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Contemporary issues in educational leadership

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Aims

This chapter suggests that despite more than a generation of scholarly activity educational leadership remains problematic and contested in terms of its relationship with other elements in the field of education. Centrally, it asks whether there is a clear correlation between educational leadership and educational performance since we may note that those systems that devote significant time and resources to leadership in education do not always seem to have higher outcomes in their school systems when compared to nations that spend comparatively little time on leadership issues. The chapter explores some of the key issues in how we might work to understand the significance and status of leadership in educational environments. To this end this chapter will examine:

- the prevailing cultural norms that dominate our thinking about leadership
- the dominant orthodoxies around leadership and interpersonal relationships
- the dominance in educational literature of seeing the school as an organization
- the changing balance between the autonomous school and the need for integrated strategies
- the need for a fundamental reorientation of school leadership to focus on effective learning.

INTRODUCTION

After more than a generation of scholarly, intellectual and academic activity educational leadership remains a problem child. Its parentage remains problematic, its genealogy uncertain and its relationship vis-à-vis other disciplines is contested. This is not to deny the integrity and validity of much of the work done in the name of educational leadership; there seems little doubt that it has academic rigour, professional relevance and might

even have contributed to securing improved educational outcomes for a significant number of children and young people. However, this latter issue remains a moot point. Is there a correlation between the level of activity centred on educational leadership in any system and the comparative levels of performance in that system? A very superficial view would point to a relative lack of interest in leadership issues in those systems that are high performing. Those systems that devote significant time, resources and energy to leadership in education do not always seem to have a commensurate level of educational success across the school system.

The genealogy of educational leadership seems to point to the emergence of an academic field that has no distinctive provenance but cheerfully borrows from an eclectic range of sources to produce a melded theory that implies an emergent conceptual framework rather than any definitive model that has enduring authority or represents a synthesis that leads to an enduring hegemony. Educational leadership theory has tended to be a borrower rather than an initiator or, perhaps more kindly, has been intellectually eclectic. This has led to waves of interest in a particular text or model which then seems to dominate for a time until it is replaced by the next pet theory. Such is academic life. However it might point to vulnerability in terms of certain conceptual models becoming dominant by virtue of their relative robustness, their apparent universal applicability and their transferability. The apparent persistence of the leadership–management debate is symptomatic of this. It seems that there is still no deep consensus as to the boundaries of leadership and management and the issue is often cultural and semantic rather than academically distinctive.

What may be significant in this context is the extent to which leadership in education is 'filtered' through historical and cultural norms in a way that may not be the case with other contexts that are concerned with the practice of leadership – for example multi-national organizations and the military. For instance, across Europe there are a range of attitudes towards leadership which vary from the frankly patriarchal to a healthy scepticism about the very concept of leadership – communities which work through personal autonomy with leadership as a necessary but limited coordinating function. It may be that we need to be more concerned with the anthropology of leadership rather than seeking to replicate the prevailing culture in successful corporations working to quite distinct norms.

This chapter will explore some of the key issues that are currently significant in how we might work to understand the significance and status of leadership in educational environments. Empirically there is increasing confidence that we can be increasingly robust about certain aspects of leadership. Day et al. (2010a) and Barber et al. (2010) have produced rigorous and systematic studies of the nature of successful school leadership. According to Day et al. (2010a: 4) successful leaders:



- define their values and vision to raise expectations, set directions and build trust
- reshape the conditions for teaching and learning
- restructure parts of the organization and redesign leadership roles and responsibilities
- enrich the curriculum
- enhance teacher quality
- enhance the quality of teaching and learning
- build collaboration internally
- build strong relationships outside the school community.

The report published by McKinsey contains, unsurprisingly perhaps, a very similar list (Barber et al. 2010: 6):

- building a shared vision and sense of purpose
- setting high expectations for performance
- role modelling behaviours and practices
- designing and managing the teaching and learning programme
- establishing effective teams within the school staff, and distributing leadership among the school staff
- understanding and developing people
- protecting teachers from issues which would distract them from their work
- establishing school routines and norms for behaviours
- monitoring performance
- connecting the school to parents and the community
- recognizing and rewarding achievement.

