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7. LEADING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS: IN SEARCH OF POLICY IMPERATIVES

INTRODUCTION

The increasing focus on the importance of school leadership as an essential driver for the achievement of positive outcomes for state investment in education combined with a view emerging from scholarship that 'powerful global and international trends are creating leadership contexts that are increasingly alike' (Dimmock, 2003) provide the broad context for this chapter. The key issue for consideration here is the extent to which the current trends in leadership policy development at an EU level are creating and supporting the development of more inclusive models of school systems. Two key documents, the OCED report on Improving School Leadership (Pont et al 2008a; 2008b) and the recent publication of Comenius Framework of Reference Report (Mlaker et al 2011) will form the basis of this critique. The former provides a broadly based study of the field of school leadership and consequently requires a more extensive examination than the latter which focuses specifically on the field of school leadership development. Both of these reports are indicative of an increasing level of interest at EU level in the area of school leadership. A number of comparative reports on how different countries are selecting, recruiting and developing school leaders are now published or in train and increasingly commonalities are emerging with respect to the focus of these reports and the manner in which they are delimiting discourse as it relates to leadership policy formation. The OECD report on Improving School Leadership published in 2008 is already impacting a number of national international developments on the field of school leadership policy (Comenius, 2011; www.schoolleadership.eu, 2012). The extent to which policy frameworks function to define and privilege certain discourses create a powerful mechanism for shaping and framing the work of schools as it relates to inclusion. The potential impact that policy envisaged by these developments could have on the discourse within which the future of school leadership is framed provides a clear imperative for extensive critique of the underlying ideological and political motives and imperatives underpinning these reports.

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THE OECD AND IMPROVING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

As a development of OECD 2005 report Teachers Matter (OECD, 2005) and in recognition of the widespread interest in the role and functioning of school leadership, the OECD conducted a study of school leadership with a view to providing policy makers with information and analysis that will help them 'formulate and implement school leadership policies leading to better education' (Pont et al., 2008a, p. 14). This work comprised two interrelated strands; the first, entitled the analytical strand, involved the 22 countries and the findings of this phase, identify 'policy levers and a range of policy options to help governments improve school leadership … and build sustainable leadership for the future' (Pont et al., 2008a p. 1). The second strand, published in volume two, focused on an more detailed examination of what was considered to be 'innovative practice in school leadership' (Pont et al., 2008 p. 15) in five case studies countries. In a similar way to other work in the globalising and internationalising of leadership development (Dimmock, 2003) the main purpose of this part of the study was to explore 'new models of school organisation and management that distribute leadership roles in innovative ways' (Pont et al., 2008 p. 15) and to identify 'promising programmes and practices to prepare and develop school leaders' (Pont et al., 2008 p. 15) both of which were identified as central to the research by the OECD team (Ibid). Neither of the two strands indicated any commitment to contributing to a more equal, just or inclusive school system. It could be argued that the broad thrust of the report as well as the policy levers identified could contribute to the development of a system that would instead function against providing a model of inclusion in schools. While the purpose of the report was not to provide a framework for the leadership of inclusive schools, it is not unreasonable to expect that this core policy driver in other areas of EU policy would be present in some of the thinking behind this seminal work on school leadership in the EU. When viewed from the perspective of inclusion there are clearly identifiable problems with many aspects of current practice in schools. It could be argued that the framework for the national reports provided by the OECD as part of the lead up to this publication did not adequately address the challenges related to inclusion (Mac Ruairc, 2009). This in itself is an oversight that should not have happened if the intention was to ensure that recommendations for improving school leadership would retain a strong commitment to inclusion. There are many well documented areas where innovative thinking is needed and where policy imperatives are needed in order to frame a more inclusive school system. A proposed model for improvement such as is articulated in this work that neither critiques the current status quo nor engages with a well established scholarship trajectory that already provides this critique makes a clear and unequivocal political and ideological statement. For the purpose of this chapter four key principles that underpin this report i.e. school autonomy, neo liberal based policy imperatives, models of school leadership and leadership development, are critiqued in an effort to examine the extent to which there is a potential to deliver a more inclusive system.

