



THE STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP.
THEMES, EMERGING MODELS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

di
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*Leadership is like beauty –
It's hard to define
but you know it when you see it*
Warren Bennis

In the educational climate of recent decades, there have been increased demands for greater accountability, along with standards and outcomes-based reform measures¹. These changing policy landscapes of education have culminated in a changing profile of school leadership in many countries². In fact, in this situation of high expectations of each country's educational provision, those leading schools have an enormous responsibility and school leadership has become increasingly important to the work of schools. In this sense, Fullan concludes that «effective school leaders are key to large-scale, sustainable education reform»³.

Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach⁴ state that over the last century a great deal has been learnt about leadership. In line with that, there has been an explosion of knowledge creation in the field of educational leadership and management (EDLM) across the globe⁵. Generally speaking, analyses of the literature in

¹ K. Leithwood, *School leadership in the context of accountability policies*, in «International Journal of Leadership in Education», 4 (2001), pp. 217-235; J. Møller, *School leadership in an age of accountability: tensions between managerial and professional accountability*, in «Journal of Educational Change», 10 (2009), pp. 37-46.

² OECD, *Improving school leadership*, Paris, OECD, 2008; OECD, *Education today: The OECD perspective*, Paris, OECD, 2010; OECD, *Preparing teachers and developing school leaders for the 21st century*, Paris, OECD, 2012; OECD, *Synergies for better learning: an international perspective on evaluation and assessment*, Paris, OECD, 2013.

³ M. Fullan, *The Change Leader*, in «Educational Leadership», 59 (2002), pp. 15-20.

⁴ K. Leithwood, D. Jantzi, R. Steinbach, *Changing leadership for changing times*, Buckingham, Open University, 1999.

⁵ P. Hallinger, J. Chen, *Review of research on educational leadership and management in Asia: a comparative analysis of research topics and methods, 1995-2012*, in «Educational

EDLM have found that the vast majority of published sources of knowledge come from a limited set of English-speaking, largely Western, Anglo-American societies. In Italy, the discourse on educational leadership is still at an arguably early stage. In fact, albeit the attempts are recent, many Italian studies of school leadership are very limited in the international educational leadership field, while there is not an established field of study at a national level⁶. At the same time, given the current Italian educational reform process, school leaders are experiencing an increased workload: they are subject to demands, not only from the education authorities, but also from other quarters, such as parents and the whole community⁷.

Many broad-based studies conducted in recent years to examine factors influencing school success have indicated that school quality largely depends on the school leaders and what on they do. In this sense, the essential role of the leaders in successful schools along with their influence in the process of school improvement have been investigated extensively⁸ and the essential role they play in cultivating shared leadership well recognized. In fact, the quality of school principals can make a real difference in the classrooms. For example, research shows that leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors as an influence on learning⁹. Second, school leaders, particularly principals, have a pivotal role in setting direction, creating a positive school culture (including a proactive school mindset), in supporting and enhancing staff motivation, and in influencing teacher quality, relationships,

Management Administration & Leadership», 43 (2015), pp. 5-27; P. Hallinger, *Surfacing a hidden literature: a systematic review of research on educational leadership and management in Africa*, in «Educational Management Administration & Leadership», 46 (2018), pp. 362-384; S. Gumus, M. Bellibas, M. Esen, E. Gumus, *A systematic review of studies on leadership models in educational research from 1980 to 2014*, in «Educational Management Administration & Leadership», 46 (2018), pp. 25-48; I. Oplatka, K. Arar, *The research on educational leadership and management in the Arab world since the 1990s: A systematic review*, in «Review of Education», 5 (2017), pp. 267-307; A. Walker, P. Hallinger, *A synthesis of reviews of research on principal leadership in East Asia*, in «Journal of Educational Administration», 53 (2015), pp. 554-570.

⁶ G. Bufalino, *A systematic review of research on educational leadership in Italy*, Poster presented at the '2018 International Conference Teacher Education and Educational Research in the Mediterranean', 8-9 June 2018, University of Malta, Malta.

⁷ A. Paletta, C. Bezzina, *Governance and leadership in public schools: opportunities and challenges facing school leaders in Italy*, in «Leadership and Policy in Schools», 15 (2016), pp. 524-542.

⁸ P. Hallinger, *Reshaping the landscape of school leadership development: a global perspective*, Lisse, Swets & Zeitlinger, 2003.

