Moving into dangerous territory? Educational leadership in devolving education systems

Peter McInerney

Flinders University

MCI01414

Correspondence:

Dr Peter McInerney

Flinders Institute for the Study of Teaching

School of Education

Flinders University

GPO Box 2100, Adelaide, SA, 5001

Email: peter.mcinerney@flinders.edu.au

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Abstract

Government schools in Australia are undergoing major organisational changes as a consequence of shifts towards more devolved public education systems. This is neither a recent happening nor a purely local phenomenon. Under such titles as 'school-based management', 'site-based decision-making', and 'school-centred forms of education' (Smyth, 1993, p. 1), moves towards local school management have gathered speed in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, New Zealand and all Australian States over the past decade or so. But devolution is a complex process that does not mean the same to all players; furthermore, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that far from increasing the freedom and authority of schools and principals, devolution in recent times has been accompanied by the recentralisation of curriculum and overt forms of accountability that have actually increased the grip of the state and subverted social justice goals.

How is educational leadership being construed in these new sets of arrangements? How do principals talk about their work today? This paper locates the emergence of new models of leadership within a corporate managerialist approach to decision-making of the neo-liberal state that undervalues or marginalises the pedagogical attributes of school leadership. After highlighting the tensions between the centre and schools in the exercise of educational leadership the paper explores the possibilities of nurturing more distributive and educative forms of leadership in the current political climate.

Introduction

At first sight the lure of local school management seems hard to resist. Who could be against greater school autonomy, the loosening of bureaucratic controls and the freedom to make decisions at the grassroots level? For parents, teachers and administrators alike the promise of greater participation, empowerment and local control is an enchanting prospect. However, just what is involved in the process of devolution is quite problematic. One of the major points of contention concerns the degree to which authority is actually being devolved to schools. Caldwell and Spinks (1992), two of the chief architects and advocates of the self-managing school in Australia, advance the following view:

> a self managing school is a school in a system of education where there has been a significant and consistent decentralisation to the school level of authority to make decisions related to the allocation of resources. (p. 4)

They go on to state that transfer of authority includes the decentralisation of decisions related to the curriculum, the means of teaching and learning, the use of facilities, supplies and equipment, deployment of human resources and the allocation of finances. Within a framework of accountability, derived from the broad goals of a national curriculum and educational standards, Caldwell and Spinks maintain that schools have a great deal of freedom to make their own choices about the educational needs of local communities.

However, such freedom is questioned by Smyth (1993, 1995a, 1995b), Blackmore (1998) and Kenway, Bigum and Fitzclarence (1994) who contend that, far from decentralising education systems, current reforms are moving towards more central control of schools. They claim that while the rhetoric is about participation, democracy and autonomy, the reality is that more power is being centralised through 'national curricula, statewide testing, national standards and competencies, teacher appraisal and curriculum audits' (Smyth, 1993, p. 4). Indeed, Angus (1994, p. 16) argues that '[s]chool-based management seems to be employed as a euphemism for new right themes of privatisation, corporate management and market control of schooling'. In these circumstances it is difficult to make the case that principals have greater freedom and authority to generate reforms that are truly responsive to their own school setting. On the contrary, they might well be regarded as agents of the state responsible for implementing mandated policies and ensuring compliance with externally driven reforms.

How much authority is (or should) be devolved to schools? How much autonomy do (or should) local schools have when it comes to curriculum development, governance and staffing? Is devolution simply a cost-cutting measure for neo-liberal governments seeking to wind back the welfare state? Is it possible to develop a socially democratic model of local school management or indeed a socially democratic educational bureaucracy? Such questions raise a number of ethical and political issues about the underlying motives behind devolution, the efficacy of local school management, the distribution of powers that should exist between schools and the education centre and the very meaning of a public education system.

This paper explores the ways in which educational leadership is being re-configured in the wake of neo-liberal reforms and the spread of economic rationalist thinking in government social policy today. Following an account of the struggles and tensions confronting educational leaders striving to sustain democratic practices I canvass some possibilities for a more enlightened and socially responsible set of relationships between the education centre and schools.

The rhetoric of devolution: the policy trajectory

For more than a century, public schooling in Australian States and Territories has operated through highly centralised departments with minimal input from school communities. Under these arrangements the centre has been responsible for funding educational programs, maintaining buildings and meeting the running costs of schools whilst principals have been responsible for the day-to-day running of schools and the implementation of centrally developed curricula. The arguments to support such a high level of centralisation have traditionally revolved around the need to ensure uniformity of educational provisions with respect to staffing, resource allocation and curriculum entitlements. In addition, there was a broad acceptance that school principals and their staffs should be largely freed from administrative responsibilities to focus on the real business of schools, namely, teaching and learning.

