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School Leadership as Governmental Dispositif in European Educational Studies

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Is there a Question about Leadership in Education?

Leadership in Education:

the problem, not the solution?

(Ozga, 2000)

Leadership: who needs it?

(Gronn, 2003)

In order to adopt a foucauldian perspective, my aims are intended to show how educational leadership represent a **key dispositif for neo-liberal school reforms**.

- In particular, in a foucauldian perspective, the concept of dispositif plays a strategic role at the **intersection of governmentality, regimes of truth, and technologies of the self**.

- The dispositif is a **historical formation of heterogeneous elements** as discourses, institutions, rules, scientific knowledge(s), and so on: '[t]he apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements' (CF: 194); sort of a **contextual and mobile configuration** (see Revel 2015).

- Grounded on a 'new' conception of power and challenging its ideological function it is **distinguished from other conceptions of State apparatus**, such as the 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (Althusser 1971).

Therefore our questions are the following:

- How do discursive formations arise to fabricate the 'reality' of leadership?

- What are the epistemic premises, the regimes of truth that define leadership?

- Which kind of (objectivation)subjectivation encapsulates head teachers through technologies of governmentality?

- What freedom can be practiced?

- There is space for ethical choices?

- What alternative truths are in play to resist against neo-liberal education policies?

Leadership: a neo-liberal 'dispositif'?

- The dispositive bears on the relationship between regimes of truth, technologies of governmentality, and forms of subjectivation and, as for the wonderful metaphorical definition proposed by Deleuze (1999), it ***cannot be interpreted simply as an heterogeneous assemblage of disparate elements***, but it is also traversed by dynamic field of relations, to allow some approximation of a ***particular preponderance or balance of forces at a given time creating both subjects and objects***.

- In a recent work focusing on policy dispositif neo-liberal education policy dispositif in England, Bailey (2013) recalls the scalar dimension of a dispositif that can be ***located both at the micro and at the macro level.*** Foucault himself has insisted on the movement between those different levels of analysis, at the moment when his 'strategic' conceptualisation of power was prevailing.

There is no discontinuity between them, as if one were dealing with two different levels (one microscopic and the other macroscopic); but ***neither is there homogeneity*** (as if the one were only the enlarged projection or the miniaturization of the other); rather, one must conceive of the ***double conditioning of a strategy*** by the specificity of possible tactics, and of tactics by the strategic envelope that makes them work (HS: 99-100).

- In this respect, leadership can be understood as a policy dispositif that produces its effects both at the **macro level** (from accountability to quasi-market, etc....), and at the **micro levels** of organisation and management in every single school.

- More specifically, the **leadership des**ign (Gronn 2003) of neo-liberal education is **instrumental** toward aims of entrepreneurship, competition and selection.

Leadership is said to be instrumental to those ends, capable of achieving what was not possible under previous regimes where the emphasis may have been on such things as administration, management, expectations, and professionalism. Leadership, therefore, is **a tool designed for a particular purpose**. It is designed to achieve **what might not otherwise be achieved** (Gillies 2003: 21, im).

Contexts and discourses

In this contribution the analysis of leadership regime of truth is stressed using both dimensions of discursive formations: the scientific paradigms and the enlarged system of leadership knowledge (savoir) (this one recalling the 'ideological functioning' for the archaeological Foucault).

1. The first dimension refers to Seddon's (1994) distinction between '***categorical***' and '***relational***' education contexts.

2. The other discursive dimension refers to the classical tripartition between ***conflicting discourses***: welfarism and bureau-professionalism (Clark and Newman 1997); neo-liberal managerialism (Thrupp and Willmott 2003); and democratic-critical (Grace 1995; 2000).

DISCOURSES (Olssen et al 1994)

1.   The **bureau-professionalism (welfarism)**:
       - formal and procedural rationality
       - legitimacy and autonomy of professional expertise
       - understanding of educational leadership as a professional   practice, both of leaders and teachers.

2.   The **neo-liberalist (managerialism)**
       - efficiency and quasi-marketization
       - accountability and competition
       - leadership as a matter, delegated (distributed) to the followers.

3.   The **democratic-critic** discourse:
       - a critical reaction to the neo-liberalist policies,
       - metaphorical interpretation
              a) processual construction
              b) questioning of its hierarchical nature.

Welfarism	New managerialism
Public-service ethos.	Customer-oriented ethos.
Decisions driven by commitment to "professional standars" and values, e.g. equità, care, social justice.	Decisions instrumentalist and driven by efficiency, cost-effectiveness, search for competitive edge.
Emphasis on collective relations with employees - through trade unions.	Emphasis on individual relations – through managerialisation of trade unions and through new management techniques, e.g. total quality management (TQM), human resources management (HRM).
Consultative.	Authoritarian.
Substantive rationality.	Technical rationality.
Cooperation.	Competition.
Managers socialised within field and values of specific welfare sector, e.g. education, health, social work.	Managers generically socialised, i.e. within field and values of "management".