⁹ K. Louis, K. Leithwood, K. Wahlstrom, S. Anderson, *Learning from leadership: investigating the links to improved student learning*, New York, Wallace Foundation, 2010.

and the commitment needed to foster improvement and to promote school success¹⁰.

The guiding assumption of this article is the idea that leadership is one of those concepts that are very hard to define¹¹. For example, Bennis¹² estimated at least 650 definitions of leadership in literature, while Stodgill affirmed that «there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept»¹³. Despite this variety of meanings, Kruse has defined leadership as «a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal»¹⁴. In an educational context, therefore, school leadership can refer to «the work of mobilizing and influencing others to articulate and achieve the school's shared intentions and goals»¹⁵. In this respect, I work with Hoerr's definition that «leadership is about relationships»¹⁶ and therefore focusing on what can be done to unearth the potential of all educators in order to improve schools and student success.

The grown of importance of school leadership has been accompanied by theory development¹⁷. In line with that, there has been also some level of awareness among scholars regarding the fact that the special characteristics of education and schools should be taken into account when considering leadership in the educational sector. This helped educational researchers to develop specific leadership models that are applicable to schools, particularly within the last few decades.

Given this premise, by reviewing the theoretical and empirical literature on school leadership, the purpose of this article is to present current leadership models in educational research and to review recent writing on leadership mod-

¹⁰ C. Day, C.P. Sammons, *Successful leadership: a review of the international literature*, CfBt, Education Trust, 2013.

¹¹ K. Leithwood, C. Riehl, *What do we already know about educational leadership?*, in *A new agenda for research in educational leadership*, cur. W.A. Riehl, C. Riehl, New York, Teachers College Press, 2005, pp. 12-27.

¹² W.G. Bennis, R. Towsnsend, R., *Reinventing leadership*, New York, Collings Business Essentials, 1995.

¹³ R.M. Stodgill, *Handbook of leadership: a survey of theory and research*, New York, The Free Press, 1974.

¹⁴ K. Kruse, *What is leadership?*, in «Forbes», 4 September 2013. Available at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2013/04/09/what-is-leadership> (accessed 1 August 2018).

¹⁵ K. Leithwood, C. Riehl, *What do we already know about educational leadership?* cit., p. 14.

¹⁶ T.R. Hoerr, *The art of school leadership*, Alexandria, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005, p. 7.

¹⁷ T. Bush, D. Glovek, *School leadership models: what do we know?*, in «School Leadership & Management», 34 (2014), pp. 1-19.

els in the attempt to make a contribution to the development of this research field in Italy. The theoretical models I will present in the following sections have been extensively discussed and implemented, in the research literature. For each prominent model, I have decided to briefly provide general information, such as the development and the content, in order to get the reader/scholar to engage personally and collectively. The list I will present in the following sections is not exhaustive, but it is mainly based upon my previous work in the field¹⁸.

Distributed Leadership

Contemporary leadership literature has produced some major developments in the reconceptualization of educational leadership for successful school reform. The kind of learning environment that is here being highlighted requires a school leader to clearly articulate the vision and create a sense of mission. This purpose requires a collaborative stance: individualism is a non-starter and school leaders need to empower others to carry out that mission¹⁹.

Within this context, leadership is now associated with concepts such as empowerment, transformation, and community building. The literature now talks of leadership capacity which implies a broad-based, skilful participation in the work of leadership. Within this scenario, leadership no longer refers only to titular or officially designated leaders, but can be distributed among the members of the school community²⁰. In this sense, distributed leadership is best understood as «practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation and incorporated the activities of multiples groups of individuals»²¹.

¹⁸ For instance see: C. Bezzina, G. Bufalino, *Il viaggio verso l'autenticità: sollecitazioni per una leadership autentica*, in «Formazione e insegnamento», 12 (2015), pp. 13-24; G. Bufalino, *Middle leadership nella scuola del 21° secolo: un'evoluzione necessaria. Una prospettiva educativa internazionale in un contesto di distributed leadership*, in «Formazione e insegnamento», 15 (2017), pp. 151-161; Id., *Per una formazione alla leadership alla followership*, in «Nuova Secondaria», 5 (2018), pp. 16-19; Id., *La leadership di servizio (servant leadership) quale modello effettivo per la leadership degli insegnanti (teacher leadership)*, in «Formazione & Insegnamento», 15 (2017), pp. 127-136.

