Educational Management and Leadership in Wales: Promise, Performance and Potential

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This paper argues that educational policies and changes in Wales over the last thirty years have somewhat neglected issues concerned with management and leadership, in comparison with other countries and within the UK. More recently however, leadership development has been provided and the Welsh National Academy for Educational Leadership has recently produced an organisational framework. Based on analysis of the Welsh educational, social and economic context and a scoping of relevant literatures, we suggest six strategies for the development of educational management/leadership for Wales, which aim to address existing deficits and build a distinctive leadership and management approach in Wales:

- A focus upon using within-school variation (WSV) in schools in Wales as a means of identifying good practice (as Wales has high levels of WSV);
- A greater focus upon leadership strategies related to classroom pedagogy;
- Implementing contextually variable leadership/management strategies to address the substantial variability in multiple areas of Welsh society and social structure;
- Embracing more advanced 'thought leadership' which acknowledges the complexity of enacted leadership;
- Embracing more productive original thinking drawing from evidence from non-educational areas;
- Attending to the reliability of Wales' educational system because system reliability puts a ceiling on system validity.

Key words: Wales; education; leadership; management; effectiveness; change

Introduction

It would be difficult to find an educational system anywhere in the world that has changed more in its management and leadership than that of Wales since 1998. Governance changed - with the devolution of full powers over Education to Wales from 1999/2000 academic year. National historic satisfaction with the system was replaced by dismay after the poor PISA (OECD 2007) results of 2007 and, much more, after those of 2010. Policies changed from what might be called historical 'producerism' to, from 2011, simultaneous supply side/demand side policies similar to New Labour's English policies from 1997 to 2010 (Reynolds 2008). And more recently there has been enhanced confidence that the present distinctively 'Welsh' organisational arrangements expressed by *Our National Mission* (Welsh Government 2017) may be proving productive in solving what until recently may have been relatively deep-seated issues.

What is surprising however about Wales, is the historic reluctance to embrace 'educational leadership' as one of the solutions to its apparent problems in the education sector. Many societies and contexts (Chapman et al. 2016) focused on leadership related policies quite early in their cycles of policy evolution over the last 30 years, but not Wales, which has addressed school and College leadership only in the last few years. In this paper we try to develop an understanding of why this occurred, briefly outline some of the educational strategies that have *not* been particularly leadership-centred in the last thirty years of national educational policy and then outline some of the current concerns with national Welsh leadership policy. We will describe the somewhat conventional and conservative historical set of Welsh leadership concerns and conceptualisations, and then speculate about what might be a set of 'appropriate

for Wales' leadership policies which more closely reflect its educational needs and contexts.

We will argue for the adoption of a set of six management/leadership strategies and policies (see Table 1).

Prior to discussing each of the above strategies, we first set out some key elements of the Welsh educational context and culture that have influenced the Welsh approach to educational leadership and management. We will conclude that although there is clear evidence of recent progress in educational thinking and practice in management/ leadership in Wales, further development in this area would be useful.

An Absence of Management/Leadership Focus

Internationally, 'leadership' in education emerged as an academic field due to a number of factors including transplants of knowledge from the burgeoning industrial/commercial leadership literature of the 1970s and 1980s. This early focus was primarily around 'good' management (echoing 'new managerialism') which related to the school effectiveness field emerging from the 1980s which, simply, swept the planet with what appeared to be easy to understand and easy to implement 'factors' that might create effective schools and, from the 2000s, effective teachers. Of the two foundational school effectiveness studies, the Rhondda in Wales provided one (Reynolds 1976) and London the other (Rutter et al. 1979).

The findings of the educational effectiveness paradigm, as summarised in reviews, suggested the following factors to be important (Reynolds et al. 2014; Chapman et al. 2016; Hopkins et al. 2014):

