From Management to Leadership: Semantic or Meaningful Change?
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From Management to Leadership

Semantic or Meaningful Change?

Tony Bush

ABSTRACT

Educational management was still a relatively new field of study and practice in the UK at the time of the Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988. The field focused on ‘management’ and not leadership. This emphasis very much reflected the business world and its use in education illustrated the ‘policy borrowing’ characteristic of an emerging field. This article revisits the concepts of leadership and management, examines the impact of the ERA on management practice in schools and colleges, and discusses the notion of managerialism. The chronology of leadership and management during the past 20 years is explored, including the role of New Labour and the opening of the National College for School Leadership. The paper concludes with a review of the contemporary emphasis on leadership for learning.

KEYWORDS leadership, learning, management, reform, schools

Introduction

Educational management was still a relatively new field of study and practice in the UK at the time of the Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988. There were very few university departments focusing on this subject and indigenous literature and research were scarce. The small number of courses drew heavily on concepts and practice from private sector management and from literature in other countries, notably the USA, where the field had been established for several decades. Shortly after the ERA, Les Bell produced an article for this journal, entitled ‘Educational Management: An Agenda for the 1990s’. His succinct summary captured the contemporary position:

We are still guilty of borrowing perspectives, models, concepts and even theories from the world of industry and commerce . . . our understandings of educational management are in the main derived from a non-educational framework and this is a weakness, both from the conceptual analysis it enables us to make and in terms of our credibility with practitioners in schools and colleges. (Bell, 1991: 136)
Bell (1991: 137) went on to argue that ‘the empirical foundations on which we have based much of our analysis of schools are extremely weak’. School and college based research was limited and provided an inadequate basis for developing grounded theories of educational management. The field was in an emerging, or fledgling (Bush, 1999), state but one aspect was unchallenged. The theme was ‘educational management’. My review of papers in this journal in 1988 revealed only one mention of leadership, at the end of an overview paper by Tim Brighouse. In an assessment of the likely relationship between schools and local education authorities (LEAs) following the ERA, he concludes that ‘the headteacher has inherited [from the LEA] all the considerable tasks of educational leadership and management’ (Brighouse, 1988: 103).

This emphasis on management very much reflected the business world and its use in education formed part of the ‘policy borrowing’ to which Bell (1991) referred. Early courses in the new field, for example the Open University’s ‘Management and the School’ (E323), included a discussion of leadership but this was a specific, and subordinate, theme within the wider treatment of educational management.

In this article, I will revisit the concepts of leadership and management, examine the impact of the ERA on management practice in schools and colleges, and discuss the notion of managerialism. The chronology of leadership and management during the past 20 years will be explored, including the role of New Labour and the opening of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). I will also consider the often uneasy relationship between general business management and educational leadership and management.

**Defining Leadership and Management**

The concepts of management and leadership overlap with each other and with the related notion of administration. ‘Management’ is widely used in Britain, Europe and Africa, for example, while ‘administration’ is preferred in the USA, Canada and Australia (Bush, 2003). Dimmock (1999: 442) differentiates these concepts while also acknowledging that there are competing definitions:

School leaders [experience] tensions between competing elements of leadership, management and administration. Irrespective of how these terms are defined, school leaders experience difficulty in deciding the balance between higher order tasks designed to improve staff, student and school performance (leadership), routine maintenance of present operations (management) and lower order duties (administration).

In the same year as the ERA, Cuban (1988) provided one of the clearest distinctions between leadership and management. He links leadership with change while management is seen as a maintenance activity. He also stresses the importance of both dimensions of organizational activity:
By leadership, I mean influencing others’ actions in achieving desirable ends. Leaders are people who shape the goals, motivations, and actions of others. Frequently they initiate change to reach existing and new goals . . . Leadership . . . takes . . . much ingenuity, energy and skill. Managing is maintaining efficiently and effectively current organisational arrangements. While managing well often exhibits leadership skills, the overall function is toward maintenance rather than change. I prize both managing and leading and attach no special value to either since different settings and times call for varied responses. (1988: xx)

Taking these definitions as a starting point, I will examine the concept of educational management in the late 1980s, consider the shift in nomenclature to leadership in the late 1990s, and assess the balance between these twin notions 20 years after the ERA.

