# Circulating power and in/visibility: layers of educational leadership

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Received 4 September 2013
Revised 26 May 2014
Accepted 13 July 2014

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to study circulating power and in/visibility. In the unfolding Maltese education scenario of decentralization and school networking, suffused with entrenched power, with added layers of leadership and more subtle levels of accountability, this paper explores the underlying power relations among the top educational leaders, namely, the College Principal and Heads of School, and among the Heads of School themselves.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Foucault's theories of power, governmentality and subjectivation are used as "scaffoldings" for the exploration of power relations. This case study research exploring one "college" is carried out through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation of Council of Heads (CoH) meetings, as well as documentary analysis of the policy mandating this reform, explored through narrative analysis.

**Findings** – Analysis shows that layers of hierarchical leadership do translate into layers of "visibility", with the Principal being rendered the most "visible" actor according to role designation and policy rhetoric. Struggles in the dynamics between tiers of leaders are a reality. Despite a deeply felt presence of the circulation of power, it is the Principal who has the final say.

**Originality/value** – This is expected to contribute to educational leadership literature with regards to the relationship among top educational leaders. Through its provision of a diverse reading of leadership, it is deemed to be of particular relevance to professional work and learning in areas of leadership, of interest to budding scholars, seasoned Foucauldians and practicing educational leaders.

**Keywords** Foucault, Distributed leadership, In/visible power relations, Professional identities, School network, Tensions

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

In the unfolding Maltese education scenario of decentralization and school networking, suffused with entrenched power, with added layers of leadership and more subtle levels of accountability, I explore the underlying power relations among the top educational leaders, namely, the College Principal and Heads of School, and among the Heads of School themselves, that is, the dynamics among leaders at similar and disparate hierarchical levels[1].

I explore the issue of how power is practiced through the leaders' narrative and performance, of how it is not merely repressive but productive, as it passes through different nodes in the network, and how it can be "masked" under the guise of distributed leadership:

*RQ1*. How do Heads feel about their new hierarchical position and about the Principal as their leader?

Journal of Workplace Learning
Vol. 27 No. 1, 2015
pp. 51-67

1366-5626
DOI 10.1108/JWL-09-2013-0065

*RQ2*. How have they taken to this new mode of collaboration with other Heads and with the Principal?

*RQ3*. What is the discursive effect of the policy re-distribution of "voice" on the realignment of power relations within the college?

This article attempts to address these research questions through an exploration of:

- the national policy context;
- a critical review of the literature revolving around distributed leadership, together with a Foucauldian theoretical framework focusing on power relations; and
- a discussion of the methodological issues involved, a presentation of findings through the leaders' voices and implications for research and practice.

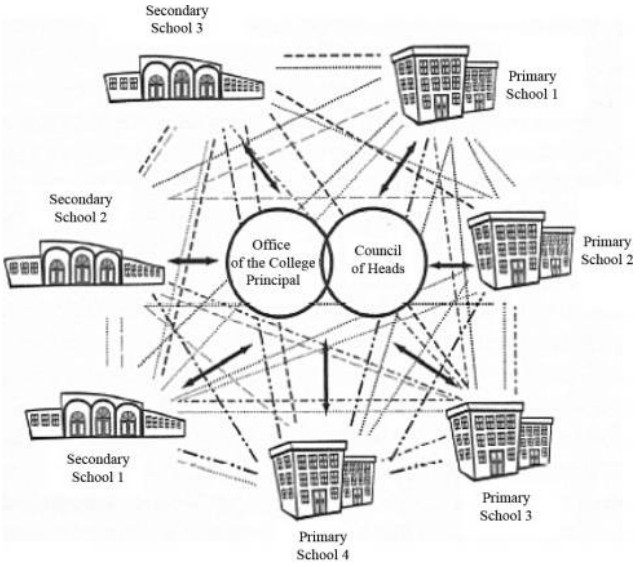
## The Maltese school scenario and policy context

Within the past decade, the Maltese educational system has been undergoing a structured, gradual but steady change in terms of decentralization and school autonomy, with the main aim being that of renewal in line with global development. The policy document "For All Children to Succeed" (Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, 2005) (henceforth referred to as "FACT") considered school networking as the main organizational form which can bring about the process of transformation in the Maltese educational system, advocated for by the Ministry of Education (1999) in "*National Minimum Curriculum*". Networks were regarded as an organizational structure that can replace the traditional top-down approach to reform previously used in the Maltese educational system with a more lateral approach.