- The nature of the leadership and management provided by the Headteacher: with more effective schools having better Head/ Deputy Head relations, and having a management style and structure that not only involved Heads setting goals, establishing directions and defining that most popular of 2000s management terms a 'vision' and 'mission', but also actively involving staff in planning the means to achieve school goals through staff engagement in decision making. The effective school therefore was seen to have a balance in its management approach between managerialism and collegiality, which aimed to incorporate both vertical push and horizontal pull and laterality or diffusion and centralisation (Bush and Bell 2002; Bush 2003);
- Academic push or 'press': involving high expectations of what students could achieve, utilising strategies that ensured large amounts of learning time (such as well-managed lesson transitions), utilising homework to expand learning time to involve parents, and entering a high proportion of students for public examinations to ensure they remain 'hooked' in their final years;
- Parental involvement: both to ensure the participation of these significant others in children's lives in the rewarding of achievement and effort, and also to ensure that in cases of difficulty the parents would, if appropriate, be supportive of the school and the child;
- Student involvement: both in the learning situation within the classroom (although here the involvement needed to be within a firm and organised structure) and within the school in societies, sports teams, leadership positions, representational positions and the like;
- Organisational control of students: which was in turn generated by cohesion, constancy and consistency within the school. Organisational cohesion was likely to be enhanced by both planning and coordination of school activities, and by a degree of

'ownership' of the school by the staff itself, to be generated by a good flow of management information and by procedures that involved staff in the organisation.

Organisational consistency across lessons in the same subjects, across different subjects in the same Years and across different Years in the student-learning experiences was also important. This was typically facilitated by development planning and by professional development activities which involved using members of staff as 'buddies' (peer mentors) for one another. Observation of other colleagues' practice aimed to ensure that the range of individual practice was made clearer to organisational members so they could take action.

Along with consistency in pedagogical approaches and organisation, the final requirement to ensure effectiveness was constancy in that there should be a limited turnover in the people who pass through the lives of young people. Frequent changes in the people in authority positions in young people's lives were seen as likely to make their socialisation into the values and standards of adult society significantly more problematic by affecting the capacity of nurturing relationships to develop.

'Piggy backed' upon these 'effectiveness' factors were the 'improvement strategies' from the school improvement literature which suggested in those days simple - indeed simplistic - ways of ensuring that the knowledge of 'what worked' reached schools.

Crucially, in all these 'effectiveness' and 'improvement' studies, the leadership factors - particularly the leadership of the good Headteacher - were prominent, albeit from a 'hero leader', leader-centric position. However, these studies did not have the popularity in Wales they had in England and, to an extent, Northern Ireland, so 'leadership' was not potentiated as a Welsh interest. Whilst the effectiveness insights were sometimes taken up at individual school and regional level in Wales, at national level they were not fully implemented. Perhaps what was in its early formulations somewhat of a 'top down' leadership model, before the more 'lateral' versions and 'distributed' emphasis of the educational management and school effectiveness field in the 2000s, did not fit a Welsh society historically somewhat distrustful of strong State solutions. Maybe the 'counter cultural' ethos of parts of Wales had a distrust of what seemed to be conventional educational solutions/wisdom brought in from elsewhere.

Whatever the reasons, there was little in Wales, in terms of leadership, that ever matched the popularity of educational effectiveness, and its focus on the importance of leadership, in England. There cannot have been more than a handful of secondary and primary Headteachers out of over 22,000 that missed one of the literally hundreds of 'effectiveness' 'road shows' held on in service days that English educational school effectiveness and improvement researchers carried out across the then approximately 100 Local Educational Authorities of England. This implementation approach cemented 'leadership' and management factors into professional and academic minds. This also happened for the field of Assessment for Learning (AFL) in England, which developed from the educational effectiveness studies into major educational policy concerns and major school-designed and owned interventions that were never apparent in Wales.

As this divergence in approach spread, vocal criticism of school effectiveness in Wales grew (e.g. Gorard, 1998, 2002). The reluctance to take up the approach taken in the other UK countries was strongly influenced by research from Cardiff (the capital city of Wales) University that emphasised the sociocultural determinants of educational outcomes over those directly related to the educational process (Rees et al. 1997; Rees 2002).

In Wales, other sets of policies came and went over these thirty years - a focus upon curriculum reform for example, with the Welsh Baccalaureate and differentiated curricular 'Pathways' within and between schools and, in the case of the Welsh Foundation Phase, different curricular and to an extent pedagogical arrangements. The 'demand side' policies of enhancing parental choice through generating different 'types' of schools – similar to the Academy Chains in England - were not prevalent in Wales, with a continued commitment to Welsh 'supply side' policies, allied with, from 2012, the publication of school achievement results on the 'demand side'.

