

# School Leadership in the Era of Neoliberalism

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Psychologie a její kontexty 12 (2), 2021, 23–38  
<https://doi.org/10.15452/PsyX.2021.12.0009>



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**Abstract** A lot of ink has been spilled to create a consensus around the meaning of the concept of leadership. This is so because the concept of leadership currently dominates the language of organizations including schools. What instead happened is a deluge of assumptions including but not limited to the beliefs that; leadership is static; it can be taught objectively and effectively to a different group of people in various situations; it can be learned quickly and easily, and the context is a secondary or tertiary importance.

These assumptions gave birth to the leadership development industrial complex, an explosion of leadership training programs all over the world especially in the United States. This growing industry promises to create transformative and high performing leaders for a small fee. Despite this training explosion, it is the opinion of several scholars that leadership failure is almost everywhere. They wonder whether the leadership development industry has improved the human condition. The elephant in the room is the neoliberal context in which all the above is taking place. Neoliberalism is an ideology whose proponents advocate the deregulation of the economy, liberalization of trade and industry and the privatization of state-owned enterprise. This ideology pushes individuals to see themselves as self-interested actors rather than people working for the social good. The new managerialism becomes the dominant form of management in organizations whose focus is on productivity, efficiency, surveillance, and accountability.

Educational institutions are not immune to the new managerialism whose introduction deserves to be interrogated. Neoliberalism turns teachers and school principals into technicians rather than professionals. The influence of managerialism on education policies is efficiency in all matters which leaves no room for the pursuit of equity, excellence and ethics and social justice (Codd, 1993). What vision of education should prospective schools' leaders develop while they are being forced to adopt a managerialist approach to

the leadership of school? Should school leaders develop both the ability to resist and build coalitions with proponents of neoliberalism at all costs?

Neoliberalism has successfully coopted our education practitioners and students to turn them into docile minds and docile bodies to the service of the market. The question this phenomenon raises is whether faculty in education leadership preparation programs are preparing their candidates for a meaningful and purposeful life. Perhaps public education should focus on society reproduction, but individual values cannot be ignored. Unfortunately, the neoliberalism ideology and its proponents have taken it upon themselves to prioritize these values less. Hence the ideological struggle continues between proponents and opponents of the impact of neoliberalism in organizations but more specifically in schools.

**Keywords** School, leadership, neoliberalism, management, administration, managerialism.

## Introduction

The concept of leadership and specifically school leadership has been the topic of intense scrutiny among academic scholars. Burns (1978) points that leadership is one of the most studied phenomena and the least accessible to the earth. Agreeing with Burns et al. (1999) explain that:

Leadership as a concept and a set of practices has been the subject of an enormous quantity of popular and academic literature. Arguably, a great deal has been learned about leadership over the last century. But this has not depended on any clear, agreed upon definition of the concept, as essential as this would seem at first glance. (p. 5)

Today the concept of leadership dominates the language of organizations (Davies, 2017). Leader as a label is recognized for senior people within formal hierarchies (Learmonth & Morrell, 2021). Leadership scholars believe that those given the label of leader are somehow infused with special qualities and special talents. The label of ‘leader’ connotes images of greatness and goodness in contrast to the label of manager which has considerably less prestigious associations. It implies that a leader merit his or her title and anyone else who tries hard might become a leader. The underlying narrative suggests that those who fail to make it to the altar of leadership lack merit (Learmonth & Morrell, 2021). Words are not innocent suggest Mautner and Learmonth (2020) because they convey identities and power asymmetries as well as legitimize certain constructions of roles and functions.

