

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: THE AUDIENCE CREATES THE TEXT

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ABSTRACT

Alternative conceptions of educational leadership that challenge the performativity culture do not appear substantively to alter the trajectory of practitioner's everyday choices. This article uses as data the responses from three different audiences to a presentation on such alternative conceptions. The three groups were academics attending an educational leadership conference, circuit managers as part of a post-project workshop, and a group of aspirant school rectors in a training diploma programme. The first two groups were South African and the third a Mauritian audience. The audience responses show how they subverted, re-interpreted and jettisoned the message of the presentation. Three vignettes constitute the analysis of the audiences' foregrounding of the lived complexities of making alternative leadership choices. The article suggests we need to be aware of how and why practitioners will choose or not to become alternative proponents of the dominant discourses around 'educational quality'.

Keywords: performativity, educational leadership, servant leadership, self-study research, narrative methodology

INTRODUCTION

This article does not intend to advocate alternative conceptions of educational leadership that expands beyond a simple adherence to meeting the requirements of a performativity culture. The respected theorists of invitational leadership (Muijs and Harris 2007; Novah 2009), servant leadership (Russell and Stone 2002; Frick and Harris 2003) or distributed leadership (Davies 2009; Bush, Bell and Middlewood 2010) have already made significant strides to shift the discourse about being an educational leader. This article will explore how alternative discourses about educational leadership are comparatively heard and re-interpreted within the context of three different audiences. It questions the feasibility of alternative discourses within the dominant hegemony of educational leadership.

I was privileged to address three different audiences to deliver my interpretation of what leadership means to me. I felt fraudulent in some respects since I do not have any formal disciplinary training in the field of educational management and leadership. I chose to focus on how the agenda of leadership is understood, re-interpreted and practised among my peers above, below and alongside me. I reflected on the way

leaders select their mission, the values and their goals. What guides their selections? From where do values of moral or ethical considerations emanate, if they choose such? I have been an educational manager/leader for about the past twenty years and this was perhaps an opportunity to reflect on my personal conceptions of leadership. My intention is to explore, despite the obvious (to me) merits of alternative conceptions of educational leadership being available, how and why many of the audiences choose to re-interpret its message as an 'exotic other', sitting on the fringes of the 'real discourse' of what is the role of an educational manager or leader.

The conceptual paper I presented to these audiences draws on the studies of the inspirational leadership offered by persons such as Nelson Mandela (Kalungu-Banda 2006). In recent times political analysts have increasingly been critical of the shifts away from the goals of social justice, freedom and democracy present in the general public discourse in South Africa (Tutu 2012; Chikane 2012). We are becoming increasingly like our materialist colonial cousins who prefer conceptions of self-advancement over conceptions of service to humanity. I drew on examples of leadership as demonstrated by theorists who shift the discourse towards schools being spaces where imagination, creativity and innovation are celebrated (Robinson 2011), and where conceptions of leadership are executed not only outside, but inside the classroom (Forde 2010). I concluded the paper with examples of the student formations that have inspired me as a dean of a Faculty of Education involved in the development of prospective teachers. I presented the paper to three audiences within approximately a period of one month (July-August 2012). The first audience was of academics who research the conceptions and practices of educational leadership in the context of its association's annual international conference. The second was a group of largely circuit managers in a professional training project workshop. The group was reporting back to the Department of Education, their foreign sponsors and the university higher education designers of the curriculum of their project of capacity building. The first was in the province of KwaZulu-Natal and the second in Limpopo province in South Africa. The third audience was a group of senior teachers who were engaged in a Teachers Diploma in Education Leadership, which trained future school rectors (principals) in the context of Mauritius. The context of both national (South African) and international (Mauritian) contexts has comparative value examining the sustainability of alternative conceptions of educational leadership.

