School Leadership – International Perspectives
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Leadership we know makes all the difference in success or failures of organizations. This series will bring together in a highly readable way the most recent insights in successful leadership. Emphasis will be placed on research focused on pre-collegiate educational organizations. Volumes should address issues related to leadership at all levels of the educational system and be written in a style accessible to scholars, educational practitioners and policy makers throughout the world.

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School Leadership – International Perspectives

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Preface

School Leadership: International Perspectives

This preface calls for us to place on record some background events that paved the way for the birth of this book. The book has derived from the work of international colleagues and friends who met regularly on international conferences and events, particularly at the international seminars and symposia in 2004, 2005, and 2006, which were hosted by Stephan Gerhard Huber. The tradition of school leadership symposia was established by Prof. Dr. Heinz Rosenbusch in the 1980s. They turned out to be the cornerstone events for school leaders in the German speaking countries. These symposia took place every 2 years and covered themes such as school leadership between bureaucratic administration and innovation; motivation by cooperation; change school from the inside; school and school inspection; school leadership and education action; and school leadership as a social change agent. In 1994, Stephan Gerhard Huber joined the symposia organizational team and started directing them since 2003. Consecutively, Huber spearheaded three international events in 2004, 2005, and 2006. The number of attendees grew up to 450 in 2006 with 110 presentations altogether. In 2009, the next international school leadership symposium took place with 450 experts from around 40 different countries with around 140 presentations. Participants came from Europe, the USA, Asia, Africa, and Australia. Among them were teachers; school leaders; representatives of school leader associations, of educational authorities, of training centres and ministries, as well as academics working in the fields of school effectiveness, school improvement, and school leadership. Furthermore, representatives of foundations, publishing houses, and school and business partnership also participated in the symposia.

These symposia were different in format each year. However, they always included not only plenty of concurrent presentations (keynote and paper presentations), workshops, small group work, various forms of discussions and educational hospitations in local schools and educational authorities and the ministry but also social, cultural, and recreational activities. On the whole, the symposia provided a context and platform to discuss and share ideas and experiences on current issues and trends in school leadership research and practice. They also provide opportunities to initiate professional networks, thus serving as a basis for future cooperation among the participants.
Key issues in the discussions were related to insights from recent research findings and their consequences for the leadership of schools, the growing importance placed on activities to professionalize school leaders, among them training and development programs and selection procedures, as well as the professional standing and the level of decision-making authority that school leaders in various countries have.

The overall aim has been to bring experts from the different fields of education together to discuss current issues and trends related to school leadership, to exchange ideas and experiences, and to discuss possible solutions to challenges we are faced with. As one of the strategies to achieve this aim, a book project was initiated. The result of this effort is this book, School Leadership: International Perspectives. Here, selected contributions are collected and published. In many ways, this book is expanding our reflections and discussions on emerging issues of school leadership from the symposia for further contemplation and deliberations. The chapters in this book provide some models of school leadership, leadership development, and measuring effectiveness of leadership and some insight to the future of school leadership.

Conceptions of and Metaphors for School Leadership

During the events, interviews with different experts were conducted. The experts were asked to describe good school leadership and to give metaphors. Through these interviews we received a broad variety of views of successful school leadership. The metaphors represent different perspectives on leadership and have different foci, depending on the context. To provide some idea of this discussion, some examples are described below.

‘Good’ school leadership as described by the interviewees is strongly connected to the notion of ‘learning’. In school contexts, learning is supposed to concern not only all stakeholders, first of all students, but also the teaching staff, parents, as well as the school leader. Learning is characterized by enthusiasm, goal orientation, and collegiality. It lies within the responsibility of ‘good’ school leadership to create an optimal learning environment for all and to motivate all stakeholders including her/himself. Doing so, leadership – regardless of its context – is not rigid, but like a ‘bamboo cane’ adaptable to different situations and flexible and at the same time, however, consistent and by no means unpredictable.

