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What Happened to 'Educational' in Educational Management and Leadership? The Rise of Managerialism

Abstract

This paper argues that school leaders and managers are being forced to abandon their educational purpose and that leadership and management activities of school leaders are now purposed towards satisfying the needs of a managerialist elite. As a result, the best interests of learners/ students are placed secondary to the interests of the bureaucrats. The paper conceptualises educational leadership and educational management and the relationship between these two actions is explained. Thereafter, managerialism is defined and its expansion to an ideology is explained. Examples are provided of how managerialism manifests itself in education systems.

Keywords: educational leadership, educational management, managerialism, best interest of learners/students

Introduction

This paper interrogates the tension between education leadership and managerialism, which Shepherd (2018, p. 1668) describes as an "increasingly modern-day phenomenon" and is framed against the concepts of educational leadership and educational management which are regarded as "foundational concepts in the origination of educational institutions" (Connoly, James & Fertig, 2019, p. 504). However, these two concepts are often used interchangeably by both theorists and practitioners which du Plessis and Heystek (2020, p. 846) describe as conceptual (con)fusion. Thus, confusion or fusion of educational leadership and educational management has been enhanced by the increased dominance of managerialism. Hence, the question whether we have lost the educational focus of our management and leadership activities. I first explore the notions of educational leadership and educational management after which I pay attention to managerialism and the implications it has on educational leadership in particular and education in general.

What is educational leadership?

It is generally accepted that the quality of leadership in educational institutions has a significant positive influence on student/learner outcomes (Bush, 2007, p. 391). Leadership implies a movement in a chosen direction; simply put, change. Therefore, the fundamental question in any leadership discussion is: Leadership towards what? Or, leadership for what? The concept of educational leadership (some call it pedagogical leadership) provides the answer. It is leadership activities that are aimed at ensuring

that "[t]he best interests of the student [learner] is at the heart of the ethic of the educational profession" (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007, p. 212). The real focus of education should therefore be student learning. This also implies a moral obligation which brings with it a responsibility (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007, p. 218). In for example the South African context, this moral responsibility is entrenched in section 28 (2) of the Constitution of 1996:

> *A child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child.*

Section 28 (2) of the Constitution is reinforced by Section 9 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005:

> *In all matters concerning the care, protection and well-being of a child the standard that the child's best interests are of paramount importance, must be applied.*

The leadership component of 'educational leadership' firstly requires "influence, not authority" (Bush, 2008, p. 276). Bush (2008, p. 277) explains that although both 'influence' and 'authority' are dimensions of power, 'authority' is linked to formal positions, while 'influence' can be exerted by anyone in an educational institution. In educational leadership the influencing process must be intentional. In other words, to achieve a certain purpose that should be in the best interest of the student (learner). The influencing can also be done by individuals or groups (Connoly, James & Fertig, 2019, p. 510).

Secondly, leadership actions should be grounded in personal and professional values which form the foundation for moral leadership (Bush, 2008, p. 277). Educational leadership therefore has a strong normative element. Thirdly, excellent educational leaders have a vision for their institutions (Bush, 2008, p. 278) and are able to clearly articulate this vision and motivate followers to strive toward this vision. This denotes the direction towards which is being led. Fourthly, excellent educational leaders are contextually intelligent because context influences teaching practice and student learning (Marishane, 2016, p. 165).

Educational leadership is focused on people and excellent educational leaders inspire trust. An educational leader originates, is innovative and challenges the status quo by continuously asking 'what' and 'why' questions. They are often frustrated by the restrictions placed on them by bureaucratic hierarchies which characterise modern education systems.

What is educational management?

The notion of 'management' is generally associated with an organisational hierarchy in which individuals who occupy higher positions exercise authority (not necessarily power) over those lower down in the hierarchy. It is often associated with dominance by those in senior positions and by status and privilege (Connoly, James & Fertig, 2019, p. 506).

Management is characterised by bureaucratic and rational approaches and education systems are seen to be divided into "management units", for example schools, and sub-units, for example subject departments (Bush, 2008, pp. 273-274). Bush (2008, p. 274) lists several criticisms of this model. Firstly, it prescribes a unitary set of objectives to all the stakeholders of schools. Secondly, it assumes that the allocation of resources is unproblematic. Thirdly, it assumes that the assessment of educational outcomes is unproblematic. And fourthly, it assumes a single process of

accountability where in practice educational managers (and leaders) have multiple, and in many cases, conflicting accountabilities.