These definitions provide powerful and authoritative models of leadership that are clearly derived from the prevailing context and evidence as to what works given current norms. The important question is around the extent to which such models are based on an orthodoxy that is now fragile and under significant scrutiny. It would be wrong to call into question the dedication, commitment and integrity of individual leaders. However, it does remain the case that many education systems are still a long way from genuine equity and consistent inclusion. In-school variation remains a challenge, as does confidence about the appropriateness and quality of teaching and learning strategies. In many countries education policy continues to be disjointed and incremental – the result of competing rationalities rather than moral consensus. All of this is to be found within a rapidly changing moral, social, technological, economic and cultural context that may point to the need for a radical reappraisal of the very nature of schooling itself.

To paraphrase T.S. Eliot, it might be that some school leaders are 'Doing the wrong thing for the right reason'. This chapter explores five



pivotal areas of effective leadership reviewing them from different perspectives to consider their relevance and appropriateness:

- *Leadership, logic and the emotions* explores the prevailing cultural norms that dominate our thinking about leadership questioning the validity of the prevailing models.
- *Understanding effective leadership behaviour* considers the prevailing orthodoxies around leadership and interpersonal relationships and raises issues around the focus on skills rather than qualities.
- *The school as organization or community* questions the dominance in educational leadership literature of seeing the school as an organization.
- *Autonomy and collaboration* reviews the changing balance between the autonomous school and the need for integrated strategies.
- *Learning-centred leadership* argues for a fundamental reorientation of school leadership following the basic design principle of form follows function; i.e. if the function of leadership is effective learning what is the most appropriate model of leadership?

LEADERSHIP, LOGIC AND THE EMOTIONS

The history of the scholarly study of leadership is essentially the story of the relative significance and status attached to the debate between logic and rationality and the recognition of human beings, and their construction of reality, as being essentially emotional. In many ways the story of leadership in the twentieth century was the movement away from scientific management to models of distributed leadership and the focus on followership – in essence from the rational to the relational. Yet the rational model remains a powerful presence and disproportionately influential. In many aspects of their work schools are posited on the rationalistic fallacy and it is quite remarkable that they function at all. Schools remain bureaucratic and hierarchical and much of school policy making assumes rationality in the system, for example the classic input-output model that simply does not work and planning models that ignore the fact that the most significant variables that influence school performance are outside their control. For Sergiovanni:

. . . in trying to understand what drives leadership, we have overemphasized bureaucratic, psychological and technical rational authority, seriously neglecting professional and moral authority . . . The result has been a leadership literature that borders on vacuity and a leadership practice that is not leadership at all. (1993: 15)

The same point is made with equal emphasis by de Gues:

. . . corporations fail because the prevailing thinking and language of management are too narrowly focused on the prevailing thinking and language

of economics. To put it another way: companies die because their managers focus on the economic activity of producing goods and services, and they forget that their organization's true nature is that of a community of humans. (1997: 9)

The language of economics is the language of the left-brain. Consider the thousands of school improvement and development plans and the extent to which they actually made a difference; look at all of the strategies focused on improvement and effectiveness and reflect on the difference they have made – most significantly look at the permutations of government policy and the highly problematic relationship between aspiration, resourcing, consistency of strategy and actual outcomes.

There are many ways of conceptualizing the tension between the competing paradigms of the linear and nonlinear, objective and subjective, rational and emotional. McGilchrist has developed a unique and very closely argued approach; in essence he explores how the two hemispheres of our brains influence how we perceive and engage with the world. In simplistic terms the left-brain is perceived as the logical rational dimension of our engagement with the world, the right brain the social and emotional.