Under the reform, Maltese state schools, which constitute 70 per cent of the compulsory school age population, were organized into ten colleges. "College" is the legal term chosen to denote the network of schools. The setting up of all the ten colleges followed a three-year foundation plan between 2006 and 2008, with the colleges presently being at different stages of their development. The decision taken by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment (2005) has been to network by region – schools have been organized into colleges mainly depending on their geographical position on the island, with primary schools feeding into secondary schools. This is meant to ensure that children will begin and finish their education in the same college, ensuring a smooth transition across levels through internal exams, control and accountability. In a typical college, primary schools outnumber those at secondary level, however, not all the colleges are constituted by the exact number of schools – these typically vary from 7 to 11, depending on the region. A typical example is demonstrated in the Figure 1 below.

### *"Visible" layers of hierarchical leadership: relationships and underlying tensions*

The major reform happening in Maltese state schools necessitated the introduction of new roles of responsibility, among which was the deployment of a College Principal, designated to be the educational leader of a college as a whole. On the other hand, the Head of School is explicitly required "to collaborate with other Heads of College Schools […] in a manner that maximizes networking under the leadership of the Principal and according to the direction and guidelines established by […] other competent authorities" ("*FACT*", Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, 2005, p. 74).




**Source:** Fabri and Bezzina (2010, pp. 31-32)

**Figure 1.**
Operative structure of the State College

The networking reform also involved restructuring the governing body of the education system (November 2007), with the ex-Education Division undergoing a complete upheaval through the setting up of two directorates. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) regulates, generates policies, sets standards and monitors the whole system, while the Directorate for Educational Services (DES) acts as operator and co-ordinates school resources management, human resources development and student services. Each directorate is led by a Director General, with the subsequent departments falling under six Directors with their individual Assistant Directors.

Heads of School have to adapt to the new "network leader", (the Principal), whom they are now answerable to, besides facing "challenges" on other leadership fronts – sharing leadership with "outside agencies", that is, other Heads of School, additionally to coming to terms with the notion of "distributed leadership" at both school and college level as spelled out by "*FACT*" (Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, 2005). The policy document fosters a strong belief in "shared or co-leadership", which is important for the distribution of the leadership function across more than one school location, thus offering the potential of generating healthy dialogue and debate. While valuing the contributions coming from all levels within the network, in other words, advocating distributed leadership, it justifies the need for senior leaders – "Distributed leadership only thrives where there is effective senior leadership" (2005, p. 39).

## The notion of distributed leadership and its problematization

The notion of distributed leadership is not a new one, however, there has been an increasing amount of attention given to this concept in recent years (Crawford, 2012; Gronn, 2006; Harris, 2004, 2007; Hartley, 2007; Spillane, 2006; Woods, 2004). The use of the notion of distributed leadership is now so widespread that there is also some confusion as to the meaning of the term (Mayrowetz, 2008; Woods *et al.*, 2004). Harris

(2007) terms this as "conceptual ambiguity" and attributes the lure of the notion to its "chameleon-like quality" (p. 315) and its ability to accommodate various interpretations and positions.

Literature reveals that sharing leadership with agencies outside their walls is still not a very strong point for many schools – as Black (2008) argues, a "moated or walled culture of schooling" (p. 44) still persists. Jopling and Spender (2006) argue that there is "no simple, single solution to leading networks" (p. 5), with Hadfield (2007) additionally describing how "[…] the very nature of a network makes it difficult to define who its leaders are […]" (p. 260).

*Problematizing distributed leadership*

The notion of distributed leadership might just be used as a mask by policy producers and government officials to ease their agenda as a normalizing discourse in schools. Despite Hall *et al.*'s (2011) recognition of distributed leadership as the "officially sanctioned model of good practice" (p. 32) advocated by government departments, they suggest that discussions around this notion reflect normative narratives and are just part of English government rhetoric to claim that power and autonomy are being shared with schools, whereas reality points to centralization and managerialism. Hartley (2007) regards it as "yet another sign of an institutional isomorphism" (p. 211). Gunter and Forrester (2008) detect a control imperative in the relationship between policy and practice in the professional practice of "policy entrepreneurs" (Kingdon, 2003), thus concluding that the primacy of the single person remains, with distribution coming downward and used as a form of sophisticated delegation.

