THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

In the field of education policy, 'translating' national policies into practice requires numerous synchronized interventions of a multiplicity of actors at different levels of education administration and its outer environment. Prompted by the lack of understanding about what may facilitate or hinder the policy success at school level and the role school leadership plays in this process, in this article we propose the use of an emerging conceptual framework organised around three analytical axes: a. contextualising the known factors affecting policy implementation within the education policy field, b. developing a typology of school leadership, and c. conceptualising an approach to explain the dynamic processes of exercising influence over the factors of policy implementation by the key school-level 'agents' of change – school leaders. Given the absence of a grand theory of (education) policy implementation, we argue that in designing a research framework for an empirical examination of a dynamic and multi-layered phenomenon of policy implementation from the perspective of school leaders researchers need to use a holistic approach while building on the legacy of the scholarly work from the multiple academic disciplines.

KEYWORDS: public policy, policy implementation, education policy, school leadership, capacity to influence, policy capacity, agency.

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Introduction

This article focuses on laying out the elements of a conceptual framework for the study of 'street-level' implementers' (Lipsky 1980) contributions to making education policies work for students – with emphasis on the role of school leaders as micro-level actors. Scholars agree on the complexity of public policy implementation as a process since 'translating' national policies into practice requires numerous synchronized interventions of a multiplicity of actors at different levels of administration, as well as multiple layers of analysis (Hill & Hupe 2009). However, despite the decades of scholarly work, there is still a lack of well-rounded concepts and theories to guide the empirical study of this phenomenon. Some authors question the possibility of constructing a single comprehensive theory to explain policy implementation *per se* (Goggin 1986; Ball 1993; Kyvik 2005). In words of Hill and Hupe (2009), "we see no case for a 'general theory of implementation'" (Hill & Hupe 2009, 83), a challenge deemed particularly "complex and uncertain" in relation to the "human service policies" (Parsons 1995).

We understand policy implementation as a process carried out by multiple actors with (different) interests and power relations, expectations and intentions (O'Toole 2000). Public policy is always purposeful (Hill & Hupe 2009) and, as a part of the wider public policy process, implementation is always oriented toward a specific social/societal problem, it "has always had a practical orientation" (Lindquist & Wanna 2015, 211). As value-oriented, public policy has a normative dimension – it integrates an explicit demand for change (Berman 1978) and is frequently legally framed (Mazmanian & Sabatier 1983). None of the policies are implemented outside of a specific (national) social, economic political and cultural environment (Maynard-Moody, Musheno & Palumbo 1990; and Berman 1980), which is why numerous authors put strong emphasis on the need to contextualise the study of policy implementation processes (Honig 2006; Falkner et al. 2007; Hill & Hupe 2009; Radó 2010; Priestley et al. 2015).

In the field of education policy, implementation is further characterized by the wide scope of policy objectives and a variety of programs and policies addressing them (Honig 2006). This is due to (i) its multifocal nature covering several education policy 'strands', including the study of curriculum, instruction, school leadership and management, and the targeted programs for diverse student populations, and (ii) the evolution of different and sometimes conflictual 'world views' of both policy makers and the implementation scholars about the very purpose of education (Biesta 2017).

