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The Nature of School Leadership

Introduction

Research for this book was conducted among school leaders (headteachers, principals) in 16 countries and was guided by three questions:

- What is school leadership?
- How do you do school leadership?
- What underpins your leadership?

Educational leadership is widely recognised as complex and challenging. Educational leaders are expected to develop learning communities, build the professional capacity of teachers, take advice from parents, engage in collaborative and consultative decision making, resolve conflicts, engage in educative instructional leadership, and attend respectfully, immediately, and appropriately to the needs and requests of families with diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Increasingly, educational leaders are faced with tremendous pressure to demonstrate that every child for whom they are responsible is achieving success. (Shields, 2004, p. 109)

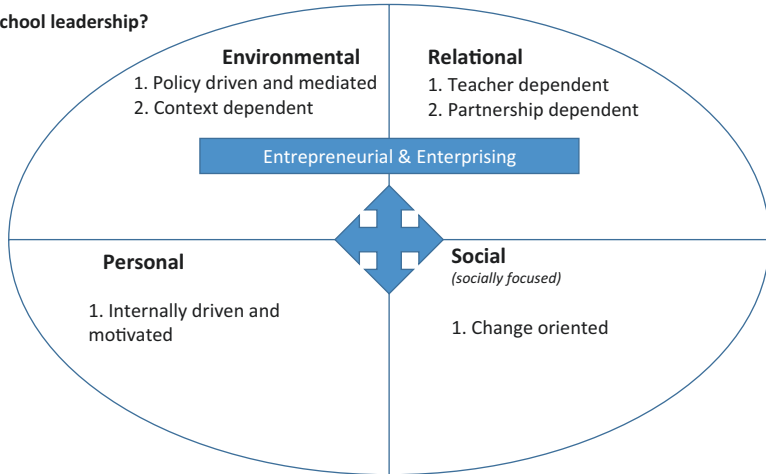
[E]ducational leadership can no longer be seen as delivering outcomes for a national state but rather for a globalised economy, although in the process one might expect the exercise of leadership to increase a nation's competitiveness. Educational leadership therefore may be thought of as both a lock and a key, to be used to secure and safeguard and to release and reassure. (Miller, 2017, p. 8)

As discussed in the Introduction, my reason for asking these questions was not to “test” school leaders’ knowledge of leadership theory and/or practice. Rather, it was to understand from school leaders, first, how they conceptualise leadership, second, to identify and articulate strategies used in their job role to secure short- and long-term objectives, and third, to identify and ascertain driving forces behind their approach to leadership. School leaders were asked the same set of questions, regardless of country, gender, school type, leadership experience or any other category. This was especially important since the primary aim of the research was to derive insights from the accounts and experiences of school leaders in different global contexts as well as to generate theoretical and perspectival insights from these accounts and experiences. It was thus my belief that this approach would contribute to our understanding of school leadership as a field of practice from the perspective of practitioners, and as a body of theory within and across different national and cultural spaces, thus enabling us to make more authoritative judgements about the nature of school leadership globally (beyond national borders).

Asserting the Nature of School Leadership

School leadership has many dimensions and is the second most important factor, behind teaching, in the success of schools/students (Seashore Louis, Wahlstrom, Leithwood & Anderson, 2004). School leaders contribute to creating a school’s culture through prioritising teaching and learning, simplifying operations and processes, acquiring and providing resources, building relationships within and outside schools, working collaboratively with others, developing and articulating a clear vision, and acting with the highest level of integrity. These varied roles and functions help us to (better) understand and appreciate the evolving nature of school leadership, described as “a more contentious, complex, situated and dynamic phenomenon than previously thought” (Dinham, 2011, p. 4). Based on the school leaders’ responses to the question “What is school leadership?” I assert that school leadership is a practice derived from four unique yet interrelated dimensions (see Fig. 9.1). I discuss each of these dimensions below.

What is school leadership?



