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# Cosmopolitan Leadership

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## Abstract

*The aim of this paper is to discuss a cosmopolitan alternative to managerial traditions of leadership in education. The reason for this is that recent understandings and practices of educational leadership tends to be geared at the primacy of economic norms due to the re-contextualization of the public sector in terms of New Public Management. In part one; I argue that our children are growing into an increasing cosmopolitan social reality that changes nation states in economic, cultural, social, political and moral aspects. If schools should aim at children attaining the required knowledge and competencies to function well in society, it is somewhat misleading to shape education in relation to one-sided economic interpretations deriving knowledge and competencies primarily from market contexts. In part two; I argue that the increasingly cosmopolitan character of social reality calls for the development of dialogical attitudes, imagination and communication. However, recent economic and managerial interpretations of educational leadership tend to shape leadership practise towards strategic coordination of action and one sided means-ends rationalization, and thereby bypassing the conditions of dialogue as well as qualities usually held important in education, that is, learning, moral responsibility and respect for cultural difference. In the third part; I sketch a cosmopolitan alternative to managerial traditions in education building on dialogical communication and coordination of actions, and a qualified conception of dialogue suitable for leadership practice in education at the level of actors*

## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to discuss a cosmopolitan alternative to managerial traditions of leadership in education. The reason for this is mainly that recent understandings and practices of educational leadership tends to limit themselves to the primacy of economic norms. This is intelligible in the light of a decline of the welfare state, but this unilateral focus is also problematic as long as we think of education as aiming not only at preparing children for flexible labour in knowledge based economies. If we think of children as a growing into a cosmopolitan reality where cultural learning, active citizenship and moral responsibility counts as valuable, we have to re-think leadership and management in education, or so I will argue in this brief and general discussion.

### 1. Cosmopolitanization – a multidimensional process of global and local change

Educational institutions are frequently assigned tasks to prepare pupils for flexible labour and entrepreneurship in knowledge-based economies (Hargreaves, 2003). The European Commission's (2002) vision for a united Europe involves us becoming the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world. A market oriented concept of lifelong learning closely connected to key competencies involved in such learning can be

seen as core values aiming at shaping national education in the European member states. Our children are supposed to grow into a competitive marketplace, and schools should aim at their attaining the required knowledge and competencies. The concept of lifelong learning and its accompanying competencies can be seen as examples of globalization in and marketization of education. However, I think it is somewhat misleading to make such one-sided economic interpretations of education.

The world our children are growing into and changed conditions for education can also be understood in terms of a process of *cosmopolitanization*. The sociological concept of cosmopolitanization captures not only globalization in its economic aspects under economic descriptions; rather, it captures changes in society and education in multi-dimensional terms including cultural, social, political and moral aspects relevant for education (Beck, 2006, 2009). Cosmopolitanization can be understood as a multidimensional process that changes nation states from within, and as a result our social reality are becoming cosmopolitan in its structure. Local, national, ethnic and global cultures and phenomena interconnect and interpenetrate, and it is difficult to draw boundaries between these categories when they are constantly re-negotiated and blurred in a world wide web of meaning (Beck, 2006, 2009). For educational institutions, traditionally serving as a vehicle for shifting people's loyalties from their local communities to a nation as the centre of gravity for self-identification, cultural belongingness, social integration and moral obligation, cosmopolitanization constitutes a challenge.

(a) *Culturally*, the formation of national cultures and identities can be seen as attempts to represent diverse societies as belonging to one great national family (Hall, 2004, p. 605). At the same time, theories of identity formation used to include assumptions about cultures belonging to a specific territory, and they were conditioned on our separating ourselves against what was perceived as foreign (Beck, 2006). Cosmopolitanization makes such formations and representations highly problematic; not only do they neglect the plural source of culture and meaning as well as the recognition of different lifestyles and cultures within a nation, they also fail to take citizens, teachers' and young people's everyday experiences seriously in that they are likely to construct shifting and multi-vocally shaped identities. Cosmopolitanization means that cultural goods and meanings are increasingly uncoupled from their territorial pasts in the world wide web of meaning.

