

# *unfolding human potential*



*Bringing it all together*

## ***We must mobilize the past against the reckless present***

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(day 2, transcript by Maartje Janssens)*

### **The importance of informal and inclusive spaces in leadership**

The session about how we understand leadership (chapter 3) was very helpful. I like particularly the notion of a shared leadership – or as I prefer to call it: shared responsibility. The only two things I want to underscore as being important are *informal spaces*, as well as formal spaces and structures. It seems to me that in developing our approach to leadership, we need to think about the informal spaces within our communities and organizations, and how important they are. They need to be inclusive spaces as well. I'm also delighted to hear of examples of young people being involved in leadership, in a whole range of ways and the advocacy of, not just school councils but class councils and so on.

### **Leadership and integrity**

Something that also struck me about that session, and which I think is the responsibility of all of us, is how we retain our integrity. How do we, on a day to day basis, leading very demanding professional lives, retain our understanding, our commitment to, and enactment of the values that we all share in this room. That is so hard. To think about how we do that seems to me really important, and there are range of ways which we can do that. We've discussed some of them at the conference. Particularly Luc Stevens' emphasis on language. The language we use to name what we value is important. And we need to be careful. I also think that a responsibility of leadership is enabling young people, teachers and other adults who work in the school, to have some space to reflect and reconnect with these things. To in a sense interrupt the pressure. I think that's absolutely crucial, particularly given the kind of pressures that we're all under in our different countries these days.

### **Shared responsibility: the link between leadership and research**

For me also the notion of accountability or shared responsibility is important. I would like to link it to some thoughts on research. One of the most exciting projects I was lucky enough to be involved in, involved some action research with John Elliott from the UK. He's one of the great pioneers of *action research*. We were working at this school which was really in a tough area just north of London. The school asked us to help them develop a framework, true to their values, where they could be held to account for. The way that we, other colleagues and the students in the school did that, was through what we called *a research forum*, that involved members of community, governance, young people, and teachers. They were involved in a collaborative quest to name what they thought was important and develop a framework. Now that for me is an example or a link between leadership and research in a sense. Because that forum brought together key players in the educational undertaking, working together and developing a framework.

### **The involvement of schools in research**

A few final thoughts on research. Research as we know isn't something that is done to schools – though sometimes that does happen of course. It is something which schools in a sense, in a broad notion of reflection, are involved in. And there are many examples of this. A recent one is the notion of 'lesson study' or 'research lesson', in which two or three teachers get together and co-plan a lesson. One of them teaches and the other two observe. Then they come back and reflect, make some changes. And then the second person teaches it and the other two observe, and so on. Students are involved in that process as well. So there are all sorts of ways in which research can become real and routed in the daily work of the school if you like. And I think that's important.

### **The importance of young people in research and a range of approaches**

Two final thoughts on educational research. First, the importance of young people in that. I've been lucky enough to be, since the mid nineties, involved in a movement which encourages young people themselves to be researchers. I give you one example. In this particular school, the students said to the staff: *'look, there's bullying going on in the school, and it's below the radar. You're not picking up on it. But we're not sure. Can you help us to develop some research which will help us to understand whether our perceptions are shared, whether these are real or not.'* And not only was that interesting because it was initiated by the young people, and supported by adults, but the methods they used were really creative. The use of photographs, drama, diaries: all sorts of very rich ways of gathering and collecting data. The students did that, and presented their results the staff on the school. As a result of that, the staff had a different awareness and different practices emerged.

### **The importance of historical research**

The last reflection has to do with the importance of history and historical research. This has been preoccupying me for a long time now. I give you one example. In the East End of London, just after the second world war, from 1945 to 1955 there was a school run by a Jewish teacher called Alex Bloom. The East End of London was extremely poor and really a tough place to be at that time. Bloom ran a school in which there was no form of punishment. It didn't mean there weren't consequences for certain kinds of behaviour, but he refused punishment. He also thought that competition was bad, no prizes. The school was ran democratically, the curriculum was emergent. If Bloom was asked about the curriculum he said: *'Well I can't really tell you because it's different each week'*. Students used to guard into London itself in order to explore various things. It was a very inclusive school, and very remarkable; Bloom got visits from all over the world. So here's a very remarkable example of practices and aspirations and understandings of education which many of us

share in this room. The point I'm trying to gesture at is: historical research is not an irrelevance. How was it that Bloom was able to develop and sustain counter cultural practices in that time? This is an important question for us now! We must understand this better than we do. So that is my plea: we must mobilize the past against the reckless present.