

## Developing Distributed Leadership in Schools through Arts-based and Embodied Activities

### Distributed Leadership: A Brief Introduction



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This document provides a brief introduction to distributed leadership and why it is of value to schools.

#### **What is distributed leadership?**

Distributed leadership is both an idea about what leadership is and a process in which more people practice and share leadership across a school, group, department or network.

Distributed leadership as an idea proposes something quite radical.

It says that leadership is a collective phenomenon that arises from the ongoing and complex interactions between all those involved in a group or organisation. For example, in the practical, everyday world of the school, leadership is not simply the product of the few who are designated as leaders (i.e. positional leaders such as principals, headteachers and middle leaders); it is the outcome of the actions, interactions and influences upon each other of everyone, including students, parents, administrative, technical and other support staff, teachers, school leaders and school governors.

Non-positional leaders – such as most students and teachers – are likely, however, not to be aware of their role in leadership.

This is where distributed leadership as a process of widening leadership comes in.

It expands awareness and increases capacity for leadership beyond positional leaders. As a process of expanding leadership awareness and capacity, distributed leadership means more non-positional leaders becoming more aware and active as co-leaders. It involves widening leadership practice by enabling more people across a school (or group, department or network) to be pro-active leaders and co-leaders of change. This includes teachers, support staff and students who do not occupy formal leadership roles.

The purpose of widening leadership is to increase innovation, promote inclusion, improve integration, cohesion and collaboration and raise motivation and commitment, with the aim of enhancing learnings and educational outcomes.

### **Why is distributed leadership of value to schools?**

School education across Europe faces unprecedented challenges. These include the need to foster innovation and democratic citizenship. Both of these benefit from the development and strengthening of distributed leadership in schools.

There is a need to foster innovation in order to tackle persistent issues in new ways – issues such as improving and broadening learning and reducing inequalities in education. Innovation is fostered by developing leadership distribution which allows the widest range of stakeholders to generate and participate in innovation and in collaborative working and learning. Innovation is also fostered by nurturing affective capabilities and awareness so leaders (positional and non-positional) act from deeper sources of intention and creativity. This enables insights and understandings that draw from the less conscious aspects of our selves and relationships and move beyond traditional ‘solutions’.

There is a need to foster democratic citizenship, in response to turbulence in democratic governance, more diverse societies and expectations to develop citizens’ capacities for creativity, imagination, mutual understanding, critical thinking and complexity. Distributed leadership, guided by values of democracy and social justice, engages teachers, students and other stakeholders in collaborative practice and the development of such democratic, creative and critical capabilities.

Consequently, schools are increasingly expected to develop collaborative ways of leading that appreciate the distributed nature of leadership and the value of less rigid hierarchies and more co-operation, free-flowing communication and trust.



*Guidance on selected further reading about distributed leadership is available under 'Resources' on the website.*

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