¹⁹ F. Crowther, S.S. Kaagan, M. Ferguson, L. Hann, *Developing teacher leaders: how teacher leadership enhances school success*, Thousand Oaks, Corwin Press, 2002; D.B. Reeves, *Transforming professional development into student results*, Alexandria, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2010.

²⁰ A. Harris, *Distributed leadership: friend or foe?*, in «Educational Management, Administration & Leadership», 41 (2013), pp. 545-554.

²¹ J. Spillane, *Distributed leadership*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2006, p. 12.

Bennett and his colleagues²² developed a generalized conceptual framework that defines distributed leadership as a collective leadership practice which involves people with essential expertise; they generalized that the process of distributing leadership is an emergent property resulting from interaction among people in schools. Harris²³ and Lashway²⁴ argued that everyone in an organization has some influence and principals need to rely on teachers with expertise in order to lead schools effectively. In this sense, the nature of distributed leadership as a theory criticizes the hierarchical design of leadership and suggests the involvement of all personnel in the decision-making process. In addition, distributed leadership is now considered as the instrument to implement change and innovation²⁵.

Based on her experience on schools in the UK, Harris²⁶ suggested three reasons to explain the widespread interest of distributed leadership within the research community:

- 1) the descriptive power of the concept which captures the forms of practice implicit in professional learning communities and communities of practice;
- 2) its representational power in the fact that obsolete organizational structures of school simply do not fit the requirement of learning in 21st century;
- 3) its normative power: the growth of what Gronn²⁷ termed 'greedy work' in schools has required leadership to be actively shared within all the school members.

Given these premises, the ability to lead is dependent on others and the relationships or networks leaders cultivate²⁸. This requires a new inclusive mindset which allows everyone to feel included, acknowledged, seen as worthwhile, able to contribute, give, learn, and grow. As Sergiovanni notes "empowerment derives its full strength from being linked to purposing: everyone is free to do what makes sense, as long as people's decisions embody the values shared by

²² N. Bennett, C. Wise, P. Woods, J. Harvey, *Distributed leadership: Full report*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership, 2003.

²³ A. Harris, *Teacher leadership as distributed leadership: heresy, fantasy or possibility?*, in «School Leadership & Management», 23, 3 (2003), pp. 313-324.

²⁴ L. Lashway, *Distributed leadership*, in *School leadership: handbook for excellence in student learning*, cur. S.C. Smith, P.K. Kiele, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2006, pp. 245-265.

²⁵ A. Harris, *Distributed school leadership: developing tomorrow's leaders*, London, Routledge, 2008; K. Leithwood, B. Mascal, T. Strauss, *Distributed leadership according to the evidence*, London, Routledge, 2009.

²⁶ A. Harris, *Reflection on distributed leadership*, in «Management of Education», 19 (2005), pp. 10-12.

²⁷ P. Gronn, *The new work of Educational Leadership: changing leadership practices in an era of school reform*, London, Paul Chapman, 2003.

²⁸ M. Fullan, *Leading in a culture of change*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2001.

the school community. When empowerment is understood in this light, the emphasis shifts away from discretion needed to function and toward one's responsibility to the community"²⁹. In this sense, distributed leadership is primarily concerned with mobilizing leadership expertise at all levels in the organizations to generate more opportunities for change. To sum it up,

«Distributed leadership is concerned with building the capacity to innovate and change;
 Distributed leadership is inclusive and implied broad involvement in leadership practise;
 Distributed leadership does not mean everybody leads but rather everyone has the potential to lead, at some time, depending on expertise and experience;
 Distributed leadership occurs in various patterns – there is no overall blueprint- it depends on the context, but it requires planning and alignment;
 Distributed leadership requires high levels of trust and reciprocal learning»³⁰.

Teacher Leadership

The idea of distributing leadership functions, actions, and responsibilities to school personnel has led to a substantial body of research focusing on the question of how teachers might demonstrate leadership in schools. The concept of the teacher as leader has been the subject of growing interest within the educational literature over past few years. In this sense, the development of the teacher leadership model was primarily based on the research of North American scholars in the 1990s. Later, during the 2000s, it became a prominent topic in the UK and in Europe as well³¹.

