# Educational leadership

There are many definitions of leadership. However, most definitions of leadership imply that **intentional influence** is exerted by one person or a group, over other people or groups, to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation. Understood as a social influencing process, leadership concepts differ in terms of who exerts influence, the nature of that influence, the purpose for the exercise of influence and its outcomes.

Educational leadership is usually associated with formal organisational position in schools. So discussions about school leadership tend to refer to one or more of the following :
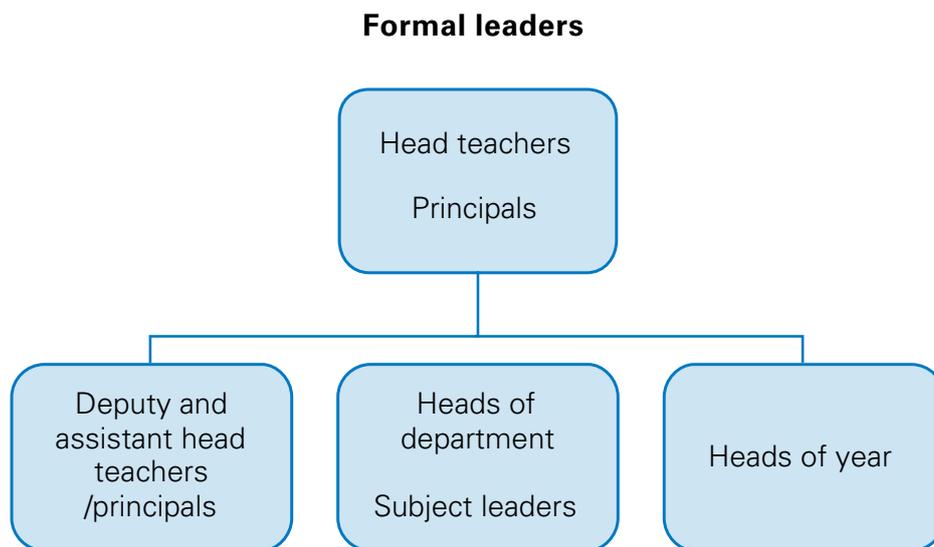
**Formal leaders**



*Much research therefore focuses on principals (or equivalent) as the main source of leadership in a school.*

- However, there are also informal leaders such as specialist leaders whose influence stems from their subject knowledge or skills with groups of learners, or individuals who have social influence with their peers and sway views and attitudes.

- Leadership is not necessarily attached to a role and can be viewed as a process rather than a position of authority. Leadership for Learning: the Cambridge Network (LfL), for example, was created with the aim of connecting leadership and learning in schools. Fundamental to the Cambridge Network is the belief that leadership is both a shared and an individual enterprise and should be distributed and exercised at every level. Teachers are viewed as having significant leadership potential (MacBeath and Dempster, 2009).

- The concept of leadership can also be extended to include developing student leadership as one goal of the educational process. This is increasingly recognised as an important life skill.

- Schools also have a role to play as leaders in their community, supporting learning beyond the school boundaries.

## What is the theory behind educational leadership?

The diversity of views about leadership results in a number of perspectives. These include:

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| Instructional leadership | focuses on the school's core business – teaching, learning, pupils' progress and achievements |
| Transformational leadership | is concerned with the commitment of colleagues, leading change, improving performance |
| Moral leadership | emphasises the importance of values, vision and ethical leadership |
| Participative leadership | stresses the importance of including colleagues, shared decision-making and social capital |
| Managerial leadership | focuses on the importance of defining functions, tasks and behaviours |
| Contingency leadership | highlights how leaders respond to the particular organisational circumstances and challenges they face and encounter over time |

Leadership is therefore about how leaders **combine** and **blend** these six areas: Which figure more or less strongly in a leader's actions? How do leaders try to balance them? How do leaders change the blend and balance of them over time as their organisations and their leadership develops?

Viviane Robinson (2007) completed an analysis of research into the effectiveness of different types of leadership on students' academic and non-academic outcomes. She concluded that instructional leadership produced a significantly greater influence than transformational leadership. Six leadership dimensions are identified as having moderate to large effects on outcomes:

- establishing goals and expectations
- strategic resourcing
- planning
- coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum
- promoting and participating in teaching learning and development
- ensuring an orderly and supportive environment.

