

Chapter 3

Lead Learner or Head Teacher? Exploring Connections Between Curriculum, Leadership and Evaluation in an ‘Age of Measurement’

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Abstract While ‘head teacher’ is still a prominent designation in many countries, there has been a tendency over the past two decades to refer to those ‘in charge’ of schools with a number of other words, most recently, that of lead learner. While one could say that these are ‘only words’ they nonetheless have a significant impact on how the position, role and responsibility of the head teacher is being understood. This chapter analyzes these conceptual shifts and the impact they have on perceptions, identities and relationship. For instance, the idea of lead learner fits within the ongoing ‘learnification’ (Biesta GJJ, *Good education in an age of measurement: ethics, politics, democracy*. Paradigm Publishers, Boulder, 2010a; Biesta GJJ, *Stud Philos Educ* 29(5), 491–503, Biesta 2010b) of educational thought and practice, that educational endeavours are increasingly being understood through a language of learning, learners – and now also lead learners. While the notion of the lead learner suggests democratic and empowering relationships, I will argue – mainly informed by a ‘Continental’ understanding of education (i.e. German ‘kritische Pädagogik’ and Philippe Meirieu’s French educational thought) – for the need to reclaim the idea of the head teacher, in order to highlight that the responsibility of the head teacher is fundamentally an educational one, one that can only be accessed and conceptualized in terms of an updated understanding of curriculum/teaching.

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Introduction

This volume of which this chapter is a part raises a number of important questions about the current climate under which schools in many countries function. Perhaps the most interesting observation concerns the ongoing divergence between three areas of scholarship: curriculum theory, leadership research, and evaluation research. These areas not only appear to have different foci and priorities but also seem to feed differently into educational policy and practice. Whereas curriculum theory on both sides of the Atlantic (albeit in very different modes and forms) focuses on the content of schooling in the widest possible sense, leadership research focuses more strongly on operational questions (again in the widest sense of the word), whereas much evaluation research continues to focus on what we might call the production of educational outcomes and the variables that impact on it – a central phenomenon in what I have elsewhere referred to as the ‘age of measurement’ (Biesta 2010a).

Whereas much evaluation research is closest positioned to neoliberal policies that continue to approach schooling in terms of the outcomes its produces – outcomes that are often exclusively valued with reference to the global economy – leadership research is not entirely free from this either, not least because educational leaders are often seen as the first responsible persons for what it is that schools ‘produce’ in terms of statistics on student performance. From this angle curriculum theory seems to be operating a bit more on the sideline of where the policy heat is. This may partly be the result of the nature of curriculum scholarship itself. Here I do think that North American curriculum scholarship has moved itself much more away from the ‘core business’ of schooling than Continental traditions. If North American curriculum scholarship has morphed into a form of cultural studies which, although not without relevance for educational practice, approaches the question of the curriculum in a rather particular and distant way, much work on the Continent, but also in the UK, has been affected by the rise of national curricula which, at least in some countries, have stifled curriculum scholarship – a situation from which the field is only now beginning to recover (see, for example, Priestley and Biesta 2013).

If one way to understand the intention of this volume is to explore the interactions and possible connections between the three fields – curriculum, leadership and evaluation – then, in my contribution, I would like to explore two of these connections. One concerns the relationship between leadership and curriculum; the other the relationship between leadership and evaluation. I will look at both issues in a slightly more distant manner, as I do not wish to claim any specific competence in the field of educational leadership research. Nonetheless I hope that my observations provide some useful input for the discussion.

Leadership for What?

The first point I wish to make has to do with the relationship between the field of leadership and the field of curriculum broadly conceived. (One question for discussion is indeed how broad or narrow we can conceive of this ‘field.’) That the observations I would like to make are important, was brought back to me by a recent experience and a more general observation. The recent experience concerned an invitation to contribute a theoretical perspective to a book with interview of educational leaders/managers in the Netherlands. I was happy to do so, particularly because the focus of the book was to gain an insight in what motivates leaders who work at a fairly ‘high’ level in educational organisations, that is, often with a responsibility for a number of schools or colleges. The interviews, to put it differently, tried to tap into the educational and professional values of educational leaders/managers.

While most of the leaders/managers were able to speak about what drives them and about what they seek to achieve through their particular contributions to the education taking places in the schools and colleges they carry responsibility for, I was struck by the fact that the language they used to articulate this was predominantly a language of learning and development, including the popular/fashionable idea that education should allow children to develop their ‘full potential.’ Their orientations were generally positive and supportive but, in my view, vague and not really informed by what I would see as a distinctly *educational* outlook. This, as I will suggest below, partly has to do with the impact of the language of learning on contemporary educational research, policy and practice. But – and partly related to this – it also has to do with the role of particular traditions of thinking and doing. And perhaps here I was most surprised, as I had – until relatively recently – assumed that a country such as the Netherlands has a strong and long tradition of distinctive educational scholarship and practice, and I had expected to find at least sufficiently robust ‘traces’ of this. That this was not the case is, I think, also an important issue for this the discussions in this volume.