But equally, such centralised arrangements were criticised for their inflexibility, lack of responsiveness to local contexts and for their failure to promote participatory modes of decision-making. Even though school councils provided avenues for parent involvement in school decision making, their input was largely restricted to that of fund raising, school maintenance and small scale planning processes. Meanwhile, principals and teachers were subjected to a plethora of administrative guidelines and controls which (it was commonly asserted) served to stifle the development of school-based curriculum.

Socially democratic approaches

During the 1970s this highly centralised education system was challenged, and partly eroded, as a consequence of some ground-breaking education reports and ministerial statements which began to question the efficiency and, to some degree, the fairness of the existing arrangements between the centre and local school communities. A key element in these early initiatives was a belief that schools needed to be more responsive to grassroots concerns and to the educational inequalities arising from the economic and social conditions of local communities. In short, what was needed was a more decentralised and participatory system of public education that encouraged innovative school-based curriculum developed in concert with local communities. But beneath the rhetoric of local empowerment there was always a lingering suspicion that devolution might simply be a cost-cutting measure on the part of the state.

More than any other national study, the *Report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission* (Karmel, 1973) challenged the way Australians thought about schooling by promoting a socially democratic approach to school management in which it was argued:

> responsibility should be devolved as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling, in consultation with the parents of the pupils they teach and, at senior levels, with students themselves. (p. 41)

In essence, Karmel challenged the view that centralisation was essential for educational efficiency and equality of opportunity and saw devolved forms of decision making as a means of improving educative relationships between schools and their communities (Rizvi, 1994; Marginson, 1997). However, he did not conceive of devolution as a cost-cutting measure; on the contrary, Karmel envisaged that local autonomy would require a greater level of investment in public education by the Commonwealth Government in order to ensure equitable educational outcomes across school communities, most notably through the provision of additional funds to the most disadvantaged school communities.

There is little doubt that the emergence of more democratic and community-based schooling in the mid-1970s owes much to the influence of the Commonwealth Schools Commission which promoted participatory decision-making processes through the mechanism of funding submissions for disadvantaged school communities. The Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP), in particular, saw schools as the locus for change and promoted democratic forms of action as the basis for school improvement (Johnston, 1993). In these schools distributive forms of leadership and the active involvement of parents was seen as a crucial element in improving the learning for students. As we have documented in a series of case studies in the Teachers' Learning Project [see, in particular, Smyth, McInerney, Hattam and Lawson (1999)] there has been a long-standing tradition of democratic decision-making, whole school planning and grassroots curriculum reform in priority project schools in South Australia. In fact, it could be argued that many DSP schools have been exercising a high degree of local school management for many years.

What then was the rationale behind moves for greater devolution of educational authority in these years? As revealed in the *Report of the Schools Commission Conference* (Connors, 1978), arguments in support of school-based decision making in the 1970s revolved around political, economic and educational imperatives. The foundation of the political case rested on the view that those closest to school communities were in the best position to respond to the interests and demands of children and their parents; that participatory and democratic models of local school management had greater potential for involving parents in curriculum development and instilling a sense of ownership, trust and community partnership than distant, highly centralised and bureaucratic education systems (Rizvi, 1994). From an economic perspective, advocates of decentralisation argued that local school budgeting provided for greater financial and administrative flexibility in the day-to-day running of schools and that efficiency in the allocation of resources created the possibility of cost savings that might be channelled back into the school. Clearly the arguments in support of greater local school autonomy were not just about minimising inefficiencies of highly centralised systems; rather, they extolled the educational merits of active school–community partnerships and school-based curriculum. It is also worth recording that these arguments in favour of greater school autonomy in these years had the broad support of education unions, principals' associations and parent bodies.