(b) *Morally*, cosmopolitanization means extension of our space of moral interpretations as well as moral responsibilities in comparison with national loyalty, but also changed conditions for emotional imagination and empathic perspective taking. The import and export of cultural meaning, worldwide media and demographic change opens up for cosmopolitan empathy because those who used to be seen as distant strangers can now be recognized as neighbors coming closer. A commonly made assumption is that moral sympathies are restricted to a close circle of significant others and neighbors that we experience as *same*, but the meaning and scope of that assumption have altered. Boundaries between strangers and neighbors are often blurred, and in the globally connected society people anywhere can affect people everywhere. Our global interconnectedness introduces the very idea that citizenship education, moral responsibility but also moral sympathy can be understood in cosmopolitan terms, that is, understanding ourselves at least partly as citizens of the world and taking seriously our responsibilities and obligations to global others living near or distant. (Waldron, 2003; Beck, 2009; Appiah, 2006).

(c) *Socially and politically*, when local, national and global cultures interpenetrate and co-instantiate and nationally demarcated societies are becoming increasingly diversified, we cannot expect a harmonious social order or broad consensus regarding lifestyles. Moreover, our global interconnectedness makes our habitual identification of nations with societies somewhat misleading. In many aspects, we have reasons to think of ourselves as co-existing in one common, *our*, society in which there are many nations, and the political autonomy of sovereign nation states have become more of a social fiction than a social fact. The cosmopolitan character of social reality makes re-negotiation of concepts like 'society', 'democracy', 'justice', 'market' etc. necessary, resulting in a break with nationalistic social science and education. In the cosmopolitanized society, Beck (2009, p. 60) argues, one can trace a new communicative logic forcing people to co-operate who otherwise do not want to have anything to do with one another. One can trace forms of compulsory democratic co-operation between people who think of themselves as having to deal with common concerns that are forced upon them.

The cosmopolitan reality our children are growing into can on these grounds not only be understood in terms of knowledge based economies competing on a global market, and the knowledge and competencies they should attain cannot only be understood as those immediately connected to market contexts; rather, cosmopolitanization calls for a concept of "lifelong learning" that includes qualitatively different aspects than those suggested by the European Commission. Beck (2006) thinks that the co-presence of rival lifestyles and the quality of multi-vocal difference often recognized within oneself makes us experience a growing need for cosmopolitan competence involving the art of translation and bridge-building, and to: "situating and relativizing one's own form of life within other horizons of possibility [and] the capacity to see oneself from the perspective of cultural others and to give this practical effect in one's own experience through the exercise of boundary-transcending imagination" (Beck, 2006, p. 89). In short, we have to develop capacities for *dialogical imagination and communication*.

## **2. The need for dialogue and the strategic character of educational leadership**

If our children are growing into a cosmopolitan social reality we have reason to meet those conditions with a cosmopolitan and not only a market oriented education. Children and young people should to some degree be prepared to: understand, validate and criticize propositions and their implicated contexts in the worldwide web of meaning and action; handle the clash of cultures within their own lives, deal constructively with social conflicts and engage in cooperative problem solving with strangers and neighbors in the public space; form inclusive moral identities and views of citizenship, and to develop abilities to take the perspectives of others and let such an empathic understanding have some practical effect in their social actions.