What was also less prevalent in Wales, in the already limited area of educational leadership as in other policy areas elsewhere, was the 'capacity building' of the profession and of senior professionals within it. In the 1990s and 2000s, many societies across the world tried to ensure that novel bodies of knowledge, new ideas, new ways of transmitting the old ideas and new reviews of the existing knowledge around schools' education were brought to their managers and professional leaders and others to improve their practice. The English Literacy and Numeracy Programmes, the English National College for School Leadership publications, and the conferences and training programmes you could have found in all Australian States and societies from Malaysia to Singapore to Chile, were all examples of this. This neglect meant that when Wales followed the international trend to develop 'ownership' of educational policies and practices by professionals involving, critically, senior managers/leaders such as Headteachers, it was developing a 'self-improving system' that was already knowledge deficient. This particularly affected secondary schools, as evidenced by successive ESTYN (e.g. Estyn 2019) annual reports. We return later to the theme of whether it is possible for effective policies in the area of leadership/management, and school improvement generally, to be generated in a self-improving system by professionals who in the first place have not routinely been provided with the requisite knowledge that they need to be self-improving, and within a culture of professional learning as a nation.

Educational Leadership Development and Training in Wales

Although the 'leadership paradigm' may not have rooted easily in Wales, it would be wrong to neglect to mention what *has* been done in Wales in the area of 'leadership' development since devolution in 1999. The Professional Headship Induction Programme (PHIP) and the Leadership Programme for Serving Heads (LPSH) offered support to new and existing Heads in the 2000s. The UK-wide National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) has been mandatory for these seeking to be Heads since 2004, now run by the four Consortia of Wales and funded by Welsh Government, and with approximately 100 candidates per year and an 80% success rate. However, there is continuing concern about the relevance of the NPQH knowledge base for practice, its neglect of more contemporary educational policy and leadership/management approaches, and its apparent narrow focus on historically identified organisational/managerial competences.

Centres for Leadership Development also exist in some Welsh Education Schools/Departments, such as in University of Wales Trinity Saint David, and there are many courses in leadership/management in the Welsh Future Education Programme of the Staff College. Welsh Government has also offered guidance to schools on the most effective use of funding when choosing external providers, and the private sector is becoming more involved in leadership related activities.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2014) review was highly critical of existing practices in the area of educational leadership and management in Wales, arguing that the development of leadership capacity had been weak, under-resourced and 'close to an afterthought' from policy makers. It also suggested that Welsh leadership 'capital' (on the lines of 'distributed leadership development' as opposed to individual 'leader development' as articulated by Bolden, Petrov and Gosling [2009] and Bolden [2011] in relation to higher education) needed strengthening in Wales and this, and the further visit of the OECD in 2016, provided an impetus for the establishment of a new National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) that was:

- Arm's length from Government;
- Coordinating, sign posting, quality assuring and planning leadership provision;
- Making available a range of leadership provision delivered regionally/locally;
- Extending across the whole range of provision involving Welsh Government (NAEL 2020).

The OECD Rapid Policy Assessment of 2016/17 had reiterated in detail that leadership is crucial to the improvement of educational standards, arguing and recommending that leadership development should be a prime driver of the Welsh education strategy and for the establishment of NAEL, the development of leadership standards and a professional learning offer for aspiring and already appointed leaders. Policies were to be designed with the new teaching standards and the emergent Welsh school learning organisation model in mind.

Promoting the use of highly skilled business managers for schools, or groups of schools, was also argued for, to reduce the administrative burden on school leaders so they could focus on educational leadership, on developing their schools into learning organisations and through this ensure the 'readiness' of staff to absorb the new curriculum, providing effective management and leadership that was of current major Welsh policy interest and relevance, given the growing number of Federations (of multiple schools) and All-Age Schools of multiple ages like 3-18 that are managerially distinct.

It would be wrong to conclude this analysis of Wales' approach to educational 'management/leadership' without pointing out that Wales now has one considerable advantage - that coming late to acknowledge the concerns with management/leadership-related issues gives Wales the chance of avoiding the management/leadership errors/mistakes of other countries/contexts, and the chance of doing novel things of high power and potential.

In the next sections we draw from research studies and the leadership literature to outline and discuss the key educational factors and strategies (see Table 1) related to management and leadership in education that are particularly appropriate to the Welsh context.

