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13. LEADERSHIP, LEARNING AND ITALY: A TALE OF ATMOSPHERES

Our 'tale of atmospheres' is about teachers facing leadership challenges for learning. On the one hand, we look at 'seeds of leadership for learning' in a nationally-devised initiative involving headship trainees engaging in online communities, and on the other a local professional development experience with a network of schools in which we see the interplay of varying tensions behind attempts to grow collaborative cultures. The stage setting is the national scenario of school autonomy, one that has promised much but delivered much less. Bureaucratic mindsets continue to pervade the system, demanding 'results' from schools but often lending a deaf ear to the authentic voices which teachers and pupils try to express. 'Faint lights on the horizon' might be the sub-title of our tale, although the sailing is rough and the keel unsteady.

SETTING THE SCENE

In Italian educational culture, leadership has a strong symbolic value. Traditionally speaking, leadership at school level has always been associated with the head, the frontline person who is in charge of the school as an establishment. With the most recent legislation (2000) having introduced school autonomy, giving headteachers the status of *dirigenti scolastici* and the responsibilities of high rank civil servants, the formal (and symbolic) weight of heads has been enhanced. This is even more so if we consider that the Italian *istituto scolastico* (the school establishment which falls under the responsibility of one head) is in most cases a cluster of schools with buildings on a variety of sites.

Since 1974 Italian schools have been officially governed by a complex structure, composed of a governing body and a number of other collegial bodies. This structure was devised in order to guarantee *collegialità*, meaning distributed collective decision-making rather than a collaborative culture of "professional collegiality" (Frost et al, 2000, p.22). School heads in Italy are in fact "inserted into an organization with a decision making process that is widely distributed among various components, [both] internal organizational players and external social

powers" (Summa, 2003, p.16), making the intertwining levels of responsibility in the governance system extremely complex.

Collegialità, then, is in the norm enacted bureaucratically (Brotto, 2003a) and in often "contrived" forms (Hargeaves, 1994), and in many circumstances represents a missed opportunity for distributed leadership and collaborative professional learning. Thus, the contexts within which leadership is practiced in Italian schools may seem not only demanding, but even paradoxical when seen through the eyes of a foreign observer.

In a context still dominated by the symbolic power of authority, teachers experience contradictions in finding their own voices as leaders and learners, whether in their classroom activity, as members of a profession or as future heads. Despite the 'teaching freedom' they enjoy, established by the Italian Constitution and reinforced by Union contract, in practice teachers struggle with school autonomy (Associazione TreeLLe, 2006). Moreover, in Italy claims to "teaching freedom" may easily be used by teachers as a shield for arbitrariness. Thus, if teachers do not focus their sense of agency on learning (whether in relation to their pupils, their colleagues, the school, the community or the system as a whole), leadership for learning may be something of a misnomer. As reported elsewhere in this book, we see leadership as an "activity embedded within which is the concept of agency" (MacBeath, 2006b, p.39) forming "the bridge between leadership and learning" (Frost, 2006, p.2).

In this chapter we present a summary of two professional development experiences. The first involves teachers coming from the ranks of roughly 1900 headship trainees due to take up headship positions in September 2007, while the second regards a group of 179 teachers who participated in a residential activity organised by the 30-school STRESA school network in the Province of Bergamo (Lombardy). Its focus was on responsibility for learning and where that locus of responsibility falls.

The data that we analyse here come from pilot surveys which give voice to the participants who engaged in professional development activities. These examples were chosen for two reasons. In the case of the headship trainees, these voices highlight a growing awareness of leadership issues and of actions that would be needed to 'make a difference' to learning within a school environment. They also present perceptions (or hopes) of possibilities for self-efficacy, however difficult this may be within the Italian situation. In reporting these voices, we treat them as acts of agency, as speech acts (Searle, 1969), a form of intentional action with the potential to induce other action. The STRESA network "summer school" experience, instead, not only throws into

relief conflicting attitudes to a theoretically learning-rich opportunity, requiring a high degree of personal engagement, but also reflects how actively sharing experience through a collaborative culture presents an exceptional challenge to very many teachers, and is at best only a sporadic activity in most Italian schools.