Educational Management and the ERA

The ERA transformed the working lives of principals, headteachers and senior staff. Together with governing bodies, they took over responsibility for many aspects of management that were previously the preserve of the LEAs. These included the management of finance and staff, as well as an enhanced responsibility to preserve and enhance the reputation of their schools in a competitive or ‘wild’ environment. (Bush, 1999: 243).

The implementation of the ERA led to an emphasis on the practice of educational management. ‘Head and principals, in particular, have been inundated with advice from politicians, officials, officers of Quangos, academics and consultants, about how to manage their schools and colleges’ (Bush, 1999: 246). Before the ERA, my first book on theory in educational management (Bush, 1986) identified five models:

- formal (including bureaucracy and rational approaches);
- collegial;
- political;
- subjective;
- ambiguity.

However, it was the bureaucratic and rational approaches that were strongly advocated, notably by Coopers and Lybrand, the management consultants brought in by the Government, to advise on the introduction of Local Management of Schools, a central plank of the ERA:

Good management requires the identification of management units for which objectives can be set and resources allocated; the unit is then required to manage itself within those resources in a way which seeks to achieve the objectives; the performance of the unit is monitored and the unit is held to account for its performance and for its use of funds. (Coopers and Lybrand, 1988: para 1.5)
Schools are the ‘management units’ referred to by these authors and it is evident that this model of ‘good practice’ is essentially rational (Levacic, 1995: 62; Bush, 1999: 247). Indeed, Glatter (1999: 256) noted the ‘very substantial growth of technical-rational approaches’ in his review of policy development in the public sector. This rational model can be criticized on several grounds:

- It assumes a unitary set of objectives to which all school stakeholders are committed whereas, in practice, aims are likely to be contested unless they are imposed by government or other external agencies.
- It assumes that the allocation of resources is unproblematic while, in practice, this is likely to be the subject of conflict (Hoyle, 1986).
- It assumes that the assessment of educational outcomes is straightforward while, in practice, several educational aims (e.g. ‘developing the whole child’) are very difficult to measure.
- It assumes a single process of accountability whereas, in practice, school managers have multiple, and often conflicting, accountabilities.

These weaknesses contributed to the emergence of the alternative models listed above, and to widespread concern about the limitations of bureaucratic and rational management approaches. The most emphatic criticism is of managerialism, ‘a stress on procedures at the expense of educational purpose and values’ (Bush, 1999: 240). Ball (1994), Gunter (1997) and Hargreaves (1994) are among the critics of this narrow and sterile stance:

Implementation of externally imposed agendas reduces the scope for practitioners to debate what should be taught, and why. The ideologies of central government drive the agenda, replacing the values of practitioners, individually and collectively, to implementation of a prescribed curriculum . . . centralisation has narrowed the educational debate and limited the scope for collegial decision-making. (Bush, 1999: 246–7)

The post-ERA period, then, focused strongly on management rather than leadership and the ‘official’ definition endorsed a particular approach intended to ensure that schools were managed effectively to achieve externally driven objectives. Bottery (2006: 176) says that, in this new market-driven period, school governing bodies sought a managerial leader; ‘the headteacher they were looking for had to be someone more like a chief executive of a business than a head teacher’. This narrow interpretation opened the door for critics seeking a greater role for school practitioners to determine, and not simply to implement, school aims.

**Education and Business**

I noted earlier (p. 271) that educational management, as a field of study and practice, was derived from management principles first applied to industry and commerce, mainly in the USA. Theory development largely involved the
application of industrial models to educational settings. As the subject became established as an academic field in its own right, its theorists and practitioners began to develop alternative models based on their observation of, and experience in, schools and colleges. During the past twenty years, educational leadership and management has progressed from being a new field dependent upon ideas developed in other settings to become an established discipline with its own theories and significant empirical data testing their validity in education (Bush, 2003: 13).