SCHOOL AUTONOMY

The evidence reported in Pont et al (2008) indicate that participating countries differ with respect to the degree of school autonomy that prevails in the different systems. The findings conclude that many systems have high degrees of autonomy with respect to curricular and resource matters and less power in relation to teacher recruitments and salary scales. Because a high degree of school autonomy is a fundamental prerequisite for the implementation of reform many countries will face changes at this fundamental level if the recommendations are taken on board by national Governments. Having noted the variety of practices that exist the report concludes that evidence from PISA data suggests that 'in those countries in which principals reported, on average, higher degrees of autonomy in most aspects of the decision making surveyed, the average performance of students tended to be higher' (Pont et al, 2008 p. 42). The high level of qualification in this statement casts considerable doubt on the real efficacy of the evidence used in support of this policy direction and suggests a note of caution in relation to basing decisions on this key issue of school governance. Autonomy, supported in the appropriate way can have a positive impact on systems. It allows for a more nuanced, organised approach to school development. Evidence indicates that if this model of school autonomy is approached in a way that is genuinely empowering, then there is potential for innovative developments. (Leithwood and Prestine, 2002) Similar literature identifies the need to support such a move with significant investment in leadership development which will enable leaders to use this autonomy in line with values based on equity, social justice and inclusion in order to contribute to greater degrees of equality between different social groups (Murphy, 2002). It is not clear if this is the case in this report, as scholarship focusing on this aspect of school autonomy is not cited. There is stronger evidence in the report relating to increasing drive towards a value for money focus within structures and systems like education that draw heavily on the public purse. The strong link within the report between autonomy and accountability creates a very specific dynamic (Sugrue and Solbrekke, 2011). It is unlikely that such a system will deliver the type of inclusive system that is envisaged by contributors to this collection. While the notion of inclusion is contested in a number of domains there is little doubt that as a model of school it is expensive. The current adverse economic circumstances complicate the field considerably. The concept of doing more with less which increasingly is becoming the operational axiom for public services will then be the responsibility of school leaders who will increasingly have to try satisfy the needs of a host of competing interest groups whose demands will likely be intensified by the imperatives for inclusion. This practice of individualising the success and failure and dispersing blame (Apple, 2009) can depoliticise systems of school funding, where school leaders face the negative consequences of poor outcomes because investment is inadequate while political responsibility for the levels of funding is only accepted when successes are celebrated. (Wrigley, 2008)

PERFORMATIVITY AND NEW MANAGERIALISM: AN UNCHALLENGED MODEL

The recommendation to enhance school autonomy in this report is very closely aligned to the need to ensure that schools are held accountable for the quality of the education provided. To this end the report is strongly in favour of the high stakes external accountability systems with some countries 'using accountability information to provide financial rewards or sanction for schools'. (Pont et al 2008, p. 52). Evidence from PISA studies is cited to support this in concluding that 'student achievement seems to be higher when teachers are held accountable through the involvement of principals and external inspectors in monitoring lessons' (ibid. p. 47). This highly critiqued and arguably discredited model of governance as it has been applied to education (Day, 2003, Thrupp and Willmot 2003, Lynch 20005, Bates 2006, Fitzgerald, 2008 Sugrue and Solbrekke, 2011) is presented as the key to transformation of countries systems based on the rationale this era of 'autonomy and accountability can respond more efficiently to local needs' (Pont et al, 2008, p. 25). This benign view of new managerialism and its conflation with high learning standards is exclusively one sided and decidedly vague and qualified. PISA Data from research carried out by Woessmann (2007) are reported in support of this paradigm of schooling 'student achievement seemed to be somewhat higher when standardised exit exams exist… they also found some evidence that students seemed to perform better if their schools were held accountable for reaching performance standards (Pont et al 2008 p. 51). No reference is made to the extensive body of literature that outlines very unambiguously the highly contested nature of this claim and provide extensive data related to teaching to the test, improvished curricula and a conservatising impact on classroom practice with particularly negative consequences for school who are engaged in innovative practices in marginalised challenging areas where efforts are being made to connect curricula with students lives (McNeil 2000, Mac Ruairc, 2009). This leads one to questions the ideological base and political motives of this report.

CHOOSING A MODEL FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

It is clear from the literature on leadership in education that the enormous amount of interest in the field has generated 'a bewildering array of findings and the endless accumulation of empirical data [but] has not resulted in any clear understanding of leadership' (Harris, 2003, p. 15). A range of leadership styles emerges producing what has been described as leadership by adjective (Leithwood and Jantzi 2006 p. 202) in scholarship. In addition to the broad categorisation of leadership, styles, practices and models that exist in the literature there are different, sometimes contradictory, perspectives using the same/similar nomenclature This is particularly the case in relation to the two main styles of leadership highlight by this report i.e. instructional leadership and distributed leadership. In the first instance both these models of leadership are relied upon to support this overall framework for improvement.

In the first instance this report fails to theorise how these two models interlink at a conceptual level. Secondly, the version of distributed leadership is very much a delegation model arguably arising from the scope of the task of school leadership as articulated within this report. The more empowering and developmental models of distributed leadership articulated by Gronn, Hopkins and Spillane is not what drives this iteration of this leadership construct. It also falls considerable short of the collegiate approach to school leadership that has considerable support over the years in some UK literature. (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1996) It many ways it is an instrumentalist view of school leadership, based on a needs must rationale.

