Importance of management in educational institutions

Educational management is a field of study and practice concerned with the operation of educational organizations. There is no single generally accepted definition of the subject because its development has drawn heavily on several more firmly established disciplines, including sociology, political science, economics and general management. Interpretations drawn from different disciplines necessarily emphasize diverse aspects of educational management and these varying approaches are reflected in subsequent chapters of this book.

Bolam (1999: 194) defines educational management as 'an executive function for carrying out agreed policy'. He differentiates management from educational leadership which has 'at its core the responsibility for policy formulation and, where appropriate, organizational transforma- tion' (ibid.: 194). Writing from an Indian perspective, Sapre (2002: 102) states that 'management is a set of activities directed towards efficient and effective utilization of organizational resources in order to achieve organizational goals'.

The present author has argued consistently (Bush, 1986; 1995; 1999; 2003) that educational management should be centrally concerned with the purpose or aims of education. These are the subject of continuing debate and disagreement, but the principle of linking management activ- ities and tasks to the aims and objectives of schools or colleges remains vital. These purposes or goals provide the crucial sense of direction which.

should underpin the management of educational institutions. Manage- ment is directed at the achievement of certain educational objectives. Unless this link between purpose and management is clear and close, there is a danger of 'managerialism', 'a stress on procedures at the expense of educational purpose and values' (Bush, 1999: 240). Managerialism places the emphasis on managerial efficiency rather than the aims and purposes of education (Newman and Clarke, 1994; Gunter, 1997). 'Management possesses no super-ordinate goals or values of its own. The pursuit of efficiency may be the mission statement of management – but this is efficiency in the achievement of objectives which others define' (Newman and Clarke, 1994: 29).

While the emphasis on educational purpose is important, this does not mean that all aims or targets are appropriate, particularly if they are imposed from outside the school by government or other official bodies. Managing towards the achievement

of educational aims is vital but these must be purposes agreed by the school and its community. If managers simply focus on implementing external initiatives, they risk becoming 'managerialist'. In England, the levers of central monitoring and target- setting have been tightened to allow government to manage schools more closely, for example through the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies (Whitty, 2008: 173). Successful internal management requires a clear link between values, aims, strategy and day-to-day activities.

The centrality of aims and purposes for the management of schools and colleges is common to most of the different theoretical approaches to the subject.

There is disagreement, though, about three aspects of goal-setting in education:
1. the value of formal statements of purpose

2. whether the objectives are those of the organization or those of particular individuals

3. how the institution's goals are determined.

Formal aims
The formal aims of schools and colleges are sometimes set at a high level of generality. They usually command substantial support but, because they are often utopian, such objectives provide an inadequate basis for managerial action. A typical aim in a primary or secondary school might focus on the acquisition by each pupil of physical, social, intellectual and moral qualities and skills. This is worthy but it has considerable limitations as a guide to decision-making. More specific purposes often fail to reach the same level of agreement. A proposal to seek improved performance in one part of the curriculum, say literacy or numeracy, may be challenged by teachers concerned about the implications for other subjects.

The international trend towards self-management has led to a parallel call for managers, staff and other stakeholders to develop a distinctive vision for their schools with clearly articulated and specific aims.

Beare, Caldwell and Millikan (1989: 99) say that 'outstanding leaders have a vision of their schools – a mental picture of a preferred future – which is shared with all in the school community'. Where educational organizations have such a vision, it is possible for effective managers to link functions with aims and to ensure that all management activity is purposeful. In practice, however, as we shall see later, many 'visions' are simply generalized educational objectives (Bolam et

al., 1993) and may be derived from national government imperatives rather than being derived from a school-level assessment of needs.

Organizational or individual aims?
Some approaches to educational management are concerned predominantly with organizational objectives while other models strongly emphasize individual aims. There is a range of opinion between these two views, from those who argue that 'organizational' objectives may be imposed by leaders on the less powerful members of the school or college, to those who say that individual aims need to coalesce around specific themes for the organization to have meaning for its members and stakeholders. One problem is that individual and organizational objectives may be incompatible, or that organizational aims satisfy some, but not all, individual aspirations. It is reasonable to assume that most teachers want their school or college to pursue policies which are in harmony with their own interests and preferences.

