

## **Chapter 2**

# **School Leadership in Context: National Policies, International Influences**

### **Introduction**

At a minimum, contemporary school leaders are required to be Janus-faced: acutely sensitive to the ecology of the school community, while simultaneously attuned to the external educational landscape. Such leadership requirements are more redolent of Daedalus than Icarus: it is necessary to occupy the swampy lowlands, indicate the future by being able to soar above, yet extremely mindful of the policy thermals that can cause instant instability. Leadership in such turbulent and unstable circumstances is more akin to paragliding than being the ‘company man’. It requires being intimate with local circumstance, yet capable also of ‘reading’ the national and international panorama—the macro, meso and micro policy environments of school leadership. This chapter sets out to indicate these three layers while seeking also to signal the manner in which these distinct spaces of practice are colonised—with particular reference to how the language, logic and attendant accountability technologies on NPM have been progressively insinuated into National policy rhetorics; a process of policy tessellation where one is over-shadowed and shaped by the other. This approach also becomes instrumental in indicating the significance of the potential of the Irish ‘case’ to inform and illuminate international discourses on leadership. I begin in the higher altitudes of this policy atmosphere—the international macro ‘social movements’, their dominant discourses and shaping influences.

### **Leadership: It’s Macro Shaping Influences**

School leaders, as the gatekeepers and boundary spanners between the internal school community, its immediate context and wider policy environment are continuously positioned on the threshold of change—a lonely borderland of turbulence that

requires considerable navigational nous accompanied by instant decision-making. Such snap professional judgements are part of the lifeworld (Sergiovanni 2000) and lifeblood (Sergiovanni 2005) of principals' practice that may have serious and long term consequences. These are the swampy lowlands (Schon 1987) over which the national policy (cumulus nimbus) clouds are suspended, while further out the (Cirrus) international policy atmosphere increasingly rains down a variety of ideas that frequently take on prescriptive proportions in national policy documents prior to entering the schoolhouse door. These layers are interconnected, while their precise connections are dynamic, shifting and therefore also difficult to predict. The school, education and public policy interface is similarly dynamic and unstable, yet, rather like the weather, over time patterns are discernible despite global warming. How autonomous are principals as they engage in these professional judgements?

## **Autonomy: Evolution of a Conceptual Policy Pillar**

Some researchers have drawn attention to "the popularity of the autonomy concept" and suggest that it "stems from evolutions on the practice of public management in OECD and other developed countries" (Verhoest et al. 2004, p. 101). The coupling of such practices to international organisations provides evidence of the influence of such organisations on national policies. Verhoest et al. (2004) indicate that "the theoretical underpinning of this movement is found in economic neo-institutionalism" (p. 101); other commentators express a preference for terminology such as 'supercapitalism' (Reich 2008), neo-liberalism, economic rationalism, neo-conservatism, while in general there is growing 'convergence' that the collective impact leads inexorably towards the conclusion that "we will have to pause from our relentless competition in order to survey the common challenges we face" (Sachs 2008, p. 5). This is clearly a monumental leadership challenge, but where does this leave professional autonomy?

Autonomy, promoted by such agencies as the OECD, and a variety of 'think tanks' (Rich 2005) have been fuelled by globalisation. There is considerable agreement therefore that: "Most nations have become part of a single integrated system of global capitalism" (Reich 2008, p. 4). Consequently, "what we want as individual purchasers of goods" has fuelled individual consumerism, yet "what we want together as citizens" has become proportionately more difficult, fractured and fractious (p. 5). The consequences of such economic autonomy for society are no secret: "it is heartbreaking that global society has evolved a highly efficient way to get entertainment to rich adults and children, while it can't get 12-cent medicine to dying poor children" (Easterly 2006/2007 see also James 2007; Putnam 2000; Putnam, and Feldstein, with Cohen 2004). Similarly resonant conclusions are evident in the following: "over the past two decades the most important and underreported story is how the market trumped politics. . . . 'we've become a 'bottom-line' society" (Bennis and Thomas 2002, p. 167). From a policy perspective, Stone indicates that "the model of society underlying the contemporary rationality project

is the market”, our life as consumers trumps our life as citizens” (Stone 2002, p. 9). She captures the psychological disjuncture to which such instrumental rationality contributes, when she states: “the major dilemma of policy . . . is how to get people to give primacy to these broader consequences in their private calculus of choices, especially in an era when the dominant culture celebrates private consumption and personal gain” (p. 23). Such bifurcation between individual citizen and society results from protective privileging of economic autonomy.

At an earlier stage in the roll out of the industrial revolution there was a growing realisation by its more reform minded entrepreneurs that “they could not simply leave their own poor to wallow in deprivation, disease, and hunger without courting crime, instability and disease for all” (see Owen 1991; Sachs 2008, p. 4). However, the consequences of the pervasiveness of this particular form of ‘economic man’ (*Homo Economicus*) has far reaching consequences for the manner in which individuals, as citizens are ‘treated’ by public services. This shift in emphasis, perhaps even to the point of fetish, or ‘cult’, is captured succinctly by Gross Stein (2001) in the previous chapter; the logic of the market and regimes of accountability hollow out meaning and sensibility (Englund and Solbrekke 2011). Thus the primacy of choice and value for money has re-configured understandings of autonomy, its attendant values with major consequences for schooling and its leaders.