The data for this article consisted of my changing PowerPoint slides, the presenter's notes and my observation notes on the programme during the course of the three occasions. After the delivery of my presentation I wrote reflective notes on the responses to my presentation. Participants also offered oral and/or written feedback on their experiences of the presentation of the paper and the audience's reactions. Drawing on the tradition of narrative inquiry (Johnson and Golombeck 2002; Clandinin 2007; Dhunpath and Samuel 2009), I elaborated these reflective notes into narrative accounts in the form of three vignettes reflecting the subtleties of the engagement with the presentation. The analysis

of these narratives (Reismann 1993; Mischler 1995; Polkinghorne 1995; Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Gee 2011) constitutes how the agenda of servant leadership, invitational leadership or distributed leadership was interpreted by the audiences. This methodology draws on self-study inquiry that points to the self as a source of epistemological development (Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell and Moletsane 2009). Self-study research recognises the powerful positionality that the researcher occupies in social settings and the reflexive role of the researcher himself/herself is therefore regarded as a productive source of data and theorising. Three narratives constitute the data of this narrative self-inquiry. The analysis of the narratives (Polkinghorne 1995; Gee 2011) constitutes a form of discourse analysis reading at close level of the relationship between the text (the delivered oral paper) and the context (the audiences listening to the text).

THE NARRATIVES: DATA FINDINGS

Vignette 1: Be the change: Voices in an academic conference

The challenges facing education leaders are overwhelming. KwaZulu-Natal is the largest of the provinces in the country, where 9 of the 12 districts are rural. Whilst the country spends about 25% of its national budget on education, most of this resource (75%) is going to pay the personnel salary bill. We would need R75 billion alone simply to address baseline physical resource provisioning: classrooms, laboratories, libraries, toilets, running water and school security. Surely the Education Department should not be dealing with the infrastructure issues of building schools: this is the mandate of the Public Works Departments! I, as a senior head of department official of education should be concentrating on building the capacity of the teachers to enact the quality of the curriculum change for the benefit of the learners.

The speaker was strident in his challenge to the Education Management Association of South Africa conference (July 2012). “How can academia help to generate the development of a leadership in education which will take bold decisions? Please come and let us policy makers know.”

The problem is about definition: we have to understand the role of a manager, the role of a leader,” argued a strong proponent of the discipline of study of educational management and leadership.

We should critique the kind of paper-chasing qualifications (“diploma disease”) that most “want-to-be” school managers embark on. Do these qualifications add any value except to promote the expectation that being certified is adequate to being a good leader? We should think of alternative means of collaborative partnerships between industry, the department of education, schools, communities, teachers and learners –yes, and the district officers – who will assist in joined-up thinking around active research projects to enhance the quality of schooling.

The academic yielded that there were many different kinds of qualifications and it was perhaps premature to tar brush all higher education institutions as being involved in a quick-fix or an entrepreneurial agenda in aligning themselves to departmentally sponsored leadership development programmes targeting existing and prospective leaders.

Do we have enough space for many more models of educational leadership? The academic conference context that explored the phenomenon of educational leadership was rich and varied. I choose that my paper ('Leadership for, in and through education') will focus on the issue of the moral responsibility towards development of the quality of education, addressing aspects of the schooling system as a laboratory for producing conceptions of social justice, democracy and equity. How teachers conduct themselves within their classrooms and school settings produces conceptions of being educated, or to being active responsible citizens. Education is a responsibility towards greater realisation of one's capabilities, one's inner growth and offering of potential to the development of the society. Educational leadership cannot, I argued, be simply about careerism. The role models of careerism are rampant in those who seem to have betrayed the struggle. Materialism is replacing ethical, moral and social values.

This has implications for whom we chose as our role models. Most inspirational leaders offer direction to their followers. Leadership is about how one relates to others. Leadership is about being an integrated being. Leadership is about engaging in small acts of generosity and respect for one's fellow human beings. It is not about making large heroic actions that draw attention to one's self. Our research methodologies must embrace this complexity showing how leadership is not about power and control over others; it is about collaboration and support of those with whom we meet.

The listening audience responded that they did not agree with my challenge that the discipline of educational management had reached its expiry date. They argued that the discipline could engender an alternative worldview and outcome: its many theories themselves were demonstrative of this. They argued that we should not be dismissive of the career aspirations of leaders since this was an incentive for their choice to become leaders. They agreed with the need to pursue alternative conceptions of leadership. But how? Is it a conscious choice to select theoretical models of leadership? We need to be careful that we do not become simply academics who parade theories of Antonio Gramsci or Paulo Freire, or other critical theorists.

