athens 2005) from different countries is that by giving away power the stronger you become and that the leadership skill lies in drawing out the inherent leadership capacities of others.

Tools, routines and strategies

Propositions become working principles when there are tools and strategies which schools can use to lever improvement. In the Bridges project it was the availability of a toolbox that enabled parents, students and teachers to focus their discussion on aspects of school and classroom life. Exchange, adaptation and invention of tools within and among countries enhanced insights into the nature of learning and the art of teaching. Discussions around *School as place for learning*, one of the twelve dimensions of the self-evaluation profile, brought for the first time for teachers as well as students and parents, a new way of seeing 'learning' and the wider purpose of school.

Mary Kennedy (1999) has described ‘the problem of enactment’ as the difficulty teachers (and school principals) face in translating into effective practice and coherent action the ideas they have embraced. Black and Wiliam (1998) found that:

Teachers will not take up attractive sounding ideas, albeit based on extensive research, if these are presented as general principles which leave entirely to them the task of translating them into everyday practice. (p15)

Over the life of the *Carpe Vitam* Project we worked progressively towards a set of key principles which everyone could subscribe to. Presented to school representatives for the first time in the Copenhagen conference they seemed to float free from practice, difficult or people to grasp and difficult to apply to their own situation. A year on in Athens these were dissected and re-presented by country groups with sharp critique as people tried to apply them to their practice. Theoretical principles of leadership for learning, accepted in Copenhagen without much demur, were now shredded creatively and critically as each country group came up to present their reformulation and application of those principles. For those principles to become sedimented into people’s thinking it required time to accommodate, to assimilate together with practical exemplification.

In the U.S the New Jersey team experimented with ways of concretising the principles, translating the metaphorical jig saw of interlocking principles into a literal wooden jig saw to be assembled by a group of teachers, testing the principles and their inter-relationships. In Seattle a teacher who had developed a ‘tuning protocol’ for strategic approach to classroom learning shared this with teachers from the seven other country sites and was able, a year later, to gather evidence of how that had been used, adapted and evaluated in five other country contexts. Other tools were critical incident analyses, vignettes of breakthrough practice, density grids to explore the spread and depth of leadership across a school and practice focused workshops in which dilemmas were explored in a structured process exemplifying the skills and sensitivities of critical friendship. All shared a common objective of making learning visible and discussable through distributed thinking and distributed leadership. In Barnwell School in England the strategic team constructed a mock-up of a brick wall on a notice board at the entrance to the staffroom.

Whenever a teacher used a post-it to record an observation it would be posted on to the wall. Soon, posting observations took on a degree of competitiveness and it was clear which departments were contributing most because of the colour of the post-its. As the wall grew, members of staff found

that it was worthwhile to stop and read the post-its as they passed on their way into the staff room. These classrooms' observation therefore became the catalyst for cross-cutting conversation about teaching and learning (Frost, 2005 p. 83)

In the final *Carpe Vitam* conference in Athens David Perkins illustrated routines designed to make learning and thinking visible, 'simple patterns of thinking that can be used over and over again and folded easily into learning in the subject areas. They have a public nature, so that they make thinking visible, and students quickly get used to them'.

(Ritchhart, 2002). Together with his colleague Shari Tishman he writes:

One of the simplest is for teachers to use the language of thinking (Tishman & Perkins, 1997).

English and all other natural languages have a rich vocabulary of thinking -- consider terms like hypothesis, reason, evidence, possibility, imagination, perspective -- and routine use of such words in a natural intuitive way helps students catch on to the nuances of thinking and thoughtfulness that such terms represent.

Using the language of thinking is one element of something even more important: being a model of thoughtfulness for one's students. Teachers who do not expect instant answers, who display their own honest uncertainties, who take a moment to think about 'What if' or 'What if not' or 'How else could this be done?' or 'What's the other side of the case?' express respect for the process of thought and implicitly encourage students to notice problems and opportunities and think them through.

(p. 7)

Neither of these projects could provide evidence for impatient policy makers of raised student attainment, and the central currency of school effectiveness studies. Neither pursued that as a goal, wise to the distractions and distortions where the pursuit of such a single-minded objective can lead. High achievement and excellence in learning were at the forefront of these projects, all schools in all countries aware of the high stakes nature attainment measures, but able to see more clearly that these were not an end in themselves but a by-product of capacity building and a focus on leadership for learning.

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