Changing times: the drive for efficiency

However, in the 1980s and 1990s there has been a significant shift in the ways in which devolution is being articulated in the educational reform agenda. Rizvi (1994) has described this as a move from a social democratic view of devolution to approaches incorporating managerialist and market-driven responses. There is little doubt that the reshaping of the educational sector in Australia (including TAFE, higher education and public schooling) was part of broader industrial and administrative reforms influencing policy directions of Commonwealth and State governments from the late 1980s (Pope, 1991). Central to this approach was the application of a corporate managerialist ideology with two distinct claims; namely, that:

> efficient management can solve any problems [and] practices which are appropriate for the conduct of private sector enterprises can also be applied to public sector services. (Rees, 1995a, p. 15)

In this approach to public administration (including public education) concerns for economic efficiency, competition and entrepreneurialism began to assume pre-eminence over Keynesian values of protection and compensation (Considine, 1988). Closely linked to this rationale was the view that schools should have a key role to play in assisting Australia to become a more internationally competitive nation through a focus on vocational education

and the acquisition of workplace skills and competencies. These moves have been advanced through corporate federalism and the adoption of national goals for schooling (Commonwealth of Australia, 1989).

In her analysis of the impact of this reform agenda on education, Starr (1998) argues that structural reform during these years involved two inter-related forms; firstly, those which 'swept across the entire public service infrastructure: corporatisation, privatisation, outsourcing, reengineering . . . and downsizing' (p. 2) which have occurred at a time of public sector and welfare cut-backs; and secondly, moves towards local school management of schools. She claims that these forms involved contradictory shifts in power relations:

> Power over policy, curriculum and resourcing has been consolidated centrally, whereas bureaucratic paperwork and minor capital works have been devolved to schools. The central bureaucracy is responsible for all policy matters, staffing, per capita financial allocations, major works and facilities budgets, and the oversight and development of administrative systems and procedures. The central bureaucracy determines the form and nature of quality controls for the performance of schools and their personnel, particularly the principal, through outcomes-based criteria and verifiable performance indicators. Schools have lost much of their professional authority over curriculum, student assessment and evaluation, for example, but are expected to take more responsibility for staffing, facilities and financial matters. (p. 3).

Starr concludes that, although moves to devolution in the mid-1990s led to a greater decentralisation of financial management in the day-to-day running of schools, the benefits of increased flexibility were offset by markedly increased workloads for principals in times of dwindling financial resources. Moreover, a lack of any real authority in establishing broader educational goals to guide local curriculum initiatives had seriously undermined the level of local school autonomy. In effect, schools (and principals) had been given more responsibility with less authority. In spite of a rhetoric of local empowerment, the socially democratic agenda envisaged by Karmel had been undermined by corporate managerialist practices.

What's the reality? Educational leadership in a devolving education system: views from the field

According to the rhetoric, school-based management promises greater freedom and authority for principals; to exercise their leadership in a way which is more attuned and responsive to the educational needs of school communities; to manage the day-to-day affairs of the school free from bureaucratic intrusions at head office, and, to make decisions in conjunction with the community about how best to allocate resources at the local level. But do school principals have greater autonomy? Has local school management delivered on its promises? In what follows I want to draw on a series of interviews with state school principals to discuss the ways in which educational leadership is being re-configured in the current political context. In particular I want to highlight how corporate managerialist approaches have impacted on the work of school leadership and explore the dilemmas facing those who seek to maintain some commitment to social justice and democratic practices.

'You have to be a good corporate player'

A commonly shared view amongst principals was that their relationship with the centre was being influenced by a significant change in the culture of leadership in the education system itself, variously described as a move towards a corporate culture, the imposition of a top-

down model of management or a shift towards a more authoritarian model of decision-making. Several principals spoke of the 'ministerialisation' of state education system which, in their estimation, had led to a strong corporate model of leadership in which education ministers and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), often recruited from outside the ranks of educators, have come to exert a powerful influence over curriculum and school organisation. Rather than exercising political independence from the government of the day, the Chief Executive Officer is now subservient to the Minister and the Cabinet and largely responsible for implementing the government's agenda—much of which has involved a great deal of restructuring and cost-cutting in public education.

Once involved in curriculum development, superintendents and senior officers are now responsible for implementing these ministerial directives within their own districts; in effect they provide a conduit between the Minister's office and schools. Principals are caught up in this chain of authority as they are increasingly expected to enact government-sponsored reforms in their own schools or in the popular language to become 'good corporate players'. An experienced principal expressed this shift towards corporate decision-making as follows:

> I believe there is a change in the culture of leadership from collaborative, cooperative decision-making—where there's involvement . . participation . . . to one where the predominant style of leadership is around the leaders making the decisions and the workers implementing the decisions. You are being paid to lead and strength of leadership means doing things . . . like don't involve anybody in processes . . . to work through issues . . . to get different perspectives. If you believe it strongly do it, work you way through the anger and antagonism and disillusionment that will result. . . wear that because that shows strength in leadership and then at the end everything will be alright because people will understand that you have made a positive and informed decision and they'll all come on board. (1#)