Some critics of the distributed leadership notion inquire whether such a concept offers a genuine alternative to other forms of leadership, or whether it just serves as "the emperor's new clothes" (Bolden, 2011, p. 254) or a pragmatic response to society's demand for equity and purpose. Gronn (2009) notes how the term "distributed can inadvertently mislabel a situation in which the influence of a number of individuals continues to be significant" (p. 385). Woods *et al.* (2004) presciently ask whether interest in distributed leadership will indeed see "autonomy and empowerment widely spread, or the same leaders applying constraint and control in new ways", which is also the thrust of the more recent Hall *et al.* (2011) argument.

Other critics argue that the notion of distributed leadership does not bring about change in the discourse of educational leadership. According to Simkins (2005), "it may just be the traditional model in a new guise" (p. 16). Despite offering an apparent solution to some of the inherent tensions, it could be viewed as "a smokescreen for the more authoritarian practices of headteachers" (Crawford, 2012, p. 617), which Hall *et al.* (2011) see emerging as a response to pressure from policy-makers.

According to Woods (2004, p. 22), as with other discourses of legitimation, such as "empowerment" and "ownership", the notion of distributed leadership appears to incorporate democratic procedures. Woods addresses the danger of the notions of democratic leadership becoming colonized by distributed leadership discourses, stating that the two notions cannot be regarded as synonymous. Distributed leadership incorporates a degree of control and autonomy, within which there is the scope for dispersed initiative and the boundaries of participation. Hartley (2007) argues that distributed leaders do not arrive at their position as the result of an election, but an appointment, with a presumed harmony and consensus about the whole affair.

Leadership can be stretched over leaders in a school, but is not necessarily democratic – Spillane (2005) argues how a distributed leadership perspective may also give rise to autocracy.

Issues regarding loss of leadership power and autonomy may arise as school leaders struggle with the notion of delegating responsibility and accountability to network members. Earl and Katz (2005) explain how:

> Establishing patterns of distributed leadership is a subtle dance of power and authority. Sharing leadership within schools and across the network can cause confusion, resentment and protection of position and power […] (p. 71).

Wartzman (2008) argues how too much dissemination of power can lead to confusion among organizational members as to who exactly is in control on any given occasion. Stohl and Cheney (2001, p. 387-389) have revealed that even in situations where leadership is a matter of collective consideration, people's attachment to the concept of "strong leaders" is sometimes still very heavily felt. Gronn (2009) argues that:

> […] solo leaders continue to figure prominently in accounts that purport to be distributed and that distributed leadership apologists have not adequately clarified the role and contribution of individuals as continuing sources of organizational influence within a distributed framework (p. 383).

It remains to be ascertained whether what is to be "distributed" remains very much within the strategic parameters and targets set by government as hierarchical forms of accountability remain.

*Educational leadership as a discourse and issues of power in educational contexts*

Niesche (2011) frames educational leadership as a discourse, or rather a set of discourses. Gillies (2013) regards this as an important stage in the application of a Foucauldian analysis which presents educational leadership as a constructed reality – undermining this concept and throwing it into question – it "renders the practice mortal, reduces its aura, creates vulnerability, and inserts instability" (p. 25). Besides, it permits further analysis of its working practices. It is within this framework that I approach distributed leadership as one of the "regimes of truth" of educational leadership and use it to explore how power relations unfold in the dynamics among leaders in a networked school setting. It has been suggested that dynamics around power in organizations and contextual factors in leadership scenarios have not been given due consideration, a move which Bolden (2011) suggests may lead to marginalization. Distributed leadership incorporates a degree of power and conflict (Storey, 2004), leading to questions of identity and power issues which are yet unexplored, and, therefore, under-theorized (Crawford, 2012) in the educational leadership literature. My work is also a response to the claim made by Harris (2007) of "empirical reticence" surrounding distributed leadership and the suggestion put forward by Harris and Beatty (2004) to explore the different forms of leadership practice emerging within school networks due to little being known about leadership across multiple sites.

Researchers viewing educational leadership as discourses have explored issues of power in educational contexts – how various discourses exert power both on and through the leaders. Niesche (2011, 2013) uses Foucault's work to illuminate how power is exercised through regimes of high stakes accountabilities on the Head, through the Head and by the Head, constituting her as a particular subject in the specificity of the

school context. Savage (2013) uses Foucault's (2007/1978) concept of governmentality to analyze a different power issue, that of educational marketization, exploring how forms of governance associated with marketization are mediated, rationalized and put into practice by school leaders, with a particular focus on how individuals govern themselves and others in relation to a broader climate of advanced liberal governance.