Gewirtz & Ball, 2000

Context	Discourse	Welfarist (Bureaucratic-professional)	Neo-liberal (Managerialist)	Democratic (Critical)
Categorical: individual-interactive		- Instructional - Moral	- Transformational - System Leadership - Distributed *(or to be distributed?)*	- Styles *(of micropolitics)* - Micropolitics - Collaborative
Network-practices		- Sustainable - Distributed *(in practice)*	**?**	- Feminist - *Greedy* leadership work *(distribution of)* - Ecological - Democratic - Configuration - No leadership at all *(neo-liberal tiranny)*

Matrix of Leadership Micro-politics

Blase e Anderson, 1995

	Transformational Goals		
Closed	***Antagonistic*** promotes the moral vision of the leader *power on & power through*	***Democratic, empowering*** promotes democracy and social empowerment *power with*	**Open**
Style	***Authoritarian*** promotes the reproduction of the status quo *power on*	***Facilitative*** promotes an organizational a more 'human'climate & individual empowerment *power through & power on*	**Style**
	Transactional Goals		

Thus, in our map, it can be noticed that different conceptions and approaches to leadership representative of a managerialist discourse avoid the serious questioning of *educational context* and adopt *individualist ontologies* based on human, especially leadership qualities and interaction with followers.

The neo-liberal dispositif of *distributed leadership* is, e.g., definitively put in practice in a very ponderous research-report that tries to demonstrate the Impact of School Leadership on Pupil Outcomes (Day et al., 2009), whereas the methodological and statistical paraphernalia of an empirist and deterministic paradigm are deployed.

And so it is possible to find such an idea of distributed leadership:

- it is a mere *variable* – certainly not a process in an educational context;

- within some path analysis models it is located as *intervening* variable between independent variables such as: leader trust in teachers, redesigning organisation, setting directions, etc.;

- and dependent variables such as: improvement in pupil behaviour and attendance and students' *outcomes* (measured in a standardized way);

- together with other intervening variables typical of the managerialist conception of a professional culture to be manipulated such as: senior leadership team collaboration, teacher collaborative culture, staff climate, etc.

Comparison of Distributed Leadership and Micropolitics Research in Education

	Distributed Leadership	Micropolitics
Typical narrative that frames the literature	Distribution of influence among leaders shapes school culture and outcomes Emphasis in normative literature on progress and solutions	Schools are shaped through dispute Emphasis on conflict and problems
Typical methodological approach	Surveys (self-reports) of administrators and other school leaders. Potentially large scale. Case studies relying upon observations of public meetings and interviews with key subjects	In-depth qualitative methods including ethnography. Particular and small scale. Case studies relying upon observations of public meetings and interviews with key subjects
Marketplace for this research	School leaders and policymakers Researchers	Researchers