Within the hierarchical infrastructure of an education administration, a lion share of policy actors is situated at the micro level, i.e. across numerous school establishments as 'structured contexts' of policy action (O'Toole 2006, 267). This specific 'territorial dimension' (Parsons 1995) of education policy implementation presents itself as a 'web of decisions' (Easton 1953), taken across schools as 'micro-environments' and it is eventually leading to the aggregate education system results, a sum of school-level implementation practices. Research has shown, however, that there are significant differences between schools in regard to school-level responses to national policies, leading to uneven policy implementation results. It does often happen that education policies do not reach classrooms (Viennet and Pont 2017). Within this specific education system's 'governance delivery mix' (Parsons 1995), and looking at the territorially dispersed micro-level system units (schools), we are interested in shedding light on the role of school leaders in the policy implementation process. As Hess (2013) pointed out "schooling is a complex, highly personal endeavor, which means that what happens at the individual level [...] is the most crucial factor in separating failure from success" (Hess 2013, 19). Uniquely positioned, school leaders and leadership teams make daily decisions about the course of action in their schools and classrooms. Their vision, decisions and actions affect the schools' performance, including the outcomes of any specific education policy implemented in the school as a specific location. Because of their physical proximity to the targeted policy 'beneficiaries'; their power to influence the course of implementation of any (centrally-set) education policy; as well as the power to institute school-level policies and unwritten practices – these micro-level actors are at the core of our inquiry. In what way do they influence education policy implementation and how does this influence facilitate or hinder policy success at school level?

Looking at this 'post-decisional' phase of public policy (Puchala 1975), we propose addressing the limitations of the policy implementation research, which is often focused on the glamorous high-level policy questions (Slack 2005). If the policy is made as it is being implemented (Anderson 1975), we expect that the empirical study of the school leaders' influence on education policy implementation represents not only valid but also an overdue research avenue. With this research agenda in mind, we argue that in designing a conceptual framework for an empirical examination of a dynamic and multi-layered phenomenon of policy implementation from the perspective of micro-level policy actors, researchers need to use a holistic approach. This article offers an elaboration of such an emerging conceptual framework.

Framing the study of micro-level actors in education policy implementation

Our key research question is concerned with the way school leaders contribute to translation of the national education policy goals during education policy implementation; how they adapt national education policies to the needs of their main constituency (students); and, how, in this process, they (re)create school-specific policies in order to support and improve their schools.

Following the Lasswellian inquiry on public policy, we are interested in 'who gets what, when, [and] how' (Lasswell 1936). In the absence of a grand theory on public policy implementation, we have assumed that the study of this dynamic process from the perspective of micro-level actors would require a close examination of a number of interrelated concepts. In this article, we have grouped them around three analytical 'axes'. Firstly, we discuss the notion of policy implementation while shedding light on the specific factors affecting policy outcomes (the '*what*'). Secondly, we explore the concept of school leadership as a term indicating the presence of a power dynamics among the actors involved in the policy implementation process with school leaders as the uniquely positioned actors of influence within the school realm (Yukl 1981/2013) (the '*who*').

Figure 1: The main elements of the framework (what – who – how)
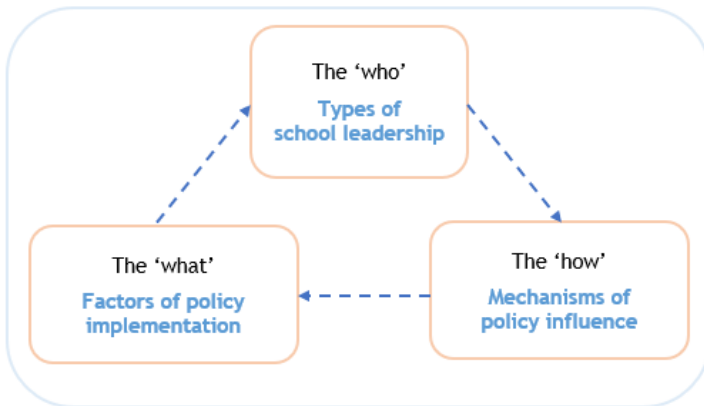
Thirdly, we combine a group of notions which enable the analysis of the connection between the factors of policy implementation, on the one hand, and the school leaders' influence over the policy implementation process and outcomes, on the other (the '*how*'). The latter refer to three 'mutually supportive' concepts found separately in the literature – a recent concept of

policy capacity (Wu et al. 2015), the concept of capacity to influence (Yukl, 1981/2013) and the renewed concept of 'agency' as defined by Priestley and colleagues (2015). We argue that, if combined, the above concepts enable a holistic approach for the empirical study of the in-school policy implementation processes from the perspective of micro-level actors.