Table 1: A suggested approach to educational leadership and management in Wales

Strategy 1	Focus on 'middle management leadership', using the large within-school variation that Wales possesses as the 'driver' or enabler of change
Strategy 2	Ensure that more powerful leadership strategies, directly related to 'instructional leadership and teaching', are developed in Wales
Strategy 3	Ensure that leadership development/approaches in Wales are variable and tailored to the context of individual schools, Local Authorities and Consortia rather than the 'one size fits all' approaches that other societies appear to have adopted

Strategy 4	Embrace 'thought leadership' (i.e. promote and value thinking and researching seriously and critically about leadership, drawing from other contexts), which may not be particularly prevalent in Wales historically
Strategy 5	Update Welsh management and leadership practices by incorporating the insights from some of the new directions in leadership practices/thinking from other educational and non-educational settings/sectors
Strategy 6	Address a concern for leadership 'reliability' in Wales to add to present concerns about leadership 'validity'

Strategy One – Developing a Focus on Middle Management/Leadership

Educational policies internationally over the last thirty years have increasingly used 'the school' as the unit of analysis, accountability, improvement and development (Reynolds and Kelly 2014). Indeed, 'school to school' improvement policies have been particularly popular in Wales as seen in the pioneering *'Schools Challenge Cymru'* work of Ainscow et al. (2000). We suggest that school related policies are linked to the perceived need to operate simultaneous 'supply side/demand side' policies whereby educational standards are 'levered up' by creating quasi markets in which educational 'consumers' 'choose' schools, and by educational managers, leaders and administrators intervening with them and their processes from the 'supply' end.

'School centric' approaches may be less useful in Wales than elsewhere, however, given this context because:
- The variation in 'raw' results in Wales seems historically to have been less than in England, with the PISA surveys showing a higher proportion of variance locatable at the within school level rather than the between school level by comparison with other UK societies;
- The geographical distribution of schools and job opportunities for parents in Wales (which tend to be around higher density populations) means that, particularly for students in secondary schools, in many rural areas there may be no realistic choice of schools for parents to operate the market.

It may be more productive for Wales to consider the operation of its 'within school' markets, rather than the 'between school' markets because Wales exhibits high levels of 'within school' variation in student achievement by comparison with other societies (in the PISA studies for example). However, the variance 'within' schools is even higher in Wales than other 'comprehensive' systems (Reynolds 2007) and higher than societies of similar socio-economic composition. This needs to be set in context. It reflects the comprehensive nature of Welsh primary and secondary provision and the inclusive policies in Wales concerning school intakes of children with additional learning needs. It may also reflect the historic lack of attention to middle management training for Heads of Department/Faculty Leaders, the historic absence of national provision on leadership until now, the lack of effective management practices within some schools, and the relative lack of effectiveness of secondary education in Wales generally. This has led to a system that has 'disaggregated' into its variable parts by school, by Departments/Faculties within schools and by individuals in schools. Such disaggregation runs counter to the view of the school as a 'whole learning organisation' (after Senge [1991], revisited recently by Westover [2018] in terms of US schools) as noted in the OECD Rapid Policy Assessment report (OECD 2017).

Interestingly, Wales was the site of the innovative *High Reliability Schools Project* in Neath Port Talbot Local Authority, which developed mechanisms and strategies for schools to

become skilled at 'benchmarking' against their own good practice in their exemplary Departments (Stringfield, Reynolds and Schaffer 2008, 2012). This work was carried on in England in the pioneering *Within School Variation (WSV) Project* of the 2000s New Labour government, and indeed a whole suite of materials and approaches were developed as a 'toolkit' that could be used to convert all schools' best practice into their standard practice (see Reynolds [2007] for an overview). The commitment to learning from any within-school variation in individual schools was one of the characteristics of the Welsh School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) of 2008, but has been strangely neglected in Wales, although the ideas have surfaced again recently. It is of concern that 'middle leader-teachers' (often seen as the lynch-pin and key change agents in organisations, see Priestly et al. 2012) do not strongly feature in Welsh educational policies (or the OECD), unless they are aspiring to be, or are acting, Head Teachers. Whilst there are attractions to learning from WSV, potential barriers may inhibit such learning:

- Weak school management might find it hard to confront the issues raised and develop mechanisms to learn from best practice.
- False modesty exists on the part of effective teachers/departments perhaps associated with a misplaced egalitarianism that does not reward helping other practitioners who are less effective because this would mean marking the less effective out and labelling them.
- In small schools, the range of excellence between teachers may be small and therefore more difficult to use, and one/two-person departments may make performance evaluation by subject a highly personal activity.
- The absence of systems to 'buddy' the less good with the better, because of the difficulty of the intense micro-political issues in this area.
- Budget/time constraints that make it difficult to create these skill-sharing systems since they require time, space and buy-out of teaching for observation/debriefing etc.
- The difficulty of separating out the personal reasons for some teachers'/Departments' more effective practice from the methods that are being used, since all factors become confounded.
- The difficulty in secondary schools of convincing departments to see any utility in swapping practice when the subject cultures of departments are so strong (for example 'it is not like that in art!').
- The practice of using exceptional individuals as the models for others when the exceptional may often be idiosyncratic, and utilising their character/personality as much as any distinctive leadership, management or instructional methods. The exceptional may also be so far in advance of the remainder of the staff in a school that they cannot actually be imitated and are therefore poor role models.

But these barriers can be addressed and the benefits of the WSV approach be gained, as follows:

- While policies for what happens in individual classrooms are difficult to implement, monitor and evaluate, this might be feasible at the subject Departmental level, academic Year level in a secondary school or the Year level in a primary school. Targeting these levels means that policy can get far closer to what should be the real focus, the classroom level, than if it only addresses the school level.
- While not every school is effective, all schools will have some practices that are relatively more effective than elsewhere in the school. Every school can therefore look for generally applicable good practice from within its own internal context. This aligns with the concept of continual improvement in terms of embedding an improvement culture through identifying and sharing good practice and building upon it.
- It might well be that one limitation to whole-school self-evaluation and improvement is that headteachers are often overloaded, because of having to deal with problems that

should fall to middle managers, and so lack the time to think strategically. Targeting sub-groups within the school in a devolved or distributed leadership approach would help alleviate this.

- Within-school units of policy intervention such as Years or subjects are smaller and, therefore, potentially theoretically more open to being changed than those at whole-school level.
- Teachers in general, and those teachers in less effective schools in particular, seem to be more influenced by classroom-based policies that are close to their focal concerns of teaching and curriculum, and less by policies that are managerial and orientated to the school level. WSV policies take us there.

So, a focus upon WSV moves us closer to a world where no school needs to wait for Welsh Government or another school to help it out, since it can help itself by looking at its own best people and learning from them. This world is one where a school's Departments and teachers cannot use excuses such as 'it's the pupils' for their performance since they have generally the same pupils. This world is one where excellence is regarded not as something to be hidden, but something to be learned from, for the benefit of all. This world could be attained, quickly. And may help us deliver the 'self-improving system'.

Strategy Two: Ensure Powerful Management/Leadership Strategies Related to Instructional Leadership/Teaching Are Developed in Wales

The study of 'teaching' and its practice may not be well developed enough in Wales. In a powerful statement in launching his Chief Inspector's 2017 Annual Report, the Welsh Chief Inspector said that teaching was the 'weakest area of provision across most areas of provision' of education in Wales (ESTYN 2017). Given that the quality of teaching is - after the quality of school leadership - the most important factor in determining how children perform and achieve, school leaders needs to potentiate high quality teaching.
The problems in this area are, however, multiple:

- Wales has historically possessed a more 'craft' orientation to teaching rather than a 'research oriented' one, meaning that neither teachers or leaders in our Initial Teacher Education (ITE) provision may have related to the massive knowledge base now available in the 'effective teaching' area (Muijs and Reynolds 2018) particularly as this applies to their own teaching practice;
- Training in classroom observation may also be somewhat limited, making it difficult to measure where teachers are in their practices;
- The discourse of 'schooling' rather than 'teaching' (to facilitate learning) has become prevalent in Wales, with the former talked about much more than the latter. Given that *'Teachers Make a Difference'* was the title of the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning, Leighton Andrews', 'twenty-point plan' in 2011, the contents had rather little to say about teaching (Andrews 2014). Given it is likely that teachers 'core' professional and personal commitments in Wales are more to the curriculum and to teaching their children than to the managerial and organisational entity of their schools, it may be that they have not found messages from Welsh Government that have resonated, until now perhaps.