Four Dimensions of School Leadership

Fig. 9.1 Dimensions of school leadership

Personal

As discussed in Chap. 1, school leadership is a uniquely personal activity. Although taking into account environmental factors, school leaders chart their own path and shape their practice. Although embedded within national education systems that are continually evolving and which create “a more complex picture for understanding how individuals think, feel, and behave in response to changing events” (Dinh et al., 2014, p. 45), school leaders rely on personal values, beliefs and factors (Miller & Hutton, 2014) to plan and coordinate change for the individual student and for a school (Reeves, 2006). Papaku Malasa (2007) argues that “[i]n establishing a set of values and beliefs, an effective school leader not only has to demonstrate ... and espouse the values themselves, but also to communicate these to staff and students as well” (p. 23). This underlines the personal nature of school leadership whilst also acknowledging that the “most reliable guide at the principal’s disposal may be the ‘moral compass’ upon which the individual has learned to rely” (Larsen & Derrington, 2012, p. 2).

Social (Socially Focused)

The primary work of schooling is change, and education is one of the main guarantors of social freedom for individuals and a national society. The United Nations and other supranational agencies have described education as a passport to human development, and as a key to reducing poverty, opening doors and expanding opportunities and freedom. But how do schools/leaders achieve change for students and society? They work with several actors, internal and external to a school, to fulfil individual and national objectives. At a minimum, school leaders provide “resources and professional development to teachers in order to enhance classroom instruction and student achievement” (Clabo, 2010, p. 227).

The partnership between school leaders and teachers is the single most important relationship in individual and national societal transformation. Miller (2016) describes teachers as “mechanics” and school leaders as “drivers”, each with very closely connected responsibilities for equipping a “vehicle” (students) with the education (tools) directed by a national state to be able to contribute to national economic development. Affirming the importance of teachers and the important role they play, school leaders in this study described them as the eyes, ears, hub and wheel of a school. This is in concert with Lipsky’s (1980) view of teachers as “street-level bureaucrats”. As the eyes, ears, hub and wheel of a school and as street-level bureaucrats, teachers in their various school roles are pivotal to the success of schools/school leaders.

Grissom and Loeb (2011) note that school leaders work in multiple ways to influence outcomes for students. For example, they suggest that management tasks such as budgeting, procurement and facilities management (maintaining the school plant) are equal in importance to instructional leadership. Thus, school leaders commit significant effort “combining an understanding of the instructional needs of the school with an ability to target resources where they are needed, hire the best available teachers, and keep the school running smoothly” (Grissom & Loeb, 2011, p. 1119). School leaders also work closely with a range of other actors and agencies, for example, parents and industry, to leverage resources and opportunities needed by the school in order to provide students with what Miller (2016) calls “a qualitatively different educa-

tional experience, directed towards their personal, social, emotional, economic and spiritual development...” (p. 106) and to provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary for their successful functioning in national societies. As noted by Sidhu and Fook (2009), “education reform has created an urgent need for a strong emphasis on development of instructional leadership skills to promote effective teaching and high-level learning. Moreover, educational leaders must recognize and assume a shared responsibility not only for students’ intellectual and educational development, but also for their personal, social, emotional, and physical development” (pp. 106–107).

Relational

As discussed throughout this book, although a uniquely personal activity, by necessity, the practice of school leadership is also a collaborative endeavour or a joint enterprise—built on and delivered through partnership working. That is, for school leadership to be effective, school leaders cannot lead in isolation of others. Dinh et al. (2014) invite us to “consider how processes change and evolve as they are influenced by context as well as by leadership occurring from multiple sources within organizations, leadership theory can move closer to the outcomes we seek to explain” (p. 55). The inclusion of students, parents, the community, industry and others in school leadership is therefore a fundamental component of successful school leadership.

As discussed above, the partnership between school leaders and teachers is the single most important relationship in individual and national transformation. Clabo (2010) urges school leaders to “focus on teachers, be visible, minimize disruptions, share/delegate leadership, and motivate students” (p. 253). In some national societies, home-school partnerships have evolved from being largely rooted in academic concerns, and concerns about financial assistance (Knusden, 2009). A school’s partnership with a community and with industry may be considered a cultural necessity. Globally, as national governments reduce spending on education, developed countries (in this study, for example Cyprus and England) join developing countries (in this study, and elsewhere) in actively pursuing funding

and other opportunities for schools/students. Communities and industry play a significant role in schools/schooling and much of the support that communities and industry actors provide to a school is based on a school's reputation and/or the degree of association an individual or business feels towards a school and/or its mission. Thus a significant part of a school leader's work is relationship building and relationship management, acknowledging that "[t]he new work of school leaders is a mixture of technical and adaptive work" (Fullan, 2005, p. 53).