This transition has been accompanied by lively argument about the extent to which education should be regarded as simply another field for the application of general principles of leadership and management or be seen as a separate discipline with its own body of knowledge. Before the ERA, Handy (1984: 26) asserted that 'schools have much in common with other organizations that bring people together for a purpose—be they hospitals, or businesses or government offices'. These common functions, including financial management, human resource management and relationships with the community, became much more significant following the ERA (Bush, 2003).

The long running debate about the relationship between general management, and that specific to education, was rekindled from 1995 with the then Teacher Training Agency's (TTA's) emphasis on the need to take account of 'best practice outside education' in devising professional development programmes. For example, its (1997: 1, 3) National Standards document states that ‘the standards . . . reflect the work undertaken on management standards by those outside the education profession’ and ‘the knowledge and understanding that head teachers need draw on sources both inside and outside education’.

Leaving aside the vexed question of what constitutes ‘best practice’, within or outside education (see Glatter [1997] and Glatter and Kydd [2003] for a discussion of this issue), there is one major problem about this ‘flirtation’ with business management. The over-riding, and unique, purpose of schools and colleges is to promote effective teaching and learning. While educational leaders may be able to benefit from a cross-sector discussion of the generic tasks of managing staff, finance and marketing (Bush, 1998), the leadership of learning is specific to schools. Baldridge et al.'s (1978: 9) caution remains as valid now as it was ten years before the ERA: ‘We . . . must be extremely careful about attempts to manage or improve . . . education with “modern management” techniques borrowed from business.’

**Education, Education . . . and Leadership**

The election of a Labour government, after 18 years of Conservative rule, was expected to usher in a new era (no pun intended) for education in England (the government's devolution agenda changed the position for Scotland and Wales). The prime minister's election mantra was ‘education, education, education’, intended to signal his priorities. In practice, however, the Blair government
continued many of its predecessor’s educational policies, notably the ‘standards’ agenda and the emphasis on externally driven accountability. However, it did introduce one major innovation, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). Bolam (2004: 260) is surely right to describe the opening of NCSL as a ‘paradigm’ shift in comparison with predecessor models in England, and internationally, but this was not the first indication that leadership had become the preferred term to describe the activities of school heads, college principals, leadership teams and middle managers.

Before NCSL was conceived (DfEE, 1999), the TTA, established in 1994, had given a high priority to headteacher development. It introduced the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), for aspiring heads, in 1997, linked to National Standards for headship. These were competence-based, an approach supported by the notion that the requirements for headship can be specified and measured. The TTA’s chief executive at that time, Anthea Millett, justified this stance and also indicated her support for leadership rather than management:

The central issue we need to tackle is leadership, in particular how the qualities of leadership can be identified and fostered . . . we should make explicit all of the key characteristics of those most likely to succeed in establishing and maintaining excellence as the head teacher of a school . . . The NPQH will provide a demanding and objective assessment that will sort out those who are ready to be leaders of schools from those who only give the appearance of being ready. (Millett, 1996)

This statement has several problematic aspects but it is significant because it represents the first official commitment to leadership, rather than management. The NCSL was a major innovation but it built on this initial emphasis. A central question, though, is whether this is simply a semantic shift, or represents a more fundamental change in the conceptualization of headship. I referred to Cuban’s distinction earlier but the differences between these twin notions require further consideration. In doing so, we should remember Leithwood’s (1994) salutary comment that the differences cannot easily be observed in the day-to-day practices of principals and Hallinger’s (2003) view that ‘a leadership perspective on the role of the principal does not diminish the principal’s managerial roles’.

Leadership may be seen as having three main characteristics:

- Leadership as influence.
- Leadership and values.
- Leadership and vision.

Influence, not Authority

Most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person (or group) over
other people (or groups) to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation. (Yukl, 2002: 3)

This widely accepted summary includes several key elements:

(1) The central concept is *influence* rather than authority. Both of these are dimensions of power but the latter tends to reside in formal positions, such as that of head teacher, while the former could be exercised by anyone in the school or college. In this sense, leadership is independent of positional authority while management is linked directly to it.

(2) The process is *intentional*. The person seeking to exercise influence is doing so in order to achieve certain purposes.