After all, it was an academic conference with all its attendant controversies, upsets and provocations. But what are the policy and practice implications?

Vignette 2: Beyond blame: Circuit managers exercise their muscles

You have got to speak to our Circuit Managers Improvement Programme (CIP). You know the entire saga about the lack of delivery of textbooks in the Limpopo province.

You should speak to us about the moral and ethical characteristics of being an educational manager. These circuit managers are individuals who have been on a departmentally-directed programme of capacity-building supported by Irish Aid.

This invitation to address a group of department officers was appealing. The group represented the interface between the intentions of the policymakers in the Department and the ‘chalk-face’ of the schools and teachers in the classrooms. Where do these officers’ accountabilities lie: upwards to their bosses, horizontally among their peers, or downwards to the communities in which they work?

The measures of success of a Department circuit seemed already clearly circumscribed: increase the pass rates at the school exit level. These monitoring mechanisms have also filtered into the primary schooling system. The circuit managers seemed to have been framed as the scapegoat for under-development or non-performance. But do they have sufficient clout to exercise influence over the system? Are the problems beyond their control? The CIP was specifically aimed at developing competences to understand the situated contextual problems, to engage in systematic analysis, inquiry and monitoring. The six modules that they had engaged were proudly displayed on the podium on the stage of the workshop as follows: ‘Education transformation in South Africa’; ‘Data-driven circuits and districts’; ‘The roles of districts and circuits’; ‘Circuit office administration’; ‘Performance management and development systems’; and ‘Interpersonal skills, mentoring & coaching’. Present in the conference were invited members of the Departmental officials who sanctioned the roll-out of the targeted three-year programme, the funding agency representatives and the appointed service providers of non-governmental agencies who had worked collaboratively with the Department of Education (DoE) and the university to deliver the programme modules. Representatives of each of the circuits were proudly present to demonstrate through their reflections the benefits of the programme. School principals from primary and secondary schools involved in the development action projects also rendered their positive conceptions of this collaborative venture. The circuit managers summarised their innovative strategies. I contemplated this assemblage of voices and vanities as I took the platform for my address.

How will these departmental officers, school principals and about-to-be-graduated/trained circuit managers respond to my critique that the concept of management was being sidelined by a misguided sense of opportunistic, obsequious careerism? I had re-titled my presentation delivered at the academic conference ‘Amandla gawethu: Amandla gawami’ to reflect Frank Chikane’s (2012) lamentations of the hijacking of the struggle against apartheid. In his speech tracing the legacy of Nelson Mandela he suggested that we are replacing the struggle slogan ‘power to the people’ with a conception of self-absorbed power: ‘the power is mine’. The argument intended to suggest that circuit managers need to be absolutely focused on our role as brokers of quality education. It was not simply about feeding into the system false conceptions of achievement, such as manipulating the scores that our circuits offer as semblances of progress. We need to be

truthful about whether equity, democracy and social justice were being achieved for all of the learners. I again was making a case for a servant leadership, not in a capitulation to the ‘master’. I was prepared for a barrage of questions. My presentation did not go very well, I thought: the relatively silent audience throughout my presentation spoke volumes.

The first question was fired from a DoE officer: what is the difference between ‘leadership for service’ and ‘leadership for achievement’? Embedded in this critical question is the tension that our South African system is grossly under-performing; our learners are not acquiring the desired level of competences and that we should be forcefully tackling under-performance. I responded that we often may become seduced by data that suggest improvements in the system, for example the improvement in many individual school exit-leaving results. It is easy to feign ‘improvement’ or ‘achievement’. We know how to look good. But in doing so we are demonstrating hidden messages to teachers, learners and parents that it is okay to beat the system, it is okay to cheat, it is okay to manipulate the powers that be. I also acknowledged that I am increasingly concerned about those competent teachers who are seen as the victims by their own peers who attempt to pull them down if they attempt to rise above the mediocre norms. Acceptance of mediocrity is regarded as a false sense of egalitarianism. This we know as the ‘tall poppy syndrome’ where those excellent shining stars are cut down to size.