Policy implementation and the factors affecting policy outcomes (the 'what')

In the past several decades implementation scholars have produced an extensive body of work exploring different factors affecting policy implementation (Pressman & Wildavsky 1973; Lipsky 1980; Mazmanian & Sabatier 1983; Elmore 1980; Hogwood & Gunn 1984; Sabatier 1986; Matland 1995; Hill & Hupe 2009). In articulating an analytical framework for the empirical research in the area of education policy implementation, we rely on the insights from political sciences, policy analysis, the study of governance/public administration, organizational and educational sciences, and present the factors affecting policy implementation organized around the following levels of analysis (see Table 1):

A. Policy content and policy process. The characteristics of the policy process and content, including the selection of policy instruments (Pressman & Wildavsky 1973; Lipski 1980; Mazmanian & Sabatier 1983; Elmore 1980; Sabatier 1986; Matland 1995; Falkner et al. 2007; Hill & Hupe 2009; Alexiadou et al. 2010; Hall et al. 2015a; Hall et al. 2015b; Silova et al. 2017)

B. National education system characteristics, i.e. structures. Education-system factors as the broader institutional context in which the schools operate (Falkner et al. 2007; Radó 2010);

C. Schools as 'small cultures'. A 'host environment' of a variety of school-level factors (Ball et al. 2012; Yukl 1981/2013; Baucal & Pavlović Babić 2016);

D. Individual professional identities of school-level actors. The professional identities of school-level actors, their autonomy and 'agency' (Lingard et al. 2003; Hall et al. 2015b; Priestley et al. 2015; Anderson & Cohen 2018);

E. Mixed environment of factors cutting across formal institutional structures: policy networks, implementation structures, civil society, and community-level actors with varying levels of policy capacity (Hjern & Porter 1981; Sabatier 1986; Radó 2010; Wu, Ramesh & Howlett 2015); and

F. Exogenous factors – extraordinary events causing major disruptions in school operations. External shocks caused by crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1: Overview of factors affecting policy implementation – the author's overview based on the critical literature review

Factors of education policy implementation
Level of analysis A: Policy content and policy process
International and regional policy influences
○ Global policy discourse/'global policy convergence' (Silova et al., 2017; Hall et al. 2015a); 'New spatiality' of policy making (Hajer 2003)
○ Policy setting and coordination within multilateral, supranational and regional organizations: externally-set education objectives; policy transfer (Alexiadou et al. 2010; Majone 1991)
National policy framework
○ Legal framework and policy traditions (Falkner et al. 2007; Hall et al. 2015)
○ Commitment and policy ambition of education authorities (a range of policy texts)
Public policy content and instrumentation
○ Characteristics of the specific thematic policy
○ Policy ambiguity/clarity of policy objectives (Matland 1995)
○ Policy ownership
○ Policy 'authenticity' (Honig 2006)
○ Policy instrumentation/'policy technologies' (Lascoumes & Le Gales 2007; Hood 2007; Ball 2012; Viennet & Pont 2017)
Level of analysis B: National education system characteristics, i.e., structures
Relevant education system characteristics:
○ School autonomy/decentralization (curriculum; human resources – recruitment; human resources – professional development; financing; school improvement) (Hanushek et al. 2013)
○ Patterns of learning and cooperation among schools (school networking/communities of practice) (Baucal et al. 2016)
Level of analysis C: Schools as 'small cultures'
○ The institution of the school as a policy tool (Hood 2007); 'generic institutional arrangements' (Painter & Pierre 2005)
○ Formal rules and procedures and informal rules/unwritten practices (Yukl 1981/2013; Rhodes 1997), including patterns of learning and cooperation (Baucal et al. 2016)
○ School policy setting and implementation/enactment (Ball et al. 2012)
○ Schools' responses to centrally-set policy objectives: commit, comply, resist (Yukl 1981/2013); enact, ignore, attack, pretend to do (Hall 2015)
○ Policy learning and policy 'translation', i.e., the use and (re)creation of policy instruments
○ Organizational learning journey (Crossan et al. 1999); 'embedding mechanisms' (Aarons et al. 2014)
○ Elements of school culture: values/vision/shared meaning (Holliday 1999; Carrington 1999; Elmore 2000)

