



Distributed leadership in Irish post-primary schools: Policy versus practitioner interpretations

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ABSTRACT

Distributed leadership (DL) is becoming increasingly prevalent in policy and practice around the world. DL is currently endorsed by Irish school leadership policy. However, despite growing interest and political endorsement, DL remains a theoretically and practically elusive concept with little consensus on its definition. The aim of this study is to explore the interpretations of DL according to Irish post-primary school leaders, teachers, guidance counsellors, and special needs assistants. The study reports on the thematic analysis of 363 qualitative survey responses. The analysis of the data takes into consideration the nature of participants' roles within the school, the number of years they have been working, and their school type. The findings of this research indicate that considerable inconsistencies exist in how school staff interpret DL. These inconsistencies include disparities in the staff members that are involved in the DL model, differences in the roles and responsibilities that are being distributed and variations in how they are being shared. The findings also suggest that some discrepancy exists between how school staff interpret DL and how it is endorsed by Irish post-primary school leadership policy (Barrett, 2018). This paper relates to the "Education Policy and Leadership" theme of the conference as it explores the 'interpretation' of DL in respect of national policy in Irish post-primary schools. The study adds to the corpus of knowledge on DL policy and practice and has the potential to inform future DL and school leadership policy.

Keywords: construct cleanup; educational leadership; school policy; schoolteachers and leaders; shared leadership