In an educational context, management is the action of carrying out the responsibility for the functioning of an educational institution (Connoly, James & Fertig, 2019, p. 507). At a school it would entail the establishment of structures and processes and procedures that are followed by the school. Among many possible examples, it would include the work allocation of the teaching staff, planning and implementing the school's timetable, the procedures to follow when drafting and moderating tests and examinations, the budgeting process, procedures for photocopying, etc.

At their core, managers focus on systems and structure and rely on control to maintain it by insisting that things must be done 'by the book'. They are inclined to rely on generic solutions to problems and are averse to innovative solutions. Generally, they accept the status quo and struggle to see the 'big picture'. The notion of management is therefore often being regarded as rigid and inflexible and "having no place in the complex and dynamic world of an educational institution" (Connoly, James & Fertig, 2019, p. 508).

However, excellent 'educational managers' understand that their management actions are not the end goal per se, but rather that their management actions should be aimed at ensuring the smooth running of the school so that the core purpose of the institution, can be realised, namely effective teaching and learning. From this perspective, good educational management creates the foundation on which educational leadership is built.

The interaction of educational leadership and educational management

As explained in the preceding sections, educational leadership and educational management require distinctly different actions. Ideally, those in formal management positions at all levels of an education system would be highly competent educational managers and educational leaders so that the best interests of students/learners are placed first in all management and leadership activities. Therefore, both management and leadership activities must be underpinned by the educational element and there must be acknowledgment that education is a multi-faceted phenomenon. This means that leadership actions must be tolerated by managers and management actions be tolerated by leaders.

In addition, allowance must be made for the contextual uniqueness of educational institutions. For example, there are differences in which one would lead and manage primary and secondary schools or schools that are in privileged or deprived contexts. The implication is that principals must play a leading role in their schools' pedagogical practices. This means that they should not merely be implementers of regulations and policies, but be developers of teachers and students/learners. In this regard, it is important to understand that development processes need to be led. It is for this reason that educational leaders are key to a recovering education system (Alava, 2018).

What is managerialism?

Managerialism is according to Klikauer (2015, p. 1103) "not simply a 'modern management method' and it is not an 'institutional model'". It is an ideology generated at universities that house management schools "that generate thousands of MBAs and

other management graduates" (Klikauer, 2015, p. 1106). In simple terms managerialism can be described as:

> *a belief that organisations have more similarities than differences and thus the performance of all organisations can be optimised by the application of generic management skills and theory* (Klikauer, 2015, p. 1104).

Klickauer (2015, p. 1104) explains that "[t]o managerialist practitioners, there is little difference in the skills required to run an advertising agency, an oil rig or an [educational institution like a school or a university]" and that "[e]xperience and skills pertinent to an organisation's core business are considered secondary". The implication is that a managerialist would not deem it necessary to have any training to manage an educational institution as it could managed by applying generic management principles. Furthermore, managerialism pretends that there is an equalisation between non-profit organisations (public schools) and for-profit organisations (corporations listed on a stock exchange) (Klikauer, 2019, p. 427). Klikauer (2015, p. 1104) also argues that managerialists "pretend to have advanced knowledge and know-how deemed necessary to the efficient running of organisations" and that "managerialism has extended itself from the limits of business organisations deep into public institutions [for example schools] and society".

Managerialism as an ideology

Management has elevated itself into an ideology – managerialism – by adding the 'ism'. Hence Klikauer's (2015, p. 1105) more comprehensive definition of managerialism:

> *Managerialism combines management's generic tools and knowledge with ideology to establish itself systematically in organisations, public institutions, and society while depriving business owners (property), workers (organisational-economic) and civil society (social-political) of all decision-making powers. Managerialism justifies the application of its one-dimensional managerial techniques to all areas of work, society, and capitalism on the grounds of superior ideology, expert training, and the inclusiveness of managerial knowledge necessary to run public institutions and society as corporations.*

Klikauer (2015, p. 1105) therefore contends that management "expanded to become something that transcended management" which he describes as "something rather simplistic, trivial, mundane, and, to be honest, rather dull", and that management has "mutated [expanded] into a full-fledged ideology". This is illustrated by Klikauer (2015, p. 1105) in the following formula: Management + Ideology + Expansion = Managerialism.