Teachers as leaders are considered as agents of change. In fact, effective educational change is dependent on the exercise of appropriate leadership roles. In this sense, Crowther, Kaagar, and Hann define teacher leadership and its contribution as «action that transforms teaching and learning in schools, that ties schools and communities together on behalf of learning... teacher leadership facilitates principled action to achieve whole-school success»³².

²⁹ T. Sergiovanni, *Leadership as stewardship: "who's serving who?"*, in *The Jossey-Bass Reader on Educational Leadership*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2007, p. 83.

³⁰ A. Harris, *Distributed leadership matters*, Thousand Oaks, Corwin Press, 2014, p. 41.

³¹ A. Harris, *Teacher leadership and distributed leadership: An exploration of the literature*, in «Leading and Managing», 10 (2004), pp. 1-9.

³² F. Crowther, M. Ferguson, L. Hann, *Developing teacher leaders: How teacher leadership enhances school success*, Thousand Oaks, Corwin Press, 2009, p. viii.

Crippen³³ writes that once one assumes the mantle of teacher, one becomes a leader in the classroom and then in the school and learning community. However, it is very challenging to view teachers as leaders with the clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities within the hierarchical school system. In contrast to much of the traditional leadership literature, the main idea here is that leadership is not vested in one person who is assigned to a formal position of power or authority, but rather it is seen as a potential capacity of both teachers and heads of schools³⁴.

Katzenmeyer and Moller define teacher leaders as: «teachers who are leaders within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice»³⁵. In addition, those identified as teacher leaders are not only respected by peers but are perceived as teachers who volunteer and accept responsibility for tasks. The term ‘teacher leader’ implies an active and responsible role that exceeds the level of the individual teachers acting in his or her classroom, adding activities related to influencing and inspiring colleagues and the school as whole³⁶.

Hence, the opportunities for exercising leadership are not limited to hierarchical and structural positions, but rather this view reflects the idea that every person, in one way or another, can demonstrate leadership. However, this does not mean that everyone is a leader, rather everyone has leadership potentialities and has the right, responsibility and capability to be a leader. This view seems particularly meaningful in empowering teachers to become involved in the decision-making process and to actively participate in the life of the school.

Instructional leadership

The instructional leadership theory is one of the most commonly studied types of leadership in educational leadership³⁷. The research on the instructional leadership model has been extensive and global in scope. In fact, important

³³ C. Crippen, *The democratic school: First to serve, then to lead*, in «The Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy», 47 (2005), pp. 1-17.

³⁴ G. Bufalino, *Teacher leadership: eresia o possibilità?*, in «Rivista dell’Istruzione», 1 (2018), pp. 13-16.

³⁵ M. Katzenmeyer, G. Moller, *Awakening the sleeping giant. Helping teachers develop as leaders*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2001, p. 17.

³⁶ M. Snoek, *Developing teacher leadership and its impact in schools*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2014.

³⁷ T. Bush, *Theories of Educational Leadership and Management*, London, Sage, 2011.

contributions have been made by researchers in the North America, Europe and Asia³⁸.

The common theme that emerged from these studies (mainly based in the USA) was that an effective leader was a type of leader who paid considerable attention to the teaching and learning aspects of schools. Within this lineage of research, the most cited instructional leadership model in the literature has been the one developed by Hallinger and Murphy³⁹. This model defined instructional leadership through three dimensions:

1) *Defining the school mission* requires principals to frame and communicate the school's goals;

2) *Managing the instructional program* suggests that principal has a pivotal role in the coordination and control of instruction and curriculum. This dimension incorporates three leadership functions: supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress;

3) *Promoting a positive school learning climate* includes principals' efforts to protect instructional time, provide incentives for teachers and learning, promote professional development, develop and enforce academic standards, and maintain high visibility. From this definition, it can be argued that the earlier understanding of instructional leadership was mostly principal-centered⁴⁰. Hence, the limitations of this model became increasingly apparent and a more democratic understanding of instructional leadership has started to appear in recent literature. For example, Hallinger notes that «the instructional leadership has recently reincarnated as a global phenomenon in the form of “leadership for learning”»⁴¹, which is considered as a more distributed school leadership model for 21st century school contexts, in contrast to a solo model of instruction leadership.

