Waiting for SuperLeader
Leadership as Anti-Resource Discourse

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Paper Presented at
CMS
Manchester, UK
July 2013
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For the last two decades, there has been a focus – one might even say fetish – on the construct of “leadership” in school organizations. The literature is replete with books on educational leadership for the 21st Century (see for example, Davies & Ellison, 1997; Murphy, 2002), leadership for change (see for example, Fullen 2011), as well as leadership preparation (see for example, Jean-Marie & Normore, 2010; Niesche, 2011). There is also a large literature on ethical leadership in education (see for example Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001; Starratt, 2004; Strike, 2006). Additionally, there is a literature critiquing school leadership (see for example, Gunter, 2001; Hoyle & Wallace 2005; Samier & Stanley, 2008; Smyth, 1989) and even postmodern approaches (see for example, Maxcy, 1994; Niesche, R, 2011). In short, within the public sector generally and schools specifically, there has been a material shift in emphasis from structure, including organizations and the administrators or managers in them, to agency, that is the “leader.”

In this paper I will examine the discursive construction of leadership in schools. I will do this by first looking at three popular images of “leadership” in U.S. schools: turnaround leaders, transformational leaders, and distributive leaders. I will interrogate these constructs in the context of the “globalization” discourse, as well as the critical school leadership and CMS literature. In doing so, I will expose how “leadership” has become an anti-resource discourse in school organizations.

Why Leadership?

This shift to the emphasis of leaders and leadership in schools has emerged within the context of the globalization discourse, with its new public management (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). “This new public management (NPM) sometimes called ‘corporate managerialism’, has be a structural practice response to the new flows of globalization and the related speeding up of policy change and indeed the centrality of a discourse of change in contemporary policy regimes” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010: 119). The NPM was to replace the traditional bureaucratic systems, which were deemed too highly centralized, rule-bound and inflexible to meet the needs now required of the public sector, including education, in a globalized economy (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). “NPM’s focus is on results or in ‘management speak’, its focus is on outputs and performance, rather than inputs and process” to be accomplished efficiently (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010: 119). Thus, the NPM, with its business-styled managerial practices was better suited to deliver polices than that of the traditional state bureaucratic systems.

Gunter and Thomson (2009) discuss how leadership developed within the NPMs. “Out of the ruins forms of state-controlled regulations developed where power was associated with privitised contractual relations between government and individuals or groups who could deliver policies. This shift exemplified the development of leadership as a form of training and processional practice” (472). Under New Labour, they argue that “[h]eadteachers had to be transformational charismatic leaders with a ‘can do’ and
change-oriented persona” (473). Thus, there was a “rising faith…in leadership as a salvation to organizational struggles …within the public sector more generally, across education (in schools and in universities) …” (Ford, 2010: 158). Managers and administrators in traditional bureaucratic systems are concerned with processes, which in turn maintain the status quo, while leaders on the other hand are focused on outcomes, which is believed will lead to change. In the managerialist discourse then, leaders are needed to ensure the desired results from policy implementation.

However, I also argue that this emphasis on leadership moves the focus to the individual agent and away from the structural role of administrator or manager. That is, the leader is accountable for the results of policy implementation. This obfuscates the structural impediments (for example poverty or underfunded schools) to the desired outcomes. Leaders are labeled “bad” and bear the blame for not achieving desired results, thus are accountable for structural difficulties beyond their control.

*Three Images of Leadership*

Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (2004) define school leadership as “the identification, acquisition, allocation, co-ordination, and use of social, material, and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning” (11). Leaders then, are key to the operation of school organizations. In the U.S., there are three popular constructs of school leaders: turnaround leader, transformational leader, and distributive leader. While perceived as distinctive, these three constructs share essential traits.

*Turnaround leader.* Murphy (2007) offered an extensive analysis of the “turnaround” literature concerning failing schools. Turnaround, he states is conceptualized in three overlapping ways: as a condition or situation, as a process, and as a consequence or end state. As a condition or situation, turnaround refers to a very low performing, and there are a number of forces preventing it from succeeding. Turnaround as a process is concerned with “moving from a troubled state to organizational stabilization” (Murphy, 2007, 77). Finally, is a consequence or end state where there is substantial positive change in performance outcomes and “objective indicators of decline [are] arrested” (Murphy, 2007, 77).

