Curriculum work as educational leadership – paradoxes and theoretical foundations

Michael Uljens*
Faculty of Education and Welfare Studies, Åbo Akademi University, Vasa, Finland

This article outlines the foundations of a critical but non-affirmative educational leadership theory. The adopted approach draws on a recognition-based tradition of education and Bildung. It is argued that every theory of educational leadership must deal with two fundamental questions as well as with their internal relations. These questions are, first, how institutional education is related to politics, economy and culture in a democratic society and, second, how leadership as a professional, moral practice is explained in terms of power and influence, that is, as an ethical and epistemological relation between individuals. On the first issue, this non-affirmative educational leadership theory accepts a non-hierarchical view of the relation between societal forms of practice, thus holding to a Western democratic tradition of citizenship and social transformation. Concerning the second problem, a non-affirmative position is adopted, according to which pure intersubjective or subject-centred (egological) approaches to explaining human intentional and cultural action and consciousness are considered insufficient. Rather, a specific version of relationism is advocated. In this theory, the classical pedagogical paradox takes a new form: educational leadership now means paradoxically to recognise the Other as if he or she was already capable of what he or she might become capable of through own activity – and to act accordingly.

Keywords: educational leadership theory; curriculum theory; critical education

*Correspondence to: Michael Uljens, Åbo Akademi University, PO Box 311, FIN-65 101 Vasa, Finland, Email: michael.uljens@abo.fi

The aim of this article is to highlight issues related to the theoretical foundations for educational leadership research. There are many reasons why it is relevant to engage in the development of educational leadership theory and to do so from a curricular perspective. First, from a Nordic perspective, educational leadership is clearly an underrepresented field of educational research, especially when compared to the existing, extensive private and public education sectors and the number of professionals working in the field of leadership. The same also holds true from an international perspective. Compared to the United States, in particular, Europe has seen limited interest in educational leadership research. A third reason for engaging in this field is that approaches to educational leadership are surprisingly many, diverse and, more often than we might expect, research is carried out without solid foundations. Fourth, many leadership models are normative or prescriptive – they aim at providing practitioners with models for good leadership practices, thus aiming more at recommendations for practitioners and policy makers than at contributing to the scientific development of this field of research. In education, this dilemma is well known – educational research is expected to demonstrate a critical approach as well as a constructive one. Policy and most curriculum research, for example, often represents more critical approaches which are aimed at understanding the mechanisms, processes and tensions underlying education, while leadership research is more often more closely linked to an interest in constructive and guiding knowledge. A dilemma in both orientations is that the alternative approach is neglected. The question is then how to combine a critical and constructive approach. An additional dilemma concerns the fact that representatives of both camps tend to be normative in unreflective ways. Fifth, disciplines other than education often seem to provide the basis or frame for educational research.
leadership research. Organisational theory, policy research or social-psychological research, ethical theories and neo-institutionalist theories are but a few examples. Contributions such as these are often well argued, yet they remain limited, since they address only one perspective at a time without consciously relating each to the other. Also, accepting other disciplines as the point of departure tends to produce results close to prescriptive proposals for educational leadership. One of the problems arising from such a complicated situation is that practitioners are expected to navigate between these unrelated offerings by trying to fulfil the neglected task of the researchers. In addition, we may question what the concept of ‘education’ refers to in educational leadership. Is it about applying general, context-neutral leadership principles to educational settings, such as schools, or does educational leadership concern a specific, pedagogical dimension of leadership irrespective of where it is carried out, for example, pointing out how leadership may support individual growth or competence development?