It is within this current research narrative on educational leadership that I position my work exploring the power relations between the Principal and Heads, and among the Heads themselves in a Maltese college setting. I now move on to give an overview of my theoretical framework.

## The use of Foucauldian theory in unmasking the "invisible" power infrastructure in educational leadership

Gillies (2013) demonstrates the value of Foucault's trident of skepticism, critique and problematization to operate within educational discourse: "Given the scale of the educational leadership literature and the relatively small amount of questioning voices raised against it, it seems eminently timely to bring Foucault into the lists" (p. 32). Gillies (2013) further debates how the very powerful educational leadership discourse renders voices problematizing the given nature of power relations as very frail and weak.

### *Relations of power*

In Foucault's sense, power is a mechanism that works in and through institutions to produce particular kinds of subjects, knowledge and truth (Foucault, 1979, 1980). For Foucault (1980), power is a sinuous and insinuating mechanism that works its way in a "capillary" fashion into the "very grain" of individuals, inhabiting their bodies, their beliefs and their self-hood and binding them together as institutional subjects (p. 39). Power, in this sense, is both coercive and enabling, in that it is not imposed from "outside" or "above", but circulates within institutions and social bodies, producing subjects who exert a "mutual 'hold'" on one another. This is termed by Foucault as "a mutual and indefinite 'blackmail'", which binds superiors and subordinates in "a relationship of mutual support and conditioning" (p. 159). This in turn leads to the "political 'double-bind' which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures" (Foucault, 1983, p. 216).

Foucault (1979), however, is very critical of what he terms the "repressive hypothesis", in turn, trying to move the conception of power away from this negative model towards a framework extolling its productive nature, "If power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we should manage to obey it?" (p. 36). Foucault (1977) spells out power as "a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise [it] just as much as those over whom it is exercised". Foucauldian power is, thus, an "exercised" strategy, not a possession; it is both "local" (never global) and simultaneously "not local" (diffuse); it has no essence, being operational; and it is not an attribute, but a relation, passing through both the dominated and the dominating.

Foucault (1983) rarely uses the term "power" on its own, as he argues that it exists only within relationships, "The term 'power' designates relationships between partners […]" (p. 217). Foucault (1980) conceives of power dynamically, by proposing a model in which power relations dissipate through all relational structures of the society.

However, he then affirms that consensus remains "a critical idea to maintain at all times" (p. 96) – this seems to be echoing the democratic ideal of negotiation.

When discussing relations of power in schools, much of the literature and research focuses on relationships between staff and pupils (Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998; Allan, 2008) rather than between members of staff, namely senior educational leaders, which is the focus of this work. It would seem that the former tend to be characterized by explicit demonstrations of power, whereas the latter shrouds more overt manifestations of power behind professional politeness and convention. Foucault (1981) acknowledges the veiled nature of power relations when he states that it "is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (p. 86). Foucauldian power is, therefore, ubiquitous, anonymous and comprehensive, and is exercised unconsciously with its effects being often repressed.

Foucault's (2007/1978) concept of "gouvernementalite", consisting of methods of shaping others' behavior, implies that power is subject to negotiation, with each individual having his/her place in the hierarchy. Therefore, the "conduct of conduct" encompasses forms of activity to affect the conduct of others, as well as the relation between self and self. This concept allows me to explore the extent to which the leaders' behavior is shaped by the "*FACT*" policy and the Principal's discourse.

Foucault's (1982) concept of "subjectivation" – dealing with the "way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject" (p. 208), with a focus on those processes of self-formation in which the person is active – helps me explore the ways in which educational leaders are "subjectified" in a college, in the changes that occur in their leadership conduct due to the creation of new roles. Through the multiple "practices of the self", Foucault draws my attention to the contingency of self-formation processes, therefore, the multiple subjectivities of educational leaders being shaped by both global and local forces.

## Research design and methodological concerns

Within the framework of a qualitative approach, my research is framed as a case study which I choose to view as a methodology, an object of study, as well as a product of the inquiry, due to its interest "in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19)[2]. I adopt the paradigmatic lens of postmodernism, as it favors multiple voices and local politics over the power of grand narratives, allowing for the dissonant voices and "masked" power relations to play out in my research. Following Rosenau (1992), I "offer 'readings' not 'observations', 'interpretations' not 'findings' […] look to the unique rather than to the general […]" (p. 8).

