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Hansen, Pernille; Nørgaard, Camilla; Hornskov, Søren

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Making ends meet - when school leaders use data and feedback in the development of leadership practice

Helle Bjerg, University College Capital (UCC), Copenhagen, Denmark. hbj@ucc.dk

Pernille Hansen, University College Capital (UCC), Copenhagen, Denmark, pha@ucc.dk

Søren Hornskov, University College Capital (UCC), Copenhagen, Denmark, sbho@ucc.dk

Camilla Nørgaard, University College Capital (UCC), Copenhagen, Denmark can@ucc.dk

In the wake of a major school reform in Denmark, school leaders face a policy driven demand for developing leadership practices, which contributes to increasing learning outcomes for all students. The use of data, assessment and feedback are promoted as part and parcel of such leadership practices. This counts both as a measure for increased performance management and accountability as well as a driver for professional development (E.g. Earl & Fullan 2003; Koyama 2014). In the research literature the use of data in educational leadership is often discussed either within a framework of accountability or with a reference to the formative use of data for development (Hornskov et al 2015). However, in our case study of how school leadership teams use and interpret data and feedback on their own leadership practices, the boundaries between accountability and development does not seem clear cut.

We explore how school leadership teams and consultants create meaning in data and feedback from *the Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning (CALL)*. CALL is an online-based survey where school leaders and their staff assess distributed leadership practices in their school on the basis of a theoretical and formative model for leadership for learning (Kelley and Halverson 2012). Theorizing the ‘use of data’ within CALL, we draw on sociomaterial perspectives on translation through concepts as enactment, performativity and productivity (Fenwick and Landri 2012). More specifically, we conceptualise CALL as an ‘epistemic object’ (Knorr Cetina 2001; Nerland and Jensen 2012) and look at the school leaders’ engagement with CALL as epistemic practices. This approach allows us to explore and discuss how it is not solely the materialised aspects of data, but even more so the underlying (epistemic) model and the standards for leadership represented herein, which is translated and enacted by school leaders and consultants in their use of data and feedback. Here a particular glance and stance on the leadership practices in their own schools is produced and performed, both in the actualised form represented by the survey data, but also in the aspirations and directions for development which the school leaders engage in and with when translating the formative leadership model of CALL into their own views and aspirations for leadership.

Thus, ‘making ends meet’ is not solely about meeting performance outcomes meted out through data, but even more so being held and holding oneself accountable for adhering to particular standards and purposes for leadership practice.

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