Finally, the observable increase in interest in leadership research has clearly happened against the backdrop of an accountability-oriented educational policy period in Europe (Uljens & Nyman, 2013). The ongoing professionalisation of school and educational leadership is therefore primarily framed and led by these policy interests. Moreover, the agenda is now somewhat different to that (more recent) of framing of the academisation of the teaching profession from the 1970s onwards. Academisation of the teaching profession corresponded in general with an increased level of education in Western societies which had to be matched by education providers, but this reflection-oriented and research-based teacher education also more clearly emphasised the ideal of the teacher as a client-oriented, autonomous and semi-professional civil servant in public institutions. The difference between these two professional paradigms, that is, the research-based teacher education and the more policy-based principal education approach, is also made clear in education programmes for teachers and principals. Principal education is still much more closely connected to and directed by the state administration. Given the new neo-liberal policy agenda, emphasising leaders’ responsibilities, principals’ profession may run the risk of drifting even further from a teacher and curriculum agenda. In addition, while this accountability agenda is today accompanied by economic regression in many countries – leading to expectations to achieve more and better results with fewer resources – this contributes to increasing tensions between teachers and the municipalities and state.

From the points made above, we can see that there is a need to develop new, more holistic, and at the same time more fundamental approaches that are able to bring together educational leadership of different kinds, carried out at different levels, with teaching. There is a need for a foundation that views educational leadership as an organic part of the administrative and governance system for public, institutional education, operating in and for democratic societies, and where leadership and teaching are seen as necessary dimensions operating for a shared purpose. It also means that theory and research on leadership and the teaching profession have to be reconceptualised, moving from an understanding of these as individual capacities, towards systemic, cultural, historical, institutional and shared practices borne by a shared conceptual system.

There is also reason to ask critically whether it really is the case that curriculum research cannot be viewed as a form of educational leadership research. Should research on the selection and treatment of cultural content for educational settings not count as educational leadership? As a practice, curriculum making, on different levels, must clearly be understood as a form of educational leadership. The same is true for research on the construction, implementation and evaluation of one of the most crucial documents, that is, the curriculum, in the direction of the core activity in schools, teaching. Should that not count as educational leadership research? We would argue that indeed it does, and moreover that it should. This research has been carried out in multiple ways and from various theoretical points of view. In fact, much curriculum research may perfectly well be defined as a form of educational leadership research. The same question can be asked regarding research on educational evaluation. Are issues of how evaluation is organised and used not pertinent examples of how a school system is led? Here, studies on what motivates certain types of evaluation procedures, how they are put into practice and how they affect practitioners’ professional identities and practices clearly should be considered as educational leadership research. In fact, the same, mutatis mutandis, holds true for policy research and research on educational legislation or financing in education. These fields are not traditionally identified as forms of educational leadership research, but they do indeed deal with the leadership and governance of schools. The concept of educational leadership needs to be reconceptualised.

One reason as to why curriculum, evaluation, legislation and policy research, for example, have not been considered examples of educational leadership research is that leadership research, in contrast to the above-mentioned fields, is traditionally dominated by studying individual agency in the application of an interactional actor’s perspective, often driven by a technical knowledge interest that is policy sensitive, improvement oriented and normative in nature. Do we have to choose one or the other? Does it make sense to choose one over the other? We argue that it does not. For many, both perspectives make sense. To say that we cannot do without either of these means that traditional education leadership research must be
expanded to include systemic, policy and structural questions, while evaluation, curriculum and policy research may benefit from including an actor’s perspective. Hence, the title of this article: curriculum work as educational leadership.

**Multi-level perspective as an initial step for mediating leadership**

It is clear that recent societal changes, especially the move away from a social-democratic welfare state model (old public administration), to a more neoliberal competition-oriented model (new public management), have made many aware of the fact that changes at the system level have had profound consequences for the activities, identities and development of professionals. Replacing one bureaucracy with another has turned attention towards understanding educational leadership as a multi-level project. Leadership in institutionalised education does indeed take many forms; it is horizontally distributed within and over many locations and professional groups and carried out at several, interconnected levels. The influences between these levels operate often indirectly and diagonally, as in the case of PISA where the evaluation results are communicated directly to the school bypassing the national authorities influencing curriculum work. This also means that educational leadership on different levels may be seen as a mediating activity between different epistemic practices (economy, law, education, media and culture) and value spheres (collective politics and intersubjective ethics). In these mediating practices, leaders typically have certain degrees of freedom to contribute to the reconstruction of social reality.