Environmental

Context matters, and context matters in school leadership. Context influences leadership and leadership influences context. An experienced and successful school leader who has achieved much in one context may achieve only limited success in another school. Adjusting for personal factors, contextual factors that may influence a school leader's performance in a new context could include school size, location, staffing, availability of material and resources, "adequacy" of funding, improvement trajectory, parental support and involvement of community. These are but a few factors in a school's environment that can have a direct influence on school leadership and school outcomes. In addition to context dependent factors, national changes to school funding arrangements continue to challenge school leaders' ability to deliver education's promise to students, families and national societies. As Gorard (1997) points out, "An education market is a zero-sum game. As one school wins, another loses, and so schools put more and more into marketing, they may, like Alice in Wonderland, find themselves running faster and faster just to keep up" (p. 254). Lumby and Coleman (2017) argue that "School leaders and teachers are at the centre of this messy process" (p. 17), where, for their survival, marketing and fundraising initiatives have become routine and central to attracting students and in some cases to keeping schools afloat.

Furthermore, ongoing changes in the global and national policy environments continue to have direct and indirect impacts on how school leaders lead. As a result, school leaders work harder to make sense of their role and the role of education in national societies, repurposed along strict economic lines. Thus, Sidhu and Fook (2009) argue that "the

evolving nature of school environments has placed high demands on educational leaders ... where knowledge of school management, finance, legal issues, and state mandates ... the primary focus ... of school leaders..." (pp. 106–107).

Identifying the Nature of School Leadership

As discussed throughout this book, the practice of school leadership is influenced by several factors, namely personal and environmental factors. As I have discussed in Chap. 1, personal factors relate only to an individual leader and could include their philosophy of education, values, beliefs and personal qualities. As I have also noted, a school operates in two broad environments—an internal environment and an external one. Factors in a school's internal environment (e.g. experience and quality of staff, school size and location) relate only to a particular school, whereas factors in the external environment (e.g. change of government, change of policy direction and content) have the potential to influence several if not all schools. As a school leader is sandwiched between internal and external factors, Miller and Hutton (2014) argue that leadership is "situated"—meaning that true leadership emerges from a school leader's ability to navigate environmental/contextual factors. As also noted by Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm and McKee (2014), effectiveness as school leader is not the result of programmes, workshops or seminars, but the "white space" between their practice and such events (Day et al., 2014, p. 80). Arguably, the "street realities" (Ball, 1987, p. 8) of school leadership are to be found in these "white spaces", thus pushing school leaders to dig deeper within themselves to find answers to questions and solutions to problems. It is therefore to be understood that school leaders' personal agency is a major factor in being able to confidently and successfully navigate environmental factors to lead and achieve change for students, their families and national societies. But how do school leaders do leadership? From interviews with school leaders, four areas of "doing" (practice) school leadership emerged: leading change, entrepreneurialism, partnership building and maintenance, and policy implementation. I discuss each of these four areas of practice below.

Leading Change

School leadership is about change. As discussed in Chap. 3, the primary purpose of education is preparing individuals to contribute to national societies through their skills and talents. National societies need to be and remain competitive, advance scientific discoveries, and contribute to and solve problems within and outside national borders, and to be able to do this, they need individuals who have appropriate skills and knowledge. Through a process of schooling, it is the duty of school leaders to ensure students are provided the education prescribed by a national government, thus developing their skills and knowledge base, in order to increase their chances of leading independent lives as well as contributing to the ambitions and aspirations of a nation state. This interlocking relationship highlights the transformative power and nature of education at the level of the individual (personal) and at the level of a national society (social), and school leadership. Furthermore, it underlines Papadopoulos' (1998) view that education has multiple purposes, including the promotion of, *inter alia*, economic prosperity and individual success. National societies need skilled and qualified professionals, and economic renewal (more so than social renewal) is (now) at the heart of education. Globally, in the face of ongoing political failure, it appears that national governments have come to regard education as the last great hope of a nation and school leaders the custodians of that hope.