Level of analysis D: Individual/professional identities of school-level actors
o Street-level actors (Lipsky 1971), backward mapping (Elmore 1980), micro-level actors (the perspective of) (Priestley et al. 2015)
o Clarity and perception of professional roles of school staff/professional identities
o School leadership capacity: institutional, lateral and upward leadership (Munby 2020)
o Accountability/networks of mutual accountability (Rhodes 1997)
Level of analysis E: Mixed environment of factors cutting across formal institutional structures
o Policy networks/advocacy coalitions (Sabatier 1986); 'New spatiality' of policy making (Hajer 2003)
o Inclusive stakeholder engagement (Viennet & Pont 2017)
o Civil society and community-level actors with various degrees of policy capacity (Wu, Ramesh & Howlett 2015; Radó 2010)
o *Ad hoc* project-related within-school implementation arrangements affecting the existing 'power relations' (Hjern & Porter 1981).
Level of analysis F: Exogenous factors – extraordinary events causing major disruptions in school operations
o Risk society (Beck 1992)
o Large-scale crisis (Boin & 'T Hart 2007)
o 'Learning crisis' caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank 2020a, World Bank 2020b)

As Table 1 shows, the outcomes of the policy implementation process are affected by a number of different factors. In addition to the broader contextual and situational features, the characteristics of an observed policy (specific policy content and the associated policy process) affect both the context and the end policy implementation results (Table 1, Level of analysis A). For instance, the so-called global 'traveling policies', in the words of Slee (2018), require 'taming and domestication' within any national context (Slee 2018, 17). Magnusson (2019) notes that globally articulated policies often represent only 'the primary point of departure' in the practice of policy implementation (Magnusson 2019, 677), leaving significant room for different interpretations. The pressure to act in a certain manner when 'delivering' on the global policy agenda is linked to the implicit expectation of the "global policy convergence" (Alexiadou et al. 2010; Hall et al. 2015a; Silova et al. 2017), where the objectives-setting is driven equally by the 'globalizing agencies' (such as the UN and the OECD) and by large supra-national entities (the EU, for instance) (Alexiadou et al. 2010; Ball 2012), requiring from national authorities to coordinate policies and act as the 'recipients' of the globally-set policy goals. The countries are less and less able to 'choose' which global policies to imple-

ment. Over time, the coercive power of the 'globalizing agencies' was gradually replaced by the 'soft power', i.e., the rational peer pressure – through the use of international policy instruments such as "evaluation studies or quality monitoring" (Ball 2012, 40). On the other hand, policy transfer could also be seen as beneficial to the individual countries; the 'cross-national' policy discussions could be of high value to different in-country policy actors; they can accelerate the adoption of innovative practices and facilitate mutual learning (Majone 1991).

National commitments to internationally-set policy objectives do necessitate adjustments, primarily as they become incorporated into the legislation as 'statutory' categories defining the scope of national policy jurisdictions (Table 1, Level of analysis B). However, examining the legal framework alone will not suffice unpacking the policy implementation. The history of policy implementation has shown that not even 'policy authenticity' *per se* would automatically translate into the desired policy results, i.e. a mere compliance with the initial policy 'text' risks leaving the practitioners focused on the formal aspects of the policy implementation instead of responding to the core policy objectives in cases when, for instance, policy articulation was not on target (Honig 2006). On the other hand, Falkner and colleagues (2007) draw attention to the need to account for the long-term in-country policy traditions, i.e. different 'worlds of compliance', as more indicative of the intention to implement an 'adopted' global/supra-national policy. They have shown that countries differ in ways they execute the policy transfer, which depends on the national compliance culture (Falkner et al. 2007) ranging from low observance and the world of domestic politics, to the world of transposition neglect; the latter, in effect, standing for the absence of action by domestic actors in response to an external policy (Falkner at al. 2007, 404). Thus, a specific policy content – its alignment or a diversion from the cultural and policy traditions – might affect the policy implementation prospects, including the selection of policy instruments.