But we are fortunate, though, because although we are relatively late on the scene in Wales, many of the factors that we need to explore to deliver 'Instructional Leadership' are now in place:
- A considerable volume of research exists upon the benefits of continuing professional

development (CPD), and on the characteristics of effective CPD that can resource instructionally based leadership. Professional Learning and development more generally is now a thriving area of research/ practice (Desimone 2002, 2009) not only in the educational sector, but across public, private and third sectors;

- Knowledge about 'effective teaching' ('facilitating learning') is now considerable, particularly in the areas related to the conventional 'direct instruction' model that formed the basis of most of the reform initiatives in teaching methods internationally in the early 2000s;
- Knowledge about a wider range of methods, such as small group, collaborative teaching and peer tutoring, is now reliable and increasingly used internationally (Reynolds 2010);
- Approaches concerning 'metacognitive' skills, such as the improvement of the students' knowledge of cognition and the self-regulation of cognition, are now quite well developed, and so are training approaches which attempt to help teachers embed the skills into day to day teaching rather than use separate distinct programmes (Muijs et al. 2014). This includes the use of learning technologies in facilitating learning and engagement;
- The rapid development of cognitive neuroscience is developing classroom insights in such areas as the role and functioning of the memory, the modular and pattern making role of the brain and the crucial role of the emotional components of learning (Kelley 2008).
- Models and theories about effective teaching, learning and assessment, from those such as Creemers and Kyriakides (2007) and Hattie (2009) have increased in number, all with the behaviours of teachers in classrooms at their heart.

Better links between HE institutions and their communities of schools, and the emphasis upon teaching related research, may also be changing the situation.

Strategy Three: Ensure School Management/Leadership Strategies Are Contextually Variable

Historically, neither educational management nor educational leadership as disciplines had much to say about whether 'what works' differs in different kinds of schools in different kinds of areas, other than for example, research on schools as micro-cultures reflecting wider political forces (e.g. Ball 2012; Bush 2003; Bush and Bell 2002). Researchers usually attempted to show regularities (generalities) *across* samples of schools rather than look at whether there were differences *between* schools in their practices in terms of e.g. their socioeconomic conditions, rurality or religiosity. In the 1980s and 1990s indeed there had been a flurry of interest in this, with arguments that certain schools needed to be more concerned with 'buffering' themselves from their communities in high poverty areas, and that to be effective in these areas they should be more lateral and more 'communal' in their leadership/management arrangements than other schools because of the need to protect against stress by means of mutual support (Hallinger and Murphy 1985, 1986).

But the 2000s in educational management/leadership saw a marked return to universal 'what works' approaches. Numerous factors in the politics of educational research appear to be the explanation for the neglect of 'context':

- The desire in the 1990s and 2000s to generate a more positivist-oriented 'scientific' perspective in education about 'what works' led to literature reviews that neglected the studies which were aberrant in their findings (such as case studies or ethnographic research) in favour of emphasising the generalisability of findings (see Reynolds, 2010). This was the age of the 'lists', or 'factors', or 'correlates'.
- The desire to ensure policymakers' take-up of effectiveness knowledge in countries such as the United Kingdom led to a downplaying of the issue of possible contextual effects, because of the perception that policymakers (and politicians for that matter) would find the

need to do different things in different schools to achieve effectiveness and improvement somewhat 'inconvenient'. 'It all depends on the context' is not a phrase the politician finds easy to use. The positivist scientific approach also led to a focus upon the need to establish technologies of effectiveness that were the same everywhere, 'wherever and whenever we chose' as Slavin (1996) argued.

- The enhanced use of 'meta-analysis' (again in line with an adherence to biomedical sciences approaches) encouraged a focus upon 'whole sample' analysis to keep sample sizes high, and discouraged disaggregation by social background that would have lowered sample size.

The absence of 'context specificity' was also seen in the school improvement field. The need for different improvement strategies, to be determined by the level of effectiveness of a school, the trajectory of a school, and the culture of a school, had been a focus in the 1990s and early 2000s (Hopkins 2003; Hopkins and Reynolds 2001), but in more recent years has seemed to become much less prevalent. Indeed, school improvement has now become increasingly interested in the 'high level architecture' of policy at national level linked to the PISA studies, which has led to an espousing of 'one right way' educational policies in all different country contexts utterly independent of national contexts and cultures (Sahlberg 2011).