For those principals actively involved in the Disadvantaged Schools Program and the National Schools Network an expectation that they should act independently and decisively undermined approaches in which curriculum was developed through consultative processes involving staff, students, parents and the broader school community. The extent to which participatory forms of decision making have been undervalued by the system can be gauged from the following comments from a principal who recounted the feed back received from a recent job application:

> The examples I gave in the application were very democratic models . . . [This] didn't go down very well. I was told by a superintendent when I was applying for different jobs that basically I needed to go back and look at a different leadership model . . . I needed a leadership model that would be more appropriate to decisive decision making . . . Leaders are expected to be firm and ruthless . . . to make decisions. (5#)

Comments like these add weight to Rees's (1995a) conviction that 'the image of the strong person taking tough decisions' (p. 16) has provided the appropriate metaphor for corporate forms of leadership in the neo-liberal state. In this scenario 'good leaders' have an ability to stamp their authority on an organisation; to act ruthlessly to secure support for corporate goals. Elsewhere, Rees (1995b) argues that managerialist values encourage militaristic and coercive forms of decision-making—even bullying—which disown the past, ridicule established organisational practices and ride rough-shod over local decision-making processes. When such behaviour is challenged critics are disparagingly dismissed as 'Luddites', 'dinosaurs' or 'reactionaries'.

'Old' and 'new' leadership

Our informants were quite familiar with the ways in which labels were being used to categorise themselves and their colleagues in terms of compliant and dissident responses to managerialist practices. For example, we were told by a principal that the term 'old leadership' was often applied to school leaders who still clung to socially democratic principles. A principal related how a colleague who missed out on a leadership position was accused by the chair of the panel of being an 'old-fashioned' leader. 'Being old-fashioned' it was explained, 'is being too democratic and talking too much about social justice.' (4#). By way of contrast, it was suggested that principals enthusiastically adopting system goals and initiatives were often portrayed in the official department press as progressive and innovative leaders.

What then does a 'new leadership' look like? According to one of our informants the preferred principal (Gillet, 1996) is 'a good corporate player' who is prepared to tow the party line. Speaking of the ascendancy of corporate governance, a principal suggested that school leaders no longer enjoy the level of autonomy of earlier years and that (in common with the CEO and Superintendents) their role has become politicised; they have become agents of the state or, as one principal suggested, 'a public servant of the Minister' (6#).

It is of course quite proper that principals should act in accordance with the agreed educational policies and guidelines of a public education system; to countenance any alternative would seem to undermine the whole ethos of public education. However, several principals expressed the view that their voices, and those of teachers generally, were being ignored when it came to the development broader educational goals. In an era of increasing accountability, it is apparent that principals are expected to ensure that schools comply with national guidelines and mandated curriculum through standardised testing regimes and performance management procedures. Today principals are not only expected to implement the government's agenda in accordance with line management responsibilities but to identify first and foremost with the organisational goals of the department over and above the interests and aspirations of their own school community.

'A climate of fear'

One of the unfortunate consequences of a corporate approach to decision making where power is concentrated in the hands of 'managers' is that it results in 'a separation of leadership from the staff' (3#)—a process that undermines distributive or inclusive forms of leadership.

Talk of 'a climate of fear' surfaced on many occasions in our conversations. It was suggested to us that principals in limited tenured positions were especially vulnerable to the overbearing tactics employed by some departmental officials in getting schools to enter into local school management agreements. In the absence of any systems-sponsored debate about devolution many principals were afraid to speak out because they risked censure and the possibility of career setbacks.

A discourse of managerialism

The coercive nature of these tactics suggests an approach to decision-making which is at odds with the language of partnerships, shared decision-making and community ownership often contained in policy documents. However, on closer examination it is quite consistent with an ideological shift away from communitarian values to those of business management (Rizvi, 1993) under neo-liberal governance. In many respects attributes of good school leadership are now being described according to business values and management

practices rather than inclusive, educative and participatory forms of decision-making (Smyth, 2001). Discussing the impact of a market-driven approach to schooling in the United Kingdom, Gerwitz and Ball (2000) delineate two discourses of school headship' (p. 254)— 'welfarism' with its public service ethos, emphasis on collective relations and commitment to equity, care and social justice and 'new managerialism' with its customer-oriented ethos, concern for cost effectiveness and emphasis on individual relations (p. 256). Although the two forms exist in an uneasy tension they suggest that there has been a major shift in principals' roles towards more technical, managerial ways of operating.

