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## Developing School Leaders Amid a New World Order: Lessons for Researchers and Practitioners

If ever there were a time to think critically about the development of public school leaders and the universities that prepare them, it is now. That is the message that saturated my mind as I reflected on the articles for this special issue. I read this scholarship amid immense civic unrest, anxiety, and fear felt across the world, but probably most acutely in the United States, where I reside and work. In the U.S., we just endured one of the most alarming presidential elections in this country's history. Our president-elect Trump has promised to dismantle scores of public services, and to effectively end whatever might have remained of this nation's welfare state. Universities, researchers, and school leaders around the world have a lot of work to do.

Civic institutions that advance and protect civil liberties, including public education, have never been so jeopardized as they will be under the next U.S. presidential administration. This danger is not hemmed into our borders. It applies across the globe, and it is a sign of what is to come. The Brexit and Trump elections are not anomalies. They are signposts. They represent key milestones in the global expansion of xenophobic populist movements as reactions to shifting demographics; individualistic critiques of immigration, economic and social inequalities; and elite political establishments. Upcoming votes in several European countries confirm this trend.

Now is the time for public institutions and their leaders to invest heavily in re-invigorating their democratic capacity. In this new world order, schools serve as critical sites for the socialization of citizens who will participate in these new political and economic systems. Developing their leaders to best prepare future generations for democratic participation, and to instill the academic, social, and political skills and values need to preserve democratic states, is a question of utmost importance.

These days, we hear much rhetoric about educational leaders who want to blow up the system. In the U.S., Norway, and elsewhere, increasing numbers of teacher and leadership development programs have oriented their work toward preparing bold, courageous leaders who are not afraid to shake up the so-called status quo, and who utilize strategies from business and industry to lead more as heavy-handed managers in a marketplace than as civic leaders in a democracy

(Trujillo & Scott, 2014). In many educational and political settings, this logic has become the unquestioned common sense. Yet it is a logic that defies what long lines of research teach about the qualities and skills that public school leaders need to develop well-rounded schools who produce competent, civic-minded students.

Resisting these educational and ideological trends will require organized social movements. Universities and schools, given their long-standing roles as conducive contexts for intellectual and practical problem-posing, are ideally situated for this work. Scholars of educational leadership and school improvement, therefore, must ask the kind of questions that help policymakers and universities understand how best to develop school leaders to carry out this charge.

In my role as a professor of educational policy and leadership, as well as the leader of the University of California, Berkeley's Principal Leadership Institute, I take up these sorts of questions with my students. As aspiring school leaders, my students have opportunities to think critically about issues of inequality, civil rights, democracy, social justice, and the civic purposes of schools. With each new cohort of school leaders, however, these questions seem more distant from their initial visions for their own leadership and their perceptions of what schools and students need. As greater numbers of teachers are socialized amid our new world order, political concerns about schools and their leaders appear to be edged out amid economic concerns about maximizing the efficiency and test-based school effectiveness. When they enter our program, most are versed in a highly rationalized, standardized discourse about benchmarks, metrics, goal-setting, and various managerial concepts. When they leave me, their imaginations of what it means to be an equity-minded school leader have often expanded.

Then they become school leaders. Sometimes, I have the privilege of hearing how their leadership experiences are going. Despite my greatest efforts, I often hear a similar refrain. They are often humbled by the "public" dimension of their leadership—the political side. Notwithstanding my best attempts to ensure that they develop the full range of political, social, and instructional leadership skills, they are still taken aback by the enormity of the political task in front of them. Balancing instructional pressures with political ones is more demanding than they expected.

Not unlike students who are thrust into the most challenging, and often least-equipped, school settings, these principals are placed at-risk. They are at risk of losing sight of their full charge as school leaders. They lead in a policy context that incentivizes them to conceive of their responsibilities primarily in terms of standardized testing and designing the most efficient classrooms for maximizing scores. They are held accountable to aligning their curriculum with the annual tests and preparing students for these assessments. Successful principals and schools, in the U.S. policy context, are very much judged by test scores. For

principals working in high-needs schools, that is, those that serve high numbers of immigrant families, non-English speaking students, children of color, or low-income children, these pressures are acute.

