Professional Development

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Experiences *from* educators *for* educators

1ST EDITION

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Editors

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Professional Development

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The Role of Educational Leaders in Professional Development

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– Calgary

Introduction

This paper first considers the roles of both leadership and context in relation to the ways in which school leaders – here referred to as school directors, but in other parts of the world as head-teachers, principals, and so forth – can best influence educational practice. I discuss the importance of human relationships and new technologies within the school, and then conclude with a consideration of the role of educational leaders in professional development

Educational leaders are at the centre of the educational enterprise. Working in what are often called "learning organizations", school directors are the leaders of these communities of learning, and of learners (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). However, the organization of the school functions within a wider socio-political arena and it is here that regional and ministry level educators influence the educational process.

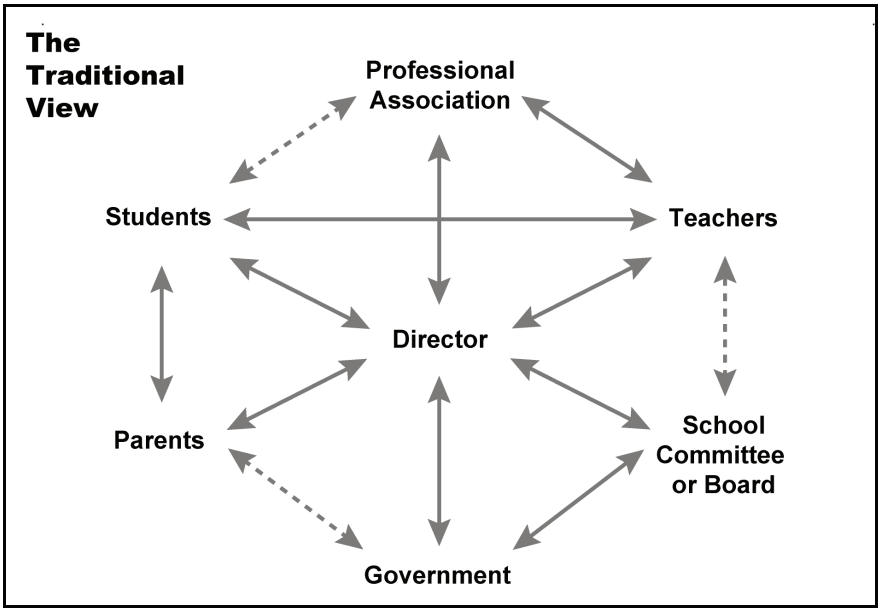
Leadership at the Centre: Different Perceptions

It is important to remember that the idea of a single person being at the 'centre' of the school really depends on the view of the observer. For example, many school directors would consider that they are at the centre of the school, and that teachers, students, parents, and so forth, are simply satellites in orbit around them. This is true – if one is a school director! To a student, however, the centre of the school is the student, and principals, teachers, and so forth are quite secondary to the daily events of education.

It is useful to consider these different perceptions of the relationships within the school. In Figure 1, we see that the school director is at the

centre. This "focused leadership" (Gronn, 2003, p. 27) is the traditional view of education. The relationships between the various stakeholders (or social actors) who participate in the decision making processes of the school are shown, and it is apparent that the director has strong links with all these individuals and groups. On the periphery we can see that there are some less direct relationships, for example those between parents and the government. Although as voters, parents do help elect the members of the government, there is little continued relationship.