The impact of the language of learning on educational research, policy and practice is not only visible in the vocabulary I encountered with the educational leaders/managers in the project above. It is also visible in the phrases that are being used to designate those who have responsibility for leadership and management in and across schools and colleges. The most striking change in this designation I have witnessed recently – particularly, if I am right, in the UK – is the use of the phrase ‘lead learner’ as the new name for what in the past was either called principal or head teacher. It is difficult to gauge how reliable Google still is in spotting trends, but when I checked “lead learner” it did generate 27.900 hits, not only from blogs and twitter accounts, but also from school websites – here is just a random quote: “My name is Matt Chappel and I am usually called the Lead Learner instead of Head Teacher because we want to show how important learning is for everyone at Thornhill, not just the children. (...) Thornhill’s vision is that everyone at Thornhill should be a highly successful learner. Out motto is ‘Leading and Learning Together.’

We have one main school rule: ‘Help yourself and others to learn.’” – and job descriptions for what formerly were principals’ and head teachers’ posts. This at least suggests at an anecdotal level that that language of learning has not only permeated the way in which many speak about the educational process, but now also on the way in which we speak about those who carry responsibility for it as managers or leaders. What is the problem here? Let me briefly try to make the point and then make some observations in relation to the theme of this volume.

The ‘Learnification’ of Education The issue at stake here is about what in other publications I have referred to as the ‘learnification’ of educational discourse and practice (see particularly Biesta 2009, 2010a). ‘Learnification’ refers to the relatively recent trend to express much if not all there is to say about education in terms of a language of learning. We can see, this for example, in the tendency to refer to students, pupils, children and adults as ‘learners,’ to refer to schools as ‘learning environments or ‘places for learning’ and to see teachers as ‘facilitators of learning.’ Also the redesignation of the field of ‘adult education’ into that of ‘lifelong learning’ is an example of the rise of the ‘new language of learning’ (Biesta 2006). I would also say that the suggestion that the point of education is that students learn is part of this development, and there are indeed many examples – in national, local and school-level policies but also in descriptions of the task of teachers – that state that the task of schools is to make students learn and that teachers have a particular responsibility in facilitating the learning of their learners.

My point here is not to criticise the idea of learning in itself (although there are further issues that require discussion; see, for example, Biesta 2013), but to highlight the insufficiency of the language of learning as an *educational* language, that is a language of and for education and educators. In its shortest formula the issue is that the point of education is not that students learn, but that they learn *something*, that they learn it for particular *reasons*, and that they learn it from *someone*. The problem with the language of learning is that it is a language that refers to processes that are ‘empty’ with regard to content and purpose. So just to say that children should learn or that teachers should facilitate learning, or that we all should be lifelong learners, actually says very little – if it says anything at all. Unlike the language of learning, a language of education always needs to pay attention to questions of *content*, *purpose* and *relationships*. The danger with the rise of the language of learning in education is that these questions are no longer asked, or they are already taken to be answered (for example on the suggestion that the only relevant content is academic content, that the only relevant purpose is academic achievement, and the only relevant relationship is for teachers to train students so that they to generate the highest possible test scores, for themselves, their school, and their country).

The Question of Purpose in Education Of the three dimensions – content, purpose, and relationships – the question of purpose is the most important and fundamental question, because it is only once we have been able to indicate what it is that we seek to achieve through our educational activities and endeavours, that we can make decisions about the appropriate content students should engage with, and that we can decide how educational relationships can be used most productively and

conducively. As I have suggested elsewhere (Biesta 2010a), what distinguishes education from many other human practices is the fact that it doesn't work in relation to only one purpose, but actually functions in relation to a number of 'domains of purpose.'

The argument is relatively simple and starts from the observation that in all instances of education – both at the 'big' level of national curricula or school systems and at the 'small' level of teachers working with their students – education is always about the transmission and acquisition of some content (knowledge, skills, dispositions), but always also 'connects' students to particular traditions and ways of doing and being and, in addition, has an impact on their formation as a person (either positively, for example by giving them knowledge, skills and connections to networks that empower them, or negatively when, for example, they are being told to 'know their place'). In more theoretical language I have therefore suggested that education always functions in relation to three domains: that of *qualification*, that of *socialisation* and that of what, with a technical term, I have referred to as *subjectification*, which is about the ways in which students can be(come) subjects in their own right and not just remain objects of the desires and directions of others.

