

International Summer School on School Leadership

2007

Peter Gronn

Professor of Public Service
Educational Leadership &
Management
Glasgow University

Leading—The work of many hands



UNIVERSITY
of
GLASGOW

Professor Peter Gronn
Department of Educational Studies
Faculty of Education
30 July 2007



Presentation Outline

1. What does “distributed leadership” mean?
2. Why is there recent interest in distributed leadership?
3. What does research have to say about distributed leadership?
4. Problems and possibilities with distributed leadership.

For discussion....

1. Is there any leadership in your organisation? What evidence would you point to?
2. What form does that leadership take? That is... is it monopolised by one person or is it shared among a number? For you, therefore, does it make sense to talk about a leader or a number of organisational leaders?
3. Who in your organisation decides who the leader(s) is(are) and who bestows the status of “leader”? How, in short, does one get to be a leader in your organisation?
4. Are any of your organisation job titles “leader of...”? Why? Why not?

The meaning of distributed leadership

1. DL as large numbers or 1+ leaders . This sense denotes a “critical mass” or overall “density” of leaders.
2. DL as small numbers: two, three or four person units in which synergies and tacit understandings operate.



The recent interest in distributed leadership

Evidence of Scottish interest in distributed leadership: e.g., SfH, HMIE, GCC.

Two main reasons for interest in distributed leadership:

- Dependence on expanding knowledge
- Increased complexity associated with role performance



Research into distributed leadership

Six studies ...

MacBeath (2005)

Spillane *et al.* (2007)

Gronn (1999)

Gronn & Hamilton (2004)

Leithwood *et al.* (2007)

Timperley (2005)

MacBeath (2005)

Context: 11 English schools – 4 Secondary, 2 Middle, 3 Primary & 2 Junior/Infant.

Purpose: To explore what DL means in the daily life of schools, to whom DL applies, sources of initiative for DL, processes for its occurrence in different contexts.

Methods: Interviews with, and observations of, 11 principals. 302 teacher questionnaires – 54 items on perceptions of, and importance attached to, aspects of both school culture, and leadership/management.

Some foci of distributed leadership researchers

- Activities
- Artifacts (or tools)
- Routines
- Networks
- Processes (i.e., the dynamics of “workflow”)
- Tasks (especially joint work through “shared cognition”)

Spillane *et al.* (2006)

Context: Data from a longitudinal evaluation of a leadership development program in a US urban school district.

Purpose: To ascertain who leads curriculum and instruction activities, and administration-related activities in 42 schools.

Methods: Self-report data from 42 principals using experience sampling method (ESM) logs—each principal “beeped” 15x per day for 6 days—and day-long observations of 5 principals.

Gronn (1999)

Context: Australian boys' boarding school (1950s).

Purpose: To document the establishment of a branch “adventure”-style campus, in an isolated mountain setting about 200 miles from the main campus.

Methods: Combination of informant interviewing, documentary and archival analyses.



Leadership couples

Four possible pre-conditions (Gronn, 1999):

1. Role rehearsal
2. Shared values, outlooks
3. Need for space
4. Blend temperamentally



Gronn & Hamilton (2004)

Context: Australian Catholic religious order girls-only secondary school.

Purpose: To investigate the dynamics of the relationship between two co-principals (one female, one male) occupying a shared role space.

Methods: A combination of observations, documentary analysis, and solo and group interviews (with principals, teachers, parents and students).

Leithwood *et al.* (2007)

Context: 2-stage study of 8 Canadian schools – 4 Prim & 4 Sec, with principals of 2+ years tenure, committed to DL and displaying evidence of improved student achievement.

Purpose (Stage 1): To ascertain different patterns of DL—Gronn’s “holistic” and Spillane’s “person-plus” types—the sources of different leadership functions and the persons who perform these, factors influencing the development of DL . (Stage 2 will report effects on student learning.)

Methods: 225 teacher questionnaires, 67 interviews with district staff, teachers, school administrators, non-school administrator leaders.

Timperley (2005)

Context: 7 New Zealand primary schools (involved in a school improvement initiative).

Purpose: To investigate (through meeting observation) the impact of leadership practices and processes in literacy teams in primary schools.

Methods: Three years of observations, interviews (with principals, literacy leaders and 21 Grade 1 teachers) and analyses of student achievement data.

The future of distributed leadership

1. Leadership or something else?
2. Co-ordination?
3. Self-leadership or leadership of leading?
4. Hybridity?





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