Although the word autonomy dates back to ancient Greece, it is generally accepted that autonomy as self-government, the freedom and responsibility to exercise judgement for oneself, independent of existing rules and regulations, is quintessentially a European Enlightenment concept with Kant frequently recognised as its progenitor (see Schneewind 1998/2005). By late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, professionals, ‘called’ to provide a particular public service, to profess, to declare publicly, their commitment to professional community and society and this ‘web of commitments’ (May 1996) implied discretionary judgement, the autonomy to behave in a professionally responsible manner (see Dyrdal Solbrekke and Sugrue 2011). At the risk of over-simplification, the reincarnation of neo-liberalism, combined with decline in public ‘trust’ (Hardin 2008; Kohn 2008), specialisation and expert knowledge, have combined to loose the ties of earlier accepted versions of ‘social trustee professionalism’ (Durkheim 2001; Johnson 1972). The impact of such international intellectual, socio-cultural and economic shifts have profound consequences for public education and its leadership.

### ***Autonomy: From Enlightenment Concept to Policy Chameleon***

In a recent European (Eurydice) report (*School Autonomy In Europe Policies And Measures*) (Coghlan and Desurmont 2007), Fiegel, Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, declares:

Schools are at the heart of all education systems. More than this, schools lay the foundations for the societies of the future, because they play such a crucial role in forming the citizens of the future. They are also decisive for our future prosperity, which depends greatly on

the skills – in the widest possible sense of the word - and knowledge which schools are imparting to their pupils now. (p. 3)

Individuals are not mentioned, only in the sense that they are the raw material for ‘forming the citizens of the future’, while ‘future prosperity’, confined here one assumes to the economic sphere only, is about preparation for the workforce, to fuel the avaricious need of the market; described as “bicycling to authority—working hard, following orders and being punctual” (Spring 2007, p. 208). What remains ambiguous is the extent to which such a ‘citizen’ is *homo economicus*, a market and marketable avatar, or is there a wider ‘possible sense’ of knowledge and skill in this context that creates spaces and opportunities for becoming a valued and valuable participating citizen in the social as well as economic spheres.

The report goes on to indicate that how the concept of autonomy has been understood and altered chameleon-like as a policy rhetoric:

The school autonomy movement has developed gradually over three decades and the associated reforms reflect a range of schools of thought which vary according to the period in which they were introduced. (p. 10)

The report recognises that across the 27 member states of the EU, and its associated free market countries, in almost all of these national contexts “school autonomy is not a ... tradition” (p. 9). Rather, at the forefront, driven by an ideological agenda, was the Education Reform Act of 1988 in the UK, that had as its primary objective the bypassing of Local Education Authorities construed as bureaucratic and inefficient public sector quangos, the legislation “provided for an increase in school autonomy through the transfer of responsibilities for the management of finance and human resources, historically held by local education authorities, to schools” (p. 10). It was in the decade of the 1990s that this policy chameleon donned the mantle of New Public Management (NPM), with the avowed purpose of applying “private sector principles to the management of public services”, consistent with its neo-liberal parent ideology as indicated in the previous chapter (p. 12). Five ‘tenets’ are identified as axiomatic within this doctrine, namely:

- placing the customer at the centre of state activities and thus eroding the public sector mentality;
- decentralising responsibilities to the level closest to the field of operation;
- making government officers accountable to the community;
- emphasising the quality of services and efficiency of public bodies and, finally,
- replacing traditional procedural controls with evaluation by results (Coghlan and Desurmont 2007, p. 12)

In this post-Thatcherite period of Reaganomics, there continues to be blind faith in the power of the market to maximise efficiency, while there is nothing original in pointing out that schools and classrooms have features that make them distinct from the conveyor belt of production and its various quality assurance mechanisms. Free up, grant autonomy to public sector workers, teachers in this context, and then hold them to account for the ‘results’ that are manufactured. As a head teacher of a secondary school in England indicated to me recently in

a conversation, such a preoccupation with target setting and measurement of results does not take cognisance of the ‘raging hormones of the adolescent population that inhabit my school’ thus rendering such neat linear planning and projection a rather less predictable and more unstable game. More importantly, there is a recurrence of language that appeared in preceding sections—autonomy and a relocation of the locus and fulcrum of decision-making to the local level, with an expectation that this is more ‘efficient’ (whatever about efficacious) while it’s ‘effectiveness’ will be judged by measuring ‘results.’ In a process of re-centralised decentralisation, the pillar of autonomy metamorphosed into the twin towers of autonomy and accountability, new intimates within international policy rhetorics of school reform.