Flessa, J. 2009. Educational Micropolitics and Distributed Leadership,
PEABODY JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, 84: 331–349
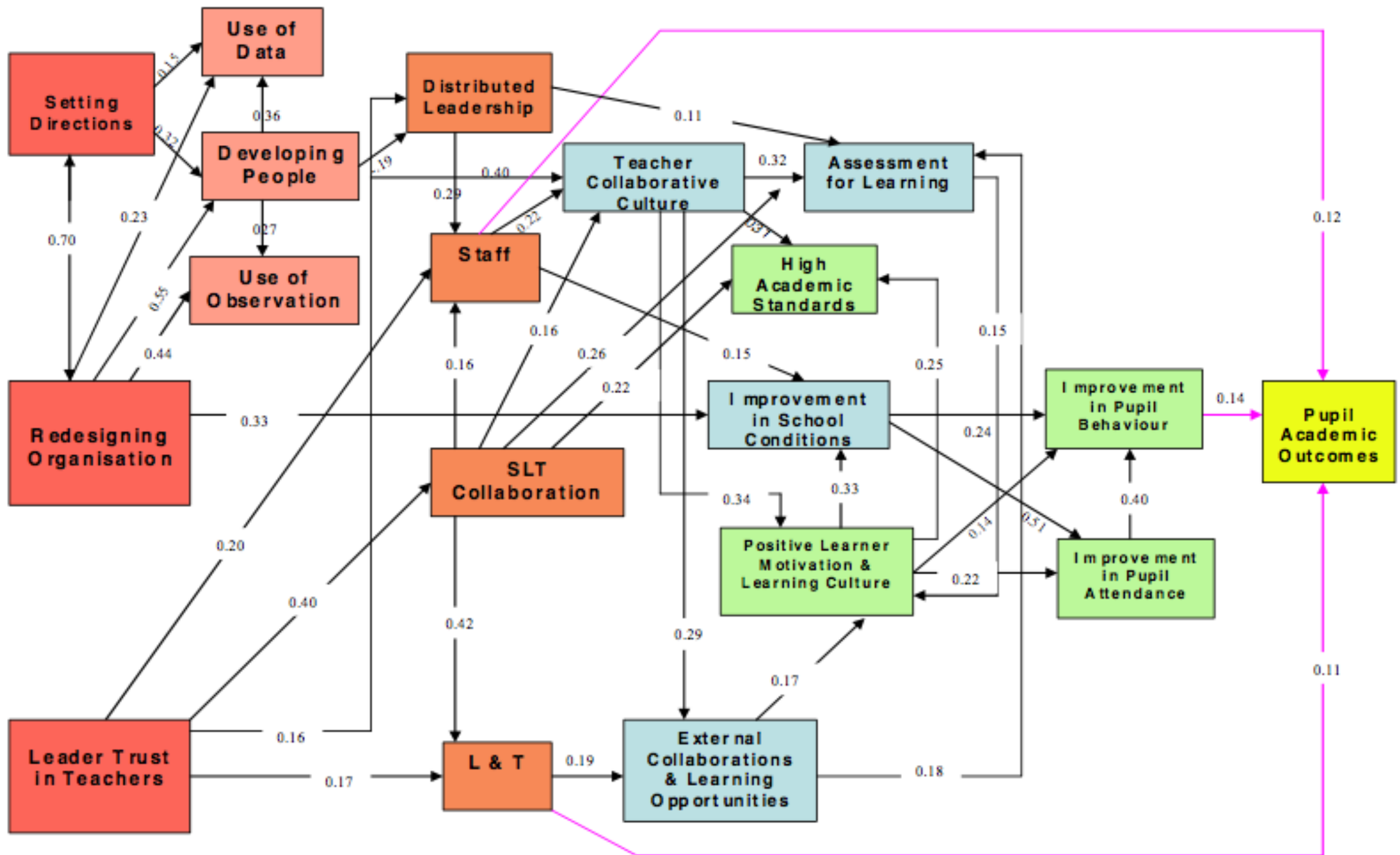
Heads Perception of Leadership Practices and Change in Pupil Outcomes