If it is the case that all education always functions in relation to these three domains, then it is reasonable to ask from teachers and others who are involved in the design and execution of education to take explicit responsibility for the potential impact of their work in each of the three domains. This means that qualification, socialisation and subjectification not only appear as three *functions of education*, but also as three *domains of educational purpose* – three qualitatively different domains with regard to which we need to state and justify what it is we seek to achieve with our students, and what we seek our students to achieve.

Although qualification, socialisation and subjectification can be distinguished, it is important to see that they cannot be separated or singled out. This means, on the one hand, that even schools that claim only to focus on qualification are still impacting in the domains of socialisation and subjectification. It means, on the other hand, that teachers and others involved in the design and execution of education are always faced with finding a *meaningful balance* between the three domains, bearing in mind that what can be achieved in one domain often limits what can be achieved in the other domains. The latter can be seen, for example, in the negative impact an excessive focus on achievement in the domain of qualification can have on the formation of the personhood of the student (which has to do both with socialisation and with subjectification).

The Need for an Educational Perspective, And Where It Might Come From All this shows why it is so utterly unhelpful to say that the point of education is just to say that students should learn, just as it is utterly unhelpful to suggest that the sole task of teachers is to facilitate the learning of their students. Without specifying what it is that should be learned and, more importantly for what purpose it should be learned, the language of learning is unable to provide a sense of direction to the educational process, which is precisely where its deficiency as an *educational language* lies.

I have been making this argument about the deficiency of the language of learning as an educational language for about a decade and although I do think that I have managed to raise some questions, it is remarkable how persistent the language of learning appears to be and, referring back to the anecdotes with which I opened this section, how it has also permeated the discourse and practice of educational leadership. There may, of course, be something attractive about the language of learning. It is generally (but mistakenly in my view; see Biesta [in press](#)) seen as an empowering and positive language that can provide an effective antidote against conceptions and practices of teaching as control – albeit that I would argue that learning has actually become a new mode or technology of control in contemporary societies (think of the strange imperative that we ought to keep learning throughout our lives), and also would like to highlight that learning is not just positive and easy, but can also be difficult and highly disturbing (for example when we learn our about inabilities and incapacities, or discover the darker sides of the histories that have formed us). But the problem with the language of learning, as I have shown, is that it provides us with very little direction for our educational efforts and that, in order to gain such direction, we need a much more robust educational language.

Here the point about different traditions becomes relevant, because – and again this is a topic I have explored in more detail in other writings (see Biesta [2011](#), [2012a](#)) – whereas the field of educational scholarship in some countries and settings has developed a distinctive educational identity, in other countries and settings it has not done so. What I have particularly in mind here is the gap between what elsewhere I have referred to as the Anglo-American and the German-Continental construction of the field of educational scholarship. Whereas the latter has generated the idea of education as an academic discipline in its own right with its own forms of theory and theorising and, most importantly, with its own particular interest – an interest in the emancipation of the child, to put it briefly – the former has established education as an academic field of scholarship and research by conceiving of it as a multi-disciplinary effort to study education as an ‘object.’ The key characteristic of this effort is that education is not seen as a discipline in its own right, but just as an object or field of study, and that intellectual input needs to be ‘borrowed’ from ‘real’ disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, history and philosophy. Such disciplines do of course have interesting things to say about education but – as I have argued in more detail in my analyses – they do so in their own disciplinary terms, so that they ask psychological, sociological, philosophical and historical questions about education but fail, so we might say, to ask educational questions about education. The rise of the language of learning can, in my view, also partly be explained through the influence of the Anglo-American construction on educational research, policy and practice more world-wide, particularly through the influence of psychology (although I am inclined to think mixed psycho-sociological approaches such as socio-cultural theory have also contributed a lot to the popularity of the learning perspective on education).

From an *analytical* perspective these observations thus suggest that the ‘field’ of educational leadership and management may have turned away from its orientation on curriculum theory and has been pulled into a much more technicist and

Anglo-American discourse of the evaluation of the ‘operation’ of education towards the achievement of learning and the generation of learning outcomes. The shift is both intellectual and political; it concerns both concepts, theories and vocabularies and social networks and alliances. From a more *programmatically* – or perhaps we should say: interested – perspective these observations suggest that there may be a need for the field of leadership and management to reconnect with curriculum theory (and I am not entirely sure whether I should add ‘broadly conceived’ as I have some doubts about the extent to which contemporary North America is able to generate the kind of educational questions and perspectives I have in mind; in my view what is happening in North America is mainly located in sociology and cultural studies) so as to be able to have a more robustly educational view about what leadership and management should be *for*, beyond the facilitation of learning or the promotion of development, such as the development of the child’s full potential. The problem with the latter idea is that in such phrases it is assumed that everything we are potentially able to do is good and should therefore be allowed out. What is forgotten here is that the ability to do good or do evil are both within our potential – which is why I have argued that the key task of education is actually to interrupt and question the child’s development, and do so particularly with regard to the question whether what the child desires is actually desirable, both for the child and society at large. The task of education is, in other words, not to facilitate and to promote but to offer resistance – a point well made in the work of the French educational thinker Philippe Meirieu (e.g., Meirieu 2008).