## **Autonomy and Accountability: Inseparable or Incompatible Policy Siblings?**

The Eurydice report is very obviously aware of a wide variety of interpretations of the concept of autonomy as applied to schools, and sought to create indicators of degrees of latitude in decision-making by focusing attention on—the use of public funds, the degree of discretion regarding curriculum and pedagogy, including the selection of textbooks, and the management structures that govern schools (see pp. 17–38). These considerations provide insight into the relative autonomy enjoyed within school communities in a comparative manner, and in some circumstances it appears that these measures have contributed to more democratic participation in education both within schools and between schools and their constituent communities and beyond. Nevertheless, the elephant in the room has become regimes of accountability. The report states that once NPM became the dominant discourse of reform, considerations of what would count as evidence of reform narrowed:

Taking account of the myriad of schools of thought at work across the different experiences in school autonomy, the principle of accountability was not, initially, at the centre of thinking in all countries. However, from the middle of the 1990s this concept became increasingly important and assumed different forms in different countries. (Coghlan and Desurmont 2007, p. 39)

New Zealand led the way followed by the UK (creation of Ofsted, post ERA) followed by the US with the passing of No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB) (2001), while the UK regimes of accountability continued to push the boat out:

But from the outset the English approach was widely seen as stronger, bigger, bolder and as providing an important test of the validity of the basic logic of competition as the driver of improvement (Whitty et al. 1998). (Levin and Fullan 2008, p. 290)

Significantly, however, after the dismissal of the Tory government from power (1997), the mantra education, education, education, espoused by Blair, in many respects stole the clothes of his Tory predecessors, thus privatisation and targets with a relentless pursuit of improved test scores continued to define the approach (Ball 2007, 2008a, b). Across the multiplicity of EU states, due to different traditions,

systemic trajectories and political power plays, very different combinations of autonomy and accountability spawned hybrids. For example, at the beginning of the 1990s, an OECD visiting team (US & UK ‘experts’) commented that the Irish school inspectorate lacked focus, its duties were ‘*sui generis*’, thus it would be necessary to shed significant aspects of its work in order to focus centrally on “the overall evaluation of the school system”. Although reports on the work of individual schools was perceived as useful, these “are not a substitute for a sophisticated and continuing review of what is happening inside the entire education system” (OECD 1991, p. 44). In this regard, two major inadequacies were identified: “a lack of development of teacher and school self-evaluation at the periphery and the inadequate data collection and analysis at the centre.” Such considerations, however appropriate in the setting, may be construed from a policy perspective as evidence of decentralisation of decision-making to the level of the school and granting of autonomy to principals and teachers to engage in ‘self-evaluation’, while exercising greater control from the centre through a process of data collection, thus sending clear signals as to what would be counted as significant. Additionally, behind the rhetoric of devolution of decision-making to the local level, is a considerable circumscription of autonomy- to exercise professional judgment but on our terms. Of course, such reports also provide indefatigable evidence of the increasing influence of international (economic) agencies on national educational policies, thus tightening the nexus between education and economy, and education as preparation for work.

These policy shifts have been described in the UK context as ‘de-centralised centralisation’ (Karlsen 2000). School inspection in the Irish context is perceived as being a much more benign process when compared with its near neighbour, though it has taken on heightened significance since the Minister in May 2006 indicated that henceforth reports would be made available publicly on the DES website (Sugrue 2011). Suffice to say that the tentacles of accountability while initially grafted onto the policy roots of autonomy, have spread wide and deep whereby accountability rather than the parent sponsor has come to dominate. With unprecedented decline in the performance of Irish 15 year olds in the PISA results (OECD 2010), the accountability stakes have been raised dramatically with regular national testing and publication of results being announced as integral to a national literacy and numeracy strategy (DES 2011); intensified further despite considerable improvement in the most recent results (see Perkins et al. 2013).

Inevitably, emphasis on accountability has impacted on leadership—theoretically and practically. A recent OECD report states:

School leadership is now an education policy priority around the world. Increased school autonomy and a greater focus on schooling and school results have made it essential to consider the role of school leaders. (Pont et al. 2008, p. 3)

Much more recent austerity prescriptions dictated by unelected European technocrats, provide further evidence of increasing encroachment on national policy by international agencies. These undemocratic, somewhat Olympian pronouncements are recognised as: “largely laid down under national legal

frameworks which demonstrate a top-down model of decision-making process without any identifiable driving force coming from schools themselves” (Coghlan and Desurmont 2007, p. 14). The assumed policy expectation is that national policies be shaped significantly by the policy rhetorics that precipitate from these macro perspectives. Such policy precipitation clearly influences meso policy when macro and meso ‘fronts’ collide.

## **Conjuncture and Disjuncture: The Interstices of Macro and Meso Policy Rhetorics**

What happens when ‘cosmopolitan’ policy perspectives meet established tradition—‘the way we do things around here’! Ireland, in this regard, may be regarded as an exemplary case study for reasons identified by the OECD more than two decades ago when it declared:

To understand contemporary Ireland, it is necessary to recognise how much its remote as well as more recent history still affects public values and attitudes and offers a key to understanding its institutions, not least its system of education. (OECD 1991, p. 11)

These lines were penned just a few short years before the ‘baptism’ of the Celtic Tiger in 1994 (see Allen 2000), while in more recent years the Tiger’s demise and the flight of its cubs (to Australia and Canada in particular), (see for example, Cooper 2009; O’Toole 2009), provides plenty food for thought on Ireland’s warm embrace of neo-liberalism. This became very pronounced as fiscal rectitude became a ubiquitous term during the economic recession of the late 1980s. As part of the reform process, the OECD visiting team identified many areas in education that needed attention, and of particular note in the present context was the need for systematic and sustained professional support “to prepare principals and senior staff in the schools for their onerous duties” (p. 132); there was recognition also that “the amount of inservice education and training (INSET) available was grossly inadequate” (p. 129), while the inspectorate too would require additional capacity “so that they can monitor schools more effectively” (p. 106). It may be suggested therefore that the pillars of new public management were already manifest in views expressed in this OECD report.