There are three essential themes concerning leadership for turnaround schools:

1. Leadership as the critical variable in the turnaround equation;
2. Change of leadership as generally essential element in organizational recovery; and,
3. Type of leadership, but not style, as important in organizational reintegration work (Murphy, 2007, 80).

Leadership is fundamental to the turnaround process. Thus, “it is leadership that provides ‘a sense of direction by setting priorities and short-term goals; establish[es] a sense of urgency; define[s] responsibilities; resolve[s] conflict; convey[s] enthusiasm and
dedication; and give[s] credit where it is due and reward[s] it accordingly” (Murphy, 2007, 81).

Owing to the primacy of leadership in the turnaround process, the first step is to change the leadership. It is recommended that the new leader be an outsider and “unfettered by allegiances to organizational traditions or precedents and untarnished by past disasters” (Murphy, 2007; 82-83). Such replacement signals to the school that business as usual is no longer accepted. In short, it is a break with the old, indicating that change will happen (Murphy, 2007).

The qualities or characteristics that the new leader brings are the third theme. “Three broad frames of action that often define successful turnaround [leaders are they] tend to be transformational leadership… are often marked by an ‘entrepreneurial instinct’… [and] are leaders of change” (Murphy, 2007’ 88). Additionally, these leaders tend to be optimistic, achievement oriented, have high-energy, are tough and competitive, authoritarian, and exhibit honesty and trustworthiness (Murphy, 2007). Turnaround leaders in schools also exhibit a higher order of moral calling, and are sensitive to the challenges of lower-achieving students (Burbach & Butler, 2005).

The turnaround leader then, is expected to come into the school optimistic that the school can become high performing for the sake of the children. Thus, through their autocratic, yet honest and trustworthy leadership, they lead the school organization to substantial and sustainable change. However, if they are successful, they are most likely to be sent to another failing school to turn it around. Consequently, turnaround leaders are similar to Zorro. They sweep in, and energetically fight the foe, leave their mark and go on to repeat the process at another school. Thus, they never stay long enough to see if the changes put in place are both correct and sustainable.

Transformational leaders. Jantzi and Leithwood (1996) stated that “Transformational forms of leadership are well suited [for school restructuring] because of their potential for building high levels of commitment to a complex and uncertain nature of the restructuring agenda and for fostering growth in the capacities that school staffs must develop to respond productively to this agenda” (514). Transformational leadership is “defined on the basis of its effects, as transforming the values and priorities of followers and motivating them to perform beyond their expectations” (Kark, Shamir & Chen, 2003, 247). There are six dimensions of transformational leadership behaviors: identifies and articulates a vision, fosters the acceptance of group goals, conveys high-performance expectations, provides appropriate models, provides intellectual stimulation, provides individualized support (Jantzi & Liethwood, 1996; Leithwood, 1994). These leaders then, offer new possibilities for the school and motivate the followers to embrace this vision for the future. They encourage cooperation among the staff to work towards common goals. They also have expectations for excellence and high performance for themselves and the staff, and model these beliefs. Transformational leaders challenge their subordinates to question the assumptions about their work and reconsider ways it can be done. They do all of this in a way that is sensitive to the needs and personal feelings of the staff (Liethwood, 1994). Transformational leadership “may achieve its effects partly
through the creation of followers’ identification with the leader (personal identification) and with the work group (social identification)” (Kark, Shamir & Chen, 2003, 247).

Empowerment is an important component of transformational leadership. It “includes empowering behaviors such as delegation of responsibility to followers, enhancing followers’ capacity to think on their own an encouraging them to come up with new and creative ideas” as well as to increase their motivation (Kark, Shamir & Chen, 2003, 248). High expectations is a means for the transformational leader to express their belief in the followers’ capabilities and at the same time demonstrating that the mission reflects the values of the followers. In this way, the transformational leader boosts the self-esteem of the followers (Kark, Shamir & Chen, 2003). However, followers may “perceive the leader as extraordinary and exceptional and therefore become dependent on the leader for guidance and inspiration (Kark, Shamir & Chen, 2003, 248).