over Three Years (2003-05), with standardised solution displayed (Secondary), Day et al. 2009.
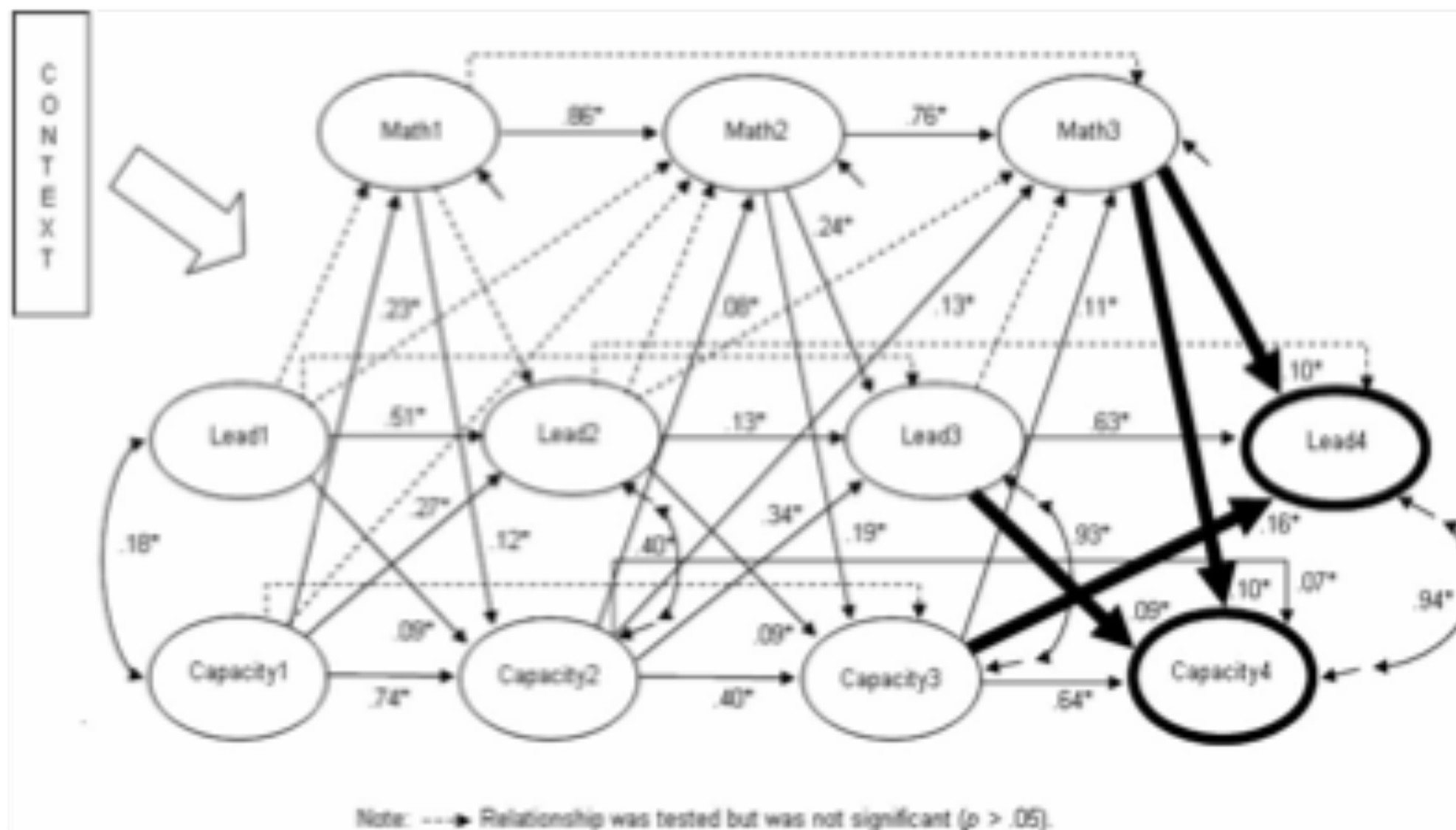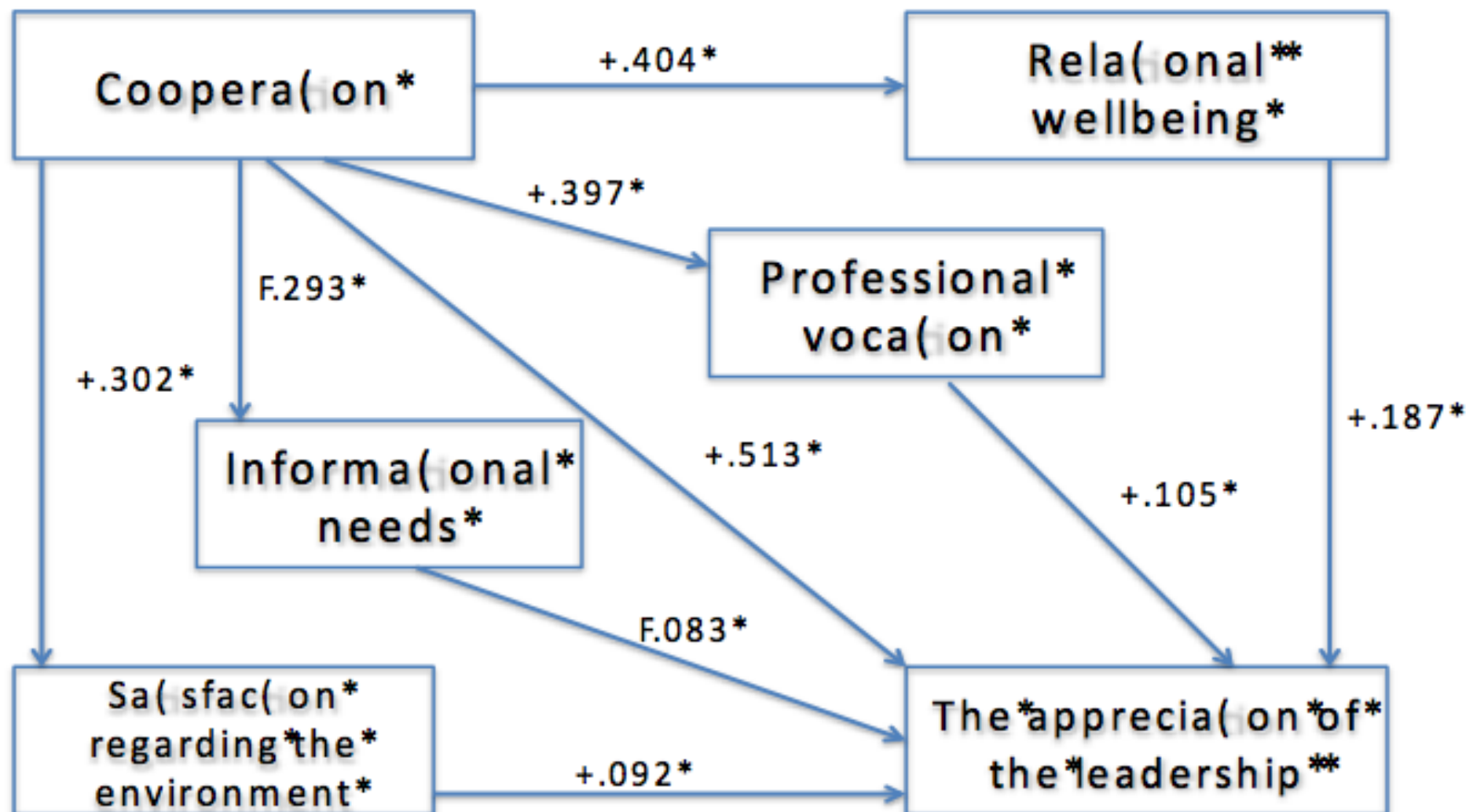
Figure 7. Extending mutually supporting relationships to Time 4 (*p* < .05).