As the 1990s progressed and the pace of change gathered momentum there was a dam burst of initiatives that overwhelmed principals in particular. As part of the partnership approach to consensual policy making, there were some key landmark moments in the process—A Green Paper (Ireland 1992), a national consultative conference to build consensus with the key partners (Coolahan 1994), followed by the publication of a policy White Paper (Ireland 1995), and this paper avalanche culminated in the Education Act (Ireland 1998).<sup>1</sup> Although this wider educational

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<sup>1</sup>This may seem very tame in comparison with the turbulence experienced in other jurisdictions. However, there was a raft of other reports on education too—Adult Education, Early Childhood

reform landscape is important, the primary focus and interest here is autonomy and accountability and their downstream impact from a policy perspective on principals in particular, as well as the extent to which reform rhetorics have been imbued with the language of new public management—the neoliberal turn. In this manner also, the work reported in subsequent chapters become a ‘case study’ through a longitudinal life history that speaks out of a particular history to the larger neoliberal forces at play globally. In this manner, the unique case, has potential to illuminate leadership matters more generally (Stake 1995).

### ***Autonomy & Accountability: The Irish Experience?***

The foreword to the Green Paper (Ireland 1992) states:

Throughout the developed world at present, including the OECD countries, there is a widespread consensus on the need for radical reappraisal of traditional approaches to education policies, to take account of the complexities of modern living and the extension of education to all and for a longer period of life. Ireland cannot stand apart from these developments. (foreword, np)

Buoyed up by ‘widespread consensus’ and spurred on by international economic agencies such as the OECD, “radical reform” was necessary to “introduce a spirit of enterprise in our young people and to prepare them for a new world”—that of international competitiveness (Gleeson 2010). This Green Paper is now more than 20 years old. Consequently, revisiting it engenders a sense of how out of date it now is, the extent to which change after change has been heaped on a system whose structures continue to owe more to the nineteenth than the twentieth or twenty-first centuries. Nevertheless, the language of NPM came into its own during this decade (1990s). Consequently, this Green Paper was a catalyst in changing the language in which education was now being discussed. Six key aims of reform were identified, and these were:

1. To establish greater equity in education—particularly for those who are disadvantaged socially, economically, physically and mentally
2. To broaden Irish education—so as to equip students more effectively for life, for work in an enterprise culture, and for citizenship of Europe

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Education, as well as legislation on a variety of other issues—Health and Safety, NEPS, 1999, Education Welfare Act (2000), the establishment of the Education Welfare Board (2002) EPSEN Act 2004, Freedom of Information, Data protection etc. all of which impinged on the lives and work of principals directly and indirectly. Services such as SLLS, 2001, PCSP, 1999, SDPS, 2000, LDS, 2002 contributed to an increasing sense of freneticism.

3. To make the best use of education resources—by radically devolving administration, introducing best management practice and strengthening policy-making
4. To train and develop teachers so as to equip them for a constantly changing environment
5. To create a system of effective quality assurance
6. To ensure greater openness and accountability throughout the system, and maximise parent involvement and choice

(Ireland 1992, p. 5)

The language of NPM is very much to the fore in these stated aims: efficiency, devolution, quality assurance, accountability and choice resonate remarkably, while preparing teachers for a ‘constantly changing environment’ foreshadows what has been subsequently identified as ‘performativity’ (Ball 2008a, b).

### *The Rhetoric of Autonomy*

There is little doubt that the Irish education system was significantly over centralised leading to considerable delay, inefficiency and frustration as part of the decision-making process. However, as principals have indicated, the rhetoric of devolution frequently resulted in the relocation of the bottleneck from centre to periphery, particularly if the structures and process at the local level were unequal to the additional burdens that policy dictated should be carried out at the level of the school. Nevertheless, the rhetoric went under the ‘principle of devolution’ “that everything that can be administered effectively at individual school level should be done there; only matters that cannot be administered effectively at that level should be done elsewhere” (p. 17). However, the statement immediately following seems to suggest that this was in the interest of the central administration rather than for the benefit of the school: “the effect of this principle would be to shift decisively the responsibility for day-to-day administration from the Department of Education, freeing it to concentrate on strategic issues allied to policy-making” (p. 17). Efficiencies at the centre would accrue from devolving responsibility to the local level—a centralised prescription. With this policy, Boards of Management (BoMs) would become “the new centre of gravity” to be “equipped with effective powers” (p. 17). Boards would be required to “draw up a formal School Plan” and to provide an annual report to parents. In relation to finance, there would be “some flexibility . . . allowed in how schools allocate spending” while “discretion over schools’ budgets would be increased progressively” (p. 18). Principals, within