However, what is not taken into consideration here is that schools are embedded in larger school district organizations, and the principal is accountable to his/her superiors, specifically the superintendent. Thus, one has to question whether it is the principal’s or the superintendent’s vision that is being articulated and fostered. Further, given the increased centrality of policy-making (Ball, 2007, 2012, 2013; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), the source of the vision comes even more in question. Is the vision that of the city, state or federal departments of education, or is it the vision of a supranational organization such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)? Additionally, these leaders must carry out the desired changes without additional resources. Transformational leaders then, are alchemists; they are expected to turn lead (policies) into gold.

*Distributive leaders*. The distributive perspective of leadership “focuses on how leadership practice is distributed among positional and informal leaders as well as their followers…. [It] is constituted in the interaction of multiple leaders (and followers) using particular tools and artifacts around particular leadership tasks” (Spillane, et al., 2004l 16). Interdependencies of leaders followers and situations are an important component of distributive leadership activities (Spillane, et al., 2004). Followers do not merely play a supportive role; rather they are a “composing element of leadership activity” (Spillane, et al., 2004, 19). Distributive leadership then is an interactive web of organizational actors and artifact (Spillane, et al., 2004).

Distributive leadership however, is another leadership model and therefore requires that the “leader” get the “followers” to consent to and undertake the fulfilling of a vision. In taking a leadership role in enacting the vision, “followers” believe that they have a stake and say in the vision. The leader however, through cajoling in one form or another, is actually getting the followers to do his/her bidding. Again, given the increased centralization of policy making in education, the source of the vision is questionable. Consequently, distributive leadership is similar to an illusionist that is they are able to make centralized decision- and policy-making appear to be locally controlled concerns. Distributive leaders then, are similar to the illusionist. They are able to make centralized control to appear as local control and empowerment.
Limits to leadership. These three images of leadership have several common traits. Additionally, they ignore particular limitations to leadership in school organizations. The first and most obvious is that they are concerned with “leaders.” In each image, the leader is the change-agent. Further, as change is needed, logic dictates that there is a crisis in the school organization. The leader then, is akin to a superhero. However, as Bottery (2001) observed, the problem with superheroes is that they tend to get things backwards; after all, they do wear their underpants on the outside of their tights!

Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) argue, “Organizations are embedded in an environment comprised of other organizations. They depend on those other organizations for many resources they themselves require” (2). Schools are embedded in a larger school district organization. They are dependent on that organization for resources, including funds, personnel, curriculum support, etc. Additionally, principals’ authority is determined and restricted by school district policies. State and federal policies, legislations and court decisions further restrict the actions of leaders. School leaders are also dependent on state and federal government for funds, which come with mandates further restricting leader autonomy. Through the certification process, states restrict the role of leaders in schools. Finally, the professional nature and expert knowledge of school leaders has been called into question and diminished through policies enacted by non-educational organization such as the OECD.

Leadership is also limited by the discursive construction of “educational leadership” in preparation programs. External organizations such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teachers (NCATE) and Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium (ISLC), through their standards and certifications, restrict the construct of school leader taught in preparation programs, consequently limiting the identity that aspiring leaders take on. These organizations also impose “rubrics” and “best practices” which limit ways of thinking about problems and foster “plug and play” solutions. Additionally, the need for potential school leaders to pass the School Leader Licensure Assessment (SLLA), further limits legitimate construction of school leader. Finally, “guru” books offer oversimplifications and performativity recommendations that are adopted as “best practice,” fostering groupthink and institutional isomorphism.

Troubling leadership

Leadership is a floating signifier; it means everything and nothing at the same time. “[T]he quest to find leadership that is distributed throughout the organization has only made matters worse. It means nearly anything and everything can be viewed as leadership” (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012, 368-369). Additionally, leadership “is at best a very broad signifier, and when subjected to closer scrutiny, often seems to connote nothing at all that can be empirically delimited” (Martin & Learmonth, 2012, 286). However, “the concept and practice of leadership, and variant forms of direction and control, are so powerfully ingrained into popular thought that the absence of leaderships is often seen as absence of organization” (Smircich & Morgan, 1982, 257). In other
words, without leadership there would be chaos. Leadership then, can be construed as a solution in search of a problem.