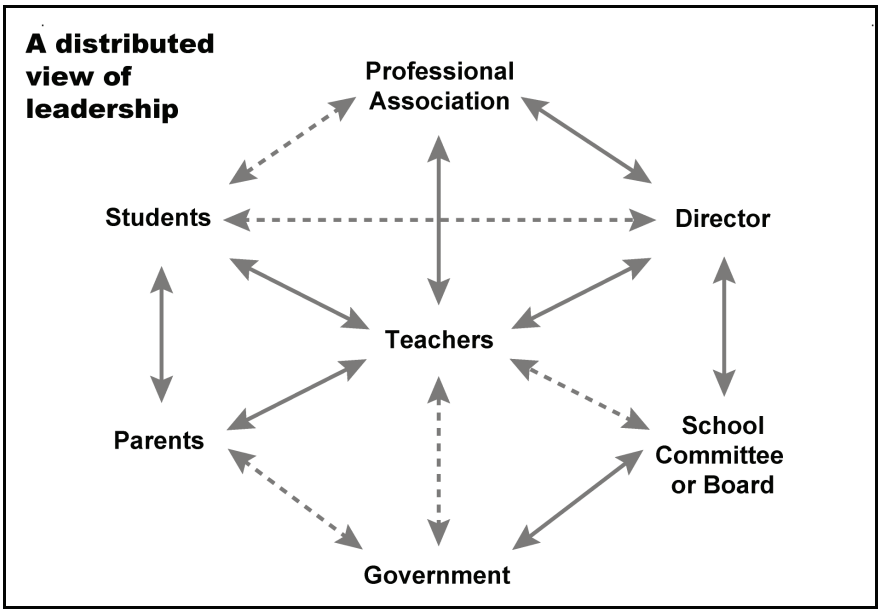
Figure 1: A Traditional View of Education



In a learning organization, however, not only the school director is responsible for learning. All members of the school community take responsibility, because all members of the school are both *teachers* and *learners*. How does this change the way we look at schools?

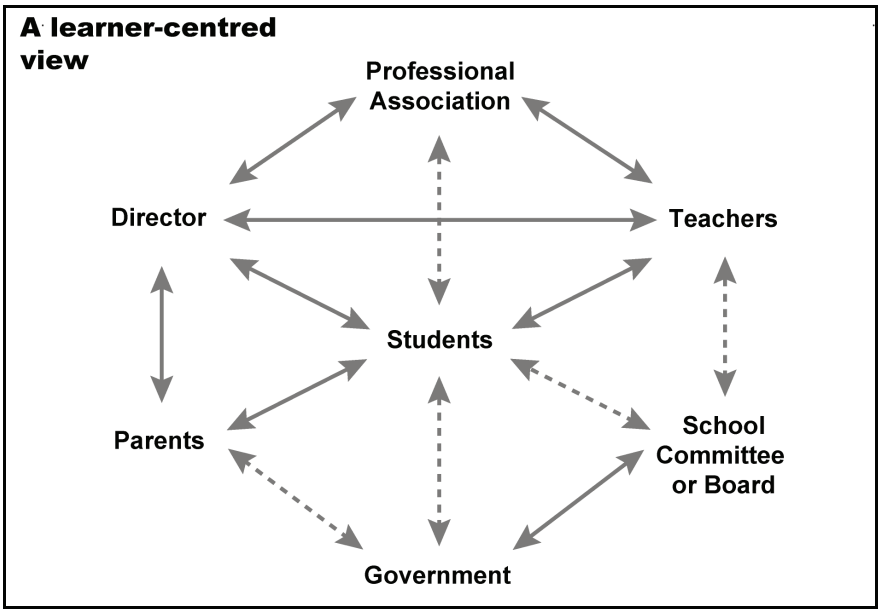
If we move the teacher to the centre, then we can achieve what is commonly referred to as a distributed view of leadership (see Figure 2). One of the immediate things we notice here is that the teachers only have direct relationships with four of the six other social actors.

Figure 2: A Distributed View of Leadership



A third way of looking at the school is to take a learner-centered view. In this model the student is at the centre of the school (see Figure 3). Here we have the same six social actors, and we observe that students only have direct relationships with three of these stakeholder groups.