Over the years there has been considerable discussion in the literature about the similarities and differences between the notions of leadership, management, and administration. Larry Cuban (1984, p. 190) states that “there are more than 350 definitions of leadership but not clear and unequivocal understanding as to what distinguishes leaders from non-leaders “. We think of leadership as being formative, proactive, and problem-solving, dealing with such things as values, vision, and mission, whereas management with the execution, planning, organizing and deployment of resources to make things happen. Management focuses on providing order and consistency to organizations while leadership focalizes on producing change and movement (Kotter, 1990 in Fidler & Atton, 2004). Although the literature distinguishes leadership from management or vice versa, there is an implicit recognition that the two terms overlap. It is essential to ensure that the current preoccupation with leadership does not marginalize the importance of management and management development (Early & Weindling, 2004). Both concepts evolve being influenced by cultures, contexts, and values.

Another significant point to emphasize as we examine the concept of leadership is the notion of “self-authorship” that Foucault refers to as the bedrock of neoliberalism (Foucault, 2008, p. 226). The celebration of leadership is associated with neoliberalism, an ideology that celebrates the glorification of individual self-interest, economic efficiency, and unbridled competition (Steger & Roy, 2010). Neoliberalism and individualism are mutually reinforcing. The language of leadership in the context of organizational life has become what Mirowski (2013, p. 117) refers to as “the creeping linguistic neoliberalism”.

In this paper I argue that neoliberalism maintains a heteronomous relation with

school leadership to the point that the school leader does not longer lead school but rather is being led by it. I begin my argument with an examination of the concept of leadership followed by the assumptions we make about it and the growth of the leadership development industry. In the following sections I tackle the alliance of institutional leadership and neoliberalism and its subsequential impact of education leadership preparation programs. I close this examination by sharing my reflections on our educational leadership preparation programs.

### Assumptions about leadership

Although there is no consensus on the meaning of the concept of leadership, assumptions abound. Kellerman (2012) exposes five assumptions and contends that they are all mistaken. The first assumption suggests that leadership is static. The second assumption proposes that leadership can be taught objectively, and its teaching is effective. The third assumption implies that leadership can be learned quickly and easily. The fourth assumption advances that one form of leadership can be taught to a different group of people in different situations. The fifth assumption leads us to believe that the context is of secondary or tertiary importance.

The belief that leadership is static grew out of the fact that it has been reduced to a set of skills to acquire, to master and to successfully apply in an organizational setting. A second reality that feeds that belief is that leadership is overstudied and codified into theories. Theories of leadership abound; from the ‘great men theories’ to a typology of eight broad theories (Bush & Glover, 2003) including instructional leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, participative leadership, managerial leadership, post-modern leadership, interpersonal leadership and contingent leadership. I would add critical and authentic leadership to the list.

The danger of theories as Zavarzadeh and Morton (1994) explain is that they are constructed not out of the unquestionable truth about the “nature” of things, but out of theoretical assumptions that justify the free market, the exploitation of labor, complicit subjectivities, evasive pedagogies, and coalitionist politics. The alleged legitimacy of theories leaves little room for meaning pluralism. Despite this proliferation of leadership theories it has become evident in the case of school, for instance, that it is more difficult for a single individual, the school principal, to possess all the skills and abilities required to lead a school (Kocolowski, 2010); and single individuals seldom have the dramatic impact on a school’s organizational performance that is so often claimed (Thorpe et al., 2011).

The second assumption is that leadership can be taught objectively. Because our leadership assumptions are so varied what is leadership in one context may be something totally different in another. Reducing leadership to a set of skills eclipses this reality. One leadership training program, for instance, promise tested recipes to create “transformative change agents” who can “innovate”, “motivate”, “empower”, “unleash”, and “disrupt” while building a “personal brand”. There is comparatively little attention paid to inconvenient personality traits that might complicate the process or get in the way, and to how

some people are not “natural leaders” (Aboujaoude, 2021). And there is a proclaimed belief that leadership can be taught objectively and be efficient. Unfortunately, several large-scale industry studies indicate that more than 50 % of senior leaders believe that their talent development efforts don’t adequately build critical skills and organizational capabilities (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019).