Furthermore, ‘good’ leadership is associated with the ability to mediate between different levels, between the external and the internal environment of the school, between teachers and students (and parents), and between different groups within the school, etc. According to the interviewees, a ‘good’ school leader practices shared or distributed leadership in terms of leadership based on cooperation and on working in teams. This form of leadership requires that the leader has clear and explicit goals and objectives and at the same time the ability to foster a cooperative environment of mutual support and guidance.
According to the interviewees, school leadership should also be service oriented and support teachers in their professional development as well as aiming at improving student learning and student achievement. For this, it is vital to create the structures that enable a high quality of the school. Besides, school leadership must explicitly initiate, develop, and actively support processes. Consequently, to ‘lead’ a school does not only mean to manage administrative tasks. Above all, leadership should be creative, innovative, flexible, scientific, honest, transparent, and future oriented. At last, the interviewees also associated ‘good’ leadership with high ethical and moral awareness.

The interviewees were also asked to characterize ‘bad’ school leadership. Apparently, ‘bad’ school leadership is recognizable judging from objective facts. Among them are low student achievement, poor results in national and international achievement tests, little value added, and a high rate of absenteeism among students and teachers. Consequences of this are a rather disagreeable school and a learning climate characterized by fear, a lack of mutual respect, distrust, a lack of integrity and cooperation, a climate of secrecy and suspicion, and a lack of ethical and moral values.

Moreover, the interviewees described ‘bad’ school leadership as characterized by a dictatorial, authoritarian, opaque leadership style which does not permit the participation of others. Besides, bad school leadership shows a lack of knowledge and of so-called emotional intelligence, little interest in other people, and a lack of the capacity to comprehend and ‘create’ leadership as a dynamic process.

The interviewees found interesting metaphors for the school: among them are ‘learning centre’, ‘stable basis for everyone’, ‘learning community’, and ‘playground’. The school is seen as open and providing a stimulating and safe environment, in which learning is a pleasure. Ideally, the school is not solely comprehended as a ‘preparation for life’, but as ‘life itself’ and as ‘learning from each other’ and focuses on the interaction among all its stakeholders. Moreover, the school was metaphorically called a ‘family’, a ‘parent assisting a child across a busy road’, a ‘garden’, an ‘orchestre (also comprising less gifted musicians)’, and an ‘organism’.

Among the metaphors that the interviewees gave for school leaders were some possibly surprising ones: a ‘conductor of an orchestra, who knows all the notes but does not necessarily play all the instruments’ may be expected to be chosen, as may be the metaphor of a ‘gardener who supervises the growth of all plants’, referring to his facilitating and supporting attitude. However, something like a ‘loop to the collar of your jacket’ sounds quite extraordinary and underlines a strong service orientation. Metaphors such as ‘bamboo cane’ emphasize flexibility and adaptability combined with consistency. Strikingly perhaps, the metaphors always refer to an individual school leader. In spite of that the interviewees stressed that school leadership ideally is shared by several individuals. An environment based on cooperation is considered necessary to foster shared leadership.

As a metaphor for leadership in general, the interviewees indicated, for example, that of a ‘jockey on a galloping horse’ and that of the ‘leader of a parade, who has to make sure that he is not more of two blocks ahead of the band’. Other metaphors
were those of a ‘star’, of a ‘farmer’, and of a ‘gardener’. Here, too, it is obvious that the individual leader is in the centre of focus. Moreover, the metaphor of a ‘pivot of hope’ describes an optimistic view of leadership. In contrast, the slogan ‘leadership is sometimes the solution to a problem, but more often the problem itself’ places a rather pessimistic perspective.

Another point of view, one that conceives leadership as a function of a system, is held by those interviewees that use metaphors such as a ‘net’ or, referring to a theatre, the ‘balcony (symbolizing a comprehensive and future-oriented vision) and the dance floor (symbolizing staying in touch with the people and their issues) at the same time’.

Furthermore, according to the interviewees, leadership is in concordance with the conception of ‘transformational leadership’, being goal-, staff-, and future-oriented and based on emotional intelligence. Those holding responsibility have to be role models and empower the organization and its members to reach their goals. Empowering, however, does not mean ‘ordering’, but providing a direction and finding the ‘balance between control and autonomy’.

**Emerging Issues of and Reflections on School Leadership**

As noted earlier, participants in the symposia considered and presented emerging issues of and reflections on school leadership. This section outlines briefly some of the significant discussions:

1. Schools increasingly face diversity. This is due to the heterogeneity of student, teacher, and parent background, to heterogeneous values, to the diversity of the skills of the students, and to differing interests of parents. The more diversity the school faces, the more need for a consensus on values emerges.

