

# Preface

School leaders are expected to play a pivotal role in educational systems, in which state policies regarding decentralization and accountability provide new challenges. The same applies to expectations about innovation, the improvement of quality in education and the finding of solutions for problems that arise from important changes in the profiles and background of students entering the school. But schools are a particular kind of organization as far as leadership roles are concerned. In this report the development of altering concepts of school leadership over a period of about 4 decades is sketched. This development started out with instructional leadership as an apparently strong break with the limited role of leadership in schools, seen as professional bureaucracies. But gradually, leadership thinking evolved to the recognition that school leadership can be devolved over staff and other organizational “substitutes for leadership”. Individual, hierarchical leadership seems to have almost disappeared from the scene in some recent studies of leadership effectiveness. The study goes on in an attempt to clarify the theoretical background of these developments, arriving at a proposal to think of a “lean” form of school leadership that is comparable to the concept of meta-control. The bulk of the study is dedicated to an analysis of the empirical research literature on leadership effects. This includes the presentation of results from an earlier meta-analysis carried out by the authors, a summary of other meta-analyses and a new meta-analysis based upon 25 studies carried out between 2005 and 2010. Interestingly the older reviews and meta-analyses were predominantly based on so-called direct effect studies, while the majority of more recent studies looked at indirect effects of leadership, mediated by other school variables. The report makes up the balance about the importance of the, on average, relatively small total effect of leadership on student outcomes and identifies promising intermediary factors which, stimulated by specific leadership behaviours, impact on student performance. In the final chapter implications for educational practice and policy are sketched under the headings: “schools need leadership”, “the toolkit of the school leaders as a meta-controller”, “the special case of turning around failing schools” and “efficiency of school leadership”. In passing several suggestions are given about interesting next steps in school leadership effects research.

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