The role of self-reflection in education leadership to help with the shortage of ...

Education

The current situation of staff shortages in educational institutions has brought about concern over leadership roles. Such shortages have placed a new emphasis upon the current role of leadership that has extended to re-evaluations of the paradigm of education. As current structures pertaining to older models of leadership begin to fail in light of this change, a call for new ways of addressing leaderships roles has emerged through a body of theory and research. One such way of addressing the current shortage is through incorporating self reflective models of leadership.

Whereas in science the over-riding philosophical pursuit is for the ongoing establishment of better knowledge related to the natural environment, so education is concerned with the best possible delivery of knowledge to the service user; in this case the student or pupil. Other organisations such as policy making, law and religion also recognise such ideals and over-riding values that act as the foundations of the institution' s hieratic structure. For example, in politics the ideals of justice are contrasted and evaluated by administrative leaders against the reality of power and corruption in an attempt to maintain parity and direction.

Similarly, religious leaders must contrast fundamental moral and spiritual guidance against the trends and developments in contemporary society. Across all of these paradigms there is both a profession and ethical principle that accords to the ideals and values pertaining to the institution. The core ideological principles of truth, justice and spiritual awakening form the basis of the values in which the leader's commitment to the pursuit of the institution serves. These values act in elevating the activities and roles of the

institutional leaders from becoming involved in battles for power and authority.

Essentially, such leadership roles are not simply focused upon pursuing the ends to which any available means are acceptable. Rather, they are set up to engage in a struggle to create and maintain the principled values of justice, truth and spiritual awareness based upon the experiences within the frame of their institution. Through self realised notions of commitment, personal belief, conscience, creativity and judgment, the role of their professional being is given over to an ideological framework based upon the production and facilitation of better progress.

This is the same process in which the education leader finds his/her role under scrutiny in relation to the learning procedures that they oversee. However, the educational leader differs in that they he/she is committed to a cause that does not suffer the easily identified ideological threats of the other professions we have mentioned. This is because justice is enshrined in law; truth is enshrined in political ideology; spiritual awakening is enshrined in religious doctrine, whilst learning is found within the learning process itself. Therefore, the success of schools cannot be easily measured, unlike the other institutions.

In this distinct difference we may observe that the values within the pursuit of better learning are not ideologically enshrined. Rather, they are understood and become apparent when evaluating the ongoing process. However, it is nevertheless clear that the professional ethics of the leader must not veer from a commitment to the learning process. In light of the

shortage in educational leaders this seems a highly problematic reality. Through such shortages there have been extra pressures put upon leadership roles. This problem of leadership roles will form the basis of our analysis of the literarture concerned with the structure of education.

Leadership Roles within the Structural Context The role of education leadership has in many ways become part of a singular process in the education environment, which Bernthal and Wellins (2006) imply is accentuated by the apparent lack of educational leaders. This is prevalent in the notion of the school and the process of evaluation that is crucial to negotiating change, scope and direction of future action. This singular process was deemed by Perucci (1999) as one that emphasises creativity, flexibility and comfort melded within a structural reality incorporating ambiguity and constant change.

While leaders are urged to incorporate a variety of skills and be astute with regards to organisational needs, DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003) indicate that the application of leadership requires a degree of sound identifications and an immediate application of problem solving and decision making. Without the realisation of key traits, the leader may suffer frustration culminating in a lack of attention to goals. Leadership roles of this kind have been suggested as being tantamount to a system run by values stemming from an arbitrary series of vested interests.

In this instance, any subsequent action becomes based upon arbitrary personality traits, as well as compromised intentions and attitudes that contribute to a hieratic chain of command leaving the leader in a state of

utmost responsibility. This is clearly the opposite of a productive chain of command. This is made clear by Eraut (1993) who states that: Professional education in teaching and management lacks an epistemological basis, a map of progression, and a theory explaining how expertise is acquired.

Addresses this problem by exploring interaction between different types of professional knowledge and different types of professional processes (Eraut, 1993). The system in which the leader or person adopting a leadership role operates is part of a cultural dynamic that incorporates the fluid and ideological values of the institution (Seel, 2000). In predominantly western societies, the cultural issues surrounding the management of assessment across a range of schools and educational institutions typically raises challenges to leadership.

Dickson et al (2003) refer to this as the pressure of effective managing of both a national and corporate culture. This also involves the significance of socio-political issues and methods relating to contemporary leadership. With such a crisis at hand, such pressures lead the aspiring leader to enter a domain packed with a vast array of responsibilities attributed to their role as leader (Hammond et al, 2001). Much research based upon contemporary leadership within education has identified, defined and helped describe the variations of key models in organisational performance and success attributed to leadership.

The acceptance and establishment of leadership roles within an organisation is stated by Hofstede (1991) as being comprised of styles, practices, and employee preferences, which prove as crucial forms of measurements to the

successful analysis of a cultural organisation. Such measurements of leadership have been incorporated into emerging conceptual models that rely upon self reflection as a vehicle for future performance. One such system of evaluation based upon the premise of improvement relates to the set up of inspection teams set alongside organisational administrators in conjunction with evaluated action plans.

The teams are present in UK schools alongside some other nations who have also adopted the model of self assessment. In each case of self assessment, the state department of education; the individual educational institution and the wider reaching community have all been introduced and given a role within the assessment process. Outlining the significance of the leadership role within such a system, the DES (2008) states that: Once the leadership team has confirmed its judgement regarding the stage the school has reached, the tool then offers suggestions for actions which can support further progress along the continuum.