Managerial leadership

Leithwood *et al.* define this model as:

«Managerial leadership assumes that the focus of leaders ought to be on functions, tasks and behaviours and that if these functions are carried out competently the work of others in the organisation will be facilitated. Most ap-

³⁸ P. Hallinger, *Instructional Leadership and the school principal: a passing fancy that refuses to fade away*, in «Leadership and Policy in School», 4 (2005), pp. 1-20.

³⁹ P. Hallinger, J. Murphy, *Assessing the instructional management behavior of principals*, in «The Elementary School Journal», 86 (1985), pp. 217-247.

⁴⁰ T. Bush, D. Glovek, *School leadership models: what do we know?* cit.

⁴¹ P. Hallinger, *Leadership for 21st century school: from Instructional Leadership to leadership for learning*, Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, 2009, p. 1.

proaches to managerial leadership also assume that the behaviour of organisational members is largely rational. Authority and influence are allocated to formal positions in proportion to the status of those positions in the organisational hierarchy»⁴².

In this sense, managerial leadership requires the leader to focus on functions, tasks and behaviors. In fact, as Bush⁴³ points out this type of leadership does not include the concept of vision, which is central to most leadership models. Hence, the focus of the managerial leadership model is managing existing activities rather than visioning a better future for the school. The model may be more visible in countries in which the educational system is centralized, since it emphasizes the implementation of practices mandated by higher external management authorities within the bureaucratic hierarchy.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is another model that has been overwhelmingly used in educational research over the last three decades⁴⁴. Transformational leadership, which appeared in the leadership literature in the 1990s, was a reaction to the type of leadership that emphasizes hierarchy and top-down relationships (see *transactional leadership*⁴⁵).

The transformational model is most often associated with creating vision, setting directions, developing staff and curriculum, and involvement with the external community. For example, Leithwood⁴⁶ conceptualises transformational leadership along eight dimensions:

- building school vision;
- establishing school goals;
- providing intellectual stimulation;
- offering individualised support;

⁴² K. Leithwood, D. Jantzi, R. Steinbach R, *Changing leadership for changing times*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1999, p. 14.

⁴³ T. Bush, *Educational leadership and management: theory, policy, and practice*, in «South African Journal of Education», 27 (2007), pp. 391-406.

⁴⁴ P. Hallinger, *Leading educational change: Reflections on the practice of instructional and transformational Leadership*, in «Cambridge Journal of Education», 33 (2003), pp. 329-352.

⁴⁵ Transactional leadership is sometimes called bartering. It is based on an exchange of services (from a teacher, for instance) for various kinds of rewards (such as a salary) that the leader controls, at least in part, see for example K.A Leithwood, M.S. Poplin, *Transformational leadership*, in «Educational Leadership», 49 (1992), pp. 8-12.

⁴⁶ K. Leithwood, *Leadership for school restructuring*, in «Educational Administration», 30 (1994), pp. 498-518.

- modelling best practices and important organisational values;
- demonstrating high performance expectations;
- creating a productive school culture; and • developing structures to foster participation in school decisions.

According to Moolenaar⁴⁷ *et al.*, transformational leadership is positively associated with schools' innovative climate and it motivates followers to do more than they are expected in terms of extra effort and greater productivity. To follow with, transformational leadership has three basic functions: 1) transformational leaders sincerely serve the needs of others, empower them and inspire followers to achieve great success; 2) leaders charismatically lead, set a vision, instill trust, confidence and pride in working with them; 3) with the intellectual stimulation they offer followers of the same caliber as the leader⁴⁸. In this model, the school becomes less bureaucratic and it functions as its own transforming agent. Instead of empowering selected individuals, the school becomes empowered as a collective unit.

Moral and ethical leadership

This model assumes that the critical focus of leadership ought to be on the values, beliefs, and ethics of leaders themselves. In fact, good leaders change organizations, great leaders change the people who are the heart of any organization and especially of a school community, which is a community of minds⁴⁹. And through the change of people leaders can develop an environment that facilitates learning. Leadership is what teachers implement in their classrooms when they transmit the passion for teaching a subject. Leadership is about leading group discussions, encouraging peer-tutoring, planning and motivating the learning process, clarifying the objectives and encouraging individual effort, showing appreciation towards the students. Cornesky, author of *The Quality Professor* points out that:

«leadership is the most important ingredient for the determination of the quality of each organization, including the classroom. This faculty, covering learning or showing love for learning and, at the same time showing re-

⁴⁷ N.M. Moolenaar, A.J. Daly, P.J.C. Slegers, *Occupying the principal position: examining relationships between transformational leadership, social network position, and schools' innovative climate*, in «Educational Administration Quarterly», 46 (2010), pp. 623-670.