VOICES OF TRAINEE HEADS OVER THE WEB: LEADERSHIP (?) FOR LEARNING?

Preparing for headship in Italy: current developments

School heads in Italy are appointed by the Ministry of Education on the basis of a nationally devised but regionally managed competition. Recent legislation in 2007 has opened the competition to qualified teachers with five years of experience, instead of the seven that had been mandated since 2001, so modifying competition and recruitment procedures (see Appendix). This procedure has lightened the load of would-be heads when compared to the very tough selection process of trainees previously undergoing pre-service development (2006-2007). In recent years, the nature of the process has left at least a third of Italy's 10,000 plus *istituti scolastici* with either unqualified acting heads or temporary *reggenze* (two school establishments being run by the same *dirigente scolastico*) and another two-thirds with heads on the brink of retirement (DiSAL, 2006). These new procedures, and other current fast-track competitions exclusively reserved for acting heads, are expected to solve the shortage problem.

The headship trainees we shall report on below are those involved in the 2006-2007 *Corso – Concorso Ordinario* training programme.

Looking at leadership-related threads on the CCO online forums

As in all recent centrally-devised professional development and education schemes involving large numbers of participants in the world of schooling (teachers, non-teaching staff, school heads and students), the *Corso – Concorso Ordinario* (CCO) headship trainees engage in a blended-learning environment using the Puntoedu platform (<http://puntoedu.indire.it/13.php>, 2006) run by the National Agency for the Development of School Autonomy. Among the course assignments, there are forums and virtual classrooms to contribute to and communities to share in. A certain amount of the work on the platform is part of a bureaucratic requirement and once the training period is over, further access to the relative section is denied. This means that

whatever form of interactive community may arise in the process is time limited and if there is to be any community leadership in the future it would need to be kept alive by other means.

Data from the pilot study involving hundreds of CCO headship trainees from all over the country (June 2006 – early January 2007) filled over 600 pages of discussion with 40 plus leadership threads on issues such as leadership identity, roles and styles; education policy, headship and leadership; leadership and school autonomy; leadership and change; leadership and management; leadership and the school as a learning organization; leadership and pupil learning; empowerment and team leadership; leadership and accountability; leadership and quality; professional development for leadership; transformational leadership; distributed-related concepts of leadership.

The contributions were screened for their understandings of the background policy environment and wider context, for their summary perceptions, portrayals and metaphors of school leadership (Serpieri, 2002), for their citations of leadership literature, for their underscoring of facets of learning and for their explicit or implicit linking of leadership and learning. Here we provide only some insight on what these future heads have said on these matters.

THE CHALLENGES OF LEADING (FOR LEARNING) IN AN ITALIAN AUTONOMOUS SCHOOL

While the words of many CCO prospective heads appear promising, this does not imply that their schools will necessarily become havens of learning-centred leadership. When school autonomy was introduced, Luisa Ribolzi (1997, p.12) sceptically portrayed the position of Italian heads as living a paradox similar to that of the "man supposed to find a black cat in a dark room on a moonless night", having to "guarantee system outcomes that have yet to be defined, in the absence of parameters to measure them and being clueless as to how to act to change them". Nonetheless, at the time there were high hopes that autonomy could break consolidated and rigid patterns so as to foster "a creative and flexible combination" of everything that constitutes an intentional learning environment (Cerini, 1997).

Ten years down the road, there is a widespread view that "our schooling system does not have the ability to be a growth factor for the country and its people" (Antonelli, 2006) and that "school autonomy 'taken seriously' [should be] refocused on powerful educational tasks, rather than on accessories [...]. Autonomy to engage in research should thus be centre-stage [for schools] with organizational development at the service of what takes place in the classroom" (Cerini, 2006). A

recent countrywide survey conducted amongst deputy heads and *funzione strumentale*¹ teacher leaders showed only “moderate acceptance as to how school autonomy has been implemented”, their relative disillusionment depending also on the lack of political support for its development (Fischer et al., 2006, p.163). In these years, it may be said, the pictures of the “legal school” (as in legislation and policy documents) and of the “real school” (with its impoverished resources and daily strife) appear to have been developed in two different darkrooms.