If this sheds some light on the connection between leadership and curriculum theory, I now wish to turn to the other dimension, that is, the relationship between leadership and the field of evaluation (including evaluation research).

Education, Measurement and the Professions

One reason why educational leadership and management and education as a field more widely may have turned towards learning and its language, is because of changes in the policy environment in which education operates and functions. As many commentators have shown, education policy in many countries around the world – and increasingly also, we might say, ‘between’ many countries around the world – is caught in a culture (or cult) of measurement that seeks to express and assess the ‘quality’ of educational process, practices, institutions and systems through a measurement of the performance of such systems. Such performance is understood in terms of what the system ‘produces’ – hence the prominence of the notion of ‘learning outcomes’ – and is generally assessed in a comparative way, that is, that measurement is used to identify who performs better and who performs best on a particular standard or set of criteria. One problem in the age of measurement is that this has led to a culture of competition – competition between nations, but also competition between schools and school districts, between classes, between teachers and between students.

The phrase ‘race to the top’ – the name of Obama’s initiative to ‘improve’ American education – nicely captures what is going on here, that is, that education is caught in a race where there will be a winner but also many losers, and that the orientation of this race is that of teaching an alleged ‘top.’ The other problem with the culture of measurement is that much is invested in the technicalities of measurement – the reliability and the technical validity, that is, the question whether what we seek to measure is indeed being measured – but that very little attention is being paid to what I have coined the ‘normative validity’ of the measurement regime, that is the question whether what is being measured is indeed what we (and the democratic question is of course who is included in this ‘we’) value about education. Given the sheer force and size of the global measurement industry it looks like the tail is wagging the dog, that is, that we are in a situation where we are valuing what is being measured, and that we no longer take the time to ask whether we are measuring what it is we value about education. The means are defining the ends, in other words – which, in the definition of Habermas, is a clear case of positivism or, in his term, of ‘halved’ rationality (‘halbierte Rationalität’).

The culture of measurement puts educational leaders in a difficult position because at first sight it looks like measurement contributes to accountability and democracy by giving all ‘stakeholders’ – itself not an unproblematic term; see below – transparent information about the performance of the education system. This is indeed how measurement is often defended, for example with reference to the social justice argument that everyone ought to have access to the same quality education, and hence we need to know how the system performs. (This argument already is spurious in at least one respect, in that it assumes that the ‘outcomes’ that can be measured are entirely the effect of – and hence the responsibility of – the school and the educational system. The shift towards ‘value added’ measuring was an attempt to address this issue, but remains caught in a rather limited input-output logic that does not really, in my view, engage with the complexities of educational purpose as indicated in the previous section.) But is it really the case that the culture of measurement improves accountability and democratisation of education? Is it therefore something that educational leaders and managers should embrace and full support – something they may feel they have to on the assumption that they should have nothing to hide? In recent work I have tried to raise some questions about this development, particularly with regard to the question whether the culture of measurement supports or distorts democratic professionalism (see Biesta 2014). In this section I would like to share some of these insights in order to gain a better sense of the problematic side of what is happening in the domain of evaluation and measurement of the performance of education. I will do this through a discussion of three post-democratic distortions of professionalism in education and related domains and will link this discussion back to the overall theme of this volume.

The Democratisation of the Professions The traditional case for professional autonomy, that is, for the idea that professionals should regulate and control their own work, relies on three assumptions (see, for example, Freidson 1994). The first is that the work of professionals distinguishes itself from many other areas of work

in that it is concerned with the promotion of *human wellbeing*. This already indicates that professionalism is not merely technical but always entails a normative dimension. Secondly, it is argued that unlike many other fields of work, professional work relies on *highly specialist knowledge and skills*, which is one of the reasons why the education of the traditional professions (doctors, lawyers and priests) has generally taken place in institutions of higher education. Thirdly, it is argued that the work of professionals distinguishes itself from other areas of work because professionals work in *relationships of authority and trust*. These three assumptions constitute, on the one hand, a *definition* of professionalism and therefore appear each time a new area of work seeks to elevate itself to the status of a profession. On the other hand the assumptions constitute a *justification* for the special status of the professions and for its system of self-regulation.