The third assumption is reductionist and suggests that leadership can be learned quickly and easily. Satisfying the requirements of a 101 class on leadership does not make one a leader. A student graduating from law school is a lawyer. A student graduating from medical school is a physician. A candidate graduating from a leadership program is a “graduate of a leadership program”, not a leader. There is a whole spectrum of skills some of whom are difficult to teach, to measure or even to articulate; they have significant affective components and are largely nonalgorithmic. Skills such as leading, communicating, relating, and energizing groups whose mastery depends a great deal on practice and feedback (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019). There is also something to be said about “street-smart leadership” that our leadership training programs tend to avoid.

The fourth assumption advances that one form of leadership can be taught to a different group of people. It is the “one size fits all” trap. A pre-assessment or skills audit is a good place to start before providing leadership training. What does a “different” group of people mean anyway? I see a group composed of men and women, white, Black, Asian, Spanish or Latin, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, gay, lesbian, trans, people with disabilities to name a few. The word “different” opens a can of worms. Demographic diversity requires intercultural competence because leadership takes multiple forms. However, the pressure of neoliberalism forces trainers to standardize their training irrespective of the cultural differences brought to the table by the participants. I would be remiss if I do not mention the counter trend to this uniformization through the PLC “personal learning cloud” (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019), an assortment of online courses, social and interactive platforms, and learning tools from both traditional institutions and upstarts. Individuals can select the course or the training that best suits them.

The fifth and last assumption makes the point that the context is of secondary and tertiary importance. Context is a critical component of successful leadership. The social, political, economic, and cultural contexts are in perpetual flux. One thing constant in a context is change. Technology development is one example. Unfortunately, too many leadership training programs hold on to the belief that a similar set of skills or style of leadership can fit in any organizational setting (Gurdjian et al., 2014).

### **The leadership development industrial complex**

There has been an explosion of leadership training programs all over the world but more significantly in the United States. Corporate executives believe that leadership development is one of the most pressing issues faced by organizations today. Leadership development is the apex of preoccupations because it represents a great chance for organizations to seize the competitive edge in their industries (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019). The

average training expenditures for large companies increased from \$ 17 million in 2017 to \$ 19.7 million in 2018. The number for midsize company rose \$ 600.000 to \$ 2.1 million in 2018. On average companies spend \$ 986 per learner this year compared with \$ 1,075 per learner in 2017. Government and military organizations spent the most per learner this year (\$ 1,433), followed by nonprofit organizations (\$ 1,360) (People Performance Solutions, 2021).

The traditional players in leadership development including university and college business schools, corporate universities and specialized training companies and consultancies are being joined by a host of newcomers including human resources advisory firms, management consultancies and digital start-ups. We are witnessing a shifting landscape of services providers. The corporate leadership training market is expected to grow by \$ 26.7 billion during 2020–2024. This is so because of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the corporate leadership training market (Technavio, 2021).

An international leadership training group advertises that it offers a 6-week leadership training program online. Its objective is “to move leaders from average to high performing by developing the four fundamental skills (self-awareness, learning agility, influence and communication)” that leaders at any level need to master for success. This training costs \$ 1,750. Demand for this sort of training is very high and the leadership training industry has sprung to meet the demand. Besides coaching, university and college programs offer MBA, executive booth camps, management rehab, advanced degrees in leadership including doctorates. The message these training initiatives sends is that leadership is a teachable science, not a complex and unpredictable intersection of luck, circumstance, experience, and temperament (Aboujaoude, 2021).

A great deal of money is being made by these leadership programs. They believe that we can train people to become effective leaders. However, companies investing in these leadership training programs are growing frustrated with the results. Corporate executives believe that their talent development efforts do not adequately build critical skills and organizational capabilities (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019). Aboujaoude (2021) and Kellerman (2012) agree that despite so many improvement opportunities, leadership failure is almost everywhere. Kellerman (2012) writes:

Tireless teaching of leadership has brought us no closer to leadership nirvana than we were previously; that we don't have much better an idea of how to grow good leaders, or how to stop or at least slow bad leaders (p. 14).

