To Lead or To Be Led – That Is the Question: From the Uniprofessional to the Multiprofessional School Organisation

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The multiprofessional perspective focuses on school in the light of all the personnel groups active within this organisation. These groups are analysed individually from the perspective of their specialist as well as generalist roles. The teaching profession can be viewed from a uni- and a multiprofessional perspective. The former focuses on the specialist function of teachers as it deals with the way teachers traditionally practise their occupation based on good knowledge of subject and method. The multiprofessional teacher role combines this specialist role with a generalist role, which presupposes that teachers also have good knowledge of and insight into the school’s basic mission and how this mission can/should be achieved in co-operation with teacher colleagues as well as other school personnel.

A similar discussion can be applied to all occupational groups active within the school (school leaders, service personnel, recreational personnel, pre-school teachers, student care personnel, etc.). All of these groups can be analysed individually in their specialist and generalist roles, respectively. Multiprofessional analyses of this type allow comparative studies of if and how the respective professions relate to the collective mission of the school in which these groups are active. From the perspective of multiprofessionalism, an activity-responsible school leader role is required. On the other hand, from the perspective of uniprofessionalism, the role is characterised as head administrator. In principle, the former role promotes school development by making use of the available scope of action, whereas the head administrator is an obstacle to such a process.

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BACKGROUND

Previous research (Berg 1993) has focused on the high school, local adult education, personnel training in companies, and folk high school education. It has concentrated on the content and forms of steering of and in the school (Berg 1999a) and if – and in that case, how – this steering has consequences for the school’s organisation and its actors. This research also had an important influence on the project ‘Steering, Leadership and the activities of the School’ (the so-called slav 2-project). This project is now completed and described in a final report. (Berg 1999b)

The slav 2-research led to conclusions about the existing professional relations between teachers and school leaders. This paves the way for studies of other school personnel from the perspective of professionalism and how the personnel (including teachers and school leaders) relate to one another. Research of this type sets the school, as a more or less markedly multiprofessional organisation, in the centre. The following text therefore has a somewhat programmatic character, as it aims to formulate some of the points of departure for a similar, future research direction.

MEANINGS OF THE CONCEPT ‘PROFESSION’

Traditionally the concept ‘profession’ is associated with a freer way of practising an occupation. For example, a lawyer without interference from the state or a higher authority enthusiastically represents his client in legal disputes. In everyday language, to practise an occupation professionally is often seen as the opposite of amateur practice. Just as in the world of sports, the ‘pro’ carries out his occupation with skill and competence, while the quality of the amateur’s – in an extreme case the dilettante’s – occupational practice is more variable. Professions can be regarded as providing key qualifications for modern societies. With the development of industrialism, professions began to take over certain key-functions in society, which earlier, in the pre-industrial farming society, had been held by the guilds.

RESEARCH ON PROFESSIONS

Both quantitative and the qualitative approaches can be distinguished in the traditional research on professions. The former presupposes that all occupations have more or less a professional character, while the
qualitative approach rests on the assumption that certain occupations are professions while others are not. The concept ‘profession’ further can be used partly to study the conditions for the occupation itself, and partly to illuminate the occupational functions within the organisation they belong to. Studies of professions that focus primarily on the occupations themselves are regarded here as having a uniprofessional approach, whereas research on the relations between the occupational groups and the organisation they are part of is viewed as having a multiprofessional approach. By combining the above-mentioned approaches in studies on professions, the table 1 can be constructed:

Table 1: Four types of professional, occupational practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative approach</th>
<th>Uniprofessionalism</th>
<th>Multiprofessionalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative approach</td>
<td>Occupational groups outside their organisational context</td>
<td>Occupational groups within their organisational context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reports on teachers and school leaders as professional actors, which our research resulted in, rest on a quantitative/multiprofessional approach. In accordance with table 1, this implies that school leaders and teachers have been studied on the premise that they are active actors in the organisation (and the institution) of the school. That the approach itself is multiprofessional does not, however, mean that the school by definition should be regarded as a multiprofessional organisation. It implies that the method used to carry out a study of professions allows the specific school organisation to be located on a scale ranging between the two extremes of uniprofessionalism and multiprofessionalism. In order to do this, clear research criteria have been formulated to characterise the uniprofessional and the multiprofessional school organisation, respectively. These criteria – which have the character of ideal types in a Weberian sense (Weber 1947) – will be now discussed.