The traditional configuration of professionalism sees professions as closed and largely inward-looking entities that, although performing important functions for society, in a sense operate at a distance and even isolated from society. In their traditional set up professions thus largely operate beyond democratic control, either from clients or from society at large. This is most clearly visible in the fact that professions regulate their own functioning with regard to quality control, entrance to the profession – including the regulation of professional education – and, in case of professional failure and misconduct, also the ‘exit’ from the profession. This makes professions into powerful entities that exert power both over their own functioning and over important domains of human wellbeing. The power of professions also helps to understand why relations of authority and trust can easily turn into the unjustified exertion of power and even abuse of power.

The democratic deficit of the professions was fundamentally exposed and challenged in the 1960s and 1970s, partly as a result of client and patient emancipation (for example in the medical domain and psychiatry), and partly as a result of changing conceptions of health and mental well-being, for example in alternative medicine and anti-psychiatry (such as the work of R.D. Laing; see, for example, Laing 1960; Laing and Esterson 1964; for medicine see also Hellín 2002). These developments, which themselves were part of wider protest and emancipation movements at the time (including the student revolts of 1968 and the rise of the anti-education movement in Germany, known as anti-Pädagogik; see, for example, Von Braunmühl 1975), particularly exposed the abuse of power within professional relationships and, through this, were aimed at what we might call a democratic redefinition of the relationship between professionals and their clients. To the extent to which, after the Second World War, many professions became more central in the project of the welfare state (see, for example, Björkman 1982), a further shift occurred from a strict orientation on individual clients and their needs towards a wider concern for the common good. This can be seen as a second democratising impulse where professions increasingly established relationships of democratic accountability with their clients and society more generally.

This potted history of the development of professions and professionalism is first of all important in order to make visible how in the 1960s and 1970s a democratisation of the traditional configuration of the professions was set into motion, both as

a result of a redefinition of the relationship between professionals and their clients, and as a result of the redefinition of the relationship between professions and professionals and their societal environment – something that was particularly connected to the role of the professions in emerging welfare states after the Second World War. Understanding these developments is also important, however, in order to grasp the significance of more recent shifts and changes in professional fields such as health care and education which, at first sight, may appear as furthering the case for the democratisation of professions but which, on closer inspection, turn out to be undermining the democratic configuration of professional work. In this section I focus on three ‘post-democratic distortions’: (1) the transformation of clients, patients and also students into customers; (2) the transformation of a democratic conception of accountability into a technical-managerial conception; and (3) the transformation of professional knowledge into ‘evidence,’ linked to the idea of evidence-based practice.

These developments should be understood against the background of the transformation of the welfare state and the rise of neo-liberal forms of governance and governing. The transformation of the welfare state – which was partly the result of economic crises such as the oil crisis in the 1970s, and partly of ideological interventions such as the conservative idea of the small state (‘Thatcherism’) (see Faulks 1998) – resulted in a shift from an orientations towards social justice and solidarity (the idea of ‘the common good’) towards a view of the state as a provider of a limited set of public services. What neo-liberalism added to this was the redefinition of the state as a regulator of the market of public services, no longer concerned with a substantive and hence political definition of the common good, but with formal notions such as ‘quality,’ ‘choice,’ and ‘the customer always comes first.’ As a result neo-liberal governments no longer see themselves as a key actor in the political debate about the definition of the common good, but increasingly understand themselves as process managers who, through a regime of standards, measurement and inspection, try to secure the quality of the products on offer. ‘Quality’ itself is understood in strictly formal terms, that is as the situation where a particular provision or service meets certain standards, without – as I have already hinted at in the introduction to this chapter – any concern for the question how meaningful those standards actually are. In what way, then, have professional fields been caught up in these developments and how has this distorted their democratic potential?

A First Distortion: From Client/Patient/Student to Customer I have indicated above that the emancipation of clients, patients and students in the 1960s and 1970s not only exposed the democratic deficit of many professions but also resulted in a transformation of professions and, more specifically, a transformation of professional relationships. Clients, patients and students literally made their voices heard in order to make clear that they were not just objects of the action and interventions of professionals, but subjects in their own right who therefore wanted to be treated as subjects of dialogue and not objects of intervention. From this angle it may seem that the recent trend to refer to clients, patients and students as customers and the tendency to emphasise that that in such domains as health care and education

professionals must offer what their customers want, is the ultimate step in the democratisation of the professions – one where those at the receiving end, so to speak, are in total control.