While the construct of leadership is, at best problematic, it has nonetheless become the privileged discourse in organizations, including those in the public sector such as schools. Indeed, in these organizations activities, which were once labeled “administration” or “management”, are now “leadership” (Ford, 2010; Gunter & Thomson, 2009; Martin & Learmonth, 2012).

An examination of the critical management studies (CMS) literature however, reveals the insidious nature of leadership. “Leadership is realized in the process whereby one or more individuals succeeds in attempting to frame and define the reality of others” (Smircich & Morgan, 1982, 258). The work of leaders is to control the meaning and definition of a context. “The actions and utterances of leaders frame and shape the context of actin in such a way that members of that context are able to use the meaning thus created as a point of reference for their own action” (Smircich & Morgan, 1982, 261). Successful leaders then, defines the experience of others in order ensure that action is guided by the common good, and subordinates position themselves to accomplish the desired ends (Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Consequently, “leadership” becomes part of the subjectivity of the leader (Ford, 2005, 2010). Additionally, “calling activities ‘leadership’ does more than calling them ‘management’ (and, it goes without saying, more than ‘administration’) in terms of encouraging individuals to identify with policy aims” (Martin & Learmonth, 2012, 286). Thus, delivering policies becomes the raison d’

etat of the leader. Further, by distributing leadership across the organization, “[t]hrough devices such as the call to leadership, then, policy and its implementation are made not just everyone’s responsibility, but also everyone’s common aim – even their sense of self [emphasis original]” (Martin & Learmonth, 2012, 286). Leaders then, not only shape the reality of their followers, they shape the subjectivity of the followers as well, forming a new grid on which both leaders and followers are evaluated (Martin & Learmonth, 2012).

Leadership then, is a “nefarious political project, one concerned with facilitating subtle forms of control: the leader seducing their followers to accepting what may not be in their best interests” (Martin & Learmonth, 2012, 282). Each of the models of leadership discussed here call for leaders to articulate a vision for change (define the “reality” of the school organization) and outline ways to motivate the followers to carry out this vision (make it the common aim of all the followers), even if the vision does not serve their interest. School leaders are able to counter these misgivings (and often do so) by making ethical claims. That is, the need for change is (more so than not) because the school is low performing as measured by high-stakes standardized testing. Thus, they argue that poor academic achievement is harming the students in the present, as well as jeopardizing their (economic) future. This vision then is in the best interest of the children (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2010), even in turbulent times (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). In doing so, school leaders appeal to the professional altruism (Johnson, 1972) of their followers, motivating them to make the vision part of their own subjectivity. Finally, as leaders are also to encourage their followers to engage in cooperative teamwork, any remaining pockets of resistance will be overcome by the tyranny of the team (Sinclair, 1992).
However, as previously discussed, with increased centralization of policy making, school leaders (principals and superintendents) are actually engaged in delivering other governmental, groups and organizations’ policies. While it must be acknowledged that these school leaders do now just accept policies indiscriminately, rather they somewhat alter the policies to fit the local context (Taylor, et al. 1997), through legislations and other legal directives school leaders are required to deliver these policies. Thus, it is important to understand the discourse in the macro policy arena, the characteristics of the policies that emerge from it, as well as the (un)intended consequences these policies have on schools.

*Globalization and Educational Policy*

Policies are not written on a *tabula rasa*, rather they are “mapped onto existing policies, programmes or organisations, and onto the demands made by particular interest groups” (Taylor, et al., 1997, 5). Taylor et al. (1997) further argue that policies are not value free, rather they represent the values and interest of the dominant power group. Flyvbjerg (1998) posits that in the policy arena “[p]ower concerns itself with defining reality rather than with discovering what reality ‘really’ is…. [Further] power defines what counts as rationality and knowledge and thereby what counts as reality…. [Thus] power defines, and creates, concrete physical economic, ecological and social realities [emphasis original]” (227). Thus, policies emerge from a contested political arena, and “policy texts represent the outcome of political struggles over meaning” (Taylor, et al., 1997, 28).