The world of the left hemisphere, dependent on denotative language and abstraction, yields clarity and power to manipulate things that are known, fixed static, isolated, decontextualised, explicit, disembodied, general in nature but ultimately lifeless. (2009: 174)

The right hemisphere in a very different, as it

... yields a world of individual, changing, evolving, interconnected, implicit, incarnate, living beings within the context of the lived world, but in the nature of things never fully graspable, always imperfectly known – and to this world it exists in a relationship of care. (2009: 174)

What would happen if the left hemisphere became dominant in the world? In fact more and more work would come to be overtaken by the meta-process of documenting or justifying what one was doing or supposed to be doing – at the expense of the real job in the real world. (2009: 429)

This last point would probably be echoed by school leaders across the world – how much time is diverted from doing 'the real job in the real world'? This helps to encapsulate one of the key tensions in any debate about leadership in education – in essence, how are the polarities of the hemispheres to be reconciled? For Morrison,

It is no longer possible to rely on linear models of management. Linear models of management, which underpinned the simple linear causality of the command and control mentality of hierarchical, bureaucratic organizations, have to be replaced with networked, nonlinear, emergent, mutually informing groups. (2002: 16)

A range of policy driven factors in the English education system could be interpreted as reinforcing a move towards a left-brain 'map' of leadership in which structures, rules, roles, systems and procedures take priority over relationships and the value placed on the dignity and value of the individual learner. Hypothetical examples of this culture might include:

- seeing leadership in terms of personal status and exclusivity rather than as collective capacity
- compromising inclusion strategies to minimize the number of poorly performing students
- restructuring the curriculum to reflect performance-based accountability imperatives rather than social and personal relevance
- imposing uniformity in terms of the use of space and time for learning
- developing school structures that reinforce academic elitism rather than securing equity
- creating cultures based on compliance rather than consent, control rather than trust
- seeing parents as customers rather than partners in educating their children.

The antidote to the trends is, hopefully, to be partly found in the following sections. However, the extent to which what follows might be implemented is dependent on a profound shift in culture in which the instrumental, reductionist and efficient is replaced by a focus on questioning, challenge and a willingness to seek a holistic and integrated approach to leadership which is derived from moral rather than pragmatic principles.

Leadership currently contributes to Finnish high performance not by concentrating on measurable performance outcomes, but by paying attention to the conditions, processes and goals that produce high performance. These include a common mission; a broad but unobtrusive steering system; strong municipal leadership with lots of local investment in curriculum and educational development . . . (Hargreaves et al. 2008: 93)

It might be that Finland's success is the result of a synthesis of left- and right-brain approaches with the latter dominating.

UNDERSTANDING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR

One of the key preoccupations of students and practitioners of educational leadership over the years has been the various attempts to find an all embracing and definitive model of leadership that provides a detailed, authoritative and applicable definition of leadership that actually makes a difference. So we have taxonomies, skill sets, criteria, competences and competencies not to mention role definitions and job descriptions. It is, of course, the work of poets to try and capture, define and express the essential nature of humanity.

However, it is also useful to have more prosaic descriptions that can be used as the basis for designing and defining the role and developing the person. This generates a significant issue – in seeking to achieve clarity, simplicity and wide applicability there is a danger that the language that is used to describe leadership is narrow, reductionist and instrumental which in turn means that leadership comes to be seen as an activity which can be defined in simplistic terminology and limited outcomes. This is dangerous as any oversimplification has the potential to distort and to compromise integrity.

What follows in this section is a discussion of the problems in describing the qualities and behaviours appropriate to effective leadership. One specific issue is the extent to which the prevailing models of leadership reflect current research and the emerging consensus of those who lead thinking in the subject. Consider the following proposition by Sergiovanni:

Leaders should be trustworthy, and this worthiness is an important virtue. Without trust leaders lose credibility . . . The building of trust is an organizational quality . . . Once embedded in the culture of the school, trust works to liberate people to be their best, to give others their best, and to take risks. (Sergiovanni 2005: 90)

This normative proposition is reinforced by the research of Bryk and Schneider (2002: 34): 'relational trust constitutes a moral resource for school improvement'. Covey (2006: 19) is unambiguous about the status and role of trust in personal and organizational life:

When trust is high, the dividend you receive is like a performance multiplier . . . In a company high trust materially improves communication, collaboration, execution, innovation . . . In your personal life, high trust significantly improves your excitement, energy, passion, creativity and joy in your relationships . . .