From our conversations there is little doubt that principals are under increasing pressure to re-define their roles in terms of corporate responsibilities and business values rather than some out-dated commitment to social justice. A principal commented:

> You've now got people [and organisations] . . . putting up papers suggesting that principals shouldn't even be teachers; that we should pluck them out of the breweries and supermarkets because they are good business managers. (2#)

Writing of the 'rise of the generic manager' during the New Zealand public sector reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, Easton (1995) argues that this practice encourages the replacement of specialist managers with generalist whose loyalty lies with a managerialist philosophy rather than any commitment to the institution itself. Several principals expressed their concerns about the shift towards a functional view of leadership with its emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness and accountability at the expense of a more pedagogical orientation to their work (Smyth, 2001). Principals described several damaging aspects of managerialist thinking on their work. They drew our attention to the intensification of their workload; of having to manage more and more of the administrative responsibilities once handled by the education centre. We heard stories of principals labouring over the complexities of global budgets and organising repairs and maintenance programs. Others felt that they lacked the expertise and/or knowledge to administer the complexities of global budgets.

> The worst part is not having the skills to manage the budgeting tools. I missed out on the original; training sessions . . . my lack of familiarity with the procedures has not helped. (3#)

They lamented how their work was being redefined in quite instrumental ways in line with their role as business managers rather than educational leaders. In one of our interviews a principal directed our attention to an overflowing pile of incoming correspondence on his desk. As he flipped through the bundle of papers he commented on their overwhelming pre-occupation with financial and administrative issues. Somewhat despairingly he exclaimed:

> Where's the educational stuff in it? Where's the thinking about curriculum? . . . about teaching and learning? It's not there. (#2)

The same principal reflected on the way in which a managerialist discourse had penetrated professional dialogues amongst colleagues.

> So much of what I hear at principals' meetings is managerialism. The jargon is business jargon. Every now and then someone reminds us all that we are here for the kids and for five minutes we will mouth platitudes about the kids and then we will go back to managerialism. [But] our business is all about relationships . . . about working with kids . . . about creating respect, attitudes, atmospheres with those kids that are conducive to them taking chances. (2#)

'Fighting for the crumbs'

For a number of these principals the reality of local school management has involved a shift in their core business from curriculum to administration at a time of diminishing resources for public education. In a competitive environment where the notion of parental choice prevails many principals are caught up in the businesses of marketing their school in a highly competitive environment. In the words of one principal:

> Where's the education experimentation that was going on in the 70s and 80s? It's gone. It's been wiped out. You've got things there they call focus schools or enterprise schools or lighthouse schools. And all they're doing is jumping to catch a little bit of money. Schools are losing sight of what it's really about and they are fighting like hell for crumbs" (2#)

Principals also expressed concerns about the withdrawal of advisory services to support curriculum development and teachers' learning and the emphasis attached to accountability measures. Some questioned whether they actually had more power under present arrangements because 'they were being checked up on more frequently' (2#). Another commented on the narrow but intrusive checking up mechanisms of the standardised testing regimes.

> [These] tests have a much bigger life than a measure of aspects of literacy and numeracy because that's the way people at a departmental level can compare how schools are going. (4#)

Remarks such as these support mounting evidence from the United Kingdom (Ball, 1999; Gerwitz & Ball, 2000; Grace, 1995), New Zealand (Harold, 1999) and Australia (Blackmore, 1998; Smyth, 1993) of a major transformation in the role of principals from educational leaders to business managers (or corporate heads) as neo-liberal governments push for self-managing schools. In a paper entitled *Global trends in educational reform and the struggle for the soul of the teacher,* Ball (1999) draws on studies from Hong Kong to argue that the introduction of financial devolution has produced

> a re-focusing of the primary tasks and substantive identities of school principals around the management of the budget and budget maximisation and away from educational and instructional leadership. (p. 5)

Re-making of the principal

Ball asserts that in this culture of managerialism the meaning of principalship is being 're-made' (p. 5). A similar conclusion is reached in empirical studies conducted by Gillet (1996) in Australia and Grace (1995) in England. Having interviewed twenty primary and secondary principals, Gillett concluded that not only had their work intensified over the last decade, but it was also increasingly focused on financial administration and school promotion to the exclusion of educative leadership; and, was more directed towards implementing top–down decisions from the department than responding to local initiatives—all of which tended to distance them from their staffs. She suggested that the 'preferred principal' in this new scenario needed a very different set of skills to those leaders seeking to retain some commitment to social justice and participatory democracy.