(3) Influence may be exercised by *groups* as well as individuals. This notion provides support for constructs such as senior leadership teams as well as underpinning the notion of distributed leadership.

This aspect of leadership portrays it as a fluid process, potentially emanating from any part of the school, independent of formal management positions and capable of residing with any member of the organization, including associate staff and students. This makes it appear attractive but tells us little about the nature and purposes of leaders' actions.

**Values**

The notion of ‘influence’ is neutral in that it does not explain or recommend what goals or actions should be pursued. However, leadership is increasingly linked with values. Leaders are expected to ground their actions in clear personal and professional values. This construct underpins the contemporary interest in moral leadership (Leithwood et al., 1999: 10).

The distinguished Canadian writer Thomas Greenfield made an important distinction between values and rationality shortly after the ERA:

> Values lie beyond rationality. Rationality to be rationality must stand upon a value base. Values are asserted, chosen, imposed, or believed. They lie beyond quantification, beyond measurement . . . a technical or narrowly scientific rationality asks only what means best foster an end. It assumes that the end is unquestionable and clear and that the means to attain it rationally and efficiently are equally clear and available. (Greenfield, 1991: 208)

This powerful statement raises three significant issues:

(1) What is the nature of the relationship between values and rationality? In the contemporary policy climate, at least in England, the dominant values and policies are those of government and these are ‘imposed’ on school leaders. As Bottery (2001: 215) suggests, there is ‘a more
centralized, more directed, and more controlled educational system'. The scope for leaders to act according to their own values is circumscribed by central power. To disagree is to risk censure by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). Leaders are free to pursue their own values only if they are consistent with those of central government.

(2) If leadership is centrally about values, what is the validity of the assessment process in qualifications such as NPQH? While Millett (1996) asserts that leadership can be assessed, Greenfield argues that values are beyond measurement. Does this mean that NPQH training is partly about inculcating the ‘right’ values or that the NPQH assessment process is flawed?

(3) Is Greenfield’s comment that technical rationality is mainly about ‘means’ apposite for English schools in the 21st century? Arguably, the normative role of leaders is to implement the policies of government rather than to act out their own values. As I noted earlier, values-free policy implementation can be regarded as ‘managerial’.

Vision

Vision has been regarded as an essential component of effective leadership for almost 20 years. Beare et al. (1992) claim that outstanding leaders have a vision for their organizations. Southworth (1993: 23–4) suggests that heads are motivated to work hard ‘because their leadership is the pursuit of their individual visions’. However, Bolam et al.’s (1993) research, published at the same time, demonstrates a number of problems about the development and articulation of ‘vision’ in English and Welsh schools. Their study of 12 ‘effective’ schools shows that most heads were able to describe ‘some sort of vision’ but ‘they varied in their capacity to articulate the vision and the visions were more or less sophisticated’ (1993: 33). Moreover, the visions were rarely specific to the school. They were ‘neither surprising nor striking nor controversial. They are closely in line with what one might expect of the British system of education’ (1993: 35). I have seen little evidence to suggest that this conclusion is inappropriate 15 years later. Indeed, the government’s grip on policy may have tightened since Bolam et al.’s research.

Writing about the same time, Fullan (1992) was even more critical, suggesting that visionary leaders may damage rather than improve their schools:

The current emphasis on vision in leadership can be misleading. Vision can blind leaders in a number of ways . . . The high-powered, charismatic principal who ‘radically transforms the school’ in four or five years can . . . be blinding and misleading as a role model . . . my hypothesis would be that most such schools decline after the leader leaves . . . Principals are blinded by their own vision when they feel they must manipulate the teachers and the school culture to conform to it. (Fullan, 1992: 19)
This fear of manipulation also worries other writers, notably Allix (2000) and Chirichello (1999). A wider concern relates to whether school leaders are able to develop a specific vision for their schools, given government prescriptions about curriculum aims and content. A few head teachers may be emboldened to challenge official policy in the way described by Bottery (1998: 24); ‘from defy through subvert to ignore; on to ridicule then to wait and see to test; and in some (exceptional) cases finally to embrace’. However, most are more like Bottery’s (2007: 164) ‘Alison’, who examines every issue in relation to the school’s Ofsted report.