Children and young people must not only develop knowledge and competencies making them attractive and competitive on the market; the development of dialogical attitudes, and their being trained to engage in dialogical communication can also be seen as essential aspects of education not necessarily fostered under the influence of capitalist competition (Rönnsström, 2010). Beck (2006, s. 89) uses the term *dialogical imagination* for our awareness of and our reflectively dealing with cultural otherness and competing

lifestyles within our own lives, and I believe that *dialogical communication* can serve as a suitable term for the kind of communication appropriate for the communicative logic and the cooperative democratization of the cosmopolitan social reality. However, recent global changes in education strengthen unilateral and reductionist economic interpretations of education. This can be seen in the area of educational leadership where one can talk of a two-level marketization of education in several nations: schools are supposed to serve the needs of knowledge-based economies at the same time as they are internally governed by market principles and private norms for leadership.

Two decades ago, public sectors in the liberal west were considered too expensive, big, rigid, unproductive and inefficient (Eriksen, 1997). They were thought of as having too much power over while offering poor service to the citizens, and the view that the state and its institutions should not differ materially from other service organs in society won global success. A new agenda was set for the public sector building on deregulation, decentralisation, customer orientation, cost effectiveness, management structures, quality assessment and increased orientation towards objective goals and results. The new agenda was later interpreted in terms of a New Public Management, referring to different strategies for change resting on the common assumption that economic norms should have primacy in the governance of the public sector (Christensen and Laegreid, 2007). There are many reports on the recent re-contextualization of leadership in education (Bagley, 2006, McInerney, 2003, Lindblad and Popkewitz, 2004, Hargreaves, 2003), but what is interesting in this context are some of its most problematic consequences in relation to education in an increasingly cosmopolitan social reality.

New Public Management builds on an individualistic concept of rationality involving the view that actors are considered rational if they are able to govern their behavior in an optimal fashion on the basis of pre-established goals or preferences with a minimum use of resources (Eriksen, 2001). This model of rationality restrict itself to means-ends relations, and this is clearly expressed when the formulation and legitimation of goals are left to higher level policy organs while lower-level units are made responsible for implementation or realization of goals given. This kind of rationalization implies that the criteria for success are concentrated on maximizing fulfillment of goals by means of effective use of resources. The benefits are supposed to be that the lower level units do not have to worry about what to do and strive for. They only have to worry about their fulfilling goals with effective use of resources (Eriksen, 1997).

This focus on means-ends rationalization has implications for the quality of cooperation, and the coordination of actions that becomes restricted. The different actors working in a unit responsible for goals and results do not have to come to an agreement, or deliberate on the goals they set for themselves. Such cooperative processes would be time consuming and run the risk of leading to disagreement. In fact, the actors do not even have to be convinced about the goals given to them, or be able to defend their importance with reasons (Eriksen, 2001). Therefore, the actors involved can take a strategic attitude towards them; they only need to adapt to but not agree on their own objectives. The downside of this means-end rationalization is that important aims for education might not be properly understood among the actors involved when they are not communicated, legitimated and reflected upon to a large extent. A unit responsible for goals and results on the market must secure its survival by means of being attractive to their customers who

may choose another unit to serve their needs and preferences. In this means-ends rationalization structure, competition works as a promoter of quality accompanied with the risk that increased customer orientation means decreased loyalty to the higher level policy organs.

New Public Management typically promotes strategic communication and external motivational structures among the actors involved. This is not surprising, because their knowledge, insight, learning or deliberation on what to do and strive for play subordinate roles in setting goals and coordinating actions. In fact, it is important that the coordination of action can be done without actors changing their views. One can bypass the actors' various personal attitudes if they have knowledge about crucial external stimuli – 'carrots and sticks' – present in their environment (Eriksen, 2001, p. 24). This means that actors often react to sanctions rather than reasons when they need to coordinate their actions and get things done. The key motivational factors inferred from motivational psychology presume that actors are constantly driven by self-interest, and positive or negative sanctions are frequently used in action coordination in the New Public Management and its typical strategic leadership. I use the word 'strategic' here to denote its means-end character of rationality, but however fruitful this kind of leadership might be in many contexts it is problematic in many aspects in educational contexts. In education it is not only the maximising of fulfilled goals with effective use of resources that counts; rather, in education goals must also be fulfilled in a right, valid and not only effective way. In education, the intelligibility and rationality of the goals themselves seem to be relevant because educational institutions are supposed to promote learning. If the actors involved in education are systematically encouraged to adapt strategically to goals given, then important aspects of learning might be lost. A norm for leadership that is encouraging strategic adaption to goals and the bypassing of learning processes; that draws heavily on means-ends rationalization and run the risk that pupils and teachers are merely treated as means to some economic ends; and that bypass cultural difference in its coordinative use of general psychological dispositions to seek pleasure and avoid pain; well, such a norm seem to be a flawed norm for educational leadership under cosmopolitan conditions.