The U.S. educational setting is unlike the Norwegian one. When I talk to or teach Norwegian students, they are often surprised at the pressures that are built into our system. Our national and state policies are designed differently, and the focus on results, on test-based outputs, has compounded here over the last three decades. Yet our experiences are not completely foreign to them. Many of the Norwegian students and school leaders who I have spoken with share they are beginning to experience analogous challenges, though far less pronounced. Some are more attuned to the political pressures on their work and the increasing policy debates about the centrality of PISA scores. But they talk about their work differently. While both groups of students seem to have much in common – the challenges of developing struggling teachers, or engaging students from under-resourced communities – Norwegian students and school leaders tend to speak more readily about citizenship. The civic dimensions of their work often appear to be more forefront in their minds. But the influences of OECD, and an embryonic discourse of test-based school quality, like here in the U.S., are still observable. And they speak to the global trends to which I referred earlier. They suggest that, if Norway and other countries do not heed the American and British and other examples, their schools, their leaders, and their civic fabric may end up looking more like ours in the not-too-distant future.

The articles in this special issue speak to these concerns, among others. Together, they point toward a promising path for developing school leaders who are fully prepared to take on these global challenges in their local work. They offer a refreshing perspective on school leadership, one that considers a broad range of trials and opportunities for developing school leaders amid this new world order.

Jorunn Møller's opening article sets an insightful stage to facilitate these very conversations. Her rich historical overview of the forty year-evolution of Norway's school leadership development provides precisely the type of long-range evidence that explains where the country has been and where it is headed. The primary documents she analyzes animate the tensions between Norway's educational policies that have been enacted, and the nature of knowledge that they advance or suppress for school leaders. Couched in the literature and theory on school leadership preparation and development, her historical analysis brings to light the ways in which global competitive pressures and economic considerations from OECD and elsewhere have increasingly shaped the substance and underlying values of national school leadership programs, in place of the theory and research bases that originally informed their design. This analysis is a must-read for anyone interested in understanding how and why governments in Norway and abroad have come to view school leadership and school quality in primarily technical-rational, economic terms. It also

underscores the critical importance of our historical awareness as scholars of leadership development and as practicing school leaders. As I read this comprehensive analysis, historians' recent remarks about the U.S. and British elections echoed in my head; these analysts have implored voters to better heed dangerous historical legacies when deciding what they want for their democracies and their schools, and to interrogate the short-sighted, individualistic, and competitive attitudes that shaped earlier efforts to maintain global competitiveness at all costs.

Bolstering Møller's arguments is Gunter's theoretical framework for analyzing leadership development efforts in England and beyond. Drawing from her book, *An Intellectual History of School Leadership Practice and Research*, Gunter presents the field with a truly valuable gift. Viewed through a five-part lens, she details why England's history of educational leadership about, with and for the profession helps explain why the English experience is a case of much more global phenomena that are not limited to English borders. Here, as in Møller's argument, scholars have an opportunity to interrogate some of the values, attitudes, and assumptions implicit in the policies that govern school leaders and the programs that develop them. In light of the recent global political shifts, this framework gives scholars and practitioners a concrete tool for thinking critically about the ways in which we define school leadership, how the notion of an educational leader is an inherently political one, and why policies and governance under New Public Management promote a more reductive model of leadership – one that distracts the public's attention from considerations of about inequality, human rights, and social justice.

Jensen's extensive review of more than sixty years worth of literature on school leadership development sets readers' sights more directly on the research field that has evolved since the 1950s. Woven together using Gunter and Ribbons' conceptualization of different knowledge provinces, this wide-ranging analysis adds even more historical texture to readers' understandings about the various purposes that school leadership development programs have served, which actors have entered and exited the field, how pedagogies and content have evolved (or devolved) through different policy eras, and the ways in which researchers have engaged this field over time. Importantly, Jensen does not stop at merely summarizing these patterns. Rather, she helps readers identify the ways in which the field can be better, both in methodological and conceptual terms. Read together, Møller's, Gunter's, and Jensen's work gives students of educational leadership the theoretical and analytical tools to ask the types of critical questions about leadership development that are paramount in today's socio-political landscape.