But is this indeed the ultimate step in the democratisation of the professions? I have reasons to doubt that this is the case, and the main reason has to do with a fundamental difference between economic transactions and professional transactions (see Feinberg 2001). Whereas in economic transactions customers know what they want and would just look for a company that can provide them with what they want for the best possible combination of price and quality, a key aspect of professional relationships is that professional not just service the needs of their ‘clients’ but also play a key role in the definition of what it is that their clients need. Clients, patients and students, in other words, do not engage with professionals just to get what they already know that they want. Part of the process is precisely to figure what it is that clients actually need. As Feinberg (2001) explains: we go to the doctor because we have a headache, but we expect that the doctor figures out what the headache is an indication of and what can be done to get rid of it. This already suggested that the redefinition of clients, patients and students as customers is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of what professional practices are and what they are about.

A clear example of what is at stake here can be found in the domain of education and upbringing. If parents were only to give their children what they say they want, and never raise the question – for themselves but also in dialogue with their children – whether what their children say they want is actually good for them, it is quite likely that their children will turn into spoilt brats who remain slaves of their desires rather than that they are in a position where they can have a mature perspective on their desires in order to judge which of their desires are actually desirable. It is here that we can locate the specific responsibility of educators, and a similar argument can be made in relation to most if not all professions: just giving clients what they say they want may be utterly unprofessional. Doctors are not just there to give their patients just what they want, but have a key role in finding out what might be wrong with the patient in order then to propose possible treatments. Patients do have a voice in all this – for example with regard to questions concerning the risks and benefits of a certain treatment – but this is always to be understood as a *dialogue* between the experiential expertise of the patient and the professional expertise of the doctor. It is not a process where the doctor simply sells what the patient wants to have.

For precisely these reasons then, the redefinition of clients, patients and students as customers is not a further step in the democratisation of professional work and professional relationships, but rather a development that subverts the unique contribution professionals make. The reason for this lies in the fact that the redefinition of clients, patients and students as customers only puts the authoritarian relationship on its head by giving all the power to the customer. What it fails to see is that real emancipation and real democratisation requires a *redefinition* of the relationship between professionals and their clients where both play a distinctive role in a dialogical process of needs definition – it is not just a reversal of the traditional set up that would make the client/customer powerful and the professional powerless.

A Second Distortion: From Democratic to Technical-Managerial Accountability A second distortion has to do with the way in which a democratic conception of accountability has been replaced by a technical-managerial one (on this see also Biesta 2004). In a democratic conception of accountability professionals are accountable for the quality of their professional action in a direct dialogical relationship with their stakeholders (clients, patients, students, and ultimately society as a whole). In a technical-managerial conception of accountability, however, the focus is no longer on the quality of professional action. Rather professionals are held accountable for the degree in which their actions meet certain standards. The role of the state in this set up, as already alluded to, is to guarantee the quality of the 'product' delivered by the professions. But it does not do so by engaging in a substantial political discussion about what, for example, good mental health care or good education ought to be, but by formulating standards and by initiating systems of inspection and control that need to make sure that professionals services meet the standards. The question of the normative validity of the standards is hardly ever discussed, or is brushed aside as 'ideological.' What happens as a result of this is the creation of a gap between professionals (redefined as providers) and their clients (redefined as customers). In this gap we find a whole machinery of often privatised quality controllers and inspectors, which means that the accountability relationships between professionals and their clients are no longer direct but have become indirect.

This is another example of what, at first sight, seems to further the democratisation of the professions but what, on closer inspection, turns out to be an erosion of the possibility for substantial democratic dialogue between professions/professionals and their clients. In her Reith lectures on accountability Onara O'Neill (2002) has shown in much detail what goes wrong here. She reveals two important shifts in the rise of the technical-managerial approach to accountability. The first has to do with a shift with regard to the different parties involved in accountability processes. She writes:

In theory the new culture of accountability and audit makes professionals and institutions more accountable to the public. This is supposedly done by publishing targets and levels of attainment in league tables, and by establishing complaint procedures by which members of the public can seek redress for any professional or institutional failures. But underlying this ostensible aim of accountability to the public the real requirements are for accountability to regulators, to departments of government, to funders, to legal standards. The new forms of accountability impose forms of central control – quite often indeed a range of different and mutually inconsistent forms of central control. (O'Neill 2002)

A second shift has to do with definitions of quality. Here she writes:

In theory again the new culture of accountability and audit makes professionals and institutions more accountable for good performance. This is manifest in the rhetoric of improvement and raising standards, of efficiency gains and best practice, of respect for patients and pupils and employees. But beneath this admirable rhetoric the real focus is on performance indicators chosen for ease of measurement and control rather than because they measure accurately what the quality of performance is. (O'Neill 2002)

O'Neill's observations thus clearly show the difference between a democratic and a technical-managerial approach to accountability and the slippery slope between the two.