Figure 3: A Learner-Centered View



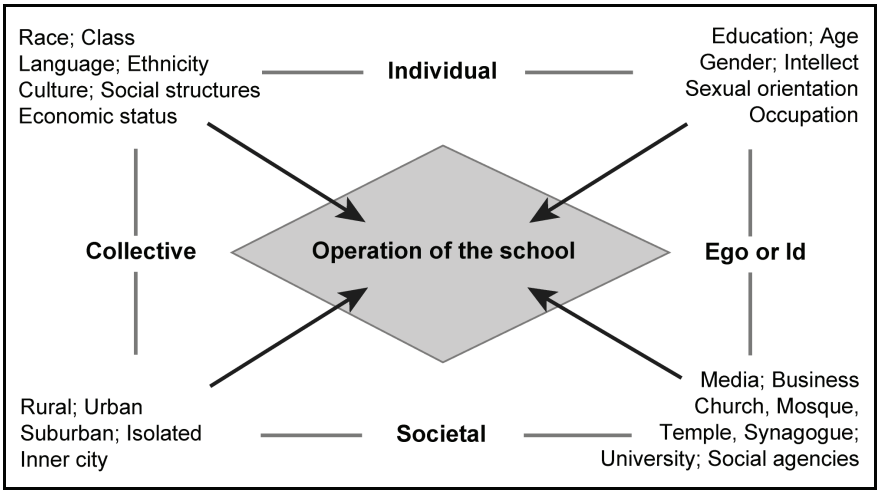
From these examples we can see that the simple act of moving different people to the centre of the educational activity does not, in itself, lead to changes in the power structures within the school. Simply stating that the "student is at the centre" does not actually lead to any structural or organizational change. The hegemonic nature of the dominant system is such that the director, who is now on the periphery, maintains more direct connective relationships than the person supposedly in the centre. If there is to be lasting change and reform to the organization of schools, then more than re-labeling is required.

The current literature contains a great deal of reference to distributed leadership and learner-centered school environments (Goddard, 2004; Gronn, 2003). This research has been seen to have positive reform effects in certain schools. However, there appears to be little or no overall change in the way that schools are structured. I would suggest that this is because there is an ingrained belief in human society that any organization requires a single leader at its head. Attempts to change this model are doomed to failure unless more robust changes occur first at the societal level.

The Importance of Context

A second explanation for the failure of these reform efforts to take hold in a global way is the importance of context. All schools operate within a nest of forces that are similar but different for each location.

Figure 4: Contextual Influences on the School



These influences on the school context can be organized into four major clusters (see Figure 4), two of which operate at the individual level and two at the societal level. At the individual level, there are both personal characteristics (those which are different for each person, and might be referred to as *ego* or *id*), and those collective characteristics which act as contextual influences on a group or community of people.

The ego characteristics include such variables as the gender of the person, his or her age and sexual orientation. The type and level of education achieved are strong influences, as is the type of work in which the person is engaged. Further, the development levels of the person – intellectual, physical, social – all influence the way in which they view the world. The collective characteristics which influence the members of social groups include race and ethnicity which, together with culture, are perhaps the most visible markers of identity. There

are other variables, however. For example, people who share a common language, or perhaps a specific dialect of that language, also identify themselves as part of that group. Similar distinctions are made based on matters such as class, economic status, and even the social structures within which people circulate.

At the societal level, there are also the ego and collective characteristics which act as contextual influences on schools. At the collective level, there are questions of location – a school in a rural area, for example, faces different realities than one in an inner city neighbourhood. These influences also impact on the individuals within the school. A person who is raised in an isolated village will have a different perception of the world than one raised in a suburban housing estate. Similarly, on matters of ego, the types of media read by a person influence their views. The religious beliefs to which one subscribes, the type of university classes attended and ideas to which one is exposed, the businesses and social agencies which one frequents, all contribute to the perceptions a person brings to the world.

These variables all influence each person who is a social actor in the school. As the formal leader of the school, it is the role of the director to understand and appreciate these differences. Indeed, although I do not explore this here, there are also temporal changes to context which must be considered. On any given day the factors described above may change, and as a result the role of the school director is intensely complex.