Collaborative Leadership and Teachers Wellbeing
Serpieri.Vatrella.2017

- It seems clear how this knowledge is connected to practices of head teacher's selection, training, evaluation and promotion that explicitly recall ***knowledge(s) that subjectivate leaders as school managers***, whose organisation and objectives are flattened on the model of educational enterprise.

- This leadership dispositif subjectivates the head teachers enabling them to redesign the educational context, both external and within the school, and where what strategically count ***are personal 'super' qualities***, sort of a clever puppet master of distributed leadership.

The dominant paradigms of leadership through heroic performances, leader designer frameworks and best-practice models that are so pervasive have little or no rigorous theoretical underpinnings, and as such the feasibility of these 'more traditional' approaches in terms of providing a means for ***critical self-reflection needs to be seriously questioned*** (Niesche 2011: 18).

Leadership deconstruction

- Leadership as policy dispositif, of which transformational and distributed are probably the most relevant ones, produces a regime of truth and technologies of governmentality to put in practice a neo-liberal education model pursuing educational goals congruent with those of competitiveness, selection, performativity and so on. In such a way it subjectivates head teachers, teachers, students and families *as entrepreneurs of themselves* (for this metaphor see BBP).

- Thus, it should be emphasized that critical knowledge(s) about leadership countervail neo-liberal knowledges on the one side, adopting more sophisticated conceptions focused on a democratic idea of leadership significantly *'engaged' in a structural and cultural educational context*, as for the case of Woods' *democratic leadership* (2005) inspired by Archer's morphogenesis, or for the *distributed leadership in practice* as for Spillane (2006) (we could also quote the Leadership *for learning* of MacBeath et al.)