These action points are linked to supporting resources. (DES, 2008) This makes the role of leadership a team responsible for the delivery and development of ongoing policies of change and improvement within schools and educational institutions. Such programmes are attributed to enhancing the transformation within the institution and relate to a distribution of leadership across a range of transitional roles. This means that circumstances and values associated with social, intellectual and economic issues that arise from varying sources are identified at the root-source.

This apparatus clearly provides evidence for the distribution of the leadership role throughout the educational domain. However, leadership roles are still apparent in the individual in the overall status of the head of department. This role is made to oversee and assess the entire assessment domain. The leadership role in self assessment programmes is still significant to the staff, pupils, students, stake holders and service users. What can be taken from this is that the concept of the leadership role does not consist of hieratic forms of leadership.

Rather, leadership in the context of self assessment is the result of organisational intervention and evaluation made by a team. As a concept, leadership is one that incorporates the entirety of the institutional mechanism in relation to evaluation and future action. It incorporates and acknowledges the many distributed roles, such as stakeholders, client feedback, community concern, employee roles and so forth. All of these factors relate to a process of evaluation. When we refer to educational leadership with regards to evaluation, we do not refer to it in the sense of the more traditional hieratic structures.

Rather, it is the incorporation of all of the roles, values and factors of the entire institutional mechanism and how they are distributed. Essentially, regardless of whether a self evaluation is implemented into a school's form of leadership, both the social and professional dynamics that relate to roles, procedures and the learning environment are crucial in the successful running of the organisation. From this pragmatic perspective, it can be said

that without the role of individual leadership there can be no way of administering order or negotiating direction.

Therefore, the evaluation of any institutional procedure along with the essential decisions required to execute change within a system of education would not be brought about on the basis of a purely communal form of leadership. Furthermore, if a process of learning is to be adopted by an organisation then the role of leadership as it relates to teaching and the distribution of values is essential to evaluation. This means that the leader must look at the ways in which leadership affects and reflects the values of the entire organisation.

With this in mind, we turn to the redistribution of leadership and the reorganisation of roles within the educational setting. We can draw a comparison between old models and new models of leadership relating to organisational structure. For instance, the former domineering boss-subordinate model of leadership that was present in older forms of education structures has given way to what Schwartz et al (1998) clearly identify as interactive paradigms common to the UK. These include such distinctions as self reflection and self evaluation that require a new set of skills focused upon a culture of redistributed roles.

This means that the relationships founded upon the former system can be flexibly observed, constantly assessed and re-evaluated. As well as working in teams, there is the reality of de-centralised decision-making. This is due to the distribution of leadership roles through a network given by a leader, which defines the temporary responsibility of the leadership role. For

instance, research related to this field of study has suggested that emerging shifts in emphasis have highlighted the need to search for meaning and purpose in the form of leadership and so values have become centralised in education settings as well as other institutions.

With this in mind, it is clear that the traditional concepts of leadership have undergone socio-political change in the educational environment. Influence is becoming superseded by more contemporary notions of leadership. Moreover, the notion of leadership is something of an ambiguous concept that has no clear, accurate or obvious distinction. Since this disruption to the traditional notion of leadership in the boss-subordinate model, a process of distributing leadership roles has been found to be a rather complex.

It would appear to depend upon a great deal of subjective factors. Limitations and boundaries are often conditional and depend upon the particular goal of a social group that the leader is representing within the education domain. Further, when addressing leadership in terms of transformational organisations such as those pertaining to a shortage of leaders knowledge of subjective factors becomes even more complex. Strong leadership roles are crucial to the success of the procedure of evaluation and reflection within any organisation.

However, without the boss-subordinate relationship within the hierarchy of the structure of education, the role of leadership becomes compromised and the values that they are meant to represent become fractured. Highlighting the significance of the disruption to the old structure, Kanter (1997) observes that: Managerial work is undergoing such enormous and rapid change that

many managers are reinventing their profession as they go. With little precedent to guide them, they are watching hierarchy fade away and the clear distinctions of title, task, department, even corporation, blur.

Faced with extraordinary levels of complexity and interdependency, they watch traditional sources of power erode and the old motivational tools lose their magic (Kanter, 1997). A degree of qualitative and empirical studies have provided indicators of measurement that reveal that the role dynamics are compromised in older models of leadership. Instruments produced to measure transformational models of leadership and leadership roles in studies by Darling-Hammond et al (2007) and Davis et al (2005) have been successful in examining the connections between leadership within the institution and other models associated with external networks.

Further, these have to be used to demonstrate the predictive validity for important employee outcomes regarding their values in relation to social structures based upon professionalism. Brown et al (2004) show that leadership roles can be related to qualities such as considerate behaviour, trust in the leader, honesty, openness, interaction fairness and socialised charismatic leadership traits which can be measured by the influence dimension model of transformational leadership.

In this circumstance, the role of leadership itself is not subsumed by any of these qualities. This qualitative approach to the evaluation process of future action can help in predicting leadership outcomes within a representative group. Brinkman and Kirschner (1994) outline these predictions as perceived

effectiveness of the leader, followers' role satisfaction and dedication and a willingness to report problems to management.

It was concluded in these research findings that constructing a relationship on the basis of this model could be applied to other construct designs by developing an explicit definition of a transformational leadership based upon self reflection. It was found by research conducted by Bono and Judge (2004) that leaders who could influence employee outcomes were viewed as attractive, credible, and legitimate role models' who were prepared to engage in normatively appropriate behaviour and make their own values realised and distributed throughout the organisation.

This compromises the hieratic dependency on power relations and reveals that by being reflective in one's capacity to lead one can distribute leadership duties and values to employees within the education environment. In such studies, employee perception was defined in terms of altruistic motivation and creation of a just work environment all of which contributed to the attractiveness, credibility, and legitimacy of the leadership role.