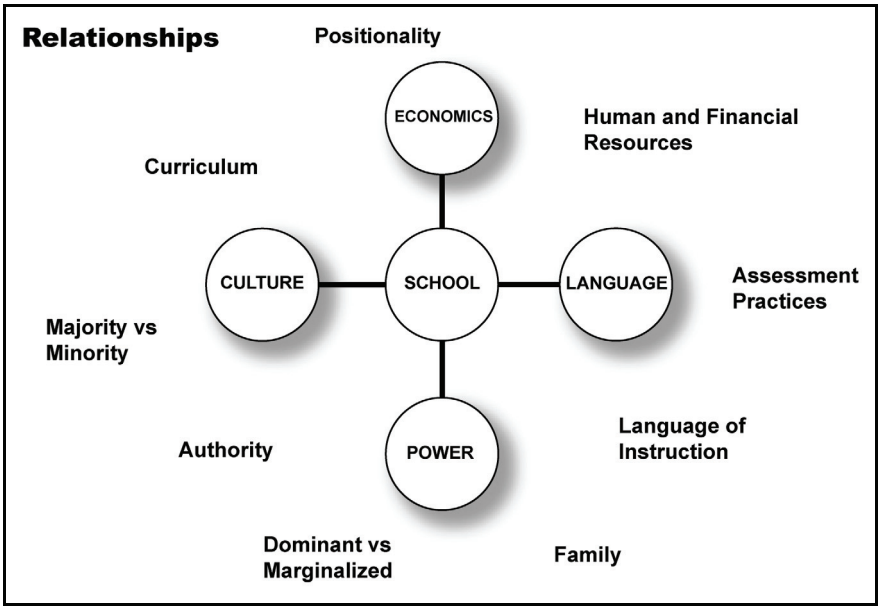
These ideas tell us that schools are more than bricks and mortar, and that education is a social process rather than an organizational one. Indeed, the discussion here suggests that we construct reality through the sum of our activities – the relationships between people are key, and these communications among people are aided by technology.

Relationships

Schools face the challenge of finding ways of dealing with the tensions between the needs of individuals, teams, whole school and the regional offices in planning staff development. Each group with an interest in the school's success will perceive its needs differently. Within a school, relationships are affected by macro and micro level

variables (see Figure 5). At the macro level, four particular influences stand out: culture, economics, language, and power. The various micro variables intersect with these macro variables in multiple and exacerbating ways.

Figure 5: Relationship Variables



The influence of culture is vital to understanding educational success. In all societies there are both dominant and marginalized communities, many of which are identifiable as belonging to a certain cultural group. The dominant or majority culture is the one with the authority and power to set the political and educational agendas on the national stage. These groups tend to have the economic means – the human and financial resources – to leverage their beliefs into policy and action. In other words, they have *positionality* within the state and are able to influence the structural organization of schools. Through this influence, matters pertaining to the selection of the language of instruction, the curriculum to be taught, and the means or types of assessment are all negotiated, generally to the benefit of the dominant social culture. It is not only the positive which

illustrates this benefit but also the negative – what content is not included in the curriculum, for example, or which types of knowledge are not assessed? The school director must be aware of all these macro and micro variables that influence the operations of the school, and must ensure that through discussion an awareness of these permeates the work life of all staff. It is through such collaboration that educators can discuss and debate issues related to pedagogy, practice, and the very notions of teacher identity. It is imperative that directors recognize and build upon such professional development opportunities.

Technology

Integrating whatever level of technology is available is an absolute necessity for professional development education. There are implications here for both teaching and administration. Technology is more than merely computers in classrooms or a high-speed Internet line in the school library – it is the force which drives educational reform today.

There are three interacting spheres of technology. First there is the ubiquitous IT, or *informational technology*. This sphere does indeed include computer labs, computers in the classrooms, laptops for teachers, and so forth. In providing a school with the appropriate hardware, teaching can be enhanced. This will only happen, however, through the adoption of ICT, or *information communication technologies*.

With ICT schools move beyond simply having computers available as expensive word processors. It is now possible for computers to 'talk' to each other, through local area networks, and for students to talk not only to each other in the building but with others around the world. Through the Internet and e-mail, students and teachers alike can access resources that are not otherwise available. From the contents of distant libraries to a live broadcast from an expedition attempting to climb Mount Everest, students can connect with a much wider array of information than ever before.