2. The tension of decentralization (deregulation, devolution) on the one hand and central control (quality assurance and control through external evaluation, inspections, standardized testing, educational standards, etc.) on the other puts pressure on the schools and on their leadership.

3. Enhanced site management of the individual school provides new chances and creative opportunities for school development, which can be made good use of. Examples of best practice are encouraging.

4. Measuring quality in education cannot be achieved through standardized testing with a narrow approach. There may be a mismatch between what is intended to be measured and what is actually tested.

5. A combination of self-evaluation and external evaluation is being discussed and implemented in various countries. Value-adding models take the individual contexts of the school into account.

6. The roles and tasks of teachers have changed and more pressure is put on them. Moreover, highly heterogeneous classes require more differentiation and a variety in teaching approaches and methods.
7. School leaders’ roles have undergone multiple changes and their tasks and responsibilities have increased. There are shifts of focus, e.g. from an emphasis on administrative tasks to an emphasis on development and improvement of instruction as well as student achievements, and school leaders are to a greater extent being held accountable for the results achieved.

8. At first sight, there may appear to be an international consensus about the important role of school leaders, their function (range of responsibilities), their development and training, and their selection (certification/accreditation). By looking more carefully, however, it is apparent that a number of countries have engaged in these issues more rigorously than others.

9. School leadership is about cooperation within the school and between schools. It is about learning from and with colleagues; it is about professional learning communities within the whole school system. It is about developing a shared language, shared concepts, and a shared culture. This approach is a vehicle for school development and has to be taken into account and mirrored by leadership training and development opportunities. Cooperation (among teachers and with external partners) can reduce stress and enhance quality. It lies within the school leader’s responsibility to promote a culture of collaboration.

10. New leadership concepts are meant to respond to the manifold demands on school leadership. While, for example, the term ‘transactional leadership’ has been applied to a concept of ‘steady state’, ‘transformational leadership’ is reputed to be particularly successful in school development processes. ‘Integral school leadership’ aims at an integration of management and leadership tasks. Studies conducted in North America, especially in the field of school effectiveness, have emphasized the relevance of ‘instructional leadership’. In Germany, the ideas of ‘Organisationspädagogik’ attempt at consistently linking ‘acting as an educator’ and ‘acting as an administrator in an organization’, regarding educational principles as guidelines for both fields and favouring leadership conceptions like ‘cooperative and democratic leadership’. ‘System leadership’ with the idea of taking over responsibility for learning and education not only in one’s own school but for all children and youngsters in the wider community gets increasingly emphasized.

11. Given the facts that school leadership is getting more and more complex and that not only the tasks but also the competences are too demanding for one person alone, shared, distributed, and cooperative leaderships seem to be solutions discussed internationally not only in the academic community but also increasingly in the profession itself. Perhaps there needs to be ‘one supreme head’ in each school. There could be other alternatives – such as collective leadership, the development of whole teams of staff, the re-conceptualization of the school leader’s role as simply one part in a team, a team made up of leaders who all need support, training, development opportunities.

12. School leaders get the impression that particularly in times of scarce financial resources politicians tend to put financial responsibility and accountability on their shoulders. The aims of educational politics and the educational aims of the school are sometimes experienced as discrepant.
13. School leaders have to be aware of the context (the national context and traditions, the society, the school system, the individual school, and the individual needs of the participants).

14. Schools need a culture of trust. School leadership actions should be based on trust. Schools themselves, however, should also be met with trust by authorities in the system and by society in general.

15. Increased responsibility on school level must not be prevented by a culture of distrust and suspicion, which focuses on managerial accountability and control, but needs support through professionalization at all levels (teachers, school leadership, education authorities) in terms of recruitment and selection of suitable personnel as well as training and development offers and support systems.

16. Schools need a culture of appreciation: this holds true internally (‘celebrating’ is among the school leadership tasks) and at the level of society. Teachers and school leaders must no longer be the beasts of burden for social and political failure. Instead, learning and education ought to be publicly appreciated as the most vital resources of a nation.
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Stephan Gerhard Huber
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