The now well articulated need for leadership to focus on teaching and learning clearly positions Instructional Leadership (IL) as a significant player in the overall leadership framework. It is clear that this the quality of inclusive schools hinges on the high quality pedagogical innovation and leadership. Literature in this area points to very positive and empowering models of school leadership. These models focus on genuine pedagogical enrichment of practice for teachers, students and the organisation (Spillane and Seashore, 2002). The iteration of instructional leadership (IL) outlined in this report is the arguably the most problematic and potentially regressive dimension in the overall narrative. If this model were to be adopted, it is the view of this author that the negative impact on the climate in schools would be deeply damaging. The report recommends a highly prescriptive model of IL with negative consequences for teacher identity and teacher sense of efficacy and professionalism. It contributes decidedly to a situation where 'the core activity of teaching and learning is being reconfigured around comparative measurement within and between schools'. (Gunter, 2003) This report takes a very narrow and controlled view of the original idea of pedagogical leadership articulated by Sergiovanni as 'a form of leadership which invests in capacity building by developing social and academic capital for students and intellectual and professional capital for teacher'. In many ways the model of IL proposed could be described as a form of policing teaching and learning rather that creating a culture where learning opportunities are maximised to the benefit of students, staff and the wider school community. The discourse of high level of monitoring comes through very strongly. An example of this cited from England describes the use of 'intervention teams' could be deployed 'to look into potential underperformance and respond to challenges'. (Pont et al 2008 p. 202) The school were this practice was evident are described as having ' a culture of constant assessment' where 'classrooms are open and all are ready for evaluation, assessment and action' (Pont et al 2008 p. 52). Instructional Leadership as envisaged by this report echoes back to on autocratic controlling surveillance offering little scope for an inclusive outcome for students, teachers or leaders.

Aligning instruction with external standards, setting school goals for student performance, measuring progress against those goals and making adjustments in the school programme to improved performance are the dynamic aspects of managing curriculum and instruction (Pont et al 2008 p. 51). The overall leadership model articulated is a response to a systems world analysis that ignores the messier more

complex lifeworld (Sergivanni, 2001) where more critical scholarship points to the increasing awareness of the person centred nature of school leadership (Fielding, 2006) and the emotional labour that mediates so much of the doing of school leadership (Brennan and Mac Ruairc, 2011). Within this narrative it is possible to identify a very distinct fault line in the improvement ideology underpinning the policy trajectory in this report. There is broad agreement among those in the school improvement /school effectiveness fields that school improvement is fundamentally focused on student achievement 'by modifying classroom practice whilst simultaneously adapting the management style within the school to support teaching and learning' (Hopkins and Jackson, 2003). In this we see the narrow instrumentalist articulation of the enterprise of schooling and it is thus that we can see how the model of instructional leadership proposed in the report delivers on this agenda rather than a broader more enriched model of school such as that proposed by more critical perspectives on pedagogy.

A MODEL FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

One of the key functions of this OECD research was to produce a model for leadership development that would lead to a sustainable capacity in systems to provide high quality school leaders. There are a number of difficulties with the model presented in this report when it is considered in the context of the diverse scholarship in the field. There is very little evidence in the report that consideration was given to research that has extensively critiqued leadership development programmes internationally. (Bolam, 2003, Harris et al 2003) The model presented limits itself to the dissemination of a 'what works' approach to leadership development. Little account is taken of the problematic nature of the use of this 'transferrable epistemology' (Gunter, 2006) approach to school leadership where there is considerable research that points to the contextualised and differentiated (Gunter, 2006) nature of the work of school leadership and school leadership improvement (Leithwood and Hallinger, 2004) The idea that different national and local contexts are 'the product of unique and dynamically changing sets of circumstances - political, economic, social, cultural historical, professional and technical- in that country' (Bolam, 2003 p. 74) is not considered in the report. The view of leadership as a form of practice that takes account of 'the moral, epistemological, sociological and discursive dimensions of practice' (Riehl, 2000) is entirely absent from the discourse framing this report. The need for leadership to comprise 'a concern for suffering and oppression, a commitment to empowerment and transformation, an aggressive advocacy on behalf of students and a critical stance towards leadership and authority' (Riehl, 2000 p. 70). This focus on critical leadership domain is a vital component in quest for equity (Grace, 1997) because it enables a genuine engagement with the overall context of schooling, the historical basis of the field (Gunter, 2006) and the workings of the power structures that delimit the workings of the education system.