The second question I interpreted as an attack on the system of the higher education institutions (HEIs) of teacher education. Or was it another attempt to raise the debates that ‘former Colleges of Education were producing far better pragmatic and practical teachers who knew how to enact the school syllabus and were good in the classroom’? The question was ‘so what are you doing in the higher education system to produce good leadership?’ This reminded me of the repeated critique that higher education institutions are ivory-towered, disconnected from the real world of schooling. My response suggested that it was unnecessary to resort to a ‘blame culture’ since there was enough for all of us to learn from one another. The universities were not, as presumed, simply producing newly qualified graduates. They were also involved in in-service programmes, upgrading and reskilling the work force, engaged in curriculum research and policy development. We all need to embrace the shared responsibility of supporting the continuing professional development of teachers when they enter schooling after graduation. Our role as HEIs is to be autonomous knowledge producers, not just technicians of the State. How schools and HEIs dialogue with one another is important to establish a continuity of purpose and direction.

The school principals and district/circuit teams then proceeded to point to the many lessons they had learnt in completing the CIP intervention. Yes, this was a celebration, but I kept asking myself the question whether the presence of the close watchful eyes of the project co-ordinators, the dedicated service providers, the higher education institution and the departmental officials tasked with overseeing the project had all contributed to the nature of the discourse. Were this project’s outcomes sustainable beyond the shelf-

life of the project? How will the officers and leaders behave in the absence of the gaze of the evaluators of the project, the assessors of the assignments for the qualifications? One circuit team represented a cogent analysis of their definition of leadership: 'leadership is what happens when no-one is looking'.

I was impressed with the different presenters' displays of their new interest in a data-driven, evidence-driven analysis of the improvement in their schools. Many still grappled with the technological apparatus of doing a PowerPoint presentation, which I presumed was a requirement of the programme. 'I was born before technology', complained one presenter, but he persisted and conveyed a powerful message.

A repeated refrain was about the toothless circuit manager who was increasingly being laden with new responsibilities to activate change in his/her zone of jurisdiction. It was simply asking too much: too many expectations, too many demands; too expensive beyond what the DoE or the project could sustain; despite the expressed conception of devolution of authority to the district. The officers were repeatedly experiencing the directives as being driven from above. 'We lack the financial muscle to really do what we know we could do,' concluded one team. There were hints of a kind of mutiny by one speaker from the floor who received thunderous applause from the about 150-member audience. He complained that much was expected, but little support was offered financially to circuit managers to exercise their responsibility. Travelling costs alone to access the schools were prohibitive, he suggested in a veiled request for increased financial input. The ruling from the chair was most informative: she reminded the circuit managers that they were 'public servants' and that they did not have the latitude for this mobilising action against the department, least of all within an occasion such as this.

My presentation on moral accountabilities had long faded into the background.

Vignette 3: Leaders and followers

I am tired of academics from abroad telling us what to do in the Mauritian context. We simply cannot do what they expect us to. You know the real world of Mauritius is very different from that of the outside world. Here we have to abide by the wishes of our government. We have to ensure that we follow what the policy expects us to do, even if we don't agree with what the government wants us to do. We have to follow them.

This was the lonely voice who dared to offer a critique of my presentation on servant leadership and a morally guided conception of the education system. She was the only practising secondary school rector in the group of about 50 aspirant school managers. Did her power silence the others? With only about 120 primary and 250 secondary schools in the country, being a school rector was indeed a prestigious job in an island in a population of approximately 1.2 million.

I waited for another response. Silence. Had the last speaker crossed the floor of the politeness hospitality culture afforded to visitors?

‘Do you agree with this point of view?’ I challenged. I waited.

‘You know, we do believe what you are saying is right. We know that the demands being made on the children in the schooling system are too much, but ...’

‘Mauritius wants to be a world leader. We are already producing good results when compared internationally. So we should try and maintain this.’ I read this to mean that Mauritians were better off than some other developing world countries. Was this perhaps a critique of the under-performance of South Africa in international comparability studies?

‘But is everyone achieving the quality of education achievements that you claim? Or is only a small minority of people: of a particular race, or a particular class, or from particular geographic areas achieving the high output of quality?’ I seemed to have provoked a response as there was a stir in the classroom.