The National College for School Leadership

As noted earlier, the Labour government gave a high priority to education, including school leadership. This led to the opening of NCSL in November 2000 followed by an official launch by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in 2002. The College’s Director of Research comments that this high level political interest in the NCSL ‘is a symbol of the esteem in which school leaders and their schools are held by government’ (Southworth, 2004: 341).

The College’s main aim is to: ‘provide a single national focus for school leadership development, research and innovation’ (NCSL, 2001: 9).

This aim was backed by a lavish purpose-built centre and substantial recurrent funding, leading Bolam (2004: 255) to claim that the NCSL now operates ‘what is probably the most comprehensive and sophisticated national school leadership development model in the world’.

The advent of NCSL has fundamentally changed the landscape of leadership and management development in England. In its relatively short life, it has designed and developed leadership development programmes for all categories of leaders, including leadership teams. It has developed a substantial electronic platform, the ‘Virtual College’, and has become the major sponsor of school leadership research in England.

Rationale

Before NCSL, leadership and management programmes were offered by a range of providers, including universities, professional associations and LEAs. Interest in these programmes was heightened by the ERA, because of the substantial management responsibilities devolved to school governing bodies and principals. Significantly, however, there was no mandatory requirement for school leaders to have a specialist qualification in educational management and many head teachers were appointed on the basis of their professional experience alone.

The rationale for the College arises from a growing belief in the importance of leadership in securing improved school and pupil outcomes:
The evidence on school effectiveness and improvement during the last 15 years has consistently shown the pivotal role of effective leadership in securing high quality provision and high standards. Effective leadership is a key to both continuous improvement and major system transformation. (NCSL, 2001: 5)

Evidence to support this widespread view is now emerging from a major study of the impact of school leadership (Leithwood et al., 2006).

**Range and Scale**

The College aims to provide for school leadership at all levels. This goal is encapsulated in its Leadership Development Framework (NCSL, 2001), which comprises five stages:

1. Emergent leadership; aimed at middle managers.
2. Established leadership, for career deputy and assistant heads.
3. Entry into headship; including the NPQH and the Headship Induction Programme (HIP) for new headteachers.
4. Advanced leadership, for experienced heads.
5. Consultant leadership, for heads becoming involved in leading NCSL programmes.

The College has extended its range to include strategic programmes and provision for school leadership teams. This is an impressive suite of programmes, providing for leaders at all career stages.

**Innovation**

The NCSL is innovative in several ways. Among the most important are:

- Its *national* focus. Its influence goes well beyond that of any other provider.
- Its *extensive use of current and recent school principals* to lead College programmes. The approach is generally facilitative rather than didactic, drawing heavily on participants' experience.
- Its use of *innovative learning approaches*. NCSL programmes include a wide range of activities thought to represent 'best practice'. The emphasis is on process rather than content and strategies include mentoring, coaching, school visits, action learning and e-learning. (Bush, 2006: 510)

**Criticisms of NCSL**

Although the College is widely perceived to have been a great success (e.g. Levine, 2005), some reservations have been expressed about the scale and nature of its activities:
The Government's decision to provide 'a single national focus' for school leadership development and research has given NCSL an unhealthy domination of leadership development activities and an absolute monopoly in the provision of the statutory NPQH. Its power has been exercised wisely but the lack of pluralism inevitably carries risks (Bush, 2006).

NPQH is unambitious in that it requires limited engagement with theory and research and is focused primarily on applicants' perceived ability to do the job. Recent research with NPQH graduates shows that many regard it as 'basic' (Bush et al., 2007a). However, there is no doubt that NCSL has reached and engaged many more leaders than the universities.

Giving so much prominence to a single national body carries substantial risks. If the College loses political support, much of the architecture of leadership development could be swept away. As Bolam (2004: 263) points out, 'nothing can, or should, be taken for granted'.

The NCSL operates in accordance with a remit letter from the Secretary of State for Education, leading Thrupp (2005: 18) to argue that NCSL can be seen as 'the delivery arm of the DfES', rather than being an independent voice for school leaders.