Thus, turning the “real school” into the “clean, wholesome and welcoming learning-friendly environment for all” that Ornella, one of the CCO trainees, wishes for is the foremost challenge facing Italian practitioners at this time. This is particularly true if we consider, for instance, that the funds transferred to schools in support of autonomy in order to run their everyday business were cut by 49% between 2001 and 2006 (ISTAT, 2007), with even more drastic cuts in the following year in the funding of supply teachers to cover temporary absences. Moreover, the complexity of the governance system in Italian schools in these and other matters makes decision-making daunting. Thus, even if the “global challenge” of “standardization and control” (Bottery, 2004) hangs in air as more of a virtual threat in the policy documents than as a concrete reality for future headship, this is only some consolation in the immediacy of the other “global challenge” of “commodification and fragmentation” with schools competing in a quasi-market, which two-thirds of Italian teacher leaders and heads see as inevitable in a situation of demographic standstill (Fischer et al, 2006) – as is the case in Italy.

LEADERSHIP

There is comparatively little literature available in Italian on educational leadership, either by Italian authors or in translation. In recent years, attempts have been made to introduce practitioners to educational leadership research from other cultural contexts through professional development initiatives and free online materials in Italian (Brotto, 2003b, 2004; and <http://www.bergamo.istruzione.lombardia.it/riccione/riccione.htm>). As

¹ *Funzione strumentale* teachers are contractually recognized, but have an unstable and hybrid profile, and are perceived as a fragmentary and temporary reply to a structural problem (Arnone, 2001) related to a lack of middle management in Italian schools. They are teacher coordinators that have honed skills in organisational planning, project design, team building and leading, ICT, evaluation methodology and knowledge of the local community within Italian autonomous schools.

Giovanni, one of the CCO forum participants stated, Italy is paying the price of the “lack of a significant link connecting policy, research, innovation and professional development”. Moreover, the research perspective in the country has been generally grey (1.1% GNP) when compared to the EU average (1.9% GNP : EU19 2004), this being especially true in education (Drago, 2006).

Given a lack of first-hand access to educational leadership literature or research, the majority of these prospective heads see themselves as wanting to act within a range of ‘leaderships’ that are perceived as conceptually related or overlapping: ‘distributed’, ‘collaborative’, ‘participative’, ‘transformational’, ‘sustainable’, ‘strategic’, ‘relational/co-operative’, ‘moral’, ‘democratic’, ‘resonant (primal)’, ‘receptive’, ‘inspirational’, ‘reflexive’, drawing mainly on North American authors such as Hargreaves, Sergiovanni and Goleman – the latter two being available in translation – in addition to an Italian author’s work on ‘reflexive leadership’ (Vitulo, 2006).

The fine theoretical distinctions among these various definitions (Spillane, 2006, p. 22 – 25, for example) are thus less apparent for these trainee principals in search of an identity and trying to answer the crucial question ‘what sorts of leader can **I** be?’ However, an underlying idea emerges of what matters most to them in their understanding of leadership. One of the participants, Stefania, makes a distinction between “*stare con*” (‘being with’) and “*essere per*” (‘being for’). Her aspiration for leadership is seen as ‘being with’, marked by “contagious” listening, empathy, teamwork and sense-making, allied with ‘being for’ as mutual empowerment and service. If leadership for learning requires a sharing of leadership, there is some reassuring evidence, then, that these future heads appear at least to be thinking along these lines.

SEEDS OF LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING?

“When people grasp a sense of their own agency, they may take initiative to draw attention to something meaningful” (MacBeath, 2006b, p.43). For CCO headship trainees leadership for learning implied making explicit their own differing conceptions of learning. Four main categories emerged:

1. learning is system and context dependent as well as being a factor of systemic survival and development;
2. learning is a lifelong and lifewide experience, which needs to contribute to reflective and creative practices of multilevel citizenship;
3. learning is an epistemological and narrative event, interpreting and modelling reality as a social construct;

4. Learning is not just to look for solutions, but to put oneself in a research perspective learning to ask the right questions.

