

## Fundamental but often forgotten perspectives on/in school and leadership

# 4 Keynoters' Abstracts

## 1. School Leadership Professionality

*Keynote speaker:* **Lejf Moos**, Associate Professor Emeritus, The Danish School of Education, DPU, Aarhus University

### *Abstract*

Doing school is a very complex task for many reasons. Contemporary stakeholder expectations are diverse: Students and parents have expectation, the professionals have their preferences, and the political system focuses expectations and conditions differently. The Danish public sector is heavily top-down contract-governed. This causes a narrow focus on learning aims and outcomes and on data guided practices and leadership. The current school regulation was constructed along these lines, and the regulation of school leadership education also complies with this logic. Formal school leadership training is not compulsory in Denmark, but leadership training providers have for some years offered an optional diploma course in general public management and leadership. This is the only option for school leader. A new version of the diploma course is presently being launched, still identically composed of a majority of general management modules and a small choice of school leadership modules.

Leadership professionalism is being described, both in school and training regulations, as competencies to 'run a small business' and to comply with the national learning aims/competencies and measurement of outcomes. Political regulations and discourses forget to acknowledge that schools' 'General Education'/'Democratic Bildung' purpose cannot be described fully meaningfully by the national standards and test, because they are mainly governance concepts, not educational concepts. Thus, school leaders are left to common sense only in their practice.

## 2. Depoliticised privatism in 'public' education and the implications for educational professionals

*Keynote Speaker:* **Helen M Gunter**, Professor of Education Policy, Manchester Institute of Education, University of Manchester, UK.

### *Abstract:*

Educational professionals such as school leaders are in the public eye with a range of modernising perspectives about identity and purposes in regard to practice. Much is demanded in terms of commitment, working hours, and performance outcomes, with public acclaim for success and condemnation with contract termination for those who do not deliver. A fundamental and often forgotten perspective regarding educational leaders, leading

and leadership is how meaning and practice set out to shape and are shaped by the wider political context in which professionals do their work. Notably I will make the argument that the reform of public services in Western-style democracies is premised on forms of depoliticised privatism. This new conceptualisation is based on the interplay between evidenced changes in governing strategies and the interplay with the 'private' in privatisation. This evidence is from a range of independently funded projects based on the study of policy texts combined with interviews with UK government ministers, civil servants, professionals, philanthropists, trade unionists, consultants, parents and children. Evidence shows that there are depoliticisation processes underway whereby decision-making is being relocated from public political arenas (open meetings, parliaments) to government agencies at one remove, to private businesses and families, and to fate (issues are off public agendas and so only matter if a person or group raises them). Such depoliticised privatism is enabled through attacks on the idea, values and professional practices for and within public institutions. This has implications for how educational professionals' practice as leaders, not least because it is increasingly a private matter undertaken for private gain.

### **3. How do educators manage dilemmas of practice as they strive for organizational legitimacy and integrity in a changed educational sector?**

*Keynote speaker: James Spillane.* Spencer T. & Ann W. Olin Professor in Learning and Organizational Change, Northwestern University, USA

#### *Abstract*

Over a quarter century, the US education sector has changed considerably as reform discourses and policy texts pressed standardization, test-based accountability, marketization, and evidence-based decision-making. These rationalization efforts have transformed the environments in which US schools and school systems operate, pressing technically rational ideas about decision-making in education. In this presentation, I explore school and school system leaders' sense-making about their environment, identifying some core dilemmas of professional practice they encounter. A sense-making perspective centres on what school and system leaders notice in their environment, how they frame or bracket what they notice, and in turn, how they interpret what they notice. The presentation uses data from two empirical studies: a) a longitudinal study of urban school principals spanning multiple years; b) a comparative study of six diverse school systems (public, private, and hybrid) operating in the US educational sector. Framed with new institutional theory, my analysis examines how educators on the ground, who are responsible for delivering education to citizens, manage dilemmas of practice as they strive for organizational legitimacy and integrity in a changed educational sector. This analysis focuses on the different institutional logics that school system and school leaders use in framing dilemmas and figuring out how to manage them. I situate my findings in the history of public schooling in the US, and the conflicting purposes that policy-makers and the public have placed on schooling.

### **4. Reason-giving in Educational Decision Making: The Role of Research and Data**

*Keynote speaker: Cynthia E. Coburn,* Northwestern University

## *Abstract*

Educational decision making is traditionally conceptualized as linear and rational. In this traditional model, policymakers weigh a range of possible solutions and draw on evidence to weigh benefits and drawbacks of different approaches. In this talk, I discuss the ways educational decision makers actually use research and data in their decision making. Drawing on Goffman's theory of frames alongside theories of evidence use in democratic deliberation, I provide findings from a longitudinal study of on US school district's deliberation around mathematics. I focus on the reasons that deliberators marshal to provide support for their claims as they seek to persuade their colleagues, supervisors, subordinates, and the public about the nature of the problem and appropriate solutions. I show that district leaders invoke a wide range of reasons for justifying their claims; only a small percentage are related to data and research. The most salient reasons are those related to constraints: stakeholder and policy demands as well as practical realities in schools. Principles, beliefs, and values are central to argumentation, often intersecting with invocations of research and data. Finally, reasons invoked are related to the nature of the decision and the degree to which decision makers have shared beliefs and understandings. By focusing on the actual reasons used by decision makers, I move away from the ideal type of rational decision making to show how research and data use are situated in a process that is at the same time deeply considered, complex, and contingent.

## **5. Rethinking Educational Leadership Praxis under Conditions of Extreme Societal Transition**

*Keynote speaker:* **Neil Powell**, Professor at the Swedish Centre of Education for Sustainable Development, Uppsala University

## *Abstract*

Reconciling the social inequalities that leadership can precipitate under conditions of extreme societal transition requires engaging with the very foundations of social science theory: the relations between agency and structure; the shaping of knowledge and normativity's and the interplay of power, contingency and practice.

Societal transition is not new, however in last decade change indexes suggest that societal transition has accelerated by several orders magnitude. As a result, the enactment of education leadership is increasingly being faced with a set of dilemmas that grow out of amplified uncertainty, controversy and power asymmetries. This can be exemplified by the social inequities that emerged in Swedish schools after the massive influx of refugees in 2015. Post 2015 educational leaders have found that many of the pre-existing norms, routines and practices, originally intended to safeguard the rights of their students and teachers, have instead, lead to a reproduction and magnification inequities.

Drawing on a body of theory from post normal science, this paper proposes that the praxis of education leadership must increasingly transcend formal educational settings and engage in learning processes with a wider array of stakeholders. In so doing, the interplay of many kinds of knowledge, values and interests are brought into view and diverging views on what constitutes a desirable leadership praxis is contested. It is arguably, this kind of dynamic, rather than orderly structures of "evidence-based" policy and science that can catalyse the kinds of collective reflexivity needed to understand and enable equitable educational leadership praxis under extreme societal transition.