The school’s occupational groups in the uniprofessional organisation

Our research on teachers and school leaders as professional actors within the school as an organisation has been based on the following variables of profession:

- autonomy
- corps spirit
Autonomy concerns the type and amount of scope for individual and independent actions, which the professional worker enjoys within the organisation. The corps spirit concerns possible, existing, informal systems of rules and the knowledge base deals with the specific level of competence that is linked to the profession in question.

A uniprofessional school organisation is described in figure 1.

Figure 1 shows a traditional occupational relation between the teaching profession and the school leader profession, which in our research reports is expressed by the concept ‘the invisible contract’ (Berg 1996). This implies a clear division of labour between school leaders and teachers. The main responsibilities of the school leaders are limited here to managing the school’s administrative apparatus (distribution of work duties, formation of schedules, etc.) for teachers to conduct the traditional, solitary type of instruction. Teachers are responsible for the activity in the classroom and school leaders for the activity that takes place outside the classroom, and the two parties to a limited extent intermingle in each other’s areas of activity. The teachers’ base of knowledge for dealing with a work situation of this type primarily concerns specialist knowledge of subject content and method, etc. The traditional school leader is an ‘autodidact’ in the sense that he/she as a rule does not have – at least not when beginning the occupation – a special education to function as a school leader. The ‘invisible contract’ is strengthened by the fact that most school leaders have their occupational origins in the teaching profession.

If an empirical study had revealed that the work relations between teachers and school leaders is just as strictly divided as the contents of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>School leaders</th>
<th>Student care and student health personnel</th>
<th>Pre-school teachers, service personnel, recreational personnel, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Autonomy</strong></td>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Work organisation</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corps spirit</strong></td>
<td>Solitary</td>
<td>Administrative 'back-up'</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge base</strong></td>
<td>Specialist knowledge</td>
<td>Autodidact</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
table 1 implies, then the conclusion would have demonstrated a high degree of uniprofessionalism. It is not enough to draw such a conclusion solely on the basis of (‘biprofessional’) studies of teachers and school leaders. Other occupational groups within the school should be analysed in the perspective of profession. The results from studies of occupational groups such as student care and student health personnel, pre-school teachers, recreational personnel, service personnel, etc., will ideally create a base for evaluating the type of autonomy, corps spirit, and knowledge base in these groups. All the occupational groups within the school can be analysed to check whether other ‘invisible contracts’ exist – and in that case between which of the occupational groups. In addition, it can be seen whether the occupational relations are characterised by at least some degree of multiprofessionalism in accordance with the criteria discussed below.

THE SCHOOL’S OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS IN A MULTIPROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The above discussion of the school as a uniprofessional organisation lies at one extreme on an abstract scale of the type and degree of professionalism among the different occupational groups in the school. Our studies lead to the conclusion that there exists a strict division of labour (‘invisible contracts’) among all occupational groups in the school. This represents the extreme uniprofessional organisation. The opposite is when there exists a thorough integration of labour among these occupational groups. In this case, the relations between groups are characterised by a lack of invisible contracts representing the other extreme on our hypothetical scale, that is, the multiprofessional organisation in its ‘purest’ form.

Figure 2 illustrates that, in the ideal multiprofessional organisation, all groups of personnel have the same attitude toward the school’s basic mission and they fulfil tasks that are considered to be in line with this mission. Because the school leadership has the overall responsibility for activity, it also has the main responsibility to ensure that the mission is converted into operational tasks. This does not necessarily mean that the school leaders personally have to put this process into effect. It simply implies that they must activate the personnel groups in this ‘transformation process’. The multiprofessional organisation requires the respective professions to maintain and develop their specialist knowledge. This implies that the teacher remains a good specialist in the subject.
and strives to develop this competence, but also that he/she has the ability to view the subject from the perspective of the school’s mission. The school psychologist, the preschool teacher, and the caretaker all have their respective specialist knowledge, but the practising of these specialist roles is related to insights into the school’s basic mission. This demands a broader base of knowledge for all the occupational groups in the school; in addition to good specialist knowledge, school personnel must possess knowledge directly related to the school’s mission. In figure 2, this knowledge base is expressed by the concept ‘knowledge of the surrounding world’.