The selection of one case study was determined through a criterion-based sampling procedure (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002), with the defining criterion of my choice from the available sample frame of ten being the College Principal. The Research Ethics Approval Form was submitted to the University and official permission to carry out research was requested to the Education Directorates. The Principal accepted my invitation to participate, as well as all the Heads, after introducing myself and my study at a Council of Heads meeting (These day-long meetings are held every month where the school leaders meet the Principal to discuss issues pertaining to the college).

"Multivocal College" was set up in 2008, during the last tri-partite phase of school networking. At the time of the research, it was composed of three secondary schools and

four primary schools, which are all within walking distance geographically. Despite the fact that since undertaking the fieldwork, both the Principal and the network composition have changed, I cannot give any more specific information about the individual schools and their leaders due to the sensitive nature of the data involved and the bounded nature of the Maltese educational community. The participants are all given the female gender and referred to numerically, except for the Principal who has to be identified. The college is given a fictitious name. I am well-aware of the fact that my case study constitutes what Damianakis and Woodford (2012) have identified as a "small connected community" where "unintentional identity disclosure" may occur due to tensions regarding the issues of anonymity, privacy, confidentiality and betrayal. The participants were informed of the limits of confidentiality and the possible risks involved, but they all opted to continue with their participation. Transparency about my personal and theoretical attitudes and research purposes enabled me to maintain good research relationships. Furthermore, engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process helped me focus my attention and awareness on ethical nuances that according to Guillemin and Gillam (2004) might arise during the research process beyond initial perceptions.

This study uses a number of different data collection methods, namely, in-depth interviews, observation and documentary analysis – a multi-method approach involving an engagement with crystallization, what Richardson (2000) thinks of as "a postmodernist deconstruction of triangulation" (p. 934). In the in-depth, open-ended interviews, I used Tomlinson's (1989) concept of "hierarchical focusing" – a strategy attempting to elicit responses using only a minimum of framing, raising topics in order of generality, with questions from the agenda being brought in when spontaneous coverage seems to have been fully exhausted. The leaders were asked about their leadership identities, the significance of the college and their reaction to the "*FACT*" policy, opportunities for interaction and relationships with the other leaders in the college, and their leadership practices in the college within a distributed leadership discourse. Participant observation, on the other hand, aids to consolidate interviews and to discover things that participants may not freely talk about – it allows me to observe the effects of power, especially through a contrast between the "visible" and the "articulable" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 28)[3], what is narrated in interviews in relation to what is observed in interaction. I observed the interaction of the leaders during Council of Heads meetings, taking field notes before, during and after the sessions, as well as recording the actual meetings on audio. Documentary analysis of "*FACT*" (2005) – the policy mandating the setting up of school networks locally was also carried out to be able to explore the positions leaders adapt or choose not to take up constructed for them within the policy. I adopted Ball's (1994) two-dimensional framework for policy analysis emphasizing policy as both product and process: "policy as text" – its presentation and interpretation, and "policy as discourse" – its framing and discourse development, the latter giving rise as to "who can speak, when, where, and with what authority" (p. 21).

The interview exchanges and observed meetings were digitally recorded (after obtaining written consent from all the participants) and transcribed from the original language. After shelving my initial idea of a simultaneous transcription and translation, due to the sheer impossibility of the task, I decided on translating only those extracts from my digitally recorded data to be used as testimonials in my writing. Despite being a bilingual researcher, with the interviewees resorting to code-switching, word and

concept choice turned out to be very difficult. The transcribed data were then explored using narrative analysis. Narrative is both the phenomenon under exploration and the methodological approach adopted for analysis. The perspectives of "both narrator and analyst" (Riessman, 2001) come into view as I attempt to switch from the role of researcher to "storyteller" (Smith and Sparkes, 2008, p. 20), to construct "another narrative" (Watson, 2012, p. 463) out of the original, paying special attention to how leaders construct and perform their identities. Analysis is based on meaning, structure, and interactional context for a revelation of how narratives are produced, recounted and consumed.