Since the late 1970s, globalization has been the dominant discourse in the macro education policy arena (Ball, 2012, 2013; Burbules & Torres 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Rotberg, 2010; Spring, 2006, 2009; Taylor, et al., 1997; Ward, 2012). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) define “globalization” not only as “shifts in patterns of transnational economic activities, especially with respect to the movement of capital and finance, but also to the ways in which contemporary political and cultural configurations have been reshaped by major advances in information technologies” (22-23). Further, “the idea of globalization represents both an ideological formation and a social imaginary that now shapes the discourses of education policy” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, 23).

Rizvi and Lingard (2010) suggest three ways of understanding globalization. The first is as an empirical fact, which explains the various shifts taking place in the world. Second is “as an ideology that masks various expression of power and a rage of political interests [and third] as a social imaginary that expresses the sense people have of their own identity and how it relates to the rest of the world, and how it implicitly shapes their aspirations and expectations” (24). It is the latter two means of understanding globalization – as an ideology and a social imaginary – that I am concerned with here. That is how globalization, based on neoliberal ideologies of markets, human capital and efficiencies, masks the interests of power and through practices of school leaders, shape the social imaginary of the leaders themselves, teachers, students and communities.

*Global education policy and the construction of the school leader*
Neoliberal ideologies of human capital, efficiencies and (perhaps to a lesser extent) market, are not new constructs in U.S. educational policy or school organizations. Rather, they have been integral part of the discourse of education and school organizational arrangements since the turn of the 20th Century (Callahan, 1962; Spring, 1972). Here, I will explore how this neoliberal discourse has been shaping the work of schools, as well as the role of the school leader, and that globalization is both an extension and deeper obfuscation power.

**Human capital.** With the rise of the “new” industrial economy in the early part of the 20th Century, policy makers looked to schools to produce a workforce with the skills to meet the needs of this new economy (Spring, 1972). A new type of worker was necessary because “inherent in the factory was a problem of social organization, [thus what was need were] industrial education programs and social activities which were designed to fit the worker into the modern industrial organization” (Spring 1972, 22). Consequently, there was a demand on the public schools to inculcate correct social attitudes and teach skills in order to transform children into workers (Spring 1972). Spring (1972) notes that

> The more general concern of industrialists was that schools produce an individual who was cooperative, knew how to work well with others, and was physically and mentally equipped to do his [sic] job efficiently. A cooperative and unselfish individual not only worked well with his [sic] fellows in the corporate organization but was also more easily managed. (43)

School organizational arrangements, including curriculum, activities, discipline, and management, were focused on producing human capital. These organizational arrangements taught children “freedom was working to accomplish group and industrial goals. Any concerns about personal desires were a reflection of “selfish” individualism” (Spring, 1972, 163). Thus, acquiring an “education” was not for greedy desire such as edification or self-improvement, rather to obtain the skills and social attitudes to make one a useful to the industrial complex. School organizations then, were charged to shape the social imaginary of children in which they viewed their interests in alignment with the interests of their industrial bosses.

This construct of schooling for human capital took an interesting turn at the start of the Cold War. With the launch of Sputnik in 1957 by the Russians, public schools were again charged to produce the human capital necessary to “win” the war, as a matter of national security. Particularly, school organizations were to increase the number of students prepared to do university degrees in science, math and engineering. To assist in this endeavor, the U.S. Congress passed the National Education Defense Act (NEDA) in 1958, to ensure not only enough graduates to fill the positions available in public and private science and engineering organizations, but also enough science and math teachers to train future workers in these fields (Johanningmeier, 2009; Spring, 2004).
In 1983 The National Commission on the Excellence in Education submitted its report *A Nation At Risk*, decrying the state of U.S. public education. Arguing that public schools were no longer producing suitable workers, it blamed school organizations for the economic downturn and questioned the ability of the U.S. to maintain its position as a global economic force. The state of public education was so dire the report claimed, “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might have well viewed it as an act of war” (*A Nation At Risk*). Worse, this harm was self-inflicted and the U.S. was engaged in “unilateral educational disarmament.” The report raised the clarion call for comprehensive education reform to produce the workers who will restore the economic supremacy of the U.S. *A Nation At Risk* then, conflated economics and national security, and the production of human capital by public schools was vital in winning the economic war.