Hargreaves and Fink (2006: 213–214) corroborate this view:

'Trust is a resource. It creates and consolidates energy, commitment, and relationships. When trust is broken, people lessen their commitment and withdraw from relationships, and entropy abounds.'

Leithwood and his colleagues provide further corroboration and identify some of the key implications of the central importance of trust:

Some recent studies show that trust remains a powerful and strong predictor of student achievement even after the effects of student background, prior achievement, race, and gender have been taken into account. Therefore, school leaders need to pay careful attention to the trust they engender in teachers, students, and parents if they wish to improve organizational performance still further. (2010: 244–245)

On this basis it would seem highly appropriate to include trust as a key quality of any human being let alone an educational leader. Yet how is trust to be defined? Is it even remotely possible to arbitrate between the trustworthiness of two people competing for a job? And if trust is not as high as hoped for then how is it to be developed – by a trust development programme? This is the heart of the problem: a pivotal human quality, by a broad consensus essential to effective leadership, is elusive and problematic in all sorts of ways.

In their methodologically punctilious research Bryk and Schneider (2002) found a high correlation between the levels of trust in a school and its capacity to improve. Schools with a high level of trust at the outset of a programme to improve maths and reading had a one in two chance of improving. Schools with relatively low levels of trust had only a one in seven chance of improving. Schools in the latter category that did improve made significant gains in their levels of trust as a prerequisite to raising attainment. This finding is endorsed by Day and his colleagues:

Previous research has established strong links between school improvement and trust between head and teacher, teacher and teacher and school professionals and parents. Research has also claimed that trust in leaders both determines organisational performance and is a product of organisational performance. Our research confirms and extends these findings. (2010b: 17)

In their recent work Bryk and his colleagues (2010: 45–46) report on a detailed and systematic longitudinal study carried out since 1989 looking at over 100 schools that have improved compared with over 100 schools that have declined. The key differences between the schools has enabled the identification of a framework for school improvement that is made up of a number of 'essential supports':

1. leadership as the driver for change
2. parent–community ties
3. professional capacity; promoting the quality of staff and focusing on improvement
4. a student-centred learning climate
5. instructional guidance – focusing on ambitious educational achievement for every child.

Bryk et al. see these components as akin to the recipe for a cake but just as putting the ingredients for a cake into a bowl is not enough to make a cake,

... then trust represents the social energy, or the 'oven's heat,' necessary for transforming these basic ingredients into comprehensive school change. Absent the social energy provided by trust, improvement initiatives are unlikely to culminate in meaningful change, regardless of their intrinsic merit. (2010: 157)

On the basis of this empirical evidence and the authoritative endorsement of leading researchers it seems reasonable to argue that trust should be seen as an essential component of effective leadership and organizational culture as well as the basis for school improvement strategies. This is where the left-right hemispheres debate becomes practically significant. If trust really does have the significance and status outlined above then there is a very strong case for arguing that it should be a primary factor in selecting and developing school leaders. Yet by definition it is an elusive human quality rather than a reductionist skill, it cannot be neatly defined and then tested through pseudo-objective selection tasks. Can people really be trusted to complete a psychometric test on trust in a trustworthy manner?

The challenge for those concerned with the quality of school leadership would appear to be the development of strategies that allow those responsible for appointing and developing leaders to focus on personal qualities and more specific characteristics, such as trust, with confidence. The potential list is worrying as it might include such qualities as courage, humour, moral confidence and empathy. De Waal makes a highly significant link:

The role of compassion in society is therefore not just one of sacrificing time and money to relieve the plight of others, but also of pushing a political agenda that recognises everyone's dignity . . . One can't expect high levels of trust in a society with huge income disparities, huge insecurities and a disenfranchised underclass. And remember; trust is what citizens value most in society. (2010: 225)

It is both ironic and troubling that two of the most powerful human qualities, trust and empathy, which are so fundamental to the human condition, are so elusive and fragile. Yet the consensus would appear to be that they are fundamental to effective leadership:

Empathy is like a universal solvent. Any problem immersed in empathy becomes soluble. It is effective as a way of anticipating and resolving interpersonal problems, whether this is a marital conflict, an international conflict, a problem at work, difficulties in a friendship, political deadlocks . . . (Baron-Cohen 2011: 127)

THE SCHOOL AS ORGANIZATION OR COMMUNITY

In every school and classroom there are echoes, some very subtle others quite raucous, of the medieval school and the Victorian schoolroom. Even the geography of many classrooms still reflects long-standing roles and relationships. Schools have changed out of all recognition in terms of key relationships but certain factors remain stubbornly the same, notably the primacy of the organization over the individual:

For the new manager in education, good management involves the smooth and efficient implementation of aims set outside the school, within constraints also set outside the school. It is not the job of the new manager to question or criticise these aims and constraints. The new management discourse in education emphasises the instrumental purposes of schooling . . . (Gerwitz 2002: 32).

Figure 2.1 shows an alternative way of approaching the tension between organizational and community imperatives.

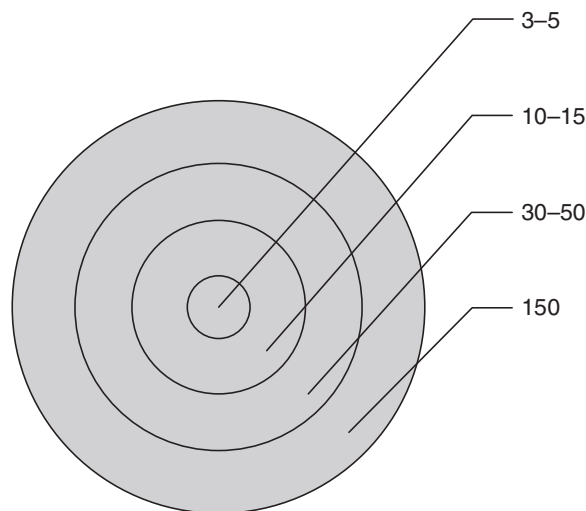


FIGURE 2.1 UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS – THE DUNBAR NUMBER

Dunbar, R. (2010) *How many friends does one person need?* London: Faber & Faber.

A good example of the possibilities of moving from left-brain to right-brain and from organization to community is in the structures that determine social relationships. According to Dunbar we live in a number of 'circles of intimacy':

Within the group of about 150 that constitutes our social world . . . The innermost group consists of about three to five people . . . Above this is a slightly larger group that typically consists of ten additional people . . . And above this is a slightly bigger circle of around thirty more. (2010: 10)

Dunbar cites a range of examples to reinforce his case that 150 is the optimum number for effective human interaction; it is the average size of a clan in pre-industrial society, the average size of village in the Domesday survey and the average size of an English village in the eighteenth century. It was the size of the century – the basic unit of the Roman army and is the size of the company – the basic unit of the modern British army. When the GoreTex raincoat became the essential fashion accessory of the 1960s the demand was met not by increasing the size of the original factory (150)

but opening new factories of about 150 workers. The Amish communities of Pennsylvania split when they reach 150.

Of course none of this can be definitive but it does seem to be intuitively right and reinforced by a range of anecdotal experiences offers a model for designing learning communities based on the circles of intimacy. It is easy to see how a secondary school of 800 students could be divided into five mini-schools which in turn could be sub-divided beyond the normal 30 in a class to learning teams of 12–15 and in turn learning partners working in groups of three or four – it is worth noting that many primary and special schools seem to acknowledge Dunbar’s model intuitively. The issue here is to design schools on the basis of well-being, effective human interaction and to enhance the possibility of creating a learning community in contradistinction to the commodification and bureaucratization of the curriculum. There is a range of examples where the needs of the system appear to take precedence over the needs of the learner, for example:

- automatic chronological cohort progression – i.e. a student moves on to the next age related cohort (year 6 to year 7) irrespective of their readiness or the appropriateness of the move
- subject choices in the secondary school where the administration of the timetable takes priority over the possible needs and interests of learners
- the artificial discontinuity between primary school and secondary school cultures
- the failure of funding formula to recognize the pivotal importance of intervention in the early years and to weight funding to increase with age instead
- the archaic and arcane structure of the school year that is perpetuated in spite of the evidence that it does nothing to enhance learning.