However, educational leadership at different levels is not the same. We may, for a start, identify a so-called first order educational leadership referring to teachers’ leadership of the students’ study activities. Second-order educational leadership concerns the principals’ leadership of teachers’ teaching activities. Here, leadership shifts theme (from studying to teaching), population (from students to teachers) and responsibility (from child and youth to adults). Obviously, a principal must not only have some idea about how teaching affects students’ learning activities but also how teachers’ professionalism develops and how that professional agency may be supported and enhanced. Finally, third-order educational leadership again shifts its level and focus, concerning leaders who lead other leaders. An example would be district superintendents who lead principals in their work, with another shift of theme (from teaching to leadership). What it means to lead leaders (principals) is obviously different to what it means to lead teachers. Further, developing and deciding on new national policies, curricula and the like is clearly a very different kind of educational leadership to the former three, and this may be called fourth-order educational leadership. As a result of political and economic aggregation processes during the second half of 20th century, the nation-state no longer suffices as the final unit of analysis. How the transnational level operates must be worked into leadership research.

It is more than obvious that such levels and processes have been approached by different types of theories and disciplines over the years. Didaktik typically explains teachers’ activities, while much leadership research focuses on principals’ activities. The contextual, or cultural-historical, turn in learning psychology has affected leadership and school development research which, for example, now talks about communities of practice. This is a welcome change. Policy research and institutional theories investigate and deliver insights into how the administration works, while curriculum theory often has a special interest in the selection and treatment of cultural content in relation to educational aims at the national level. The question is, however, whether operating with many and different disciplines create difficulties in theories and fields of research, all of which focus on their respective professional groups, such as teachers, principals, administrators and politicians. It is clear that we cannot empirically investigate all different kinds of leadership carried out on these levels simultaneously, but a general and common framework for educational leadership, in a broad sense, may be both possible and beneficial.

In the approach to curriculum work as educational leadership outlined here, a preliminary question for a theory of educational leadership concerns how an approach might appear which is able to unite different levels without treating educational leadership in a reductionist manner and thereby turning it into sociology, organisational or institutional theory, ethics, politics or the like. The aim would be to view these perspectives as valuable and necessary aspects which must be addressed in order to understand educational leadership, in the broad sense, in institutionalised settings framed by a political, economical and cultural system.

**Outlining the argument**

How might an approach to ‘curriculum work as educational leadership’ then look? In this article, the foundations of a critical but non-affirmative educational leadership theory are outlined. The approach draws on a recognition-based tradition of education and Bildung (Fichte, Hegel and Honneth). As theories are always answers to certain questions, the first task is to argue what questions an educational leadership theory addresses and why these questions are relevant in the first place.

Consequently, in laying out the arguments for the current approach, it is claimed that every theory of education must deal with, in principle, two fundamental questions, as well as their internal relations, in a coherent way (Uljens, 1998). These questions concern, first, how institutional education is considered to be related to, for example, politics, economy and culture in a democratic
society and, second, what kind of human activity educational leadership concerns with as a professional and moral practice. How is the practice of leadership, carried out at different levels and in different contexts, explained in terms of power and influence, that is, as an ethical and experiential (cognitive) relation between individuals, both with respect to how human freedom and awareness is explained?

On the first issue, this approach accepts a non-hierarchical position on the relation between societal forms of practice, thus holding to a Western democratic tradition of citizenship and social transformation. The point of this non-hierarchical leadership theory is that it explains the paradoxical relation among modern democracy, dynamic culture and (critical) education, each of which presupposes the others.

