Thema

Educational *Leadership* and the Changing School

Emanuele Berger

Modern-day schools have been going through periods of reform and innovation for some time. This is due to the growing complexity of the reality we live in, evolving as it is in often unpredictable ways, thus leading our education systems to the awareness of the need to continuously adapt. A more pronounced degree of flexibility is also entailed, with greater authority being placed in the hands of the individual school and a consequent redistribution of power ensuing at all levels (Hopkins, Stoll, Fullan, & Hargreaves, 2003; MacBeath, 1998).

This means every aspect of the school as a whole is involved in the reshaping process— from the overall organisational structure through to the decision-making mechanisms, the pedagogical framework, the syllabi, the teaching processes and up to the management of human and financial resources (Bottani, 2002).

The extent to which the «decision-making map» is undergoing review also implies a re-defining of roles and professional profiles engaged in planning, leading and management. In short, what schools need are new and true local leaders.

The term «leader» here carries with it a wide range of pedagogical, administrative, relational and creative traits. This notion of the term cannot be confined to a mere managerial and/or economistic role, as research unrelated to education may rather tend to suggest. From this stance, more and more thought is being given to the idea of *leadership* as a response to social and institutional change, and as a *consequence* of such change.

At the same time, however, *leadership* may also be the *cause* of change within the school environment, triggering and sustaining school development. Anyone in charge of an educational institution or system — be it on the school level, local administration or regional/national government level — cannot be solely preoccupied with the daily business of running schools. They also need to act as change agents, fostering innovation and supporting improvement (Fullan, 2001b). It is precisely in the height of innovation that *leadership* is exalted, and fulfils itself (Quaglino, 1999).

These themes were explored in the Lugano congress, as well as the links between them. Looking at the topics also in evolutionary terms, the congress examined various definitions of *leadership* seen in their looser or tighter relation to school development, while showcasing existing practice and bringing open issues to the fore. Three strands of reflection were thus proposed within which it became possible to highlight the state of the art of research in Switzerland and in other countries in these fields.

In the first strand, called «the concepts of *leadership*», contributions were made in outlining the notion itself of *leadership*, as seen mainly within the educational sphere. We may recall that «*leadership*» is not easily defined on account of the numerous facets and the diverse connotations the concept entails in differing cultural traditions and settings. Many attempts at defining it may be found in research literature, each focusing on distinct issues or features. The most recent tend to expand the domains of the concept, so as to include school heads, teachers, students and local authorities on the one hand, and regional/national policymakers and administration on the other (Bush & Glover, 2003).

The second strand or topic area, «the roles of *leadership* in school improvement», analyzed the relationship between *leadership* and change, on the basis of the key role played by leaders in making schools better. In brief, as previously stated, if the heightened importance of *leadership* is seen as a consequence of social and institutional change, a greater part of research experience has been focused on looking at how *leadership* may actively contribute to school improvement. Indeed, *leadership* has been repeatedly highlighted as a key factor in school development, whether at the school or the system level (Fullan, 2001a).

The contributions to the third strand concentrated on «*leadership* and its players», looking at some of the practical implications of the increasingly important role attributed to leaders within schools. Particular attention was given to the recruitment and education processes and strategies of school leaders.

Numerous researchers from Switzerland and abroad were invited to present their work at the congress. Most of the contributors' papers and presentations may be viewed and downloaded from http://ssre05.educanet2.ch/ , under the section «Proceedings».

This edition of the SSRE *Review* focuses on a number of conceptually significant tracks in educational *leadership* thinking. Not only have the papers included been selected on the basis of the quality and relevance of the research work presented, but an attempt has also been made to represent the cultural and linguistic diversity and the array of different scientific approaches and disciplines which certainly characterized the Lugano congress.

The first article in this special edition of the *Review* is by Monica Gather Thurler, whose keynote address opened the first three days of the Lugano congress. The main point in the paper concerns the difficulty encountered by school heads in handling the tensions generated by the needs of their everyday business, the needs of quality assurance and the need for continuous improvement. The author goes on to point out the assorted risks of linguistic misrepresentation which may accompany the use in French of a term that has been carried over from English. She concludes demonstrating how *leadership* must develop together with research on *leadership*.

The second article has been contributed by Andy Hargreaves (also a keynote speaker at the congress), in collaboration with Dean Fink. The two researchers, basing their assertions on a seminal study carried out in Canada over many years, (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006) propose an innovative vision of *leadership*. The latter is defined as «*sustainable*» and issues from a pragmatic, conceptual framework aiming at transforming reality on the basis of research results. The concept carries a highly epistemological standing of activist engagement with it which Hargreaves, inspired here by Ivor Goodson (1999), defines as the position of the «*public intellectual*». According to the authors, «Sustainable educational *leadership* and improvement preserve and develop deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm to and indeed create positive benefit for others around us, now and in the future» (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003).

The third paper by Stephan Gerhard Huber provides a precious overview of the most recent international developments in the field of educational *leadership*. The overview emerges from a detailed-analysis exploratory study of the principal tendencies in educational *leadership* in 15 countries. Huber reports that a substantial paradigmatic shift is underway within the field, the result being that the school is no longer considered a static, self-replicating system, but rather a «learning organization». The obvious consequence to this shift, for example, involves also a shift in the way the role of the school head is conceptualized: from that of a manager handling the present state of affairs to a vision of a role centered on change and school improvement, thus on a vision focusing on *leadership* and on the human dimension of leading a school.

The research findings illustrated within Bruno Leutwyler and Priska Sieber's article deal with the changes which have taken place within the last few years in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, in the circumstance of schools having become partially autonomous institutions. As a result, the institutional role of the school manager has been developed. The authors, on a mandate received from the Teachers' Union (LCH), wished to verify the extent to which those most directly affected by the change accepted the new internal career possibilities for teachers, who could now become school heads, or assume other managerial roles. The results indicate a largely positive reaction, in particular among

women teachers. Among the reasons cited, one was the possibility of obtaining formal recognition (increased prestige and higher wages) for a series of duties for which, up till now, no specific recognition had been envisaged. Another expectation tied to the possibility of professional advancement would also mean the relief from the burden of numerous tasks not inherent to teaching, tasks now formally assigned to a handful of teachers. A further finding emerging from the study also shows how teachers in the survey generally prefer a form of distributed *leadership*, rather than that of the traditional school «superhero».

The subsequent article is by Italian researchers Roberto Serpieri and Immacolata Romano. It elaborates upon the concept of educational *leadership* on the basis of a case study within the context of the Italian school system. In particular, the authors looked at how an Italian school manager adapted to the reforms taking place within the Italian school system, and the subsequent new «emerging responsibilities» which came as a result. The school manager is perceived here as a player acting autonomously and competently in his role, a player who is capable of interacting with his environment, of transforming it and becoming reflexively transformed by it.

The final paper is by Katharina Maag Merki and Brigitte Steinert, and does not deal with the theme of *leadership* directly. Rather, it analyzes the effects of an organizational structuring of schools, defined as «partially autonomous», requiring the presence of one or more qualified managers. The principal conclusions of the study carried out in 22 Secondary Schools in the Zurich Canton, see students feeling better supported in schools which showed strong collaboration among teachers.

We hope that the articles collected in this special edition of the *Review* will not only provide a broad picture of contemporary research on educational *leadership*, but will also appreciably sustain reflection and practice, while stimulating more further research needed on the issues raised.

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