From his study of eighty head teachers in England, Grace (1995) argued that local school management had generated new forms of managerialism which had not only distanced head teachers from children and classroom learning but had also seriously undermined their work as educational leaders. He surmised what was happening in the United Kingdom as an

'attempt to transform . . . school headship from a prime identification with professional and educational leadership to prime identification with school management' (p. 11). Although the move to local governance is much more advanced in the United Kingdom than most Australian States, the signs are unmistakably clear that principals now have to negotiate a very difficult path between a corporate model of leadership that is largely dismissive of participatory forms of decision-making and socially democratic approaches that more typically characterise local school communities.

Clearly there are additional tensions for principals committed to socially just practices when competitive market-driven approaches of the kind advocated by Caldwell and Spinks (1992) are allowed to take hold in schools. Amongst these concerns can be cited: an overemphasis on business management at the expense of educative forms of leadership; a lack of attention to teaching and learning such that school-based management becomes an end in itself rather than a means to improving learning for students (Murphy, 1991); the likelihood of greater inequality in the provision of educational services between rich and poor schools as a consequence of competition between schools; and, the lack of systemic resources to support grassroots reform.

It was suggested that pursuing educative leadership in these times is a difficult task because it means achieving corporate objectives whilst still working on school priorities of social justice and democratic values. Principals wanting to sustain public schooling as an ethical endeavour have to live with a high level of ambiguity as they attempt to balance the corporate objectives of the state education system and their own principles of what constitutes good teaching and learning. But from our conversations it was apparent that a number of principals were still hanging in on this possibility.

Re-configuring a socially just approach to devolution and educational leadership

During the 1980s radical educators such as Bill Hannan tended to view moves towards local school management as egalitarian initiatives which had the potential to make schooling more democratic and responsive to local communities. However, in the light of recent experiences many of these early protagonists have become highly sceptical about the ideological motives of those engaged in the push for decentralisation. Nonetheless, the ideal of devolution has broad acceptance in Australian education circles. Few principals want to turn back the clock and return to the highly structured and rigid bureaucracies of the past. But whilst many recognise the merits of school-based management they view the notion of a stand-alone school as untenable. What then might a socially just alternative look like?

First and foremost, such a model would accord the education centre a prominent place in supporting and sustaining an ethos and values of a public education system. Over the past decade there has been a wholesale reduction in curriculum resources to support teachers' learning, school-based reform and equity programs. But, as Smyth (2001) points out, bureaucracies can (and must) play a crucial mediating role in sustaining social justice, equity and participation across the education system where great disparities exist in the distribution of social, economic and cultural resources. If this is left to schools (or to market forces) there is every likelihood that the most disadvantaged groups in our society will continue to be marginalised by education policies and practices. This cannot be done simply through accountability frameworks and performance management procedures; what is required is a much bigger commitment to fund equity programs, to sponsor and promote public debate about curriculum, and, to intervene where necessary to ensure that social justice goals are being implemented in schools. What is being canvassed here is the notion of a socially just bureaucracy that complements and supports a socially just version of the self managing school (Smyth, 1993).

Secondly, an alternative approach would seek to democratise leadership structures and to promote a pedagogical view of leadership. This paper has tracked the ways in which a damaging discourse of managerialism has trended to undermine more participatory forms of decision-making in schools as well the educative roles of principals. Arguing for a shift away from a managerialist to more inclusive forms of leadership (Smyth, 2001) speaks of a need

> to incorporate all school participants in an active and inclusive process of questioning, challenging, and theorising about the social, political and cultural nature of the work of schools. (p. 240)

Distributive and educative leadership of this kind is much more focused on promoting a culture of debate about teaching and learning than it is on mindlessly implementing centrally determined goals or exercising bureaucratic power over others. Leadership of this kind is about engaging teachers, students and parents in setting school goals and developing curriculum that is attuned to the needs of the community. If schools are to sustain a focus on social justice principals not only have to know how to efficiently manage schools but they have to be able to reimagine their roles as educational leaders. Devolution may indeed be taking school into potentially dangerous territory but there are maps to chart a more democratic and socially just pathway for public education.

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