this devolved system would be “chief executive” and apart from “executing the School Plan” would also be responsible for “evaluating individual teachers’ capability,” and henceforth principals would be appointed on “a fixed-term contract (such as 7 years) rather than permanently.” This new departure was intended “to encourage mobility and career development” but despite this, the title of chief executive and the fixed term contract disappeared from the subsequent White Paper. Nevertheless, “effective management and leadership at all levels within the school” was deemed essential and this too would require considerable internal restructuring (pp. 146–148). There was recognition also that devolution of decision-making would necessitate the creation of “effective management structures in the schools” and towards these ends “training in management functions would become a stronger element on both initial and in-service training for teachers” (p. 20). Many of these initiatives were necessary and overdue, it is how they have evolved subsequently that is perhaps of more interest. In addition to a rhetoric of autonomy, attention was also paid to quality assurance—accountability and transparency.

### *Accountability and Transparency*

School inspection in primary schooling in Ireland has had a persistent presence from the foundation of the national education system (1831) (see Coolahan, with O’Donnovan, P. F., 2009). An important shift in emphasis would entail “the collection of quantitative data about students’ performance” and, rather like the UK system, “students would be assessed by standard methods around the age of 7, 11, and 15” but these proposed departures too fell on fallow ground, only to be imposed in the wake of PISA results (2010) and the imposition of a Literacy and Numeracy strategy (DES 2011). Nevertheless, the rhetoric made explicit that the price of autonomy inexorably required greater accountability: “following directly from increased autonomy is the need for adequate systems of accountability” and this requires “a much greater degree of openness at all levels” (p. 27). Such accountability and transparency would enable parents to “make a more informed choice in the selection of schools for their children” thus signalling also that market forces thinking was already part of the repertoire of the policy-makers. However, even if the language of NPM was more in evidence, its progress can sometimes be temporarily slowed, even when the international juggernaut is unstoppable—a non-linear trajectory always seeking an opportunity to ‘progress’. The assumption too that autonomy requires accountability rather than trust is most questionable. Rather, “autonomy is centrally associated with the notion of individual responsibility” (Dworkin 1988, p. 102), an essential ingredient for building trust (Bryk and Schneider 2002).

### ***NPM: White Paper (1995)***

In response to stinging criticism of the Green Paper due to the absence of any underpinning set of ideas or principles, the first chapter of the White Paper sought to redress this lacuna with a chapter entitled ‘Philosophical Framework’. While the principles of—quality, equality, pluralism, partnership and accountability are espoused, there is considerable evidence also of an increasing pervasiveness of the language of economic rationalism. The rhetoric of ‘partnership’ is retained but now divided into two categories—more immediate partners such as—“parents, patrons/trustees/owners/governors, management bodies, teachers, the local community and the state” (Ireland 1995, p. 7), and the “social partners”—“businesses and the professions”. Nevertheless, there is evidence also of deference to institutional church with specific recognition of a school’s ‘ethos’ as having a “critical intangible character ... which encompasses collective attitudes, beliefs, values, traditions, aspirations and goals” (p. 9) (see Gleeson 2010).

Although the Convention Report (Coolahan 1994) may have tempered the language of the White Paper, the language of NPM is evidently present. For example, “the State should ... develop rigorous procedures for the evaluation of the educational effectiveness and outcomes.” (p. 8). Since the State was increasing expenditure in this sector, it is entirely appropriate that it should “evaluate the effectiveness of educational policy, provision and outcomes”. Consequently, nothing less than “full public accountability” would suffice and this would require that “effective systems ... for evaluating effectiveness and efficiency with which resources are used” (p. 8). However, there is a strong sense of accountancy about such a policy stance that does not indicate what would count as value for money. As Biesta suggests:

... the idea of accountability has been transformed from a notion with real potential to a set of procedures that have stifled educational practice and that have reduced normative questions to questions of mere procedure. (Biesta 2010, p. 50)

The White Paper devoted individual chapters to school Governance, In-School Management and the school plan (pp. 151–159) where leadership, management, effectiveness and instructional leadership broadly redolent of prominent international research literature during this period are ghosted. In short, “organisations [such as schools] must be changed to make them auditable” (Power 1999, p. 47). In recognition of the increasing importance being attached to the leadership function within the school, professional development and support would be vital. Many of the provisions for principals were to be provided during the next 5 years, and despite such policy commitments the Leadership Development for schools (LDS) ([www.lds21.ie](http://www.lds21.ie)) support service was not created until 2001, more than 6 years later. Principals were also to serve a probationary year, and appointed “for a maximum period of seven years”, and “potential candidates for leadership and management positions” were to be identified and afforded “the opportunity to gain practical experience in a wide range of curricular and administrative duties” but these more imaginative proactive policy intentions have not come to fruition.