The determination of aims
The process of deciding on the aims of the organization is at the heart of educational management. In some settings, aims are decided by the principal or head teacher, often working in association with senior col- leagues and perhaps a small group of lay stakeholders. In many schools and colleges, however, goal-setting is a corporate activity undertaken by formal bodies or informal groups.

School and college aims are inevitably influenced by pressures emanating from the wider educational environment and lead to the questions about the viability of school 'visions', noted above. Many countries, including England and Wales, have a national curriculum, linked to national assessments and inspection systems, and such government prescriptions leave little scope for schools to decide their own educational aims. Institutions may be left with the residual task of interpreting external imperatives rather than determining aims on the basis of their own assessment of student need.

Wright's (2001) discussion of 'bastard leadership' develops this argument, suggesting that visioning is a 'sham' and that school leaders in England and Wales are reduced to implementing the values and policies of the government and its agencies:
Leadership as the moral and value underpinning for the direction of schools is being removed from those who work there. It is now very substantially located at the political level where it is not available for contestation, modification or adjustment to local variations. (Wright, 2001: 280)

The key issue here is the extent to which school leaders are able to modify government policy and develop alternative approaches based on school-level values and vision. Do they have to follow the script, or can they ad lib? Gold et al.'s (2003) research with 10 'outstanding' English principals begins to address this central issue. They 'take for granted that school leaders are essentially "value carriers" ... school improvement is not a technocratic science, but rather a process of seek- ing ever better ways of embodying particular educational values in the working practices ... of particular schools' (2003: 128). These authors assert that their case study principals were developing just such value- led approaches to school leadership and management:

The school leaders in our case study schools were clearly avoiding doing 'bastard leadership' by mediating government policy through their own values systems. We were constantly reminded by those to whom we spoke, of the schools' strong value systems and the extent to which vision and values were shared and articulated by all who were involved in them. (Ibid.: 131)

Wright's (2003) response to the Gold et al. research questions the extent to which even 'principled' leaders are able to challenge or modify government policies. In his view, these principals are still 'bastard leaders' because their values cannot challenge government imperatives:

What is not provided [by Gold et al.] is clear evidence of how these values actually impinged at the interface between particular government initiatives and action in these schools ... 'bastard leadership' ... is actually about the lack of scope for school leaders to make decisions that legitimately fly in the face of particular unrealistic and often inadequately researched government initiatives or requirements. (Wright, 2003: 140)

This debate is likely to continue but the central issue relates to the relative power of governments and school leaders to determine the aims and purpose of education in particular schools. Governments have the constitutional power to impose their will but successful innovations require the commitment of those who have to implement these changes. If teachers and leaders believe that an initiative is inappropriate for their children or students, they are unlikely to implement it with enthusiasm. Hence, governments would like schools to have visionary leadership as long as the visions do not depart in any significant way from government imperatives.

Furlong (2000) adds that the increased government control of education has significant implications for the status of teachers as professionals. He claims that, in England and Wales, professionalism is allowed to exist only by the grace of central government because of the dominance of a prescriptive national curriculum and the central monitoring of teacher performance.

The nature of the goal-setting process is a major variant in the different models of educational leadership and management to be dis- cussed in subsequent chapters.

What is educational leadership?

Gunter (2004) shows that the labels used to define this field have changed from 'educational administration' to 'educational management', and, more recently, to 'educational leadership'. In England, this shift is exemplified most strongly by the opening of the National College for School Leadership in 2000, described as a 'paradigm shift' by Bolam (2004). We shall examine the differences between leadership and management later in this chapter.

There are many different conceptualizations of leadership, leading Yukl (2002: 4–5) to argue that 'the definition of leadership is arbitrary and very subjective. Some definitions are more useful than others, but there is no "correct" definition.' Three dimensions of leadership may be identified as a basis for developing a working definition.

Leadership as influence

A central element in many definitions of leadership is that there is a process of influence.