Although these features correlate with one another, we can examine these singly, matching a few of the trainee voices from the online community to each of these four categories (see Table 1) so as to highlight the 'seeds' of leadership for learning which are implicit in these accounts.

Table 1: Trainee Voices from the Online Community in Four Categories

For Adriana, Giancarlo and Pasquale, management dirigenti scolastici respond "inadequately learning in relation to needs of learning-centred leadership", not being themselves "guides for learning" or not role modelling what it might mean to be part of "comunità formativa" ('learning community').

Mario pleads the case for "pupil learning" as a core issue in any discussion on leadership and accountability".

Annalisa, Annamaria and Rossella discuss leadership in system terms of "what is needed to make the school a learning organization"

Nino insists on "building possibilities for 360 degree collaboration with the outside world", in order to improve outcomes in pupil learning.

Guido highlights how externally defined models of quality have made his school "something like a big railway station (not in Italy) or an international airport, in which the trains and planes always leave on time [...] but whose 'organizational structure' only marginally impacts on the quality of teaching".

Anita focuses her contribution on the ability of leadership should have to be "self-challenging in order to allow a long and lifelong continuous learning process", issuing from continuous learning for multilateral leadership to listen to others and to become a reciprocal relationship between leadership and citizenship reciprocally interdependent.

Maria sees leadership as having a daily diet of "ideas and Bildung".

Fiorenza believes the only way to face the challenges of "the so-called 'liquid society' (Bauman), the 'risk society' (Beck) and the 'global

ciety' (Goldsmith)" is to engage in cooperati
rning in order to activate the "dynamics
zenship and of lifelong learning."

Alfonso underscores the "high cultu
ffic" marking 'today's school as a social worl
s requiring "an anthropological" perspective in
rning practices.

Elisabetta, Stefania and Silvia concur
juing the case for interpretive "autobiographi
arning as a narratid narrative" approaches in professional learni
ent and socether self-directed or related to teachers.

struct Maria Teresa shares an Italian summary s
s made of a paper on social capital presented
bert Putnam to the 2004 OECD Educati
rsters' meeting in Dublin, using as its title t
ican proverb: "you need a village to raise a child
ling to mind an interweaving of voices as well
orts and responsibilities.

Some metaphors used by the future hea
their portrayals of leadership: "being in the othe
lly" (a "Gestalt perspective" by Anita);

"boundary walking" and "border crossin
rdrea, after Scurati);

a "ferryman" (Teresa, after Lagrasta);

in the words of Nestor to his son in Home
id (Rosa): "learn to use multiple intelligences,
pose the use of force, to nurture a capacity f
esight, to think densely and to recogni
portunities").

Turning a school into a "research commun
not just an ideal model for teachers, but it has
research perspectply to heads as well" (Mauro).

ring to ask t Giuseppina adds that "if learning
ht questions portant for teachers [...], it is even more so f
neone who must lead a learning organization" a
s someone is "a person who might not alwa
ve the right answers but knows what questions
< himself and to ask others".

Clara speaks of the need to fathom "wh
't there" through "negative capability".

Francesca hopes for more “black bc nking as “less attention, perhaps, should be pæ the exclusively rational and intentional views ganizational life”, recognizing the importance of ythical, sense-touching, blurred, ambiguous a radoxical qualities” (Varchetta, 2005).

Haridimos Tsoukas (2005, p.70) writes, “as well as being institutions, organized contexts are *practices*” and from a “gnosiological point of view”, participating in a practice means “sharing in its narratives” (p.82) of examples, metaphors, experiences, thoughts. In presenting these voices, their use of metaphor, their aspirational language, their sense of values, we have tried to capture something of the ‘ethos’ of their discussion and what they hope to ‘be’ in spite of a policy context which may well inhibit the flowering of their sometimes high flown ideals. If, however, we were to take all of the voices of these CCO trainee heads and subject them to quantitative analysis, we might be disappointed by the relative lack of awareness of leadership as being related to learning. We have, so as to speak, picked the cherries out of the fruitcake. Yet, if we see these various thematic threads as slices of that fruitcake, we may take a more optimistic stance, remembering how the separate flavours of the fruit and nuts mellow together in the cake tin in the weeks before we eat it at Christmas.