The audience was Teachers Diploma in Educational Leadership (TDEL) students in a teacher upgrading programme. The presentation I had given was a guest lecture on conceptions of education leadership. I was asking them what lessons can be learnt from my examples. The title chosen by the course leader was ‘Using qualitative research methodologies in educational leadership’.

Yes we know that it is mostly the rich who can afford to give their children good education. They are really succeeding in education here in Mauritius. But what can we do? That is what the government wants us to do.

You know that this examination for primary schools is causing so many problems amongst parents here in Mauritius. Parents are stressed out because if their children don’t get 4 A’s in the examinations they will not be able to access the good secondary schools. So the parents are really pushing the children. It is not really right. But we want to see children get ahead. We want our children to succeed. Otherwise their life is over.

Can we challenge these conceptions of what the government wants? Do we want different ideas about what it means to be an educational leader in Mauritius?

It seemed that my question was rhetorical.

Yes, we would like to have different understandings about what it is to be a leader, but that is not what is valued by our authorities. So we must be what they want us to be.

Tell me, ma’am, are there examples of people whom you consider to be inspirational in your life: an aunt, an uncle, a neighbour?

I asked to provoke some dialogue about whether the conception of servant leadership or distributive leadership was indeed a foreign concept.

The respondent then explained that she knew exactly the persons who had inspired her in her life. They were indeed humble, focused on respect, dignity and were morally upright.

This was the spark that opened up further input. Yes, the concept of service as leaders was not really foreign, but it is not a valued quality of the public school system

in Mauritius. Yes, individuals themselves respected peers in leadership positions who demonstrated these admirable qualities. Yes, it was true that many Mauritian people in authority like to look down on those not in positions of power. We need to develop more respect for everyone. Yes, we can look more closely at how we relate to our peers when we organise and collaborate. Yes, we know that leadership is not about showing how much power you have. Yes, we can share power. But if we did this, we would be regarded as weak leader! We won't get promoted by the authorities.

The discussion seemed to rotate to the original position.

I had reached the length of my time allocation and the chair thanked me for opening up the debate. As I prepared to exit the room, the first speaker came up to me and said that she had been reading some article by a South African author, Jonathan Jansen, on 'Curriculum reconstruction in post-colonial Africa: A review of the literature'. I heard later that she in fact was a part-time lecturer at the Mauritius Institute of Education, lecturing on the Teacher Diploma in Educational Leadership programme. Moreover, she was the rector of one of Mauritius 'star schools'. She informed me that the group had opened the course by watching the film *Invictus* about the role Nelson Mandela played in national reconciliation through the way in which he chose to relate to the rugby sporting culture. South Africa emerged as the winners of the Rugby World Cup. How inspirational leaders can be!

Should the change come from above?

READING THE VIGNETTES: DATA ANALYSIS

Titles

It is noteworthy that the title of my presentation shifted in relation to the target audience. An original PowerPoint slide presentation and presenter's notes constituted the first draft outline of the structure of the paper. The intended audience was both academics and practitioners who were teachers and managers. I was keen to emphasise that I was not within the discipline of educational leadership or management, but that my years of being surrounded by the discourse as an education leader encouraged my reflections.

The first title of the paper was 'Leadership for, in and through education'. The paper was arguing that we need to examine how to prepare leaders for the education system (a training imperative), through examining what goes on inside schools (an operational practice analysis), but that through education we could be developing conceptions of leadership itself (a moral and cultural responsibility). This had the necessary ring of an academic discourse drawing on my conceptions of teacher professional development literature that sharpens our thinking about how teachers acquire a fully fledged identity as a professional. The strongly academic tone infuses this representation of a paper.

About a week later I was invited to deliver the same address at the Polokwane workshop for the development of circuit managers. The draft written paper was now constructed, but I chose to title the presentation 'Amandla Gawethu: Amandla Gawami'

followed by the original academic title. I realise now that the political overtone embedded in this title was driven by my expectation that many of the intended audience were highly charged within the climate of the political accusations confronting the provincial Department of Education at the time. Textbooks, eight months into the academic year (August) had not been delivered. Accusing fingers pointed to the sense of financial scandals association with the awarding of the tenders for delivery of the textbooks. There were suggestions that the educational leadership of the department were failing the society, the parents and the learners. I was concerned that the situation illustrated a misguided notion of what education leadership entails. My paper title hinted at restoring the quality of education systemically. The presentation was not going to lay blame on the circuit managers and I was presenting the option for them to choose to be different from the dominant outputs-driven performativity cultures. But why was I afraid of staring the elephant in the room?