However, there was growing recognition that schools were becoming far too complex to enable even heroic principals to operate effectively, but since distributed leadership had not yet become part of the leadership literature ‘effective delegation’ was espoused (p. 154). The school plan was advocated as a significant conduit to “implement and manage change and improve the quality of education” yet concerns expressed during the National Convention were repeated in the White Paper that recognise the limitations and possible consequence of imposed top-down reforms:

... that the production of a final document might be used as a rigid accountability mechanism for evaluating schools; if this were to occur, the planning documents may not convey the realities of school, but rather become marketing devices. (p. 157)

Consequently, distinctions were made between ‘the *relatively permanent features of school policy*’ and a ‘*development section*’ which would focus on “a limited number of small-scale development projects” but this does not appear to have reduced the proliferation of documentation. In the circumstances, it may be understood as a (vein) effort to retain relative autonomy in the face of increasing accountability.

In terms of quality assurance, major reforms of the inspectorate were envisaged. It was proposed to have a central and regional inspectorate but this became less plausible and acceptable when proposed Regional Educational Boards (rather like Local Authorities in the UK) were not established. Henceforth, the inspectorate would concentrate much more than in the past on “evaluating and reporting on the quality and effectiveness of the provision of educational services” (p. 185), and would publish “an annual report on the quality of education” something the inspectorate had failed to do for several decades (see O’Donovan 1992). As part of its remit to concentrate more on its evaluative and policy making functions, the inspectorate would also develop “performance indicators and criteria” (Ireland 1995, p. 187) for the compilation of such reports as well as providing more systematic data on the system in general from accountability, transparency and policy making perspectives. There was particular awareness of the increasing influence of international agencies when reform of the Department of Education itself is discussed, while this too is indicative of an increasing influence of OECD, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and Eurostat, all of whom are mentioned (see p. 193). Penetration of international social movements to the local level is very evident as the language of NPM is promoted by these international agencies- such that thinking and behaviour are challenged:

Development of international comparators is receiving attention at present. Considerable progress has been made in recent years, through the work of the OECD on educational statistics and comparative indicators, in their comparison of different national systems of education and the macro level. It is possible to compare systems in terms of inputs (expenditure, staffing), results (graduation), outputs (student achievement, labour market outcomes) And processes (rates of participation, pupil-teacher ratios and indicators of school decision making). However, much work remains to be done in developing these indicators .... (p. 193)

Nationally, in response to such international influences, “**performance measures**” were increasingly integral to this elaborate data generation process to the extent that a “value for money system in all government departments” was rapidly becoming the new orthodoxy (p. 194). Apart from the more obvious pervasive presence of the language of NPM, the degree of external prescription by policy-makers, emboldened by the increasing influences of international agencies, professional autonomy is simultaneously being curtailed and circumscribed; the system world is increasingly invading the life-worlds of school leaders. By contrast, others see autonomy as “a characteristic of agents who are emotional, embodied, desiring, creative and feeling as well as rational creatures” (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, p. 21). The adoption of a longitudinal life history perspective to leadership has the potential to redress this increasing partial strangulation of the life world while indicating what happens to that life and work when professional autonomy is curtailed.

## **Autonomy & Accountability: From Meso to Micro Realities**

As the decade of the 1990s progressed, and the dam burst of reform initiatives cascaded into schools, principals increasingly felt put upon and unable to cope, and their concerns and frustrations became manifest in a number of ways. There was clamour from teacher unions for additional salary in recognition of increased workloads, but there was a sense also in which principals felt that their concerns were either being ignored or inadequately recognised. Until then, principals were members of the same teacher union as their teaching colleagues at both primary and post-primary levels. In the case of the former, the primary teachers Union (Irish National Teachers’ Organisation) had resisted successfully attempts by cohorts of principals to establish an association, often with coercive tactics. In order that principals voices would be heard, particularly at the policy-making table, the National Association of Principals and Deputies (NAPD) ([www.napd.ie](http://www.napd.ie)) was formed in the late 1990s to represent post-primary interests while in 2000 the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN, [www.ippn.ie](http://www.ippn.ie)) was also founded. The vast majority of members of these associations continue to retain membership of their respective unions. Both bodies have gained formal recognition from the Department of Education and Skills thus they have a voice at the policy making table, while they provide considerable professional support both formally and informally for members, as well as run annual national and regional conferences and seminars. These have been important developments within the national arena that have brought considerable focus on school leadership issues. A ministerial review committee established as a consequence of lobbying by primary principals led to the publication of a substantial report on primary principalship (DES 1999). A further outcome was the belated establishment of a DES funded professional support programme for school leaders—Leadership Development for Schools ([www.lds21.ie](http://www.lds21.ie)) and provision of these important services has been extended to other leadership roles that have evolved in the past decade.