The jury is still out as to whether over its roughly forty years, the leadership development industry has in any major or meaningful way improved the human condition. Who is to blame for this failure? Would it be even worse if the leadership development industrial complex did not exist to offer its services? Or is it partly to blame for nurturing the leadership obsession by helping individuals motivated by the wrong reasons visualize a way to the top? (Aboujaoude, 2021).

## Leadership and neoliberalism

Neoliberalism emerged in the 1980s as an ideological response to inflation (Barnoff et al., 2017). It is a complex set of values, ideologies, and practices that affect the economic, political, cultural, and social aspects of society. Proponents of neoliberalism advocate for deregulation of the economy, liberalization of trade and industry, and privatization of state-owned enterprise. This is obvious around the world where countries introduce massive tax cuts for high income earners and businesses, reduce social services and welfare programs, and use interest rates by independent banks to keep inflation in check; downsize government, decrease unionization, and increase labor flexibility, and remove controls on global finance (Steger & Roy, 2010). Rather than embracing and encouraging citizens to work toward the ideal of social good they are encouraged to see themselves as self-interested actors who are responsible to see themselves economically accountable, efficient, and transparent (Giroux, 2004).

Martinez and Garcia (1997) unpack neoliberalism by exposing the way it is implemented. First, is the rule of the market; liberating free/private enterprise from any restrictions imposed by the government or the state irrespective of the social damage this causes. Capitals and services can move freely across borders without restrictions. Second, cutting public expenditures for social services such as education, health care to name a few. Third, deregulation; reduction of government regulation that might diminish profits, including regulations that are intended to enhance on-the-job safety or protect the environment. Fourth, privatization; the idea of selling public institutions, state-owned enterprises, goods, and services. This is promoted in the name of efficiency. It is the case for school privatization with the school choice movement exemplified with the emergence of charter schools. Fifth, elimination of the concept of “the public good” or “community” to be replaced with “individual responsibility” and pressuring the havenots to find solutions to their problems, i. e., lack of education, health care, etc. It is also a political system one in which there is formal democracy, but the citizens remain spectators, diverted from any meaningful participation in decision-making (Ross & Gibson, 2007, p. 3).

This ideology is espoused by conservatives as well as liberals in the United States because of the economic edge it can give to the country. McChesney (1998) describes neoliberalism as:

Trivial debate over minor issues by parties that basically pursue the same pro-business policies regardless of formal differences and campaign debate. Democracy is permissible as long as the control of business is off-limits to popular deliberations or change, i. e., so long as it is not democracy (p. 9).

Neoliberalism is operationalized through what scholars refer to as “new managerialism” which has become the dominant form of management in organizations and institutions including schools (Davies, 2005; Deem et al., 2007; Farrell & Morris, 2003). In this context, new forms of governance align with a market-driven rationale whose focus is on accountability and employees’ performance measure and outputs (Gray et al., 2015; McDonald, 2006).

Good leadership means operationalizing neoliberalism through increased surveillance putting employees under a panopticon of accountability, productivity, efficiency cult, and transparency. Workers are reduced to human capital or economized beings urged to outperform their competition. Managerial practices focus on surveillance and audit to reduce costs and increase efficiency and productivity. The emotional cost attached to these practices amounts to depression, exhaustion, shame, loss, discontentment, stress, overload, insomnia, anxiety, aggression, hurt, guilt feeling of out-of-placeness, fraudulence and fear (Farrel & Morris, 2003; Mountz et al., 2015).

Managerialism is hard to negotiate. It generates resistance depending very much on the settings where it is being applied. The challenges it offers is that it takes multiple forms in various contexts that it is very difficult to disrupt. Leadership is great concept indeed but operationalizing it presents a unique challenge.