Ottesen's analysis takes up questions that look more directly at the content of leadership development programs themselves – their curricular offerings. Scholars of curriculum theory teach us that the formal curriculum is not merely a technical artifact of an academic program; it is a political one. Curriculum, as

Ottesen's analysis makes evident, represents the result of professional compromises. It is contested. The field does not have a unified stance on which professional competencies and values all leadership development programs should impart. As I reflected on this piece, I asked myself about the degree to which such programs should, in fact, have a unified stance. Ottesen's article points designers of such programs towards some critical questions. To what extent should we have a core knowledge base for leaders? How much of that knowledge should be context specific and how much can be generalized across settings and circumstances? Who should choose? As professionals, educators and educational leaders ought to be expected to set the standards for and specifics of their leadership development curricula, but increasingly national actors are steering these decisions. What is the ideal balance? How much this knowledge base should reflect educational science and research, how much should reflect the relevant practical knowledge that we can usually only glean from the field itself? Ottesen's arguments trigger questions like these for me. I wonder how current global and local events might shape our answers to them.

Grutle and Roald extend Ottesen's fundamental concerns about this same knowledge base, though from a philosophical perspective. By analyzing various policy documents and plans for the Norwegian Principal Education Program over two five-year periods, they connect the dots between the forms of knowledge that were promoted within two distinct educational policy plans. Their findings are illuminating. Whereas certain plans and their associated documents seem to advance an approach to school leadership that prioritizes principals' autonomy to act and make decisions based on their own professional judgment, others clearly reinforce a more rational performance management model. Analyzed in light of different contemporary policy phases and the specifics of the plans themselves, Grutle and Roald teach us that the classic tensions between professionalism and bureaucracy are still alive and well in the educational policy and the leadership arena. Importantly, they question whether the most recent round of plans are adequately designed to best prepare school leaders to meet the demands of the future.

Andersen steers readers toward another dimension of Norway's school leadership development altogether – its effectiveness in preparing school principals to lead in linguistically and culturally diverse contexts. His analysis could not be more timely. Norway's robust levels of immigration, as well as the social and economic tensions and opportunities associated with its changing demographics, place the country in a position familiar to many nations around the world. Xenophobic attitudes and fears, inexperience with different ethnicities and languages, and heightened immigration regulations combine in Norway, as in the U.S. and elsewhere, to create a daunting set of challenges for teachers and principals in heterogeneous settings. Yet, Andersen reveals the less popular truth that so many designers of leadership development grapple with – the reality that they are not, in fact, fully preparing their graduates to foster more

inclusive, equity-oriented schools for all children. The evidence Andersen exposes is of the highest relevance not just to Norway, but to all countries grappling with fluctuating demographics and their economic and educational implications. How can schools and their leaders best prepare all students, particularly the least advantaged ones who have historically been underserved, for civic life and full democratic participation? This is likely one of the most central questions for the next generation of leadership development programs around the globe. It is also one that the architects of these programs will have to embrace if they are to keep pace with current political and social trends.

Importantly, the scholarship in this issue does not stop at inquiries about content or curricular foci. It also encompasses questions of pedagogy and learning. In this sense, the collection knits together both macro- and micro-level considerations, and presents readers with a refreshingly holistic perspective on leadership education and the practice of school leaders. Eide and Tolo take a fine-grained, empirical look at one aspect of this pedagogy – the relationship between academic writing and school leadership competencies. Their in-depth accounts of school leaders' experiences writing and extending their learning from their program suggest that assigning academic written work is a necessary, but insufficient condition for adequately preparing school leaders to bridge theoretical concepts with their practice. The key ingredient, according to their recipe, is continual, precise, timely feedback and close supervision. As a professor and leader of one such leadership preparation program, their findings piqued my interest, and made me reflect on the ways in which my own program and others provide these types of learning opportunities.