⁴⁸ P. Castanheira, J.A. Costa, *In search of transformational leadership: A (Meta) analysis focused on the Portuguese reality*, in «Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences», 15 (2011), pp. 2012-2015.

⁴⁹ T.J. Sergiovanni, *Building community in schools*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1994.

spect for students as learners, will extend their possibilities and their interest in what they have seen modelled by learning from their coach. The result is the empowerment and expansion of knowledge»⁵⁰.

So, leadership increasingly refers to something personal and situational.

For Starrat⁵¹ each leader is responsible as a human being, as an administrator and as a citizen: liable for students, teachers or others involved in the school community. Starrat⁵² places the reflection on the authenticity of the leader within a perspective of learning, providing three fundamental principles. Firstly, authentic leadership cannot be merely conceptualized in terms of interpersonal morality. To do this, it has to be pointed out that leadership is exercised within an institutional context, which is certainly not neutral in terms of structures and processes. The second point is that leadership does not refer merely to managerial skills, strategies or techniques: if there is an over focus on these it could ignore the true meaning of learning. The third point is that leadership should not be just focused on adults without considering the authenticity of students' learning and the related teaching strategies, resource allocation and reporting. In short, authenticity cannot be developed separately from the school context and social environment. Therefore, it is important the cultural aspect that students and teachers bring together in each institutional setting.

Servant Leadership

«The great leader is seen as a servant first». This challenging quote, a fragment of the essay *The Servant*, captures the essence of the concept of servant leadership⁵³. Through this oxymoron, that is the combination of two seemingly contradictory terms, servant and leader, Robert Greenleaf questioned the very nature of leadership with new categories. The old, authoritarian models are about the power connected to a role, not about the service. Whilst this latter

⁵⁰ R.A. Cornesky, *The Quality professor: implementing TQM in the classroom*, Madison, Magna Publications, 1993, p. 41.

⁵¹ R.L. Starratt, *Leading a community of learners learning to be moral by engaging the morality of learning*, in «Educational Management Administration & Leadership», 35 (2007), pp. 165-183.

⁵² R.L. Starratt, *Moral issues in a test-driven accountability agenda: moral challenges for learning-centered leadership*, Paper presented at the 10th annual Values and Leadership Conference, 13-5 October 2005, Pennsylvania, Usa.

⁵³ L.C. Spears, *Insights on leadership: Service, stewardship, spirit and servant-leadership*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1998; R.K. Greenleaf, *Servant-leadership: a journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*, Mahwah, Paulist Press, 1977; A.B. Carroll, *Servant leadership: an ideal for non-profit organizations*, in «Non-profit World», 23 (2005), pp. 18-20.

concept of power can eventually lead to the productive results you want, it ignores the people, their aspirations and their talents.

Leadership without service is less substantial, more ego-driven and selfish, instead of being community centered, altruistic, and empathetic. The idea of Greenleaf years later continues to revolutionize the way we think about the workplace, overturning old organizational pyramids and placing employees at the summit. This idea, although not new, is still revolutionary and calls for more research and further considerations in the field of leadership studies. Describing the traits of the servant leaders, Soderquist⁵⁴ highlights their capacity of believing in and feeling responsible for the development of others; their possibility to share not only the responsibility but also the recognition for success; their will to build relationships based on mutual respect and trust at all levels; their particular dedication to care about and look for ways to meet the needs of everyone they come in contact with. If servant leadership can be considered as a way of life, then it becomes important what it takes to nurture such a context where leaders and followers can relate and grow together. In this respect servant-leadership becomes a guiding philosophy, an institutional model⁵⁵.

Concluding remarks

The above list is far from being exhaustive and several other models, including technology leadership⁵⁶, strategic leadership⁵⁷, visionary leadership⁵⁸, contingent leadership, political leadership, curriculum leadership, just to name a few, have also been adopted in educational research. Each of the leadership models discussed in this article is partial since it provides distinctive but unidimensional perspectives on school leadership⁵⁹. Sergiovanni adds that much «leadership theory and practice provide a limited view, dwelling excessively on some aspects of leadership to the virtual exclusion of others»⁶⁰. Each model

⁵⁴ D. Soderquist, *Live Learn Lead to make a difference*, Nashville, Countryman, 2006.