Throughout the analysis process, I focus specifically on Foucault and his concepts of power relations, governmentality and subjectivation, I engage in "plugging in" as a process, "a constant, continuous process of making and unmaking" (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p. 1) which involves decentering both the data and the theory, showing how they constitute one another; showing how analytical questions emerge in the middle of plugging in; and working repeatedly with the same chunks of data – it is really a connection of three fields: that of reality, of representation and of subjectivity (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, pp. 2-4). Rather than just focusing on the spoken words of these "voices", I explore their "silences" – silences present both in the absence of speech and in speech acts. Both the deliberate, "veiled" silences and the unintentional ones are laden with significance: the non-responses, evasions, circumventions; the hesitations, pauses, resistances […] I consider silence as "the always already absent presence" (Mazzei, 2004, p. 32).

All the interviews and observation sessions were individually analyzed, with the most salient quotes (as decided by me) related to the themes emerging from the research questions selected to be presented as the findings. At times, I remain as faithful as possible to the original "voice" (which has already undergone a double-layer of translation: transcription from speech to written text, and translation from Maltese to English), while at other times I paraphrase to retain anonymity, as well as to respect ethical issues due to the very sensitive nature of the data revealed to me.

## Findings and discussion

### *Relationships between the college principal and the heads of school – narratives and performances*

Struggles in the dynamics among different-tiered leaders are commonplace, though not openly acknowledged – this situation, as described by Hadfield (2007), is what I discovered through the narratives and performance of the leaders.

One of the Heads describes her relationship with the College Principal as maturing over time, "She"s one of us […] We have a good relationship with this Principal […] I cannot say that it was like that from the beginning" (Leader 3). When practicing leadership under her direction, Heads narrate themselves as gradually changing their misinformed negative image of the Principal:

> When I was summoned to the Department […] I was very, very, very hesitant […] I had heard so much negativity […] that I was really, really scared in accepting […] And I found something totally different than what I had heard (Leader 4).

Generally, there seems to be an overly positive relationship between the Principal and the Heads, with only two Heads revealing their disagreement with the Principal:

> I had several arguments with Her when I had to move schools […] She told me not to interfere – a lot of emails were exchanged – every email I sent her was forwarded to the Director General – so the matter just escalated […] She had the final word (Leader 6).

I regard this as an example of relational power developing in different ways according to how the Heads are subjectified by the Principal's discourse.

This new organizational setting is at times regarded as a more nuanced form of centralization, as it seems to have added layers of leadership, consequently creating more subtle levels of accountability, perhaps somehow "restricting" previous "freedoms", calling into question the "structure/agency" dichotomy as well as underlying power relations. Belonging to the college may be regarded as "a mechanism for increased surveillance" (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002) with the Heads now being under the disciplinary gaze of the Principal. Belonging to a "college" seems to have added more work to the already burgeoning demands on the Heads, who voice complaints about the very demanding nature of the Principal:

> She likes imposing on people, she never tells you, "Let's discuss this. Is it good for your school?" […] Even in the Council of Heads there's a lot of imposing […] (Leader 5).

This transfers the "visibility" from the Principal to the Heads of School with the latter having to adapt to the Principal's interference in their practices. As one Head says, "[…] implementing too much change at one time, it becomes so overwhelming that you know […] people are going to reject it […]" (Leader 4). Heads also feel the (previously unfelt) need to inform the Principal of decisions taken or measures to be implemented (that were not previously discussed at "college" level):

> She respects our territory a lot […] but then unconsciously you get used to the fact that unknowingly, there are certain things that the Principal's office has to be made aware of […] It's not fair on her […] to get to know of the matter from another source. One has to respect her authority (Leader 3).

The decisions and actions of the Heads of School are now rendered more "visible" in the eyes of the Principal, with this increased visibility rendering them somewhat uncomfortable. The Heads have been subjectified by the policy discourse and have, therefore, taken up leadership transparency as a "technology of the self" – belonging to a college has self-disciplined them into respecting the various layers of accountability represented by the leadership roles of the Principal and the Directors General.

### *The (non-)circulation of power*

Evidence of the "circulation of power" within institutions is strongly present in my case study. For instance, the Principal talks about her initial dream:

> I had this vision of a mobile office […] of working from different schools on different days of the week to be closer to all stakeholders […] Unfortunately, this never materialized […] Basically, my presence in the schools is there, is normal and the Heads know that the Principal is there to give support, at any time […] always, not just occasionally […] I do not visit to oversee or criticize, but to learn and have fun.