The discourse of globalization continues this construct of economic warfare. Here schools are “the front line in America’s battle to remain competitive on the increasingly competitive economic stage” (Achieve Inc. & National Governors Association, quoted in Spring, 2009, 3). However, in addition to skills training and inculcating appropriate social attitudes, schools now need to produce human capital that engage in lifelong learning for improving or learning new skills need for economic growth (Spring, 2009). Further, this human capital is responsible for its own ability to acquire new skill sets as well as maintain health in order to be a productive participant in the economy (Ball, 2013). Individuals then, are to view their worth in terms of ability to become and remain economically productive and therefore competitive in the global labor market. Further, school organizations need to be able to determine what unique skill sets students will need to be successful in the global labor market when they graduate from high school in 13 years or university in 20 years.

**Efficiency.** In the global neoliberal discourse, efficiency “has become a kind of metavalue within the framework of which other more ethical and cultural purposes of education are now interpreted” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, 116). Further, the discourse of efficiency is concomitant with the discourse of effectiveness. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) argue that has resulted in increased accountability measures of performance. The established standards and benchmarks are a means of measuring efficiency of the educational process. Further, with the decentralization of control of funding – site-based management – school leaders have taken on managerial roles complete with performance targets and fiscal responsibilities. Consequently the “focus is placed on greater school-based management and autonomy, while also emphasizing increased standards of accountability…” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, 121). In other words, under site-based management, principals only have the autonomy to budget the school’s funds to efficiently and effectively carry out policy goals. Therefore, as a “manager” principals need to ensure performance standards (set elsewhere) are met at the lowest possible cost.

However, like the human capital discourse in schools, the efficiency and effectiveness discourse are not new. Callahan (1962) offers a history of what he calls “the cult of efficiency” in schools. He argues that in the early part of the 20th Century, schools were
to become “factories in which raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life” (97), that is to become the human capital needed for the industrialized economy. To accomplish this task both efficiently and effectively, school administrators had to become more like business managers. Further, the introduction of scientific management in schools “was to create standards so that the efficiency of the work of the schools could be determined, demonstrated, and communicated to the public…” (Callahan, 1962, 97). Consequently, university based training programs for administrators emphasized the business and managerial aspects of running schools, neglecting the instructional task of schools. Thus, administrators measure their efficiency and effectiveness by the number of students who go from elementary school to high school graduation without failing (Callahan, 1962). This legacy of efficiency, he argues, still leaves school administrators vulnerable to pressure from the public, as well as the “perennial problem [of] how to get enough money to operate schools from a nation that is reluctant to spend money in public sectors of the economy” (255). I argue that this legacy has continued with the globalization discourse. Further, it is the combination of accountability measures for both efficient site-based budgeting and meeting externally set academic performance standards that have shifted the construct of principal from administrator/manager to leader.

Globalization and the school leader. Earlier in this paper, I discussed Flyvbjerg’s (1998) assertion that in policy-making processes, power defines both reality and rationality, and in doing so both obscures and reinforces itself. In the globalization educational policy discourse, power has defined a reality where children in the U.S. are in fierce competition with children in China, India, Finland, and a host of other countries for jobs. Further, the competitive global labor market demands ever-increasing levels of education, especially in the knowledge economy (Spring, 2009), as well as a commitment to lifelong learning in order for individuals to maintain a competitive edge (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Spring, 2009). To demonstrate capability to compete in the global labor market, students need to perform to educational standards set by both the state and federal governments, as well as supranational organizations such as the OECD, as measured by standardized test scores. “Such education quality measures have become surrogates for the strength of the national economy” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, 123).

Through the discourse of the new public management (NPM) and what Rizvi and Lingard (2010) argue is the shift from government to governance; principals internalize these prescribed educational performance goals as their own. Here, performativity “is a ‘new’ moral system that subverts and re-orientes us to its truths and ends” (Ball, 2013, 138). It makes us responsible for our performance and for the performance of others. In short, ensuring that the organizational arrangements of their schools fosters the attainment of these goals becomes their raison d’ etat, and in doing so, principals make the shift from administrator/manager to leader.