SETTING THE SCENE FOR TEACHER LEARNING: VOICES FROM THE STRESA NETWORK SUMMER SCHOOL

Can professional development activities support the development of leadership for learning? The second experience described here raises some interesting issues with regard to teachers’ discussion of leadership for learning in the context of a residential training module, held in June 2006, in which 179 teachers participated.

The context and the promoter

The course was the sixth edition of a recurrent activity organised at the end of every year by the “STRESA Network” (STRumenti per l’Efficacia della Scuola e l’Autovalutazione), an association of 33 primary and lower secondary schools (accounting for 3,215 teachers and 27,818 pupils in 2006-2007). The Association was founded in Lombardy in 1998 with the purpose of planning and implementing school self-evaluation for school

improvement. Over the years, the need to integrate and support self-evaluation through robust, creative research and professional development activities for teachers and heads had become increasingly evident to the network's steering group. In the Italian educational scenario, high stakes accountability does not exist and even external evaluation has not yet resulted in any fruitful initiative, despite many (unsuccessful) attempts (Domenici, 2005). Nor has there been national promotion of self-evaluation as is the case, for instance, in England (MacBeath, 2006a). So, self-evaluation faces a considerable challenge if it is to become a genuine tool for improvement and if it is to become internalised in the day-to-day work and affections of teachers. If it is to raise self-awareness and prove useful in framing and confronting crucial issues arising from every day school life, it must belong to teachers and be close to their needs, independently of any official external demand.

Charts filled with numbers and cold figures do not say very much to Italian teachers who are, by tradition, sceptical of any forms of evaluation (Losito, 2007), at least when there is a lack of space, time and support for interpretation and development of ideas. With this in mind the network began to launch seminars, workshops and research groups for teachers and heads together in which different viewpoints could be shared (Barzanò, 2002). While such activities initially targeted the technicalities of self-evaluation, following what was seen as most relevant by teachers and heads, they gradually developed into more "philosophical" forums, focusing on the big questions emerging from self-evaluation analyses. For example, 'Why are there such large differences between classes with regard to how pupils view their teachers, when in fact teachers are working towards very similar objectives? What does feedback mean? Why do children often think that the feedback and the reward they get from teachers is unsatisfactory'?

Underpinning this development is a belief that school improvement cannot be achieved when learning is focused only on pupils. The involvement of teachers themselves and the school as a whole is fundamental to the whole initiative (MacBeath, 2006b). This led to the conviction that it was necessary to establish 'a learning scene' in which teachers' narratives could be valued adequately, could be generative of new thinking and could link to wider narratives about social change and globalisation (Goodson, 2003).

So the STRESA network "summer school" became a main arena where the trickiest questions arising from data analysis could be discussed and plans made for initiatives to tackle them. It consists of residential modules lasting three days, each usually hosting some 150-200 teachers. Every year the "summer school" is focused on a different

topic, clustering together a series of crucial questions. In order to maximise the impact on individual schools, it was agreed that participants could be partially sponsored (70%) by the network when they enrolled in large groups from the same school (at least 8). Participants are seen as “explorers”, of meanings, of encounters, and attitudes in relation to the selected topic. They work intensively in plenary or in groups following the official agenda. However, as is typical of residential courses, they are also able to benefit from “a third time”: the more emotional and less formal one where they can share the full life of three days, letting feelings, ideas and proposals emerge at their own pace (Claris and Cancelli, 2006).

