A socio-historical analysis of the development of educational leadership in Finland

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The aim of this paper is...

... to provide an interpretation of how Finnish educational leadership policy have developed during the past four decades (1972-2012)

How?

• By introducing a conceptual analytical model for educational leadership policy changes in Finland during the years 1972-2012.
The paper and the presentation is based on:


which is Chapter 3 in the forthcoming book:

Positions and changes in Finnish educational leadership policy

The model

- conceives of educational leadership and administration as a cultural-historical phenomenon – which is accordingly analysed in relation to the cultural-historical context
- is built on the understanding of education as an intentional and experiential phenomenon
→ explicated through two simple but crucial dimensions:
   a) planning
   b) evaluation of education
Within this system four different main positions are identified.
Positions and changes in Finnish educational leadership policy 1972-2012

Curriculum and governance: centralised

1. Management by objectives and rules

2. Professionalisation and academisation of leadership and teaching

3. Deprofessionalisation: outcomes-based and effective schools

4. Reprofessionalisation: research-based school development and development-oriented research

Evaluation and assessment: local responsibility

Curriculum and steering: decentralised
Management by objectives and rules

- Welfare state – the state and municipalities were maintainers of education
- Implementation of the Finnish comprehensive school system in 1972
- Schools were directed by laws, curricula and inspections
- Planning was conducted centrally, curriculum had been created nationally: low degree of freedom on the local level
- Responsibility for evaluation and assessment: local
moving towards Position 2:

- curricular work was being decentralized, first to municipal level, later to schools
- in 1974 the faculties of education were established, and all teacher education was from now on located at university. In 1979 also primary school teacher education (grades 1-6, age 7-12) expanded to master’s level (300 ects).
- shift from a traditional administration-oriented way of governing schools to a qualification-oriented and decentralized way – from educational management to educational leadership
- from 1978, when reforming principals’ profession, all schools were to be led by principals, although principals in small schools were also teaching
- 1983 new law on principals job: Detailed job description
Position 2 (1980’s-)

Professionalisation and academisation of leadership and teaching

- Two new masters’ programmes in education had been established in 1979 – a teacher- and an leadership-oriented one

- Alongside with the increased confidence and trust in teachers’ and principals’ professional capabilities, the state diminished its control over schools

- Curricular work and evaluation was more than before done on the local level, in schools and municipalities

- The welfare state policy changed into that of a market state after elections in 1991
moving towards Position 3:

- Growing emphasis on excellence, efficiency, productivity, competition, internationalisation, increased individual freedom and responsibility

- The relation between the state, the market and education changed – from state as provider of services to state as buyer of services
Position 3 (mid 90s-2008) (De)professionalisation: outcomes-based and effective schools

- Decentralisation and deregulation of the educational sector (as well as other sectors of the society)

- The new curriculum of 1994: school based curricula and low degree of control over schools → gave huge freedom to teachers and strengthened the role of the principals

- → centrally, even transnationally, created techniques for quality assessment and evaluation

- Evaluation “prior to” planning, teaching for testing, evidence-based management

- “Accountability-driven managerialisation” of educational leadership

- BUT all this to a limited extent: note that neo-liberal policy only mildly affected Finnish basic education! (to a higher degree e.g. higher education)

- In Finland the movement went rather directly from Position 2 to 4

- The subprime crash in 2008: growing mistrust in market as a self-regulative actor
- Can be seen as a shift from the market state “back” to the welfare state – but of course to a new kind of welfare state
- In the welfare state of Position 1 education was managed by “hard government”, but in the post-2008 welfare state of Position 4 educational leadership can rather be referred to as strategic, policy- and development-oriented
- Reprofessionalisation and recentralisation of educational leadership – growing state focus on drop-out
Position 4 (2008 →)

Reprofessionalisation: research-, policy- and evidence-based school development and development-oriented research

- Planning/curriculum again central, as well as evaluation and assessment (central and transnational)

- The education sector more policy governed top-down and bottom-up result oriented

- The professional development of teachers and principals combined with research-based and data-informed school development

- New forms of collaboration between schools, municipalities, national and regional institutions and universities

- New meeting arenas, new practices – how to make use of existing degrees of freedom in a constructive way?
Research paradigms

Positions and changes in Finnish educational leadership policy 1972-2012

Curriculum and government: centralised

- **Positivist**
  1. Management by objectives and rules

- **Interpretative and ideographic**
  2. Professionalisation and academisation of leadership and teaching

- **Interventional**
  4. Reprofessionalisation: research-based school development and development-oriented research

- **Quantitative accountability**
  3. Deprofessionalisation: outcomes-based and effective schools focusing on delivery of contents

Curriculum and steering: decentralised

Evaluation and assessment: local responsibility
Thank you!