- On the other side, critical contributions conceive of the leadership dispositif just as *one of the tyrannies* (along with accountability, performativity, and so on) of neo-liberal education, as witnessed by the absence of the leadership theme in the 'critical' Handbook of Sociology of Education (Apple, Ball, Gandin, 2010).
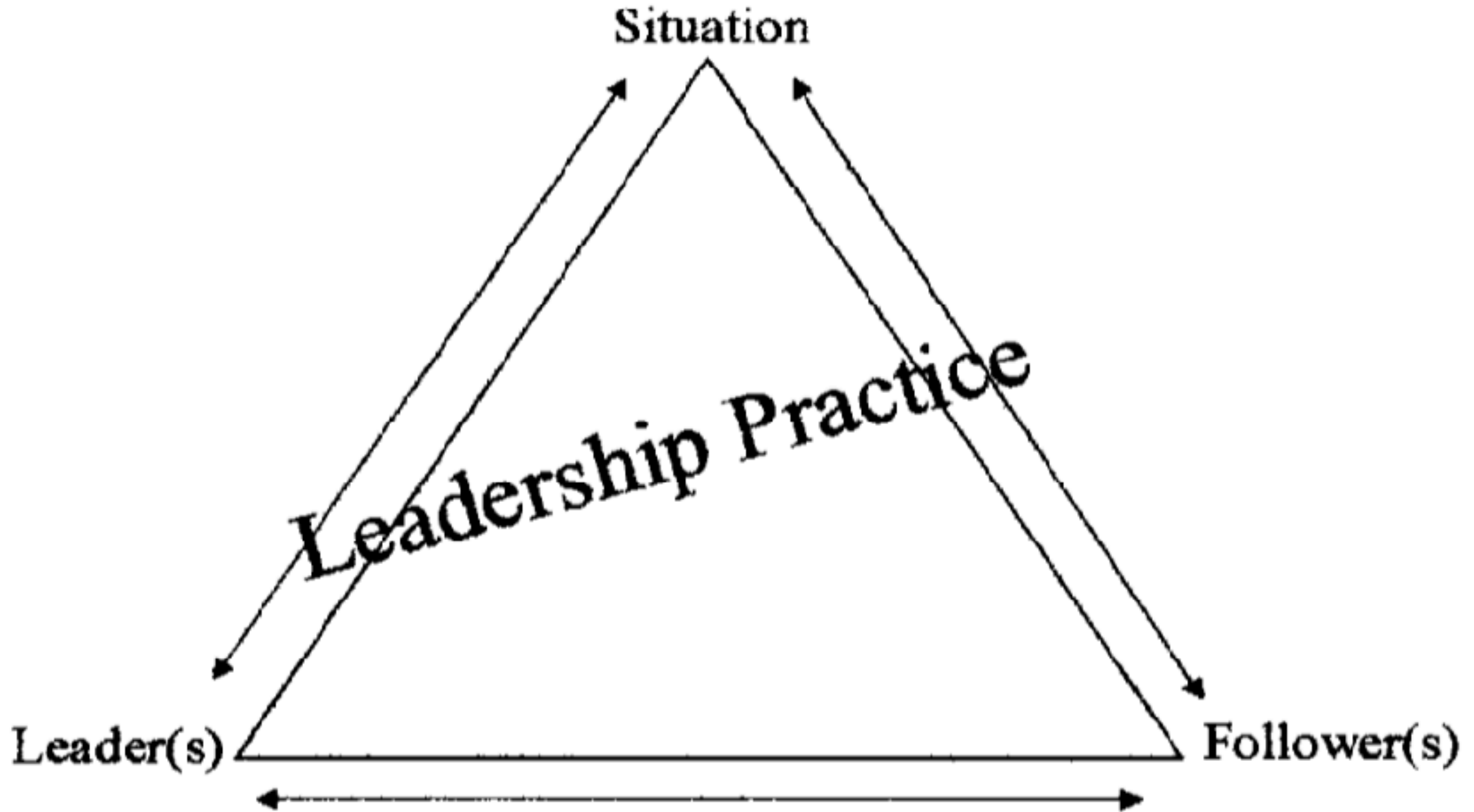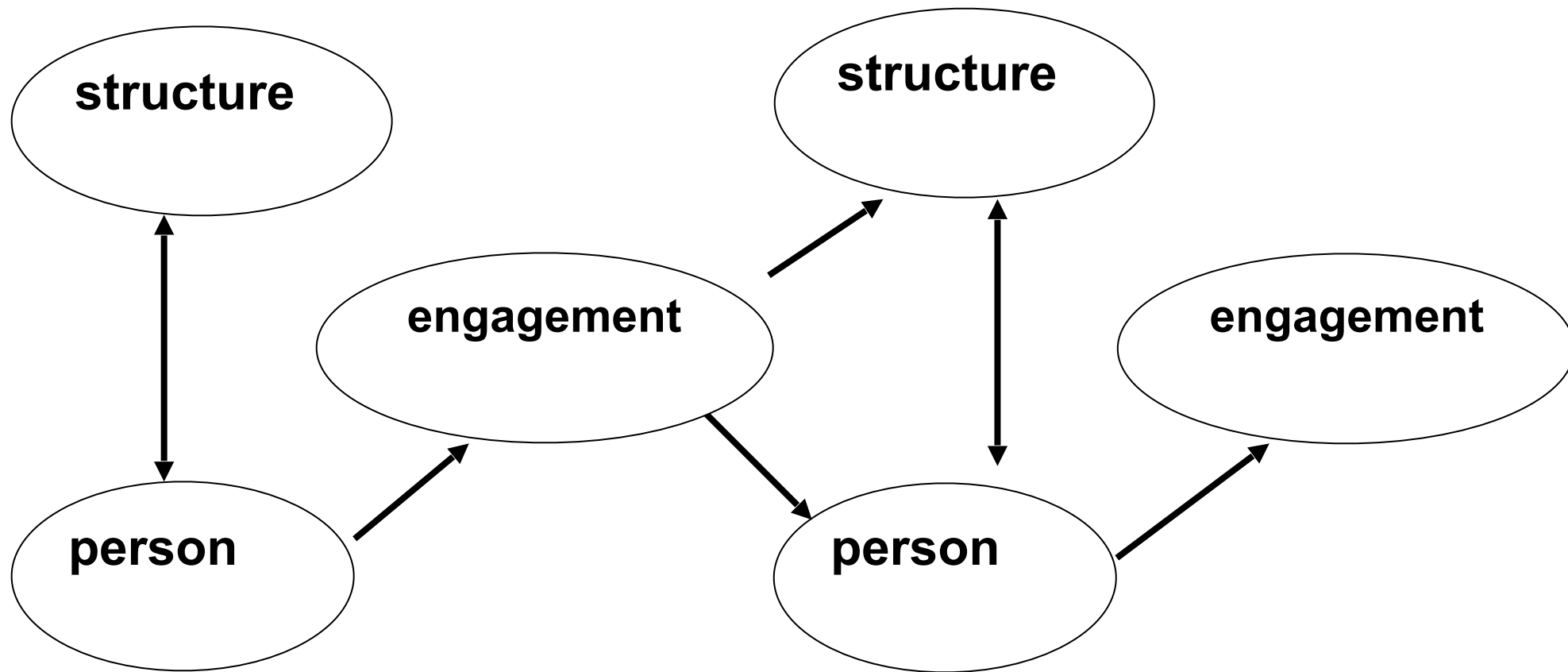
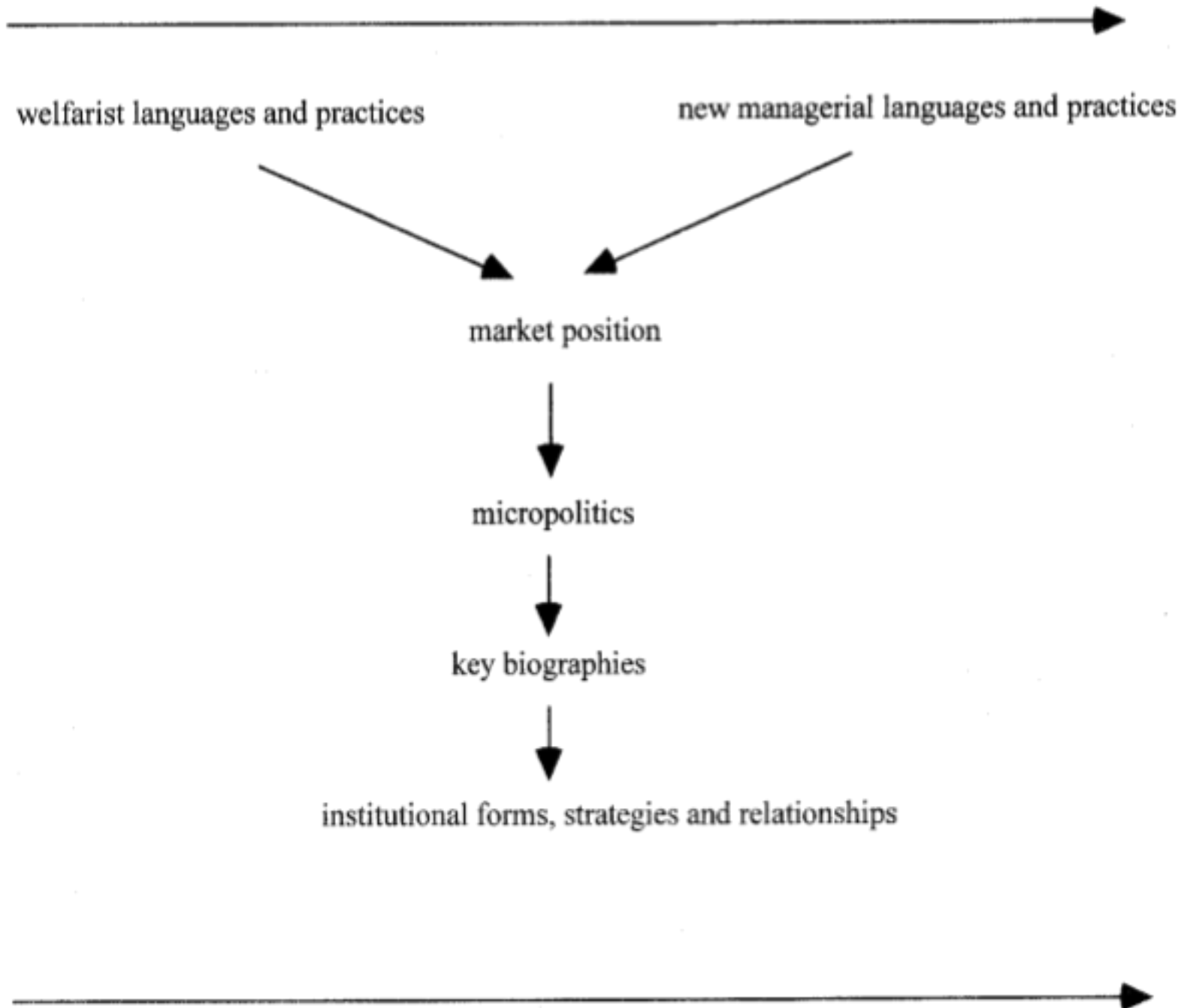Figure 1.   Constituting elements of leadership practice.