Entrepreneurialism

Hentschke argues that “schools are like businesses and their leaders are like business leaders—for better or worse” (2009, p. 149). Changes in how schools are funded means that schools/school leaders are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. Further, naming and shaming of schools as well as strict accountability measures have led to school closures or the threat of closure, with some schools losing students and staff rapidly. Both these outcomes are the result of education markets—in which the ability of a school to engage in transformation, and its very survival, is linked to fundraising, expedient partnership arrangements

and intense marketing “in order to compete effectively and secure their funding in the volatile and fluid education market place” (Coffey, 2001, p. 33). Schools/school leaders are engaged in environmental scanning (Woods, Bagley & Glatter, 1998) as they ‘assess’ the community opinion of, and thus the market for, their schools through a combination of school based activities (parents’ evenings, open days) and surveying parents and residents of the local school community.

Although Waslander and Thrupp (1997) highlight that by focusing too much on marketing, other important aspects of schooling may be placed in jeopardy, Miller (2016) notes that school leaders have no choice but to “sell” their schools through several means using, for example, staff qualification and experience, school safety record, location, class sizes, examination results and so on. Miller (2012) also notes that much more is being demanded from schooling/school leaders, although much less is being spent on education by national governments. Despite this apparent paradox, school leaders cannot shirk their duties. Instead, as Miller suggests, “[t]hese unpredictable and swiftly changing times require an approach [to leadership] that is neither top-down nor bottom-up, but that is encompassing, synergistic, innovative, and practical” (p. 9). It is this practical and innovative approach to school leadership that guides many school partnerships, and in particular, the large numbers that are underpinned by pragmatism, such as for securing funding, placement opportunities and gifts for staff and students.

Partnership Building and Management

A significant part of a school leader’s work involved partnership working. No school is an island, and it is not possible to fully understand the practice of leadership without considering the role of others involved in the leadership process. The operations of a school are based on a range of partnerships, including internal collaboration between school leaders and teachers around a shared understanding of what education is and a shared purpose of schooling. Schools also invest in partnerships with parents since, in addition to helping to manage concerns related to teaching and learning and behaviour management, school leaders/schools from time to

time leverage the expertise of parents in trying to raise funds, deliver projects or otherwise contribute to a school's development. Furthermore, schools work in partnership with local communities that provide opportunities for staff and students. These relationships are vital to a school leader's ability to manage effectively, in particular, in contexts where resources are scarce, there is a shortage of staff, student behaviour is a problem or opportunities are not readily available. Inasmuch as a school leader contributes to building the internal and external school community, the internal and external school community also contributes to the building of a school and to the success of school leadership. School leadership is thus a collective endeavour, practised by multiple sources within and outside a school, for the overall good of that school.

Policy Implementation

As discussed in Chap. 2, the supranational and national educational policy contexts combine to provide the overall regulatory framework for actions undertaken by schools within a national education system. Miller (2016) described educational policies as the “fuel” and “roadmap” of an education system. As the fuel, they sustain an education system, and as a roadmap, they establish parameters and provide direction (p. 142). Each nation state has certain expectations of schools and schooling, and globally, education has become a priority issue for governments, linked much more closely to national development outcomes for “economic prosperity and social citizenship” (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p. i).

As schools do not exist independently of an educational policy context, school leaders have an obligation to implement national policies at the school level. This, in national educational and school contexts where “the latest set of ministerial priorities will [soon] be superseded by a new set” (Miliband, 2003), and where “in some respects, many headteachers are more like branch managers ... handed down expectations, targets, new initiatives ... all of which may or may not be manageable in their context” (Lewis & Murphy, 2008, pp. 135–136). Nevertheless, school leaders have no choice but to implement national policies at the school level since “[t]he experience of each individual learner is

therefore decisively shaped by the wider policy environment” (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p. i). Furthermore, as different “policy actors” at the school level are positioned differently in respect of each policy, how policies are therefore perceived by actors can lead to resistance or support, thus influencing the degree of successful implementation (Ball, Maguire, Braun & Hoskins, 2011). Nevertheless, a significant part of school leaders’ role is policy implementation.