'*The more leaders focus their professional relationships, their work and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater the influence on student outcomes.*' (Robinson, 2007, p12)



### What is the theory behind educational leadership?

- Leadership is seen as a prime factor in improving **school effectiveness**. Leadership makes a difference. Effective leadership improves schools.
- **Learner achievement** in a school rarely exceeds the quality of its leadership. Three (of the many) factors that influence learners' achievements are: parental involvement, the quality of teaching, and school leadership. Leadership is strongly associated with school performance. Inspection reports from organisations such as Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills in England) suggest that there are no instances of a failing school being 'turned around' in the absence of good leadership.
- Good leadership is not only important in itself; it is also a powerful way to improve **classroom teaching**.

### What are the challenges of educational leadership?

- Not only is there a diversity of theory about leadership, it also **varies according to context**. For example, in some countries, schools have high levels of autonomy; in other countries, there may not be as much autonomy. In some systems, principals do not appoint teaching staff; in others they do. Ensuring that leadership is sensitive to context and that leadership development activities reflect local circumstances is important.
- While leadership is widely understood as making a difference, **measuring an individual leader's impact is very difficult**. This is because their influence is indirect – they work with and through others, most obviously their teacher colleagues.

## Practical tips

### How can schools support educational leadership?

- In schools there is a need to **prepare, train and develop leaders**. Effective leadership development is school-based and on-the-job. However, this should be supplemented by out-of-school activities including increasing individuals' knowledge of a range of leadership approaches, reading, reflection, and interaction with peers in other schools and settings.

- **Mentoring and coaching** can benefit newly appointed leaders.

- **Using the skills and expertise of leaders**, with a proven track record of success in schools, can help to support newly appointed leaders – although highly effective leaders do not always make good mentors or coaches.

- **Identifying leadership talent and potential** should be seen as a part of every school principal's responsibilities. Leadership involves the liberation of talent. Some organisations are poor at managing talent; they stifle potential. Leaders need to ensure they positively manage talent.

- **Develop leadership teams.** Distributing leadership is important. Schools need lots of leaders, at all levels. However, when leadership is distributed it needs to be co-ordinated.

- **Consider student leadership programmes** to widen student participation in the running of the school.

## Why is Educational Leadership relevant to Cambridge?

- **Strong leadership is a necessary condition for school improvement and curriculum development**. Many countries and school systems are focusing on leadership and leadership development. Therefore, as well as developing teachers and teaching, developing leadership is critical for Cambridge schools.

- **Promoting and participating in the professional development of teachers** is the most powerful way for school leaders to make a difference to students' learning. Therefore, to ensure that Cambridge teacher development activities yield the maximum impact, school leaders need to develop their own leadership and consider how they can develop their teachers.

## How is Cambridge supporting Educational Leadership?

- Cambridge provides **professional development qualifications** on educational leadership for those who are currently in, or about to start, a leadership role in a school.

- Cambridge gives leadership **guidance** in *Implementing the Curriculum with Cambridge: A Guide for School Leaders* – for example, on:
  - developing the Cambridge teacher and learner attributes; confident, responsible, reflective, innovative, engaged
  - planning and evaluating curricula
  - building school capacity.

- Cambridge is working with the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge on Leadership for Learning. A pilot project involving seven schools across three continents was undertaken between December 2012 and June 2014. The next phase of development, with 20 selected schools, will start in September 2015 and finish in June 2017 and serve as a model for wider participation in the future. For more information see: www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/lfl/

## Where can you find more information?

- Cambridge professional development qualifications for educational leadership:
  www.cie.org.uk/pdq

- Davies, B. ed. (2009) *The Essentials of School Leadership*. 2nd edition. London: Sage.

- *Implementing the Curriculum with Cambridge: A Guide for School Leaders*
  www.cie.org.uk/images/134557-implementing-the-curriculum-with-cambridge.pdf

- Leadership for Learning: The Cambridge Network: **www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/lfl**

- Macbeath, J. and Dempster, N. eds. (2009) *Connecting Leadership and Learning: Principles for Practice*.
  London, UK: Routledge.

- Robinson, V. (2011) *Student-Centred Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Robinson, V. (2007) 'The impact of leadership on student outcomes: Making sense of the evidence' Research Conference
  Paper. *The Leadership Challenge: Improving Learning in Schools.* Australian Council for Educational Research.

*Acknowledgement:* Professor Geoff Southworth

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