

Educating School Leaders for Democracy

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The purpose of education and thus of school leadership

In order to be able to discuss, in meaningful ways, how school leaders should be educated we need to sketch the context in which they are going to lead, that is the visions and purpose of education and the schooling, which is dominant in society. In most societies we see clashes of many discourses and cultural/political fights. In order to simplify the discussion a bit, one may describe two very important discourses of contemporary school visions, an outcomes-orientated and a process-orientated discourse:

The outcomes-orientation is an outline of a neo-liberal, New Public Management (NPM) version of social justice through education that focuses on outcomes of education. The process-orientation is a professional conception of how schools should work for social justice through inclusion. The versions are not empirically descriptions of existing educational systems, but abstractions of which we often find mixtures in real life. They are constructed for the sake of argument because they can help us reflecting on the functions and roles of schools and school leadership. Not ignoring the NPM orientation I shall nevertheless concentrate on concepts of inclusive education, as this is where we find better arguments for democratic education (Moos, 2008).

Inclusive, deliberative education

There are many arguments for establishing education and schools, one of which is a cultural explanation: Many societies and educational systems used to build

on the understanding, that schools were the major cultural institution that societies established and maintained because they wanted to make sure that the next generation of citizens were brought up and educated to take over, maintain, and develop the society. Thus educational purposes were often described in broader terms: Schools should educate students to become enlightened, participating, deliberating, active, and collaborating citizens. ‘Democratic Bildung’ therefore aims at maturity, reflexivity, social judgment, aesthetic and political consciousness, and competence of action. Schools were therefore also about social justice, equity, empowerment, and community. These notions still live in schools in most places, but are not always furthered from the level of politicians and administrators.

In line with this understanding we find that Beane and Apple (1999), Furman and Starra (2002), and Woods (2005) describe the central concerns of democratic schools as:

- the open flow of ideas, regardless of their popularity, that enables people to be as fully informed as possible, in line with Dewey’s idea of a ‘full and free interplay of ideas’;
- the use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, and policies;

<i>Outcomes-orientation</i>	<i>Process-orientation</i>
<i>Purpose of schooling</i>	
Back to basics: Effective schools	Democratic ‘Bildung’: The comprehensive and socially just education of students’ subject matter competencies, personal competencies and social competencies
<i>Governance</i>	
No trust, control between levels of governance	Trust between levels of governance
Detailed standards, measurable outcomes	Room for interpretations and negotiations
<i>Accountability</i>	
National testing system	Formative evaluation and self-evaluation
Documentation to educational system	Dialogue between stakeholders
<i>Education/instruction</i>	
Focus on texts and writing	Focus on dialogue
Individual learning	Learning in communities
<i>School Leadership</i>	
Strong, top-down, strategic leader	Distributing, negotiating leader

- the welfare of others and the ‘common good’; and
- the concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities.

It is useful to position the view of democracy that is used by Dewey (1937), Beane and Apple, and also by this author: the concept of deliberative democracy, which is the most appropriate and useful concept in regard to schools and education. This ideal refers to communicative relations among participants that—to the extent possible—seek mutual understanding and aim at minimising the exercise of dominance within institutional relations that must necessarily be asymmetric and embedded within particular organisational structures.

This concept seems to contradict the concepts of leadership. If we, however, understand leadership as communication, we can accept that leading equals influencing: Leading is influence. Thus, leadership is constructed in processes with several phases, beginning with the emergence or *construction of the premises* on which decisions are made, moving on to *decision making*, and ending with the *connection*, that is, how the communication is perceived, understood, interpreted, acted upon, or connected to by the follower (Moos, 2009a). When looking at leadership through communications lenses we can see that the absolutely greatest part of school leadership practice is constructing premises for decisions and hence it is communication.

Deliberative leadership functions and competencies

Research on school leadership points to four leadership functions that are taken care of by most successful school leaders: Negotiating the direction of school development (including managing the teaching and learning programme), understanding and developing people, redesigning the organization, and communicating with local communities (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Moos & Johansson, 2009).

Point one: Negotiating the direction of school development is the essence of leadership; understand external expectations and transform them into direction for the school in negotiating with staff. This means that school leaders must be competent in understanding and prioritizing political, educational, and administrative demands and in motivating staff to make sense of the direction and find ways of changing practices.

The second point: Understanding and developing people is pivotal because the most important actors in schools, when it comes to furthering students’ learning, are teachers. Thus they must be given optimal conditions for performing in classrooms and in teams. School leaders therefore must be competent in understanding professionals and in giving them systemic support and personal, professional development. Pivotal competencies are empathy, sense making, and team-building competencies. And it also includes competencies to monitor, support, and evaluate teachers’ work and instruction for the benefit of student learning. This encompasses competencies in understanding evaluation and

assessments and guiding teachers in making use of the results of those in order to adjust teaching.

The third point: Redesigning the organization, means that school leaders must be competent in organizational development, like collaboration in teams, which provide optimal working conditions for teachers and students. The organization also must be open to parents and local communities.

From deliberations towards leadership practices

In order to lead teachers and schools in a deliberative, democratic direction, school leaders can choose from several forms of influences/leadership:

- a. *Direct leadership*: the belief that leaders do the leading by prescribing or persuading followers to do, what they would else have not done;
- b. *Strategic leadership*: the belief that organizations should make short- and long-term strategic plans or strategies (pointing to goals or visions and to the means to reach them);
- c. *Reciprocal leadership*: the belief that leadership is enacted in relations, interactions, and communications between the actors—leaders and followers—at many levels. Concepts used in this understanding are setting the scene, setting the agenda, sense-making, negotiating (Weick, 2001; Moos, 2009b).

School leaders will from time to time make use of all three forms of influence. They therefore must be competent in all kinds of influencing individuals and groups/teams, both in direct communication and in formal prescriptions or inspiration papers. Leadership in schools is for the most part done indirectly: School leaders are not present when teachers make their decisions in classroom leadership and teaching or when teachers in teams discuss and negotiate their practices.

Thus school leaders must find ways of influences that can work at a distance and also ways of establishing relations that can further productive and trustful relations and deliberation.

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