(Spillane 2006)

Woods, 2005

Not researching leadership?

- This is the case of Ball and his colleagues, who more recently have developed an interpretation of *leadership as imbricated into discursive formations and educational contexts*, that Gunter has signalled as an original way of 'not researching leadership' (2013).

- Thus, in researches conducted on the shifting from welfarist to neo-liberal discourse (Gewirtz and Ball 2000), the head teacher is conceived as *discursive catalyst in school contexts*. Such understanding of school leadership refers to sophisticated and thick descriptions of head teachers' and teacher's biographies, seen as a key interpretative dimension useful to understand the shift of the welfarist discourse toward the neo-liberal ones.

welfarist languages and practices   new managerial languages and practices

market position

micropolitics

key biographies

institutional forms, strategies and relationships

Taking context seriously

- 'Key biographies' do not play any causal role, as for the neo-liberal leadership dispositif, meanwhile are rather intended to show how school contexts change through complex, non-linear and contingent processes. A genealogical interpretation of problematisations is put into play: and biographies show how some ***processes of re-subjectivation are not ideological, but catalyse, code and recode and enact diverse educational truths***.

- A precious contribution in this direction comes from recent researches on ***policy-enactments*** in schools (Ball et al. 2012), where it is important to: 'taking context seriously', together with 'policy artefacts', 'discourses, representations and translations'.

Thus, policy enactment involves ***creative*** processes of interpretation and recontextualisation – that is, the translation of texts into action and the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices – and this process involves 'interpretations of interpretations' (…), although the ***degree of play or freedom for 'interpretation' varies from policy to policy*** in relation to the apparatuses of power within which they are set and within the constraints and possibilities of context. ***Policies are not simply ideational or ideological***, they are also ***very material*** (Ball et al 2012: 3).

- These researches, inspired by practice epistemology and ontology (where processes and non human actors do matter) and ***democratic and critic discursive formation***, do not leave space for leadership as dispositif in a neoliberal way.

- They show how ***some roles are enacted*** by educational professionals, such as 'narrators', 'entrepreneurs', 'transactors', 'translators', and so on, ***but there are no any leaders*** (49).

- In other words, they propose a ***'leadership configuration'*** (Gronn 2010), that is a plurality of roles or, even better, a ***'contextual configuration'***, historically situated, and 'mobile', ***open to ethical freedom and creativity*** (Revel 2015) in a foucauldian way.