A Third Distortion: From Professional Knowledge to Evidence-Based Practice The third arena in which the democratisation of professionalism has been distorted has to do with the way in which professional judgement in a range of different professional domains is increasingly being replaced or pushed out by a demand for an evidence-based approach (for more detail see Biesta 2007, 2010b). The idea here is that professional action can only become really professional if it is no longer based on the singular insights (or according to some: subjective opinions) of professionals, but when it becomes based upon secure scientific knowledge about 'what works.' And the claim is that the *only* way in which we can be certain that a professional intervention 'works' is by means of randomised controlled trials – in the literature known as 'golden standard' – which has even led to situations where professionals are prevented from doing anything unless there is positive evidence that their interventions will work.

While proponents of evidence-based approaches claim that professional fields such as education, social work and care can be improved dramatically if they opt for the evidence-based approach which, so it is claimed, has been the main driver of progress in such fields as agriculture and medicine (see for this particular argument Slavin 2002), there are a number of reasons why the idea of 'what works' is actually not that easily incorporated. One key issue is that in domains such as care and education – although this ultimately also holds for agriculture and medicine – the question can never simply be about 'what works' but always needs to be phrases as the question 'What works for what?' The point is, that any idea of 'working' always needs to be understood in relation to the aim or aims of professional action in a particular field. This already shows that the question of 'what works' can, at most, be relevant with regard to the means of professional action, but not with regard to the ends.

The more important point with regard to the question whether the idea of an evidence-based approach makes sense in domains of professional action has to do with the fact that all professional action takes place in what Aristotle already distinguished as the domain of the 'variable' (see Aristotle 1980), the domain of actions and possible consequences, and not in the domain of the 'eternal,' that is, the domain of cause-effect relationships. One reason for this lies in the fact that professional action takes place between human beings who never appear just as objects of intervention – which also shows that the language of intervention is actually quite misleading – but always also as subjects in their own right. In the domain of the variable research can at most provide us with information about *possible* relationships between actions and consequences. But research can never guarantee that relationships between actions and consequences that were found in the past will appear in exactly the same way in

the present. While research therefore can tell us what in a concrete situation and under specific circumstances *has worked* in the past, it can never tell us what *will work* in the present or the future. Next to the need to make judgements about the ends of professional action, we therefore also always need judgement about how to act – which is a judgement about the application of general and decontextualized knowledge to concrete situations and singular cases. Scientific evidence can neither replace judgements about how to act, nor can it replace judgements about the aims and ends of professional action – and where we find claims that it can or should, we have an example of positivism, where the means are defining the ends, rather than that we are in a position to define the ends of our actions ourselves.

The call, and in some cases even the blunt demand to work in an evidence-based way thus appears as an attempt to eradicate professional judgement with regard to the ‘how’ and the ‘what for’ of professional action from the domain of professionalism. It seeks to transform professions into abstract ‘machines’ in which reflection and judgement are seen as a weakness rather than as an essential part. This shows how the call for an evidence-based approach is not a deepening of the knowledge and judgement of professionals, but rather an attempt to overrule such knowledge and judgement. In precisely this sense the evidence-based approach is another erosion of the democratic dimension of professionalism and hence another post-democratic distortion.

The Role of Measurement If the above provides us with an insight into the ways in which recent developments in professional fields such as education are hindering rather than enhancing their democratic potential, there is the additional question how the culture of measurement is contributing to this. With regard to this question I wish to make two observations. Firstly I wish to argue that with regard to each distortion there is a need for data, information and measurement. After all, to give customers what they want and to give the choice and value for money they need data about the quality of the products on offer. Also: to hold professionals accountable for the quality of their performance we need data about the degree to which their work meets pre-set standards. And in order to make professional activity evidence-based there is a need for data about what works, particularly data that show correlations (if not causal connections) between ‘interventions’ and ‘outcomes.’

We can say, therefore, that the culture of measurement has played and continues to play a key role in the post-democratic transformation of the professions. But it is not only that the transformations *require* data and measurement. At the very same time the availability of data, information and measurement *reinforce* these particular distortions rather than that they work against them. After all, once there are data available about the performance of individuals, groups or systems, it becomes increasingly difficult not to look at the data. Similarly, once there are data about the performance of individuals, groups or systems, it is difficult not to include them in any accountability exercise. And once some kind of apparent ‘evidence’ has been constructed about particular practices and ways of working, it becomes again difficult not to make use of it. The availability of data, information and measurement, to put it differently, is seductive and difficult to resist – which reveals another dimen-

sion of the social psychology of the culture of measurement and provides a further explanation for its attractiveness and ‘force.’