This physical presence of the Principal in schools can be interpreted in two ways: both as the circulation of power on Her part and also as the subjectivation of the Heads by a repressive form of power due to "having your superior at your school for a whole day" (Leader 7).

Power is not just exercised by the Principal but Heads are empowered, especially in the Council of Heads meeting, where, according to the Principal, "they can think as Heads, where they can talk as Heads, where they can decide as Heads". In the words of one Head, the Council of Heads is a good practice because "[…] everyone speaks out so much that you realize we all have common problems […] It serves as a therapy session because it's offloading your so-called frustrations" (Leader 4). This potential for empowerment from the Principal's perspective is deeply appreciated by the Heads. This circulatory notion of power allows negotiation to come into play, where both the Principal and the Heads change their minds over certain issues, where even Heads are given the power to decide:

> There are certain decisions where She says, "No. This has to be done in this way" […] and she puts her foot down […] However, these occasions when she goes against our word is very rare. I feel that she gives us plenty of space to share decision-making with her […] She is open to discussion, to development […] (Leader 7).

Certain things are given, while others are negotiable – one Head describes it as a "two-way street" (Leader 4).

The Principal attempts to invert the roles prescribed by policy discourse through the active involvement of Heads in certain instances of decision-making by circulating the power flow in their direction, with dispersed power being exercised from innumerable points. At times, the "masked" resistance of the Heads transforms into "masked" power, with the Principal having to give in and give up on solo decisions for negotiation among both parties, with the Heads acting as "agents of resistance and transgression". Network traffic, thus, flows in the direction of the Heads. However, it does go back to the "master", as she decides when to break off the meeting, when to finish, which issues to give importance to or to ignore: "Should we move forward now?? […] Can we speed this up a bit please?? […] Let's move on, let's move on […]" (Principal during the CoH meeting). Although the Principal herself seeks to reach a compromise on certain issues, resistance does not always lead to negotiation. There is a remarkable difference between the narratives of the decision-making process and its performance. The Heads "talk" a lot, but their voices, though loud and audible, are not as powerful as the steady voice of the Principal – "democracy" is utilized as a masked power relation as the Heads have plenty of space to make their voice heard but little room for negotiation.

*"Masked" power*

This Principal communicates a lot via e-mails, therefore, when a period of "electronic silence" elapses, the Heads express their worry about having done something to displease her – her "absence" makes her "more present" in their minds – "Non-contact you feel that there is no support […]" (Leader 7). "When you have […] your senior person coming by unannounced" (Leader 5) is another source of anxiety despite their confession to a "very good relationship" – the Principal still manages to exert her perhaps "unconscious" influence on the school leaders who are at an inferior hierarchical level. Power, therefore, is exercised by the Principal mainly through communication and presence, both physical and virtual. The Heads are subjected to the normalizing and disciplinary gaze of the Principal on an immediate level and the policy "*FACT*" on a macro level.

Even the Heads themselves exercise an unconscious power on each other, with the dominant voices during the Council of Heads meeting being those of the primary

school Heads who seem to have unconsciously formed a "network within a network", ousting the others in the process due to what they explain as "curriculum incompatibility". This is what one secondary school Head says, "With primary school Heads, there is networking on student transition […] apart from that, we don't have anything else in common, so we cannot work together" (Leader 6). This is an example of Foucauldian governmentality, where the "conduct of conduct" of primary school Heads is affecting the subjectivities and leadership identities of secondary school Heads who belong to the same college. This "college" asymmetrically privileges the primary school leaders with unequal power, making them more "visible" as actors in the CoH meeting, having formed an extremely "visible" "stronger network within a weaker network".

*Feelings of power and powerlessness*

The pyramidal hierarchy, intrinsic to current educational establishments, has relations of power integrated into its structure. Power goes down the hierarchy from the Directorates to the Principal who exercises this over the Heads – "I don't think it stems just from her but it stems from above, as well, because it is passed down" (Leader 4) – who then generate it in their own schools. This is what the Principal says:

> There would be some decisions which come directly from The Centre and the Directorates – those I would, very reluctantly, just have to communicate to the Heads – one of my least favourite leadership tasks.

One Head even describes the Principal as a "messenger" of the Directors, "a puppet pulled by their strings" (Leader 7). The Directors turn the Principal into a "docile body", who, in turn, does this to the Heads – they are all rendered subjects at different hierarchical levels in a uni-directional downward flow of power.