As leaders then, principals are able to shape the realities of their followers (Smircich & Morgan), and part of this reality is that the neoliberal ideologies of human capital, efficiencies and markets are axiomatic. Further, “[t]he move from government to governance is also accompanied by a move from hierarchy to network, from classical
hierarchical vertical bureaucratic relationships to more horizontal networked relationships” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, 126). Distributive leadership is just such a horizontal network. It ensures that many people in the school organization internalize the goals of globalized education policies and view them as their own goals – making it their sense of self (Martin & Learmonth, 2012) – thus allowing the neoliberal ideologies to spread further and root deeper in the school organization. In this way then, the construct of leadership plays an important role in making neoliberal ideologies part of the social imaginary of the school organization as well as the community it serves. This is also justified ethically as “acting in the best interest of children” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011), because they are ensuring the children’s economic future. However, in doing so, leadership also allows for the obfuscation of power and the perpetuation of inequality.

**Leadership as Anti-Resource Discourse**

The recent economic downturn with the financial collapse of the housing market in 2008 has lead to continual hardships in the public sector, particularly education. As a result, states have radically cut their education budgets. Thus, school leaders need to find ways to do more with less, while still maintaining or increasing school performance on standardized tests. They “take responsibility for working harder, faster and better as pour of [their] sense of personal worth and …estimation of the worth of others” (Ball, 2013, 139). Through distributive leadership and the tyranny of the team (Sinclair, 1992) school leaders are able to make increased performance with decreased resources the common aim and sense of self for the entire staff (Martin & Learmonth, 2012). Thus, performance under very reduced circumstances becomes a new “grid” (Foucault) for perceptions of school organizations and evaluation of the staff.

Responsibility for “effective” curriculum and pedagogy then falls on the “leaders” of the school – including under distributive leadership principal, assistant principal, and teachers. Additionally, state and federal governments continue to hold school leaders accountable for the academic performance in their schools, because education is vital to U.S. competitiveness in the global economy. “Good leaders” are able to meet goals even in the absence of adequate resources to do so. Through this “double-speak” policy-makers and legislators at the state and federal levels are able to deflect their lack of responsibility onto school leaders. Thus they excuse themselves from finding ways to adequately fund schools. Leadership then, is an anti-resource discourse.

Budget cuts and austerity measures have a greater impact on poorer urban and rural school districts. While there are funding cuts in wealthier school districts, parents are able to supplement the budget through their personal resources and connections. The neoliberal market ideology tells parents in poorer districts that if their neighborhood school is failing, they should use the school choice option to find a better school – even if there isn’t one or if those options are closed to them, or if they have neither the economic nor social capital (Bourdieu) to draw from to engage the in school choice process. Thus, parent (leaders) in poor schools have to find a way to help the schools do more with less. It is their responsibility to ensure that their children receive an adequate education. If unsuccessful, the victim is blamed. Additionally, in the political rhetoric, poor parents
have to prove that money does matter in education, while wealthy parents are not asked to prove that it doesn’t matter. Thus, the systemic violence (Epp & Watkinson, 1996) of inequity is reproduced in school and society.

“Good leaders” ironically act against the best interest of themselves, the staff, the children and the entire community. By facilitating the inculcation of the neoliberal ideologies of human capital, efficiencies and markets into the social imaginary of their followers (teachers, staff, students and community), school leaders unwittingly play a role in the obfuscation of power.

One of the main critiques of the global economy discourse is that there are not enough jobs in the world for all of the human capital that schools produce. Further, there is a desire on the part of multinational corporations for an overproduction of human capital – including in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields – so that there will be a depression of salaries for these workers (Spring, 2009). Additionally, under global capitalism, multinational corporations, facilitated by various trade agreements, are able to their work to the cheapest labor market, as well as to counties with lax or no environmental or work safety regulations. Thus, by capitulating to the desires of these corporations, particularly in the education sector, countries around the world have engaged their citizens in a race to the bottom in the name of global competition.

If our sense of self includes being an ethical agent, then as professors of (educational) leadership, along with school practitioners (teachers and administrators) we need to question the assumptions of our reason and actions. “One task of the intellectual, but not theirs exclusively, is to make people aware of how intolerable taken-for-granted exercises of power actually are and show them that things could be different” (Ball, 2013, 145). In other words, perhaps it is time that we took the lead in an education reform that does not train human resources rather it educates resourceful humans.

References


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