The activities

The 2006 edition’s overarching topic was “the responsibility of teachers and heads in the teaching-learning process”. Some of the underlying questions were: how do we constructively face pupils with their failures? To what extent do we have to change our assessment criteria on the way, according to the needs of the context? How do we balance our own principles with the need to adapt them to children’s interests? Are we prepared to sometimes “cheat” on legislative requirements in the interests of children? Teachers and heads attended a preliminary plenary section on theory, where the concept of “responsibility” was discussed from different perspectives through talks given by a philosopher, a psychoanalyst, an orchestra conductor, an expert on educational organisations and an expert of business organisations. Then they worked for a full day in self-coordinated modules of 10-15, aimed at sharing their experiences and discussing their implications. The work groups’ task was to present the assembly with their considerations and perspectives, using different communication styles. Results led to a meaningful variety of lively feedback reported in the assembly. This included:

- Powerpoint presentations, in which responsibility was defined making use of metaphors, ironic sketches or comics illustrating typical school dilemmas;
- Analysis of conflicts occurring with teacher colleagues and pupils, requiring long term approaches in apparent contradiction with the need for immediate results;
- Musical performances (guitar) including songs and pace exercises underlining the ups and downs of moods and burdens of responsibility;
- Drama performances illustrating typical scenes of school life.

Two drama performances were particularly interesting and give the idea of the learning ethos. The first was performed by a group of eight

heads who acted in different roles and represented the typical scene of a new foreign child placed in a problematic class in the middle of the school year. The performance, with its touch of irony combined with warm passion, elicited an intense involvement of the audience and offered a precious opportunity to frame the headteacher/teacher relationship from different viewpoints: eight heads performing in front of their teachers about school problems was, for Italian teachers, an unusual learning situation. The second performance was a witty representation of a case where every one was blaming someone else for something going wrong and for which they were all partly responsible. It was given in the middle of the plenary room and simulated a complaint by the participants on the course itself – for a few minutes the whole audience did not realise it was a joke!

Inside the learning atmosphere

In the spirit of a continuous self-evaluation process, the network is used to undertaking an evaluation of its activities. The 2006 summer school edition was the object of a particularly intense evaluation process, more deeply and with more revealing instruments than the usual cursory questionnaires. Its rationale was considered by the network members unusually brave, both in relation to the topic and the nature of the very testing questions which it aimed to address, together with the broad “unorganised” space left to the participants themselves. In addition to the usual questionnaire, including both tick-box and open-ended questions, in-depth interviews and informal conversations together with ‘thick descriptions’ were undertaken by professional researchers, appointed by the network. While the quantitative data collected led to the expected appreciation of the course in most of its aspects, qualitative data provided more sophisticated and significant information.

The 2006 course was attended by 179 participants (67 newcomers) of which 177 returned the questionnaire. 162 participants answered the question: ‘Can you describe a particular feeling you experienced in this course, a moment when you felt touched?’ This generated a variety of observations and comments in addition to the 35 participants who took part in individual or collective interviews.

The teachers’ perceptions emerging from the data collected proved informative and formative for a number of reasons: they offered a test bed for the course rationale and its future development but even more telling they opened a window on teacher learning, and what it implied for their professional work and identity. The majority of the comments, both from the written observations and from interviews, were about the learning adventure, determined by the topic as well as by the way of

working and the course ethos. For the purposes of this brief analysis only two broad categories are considered: *discovery accounts* and *critical comments*. Here are some meaningful examples selected among the *discovery accounts*:

I feel it as a privilege... being able to work not only with children, but also with adults, with whom you can share professional ideas and even more... matching your experience with others is interesting and involving: I feel very enriched! (Marta, Interview).

It's my first time at the summer school... I was curious: why are we listening to an orchestra conductor? Why do we have so much time on our own in small groups? Now I start to understand: the passion that the conductor spoke about is the same I put in my own work! And if I have time to discuss this with colleagues I will go back home ready to put ideas into practice... (Rossella, Interview)

I left home with the idea that I would have never been able to participate actively in a debate: I was not brave enough "to come into play". Suddenly this feeling changed. Why? Thanks to the nice words of the speakers? No! Listening, listening and listening: not with my ears, but entering into people, being able to dig into the depth of their beauty. Everything changed because people showed themselves, their inner feelings. I was enriched by them. (Valeria, Written comment).