The third presentation title was influenced by the purpose of the presentation within a capacity building programme. The Mauritius Institute of Education was keen to expand the repertoire of qualitative research methodologies amongst the school head teachers. Their very practical interest to produce a “research project” perhaps lay at the back of the minds of the organisers of the guest presentation. The title advertising the presentation read as follows: “Using qualitative research methodologies in education leadership”, emphasising a research-oriented tone.

The presence of the education officials

The three presentations were conducted in the ‘presence’ of departmental officials, in varying degrees of their immediacy. Despite the KwaZulu-Natal official (Vignette 1) being the most receptive of an influence of the academic input of the conference into the world of policy, he was not able to remain throughout the deliberations of the conference, having only presided over the opening ceremonial perfunctory spaces.

The CIP workshop in Polokwane (Vignette 2) was presided over by a provincial departmental official who had many years of ‘struggle credentials’ as a teacher union activist who now led and was an acknowledged advocate of the capacity development programme for circuit managers. He remained throughout the conference, ever-present and contributing to shaping its discourse. His presence as a listener was felt markedly by the audience who saw the opportunity of the workshop to reflect back their views of their challenges. The chair interestingly interpreted her role as protective of any verbal attacks on the speakers whether they came from inside or outside the Department of Education.

The third vignette (Mauritius) did not have any physical presence of a Department official. However, this ‘absent official’ was perhaps the most present in the discourse of the participants. Perhaps the smallness of the island state produced a kind of intimacy of presence of the officials of the Department (for an analysis of the intimacy of small

islands, see Crossley, Bray and Packer 2011). The aspirant rectors were in my view silenced by the ‘presence’ of the official position about the role and identity of school rectors. There was no latitude for innovation or critique. The absent officer was the most present. The presence of an acclaimed school rector too may also have been interpreted as the phantom department officer.

It should be noted that the KwaZulu-Natal officer invited critique but was not present to hear it; the Polokwane official invited critique and stayed to hear it; and the Mauritian officials were ‘not there’ but set bounded parameters of what could be said (at least in the audience’s opinion). The audience was choosing how to listen to the paper and interpret how the Department would listen.

The audience

The three vignettes reflect the co-production of the discourse activating a relationship between the (oral or written) text and its context within which it is received. The audience listens through the filter of their positionalities; their understandings of the message are produced by their associations with the schematic worldviews already within their own experiences. In this sense the text only has potential for meaning and will be understood quite differently by different audiences. The academic audience of Vignette 1 largely was interested in the text as a means to contribute to the development of the field of the study of educational management and leadership. They were keen to establish discursive spaces between different participants for the department, business, academic and practitioners. Notably Vignette 1 was still dominated by the academic theoretical and research methodological discourse.

Vignette 2 (Polokwane) points strongly to the capacity development discourse. Circuit managers were going to grind their axes about the lack of support to execute what they understand as the role of circuit managers. They wanted assurances of a sustainable prolonging of their project. The academic paper I delivered was really shifting responsibility too closely towards an internal self-reflection on why and how managers were choosing their agendas. This is not really what they wanted to hear. Instead they were there to celebrate what they had learnt about practically collaborating with school principals, institutions of higher learning and school teachers. They wanted to hear that the Department would continue to support these projects of education collaboration. An academic paper about the values underpinning their decision to be an educational leader in my view was less important.

Vignette 3 (Mauritius) is to be understood in the discourse of resistance to the importation of epistemologies from outside the island context. Too often Mauritius is on the receiving end of ‘development discourses’ claiming to bring new modes of salvation from abroad. Mauritians were comfortable that they had enough inner resource to design their own appropriate responses to maintaining education quality. However, I think that the choices for educational quality they were executing ironically were simply

disguised mantras of econometry and performativity drawn largely from the western world. Of course the disease of econometry is perhaps more easily spread in a small island context where normative influence is easier to pervade their landscape. Their discourses with the presentation were being produced in relation to their confidence in the official growth and development strategy.