What Underpins Your Leadership?

The third question posed to school leaders was “What underpins your leadership?” The purpose of this question was to identify and examine the factors that “drive”, “shape” and “influence” how school leaders approach their job. From interviews with school leaders, four key practice shapers, influencers, drivers and enablers emerged: educational policies, teachers, schooling/education context and personal factors/motivation. I summarise the main findings in Fig. 9.2 below.

How do you do school leadership?
What underpins your leadership?

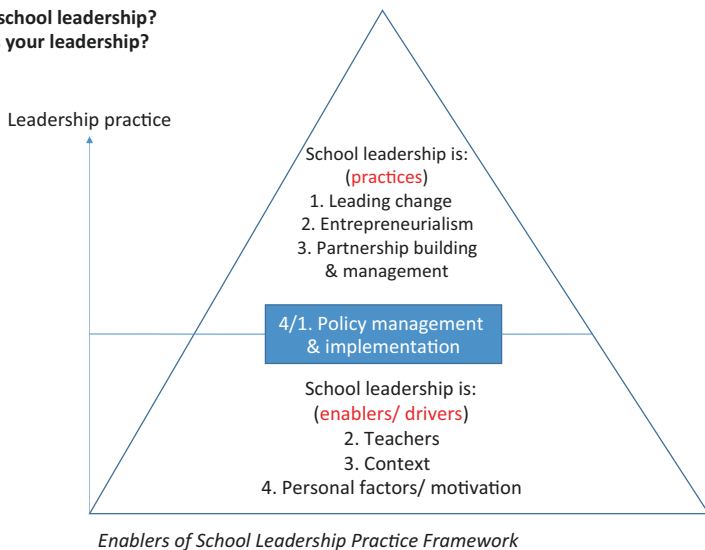


Fig. 9.2 Enablers of school leadership practice framework

Educational Policies

As discussed above, an education system cannot function without educational policies. Although it is understood that school leaders are generally overwhelmed by the changes in a school's policy environment (Murphy, 1994), it is also understood that policies provide guidance and support to all those who study and work within an education system, in particular school leaders. Ball found that school educational policies did not always reflect the "street realities" of schooling (Ball, 1987, p. 8). The work of a school revolves largely around the latest dictate of a national government, and there is no escaping this. Increasingly, school leaders have to protect staff time from distraction brought about by new events, new requirements and additional demands of the policy environment. As suggested by Lumby and Coleman (2017), "[t]he policy context changes not only what is done in schools, teaching and learning, but also the relationships between staff and children, between staff, and between staff and parents. The pressures of performativity, that is, constant scrutiny by means of league tables or inspection, accompanied by fear of potential public exposure, are particularly corrosive" (p. 20).

Blasé and Blasé (2004) also point out that policy changes have encouraged "the kinds of leadership that seriously damage teachers, teaching and student learning" (p. 245). Gunter (2012) argues that school leaders are caught in a game "where those outside of schools" are in control of school leaders (p. 18) and where school leaders almost always struggle to assert their leadership against the structures that enable and prevent their agency (Gunter, 2005). Eacott (2011) describes these events as leading to "the cultural re-engineering of school leadership..." (p. 47). Notwithstanding the pressures placed on school leaders by changes/events in global and national policy environments, as far as possible, school leaders must implement government policies at the school level in order to be compliant with a national state and in order to align a school's actions and objectives with those of a national state. This has a direct impact on their leadership. As a result, depending on the content of educational policies, their engagement with educational policies, and the likely impact of educational policies on their school, school leaders are likely to interact with educational policies as protagonists or antagonists or both. In either case,

educational policies thus contribute directly to the shaping of school leadership practice by having a direct and constant impact on a school leader.

Teachers

Teachers are central to the work of a school as well as to the overall effectiveness and success of an education system. Without adequate numbers and appropriately experienced and qualified teachers in place, an education system cannot achieve its best for students and for society. Schools are complex institutions in which teachers and the work they do are sometimes not recognised, although without them it is impossible for schools/school leaders to function. Miller (2016) described teachers as “mechanics”, tasked with the important responsibility of preparing students to lead successful lives. Several other roles associated with leadership, teaching and mentoring have been used to describe teachers. These include counsellors, mentors, curriculum specialists (Harrison & Killion, 2007), and conveyors of information, knowledge builders and innovators of new ideas and practices (Bennis, Benn, Chin & Corey, 1976).