### School leadership and neoliberalism

Research on nontraditional approaches to school leadership is still in its infancy and corresponds with the entry of the concept of leadership in school context in early 1980. This is when neoliberalism started its incursion in various venues including the schools. A “Nation at Risk” set the alarm for standards and accountability in schools. The proponents of school reform felt at the time that the public education system operated without accountability for a long time and needed change. The schools needed to operate as businesses. If businesses were so successful using a managerialist approach, schools could also benefit from adopting a similar approach. It was perhaps too early for many school leaders to make sense of what was happening.

Before 1980 the terms used were “administration” and “management”. Seldom did one hear about the concept of school leader. Finch (1977), John (2016) and Pink and Leibert (1986) were the earliest writers to apply the concept of leadership in school context. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the concept of leadership became widely used. It displaced the concept of management and gave educators a way out of what they perceived as a “cult of efficiency”. By introducing the concept of leadership, neoliberalist proponents challenged school administrators to consider their roles to include transformation, empowerment, and collaboration rather than mere management as it was being redefined in the business world. This was an unwelcome addition to school administrators who felt comfortable with the status quo and feared change. “Leadership became associated with the ideas of change and innovation and was elevated in status above management, which became residualised as inherently conservative and status-quo oriented” (Gronn, 2006, p. 3). As a result, the concept of leadership began to assume a superior and exceptional status.

In the business environment, shared leadership began to emerge as team-based structures replaced hierarchical structures (Avolio et al., 2009). This trend shifted away power concentration from one person toward expanding the capacity of leadership at the top level of the corporation (O’Toole et al., 2002). Informal arrangements sometimes arose spontaneously because of the exigencies of the workplace.

Most studies on shared leadership fall in the domain of healthcare, nursing, medicine and education and distributed leadership within business, management and other areas of the social sciences e. g., consulting teams, technology, etc. (Anderson et al., 2008; Bolden, 2011; Boardman, 2001; Hall, 2001; Hsu & Sharma, 2008; Jackson, 2000; Konu & Viitanen, 2008; Merkens & Spencer, 1998; Meyers & Johnson, 2008; Prather et al., 1988; Rice, 2006; Spooner et al., 1997; Steinert et al., 2006; Wallace, 2001). There are limited theoretical and empirical studies that help us understand leadership configurations that make a positive difference in school settings. Instead, school leadership research has focused on the traditional model that invests authority in a single person. Copland (2001) writes:

Expectations for the principalship have steadily expanded since the reforms of the early 1980s, always adding to and never subtracting from the job description. As expectations have grown, the principal role has come under more scrutiny. Now two decades into the current age of school reform, one can argue that we have reached the point where the aggregate expectations for the principalship are so exorbitant that they exceed the limits of what might be reasonably expected from one person. (p. 529)

These exaggerated and unrealistic expectations in the ability of a single individual to transform a school have triggered an avalanche of reforms taking place in school settings where new leadership configurations are being initiated. In education, the hope of superhero principal especially in high needs schools is quickly fading (Harris et al., 2007). It is becoming more difficult to think of leadership as characteristics of a single agent. Instead, the construct of leadership is being considered as an organization or inter-organization wide attribute or as expressed by Lambert (2002) “the professional work of everyone”.

Schools are complex and sometimes incoherent types of organizations (Ball et al., 2011). The imposition of managerialism and neoliberalism needs to be interrogated. Ideas of marketization and autonomy, choice, deregulation or freedom from local authority or “bureaucracy”, merit pay for teachers, risk-based approaches to performance management and educational outcomes, datafication (use of data to make a decision) and the re-purposing of education for human capital development become the guiding principles of the public education system. This tension in the education ecosystem deserved to be challenged and taken into account when the curriculum for the preparation of future education leaders is being designed including the standards for education leaders.

One of the strategies being used by states is to inundate schools with legislations to standardize the educational system to bring it under the control of the market. This process is affecting the morale of school principals, teachers and staff and prevents them from providing students with the skills they need to work beyond the knowledge economy (Hargreaves, 2003 in Bottery, 2004, p. 30). These legislations strip the educational system of its values and its pursuit for social justice, for instance, turning teachers and school principals into technicians rather than professionals (Hijazeen, 2016).