### **3 The Characteristics of a Cosmopolitan Leadership**

Leadership is basically an action coordinative relation between actors dependent on one another to get things done together (Eriksen, 2001). Leadership is a contested concept not always accepted as an appropriate term for educational institutions, but as a consequence of New Public Management it is a term frequently used to label the work of both teachers and school leaders. In this context I use 'leadership' in the sense of professional school actors assigned the right and status to influence and coordinate actions of others for educational purposes. If we take seriously the multidimensional character of the cosmopolitan social reality in which education takes place, we have reasons to think of educational leadership and shape leadership practice not only in one-dimensional economic terms but in cosmopolitan terms as well. The first drawings on cosmopolitan leadership that I outline here are based on the assumption that even if New Public Management are exercised at the level of governance, it does not necessarily need to dominate leadership practise at the level of actors. Cosmopolitan leadership can be seen as an appropriation of the managerial re-contextualization of leadership in the public sector at

the level of actors for educational institutions. The communicative and action coordinative core of cosmopolitan leadership is respect and care for the conditions of dialogue in one's attitude, cooperation, communication and imagination, accompanied by an awareness of the fact that strategic coordination of action is also involved in leadership practice. First, I will compare the difference between dialogical and strategic coordination of actions, and then I will briefly sketch the main characteristics of cosmopolitan leadership.

Dialogical coordination of actions basically means that the actors are oriented towards mutual understanding and acceptance of goals, roles, norms and other things affecting them in their work. In strategic action coordination shaped by means-end rationalization, leadership communication often becomes one-sided attempts to achieve some intended effects on other actors resulting in a low degree of mutual understanding and learning. Dialogical coordination of action, on the other hand, is performed with a restrictive attitude to affect the other by means of an orientation towards understanding, including an understanding of reasons he or she can accept rationally and willingly without the use of positive or negative sanctions. A cosmopolitan leader respecting the conditions of dialogue is providing a space in which their interpreting actors can take unforced yes- or no-positions to their different propositions and suggestions. Therefore, influence is primarily exercised by means of giving and taking reasons for goals, norms, decisions and actions, and the search for the better interpretation, argument, decision or solution in the eyes of the affected actors is given primacy.

In strategic coordination of action, the actors involved are free to use whatever effective means they can to achieve their goals which implies a somewhat objectifying and morally problematic attitude in which the other can be reduced to a means to an end, or to his or her general psychological dispositions of seeking well being and avoiding pain. Typically, strategic coordination of action is not constrained by restrictive moral attitudes, mutual learning, cultural differences and what one may call a cosmopolitan dialogical attitude. It should be clear by now why the action coordination of strategic leadership is problematic if actors and institutions in education are to respect and respond to the multidimensional character of cosmopolitanization and cosmopolitan competence. Dialogical communication and action coordination contributes to a higher degree of reflective learning because of its orientation towards mutual understanding, the giving and taking of reasons and the space for taking unforced yes- or no-positions to different actions, proposition or decisions. Dialogical and strategic coordination are both definitely parts of our social reality and education, but the latter cannot replace the primary status of the former in educational leadership as long as learning, citizenship, moral responsibility and respect for difference counts as important aspects of education. Therefore, the communicative and action coordinative core of cosmopolitan leadership can be briefly sketched in terms of the following qualified conditions of inclusive dialogue:

***Mutual understanding and perspective taking:*** The meaning of goals, values, norms and actions in education cannot be taken for granted, as it often is in managerial traditions with its strategic adaptation to clearly formulated goals. In a cosmopolitan social reality, interpretations one used to take for granted in the past must often be re-established or re-negotiated in the present and future. Therefore, in dialogical communication actors orient themselves towards mutual understanding and perspective taking,

and the right and opportunity to speak is followed by an obligation to listen to the other. Understanding among actors is crucial because most of the activities in education depend on grasping the meaning of events, actions, goals and other people giving voice to their thoughts and wants.

***The establishment of overlapping background:*** Leaders depending on mutual understanding, and the space for themselves and others to take a yes- or no-position to things that concerns them, must be willing to establish the necessary background for such a position. Actors must be able to understand the consequences of one's chosen position. If one is asked to choose between A and B without being able to imagine some plausible consequence of one's choice, the conditions of the dialogical process are broken.

***Communicative openness and moral constraint:*** A strategic actor can use whatever means he wants to achieve his intended results, but in dialogical communication one needs to achieve one's goals in a right and acceptable way. Actors are supposed to make relevant reasons, motives, knowledge, interests, needs and solutions accessible for those involved, and not merely treat others as means to an end without at the same time treating them as ends in themselves.

***Giving action relevant reasons:*** In the process of action coordination and influencing one another, it is the ways in which one exercise one's influence that are important. In the managerial tradition of New Public Management negative (sticks) and positive (carrots) sanctions can be used as an effective means in one's exercising power or influence over others, but these strategies would not count as dialogical reasons, that is, reasons that are relevant for a suggested action, proposition or decision. Cosmopolitan leaders are striving for backing up their words and deeds with reasons highly relevant to those words and deeds, in ways that are acceptable to the actors whose behavior they are trying to influence or whose actions they are trying to coordinate.

***Rational acceptability of goals given:*** The means-end rationalization pattern in New Public Management is extended to include the possibility of validating and appropriating the goals given in education. This validation and appropriation is performed under respect and care for the conditions of dialogue, and therefore the boundaries between policymakers and others are blurred in one important aspect: actors who are involved in the implementation of goals are also involved in the validation and appropriation of them. This means that actors working in education can understand themselves as participants in dialogical communication about what to do or what to strive for in education.

***Dialogical freedom and responsibility:*** It is crucial to dialogical coordination of actions that mutual understanding and rational acceptability are followed by one's duty to act in accordance with the outcome, bonds or yes- or no-position established in the dialogue. However, cosmopolitan leaders also need freedom to act to be able to cope with their daily work, and they cannot enter into dialogue with others about everything all the time. Freedom of action can be established within the process of dialogical communication, in which it is decided in which areas a cosmopolitan leader can act autonomously. Moreover, when the cosmopolitan leader decides autonomously he can use the process of dialogical imagination in which those affected are invited to a virtual space where their voices and interests count as the leader knows them. An autonomous decision should

also be backed up with reasons, and decisions should be reversible and evaluated in general.

***The cosmopolitan dialogical and moral attitude:*** This attitude is primarily perceived as an invitation to cooperation rather than competition. A basic dialogical attitude includes willingness to: treat the other and oneself as autonomous subjects with personal responsibility for their own thoughts, feelings, verbal and non-verbal actions, and with the moral responsibility to not treat others merely as means to one's own or others' ends; to learn from and take the perspectives of the other, and motivate one's own actions with acceptable reasons in the eyes of the other; include affected people in decisions and decisions making processes, such as the formation of goals; to coordinate actions and manage conflicts in non coercive cooperation rather than with the use of sanctions; to be sincere and honest in communication; and integrate and take personal responsibility for one's working role and goals given in one's exercise of leadership.

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