### ***Middle- Management Structures—Shared Responsibilities***

Since the 1970s, both primary and secondary teachers had access to ‘posts of responsibility’ in two categories—A and B, with the former being approximately twice the value of the latter in terms of additional remuneration—currently, these allowances are respectively: €8,520 and €3,769, and subject to percentage increases when additional salary is awarded.<sup>2</sup> When first created these positions were awarded solely on seniority, and individuals were assigned additional duties such as school library, audio-visual equipment, school tours etc. Throughout their history at primary level, the general axiom was that such additional responsibilities could not interfere with class teaching duties, but neither was a teacher obliged to fulfil these additional responsibilities outside of normal school hours. Persistent vociferous complaining by principals regarding workload and responsibilities towards the end of the 1990s resulted in the creation of more definite middle management structures with additional ‘posts’ in a concerted effort to create more robust management structures to accommodate devolved responsibilities. Vice-principals were re-designated as deputies, while A post holders became assistant principals and B post holders were re-designated as ‘special duties’ personnel. The intention was to create a management team approach as opposed to individuals being assigned specific tasks. As a consequence, within the re-designation, assistants and special duties teachers would have three elements to their portfolio of responsibilities: managerial, curricular and pastoral. After initial teething difficulties where there was ambivalence and ambiguity as to the extent to which seniority or meritocracy would apply within school communities, these new structures have been of considerable assistance to principals in making the school as an organisation work more efficiently while making the role of principal more tolerable. Approximately 50 % of teachers held these promoted positions until the introduction of a moratorium on replacement (2009) with limited alleviation introduced more recently (DES (2014)), an austerity inspired move that has seriously undermined the potential of school leadership. In the primary sector, where other than a tiny number of deputies in the largest schools who may not have any teaching responsibilities, there are limits to what this system can achieve since teachers have full-time teaching duties.. Nevertheless, creation and expansion of middle management structures provided an important opportunity to rethink school leadership, roles and responsibilities, but the global winds of change were shifting in favour of increased accountability, inevitably curtailing professional autonomy.

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<sup>2</sup>However, since the loss of financial sovereignty (2008; restored January 20014), as these leadership positions have fallen vacant due to (early) retirements, they are not being replaced, thus many schools are being denuded of management structures deemed vitally necessary in a policy context of devolved responsibility. The Press office of the INTO indicates that 46 % of Assistant Principal posts remain unfilled while 29 % of special duties positions continue to be vacant (16/5/2013).

## ***Internal and External Accountability: Increasing Performativity?***

Many of the policy initiatives that fermented during the 1990s were enshrined in the 1998 Education Act. Part three, inter alia, indicates that the ‘inspectorate’ would have responsibility for visiting schools to—“support and advise ... evaluate the organisation and [its] processes ... evaluate the education standards ... assess the implementation and effectiveness of any programmes ... assess the implementation of regulations” (section 13). The research and policy remit of the inspectorate was also strengthened—it would conduct research, benchmarked against “international practice and standards” as well as advise on matters of policy. While these responsibilities had existed prior to the legislation, there was a significant concentration of effort, thus new demands on principals and teachers also.

Such demands found their most significant expression in the evolution of Whole School Evaluation (WSE). Through a series of centralised partnership agreements (commonly referred to as national understandings), productivity in exchange for salary increases meant more planning, and accountability through WSE, productivity being an important element of NPM. Such consensus building strategies became an easy conduit for the further insertion into policy and increasingly practises also of NPM inspired accountability measures, but were ‘sweetened’ significantly by salary increases; teachers and principals as ‘consumers’ bought the policy, while in turn were bought by it.

It is generally accepted internationally that “self-evaluation and external evaluation reinforce the commitment of all of the key players, in and out of the school, to evaluate what they are doing” (MacBeath and McGlynn 2002, p. 25). Until relatively recently, in the Irish context, school inspection was seen as the prerogative of the inspectorate to be endured by teachers from time to time (see Sugrue 1999). Through a combination of policy borrowing and the influence of international agencies, there is a growing confluence of policy influences. In Scotland, England and Ireland, for example, the following policy documents arrived in sequence: *How Good Is Our School?* (SOEI, 1996), *School Evaluation Matters* (Ofsted 1998), and *Looking At Our Schools: An Aid to Self-Evaluation in Primary Schools* (DES, 2003). However, when self-evaluation is promoted as being virtuous by those with responsibility for external accountability, there is considerable potential for sending mixed messages, as well as ratcheting up the performative dimensions of accountability. In the UK, re-centralisation through regimes of external accountability led to the emergence of ‘performativity’:

... not in any simple sense a technology of oppression, it is also one of satisfaction and rewards, at least for some. Indeed it works best when we come to want for ourselves what is wanted from us, when our moral sense of ourselves and our desires are aligned with the pleasures of performativity. But there is always the possibility of slippage between pleasure and tyranny within performativity regimes. (Ball 2008b, p. 52)

When accountability morphs into performativity, it becomes critical that principals and teachers have a very clear view of their responsibilities as professionals, to

‘speak for themselves’ (MacBeath 1999). For internal and external accountability to function in complementary ways an appropriate synergy is required between: goals, their ongoing monitoring, well documented evidence regarding specified goals and criteria and being transparent regarding an adequate audit trail while making this evidence available for appropriate scrutiny (MacBeath and McGlynn 2002; Rudd and Davies 2000). National policies have been influenced in significant ways by a general move towards more tightly scripted regimes of control internationally (Sugrue 2006). Suffice to say that the OECD report in 1991 was something of a catalyst (OECD 1991), while the sequence of publications provided in the ensuing decade is an important ‘audit trail’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985) of the manner in which subsequent national policy evolved (DES 1996, 2002, 2005, 2006a, b, c, d, e, f; Sugrue 2008).