May, Huff and Goldring (2012, 435), in an American study that failed to establish strong links between school Principal behaviours and attributes in terms of relating the time spent by Principals on various activities to student achievement over time, concluded that:

> contextual factors not only have strong influences on student achievement but also exert strong influences on what actions Principals need to take to successfully improve teaching and learning in their schools.

The authors conclude in a memorable paragraph that:

> our statistical models are designed to detect only systemic relationships that appear consistently across the full sample of students and schools.(…) … if the success of a Principal requires a unique approach to leadership given a school's specific context, then simple comparisons of time spent on activities will not reveal leadership effects on student performance.

Wales has a wide range of factors in its structure, population and history that might influence the paths that its young people take, including socioeconomic (pockets of high deprivation); linguistic (Wales is a bilingual country); religious; cultural; geographical (concentrations of populations coupled with high rurality), and historical factors. The issue of whether *different* things should be carried out at the level of the educational system/schools to generate the *same* high-quality educational outcomes needs further exploration.

Strategy Four - Embrace Educational Thought Leadership

Discussion of education in Wales has historically been somewhat simplistic, reflecting a population that probably constitutes a weak 'civil society'. In Wales, there is little equivalent of the ferment of educational policy/practice ideas that has existed for example in Scotland, where quality newspapers cover education in depth and with rigour, together with a political atmosphere in which there has been a rethinking and re-imagining about all aspects of national society. In UK higher education (e.g. Grieves 2018) and in healthcare (e.g. Midgeley 2017), the concept of 'thought leadership ' is becoming more widespread as a developmental approach with multiple models being developed and tested. Put simply, thought leadership can be vested in an individual, group or organisation and relies on an acknowledgment of expertise and authority, a

willingness to use that expertise to challenge assumptions, and the development of ideas to improve or develop the organisation and those within it. Thought leadership therefore requires a safe thinking space, facilitated by 'experts' where 'fierce conversations' can be held. Such spaces enable stakeholders to tussle with 'wicked' problems (problems with no straightforward solution) within complex, changing environments (e.g. Obolensky 2017) and help devise solutions and ways forward.

In Wales, a number of questions could be interestingly explored in such a 'space', such as:

- Wales retains a commitment to the homogenous, 'common ' or comprehensive school in a society that is increasingly heterogeneous, while many societies have experimented with more diverse and variegated systems. Should Wales experiment in this way?
- Welsh policy documents talk repeatedly of schools as 'community schools'. What exactly does this mean, in theory and in practice? Attaining synergy between educational approaches and those related to the community is important and the potential effects on children would be cumulative, but are there blueprints of what this might look like in terms of distinct educational/community processes and interventions?
- The 'Donaldson Reforms' (Welsh Government 2018a) clearly imply new teaching and learning practices in schools, given the enhanced outcomes that will be expected from schools in Wales in future and given the compelling educational vision articulated. From where might these practices be conceptualised, operationalised and delivered? The effects of the hegemony of 'Labourist thinking' and the absence of any well-thought-out alternatives of quality from other political arenas mean that much educational discussion in Wales has been somewhat sterile and lacking in passion and originality (Reynolds 2008). Thinking about alternative educational practices that might motivate education managers and leaders in Wales in the way that the 'Donaldson' reforms have clearly done is important.
- Wales is notable for the very large numbers of teaching assistants in its schools, especially secondary schools, a factor that is known to have concerned the delegates on the OECD 2014 visitation. What is the upside and downside of this? If the downside is the substantial complexity of Welsh learning environments, how can the teaching profession be helped to cope with this?
- Wales has an increasing number of all-age schools that appear to have interesting effects upon their students and communities, in total now over 30. Is there an effect where all the parents/carers in a community - not just some - meet outside the schools to collect their children at the end of a day? Does the Welsh language stand a better chance of being widely promulgated when the linguistic balance of schools reflects (younger) Welsh speakers more? Do interactions between the older and younger children create positive peer interactions more than those of children of more similar ages in separate primary and secondary schools? All-age schools may also help link the Foundation Phase and the Welsh Baccalaureate and lead to a notable success for Wales. More research into the impact of all-age schools is therefore required.