I go back home with a sense of belonging to the teacher category having been reinforced. I'm proud to be a teacher after having met so many colleagues of such breadth and depth. (Camilla, Written comment)

The topic is intriguing but difficult. Last year I was scared... the course was about "feedback and reward"... difficult lectures, a lot of quotes. Philosophy, science... even poetry! I kept asking myself: "What will the impact of all these things be on my work?" Yet during the year, once all the ideas had settled down inside my self, I realised how many things I had learnt and how I could mirror my experience into many ideas I had never met before... indeed through my own experience! (Michele, Interview)

These positive quotes are no more than a small sample but their tone makes them sound like popular adverts extolling customer satisfaction. What is noteworthy in these examples, however, is the way they unravel important aspects of teachers' attitudes, relevant to understanding their needs and professional scope for learning. When we read behind the enthusiasm, we discover that lying behind these affirmations are scarce

opportunities for teachers to develop their professional identity in the course of their normal work. What all these accounts share is a sense of surprise and wonder when facing experiences which, according to most of the literature on professional development, should be routine for all good education professionals (Eraut, 1994, Goodson, 2003, MacBeath, 1998). There is an abundance of research and theoretical texts which lay emphasis on sharing experiences "in depth" with colleagues, discovering richness and hidden treasure (Marta, Rossella), learning how to listen (Valeria), reflecting on their learning (Michele). It is striking to think that Michele, an experienced fully qualified teacher who proves to be open to reflection, has finally met the opportunity to become aware of how his own learning works. How can he deal with children's learning every day if he himself is not aware of his own learning?

While it would appear that these teachers have over time internalised the diminished public value accorded to the teaching profession, what emerges from behind the screen is a "new pride" (Camilla). Many participants alluded to this self discovery, opportunities to feel proud of themselves both as individual professionals and as a collective profession.

Critical comments bring to light further aspects of how teachers interpret their opportunities to learn:

Like my colleague I had difficulties in the group. We spoke three hours about sharing ideas and experiences and at the end the strongest personality decided. We were short of time and he was the one who said what had to be presented. I did not agree with what my colleagues were saying, but I kept silent. What I think is very different, but luckily I could share it with my room mate during the night! (Paola, Interview)

I appreciated the group work, but I would have preferred a real coordinator, rather than one selected by the group itself. A person more aware of the objectives and the group dynamics would have been more effective (Annamaria, Written comment).

I think that in a course most of the time should be given over to the speakers, our maestri. I like listening to them. The group work would have been more effective if it had not only been based on our experience, but on more input by the speakers. I would have preferred a more skilled coordinator (Stefano, Written comment).

Last year there were more suggestions and inputs by the speakers... It was a bit light this year! I would have liked more input. This morning we

spent three hours talking with colleagues in the group. In the past years it was only an hour, there were more talks (Marina, Interview).

There were far fewer critical comments than discovery accounts, there being generally positive observations. However, these comments show how a group of teachers and heads have difficulty in taking on board the responsibility of their learning through more autonomous agendas. Above all they are looking for *maestri*, great lecturers who can 'give lessons'. They are open to learning, but they feel more comfortable with a traditional pattern. As Marilena explained in an interview, "I like the idea of being a pupil for once. I like learning, going back to school, attending lessons." Some teachers are reluctant to share their experiences with colleagues and seem to indicate that colleagues' ears are not qualified enough to listen to the story they have to tell. What these teachers have in mind is a more hierarchical view of learning in which someone is transmitting and someone else is receiving.

This quick journey into the voices of some Italian teachers does not obviously intend to provide a detailed portrait of what the perspectives for leadership for learning are. The STRESA network summer school is, to some extent, a privileged learning scene for education professionals. Unlike other professional development contexts it benefits from the stability and continuity offered by the network's history. Participants in the course are motivated; they know from their own experience or from colleagues' accounts what the style of the network is and what they can expect. However, they are still surprised to discover that a deep sharing of their experience with colleagues may result in a successful exercise. They are still not familiar with the idea that at the core of their profession today there should be continuous learning, "critical, penetrative, thoughtful, and ruminative [...], that engages people's feelings and connects with their lives" (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006, p.53). To use a gastronomic metaphor, they could be sophisticated wine connoisseurs, who can distinguish and appreciate different brands, yet they look at wine with wonder and they enjoy it with the naïve pleasure of someone who has always drunk only beer. This gives an idea of how finding good and convincing opportunities to learn may be challenging and complex for teachers. On the other hand, some teachers do not even dream of being active and reflexive in their learning, as revealed in an interview with Clara: "Some teachers are very good at reading books. One year they implement one book, the next another one. If the second says the opposite from the first it does not matter: it is written in a book, it must be done!"