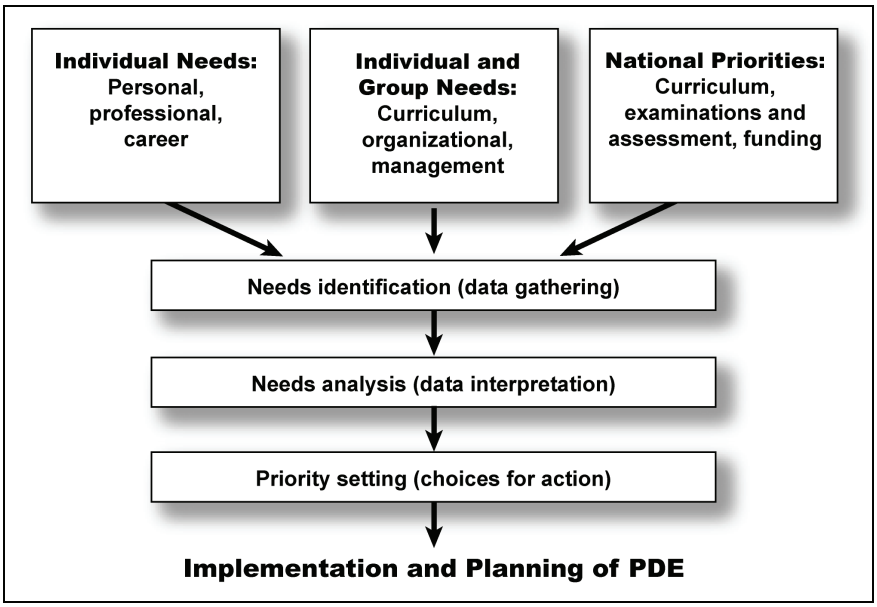
The enhancement of teaching that occurs due to IT and ICTs is complemented by the administrative usefulness of IM, or *information management*. Whether this is the filing of student records, the development of timetables, the tracking of an individual students'

academic test results or the scheduling of sports events, information management is a major part of contemporary administration.

It is apparent, therefore, that these two areas, relationships and technology, are crucial for effective school leadership. We know that each group of social actors involved with the school has a different script, a different set of aspirations and understandings about what is best for the school. Administrative action must be based on evidence, on an understanding of the pressures which individually, collectively, and in an interwoven manner influence the actions of all the social actors, not just the director. Further, it is apparent that even this knowledge is irrelevant unless it is contextualized within the distinct and unique setting of the individual school. Finally, although recognizing that it is impossible to achieve everything, it is also apparent that the key role of the school director is to pull everything together in a coherent and articulate way.

This is achieved through a normal problem solving cycle (see Figure 6). First, the individual needs of the teachers – and of the school director – must be identified, usually through private conversations dedicated to this topic which should be scheduled and enacted once per year. Second, these individual needs must be placed within the context of the needs of the school – those institutional parameters related to the organization and management of the facility itself. Finally, the school director must place his or her understanding of these personal and institutional needs within the broader national priorities set by government to dictate curriculum content, assessment strategies, funding envelopes, and the like.

Figure 6: Needs Assessment, Identification and Prioritization Process



Source: Oldroyd and Hall, 1997, p. 135

It is only when these three disparate groups of data have been collected that efficient data analysis can take place. The interpretation of these data does not happen in a policy vacuum, but is rather fully impacted by the variables described earlier (see Figure 4). It is one of the unlauded but most necessary skills of the effective school director to be able to analyze locally collected data within the wider context described above. Once the data are analyzed, a number of possible courses of action will become apparent. Naturally not all of these can be implemented. Questions of available support, especially human and financial resources, will help to determine which strategies are prioritized. These priorities will also be reviewed through the lenses of political expediency, organizational goals, and community expectations. The effective school director will undertake this analysis in an almost automatic mode, scanning the environment for hitherto unnoticed factors which must also be taken into account. It is only once this assessment, identification and prioritization process has been completed that specific strategies can be identified and implemented as part of a professional development education plan.