Through this expansion, managerialism has not only universalised its generic managerial techniques and solutions, but also has indoctrinated those who are not managers, to think like managers (Klikauer, 2015, p. 1104). Managerialism is thus oppressive in nature as it is primarily concerned with the advancement of the managerial class. In societal spheres where managerialism has become dominant, its ideology is portrayed as common sense. It therefore does not require further explanation and should therefore not be questioned (Klikauer, 2015, p. 1104).

Manifestations of managerialism in education

Managerialism has penetrated education systems of the world and manifests itself in a variety of ways, resulting in a managerialist society. Du Plessis and Heystek (2020,

p. 847) argue that the paradox created by managerialism is that policies aimed at deregulation and greater autonomy of schools is associated by many with a process of re-regulation and re-centralisation. This has resulted in educational strategies that focus on the monitoring of learner and school achievement (Strandler, 2015, p. 890). Glatter (2012, p. 562) argues that this has led to the emergence of a "compliance society" controlled by a "remotely accountable and technocratic centre" – the managerialists - who takes the initiative. In this compliant society relationships between learners/students and teachers are de-socialised and relationships of dependency and compliance have developed rather than relationships of interaction, negotiation and mutual respect. Wilkens (2011, p. 391) describes it as a "deliberate antagonistic assault on the notion of the autonomous profession" and an undermining of the essence of classical professionalism. In this compliance society, teacher professional development (TPD) "has become a 'top down' imposition rather than a genuine personal and collegial enterprise, and is likely to be viewed more as a disciplinary device than an empowering one" (Wilkens, 2011, p. 391).

Therefore, support provided to teachers is underpinned by a philosophy of ensuring compliance rather than a philosophy of capacity-building and improvement (De Grauwe, 2004, p. 9). In this regard Hargreaves (2000, p. 169) reason that "performance management through targets, standards, and paper trails of monitoring and accountability … may have comforted governments with 'procedural illusions of effectiveness', but they have also subjected teachers to the micro-management of ever-tightening regulations and controls that are the very antithesis of any kind of professionalism". This has resulted in an ultimately damaging risk-averse, target chasing ethos "where traditional notions of context-specific practice emerging through professional dialogue are suppressed" (Wilkens, 2011, p. 391).

It is argued by Kimber and Ehrich (2011, p. 181) that the managerialist restructuring of education systems has created what they call a "democratic deficit", meaning that instead of strengthening accountability, managerial practices have undermined it. Secondly, the over-reliance on, and inappropriate use of performance practices derived from the private sector have led to traditional roles and values associated with the public sector, being ignored. Thirdly, they argue that a "hollow state" has emerged "where public goods and services have been removed from the public sector" resulting in citizens being subordinate to the 'ruling' managerialist class. In a school situation this results in what du Plessis and Heystek (2020, p. 851) describe as "top-down and bottom-up dissonance". They (du Plessis & Heystek, 2020, p. 851) argue that "the top-down managerial voice of the education authorities" creates discord with the "bottom-up teachers' voices" and that this discord generally plays itself out in the offices of school principals. Due to the authoritarian nature of managerialism, principals would be more inclined to listen to the voice which speaks the loudest, the bureaucrats who have subscribed to the managerialist ideology.

Conclusion

This paper argued that the educational element of school leadership and management has been devalued and is being placed secondary to the principles of subscribed by managerialism. The generic application of managerialist principles has resulted in the leadership actions of educational leaders and managers (school principals, etc) being restricted because it is contrary to the managerialist belief that there are universal solutions to problems. As a result, education systems are

increasingly favouring the best interests of the managerialists – bureaucrats – rather than the best interests of the learners/students. Learners/students are being depicted in terms of outputs and targets and the contextual nuances that are relevant to individual schools, individual learners/students and teachers, are being ignored. This ignorance undermines the education profession. In addition, the managerialist desire to create a compliant society and the suppression of democratic principles makes the education profession an unattractive career option.

Therefore, education systems need to question whether they are indeed 'educational' and are focused on the best interest of their learners/students. If they answer yes, an education system will have hope to recover. If the answer is no, …

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