Concerning the second problem, a non-affirmative approach is advanced (Benner, 1991). Affirmative education and teaching means that the practitioner either confirms the present situation and the needs of the learner, or the aims and content of schooling reflecting contemporary needs of society, in a rather unproblematic fashion. Confirming the given present reality, the given values or future ideals can mean to uncritically relate one’s professional practice to these while the task of education is considered a meditational practice between these interests. A version of affirmative teaching would be to be concerned with the learners absorbing the given content of teaching as such, without paying attention to the fact that content in educational settings primarily serves as an example of something more general, something for which the content is exemplary as such. An affirmative attitude ends up having two dilemmas. First, to the extent that aims are given and accepted, educational leadership and teaching is expected to follow a technical rationale. Such a (Tyler) rationale measures quality in terms of efficiency and efficacy. But we must ask how much and how often? Non-affirmative theory of education (NATED) expands this territory into the realm of the practitioner. NATED views educational leadership and teaching as moral practices. Teaching and leadership are not devoid of values. On the contrary, in moral professions, practitioners make continuous value decisions. Somewhat unique and of utmost importance to any kind of educational leadership is also the fact that it includes decisions on how the development of the learners’ moral reasoning may be supported. Affirmative approaches typically intend to transform given values, while a non-affirmative approach allows for critical discussion on also the values lying at the foundation of democratic education. Finally, practitioners in moral professions fulfill their professional roles in concrete individual tasks. This means that practitioners stand as moral subjects behind assigned professional roles and tasks. The role is loaded with personhood or moral agency. To establish professional identity is a process of coordinating one’s individual values in relation to professional task description and other collectively decided questions framing the work.

Further, the approach developed here considers insufficient, purely intersubjective or subject-centred (egological) approaches to explaining human awareness, intentional and cultural action. Rather, a specific version of relationism is advanced which acknowledges both intersubjective and subject-philosophical approaches (Uljens, 2007). One of the conclusions of this theory is a reinterpretation of the classical pedagogical paradox or the paradox of learning. Here, it takes a new form: educational leadership now means to recognize the Other as if he or she were capable of what he or she is expected to become capable of through own activity – and to act accordingly. This paradox will be partially addressed by the concepts of recognition, summoning to self-activity and Bildung.

In addition to these philosophical assumptions of human freedom and societal indeterminism, leadership in and of institutionalised education is viewed as a culturally, historically and politically embedded phenomenon. To make such a statement is to make a theoretical claim, meaning that when we explain educational leadership on a theoretical level using core concepts, we have to take seriously and incorporate the open dynamics between education and politics, between education and economy, and between education and culture. These relations are not determined but open. To see these as open means that these relations may change over time and that they are historically developed. Educational leadership is thus to be understood as an activity carried out in a historically developed cultural and societal institution. If we aim to understand educational leadership through research, this historicity cannot be overlooked.

Taken together, these perspectives can be claimed to broaden, deepen and unite contemporary curriculum theory, Didaktik and leadership research without disregarding existing contributions from these fields, thus offering practitioners a more coherent conceptual framework for practical pedagogical work from classrooms to national institutions.

Two questions as core topics

The many levels, activities and themes above can be reduced to two rather general but interrelated questions:

1. How do we define the relation between school and society, that is, the relation between institutional education and other societal forms of practice, for example, politics, economics, culture? How are the dynamics between, for example, education and politics explained?
2. How does an educational leadership theory explain the relation between individuals in terms of pedagogical influence? That is, if leadership is to influence somebody else, then what kind of influence are we addressing?
The relevance of these questions are well acknowledged in continental and Nordic general education and general Didaktik (e.g. Wolfgang Klafki). The first question concerns how a theory explains the relation between education and politics, economy and culture, respectively. Through what processes societal interests transform themselves into practices of schooling? What are the mechanisms and degrees of freedom involved in these transformational processes at different levels? More generally, the question concerns the reasons and aims for which (liberal) education is promoted by the political system. But the converse perspective is also crucial: what kind of education is considered necessary or valuable in order for Western democracies to survive? In essence, we focus here on how societal reproduction and transformation should be understood and organised as a relation between generations. It is difficult to think of educational leadership touching upon a system. But the converse perspective is also crucial: what kind of education is considered necessary or valuable in order for Western democracies to survive? In essence, we must, for a moment, turn our attention to a philosophical level of analysis and the history of ideas.