⁵⁵ G. Bufalino, *La leadership di servizio (servant leadership) quale modello effettivo per la leadership degli insegnanti (teacher leadership)*, in «Formazione & Insegnamento», 15 (2017), pp. 127-136.

⁵⁶ P.M. Davies, *On school educational technology leadership*, in «Management in Education», 24 (2010), pp. 55-61.

⁵⁷ H. Williams, T. Johnson, *Strategic leadership in schools*, in «Education», 133 (2013), pp. 350-355.

⁵⁸ A. Aksu, *Visionary leadership in education*, in «Education Sciences», 4 (2009), pp. 476-785.

⁵⁹ T. Bush, *Theories of Educational leadership and management*, op cit.

⁶⁰ T. Sergiovanni, *Leadership and excellence in schooling*, in «Educational Leadership», 41 (1984), pp. 4-13.

provides clear normative frameworks by which leadership can be understood but relatively weak empirical support for these constructs. They are also artificial distinctions, or 'ideal types', in that most successful leaders are likely to embody most or all of these approaches in their work⁶¹.

Another point here is that in researching educational leadership, the issue of context and culture remains an important consideration⁶². Indeed, much of the research and literature in the field has broad application; however, it has a narrowly conceived cultural bias. In fact, the field of educational leadership has developed along ethnocentric lines, being heavily dominated by Anglo-American paradigms and theories⁶³. Hence, it is clear that a key factor missing from many debates in educational leadership is the context, that is the societal culture and its mediating influence on theory, policy and practise. If the aim is to gain better understanding of school leaders in societies outside the Anglo-America World, research must be contextualized and take account of culture.

In pursuing research on educational leadership in the Italian context, I therefore encourage a cultural and cross-cultural approach as the basis of developing a comparative dimension to the field. In addition, it is important to focus on the school as the unit for comparison, to connect leadership to the curriculum, teaching and learning. Furthermore, the need to contextualize leadership highlights deficiencies in modal research methods that focus on mean effect and either ignore context effect or relegate them to shadow. In this sense, the field of education leadership needs to refine current research methods that enable researchers to better study how successful leadership responds and adapts to different context⁶⁴.

ABSTRACT

In the educational climate of recent decades, recent policy initiatives have been mainly focused on increasing the autonomy of schools. In this scenario, the study of educational leadership has gained interest within the research community because of the widespread belief that the quality of leadership makes an important difference in improving learning and teaching processes. In Italy, the discourse on educational leadership is arguably at an early stage and it has been characterized by different perspec-

⁶¹ T. Bush, *Theories of Educational Management*, London, Sage, 2003.

⁶² A. Harris, M.S. Jones, *Leading futures: Global Perspective on Educational Leadership*, India, Sage, 2015.

⁶³ A. Walker, C. Dimmok, *School leadership and administration. Adopting a cultural perspective*, New York, Routledge, 2002.

⁶⁴ P. Hallinger, *Bringing context out of the shadows of leadership*, in «Educational Management Administration and Leadership», 46 (2016), pp. 5-24.

tives. Given this premise, by reviewing theoretical and empirical literature on educational leadership, the purpose of this article is to present and discuss the most studied leadership models in educational research in the attempt to make a contribution to the development of this research field in Italy.

I recenti orientamenti normativi di Riforma in materia di politica scolastica hanno dato un nuovo impulso all'autonomia delle istituzioni educative. Nel contesto di tali cambiamenti, il tema della leadership educativa ha assunto crescente rilevanza nel dibattito interno alle scienze pedagogiche. La fiorente letteratura internazionale ha dimostrato, peraltro, come la leadership educativa rappresenti una componente chiave per lo sviluppo di ambienti professionali ed organizzativi efficaci per i processi di apprendimento e di insegnamento. In Italia, il recente dibattito e la ricerca sperimentale sulla leadership educativa sono stati attraversati da prospettive e *focus* interpretativi differenti.

Nel tentativo di offrire un contributo atto ad accompagnare lo sviluppo di nuove aree di ricerca all'interno degli attuali scenari educativi e formativi, l'articolo propone una sintetica ricognizione della letteratura internazionale utile a chi voglia esplorare oggi i più attuali, emergenti modelli teorici ed empirici nel campo della ricerca sulla leadership educativa.