These teachers' voices indicate clearly how important, but complex, it is to create contexts in which they can see from the outside and appreciate their own professional competence.

Experiences such as the STRESA network summer school show that meaningful learning events can be implemented successfully, but connecting these events and creating a stable active learning environment around teachers is a difficult task².

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The voices of the participants in the two examples described reflect different kinds of learning ethos emerging from attempts in Italy to create contexts which root the idea of leadership for learning in the discourses and practices of education professionals. The idea itself is of growing interest in the Italian educational arena, although it has always to be set in a policy context where the aim is one of improving pupil performance results - *successo formativo*. Nonetheless, it finds its way into national initiatives, such as the *corso-concorso* forums illustrated above, and other professional development activities which target teachers through blended learning. It has also inspired several local experiences which have been able to benefit from more stable audiences in long-term projects, as is the case of the STRESA network.

However, implementing leadership for learning in a broad sense in Italy appears to be more complex than expected. A diehard traditional bureaucratic mind frame at the governance level, together with the lack of investment in educational research, makes the task arduous, to say the least (Drago, 2006).

The risk is also that frameworks launched with the best intentions, intended to be to be rich in their implications and possible developments, may produce only overarching 'labels', deceiving with 'appearance' more than 'substance'. In the case of the *corso concorso* for headship, the stimulating dialogue taking place among the trainee heads is only superficially monitored, attention being paid to whether or not they perform their mandatory tasks rather than to what they really have to say – as such an opportunity lost to research which potentially might involve researchers and practitioners in working, thinking and planning together. Moreover, once the formal part of the training is over, access to the platform is withdrawn and the further "official

² The author would like to thank Silvia Zanoni, a retired headteacher, for her help in processing the questionnaires and Giorgia Galano and Emiliano Grimaldi, research students at the University of Naples, for conducting the interviews.

support” available only comes in the form of sporadic top-down interventions, with little evidence of a genuine and on going response to real needs.

On the other hand, the STRESA network experience shows how establishing a systemic fruitful learning environment for teachers is also complex. As the Italians say: *una rondine non fa primavera* (“one swallow doesn’t make it summer”). Individual events may be successful in themselves, but producing a real culture of learning among teachers is a different story altogether, the ordinary life of most practitioners still being far removed from the intensive and reflective opportunities to learn. In addition, several teachers appear to stay anchored to the hierarchical learning patterns they experienced as students.

Indeed what these examples underline is the need to nurture, through continuous monitoring and feeding, those broad arenas where discussions, reflections and experiences may cross each other and grow. In other words, leadership for learning requires a continuous reinventing of the scene, while carefully and sensitively observing what is happening. This is the challenge we are facing.

Note: To the corresponding authors, Francesca Brotto (frbrotto@libero.it) and Giovanna Barzanò (dott.giovanna.barzano@gmail.com), who have drafted this chapter interactively, are respectively attributed p. 206 – 213 (top) and p. 213 – 219.

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APPENDIX: THE CURRENT RECRUITMENT PROCEDURE IN ITALY FOR SCHOOL HEADS THROUGH NATIONAL COMPETITIONS (2007)

1. qualified teacher applicants with five years of experience are screened in a pre-selection phase through objective testing;
2. admitted candidates sit for a written examination and an oral examination-interview;
3. the qualifications and experience in the academic, professional and cultural fields are evaluated on a point scale for candidates successfully completing the second phase;
4. a ranking is determined on the basis of the results of the previous phases and a predetermined number of candidates are then admitted to a headship training programme;
5. training for headship;
6. awarding of an initial 3 – 5 year contract by Regional education officers to the new heads, or dirigenti scolastici as they are called, and their appointment to any school in the region requiring a head, with their first year in office as a probationary year;
7. permanent status in headship through renewable contracts generally ensues.

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