Aas, Helstad, and Vennebo draw our attention to the promises and pitfalls of another pedagogical technique – case-based learning methods. Their observations reveal the ways in which school principals approach problem solving differently based on the context. In case discussions, they aim to develop situational awareness before making suggestions for improvement, and they draw almost exclusively on their own leadership experiences for resources and ideas. The role of theory, or their own reflexivity, appears fairly limited in their calculus. Their analysis points students and scholars of educational leadership to an enduring educational problem when preparing educators and their leaders – the challenge of connecting theory to real world problems of practice, and to developing the habits of mind that principals will maintain when they leave their classroom and return to the field.

Of course, pedagogical considerations are only helpful insofar as they are used to advance practically relevant learning, not just abstract ideas. On these questions, Halvorsen, Skrøvset, and Irgens contribute important insights. Their examination of the program, National Leadership Education for School Principals, suggests that, despite some reservations about the relevance of management-oriented preparation programs, particularly as they relate to the programs' applicability to principals' multi-faceted roles and responsibilities,

the graduates from this program still appear pleased with their own preparation. Program participants report that they conceive of leaders in complex ways, and that student learning in fact plays a central role in their thinking about the principalship. Of course, their findings are based on self-reports, which carry with them their own limitations in terms of validity and certain biases. Nonetheless, these researchers push other scholars to consider the ways in which Norway's national program and programs like it actually generate relevant, realistic models of leadership. They also pave the way for future inquiries that take into account multiple forms of evidence, and the multiple conceptions of leadership that programs might foster in their graduates – managerial, humanistic, intellectual, and more.

Contemplating these questions from a global perspective, however, brings to light different tensions and concerns. Here, Ottesen and Colbjørnsen offer solid food for thought. Internationalization in the preparation of school leaders – the commonly promoted motivation for preparing global leaders – is an often touted, but rarely studied aim of leadership development. Seizing the opportunity to look critically at the Erasmus Intensive Programme, Leadership for Democratic Citizenship in European Schools, this research team explored the tangible opportunities for learning that transpire when students from six European countries come together to co-construct their learning and prepare to lead in an increasingly multi-cultural society defined by porous borders, linguistic heterogeneity, and complex democratic strains and prospects. Their results are both sobering and instructive. Efforts to increase the internationalized character of students and school leaders can be hindered by linguistic and cultural differences, divergent communication styles, and power asymmetries.

Of course, all of these inquiries, and the lessons we take away from them, are helpful only to the extent that they can lead to programmatic learning and competencies that survive once graduates return to the field. What happens when the rubber meets the road? How well have we prepared our learners to anticipate predictable pitfalls and to be nimble in a constantly evolving academic and political environment? Abrahamsen, Syse and Øydvin offer up some provisional answers to these enduring questions of education. Drawing on focus group and electronic interview data, they frame the fundamental problem in terms of a useful concept – balancing exercises. Tensions between expectations and new demands, proximity and distance to teachers, and different preparation experiences all characterize newly developed leaders' experiences. Individual interests compete with systemic ones, and the realities of middle managers' roles and responsibilities are now front and center for school leaders. These dilemmas comprise the crux of school leadership development. It is a balancing act, and no single, straightforward answer applies to all situations. The context-laden nature of principals' work swiftly becomes palpable for these leaders, and the manifold political, social, economic, and instructional demands compete with their visions and define their work. If we accept Abrahamsen,

Syse and Øydvin's general thesis, then we accept that these enduring dilemmas must form the basis of our school leaders' developmental experiences.

School principals are instructional leaders, but they are also social and political ones. They are professional mentors, though they are also expected, particularly amid the rapid expansion of New Public Management, to be efficiency-minded managers. Amid the political upheaval and changing power structures of late, these problems can be viewed not just as problems for educational leaders, but for our civic society. They serve as reminders that universities stand at a crossroads. They can tailor their leadership learning experiences to the most dominant economic and political forces, or they can balance their attention to these realities with an attention to the conditions that preserve and protect a democratic society.

The scholarship in this issue can aid in these decisions. It reminds us that school leaders serve multiple purposes, not just economic ones. Taken in its entirety, this collection helps illuminate the path toward more democratic, humanistic models of leadership that our students, governments, and global community need now more than ever.

## References

Trujillo, T., & Scott, J. (2014). Superheroes and transformers: Rethinking Teach For America's leadership models. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 95(8), 57-61.