The creation, and lavish funding, of the NCSL has weakened the university sector. Some have closed, or scaled down, their educational leadership centres while most are experiencing difficulties in recruiting candidates to their masters' and doctoral programmes in competition with subsidised College programmes. The academic field of educational administration and leadership remains important for its research but its long-term future is uncertain. (Bush, 2006)

A Qualified Success

The NCSL is the latest and most significant stage in what has been a dramatic increase in the perceived significance of educational leadership and management since the ERA, beyond the wildest dreams of academics and practitioners in 1988. It is an outstanding example of policy innovation and has a momentous impact on the landscape of school leadership in England. In creating a suite of development programmes, it has increased recognition that leadership goes well beyond headship (Southworth, 2004: 341). It has also succeeded in involving many thousands of leaders in its various activities, a quantum leap in the scale of leadership development. More specifically, it has implemented the government's decision that it should become a requirement for new head teachers. Beyond programme development, it has also pioneered an impressive electronic platform and encouraged a significant increase in school leadership research.

Despite these achievements, there are certain reservations about NCSL programmes and activities. The limited expectations of participants lead to a
feeling that the impressive scale is at the expense of quality. Instead of the sustained engagement with research and literature, expected in the best university courses, the College’s expectations of participants are modest. While requiring all heads to be qualified is a step forward, the NPQH makes only limited intellectual demands and it is rare for any candidate to ‘fail’. Brundrett’s (2000: 366) caution about ‘reductionist conceptions of leadership’ being inappropriate for increasingly complex school environments suggests a need to move beyond NCSL’s current emphasis on scale. The College has made an impressive start but expectations of school leaders need to be raised if its initial success is to be sustained (Bush, 2006).

In evaluating NCSL, it is important to remember that there are many other successful models of leadership development. In North America, aspiring principals are required to obtain masters’ degrees in educational administration. Although these have been criticized (e.g. Young and Petersen, 2002), they certainly require a higher intellectual level than the NPQH. Singapore also has a national leadership model but it has chosen to operate it through a university (Bush and Chew, 1999). The South African government is piloting a new national qualification but this is also being run in partnership with universities (Bush et al., 2007b). The NCSL is untypical in eschewing a formal role for universities in its leadership development programmes and it remains to be seen whether this produces more effective leadership than the academic models.

**Leaders and Leadership**

The advent of NCSL has begun to shift the previous perception that leadership was primarily about headship. The Leadership Development Framework, and the introduction of programmes for leadership teams, has helped to broaden the notion of leadership. However, most of its provision remains focused on individuals and may be regarded as leader development rather than leadership development. While preparing middle and senior leaders is important, it seems evident that the wider issue of leadership development for school improvement needs more attention. Team programmes provide for groups of staff and the evaluations (e.g. Bush et al., 2005) suggest that, where schools provide fertile learning environments, gains can be powerful. Brundrett’s (2006) research also shows that multiple participation in programmes provide extra school-wide benefits.

Hartley and Hinksman (2003) say that leadership development requires a focus on structure and systems as well as people and social relations. Tusting and Barton (2006) argue that there is a movement away from the individual towards the emergent and collective as well as providing greater recognition of the significance of the context for leadership learning. Given the popularity of interactive learning, such as networking, a stronger focus on school-wide leadership development appears to be timely. One way in which this might be achieved is through distributed leadership.
Harris (2004: 13, 14) notes that ‘distributed leadership is currently in vogue’ and adds that it is a form of collective leadership, ‘in contrast to the traditional notions of leadership premised upon an individual managing hierarchical systems and structures’.Muijs and Harris (2007: 112), however, add that ‘a singular view of headship continues to dominate, equating leadership with headship’. Their work, and that of Woods et al. (2004: 439), is beginning to shift this perception and distributed leadership has ‘increasing currency’. Harris (2004: 21) says that this mode of leadership stresses people and networks rather than ‘lone chiefs’.

Woods et al. (2004: 442) claim that distributed leadership has three distinctive elements:

- It is an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals.
- It has open boundaries with no limits on who should be brought into leadership.
- Leadership depends more on expertise and this is ‘distributed across the many not the few’.