**SCHOOL LEADERS IN UNI- AND MULTIPROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

If we focus on school leaders as an occupational group and regard this group from the perspective of multiprofessionalism, the way is paved for what can be called an activity–responsible school leader role. On the other hand, if school leaders are regarded from the perspective of uniprofessionalism, the role can instead be characterised as head administrator.

These divergent demands from the surrounding world can be viewed as extreme points of a measure (with uni- and multiprofessionalism representing these points, respectively), which express the different demands on school leaders. The head administrator role is based on the school leader’s carrying out the work which the teachers – in their capacity as the main bearers of the traditional school culture – expect him/her to, in accordance with the invisible contract as set out in figure 1. This implies a strict division of work (cf. figure 3) between the
school leaders and the teachers. The school leader’s main responsibility is here limited to managing the school’s administrative apparatus (task distribution, formation of schedules, etc.) to allow teachers to carry out traditional instruction. The teachers are responsible for the activity in the classroom, and the school leaders for the activity that occurs outside the classroom; and the parties intervene to a limited extent in each other’s area of activity. The activity–responsible school leader has basically a different occupational role which presupposes that school leaders adhere to, and act in accordance with, the fundamentally more diffuse institutional mission that is marked as the ‘dashed cloud’ in figure 3. If so, each school leader must have deeper insight into this mission’s background, development and (ambiguous) content. This is the same as having insight into where the limits extend for permissible school activity. With these insights as a point of departure, the task of the school leader is then to check that the actual activity is kept within these limits. This rather supervisory school leader role ought to be complemented, however, by a supportive role in which the school leader encourages and stimulates the personnel in relation to problems arising for the school’s activity. This is the same as encouraging the school’s personnel to make use of the scope of action that exists within the limits. The occupational code is here thus a matter of acting as a boss (control-evaluation) as well as a leader (support-development-work). The activity–responsible school leader’s work-area encompasses the school’s activity – including the work in the classroom – in all its aspects. A broader fundamental knowledge base of the surrounding world is needed by a school leader to be able to cope with an occupational role of this type and also a focus on steering of as well as steering in the school. The activity–responsible school leader must interfere in some way in the strictly divided work-relation between teachers and school leaders, which is expressed in the ‘invisible contract’. In this ‘battle for the classroom’, there is a hint of a potential conflict between the school leader and the teaching profession.

Activity–responsible school leadership is a matter of leading within the limits ultimately set by the type and degree of the ‘steering sources’ of and in the school. This leadership attempts to modify the existing cultures and the types of actor preparedness linked to them. In contrast, head administrator leadership is a question of being led; carrying out activity in accordance with the existing system of rules, and striving to ‘tame’ the existing school culture to correspond to the content and
Table 2: Steering as opposed to leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School leader role</th>
<th>Activity responsible in the multiprofessional school-organisation</th>
<th>Head administrator in the uniprofessional school-organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic responsibility</td>
<td>Outer boundaries and available scope of action</td>
<td>Directives regulating the day-to-day activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic issues in the</td>
<td>What prerequisites for goal-steered activities exist in the</td>
<td>What obstacles to rule-steered activities exist in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internal work</td>
<td>organisational culture?</td>
<td>organisational culture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key words</td>
<td>Prerequisites</td>
<td>Obstacles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General leadership style</td>
<td>To lead</td>
<td>To be led</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

meaning of the system of rules. Activity–responsible leadership discovers and utilises the prerequisites that are available, whereas the head administrator aligns activities according to the obstacles present in the system.

After this general discussion of different school leader roles related to the uni- and multiprofessional organisational types, I will now discuss how we can view the inner learning process in a multiprofessional school organisation. Such a learning process is synonymous to development work.