Lipsky (1980) described teachers as “street-level bureaucrats” who establish and invent devices, decisions and routines to cope with uncertainties and work pressure that effectively become the public policies they carry out. This is consistent with school leaders’ descriptions of teachers in this study as, for example, “the wheel of a school”. This also underlines a main proposition by Seashore Louis et al. (2004) that “[l]eadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p. 65). Thus, the work of teachers, whether in the classroom or in a pastoral, leadership or support role, is a most significant factor in the overall success of schools/school leadership.

Schooling/Education Context

Context matters, and no sensible evaluation of school leadership (practice, effectiveness) can take place without consideration of the context within which leadership is enacted. What are the social issues within a

school's national environment? What are the geo-political issues within a school's national environment? What are the technological and economic issues within a school's national environment? What are the religious and cultural issues within a school's national environment? How do these issues influence/impact school leadership? How do these impact school leaders? How do these issues influence schooling? How do these issues influence individual schools?

However, national issues are only part of the wider contextual factors. What about school related issues? What is the size of a school? What are the average class sizes? Does the school have sufficient numbers of staff? Are staff suitably qualified and do they possess appropriate experience? There are also community related factors to consider. What are the socio-economic backgrounds of parents? Are parents educated—can they read and write? Do parents attend/support school activities? Do/can parents contribute to schools financially or otherwise? What support, if any, can a local community provide to a school? There are also factors related to the governance of schools. How effective is the school board in supporting a school leader? Do school board members understand their role? Does the ministry of education/education department provide adequate support to schools in terms of resources required—financial and technical? As Hutton (2011) notes, “With context being an important factor in determining the nature and type of leadership exhibited by principals ... researchers must be mindful that there are literally hundreds of factors ... which seem to be associated with effective or high performing principals” (p. 50). These are some of the contextual factors that simultaneously enable, drive, support and influence the effectiveness of school leadership.

Personal Factors/Motivation

McCleskey (2014) describes leadership as “a characteristic ability of extraordinary individuals” (p. 117). Greer also notes, “[l]eadership is not a position; it is a process” (Greer, 2011, p. 30) and that “[i]t’s difficult for leaders to be effective if they do not take the time to examine their sense of purpose and the ways it has been defined, influenced, informed and refined by their experiences” (p. 20). This awareness of

self suggests leadership is not only a personal but also a reflective activity underpinning a school leader's understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, and the range of factors that guide their decision-making and actions.

As discussed throughout this book, school leadership is influenced by several factors within and outside a school's immediate environment. Furthermore, "the complexities related to running schools have forced principals to develop their unique approach to effective leadership" (Hutton, 2013, p. 90). Holden (2002) describes this improvement in leadership quality and personal agency as arising from "... conscious interaction with the culture of the school". As discussed in Chap. 1, school leadership is a uniquely personal activity, influenced and shaped by factors in a school's internal and external environments, but balanced by personal factors unique to each leader (Miller & Hutton, 2014). Personal factors may include determination, self-confidence and motivation. Highlighting the role of personal factors, Clarke and Wildy note that school leadership requires "not only functional knowledge, understanding and contending with matters of compliance, but also confidence, determination and political sophistication" (p. 47). In addition to personal factors, values, beliefs and educational philosophy also influence school leadership. In Chap. 1, I described values as "*a set of regulatory codes, implicit and explicit, that sets the tone for an organisation and provides agency to an individual school leader and checks and balances to their actions*". This corresponds to Halstead's definition that values are "principles, fundamental convictions, standards or life stances ... general guides to behaviour ... which are closely connected to personal integrity and personal identity" (p. 5). Ferrero (2005) described personal philosophy as a "source of distinctiveness" among school leaders that underpins the values and beliefs associated with "what makes life worth living ... what is worth teaching..." (p. 8). Furthermore, as proposed by Ashby and Krug (1998), "[m]ake no mistake: your personal philosophy shapes your educational philosophy and influences the decisions you make on the job..." (p. 55). Consequently, a school leader's sense of self, their beliefs and values and other personal factors are major influences on their approach to leadership and therefore the practice of school leadership.