A non-hierarchical relation between education and politics, economy and culture

In an attempt to understand how educational leadership is related to politics, economy and culture, we must first negotiate a path through the various extant explanations in the history of education.

First, a premodern mode of thought understands education as being located within the existing society or culture. This socialisation-oriented model of education emphasises the task of education as preparing the individual for an existing society and culture wherein societal practices and norms function as the guiding principles. In this model, educational leadership is subordinated to societal practices. Education does not have any developmental or transformative role with respect to the existing society but rather is preparatory in character. The power of societal transformation lies beyond education, and as a consequence, education is reduced to socialisation.

Second, in contrast to the reproduction-oriented model, we have been familiar, since Rousseau, with the idea of education as a revolutionary force with respect to societal practices. In its most radical form, revolutionary or transformation-oriented education is not only disconnected from society but also allows itself to be positioned as superordinated with respect to societal interests. According to Rousseau, there is not much point in educating individuals for an existing society, since education would then only reproduce unacceptable constellations. Rather, the role of education would be to develop something new, something which does not yet exist. Education would work towards ideals, which may, in the future, become realities as a new generation enters society after having undergone education. In this model, education is superordinated with respect to societal interests. More recently, this position has gained renewed traction within an approach called ‘critical pedagogy’, as seen in the work of Henri Giroux and Peter McLaren, but is in principle accepted by all educational theories that propose determined, normative ideals about how the
future should be. These ‘critical’ theories do not place any critical distance between the values and norms they themselves represent.

For a third group of theories, these educational models are, taken alone, considered insufficient as such. It is thus considered that the strength of the reproduction-oriented model is that cultural content which is considered valuable is transferred to the next generation. The strength of the second, transformation-oriented, model would be that education would function as an instrument for the development of the society. If current affairs lead to unfortunate results, then a new course may have to be established with the help of education. To combine the two models would be to decide upon what is valuable and what is not. The valuable aspects of a culture would be passed on, while the less valuable would be replaced by ideals, with the hope that they would become future realities. According to this third line of reasoning, we should not choose either the first or the second, but take both together.

The similarity between these three positions is their normativity, meaning that a predetermined set of values guides educational practice. In addition, these values are defined irrespective of the educational leader’s own interests. In the third model, the same arrangement of norms (existing practices or future ideals) should guide both reproduction and transformation.

A fourth line of reasoning opposes all the above-mentioned ones by criticising them for their normative nature. Both the reproduction and the transformation-oriented models are normative in the sense that what is either valuable or ideal in society is decided upon in advance. Therefore, it is supposed that the previous models, taken seriously, in fact run the risk of indoctrination and of turning educational leadership into a technological profession where results are related to values external to the profession. Another problem with the previously described models is that they do not leave room for developing the ability of the principal, the teacher or the learner to decide upon what is to be considered valuable and meaningful. Pushed to an extreme, these approaches do not prepare the individual for self-reflective decision making about the future, either for the self or society.

In contrast, in this fourth position, since the future is thought to be undetermined and the question of morality is something that cannot ultimately be decided in advance, the individual’s reflective ability – self-awareness and self-determination – is seen as an ability which must be developed. In this last model, education is seen in a non-hierarchical relation to politics, culture and economy. Education is not solely placed either ‘outside’ or ‘inside’ the society and is thus not either super- or subordinated with respect to society but attempts to mediate between the two. In this non-hierarchical conceptualisation, educational institutions are given relative independence with respect to societal and other interests. It is this space that both allows for and requires reflective, professional educational leaders on each level of the education system. It should be observed that a non-hierarchical understanding accepts that hegemonic political interests influence education but recognises that if educational leadership were to be reduced in the service of some political ideology, it would be in conflict with democratic principles. Thus, political democracy requires a certain form of critical educational leadership, that is, relative independence should be guaranteed by the political system itself. From a non-hierarchical perspective, educational leadership is leadership which sustains democracy, related to an image of citizenship. From this point of view, education is allowed to critically examine the political system within which it operates, but it also leaves room for politics to be reflective and critical about contemporary education and educational leaders. The same relation occurs between education and economics: education must prepare individuals for an existing working life, but in such a way that the individual may transcend existing ways of working.