School leaders become enforcers of the market principles and teachers are the implementers. School leaders adapt to the educational ideology of the market to manage their schools in a competitive way through the market mechanism. This means that the school principal, the alleged leader, become manager of an organization responsible to the board

of trustees. More time is devoted to accountability, balancing the budget, recruitment amongst other duties leaving less time to implement their moral vision, thus, “Boards govern, principals manage, and teachers operate” (Codd, 1993, p. 159), a brilliant summary of the school business model, here concepts of professionalism and collaborative leadership are substituted by manager-staff relationship, fostering a climate of mistrust which produces “erosion of collegiality” (Court, 2005, p. 161). In this neoliberal ecosystem educational leaders are vulnerable and almost incapacitated in what they are supposed to do in the eyes of the public that is oblivious to the changes happening to the educational system. The influence of managerialism on education policies is efficiency in all matters, which leaves no room for the pursuit of equity, excellence, ethics, and social justice values (Codd, 1993).

School principals are under intense scrutiny and surveillance and are being assessed through students’ progress, test results to hold the schools accountable for the public money expended more particularly in subject area deemed essential for the nation prosperity, reflecting the view that education is first and foremost to support a globally competitive economy (Adams, 2013; Ball, 2008; Kelly, 2013).

This development begs the question of what vision of education should prospective school leaders develop while they are being forced to adopt a managerialist approach to the leadership of school. Given the encroachments of the neoliberal agenda, are there ways in which we might imagine, clarify, and unpack leadership more hopefully to prepare individuals for school leadership? Should school leaders develop both the ability to resist and build a coalition with proponents of neoliberalism? How can we be challenged to rethink what a school leader, who is a strong advocate for their school, might look like? Is there a way to restructure school leadership in such a way that no one is expected to have the totality of all the skills defined (Barnoff et al., 2017)?

## Reflections of Education Leadership programs

Education leadership programs have been the subject of a lot of criticism. Starting with the discrepancy between what is taught and what the field requires, the lack or a crisp vision for many programs, unclear philosophy, and mission, the poor delivery of instruction not to mention the content, the inability to prepare practitioner-scholars capable of conducting research and using research to examine and resolve persistent education problems (Jean-Marie & Normore, 2010; Levine, 2005). Another critique formulated by Murphy (2006) is on the propensity of graduate programs in education leadership to prepare managers rather than leaders grounded in the educational aspects of schooling who have a deep understanding and an appreciation for the purpose of schooling.

Education leadership as terminology and as a discipline is a newcomer to the field of education. Murphy (2006) discusses four broad eras in the historical development of education leadership in the United States; the era of ideology (pre-1900); the prescriptive era (1900–1945); the era of professionalism/behavioral science (1946–1985) and the emerging, dialectic era (from 1985–the present). I would not delve into a discussion of each era as Murphy (2006) has them fully outlined in his work. My focus is on the dialectic era.

Although I agree with several criticisms against education leadership programs, I tend to agree with McCarthy (1999) that “to fully understand... university programs that prepare school leaders it is necessary to explore the external forces that have helped shape them” (p. 119). Critiques of these programs have paid scant attention to the contexts within which these programs operate. What is often being advocated is to redesign these programs which to my view is doing the same thing and expecting a different result. I am quoting at length Grogan and Andrews (2002) and other researchers who suggest that the redesign message is threefold: First, while it is imperative to address problems that plague current programmes, it is insufficient to build a new vision for educational administration primarily as a foil to existing deficiencies. Second, the successful construction of better programmes is unlikely unless attention is paid to history so that the proper means for reconstructing our social institutions are best suggested by a careful accumulation and analysis of our institutional experience. Third, more effective models of preparation are likely when programmes conceptions are grounded in visions of society, education, learning, moral literacy, and leadership for schooling in the twenty-first century as well as in values and evidence that define the paths to those visions (Kelly & Peterson, 2000; Leonard, 2007; Normore & Brooks, 2014).