**SCOPE OF ACTION AND MULTIPROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORK**

Using the so-called scope of action model (Berg & Wallin 1983) as a starting-point, the above discussion can be illustrated in the following way:

In the models in figure 3, the outer, dashed lines symbolise the limits of the school’s (multifaceted) mission, which is synonymous with the activity sanctioned by the state. The dotted lines within the outer limits illustrate the operational tasks that are fulfilled *de facto* by a specific school organisation. On the left-hand side of the figure, the professions within the school relate in different ways to the mission as well as to the operational tasks. This is an expression of a high degree of uniprofessionalism; that is, in practice the professions act according to their own terms. On the right-hand side of the figure, the professions are gathered inside the frame of a task-structure shared by all. The tasks are more in line with the overall mission (that is, the available scope
of action is exploited to a greater degree). In this case, we have a high degree of multiprofessionalism.

With this reasoning, the development work in multiprofessional organisations can be described as activity which

- links together the relevant professions without threatening the solidarity within the respective occupational groups,
- on an operational level, accomplishes tasks that lie within the frame of the organisation’s mission,
- aims for greater exploitation of the available scope of action,
- encompasses critical reflections on the content and implications of the mission/tasks.

This view of development work can be linked directly to the scope of action models in figure 3. It implies that the common denominator among the professions in the organisation is that they are united by one collective mission (or several missions) operationalised in a number of collective tasks. Development work entails the linking of operational tasks to the mission, to the greatest possible extent through making use of the available scope of action. This provides increased opportunities for the professions to examine critically the basic implications of the mission and its content (i.e. the outer limits). Such critical examination can pave the way for dialogue between the task-assignors (in the school’s case, the state and community) and the task-receivers (the relevant professions). This does not rule out opportunities for the respective professions to develop in their own terms as well; teachers develop
their knowledge of subjects, school leaders their administrative skills, etc.

**DISCUSSION**

The multiprofessional perspective is naturally associated with the school as an institution and organisation (Berg 1992). It is also applicable to other institutions and organisations, which encompass a multitude of professions. One example is the health care organisation, which includes a great number of specialist functions (doctors, nurses, psychologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, administrators on various levels, etc.). For these specialist professions, to tackle the question of a collective, multiprofessional attitude, which is linked to the overall mission (‘good care’), is at least as important as within the school. A multiprofessional approach might even be used in relation to quality and quality assurance in public organisations as an alternative to current economic strategies. The multiprofessional approach has the limitation that, when questions about quality and quality-guarantee arise, the organisation is viewed primarily from the perspective of the personnel, not the ‘users’ or clients. From the perspective of democracy, the professions’ striving toward ‘professionalisation’, toward strengthening their positions of social power, can be problematic. Advancing the power of individual professions can, in some cases, be viewed as corporative striving with anti-democratic overtones.

The multiprofessional perspective presented here does not only imply that the profession regards the practising of its occupation on its own terms. The occupation is also seen in relation to the mission and the operational tasks deriving from the mission. The profession shares these with other professions active within the relevant organisation. It is therefore not consistent with the profession’s corps spirit to regard the occupation only on its own internal terms, but rather, the occupation must be practised and coordinated with the practice of other professions.

This implies that multiprofessionalism functions between the profession as such, and the surrounding organisational and institutional world in which the profession’s activity is concentrated. This occupational ethic does not encourage the development of an occupation solely on its own terms. Ultimately, the multiprofessional perspective presented here is therefore inconsistent with antidemocratic strivings in a corporative direction.
CONCLUDING REMARKS: LEADING AND LEARNING

An ideal multiprofessional school organisation brings the different professions in a school together in a way that encourages optimal resource allocation. It is a means to explore the available scope of action with the basic purpose to create maximal learning opportunities for the pupils/students. This is in itself an organisational learning process that amounts to school-based development work. However, someone must initiate, support, encourage and evaluate this ongoing process. A school leader acting as a head administrator rooted in a uniprofessional school organisation and led by the invisible contract cannot perform this role. An activity responsibility school leader rooted in the multiprofessional school is on the other hand, a suitable professional actor to lead such a process. So I finish where I started: To lead or to be led – that is the question.

REFERENCES