Organizations are not per se inappropriate or hostile to effective learning. The issue is the extent to which the learning environment is designed around the learner rather than the needs, priorities and prejudices of those who put the logic of systems and structures before the needs of people. In the worst case organizational imperatives can lead to the sort of polarization depicted in the Table 2.1.

TABLE 2.1 POTENTIAL POLARIZATION BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL AND COMMUNITY IMPERATIVES

Organization	Community
Organizational rules	Values based on consent
Competition	Collaboration
Hierarchy	Networks
Linearity/control	Complexity/trust
Top-down power	Shared authority
Specialization	Interdependent working
Career structure	Personal growth pathways
Performance-based accountability	Moral accountability

AUTONOMY AND COLLABORATION

What now seems to be understood is that one-size, top-down models do not build capacity or sustainability. They might have a short-term positive effect but the history of national policy based approaches seems to point to such strategies having a limited life cycle and often being compromised by limited horizons, notably in terms of resources and the pressure to demonstrate success. This helps to explain a movement towards greater institutional autonomy as the basis for long-term and sustainable improvement. At the same time it is recognized that the movement towards autonomy requires new types of support and different models of working relationship. This has led firstly to what is now generally described as systems leadership and second the emergence of school-to-school support to replace a range of other agencies. As Fullan (2004: 9) puts it:

A new kind of leadership is necessary for breaking through the status quo . . . These new theoreticians are leaders who work intensely in their own schools, or national agencies, and at the same time connect with and participate in the bigger picture. To change organizations and systems will require leaders to get experience in linking to other parts of the system. These leaders in turn must develop other leaders with similar characteristics.

This implies a significant realignment of our thinking, moving from the focus on the leadership of institutions to integrated approaches that reconcile autonomy with collaboration:

That starts with leadership. We need to develop a new generation of leaders who come to the task with a different understanding of the job and with a different skill set than previously required. Being masters of space and place must yield to proficiency with connection, communication and collaboration. Superintendents of schools must become superintendents of learning. We need to retool our current leaders to remake the system top to bottom. (Houston 2004: 2-3)

This perspective reinforces one of the early authoritative discussions of systems leadership:

System leadership involves a shift in mindset for school leaders, emphasising what they share with others over how they differ. Where they can system leaders eschew 'us and them' relationships – with the community, with other schools and professionals and with the department – and model commitment to the learning of every child. (Craig and Bentley 2005: 3)

According to Craig and Bentley (2005: 4) there are three broad components to systems leadership:

1. building sustainable capacity in institutions so as to enable engagement across the system – it is clearly fundamental to any model of systems engagement that the participant's school should not be compromised
2. developing sustainable capacity beyond the institution – developing new alliances and resources to enable systems approaches
3. creating a climate of professional generosity and exchange in which leaders open up professional practice to wide scrutiny and make professional learning public.

Systems leadership is probably best thought of as making the very best of leadership available beyond the school of the individual leader (or more likely, leadership team). It is an attempt to replicate best and outstanding practice beyond successful institutions to contribute to system-wide improvement and greater equity and equality across the system. It would be naïve to imagine that moving into systems leadership will be anything other than difficult in the present climate in the English system. Principal reasons might include:

- the prevailing model of accountability remains focused on the institution's performance rather than the collaborative activities
- resourcing is focused on the number of students in a school – there is no parallel funding for collaborative ventures
- what might be described as the 'My school' syndrome – the fiercely protective pride in place of staff, pupils, governors and parents
- these three points are exacerbated by the prevailing culture of competition that is reinforced by ever more divisive league tables.

These negative factors are further reinforced by a potential lack of strategies and experience in working collaboratively.

