Leadership Preparation and Development – A Perspective from the United Kingdom

By Jacky Lumby

Development for what?

In the United Kingdom, a hegemonic view of the purpose of educational leadership is summarised by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) as "transform[ing] the quality of learning for all pupils" (Southworth, 2004, p. 340). School leaders are assumed to be committed to this aim, leading to a view of schools, embedded in preparation programmes, as benign places, focused on equity in learning, and working for the good of all. Yet evidence on the differentiated and inequitable pathways of learners, and the continuing exclusion of those deemed 'other' from leadership roles suggest a different interpretation of the purpose and enactment of leadership (Bush et al. 2005; Blackmore, 1999; Coleman, 2002; Gorard et al, 2003; Lumby, 2006; Reay, 2001). As Quantz and Rogers (1991, pp. 3-4) point out, there is overwhelming research evidence that "schools work for the very special interests of the status quo" and that "active denial" is needed to remain ignorant of the exclusion of groups of learners and potential leaders indicated by research.

The causes of inequity are highly complex, contested, and contingent (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Lumby et al , 2005). However, in this paper for the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, I want to suggest that among many causes, both the theory of leadership and, relatedly, leadership preparation and development are profoundly implicated in the continuation of inequity.

Theorising leadership

Although a number of concepts of leadership are used in leader preparation and development in the UK, two models currently dominate the field, transformational and distributed (Bolam, 2004; Southworth, 2004). Transformational leadership, in Kotter's (1999, p. 77) succinct definition, "establishing direction, aligning, motivating, and inspiring people," appears to offer the hope of democratic, values-based, and inclusive leadership. Transformational leadership theory is pervasive in leader development programmes (Lumby with Coleman, forthcoming;

Bolam, 2004). It promotes a widespread assumption that a common vision and set of values among faculty can and must be achieved as a prerequisite for leadership effectiveness, and that such agreement is benign if reached by, for example, consultative processes (Begley, 1994). By its easy assumption of alignment, sameness, and agreement, by its deletion of conflict and inequitable power, the theory suggests homogenisation of the faculty and leadership. Those perceived as 'other', those who have less power to influence values and direction, those who are disadvantaged by the choices made, disappear. Reynolds and Trehan (2003, p. 164) deplore "a subtle manifestation of consensus masquerading as 'common interests'." The effect is rather like an optical illusion. One glance and what appears is the commonly accepted ideal of a values and vision driven leadership. Shift the angle slightly, and the picture becomes much more disquieting; schools where deletion of 'other' is disguised as values-based inclusion and democracy. Fraser suggests, "The role of critical theory should be to *render visible* the ways in which societal inequality infects formally inclusive existing public spheres, and taints discursive interaction within them" (Fraser, 1994, p. 83, original authors' emphasis). Transformational leadership theory renders inequity of power *invisible* through the lauding of sameness.

Distributed leadership theory is explicitly embraced by NCSL (Bush, 2004). Spillane et al (2001, 23) define it as "practice, *stretched over* the school's social and situational contexts" (original authors' emphasis). Although there are occasional references to the issue of unequal power among those enacting distributed leadership (Harris, 2004), explicit note of how gender, race, disability sexual orientation and other characteristics influence the emergence and leadership of individuals and groups is not visible. Distribution is much more likely to be interpreted as pertaining to different hierarchical levels or to particular roles. For example, NCSL has a suite of preparation programmes for new and experienced principals, for middle leaders, subject coordinators, and so forth.

Preparing leaders

Why the two theories are hegemonic is complex. Sociobiological perspectives suggest a similarity attraction mechanism, which would render transformational leadership, with its emphasis on achieving commonality, psychologically satisfying (Gudykunst, 1995; Simons and Pelled, 1999). Also, a range of evidence suggests

that homogeneity, at least in the short term, may lead to higher levels of performance than a more diverse faculty (Maznevski, 1994; Milliken & Martins, 1996). Transformational leadership is therefore both enjoyable and effective. Distributed theory also purports to offer greater control and power in schools to a larger number of people, while simultaneously ignoring the parallel mechanisms, which include or exclude current and potential leaders from the process of distribution. Transformational and distributed theories therefore fit psychological preferences to delete 'other' (Milliken & Martins, 1996). They also offer an apparent commitment to greater equity, effectively camouflaging the active denial of issues of exclusion. Alternative theories, such as authentic leadership, which is "a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration," (Begley, 2004, 4-5) assume a personal struggle to find ethical positions in the context of value conflict and power conflict, rather than mutual values. The starting point is not to achieve *consensus* but to improve self-knowledge and to understand the position of others so that practices can be not 'aligned' but mutually influential. Transformational and distributed concepts both offer an agenda for preparation and development programmes, and an end point – the achievement of aligned values (even if illusory) or a configuration of leadership roles. Alternative theories, which assume ongoing difference and struggle (Begley, 2004; Boscardin & Jacobson, 1996), do not offer any easy agenda nor an assessable achievement point in time, as the struggle to navigate conflict and power inequities is without end. Embedding such personal engagement with difficult choices is therefore both more problematic in curricular terms and, in being more psychologically challenging, less likely to be popular with participants (Lopez, 2003).

Rather than, as assumed, contributing to metamorphosing the quality of learning and of leadership, the transformational and distributed theories of leadership, which underpin programmes in the UK, contribute to the continuing homogenisation of leadership in subtle ways (Lumby with Coleman forthcoming). One area the journal may hopefully address in the future is not so much how leadership programme content can be changed to be more mindful of diversity and inclusion issues, but more fundamentally, how the underpinning theories of leadership themselves can be transformed in order to support a more inclusive leadership in our schools.

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