The basic structure of internal and external accountability was articulated by the inspectorate in ‘Whole School Inspection’ (DES 1996). This policy has largely remained focused on:

- The quality of school management
- The quality of school planning
- The quality of teaching and learning (p. 27)

It was reiterated subsequently in ‘looking at our schools’ (DES 2003), followed by the Guide on Whole-School Evaluation (DES 2006c). Other systemic developments had a catalytic effect. After the Revised Primary Curriculum was published (Ireland 1999), as part of the implementation strategy, two important support services were created—the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP), and the School Development Planning Service (SDPS), subsequently amalgamated (2008). Both services were under the control of the inspectorate, while staffed by a significant number of seconded primary principals and teachers. There is a sense therefore in which SDPS in particular became the Trojan horse of the system, promoting self-evaluation, policy devised at the centre to be imposed on principals and teachers but mediated to principals and teachers by seconded colleagues. Apart from making the addition of ‘support for students’ there is little that distinguishes internal from external evaluation as indicated above (Fig. 2.1).

| ‘Themes for school self-evaluation at primary level’                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | The evaluation framework                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Quality of school management</li><li>■ Quality of school planning</li><li>■ Quality of curriculum provision</li><li>■ Quality of learning and teaching in curriculum areas</li><li>■ Quality of support for pupils (DES, 2003, p. iii)</li></ul> | <p>The WSE team evaluates and reports on the operation of the school under the following headings or areas of inquiry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The quality of school management</li><li>■ The quality of school planning</li><li>■ The quality of learning and teaching</li><li>■ The quality of support for pupils (DES, 2006, Section 3.2, p. 10)</li></ul> |

Fig. 2.1 Self-evaluation and whole-school evaluation

These policies clearly indicate a convenient seamless confluence of the internal self-evaluation as an aid to external evaluation, an agenda underpinned by the Education Act (1998). A significant element of the SDPS brief was school planning, thus in terms of demands for paperwork alone, there was a proliferation of policy documents and inspection reports reflect this emphasis on planning (Sugrue 2011). These changes, allied to a decision to ‘go public’ with WSE reports in 2006 (published on the DES website), has certainly added to a feeling among teachers and principals that they are subject to considerably more surveillance than heretofore. A better educated parent population is more likely to be more enquiring regarding the progress of their children, and more likely also to question or challenge teachers, spurred on by the same neo-liberal rhetorics of choice and competitive advantage. In the case of principals, despite the creation of middle-management structures, their role is more complex, varied and diffuse. In 1991, the OECD report commented on the ‘legendary autonomy’ of the teacher in Ireland, consistent with Lortie’s (1975) depiction, while under the Education Act (1998), principals are to be held accountable for the quality of teaching and learning as well as “regularly evaluate students” and “periodically report the results of the evaluation to the students and their parents” (section 22, 2a, (b)).

## Conclusions

It would be inappropriately pre-emptive to indicate how changes in educational discourses selectively documented throughout this chapter have impacted the lives and work of principals and teachers in the Irish jurisdiction. Rather, the purpose of this chapter has been to indicate the manner in which the language of new public management has invaded and pervaded policy rhetorics while simultaneously signalling how international agencies and social movements have shaped and influenced these national reform agenda. As a predominantly English speaking country, on the periphery of Europe with a very open economy highly dependent on exports, as well having been a major beneficiary of EU development funds for three decades, and with strong historical ties to the US, and proximity to the UK, it may be the case that for all these reasons and more, educational policies have been particularly susceptible to these external influences, more so perhaps than mainland European countries, protected as they are to some extent by language and more deeply rooted commitments to notions of education as a welfare issue, stronger intellectual traditions and a more bifurcated politics of right and left (Esping-Andersen 2000; Esping-Andersen, with, Gallie, Hemerijk, and Myles 2002). However, I am mindful also of inherited intellectual traditions allied to the residues of post-colonial mindsets that coalesce in the Irish context into what have been identified as the ‘say/do dichotomy, and a capacity for delusion: “traditional Ireland is characterised ‘less by hypocrisy than by a capacity for self-deception on a heroic scale’” (Lee 1989, p. 652, quoted in Gleeson 2010, p. 17).

Even in post-Celtic tiger Ireland, as various facets of school leadership are critically scrutinised, it will be necessary to bear in mind internal systemic structures and cultural forces as well as the external winds of change. Nevertheless, if changing language changes discourses, and a premium is placed on the twin rhetorics of autonomy and accountability, as is evident above, then their impact on the nature and nurture of leaders and leadership should be evident in several respects. The ‘case’ of Ireland, viewed through a longitudinal life history lens, while unique, has potential also to insert its own perspectives and insights into school leaders’ lives and work thus contributing to leadership literature in its own distinct manner. Constructing this tableau as it has been buffeted over time by these increasingly influential external forces, and shaped by the biographies, thoughts and actions of school principals in the setting is the focus and purpose of subsequent chapters.

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