Collaboration is the combination of strategies and processes that enable systems leadership. Although it is a crude typology it might be helpful to think of a movement in recent years from school management through school leadership to system leadership:

System leadership maximises the influence and effect of leadership across a system. It represents both a shift in the practice of leaders to insure wider influence and in the system itself to make this possible. The result is to break down some of the false distinctions between policy and practice, creating a system better able to learn, improve and secure leverage for its outstanding leaders. (Craig and Bentley 2005: 3)

In spite of the very powerful negatives identified above there are many compelling factors that support collaboration and movement towards integration. Such factors will vary according to specific needs of time and context and they will not all be relevant in any given situation but many of them are valid for most schools in a period of rapid change, economic constraint and relentless pressure to perform (Robins and West-Burnham 2011: 17):

1. Standards are likely to rise as the result of the dissemination of best practice across schools and between schools – ‘closing the gap’ is more achievable through collaboration and the ‘deprivatization’ of successful practice.
2. Succession planning will be significantly enhanced by the developmental opportunities offered through systems leadership strategies.
3. There is the potential for significant economies of scale in economic terms – notably in terms of learning resources and materials.
4. Shared CPD has the potential to enhance consistent practice and embed improvement and cross-fertilize good ideas and the best practice.
5. Strategic planning is more likely to be effective through collaborative governance.
6. Integration across phases and primary–secondary transfer is likely to enhance the learning experience of pupils through integrated and collective approaches.
7. Intervention to support pupils would be more effective with consistent record keeping, monitoring and use of data.
8. Deployment of staff could be more flexible and effective.
9. The potential for successful collaboration with other agencies would be significantly enhanced.

So what would appear to be necessary are school leaders who are confident in their ability to lead institutional improvement in their own school and then have the confidence, clarity of moral purpose and professional commitment to engage with other schools to secure equity across the system. It might be worth considering the extent to which schools functioning autonomously can achieve the reform and school improvement agenda:

There are common sense and pragmatic reasons for schools’ collaboration in learning networks to achieve transformation. A proper understanding of our knowledge base reveals it to be distributed, constructed and situated in our working practices. This means that collaboration across schools is a necessity rather than an optional extra in the transformation project. (Desforges 2006: 2)

In other words, the more we share our effective practice the more likely we are to get it right and then to secure and embed it in practice:

There is evidence that the process of change is more resilient and improvement more sustainable when schools collaborate and learn from other schools. Schools that sustain improvement are usually well networked and have a good structure of internal support.

While such schools may be considered to be leading the way for others to follow, the reciprocal nature of the relationship and the opportunities for schools to innovate together means there is added value in both directions from these forms of collaboration. (Leithwood et al. 2010: 232)

LEARNING-CENTRED LEADERSHIP

The profession has come a long way since the following conclusions were drawn:

There is a widespread recognition across the sector that an essential role of school leaders is to promote and develop the quality of teaching and learning delivered in the school. Many school leaders expressed their frustration that the current environment does not allow them to be as involved in this area as they would like. This is reflected in the fact that, in order to enable them to devote sufficient time to leadership and management school leaders themselves teach a lot less than they used to . . . (PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP 2007: 5)

What is so significant about this statement is that a) teaching and learning and leadership and management are seen as distinctive activities and b) that school leaders' involvement in teaching and learning is perceived as classroom teaching rather than enabling others to engage in successful teaching and learning. It is worth remembering just how radical the concept of 'instructional leadership' was when it first emerged. It is now a matter of high confidence that school leadership, in particular headship, makes a difference:

There are statistically significant empirical and qualitatively robust associations between heads' educational values, qualities and their strategic actions and improvement in school conditions leading to improvements in pupil outcomes. (Day et al. 2010b: 1)

However this is leadership that is explicitly focused on teaching and learning and devotes time, energy and personal authority and credibility to making learning the core purpose of the school. This is in sharp contrast to the perspectives reported by PricewaterhouseCoopers above. Compare that perspective with the model of leading teaching and learning that emerges from the draft Ofsted Framework that was implemented in 2012:

Strong leadership creates the climate in which effective teaching and pupil achievement flourish. The current inspection framework sets a clear expectation that leadership and management should focus strongly on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Effective leaders know their school well. They have very high expectations and set ambitious targets for raising standards based on accurate self-evaluation. They monitor teaching and learning rigorously and track pupils' progress meticulously, drawing on outcomes to target areas where more improvement is needed. They plan staff training and development accordingly.