Distributed leadership clearly has the potential to impact on schools but it is unlikely to develop strongly unless the headteacher is involved ‘in fostering and generating’ it (Harris, 2004: 16). This echoes Hoyle's (1986) pre-ERA argument about collegiality; if it depends on the whims of formal leaders, its potential is unlikely to be realized.

Distributed leadership represents another step along the continuum from management to leadership. As I noted earlier, management is associated with positional authority while leadership may be exercised by those without formal management roles. Much more research is required to establish whether and how it differs from previous models but it is clear that ‘distribution’ constitutes a loosening of the formal structure.

**Conclusion**

During the past 20 years, there have been many portentous changes, both within and beyond education. One of these is the astonishing impact of information and communications technology (ICT). Another, stimulated by ICT, is globalization. At the beginning of this paper, I referred to Les Bell’s point about ‘policy borrowing’ in the field of educational management, as it was called then. This trend has accelerated since 1988. Two aspects are particularly relevant to the theme of this paper.

**Decentralization**

The notion of partially decentralizing responsibility for education, to lower levels in the hierarchy, or direct to schools and colleges, is now widely
accepted. Caldwell (2002: 34) says that this is ‘a feature of school reform in virtually every nation that is seeking to improve the quality of learning’ He (2002: 34) adds that its ‘adoption appears irreversible’. However, it takes many different forms. In Tanzania, for example, it is devolved administration motivated primarily by an intention to pass on the costs of schools to local communities (Therkildsen, 2000). In almost all cases, however, it means that the leadership and management role has been enhanced. School heads and principals, and their senior teams, have greater scope for action coupled with stronger accountability pressures. As Glatter (2002) points out, increased autonomy is often traded for increased accountability. The scope for self-management is mainly about implementation of government policy. School leaders and managers are able to choose how to carry out a new policy but not whether to do so.

**Leadership, not Management**

The focus on leadership rather than management, signalled most strongly by the opening of NCSL, has attracted attention in other parts of the World. In South Africa, for example, the first specialist leadership centre is called the Matthew Goniwe School of *Leadership* and Governance. Similarly, the new national qualification for principals is called the ‘Advanced Certificate in Education: School *Leadership*. There is evidence that many South African schools are dysfunctional (e.g. Bush et al., 2007b), suggesting that a focus on management, as defined by Cuban (1988), would be more appropriate.

The normative preference for leadership is partly a semantic change but it also signals a refocusing on the professional aspects of the leader's role. Before the ERA, Hughes (1976) distinguished between the ‘chief executive' and ‘leading professional' roles of the head teacher. The ERA encouraged a sharp shift in the balance between these two dimensions with heads giving their main attention to financial and human resource management, as they came to grips with the demands of site-based management. Towards the end of the 1990s, informed by a shift in the official ‘language' of school organization, heads began to refocus on their professional role, the leadership of learning. The NCSL includes ‘instructional leadership' as one of its ten propositions and its main programmes all include this as a major theme. The balance has shifted back to the head's ‘leading professional' role. While heads both lead and manage their schools, leadership is firmly established as the dominant concept in the 21st century.

Leadership and management are now of global significance as governments recognize the importance of education, so that they can compete effectively in an international economy, and see effective leadership as the key to school improvement. In many parts of the world, school leaders are being given enhanced status, and in some cases specific training, in recognition of their importance. These are appropriate developments but they, and we, should
never lose sight of the purpose of schooling; promoting pupil learning and well-being. Hallinger and Heck's (1997) widely accepted view is that school leadership effects account for about three to five percent of the variation in student achievement across schools. A more significant variable is classroom practice and it is vital that the contemporary focus on leadership does not distract from the need to support good teachers and underpin effective learning. The combination of limited size, and indirect impact, also makes it difficult to detect leadership effects. While by no means negligible, such a small percentage effect raises questions about whether the rhetoric of school leadership (‘no longer in doubt’, ‘pivotal role’, ‘powerful influence’) is really justified (Bush, in press).

The best way to ensure the efficacy of leadership is to ensure that it is focused on classroom learning rather than being obsessed by budgets and HR practice.

References


**Biographical note**

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