What does the redesign message have to say about the new managerialism and neoliberalism in general and its imposition in our educational institutions? It is obvious that neoliberalism has successfully coopted our education practitioners and students to turn them into docile minds and bodies to the service of the market. The influence of managerialism on education policies is efficiency in all matters which leaves little room for the pursuit of equity and social justice values. Codd (1995) argues and rightfully so that “given the influence and pervasiveness of the current system of control within the education system we tend to forget that teaching is a moral enterprise and education is about values” (p. 128). This is a critical point because “it challenges the government to recognize the importance of issues such as social justice, values, morality, and gender inequalities” (Court, 2005, p. 160).

Hijazeen (2016) explains that the purpose of education has shifted from public good to the preparation of students for the labor market. He poses the question as to whether university faculty members in education leadership preparation programs are preparing their candidates for a meaningful and purposeful life that is for their needs or the needs of the capitalistic economic system? As a school leader, the challenge is probably to make schools relevant to society and to design curricula that are relevant to the lives of the students, to address issues of poverty, to build future identities to enable. As we prepare future education leaders, we need to avoid succumbing to the illusions of neoliberalism and develop a democratic and self-reflective framework, to encourage our educators to resist the enforced duty and adherence to educational policies and education systems that solely propagate social inequities through “the current forces of managerialism and technocratic reductionism” (Codd, 1995, p. 128). We should be resolute to understand leadership not as only a set of skills that can be grasped in school, or training programs but rather as an emerging phenomenon with multiple locations including primary

school, high schools, universities, and post-university education for school leaders and administrators.

## Summary

Henry M. Levin (1987) makes a cogent argument about the purpose of the school, one that I happen to agree with. Levin explains that public education stands at the intersection of two legitimate rights: a) the right of a democratic society to assure its reproduction and continuous functioning through preparation of its members to understand and accept a common set of values and knowledge required for societal equity and cohesion; b) the right of families to decide the way their children will be guided and molded and the types of influences to which their children will be exposed. Levin acknowledges that to the extent that families have different personal, political, social, philosophical, and religious beliefs and values, a basic incompatibility might exist between their private concerns and the public functions of the school.

This is the framework within which we should localize our discussion on the hostile takeover of the public school system by neoliberalism. As the market takes over our public school system, there is not much left for the students. They feel alienated by school. How often do we hear “School is boring” another way of saying that school is irrelevant if its whole focus is to prepare students for labor? The previous statement is the hallmark of conventional schooling including authoritarianism, boredom, irrelevance, frustration, and alienation. Under these circumstances the school will struggle to motivate students to participate in this alleged democratic society. I understand our preoccupation to reproduce our democratic society, to maintain it and to share our values. I do also believe that one role of the school is self-realization and the formation of an equitable society. There is also an implicit recognition of the traditional role of schools in reproducing social, economic, and political inequities including some forms of violence (Harber, 2004).

What is the school principal to do in this context? How does he or she reconcile the differences between private and public benefits providing a common framework to prepare students for their political, economic, and social world along with the freedom to pursue individual goals? Public goals can undermine private goals and vice versa. How do we provide a curriculum that balances both the private goals and the public goals of education? How do we prepare education leaders who can provide this equilibrium? How do we address this dichotomy? This is a challenge aimed at education leadership preparation programs. We have spoken a great deal about what needs to happen in our education leadership preparation programs and yet this problem persists. This brings us full circle to the fundamental question of the purpose of education leadership preparation programs.

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Wamba, N. (2021). School Leadership in the Era of Neoliberalism. *Psychologie a její kontexty*, 12(2), 2021, 23–38. <https://doi.org/10.15452/PsyX.2021.12.0009>