The more recent report on school leadership development (2011) focuses specifically on 'improving the preparation and training of effective school leaders and disseminating a better understanding of the role of school leaders' (Mlaker, 2011p. 7). Representatives from thirteen countries constituted the core team for this report and fifteen other countries joined these. The partnership incorporated school of education, in-service training institutes, school, ministries of education and NGO's (ibid). The overall purpose was to develop a framework of reference for school leadership. It followed a similar development pathway to the OECD report; phase one consisted of compiling and collating country background reports into a European Synopsis while the second phase identified core elements of school leadership qualifications by explicating a series of domains and components which in the view of the participating partners should constitute a leadership development framework. This developed previous work by Leithwood and Riehl (2005). To this end five domains are outlined which are considered to capture the different dimensions of leadership practice. These domains were subdivided into components which provided greater detail in relation to the content of each domain. Finally each of the components were linked to modules, a number of which are included in the report by way of exemplars which not only capture aspects of what different countries are doing with respect to leadership development but also facilitate the sharing of good practice. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide an extensive critique of this framework document. When viewed from the perspective of developing leaders to deliver a more inclusive type of school system the framework falls considerably short of what is required. On a positive note there is specific reference in the first domain to aligning the core purpose of schooling with 'ethical, educational, political and cultural values [to [include procedures that guarantee fairness justice and democracy' (Mlaker et al 2011, p. 12). One of the domains also focuses on the personal development and growth of the school leader. Both of these signal a departure from the language and intention of the OECD report. However neither domain or their constituent components are developed to any great extent in the document, The overall thrust of the language of the document retains has a strong resonance with the neoliberal discourse of outputs, effectiveness, an over emphasis on management activity rather than the more complex domain of leadership and 'the creation of a corporate identity' (Mlaker et al 2011, p' 10). When the catalogue of qualification modules collated from the current leadership development practice in many of the participating countries are examined from the perspective of inclusion it is clear that focusing on the challenges of developing an inclusive school system is not being addressed to any significant level in what has been selected as noteworthy modules. Inclusion only appears once in any of the module infact it only appears once in the entire document. In this case it is included in a module comprising 7 × 1.5 hour sessions covering the following areas: the school as an organization, the self-evaluating school, school culture, Inclusion, Leading the change process, Strategic planning, Leading in context. The scope of this module indicates a lack of awareness of the complexity of what needs to be explored in the area of inclusion. The final section of the report explicates concepts

and good practice which are considered to be 'example of good practis[c]e in the areas of leadership and leadership development...that could inform practitioners and policy makers' (ibid, 102). A similar lack of focus on inclusion prevails in this section. The incidences of references to other cognate concepts in the entire document are included here in parenthesis social justice (0), equality (0), Justice (2) equity (2) democracy (2) [in the same sentence on the same page] social class (0) gender (0), Race (0) ethnicity (0). Essentially what has been reported and to some extent recommended is a leadership development programme that does not deal with any of the aforementioned areas. The scope for dealing in any comprehensive way with inclusion is clearly very limited indeed.

CONCLUSION

In the case of both publications, the manner in which the process of leadership development is deeply embedded in the political and ideological is omitted. It could be argued that such perspectives if used as a guide to leadership development will create problems, particularly in the context of increasing diversity which is part of the rationale for developing strategies around school leadership. There is increasing evidence that homogenous forms of schooling are failing to deliver appropriate levels of education to diverse student groups including lower socio-economic groups, ethnically diverse groups. (Riehl, 2000, Riley, 2009) These groups are increasingly claiming their own forms of subjectivity and are beginning to strongly resist being treated as a social variable by policy makers (Wrigley, 2008) where the impact of these social variable is controlled for in statistical studies, particularly in school effectiveness research where the noise of this diversity has to be silenced in order for the real findings to emerge. The socially constructed nature of difference on a whole range of variables will require leadership that is responsive, sociologically informed and above all critical of the competing discourses. There is a considerable body of scholarship that is now focused on the need for school leadership to engage in a critique of current models of schooling and address the gaping need for a leadership that is focused on the key issues of equity and social justice though the building and strengthening of a democratic community in schools.

The impact that reports of this type have on the field of practice remains to be seen, The OECD 2008 report is already having an impact and is regularly cited in policy documents. The recent economic turmoil may have limited the follow up activity with the report in terms of policy actions in different countries. This does not mean however the intention has gone away or that the hand of the economic imperatives is any less formidable. A key issue to consider when critiquing reports such as these is how they function to frame the discourse related to leadership. Central to this is how language use is 'inextricably connected to rule based actions that define reality, generate meanings and constitute social forms and relations. A formidable power to create and define regimes of truth and delimiting the boundaries of what is possible to think and say in a given era result when patterns of language

use combine to produce discourse (Foucault). The fundamental link between power, position, knowledge, discourse and the production of ideological stances further augments the need to engage in discursive critique. This position is fundamental to the approach taken to this critique this report and the reader is asked to consider the impact on future leadership discourse and practice as it relates to inclusion if the language used in the cited texts were to dominate the field. It is vital, if we are serious about the idea/ideal of inclusive schools to ensure that scholarship continues to focus on 'critical questions concerning the nature and shape of knowledge, how this knowledge was being produced and by whom and the underpinning construction of this knowledge for the field.' (Fitzgerald and Gunter, 2008).

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