Policy implementation will also depend on the education administration's political commitment, as well as the ambition expressed through a variety of policy texts – strategies, pieces of legislation, and budgetary orders, for example. Furthermore, the lack of policy clarity will negatively affect the policy implementation processes, as shown in Matland (1995), who proved the theoretical significance of the tension between ambiguity and conflict in the implementation process (Maitland 1995, 145).

The institutional context, i.e. the system environment in which any given policy is implemented, is fundamental to understanding policy implementation processes (Table 1, Level of analysis C). By virtue of 'hosting' various public policy actors, public policies are typically imple-

mented within the "generic institutional arrangements" (Painter & Pierre 2005). Relevant characteristics of the education administration, as the school's 'outer environment' include the degree of school autonomy/the degree of (de)centralization in a number of its core areas/functions. For instance, the school's autonomy to adapt national curricula, its prerogatives in hiring and firing school staff and affecting their professional development, and in financing – particularly, in deciding teacher pay – comprise some of the critical aspects of 'street-level entities" freedom from the policy 'center'. Additionally, the system could prescribe the patterns of learning and cooperation, both among and within the schools (Baucal et al. 2016).

The inner school environment is often characterized by a set of formal rules and procedures, complemented by informal patterns of unwritten school practices (Yukl, 1981/2013; Rhodes, 1997) (Table 1, Level of analysis D). Thus, every school – as a location – will also have a set of varied elements of a 'small' school culture: its vision, beliefs and values, more or less shared among the staff (Carrington 1999; Holliday 1999; Elmore 2000). Schools differ in the way they practice school-level policy setting, as well as in their response to a specific externally-set policy (Ball et al. 2012). A range of policy responses has been identified in the literature. Although sometimes named differently, policy responses mostly refer to three reactions: commitment, compliance, and resistance (Yukl 1981/2013), where the forms of resistance may include the ability to ignore, to attack or to pretend to follow a central policy direction (Hall 2015). In cases of policy commitment, there could be a tension between 'policy authenticity', in the Honig's sense (2006), and the active approach to an 'imperfect' policy design/instrumentation. The process of cognition and remediation (policy 'translation') can take place at the school level when policy instruments are (re)created to enable the achievement of the higher policy objective in a manner more suited to the specific school (Ball et al. 2012). In articulating their own policy stance, the schools and their leaders – as any other frontline actors – will likely take an organizational learning 'journey' – leading to 'institutionalization' as its final 'destination' (Crossan et al. 1999).

Policy actions are ultimately taken by individual school-level actors within a shared 'institutional space'; and, policy implementation will depend on the clarity and the (mutual) perception of their individual professional roles (Table 1, Level of analysis E). The legally defined roles will be affected by the informal inner network of interpersonal relations, with teachers and school leaders' professional identities and attitudes, as well as their perception of the established patterns of the within-school cooperation. The individual characteristics of school staff, their values, competences and behavioural patterns, cannot be dissociated from the

manner of policy enactment. Viennet and Pont (2017) discuss the need for an 'inclusive stakeholder engagement' as crucial for the effectiveness of a school-level policy implementation; in their view, 'stakeholders' or 'actors' use or do not use "their skills and resources to contribute or react to the implementation of the policy" – thus, affecting the policy outcome (Viennet and Pont 2017: 30). Last but not least, the specific networks of mutual accountability among the individuals within an institution will facilitate or impede policy implementation (Rhodes 1997). This is a point of connection between the more or less democratic school cultures and the individual staff member's agency in the pursuit of a specific policy objective (Anderson & Cohen 2018).