Strategy Five – Designing New Approaches to Delivering Management/Leadership Outcomes

The field of 'leadership' and its practices is rapidly changing. Many management/leadership programmes have moved beyond the charting and induction of simplistic leadership/managerial competencies, and are concerned with developing informed leaders, who are aware of (and able to) manage, lead and follow in terms of themselves (the intrapersonal level), others (the interpersonal level) and the organisation/system level (McKimm and O'Sullivan 2016; Swanwick and McKimm 2014). Such leaders are aware of relevant leadership/management theory, models and concepts and, more crucially, can apply these

directly to their practice and context to add value and improve both processes and outcomes. Learning from the work done in diverse sectors and contexts (e.g. business, healthcare, higher education or the third sector) is essential and will enable educational leadership development in Wales to be highly contemporary and topical. Some of the features that the most effective leadership development programmes have in common internationally are that they:

- Are sequenced and programmatic, working with current and aspiring leaders, not simply in one-off workshops (although some are useful) but over the longer time: *'leadership is a journey, not a destination; a marathon, not a sprint'* (George 2015);
- Draw on theory-rich formulations that enable leadership practitioners to link different 'correlates' together;
- Include field-based involvement that allows leadership learners to observe and explore diverse relations in placements and facilitates reflection and discussion grounded in practice;
- Incorporate multidisciplinary content that brings together knowledge from any relevant source or paradigm that may help improve practice;
- Focus upon transformation rather than 'incremental', social engineering-based change, with an understanding of how transformative change processes operate in a complex world;
- Involve students working collaboratively together under a shared, collaborative or collective leadership model;
- Aim to develop leaders who can negotiate and navigate complex interpersonal and micro-political organisations and systems;
- Embed a focus upon the values that must underpin leadership behaviours and practice if it is to be reliable: helping them to become authentic, value-led leaders;
- Place focus upon developing interpersonal skills such as self-insight, emotional intelligence, resilience, and compassion;
- Emphasise how leadership is, more than anything, the capacity to inspire followership, coupled with an understanding of when, where and how management, leadership and followership activities and skills are required;
- Facilitate the setting and communication of a vision, although not the 'visions that blind' that emanate from poor communication.

There is work in progress in Wales, for example on different, potentially transformative kinds of leadership training for health professionals, and numerous other provider groups. It appears timely therefore to work with other sectors to systematically conceptualise some 'new' practices in Educational Leadership that help develop and implement the radically 'new' educational system in Wales that is promulgated in policy documents.

Strategy Six: Be Concerned About Reform Reliability as Well as Validity

The reliable implementation of policy reforms about education in general into organisational structures is something that has proven difficult to attain (Stringfield, Reynolds, and Schaffer 2012). Many ideas arise 'in theory' but do not 'root' in practice - such as tri-level reform in the 2000s in School Effectiveness Framework of 2006/7 (Welsh Assembly Government 2008). In a system of multiple autonomies and multiple levels of the educational system such as Wales where new ideas and practices may not reliably 'root', it is possible for practices to have little positive effect because the unreliability of their implementation has a ceiling effect - their validity, therefore, is determined by their reliability. Indeed, Wales is unusual in an international context because it has three operating levels of its educational system - an involved Central Government, the long-standing Local Authorities and a still

relatively new Consortium or Regional level, all making the issue of reliability core. And when policies are unreliably implemented then they have never actually ever been truly 'done' or tested. For example, interesting initiatives such as 'Professional Learning Communities' (Welsh Government 2013), and 'Schools as Learning Organisations' (Welsh Government 2018b) with which it shares certain approaches, were only partially implemented. Indeed, the partial implementation of these two initiatives actually increased the heterogeneity of schools rather than leading to common approaches that could be rigorously evaluated. Rather than generate further variability in processes and philosophies on top of already pre-existing variability (reflecting variable take-up of past policies that nothing was reliably done about remedying), it may be more productive for Wales to consider retrenching to a smaller number of 'core' policy concerns, which are implemented across the sector with fidelity of implementation, and define what is non-core, where schools can determine their own approach. Currently, this is happening in terms of the reduction in the number of policy streams which have funding attached to them, but this does not necessarily seem to have spread into a general Welsh concern to focus upon reliability.

Conclusion

Our analysis suggests that marked changes in the relationship between the educational leadership/management field and the educational system in Wales are required, with these becoming closer and more productive. We have suggested six strategies (incorporating theoretical and practical approaches) which could help Wales build on the improved performance in the most recent international PISA survey published in 2019, which has encouraged optimism and further educational movement.

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