School leaders have a particular responsibility for narrowing the gap in achievement between potentially vulnerable pupils and their peers.

Most importantly, effective leaders focus on classroom practice and develop consistently good teaching and learning.

. . . We propose to include the quality of the curriculum as an important consideration in judging leadership and management. (Ofsted 2011: 12–13)

What is highly significant about the Ofsted framework, and this may mark a significant conceptual leap forward, is that leadership and management are here defined as primarily about teaching and learning – in essence that is why schools have leaders and managers. What Ofsted are doing here is clearly capturing and reflecting the prevailing practice in outstanding and successful schools (defined by their criteria) – synthesizing and codifying what is now emerging as the norm for the focus of leadership time and energy. Based on a synthesis of the works of Barber et al. 2010, Bryk et al. 2010, Day et al. 2010a, Day et al. 2010b, Leithwood et al. 2010 and Pont et al. 2008 the following criteria might help to clarify and elucidate exactly what learning-centred leadership might look like:

1. Leaders share an explicit moral framework that focuses on securing equality and equity in learning and embedding the entitlement of every learner to a quality experience of the curriculum.
2. Leaders work to create a learning culture based on respect for every learner, high quality personal relationships and high levels of trust.
3. In their leadership and management activities leaders give priority to the quality of teaching and learning evidenced through the priorities in their meeting agendas, the time they spend with middle leaders and teachers that is focused on learning and, most significantly, the time with pupils and students listening to their experiences of learning.
4. Leaders are confident in their knowledge of effective teaching and learning, they are aware of significant research, work to apply it in school and develop a research-based culture.
5. All leaders accept responsibility for modelling effective teaching and learning, leading professional conversations and dialogue around effective practice and coach colleagues to support changes in professional practice.
6. School leaders monitor the impact of teaching and learning; in particular they focus on the levels of progress being made, especially by vulnerable groups of learners.
7. Learning-centred leaders model effective learning in their support for the learning and development of colleagues through coaching and modelling and supporting collaborative strategies and enabling review and reflection in order to continuously improve the quality of teaching and learning.
8. Parents are encouraged to become actively engaged in their children's learning as co-educators, as is the wider community.
9. In the final analysis leaders are prepared to intervene in order to secure effective learning and teaching.

Two significant issues underpin this summary. First, leadership has to be conceptualized as collective capacity rather than the personal status of individuals and, second, leaders have to be able to lead – an appropriate supportive infrastructure is essential.

CONCLUSION

So far this chapter has avoided using the word 'paradigm', but it is now appropriate. What is happening to schools in England is a paradigm shift by most criteria – that is a fundamental reorientation of basic assumptions and challenges to prevailing orthodoxies. In such circumstances it may be appropriate to explore alternative conceptual frameworks, models and sources of evidence and to create a new synthesis. The leadership vocabulary that emerges from this study centres on words like interconnection, care, trust, relationships, collaboration, interdependence, morals and learning. Taking Darwin's metaphor of the entangled bank Johnson provides us with a powerful image of how we might need to rethink the fundamental assumptions that surround leadership:

The patterns are simple, but followed together; they make for a whole that is wiser than the sum of its parts. Go for a walk; cultivate hunches; write everything down, but keep your folders messy; embrace serendipity; make generative mistakes; take on multiple hobbies; frequent coffee houses and other liquid networks; follow the links; let others build on your ideas; borrow, recycle, reinvent. Build a tangled bank. (2010: 246)

The challenge then is to find strategies that support leadership in this new paradigm and, crucially, help to develop leaders who are confident in abandoning many of the norms that have informed the practice of leadership in the past and learn to lead with authenticity in new ways.

Reflection points

To what extent is leadership about 'collective capacity' rather than individual status in your own institution?

What 'norms' of leadership does your school work within, and which could be abandoned and which are central to school life?

Are there ways in which your own schools could be restructured to meet the needs of both staff and students better? If so, are these really practicable and what changes in methods of leadership and management would they require?

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