According to this view, educational leadership is seen as a vertically, horizontally and ‘diagonally’ distributed system which embraces interconnected professionalities and institutional practices and emphasises questions about, for instance, how educational leaders cooperate, learn and lend horizontally, or what kind and degree of freedom/influence exists between levels?

The non-hierarchical position to the relation between school and society accepts that:

1. School prepares individuals for an existing world – though it does so in a problematising, non-affirmative fashion, not confirming to the present state of affairs.
2. Democratic ideals are defended: education prepares individuals for participation in societal political practices and change.
3. Human freedom is assumed – from provocation (intervention) to self-activity.
4. The question of the good life remains an open question.
5. A relative degree of freedom is guaranteed for the state, district, principal, teacher and ultimately for the student.

Educational leadership and the pedagogical paradox

The second question which must be addressed by educational leadership theory deals with what kind of influence educational leadership has and how this influence is related to the person being influenced. In order to answer this question from a leadership perspective, it is argued that we may make use of some core concepts in classical (modern)
education theory. These are recognition, summoning to self-activity and Bildsamkeit (Benner, 1991). It is argued that these concepts may be used to deal with the paradox of educational leadership.

The history of education may be read as a history of paradoxes. Regardless of the prevailing cosmology, the learning or the pedagogical paradoxes seem to reappear in different versions. Here, I refer only to Meno’s paradox on learning. Plato asks us to consider how we should explain learning, given that we cannot search for knowledge if we do not know what to look for. But, on the contrary, if we had knowledge it would obviously no longer be necessary to search for it. Plato’s answer to this dilemma was a nativist one, but paradoxical: the condition for reaching knowledge is to have knowledge. We must have access to knowledge in order to look for knowledge. How does he construct his case? According to this form of nativism, a soul is attached to the individual by birth. This soul contains all eternal knowledge but the individual is unaware that they possess this knowledge. Given this, an individual’s knowledge cannot come from outside, for example, from a teacher. The learner, according to Plato, must learn only one thing – to remember that they already possess the knowledge required. When the learner has learned to remember, they can start to strive to achieve ‘in-sight’, they can begin the search for something that they already possess. In other words, in this paradox, the learner must reach out for something they already have. The teacher’s role is to direct the learner’s attention so that the learner may access what they already possess.

The paradox of learning changes when it leaves such a predetermined cosmology. The shift from a premodern to a modern, ateleological view of individual and societal change is a move towards a view of the future as indeterminate and not oriented towards a given end, a view where the individual or the world is no longer seen as predetermined. The paradox of learning changes in parallel, with freedom and autonomy becoming the key concepts around which the modern paradox evolves.

In modern thought, knowledge is not believed to exist within the individual before experience, but nor does it come from the outside. Rather, education is often viewed as provocation to self-reflection. However, in order for the individual to transcend their present state, to reach autonomy, become self-directed or achieve the ability to reflect, they must, according to this line of reasoning, already be perceived as autonomous, free and self-reflecting. The act of educating thus seems to presuppose the very existence of that which is a necessary condition of education (autonomy). In other words, in order for education to be possible, there must be a somebody whose reflection is provoked, but simultaneously it is thought that the individual becomes a somebody through the process triggered by a provocation. Stated differently, the pedagogical paradox concerns the following dilemma: in order for education to be possible, the individual must be free and self-active, and, simultaneously, in order for the individual to become free and self-active, education is necessary. Again, we are faced with the problem of how the individual can become something that it already is. The answer provided by modern education (Fichte) of this paradox is to consider the learners as already able to do what they may become able to do (Benner, 1991, p. 71). Using this argument for developing an understanding of educational leadership, it is assumed that individuals can reach cultural, productive freedom (the ability to act) only by being recognised and treated as if they are already free (or reflective, capable, trustworthy). Educational leadership is therefore understood as an invitation, intervention or provocation, a violation, disturbance or expectation concerning the Other’s relation to itself, the world and others. Educational leadership is then to recognise somebody as if he/she is already capable of doing what he/she is supposed to become capable of – and to act accordingly.