Professional Development Education

In addressing the needs of teachers or administrators, it is important to remember that individual needs vary at different times of a persons' career. Oldroyd and Hall (1997) have examined these career stages and have developed a rubric which shows the relationships between the number of years someone has been employed as a teacher, the type of training activity that might be most useful, and the purpose of such professional development programs or processes (see Figure 7). Through such an understanding of the individual needs of his or her staff members, the school director can more effectively plan a program of professional development education that meets the needs of the staff.

Figure 7: Professional Education Needs at Different Career Stages

Not All Individual Needs are the Same						
Stage	**Induction**	**Consolidation**	**Reflection**	**Focus**	**Renewal**	**Refreshment**
Time in teaching	1 - 3 years	4 - 6 years	6 - 8 years	8 - 12 years	12 - 15 years	20+ years
Possible training	Induction courses	Short courses of full-time study, specific in content and application	1 term secondment	Part time specific specialist	Advanced studies - up to 1 year secondments	Series of 1 day or short-term weekend courses
Purpose of training	Supplement specific needs	Adding to knowledge and developing skills	Initiate a career change or confirm and enhance direction	Develop specialist expertise and knowledge	Extension of specialist experience and knowledge	Top management or refresher needs

Source: Oldroyd and Hall, 1997, p. 142

In understanding that different people have different professional needs at different stages of their careers, it becomes apparent that a 'one size fits all' training model will not be effective. If all staff are subjected to the same professional development program, then even with the most careful planning only a few will find it useful. For some, the event will simply replicate what they already know. For others, the program will address issues for which they do not yet

have the necessary prior knowledge or experience. In both instances, these teachers will not fully benefit from the training and may, in fact, inadvertently act as negative influences on the event.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have illustrated that the formal or recognized leaders of the school are not the only centre of the institution. By examining other possible centres, we can draw different pictures of the ways in which the social actors in schools act and interact with each other. It has also been described how changing perspectives can produce innovative strategies – sometimes it is only by taken an uncommon view that new variations on a theme can be envisaged. Further, it has been demonstrated that societal influences are as important as organizational ones insofar as the daily life of the school is concerned, and that school administrators must be aware of the impact these variables have not only on individual social actors but also on the relationships between various social actors. Indeed, it has been noted that the three most important contemporary domains related to human interactions in schools are relationships, communication, and technology.

Ultimately, the purpose of any professional development education program is to lead to both individual and institutional benefit. For the individual, professional development education can provide both academic and professional credit. Professional credit can lead to promotion within the educational hierarchy and academic credit leads in many societies to increased standing within the professional ranks. Often, the result of both these changes in individual status is a salary increment.

At the institutional level, professional development education leads to the staff developing a shared understanding of the common mission and values of the organization, and thus to increased teamwork. Professional development education also results in organizational growth, as staff bond together to focus on continuous change. Together, these organizational changes result in a shared commitment to school improvement.

In an earlier article I have suggested that "it is important that leaders are aware of the need to change the values and belief systems of

people, and to do this in ways that are open, collaborative, and respectful" (Goddard, 2004, p. 692). This is not easy, because few new school administrators are properly prepared for the role. Indeed, Early and Evans (2004) suggest that even those who think that they are prepared, are not. They noted that some 34 per cent of new appointees believed that they were not very or not at all prepared for the role, but when asked again when reflecting after a few years in the job, the number who believed they had not been properly prepared rose to 44 per cent, or almost half of those interviewed in this major British study.

I have argued that Professional Development Education is vital for individual and organizational growth. I have suggested that educational change will not be sustainable unless our schools change. Further, because schools are the sum of the activities of people – relationships between people and communications among people are aided by technology – so schools will continue to improve only as long as people continue to improve. It is my contention that one of the key roles of the educational leader is to facilitate that process. If school administrators are to embrace this responsibility then they must be prepared appropriately, and it is only through a careful and considered program of Professional Development Education that this will be achieved.

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