The role of principals

All three audiences believed that the discourse of ‘quality’ was being produced elsewhere and that they were merely the instruments to abide by its values. Performativity ironically was seen as here to stay. Even the relatively more free academic discourse of Vignette 1 still operated circling around the expectations of outputs-driven mantras. Vignette 2’s hidden discourses were about the conception that leadership is about providing data-driven evidence of what is or is not working, so that it can be fixed to produce the output achievements. This is after all what educational leadership was expected to do. The teachers of Vignette 3 perhaps displayed an expected capitulation to the discourse of econometry. What they were, however, able to articulate was that this was not necessarily a discourse they fully embraced at a personal level: they knew that some of the discourses were producing more angst and stress. But they were not prepared to resist it since they feared that their own self-advancement would be threatened. Their co-opted silences assist produce the econometric discourse.

Performativities

Measured academic achievement outputs permeated all three contexts. The ever-present Performativities of success of either academics (or their students); circuit managers (and researchers of the education system) and aspirant school rectors dominated the audience discourses. Deeper realisation of the personal, social, moral and ethical growth of their leaders was perhaps regarded as too far removed from being a measurable goal of the education system. It was an ideal they saw as valuable, but were not the yardsticks of their authorities. They were thus less likely to support alternative measures of quality performance.

Repeatedly the audience were arguing (even in their silences) that they knew what was an alternative mode of operation as a leader; they even could provide examples of those who have been inspirational, but they were not willing to deeply and personally engage with being a campaigner of alternative discourses. Partnerships across the sector were possible, as long as the dominant partner (business, industry, the academia, or the department) called the shots. Educational leaders themselves feel simply too much on the margins to execute any deep change. In this context it was easy to resort to a blame culture: finding sources of responsibility for the choices that they themselves are making. The participants all alluded to the possibility of innovative ways of recognising inspirational leaders and the quest to find new ways of reflecting the complexity of their

contexts and situations. But were they prepared to challenge the system? There was too much working against them to do so.

So the text of the paper was re-interpreted by the different audiences: the message is good for others, but not for me. The audience rewrote the text that an econometric development discourse was the most powerful way of self-advancement. Developing the economic growth industry through education was the role of the educational leader. Educational leadership in their view can be about realising moral capabilities, but in practice was about promoting performativity cultures.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This paper questions the academic pursuit of elaborating the theoretical alternative conceptions about educational leadership. Most existing or aspirant leaders know the propositional content of these alternative discourses. Disappointingly, they suggest that they are unlikely to embrace this alternative practice. However, many disciplinary academics are indulgent in this pursuit of expansionist theoretical building, but are failing to affect any substantive inroads into alternative practical enunciations of these moral, social and ethical worldviews. How will educational leader practitioners make use of these alternatives in their everyday lived complex worlds of the school system? How do we engage 'productive leaderships' in relation to the multiple levels of complexities and competing agendas? Inspirational leaderships, servant leaders or any other forms of leadership that challenge the econometric of performativity cultures remain a theoretical mirage in the desert horizon of a powerful hegemonic control. How do we engage educational leadership as a form of social action, not only of knowing but also of relating to our contexts, of being the change we desire? Surely there is more than simple capitulation to prop up semblances of quality education? The audience is reading the text of alternatives as a moral guide for their personal belief system, but not as a set of practices they will engage in their present school environment.

This suggests that as developers of educational leaders, as researchers of the discipline of educational leadership, we need to find different ways to activate the hope of practice. Increasingly as global forces choose to examine the mantras of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or the targets of Education for All (EFA) in their local national contexts, it can be seen how the achievements in quantitative terms (in many contexts) are being valued. Is sufficient attention being directed towards the social, moral and ethical quality of education? What are the unintended consequences of chasing these external measures of success? Our concerns must be directed to understanding the complexity of how educational agendas are being interpreted, re-interpreted and perhaps even subjugating the originally intended goals for which the targets had been declared at regional, national and international level. Our concern must be on how the education leadership discourse is being read, being re-created by the audiences. Who sits within and outside this audience is of primary importance.

There is hope: after all the audience writes our texts.

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