- Moreover, the authors construct a map of such a school configuration where, paradoxically, both leader and leadership disappear.
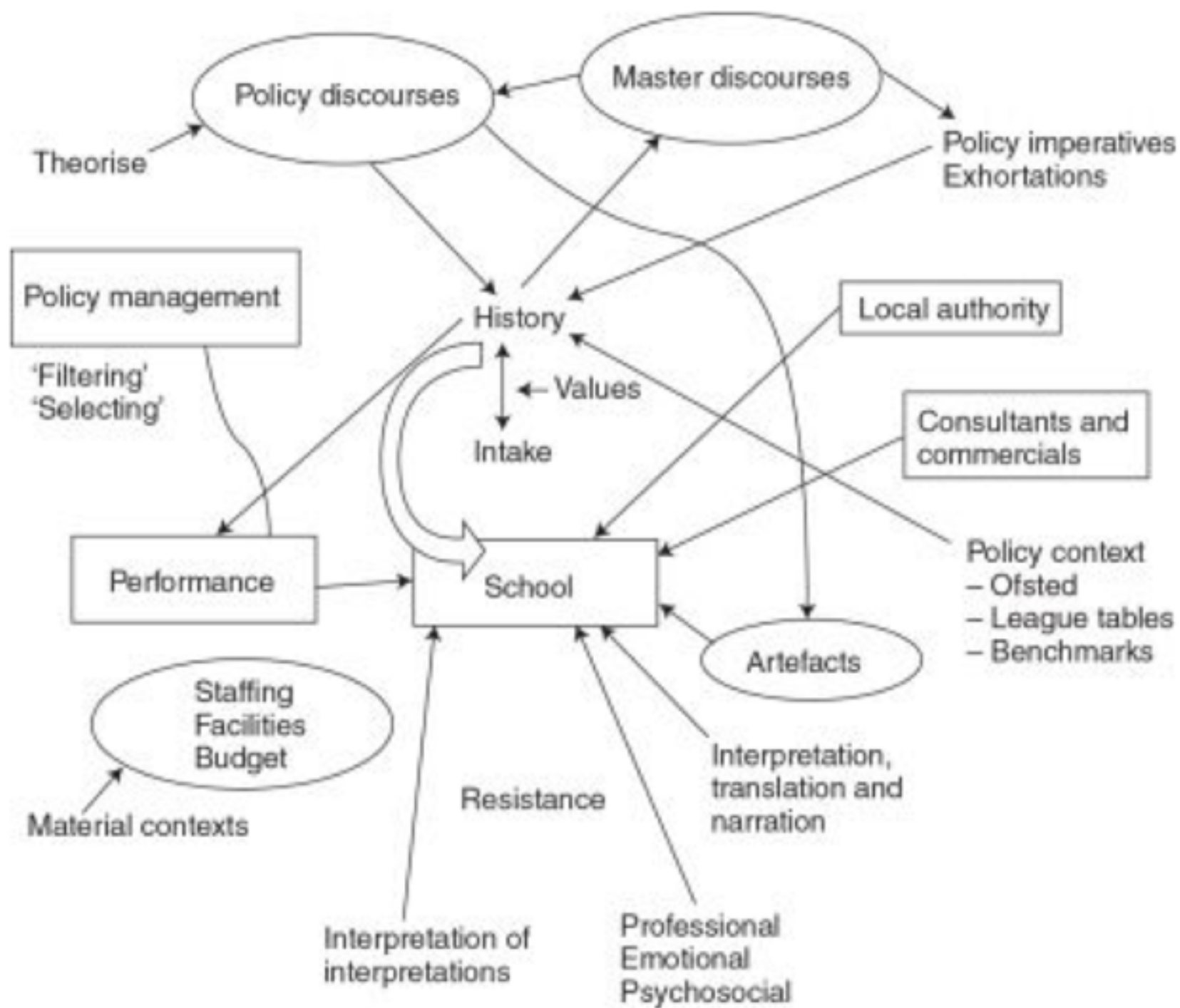
- Such a configuration, which could be labelled 'without leadership' (Serpieri, 2008), opens up interesting scenarios that allow us to explore the *'potentials'* (Gronn, 2009) *for a 'democratic leadership'* (Woods, 2005), in order to deconstruct the neo-liberal dispositif of leadership.

- This perspective drives us to reflect on the way in which *head teachers can carry on their discourse* about leadership: critical, resistant, and bearer of truths that are different from the neo-liberal discourse; but also to explore the *ethical spaces of freedom* (Laidlaw, 2014), that let head teachers to enact a parrhesiastic life (Ball, 2015; Ball and Olmedo 2013).

- However, foucauldian lesson reminds us that an escape from dispositif and regimes of truth is never fulfilled and that *we will always been subjectivated* through diverse technologies of governmentality: according to our *ethical choice of practicing a 'courage of truth'* (CT), to think *other 'possibilities'* (Ball 2013) for exploring more democratic leadership configurations outside of neo-liberal policy dispositif.

Thus let's recall our questions:

- How do discursive formations arise to fabricate the 'reality' of leadership? Thanks to Governmetanlity Practices (not only Discursive ones)

- What are the epistemic premises, the regimes of truth that define leadership? Individualism and Rationalism (Neo-Liberal Paradigm)

- Which kind of subjectivation encapsulates head teachers through technologies of governmentality? As Levers of Neo-liberal Reform

- What freedom can be practiced? As (self)Entrepreneurship

- There is space for ethical choices? Through other Regimes of Truth and other Governmentality Practices

- What alternative truths are in play to resist against neo-liberal education policies? Enacting other Subjectivities (Subjectivation vs Subjection)

A Foucauldian perspective on regime of truth and governmental dispositifs such as educational leadership then let us go beyond ideological petitions and presumptions.

THANK YOU

this presentation derives from the chapter "Discourses and contexts of educational leadership. From ideology to dispositif" in Samier, E. (2016)

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Edited by
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ROUTLEDGE