Some Heads confess to feeling "powerful" in their own schools, but "powerless" in the college, regarding the Principal as the "factotum" who decides, therefore feeling uncomfortable to make their voices heard in the Council of Heads meeting, thus remaining "voiceless". In the words of one Head:

> But I don't speak up […] And funnily enough, I've realized that my inferiority complex which I had when I was young, at times comes out during a Council of Heads meeting (Leader 6).

A Head can feel both "powerful" and "powerless" in her own school. Leader 2 says:

> I am me in my school as I can deliver what I believe in […] whereas in the college I sometimes (doesn't mean "never") don't feel that free to speak about my vision.

However, she feels powerless in her school when the Principal's impositions lead her to perform her leadership identity in a way that clashes with her principles:

> Her impositions created conflicts with teachers […] And you get caught in the middle […] How can I convince the teachers when even I, deep down, do not believe in the thing? I just feel that I am betraying my staff […] And that is difficult (Leader 2).

This "powerful"/"powerless" dichotomy can be readily translated into layers of "visibility" and "invisibility".

## Conclusions

This paper gives an explanation of the "visible" and "invisible" power relations flowing in an educational leadership context by exploring what leaders do, what they think they do and how they talk in terms of leadership.

The current policy discourse favors distributed leadership, which necessitates democratic relationships, and yet there is little discussion about what this means in terms of relations of power. It is possible that a move towards distributed leadership will simply involve more complex "masks" being utilized. As the processes inherent within school "colleges" involve a distribution of leadership, Foucault's construction of power as relational is used to try to identify and understand the nature of power relations which appear to be present. His definition of a relationship of power as "a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others" but "acts upon their actions: an action upon an action" (1983, p. 220) helps me to focus my analysis on the subtle and complex actions on actions within the practice of educational leadership. Gore (1998) contends that the study of educational change has "paid little attention to the micro level functioning of power in pedagogy" (p. 232). I would contend that paying attention to the micro-functioning of power relations among educational leaders within the college structure will allow a fresh look at the complexities of professional identities and development and will enable an exploration of the "masks" which are utilized and "the forms of resistance against different forms of power" (Foucault, 1983, p. 211) which are apparent among professionals.

This paper is extremely relevant to professional work and learning in areas of leadership. It is significant for those budding scholars as well as seasoned Foucauldians who are interested in studying aspects of educational leadership through the "multiple lenses" provided by Foucault. It can also serve as an inspiration for practicing educational leaders in present-day educational institutions to reflect on the multiple influences on their leadership experience and identity, on how they are "subjected" by both local and global forces, and how they, in turn, subjectify others, all the while moving down the leadership hierarchy. The explanations and insights presented in this paper might help senior educational leaders to delineate and re-write their positions within the school network system. It can also lead educational leaders at different levels within the hierarchy to challenge and question the power relations presented by the current educational leadership discourse, consequently adopting a productive role by opening up the discourse for the construction of novel responses and positions. They can take up Foucault's (2000) notion of critique as a "permanent" ethos in which they explore the nature of their existence but at the same time query the limits imposed upon them, while probing opportunities for increasing freedom (p. 118).

I provide a diverse reading of leadership – a reading through power relations as simultaneously exercised through and experienced by the educational leaders in "Multivocal College" through their own voices that does not necessarily conform to the prescribed models and theories so prevalent in much of the leadership literature.

## Notes

1. This article was developed from a refereed paper presented at the 8th International Researching Work and Learning Conference hosted by the University of Stirling, 19-21 June, 2013. The review process for this paper was handled by Professor Fenwick and Professor Field, who were the guest editors on the 2014 Journal of Workplace Learning special issue

titled "The Visible and Invisible in Work & Learning". This special issue comprised the best papers collected through the 8th RWL conference in Stirling (UK).

2. The empirical data used in this article emanate from an ongoing doctoral research.
3. According to Deleuze (1988), a form that haunted the whole of Foucault's work is "the form of the visible, as opposed to the form of whatever can be articulated" (p. 28). I want to clarify the fact that the concept of "visible/invisible" power which is one of the main foci of this manuscript is not Foucauldian. I came up with the term myself to align my presentation with the conference theme "The Visible and Invisible in work and learning". I was, however, inspired by Foucault's (1983) notion of "masked power" and Deleuze's (1988) the "visible" versus the "sayable" in Foucault's work.

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