In order to conceptually clarify the modern version of the educational leadership paradox, three concepts established in the infancy of modern educational thought (Kant, Fichte, Herbart and Schleiermacher) can be used. The first is the concept of recognition. This Fichtean and Hegelian concept has been interpreted differently by different philosophers, and holds an important position in contemporary social philosophy through the work of Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser, Charles Taylor and many others. Here, recognition, in short, refers to how the Self is aware of the Other as being indeterminate or free (ontological assumption), not only as an awareness of the Other’s situation or reality (epistemological relation) but also to a moral relation in terms of the Self’s responsibility for the Other’s worth, dignity and inviolability as person and individual (ethical relation). In addition to viewing recognition as a kind of position of the Self and an orientation or attitude towards the Other and his/her future, two additional concepts are considered necessary for unpacking the modern paradox of being and becoming. These are summoning to self-activity (‘Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit’) and ‘Bildsamkeit’. Bildsamkeit refers to the individual’s own conscious efforts aimed at making sense of the world and his/her experiences while ‘summoning’ may be seen as the leader’s or the teacher’s invitation of the Other to become engaged in a self-transcending process. These principles, introduced by Fichte and Herbart, are considered to be dialectically related. In other words, while the concept of recognition is here considered as both an ontological concept and empirical orientation, which refers to a cognitive, emotional, moral and political acknowledgement of the Other on an individual, institutional and cultural-societal level, we see that the concept is in fact differentiated into various forms of recognition.
It is obvious that all these forms of recognising the subject influences how the individual constructs and reconstructs itself, how its self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem develops (Honneth). However, from a pedagogical perspective, it is difficult to see self-respect and self-esteem as categories to be accepted as points of departure. Rather, all versions of self-relations may be seen as resulting from contingent, experience-based concrete actions and conditions. The question is then, how do we, for example, explain the individual development of self-respect, if having self-respect means to have a sense of oneself as a morally responsible agent or person? Recognition-based social philosophy typically accepts that the experiencing of oneself as autonomous, for example, is mediated by other individuals or conditions. In order to identify pedagogical and educational leadership actions among all possible mediating instances, circumstances or activities which influence the subject’s construction of self, autonomy or personhood, there is reason to make use of the concepts of summoning to self-activity and Bildsamkeit. These concepts leave room for genuine educational acts in terms of summoning (inviting) the Other to self-activity. The concepts of summoning and Bildsamkeit then explain how a teacher or a principal has a mediating role with respect to the Other in the maintenance and development of the Other’s self-relations.

We should note, then, that the very same core concepts may be laid out as foundational for both teaching and educational leadership as human interpersonal practice. In fact, educational leadership as management, for example, is a process of intentionally creating working conditions and circumstances for colleagues in relation to which individuals may reconstruct their professional identity. Such institutional perspectives may be included into an extended concept of summoning to self-activity. Consequently, non-affirmative school leadership would be focused on creating a professional school culture where individual learners learn about what it means to find a voice of their own and what it means to develop towards democratic citizenship. Here, the learners learn to make use of their own productive freedom. Insofar as district leaders and school principals act accordingly, they mediate between governance mechanisms, interpreting and translating them in dialogue with teachers. In such a process, the use of positive knowledge of, for example, new legislation or curricula may be focused towards not only understanding them as such but also towards reaching the questions or interests to which existing policies, norms or practices are seen as answers or responses. An educational leader in this case invites (summons) colleagues or even the public to engage in reflective self-activity (Bildsamkeit) in order for them to transcend what is given. An educational leadership which supports the identification of questions behind provided answers may result in the development of an ability to formulate alternative questions and agendas.