Reclaiming a Space? If my analysis of the distortions of professional fields such as education is sufficiently adequate, one question it raises is whether it is possible to regain a space for professional action – which is important for teachers but also for educational leaders and managers. There are (at least) three dimensions to this. The first is to challenge, interrupt and resist the redefinition of the professions, particular with regard to the three distortions I have discussed above: the redefinition of the client/patient/student as a customer; the replacement of democratic accountability with technical-managerial accountability; and the attempt to replace professional knowledge with evidence about ‘what works.’ In each case it is particularly important to show that these developments are based on a misunderstanding of what professional work is about.

Secondly it is important to expose the democratic deficit of these developments, that is, to show that in spite of what may seem to be the case at first sight, they are actually undermining and eroding the development of more democratic ways of working in professional fields such as health care and education. For this it is important to highlight that democratisation of the professions is not a matter of reversing the positions of the involved parties, that is, just turning authoritarian relationships on their head. It rather requires the establishment of new relationships between professionals and their clients – relationships of dialogue where both can contribute their particular experience and expertise, acknowledging that the experience and expertise of each of the parties involved (professionals and clients) is different and complementary, and that the differing contributions from all are needed in order transform authoritarian into democratic professional relationships.

To resist post-democratic transformations of dimensions of professional work, and to insist on the need to transform relationships rather than just reverse them, often means that one finds oneself defending ideas and positions that, at first sight, may look outdated. For example to argue against the ‘learnification’ of education, that is, against a conception of education that puts the learner at the centre and sidelines the teacher, and, in response, to make a case for the importance of teaching and the teacher (Biesta 2012b) – and also for the head teacher – is often perceived as a step back rather than a step forward. So it needs careful argumentation to show that the turn towards the learner and away from the teacher is actually an inadequate response to authoritarian forms of teaching as control, as it only reverses the position of the student and teacher, rather than that it seeks to transform the nature of their relationship. Similarly: to argue that education should be understood as value-based rather than evidence-based (Biesta 2010b), is often perceived as a return to a pre-scientific age rather than as an attempt to show that science – in the form of evidence or otherwise – can never do away with the need for judgement in education.

The Importance of an Educational Perspective At this point I come to a similar conclusion as the one I reached in the previous section because when we consider how educational leaders and managers are caught up these developments, it becomes again important on the one hand to understand – analytically – what has happened and why it has happened and, on the other hand – programmatically – to identify what kind of resources might be needed in order to regain a sense of professional control within these developments rather than to constantly being pushed in the position of being the servant or executor of other people's ideas – which is one way to think about how educational leaders and managers have become positioned in the culture of measurement. Perhaps to put it briefly – as a point for discussion – this analysis points again in the direction of the question whether those who play a key role in the design and enactment of education have access to educational ways of understanding what education is about (and I apologise for the multiple appearance of the word 'education' in this sentence) or whether the only discursive resources they have are policy resources and a language of learning and development. To see how much effort is needed to make clear that teaching is a normative profession – a profession crucially built around the exercise of educational judgements – and not a technicist endeavour; to counter the influx of competence-based conceptions of teaching and teacher education that keep forgetting to engage with the question what all these competencies are for, that is, what they are supposed to bring about, indicates, even on anecdotal evidence, that the main stream of education – as practice, and as research – has lost contact with resources that have been central in (some) traditions of curriculum theory and wider educational scholarship. For a strong, self-confident *educational* profession the connection with these traditions remains important.

In Conclusion

Having put quite a lot 'on the table,' let me be brief in my conclusions. I have tried to analyse developments in relation to two aspects of the triangle proposed by the editors of this volume – the triangle being composed of curriculum, leadership and evaluation. On the one hand I have explored connections between leadership and curriculum directly, which I did through a critique of the language of learning and an argument in favour of the educational forms of theory and theorising. It may be that many leaders and managers have insufficient access to these – either because they have themselves been educated within traditions of thought and practice in which such perspectives were not present, or because they have lost touch with them as a result of the pressures of a more global culture of measurement. This is the other dimension of the triangle I have explored, that is, how the culture of measurement – which includes a particular way to 'evaluate' the 'quality' of education – impacts on education and on the room for manoeuvre educational professionals, including leaders and managers have. Here again I suggested that one important precondition for countering the distortions that I think are still going on in education

is to re-engage with vocabularies and discursive resources that keep education away from production metaphors and consumerist and technicist thinking and doing. Let's cautiously and provisionally conclude, therefore, that there may be a case to turn educational leadership and management – both as practice and as field of scholarship – 'back' or in the direction of curriculum theory, particularly those forms of theory that are informed by and built upon educational forms of theory and theorising. If my contribution reaches this conclusion in a more abstract sense – generalising rather quickly across a number of national contexts and settings – one interesting question is what might become visible in more detailed comparative studies, that some of the other contributions to this volume will provide us with.

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