Evidence Summary

A correlation matrix was formulated among the seven themes of the book. Significant relationships were evidenced between and among all variables according to continents. However, only a slight relationship was found between school leadership that is personally internally motivated and school leadership that is policy driven and mediated. This is to be expected since one is intrinsic and the other is extrinsic. Put differently, although school leaders acknowledge the importance of educational policies, there were sometimes tensions between the content, aim and implementation of particular educational policies and their agency, educational values and/or personal philosophy. A correlation was also made among the five continents from which data were gathered. No significant relationships were found. However, what was intriguing was that, when a comparison of the overall school leadership scores for the entire survey was conducted, there were major differences between Asia and North America and between Africa and North America regarding the practice of school leadership. These results show that leaders in one continent sometimes scored higher in a category than leaders in another continent. For example, school leaders in Europe are more likely to resist wholesale policy implementation while school leaders in Asia are less likely to do so. This directly correlates with research findings from Hofstede (1980), Dimmock and Walker (2005), and Hallinger (2016) where the cultural approach to leadership vis-à-vis the power/distance among individuals in Asian societies is much more clearly delineated than it is among Westernised societies. A similar finding came to light between Asia and South America and Africa and South America where school leaders were found to approach school leadership rather differently. In particular, African, South American and North American school leaders very much engaged in partnership working, but this was not as developed a phenomenon among school leaders from Asia. This directly correlates with research findings from House, Hanges, Javindan, Dorfman and Gupta (2004) where leadership practice is related to institutional as well as societal cultures. Overall, the findings suggest school leadership is understood more or less the same way among school leaders irrespective of origin. However, the practice of school leadership varied somewhat

depending on location and country context. For example, whereas school leaders in developed countries saw teachers as primarily “doing their jobs”, school leaders in developing countries saw teachers as important partners, without whom school leadership would be more of a challenge. Furthermore, school leaders in developing countries tended to be engaged in external partnership working as a result of economic necessity, whereas school leaders in developed countries tended to pick and choose external partners—usually based on securing an opportunity (which may or may not be a need for the school).

Conclusions

The purpose of this book was to derive an understanding of how school leaders in global contexts conceptualise, do and support their leadership. Schools are complex institutions, each with its unique culture despite their common aims and objectives. Although schools generally have some similarities among them in terms of norms, structures, rituals and traditions and common values, the particularities of a school’s context (internal: staffing, size, parental support; external: location, regulatory environment, community involvement and support) significantly influence the degree of effectiveness exhibited or potentially exhibited by a school leader.

Leadership is a bridge that connects the practice and policy environments, and a lever that helps to negotiate and navigate the complexities of these environments. There is no blueprint for successful school leadership, and if one were to speculate on the content of such a blueprint, s/he would expect educational policies, context, partnerships, teachers and personal factors/motivation to be essential components. Although improvements to national economic fortunes have undoubtedly recast how education is conceptualised, done, and is seen to be done, students are fundamentally the main focus of education upon whom achieving the expected changes and improvements rests.

There are unprecedented large-scale educational reforms taking place in national education systems globally. There are also fundamental social and economic changes occurring outside the control of schools and school leaders, which have significant bearing on every aspect of schooling and school leadership. School leaders feel they are being driven

and not being led by educational policies in respective national education systems. They feel “too much” is happening in national policy environments, and as a result they do not always have time and space to deliver one policy directive before another one is thrown at them. This, they argue, is antithetical to the clarity and coherence national education systems need.

“The intelligent school is greater than the sum of its parts” (MacGilchrist, Myers & Reed, 2004, p. xvii). Schools serve the needs of the present and the future—and teachers play enormously important roles as primary change agents, learning leaders, partners in national development, and the eyes, ears, hub and wheel of a school. Without good quality supportive teachers, school leadership is doomed. Through personal agency, school leaders apply “corporate mindsets” (Miller, 2016, p. 120), enter into selective partnership arrangements, leverage available support for their schools in order to tackle or respond to challenges in a school’s internal and external environments, and respond to national development objectives for change in individuals and in national societies.

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