Finally, it is to be observed that ‘summoning to self-activity’ operates horizontally, diagonally and vertically in institutional settings.

Conclusion – What is educational leadership?

This article argued that every theory of educational leadership must deal with two fundamental questions as well as their internal relations. These questions concern, first, how institutional education is related to politics, economy and culture in a democratic society and, second, how leadership as a professional, moral practice is explained in terms of power and influence, that is, as an ethical and epistemological relation between individuals in professional settings. On the first issue, this approach argues for a non-hierarchical view of the relation between societal forms of practice, thus holding to a Western democratic tradition of citizenship and social transformation, allowing evolution and revolution. This non-hierarchical leadership theory explains the paradoxical relation between modern democracy, dynamic culture and education that are each mutual preconditions. The claim that educational leadership is simultaneously a dynamic, institutional, multi-level, diagonal, horizontal and vertical process, operating between different epistemologies and value spheres, where the intersections between levels and interests may be described as negotiated discursive spaces (Schmidt), ultimately returns us to a theoretical definition according to which education stands in a non-hierarchical relation to politics, economy and culture. The very same structure explains how curriculum works, since educational leadership is meaningful as a dynamic relation between different levels. To the second, interactive problem concerning the kind of influence educational leadership has, a non-affirmative approach was adopted. The article argued for a recognition-based social philosophy, but one avoiding reducing everything to recognition and thus arguing for genuine pedagogical activity and educational leadership using the concepts of summoning to self-activity and Bildsamkeit.

Educational leadership, including curriculum work, was thus defined as:

- a non-affirmative, critical-interpretative and cultural-historical practice carried out on different levels of the educational system, operating between different epistemologies (knowledge practices) and value-spheres (ethics and politics) where professional actors, through their roles (tasks) and persons, based on a recognition of the Other’s potentiality, reality and possibility, aim at supporting teachers/principals/students by summoning (inviting, intervening, demanding, supporting provocation) to engage in the transcendence of one’s current pedagogical work (Bildsamkeit), which may be done by e.g. developing routines and cultures of change, in order to create dynamic and reflected teaching opportunities, so that...
students become able to grow into an existing world while being prepared to change it according to their interests.

In addition to these philosophical assumptions concerning human freedom and societal indeterminism, leadership in institutionalised education is viewed as a culturally, historically and politically embedded and developed phenomenon which point at hermeneutically oriented research methods. In addition to these theoretical and cultural-historical perspectives, we emphasised that leadership in politically framed public institutions may draw upon discursive institutionalism and policy research. These perspectives broaden, deepen and bring together contemporary curriculum theory, Didaktik and leadership research without disregarding existing contributions from these fields, thus offering practitioners and policymakers a more coherent conceptual framework for practical pedagogical work from classrooms to national institutions.

References

Benner, D. (1991). *Allgemeine Pedagogik* [General education]. Weinheim: Juventa.

Uljens, M. (1997). *School didactics and learning*. Hove: Psychology Press.

Uljens, M. (1998). *Allmän pedagogik* [General education]. Lund: Studentliteratur.

Uljens, M. (2007). Education and societal change in the global age. In R. Jakku-Sihvonen & H. Niemi (Eds.), *Education as a societal contributor* (pp. 23–51). New York: Peter Lang.

Uljens, M., & Nyman, C. (2013). Educational leadership in Finland or building a nation with bildung. In L. Moos (Ed.), *Transnational influences on values and practices in Nordic educational leadership: Is there a Nordic model?* (pp. 31–48). Dordrecht: Springer.