The school's 'outer' operating context is further defined by the its interactions and arrangements with a series of other public and private institutional and organizational policy actors (Table 1, Level of analysis E). The mixed environment of factors that affect policy implementation is often linked to the school's engagement with external actors and processes, which might cut across the formal school structures. For instance, *ad hoc* project-related implementation arrangements can threaten the existing school 'order' and the established formal roles (Hjern & Porter 1981). Schools or their staff can engage in policy networks operating beyond the school's immediate community or can use the school as a framework for the integration of externally-led actions (Sabatier 1986). While this could be seen as an opportunity for the school to gain access to additional resources, it can also cause the school's practices to change, affecting the *status quo*.

In extraordinary situations, exogenous factors may disrupt the regularity of educational processes – including concerted efforts to implement specific policies – and can cause profound educational crises and a 'learning loss', like with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020–2021 school year and onwards (World Bank 2020b) (Table 1, Level of analysis F). In his observations of the historical development of modernity, Beck (1992) talks about the phenomenon of a 'risk society' in which "the gain in power from techno-economic 'progress' is being increasingly overshadowed by the production of risks" (Beck 1992, 13). The risks production is being built into the foundation of the new reflexive modernity with "irreversible threats to the life of plants, animals, and human beings"; it can manifest globally – across the national borders – bringing "into being supra-national and non-class-specific global hazards" (Beck 1992, 13). In Beck's terminology, the global phenomenon of COVID-19 – which has brought the world to a standstill – could be understood as one manifestation of the non-selective "growing 'hazardous side effects'" of the new modernity (Beck 1992, 21). In the contemporary academic discourse, the

concept of 'crisis' is often related to large-scale events causing the "unexpected, undesirable, unimaginable, and often unmanageable situations" (Hewitt 1983, according to Boin & T'Hart 2007, 42), which can affect the capacity of schools and school leaders to respond to the regular teaching and learning processes – leading to 'learning crisis' – or put an end to the focused implementation of any novel policy.

As the above overview has shown, in the study of policy implementation process, a set of mutually interrelated policy implementation factors need to be considered as defining 'elements' of the policy environment affecting the prospects for the policy implementation success. In today's globalised world, no policy (content and process) can be understood unless analysed within the cross-border framework of policy ideas and influences. Similarly, the 'outer' school environment is comprised of a number of education system institutions with a particular hierarchical architecture while the 'inner' school environment is highly dependent on the composition of the student body and the school staff with their worldviews on the policy objectives and values, i.e. the presence or absence of the coherent school culture. A variety of external (policy capacitated) actors, including civil society and private sector stakeholders, can influence the in-school processes and policy outcomes. This is also the case with the large-scale disruptive events, i.e. the exogenous factors affecting policy implementation. Combined, they contribute to the how and why policy implementation decisions and actions take place in any observed 'front-line entity', such as the school.

School leadership as a role and a position (the 'who')

Two distinctive developments of the past decades have added to the complexity of the contemporary study of education policy implementation. Firstly, the changing global policy context led to the expansion of students' educational 'entitlements' with what is likely one of the most impactful "new emerging paradigms" of equity (Radó 2010, 102) and social justice (Angelle & Torrance 2019). As a result, national education systems have discontinued the practice of catering only for the privileged students and are now required to cater to the educational needs of all, including previously neglected, marginalized populations. These developments led to an unprecedented increase in the scale of student intake, and have had "major implications for the alignment, targets, and instruments of policies designed to reduce inequities in education" (Radó 2010, 102). Secondly, since the 2000s we have seen further increase in the complexity of education policy ambitions and the policy targets placed before the 'implementers' in virtually every country in the world. Today, both learning and multiple social objectives of education have become intertwined legiti-

mate parts of the 'core' education 'business'; different social objectives that had been previously seen as 'external' to the main education aims became integrated into national policy agendas and, subsequently, in daily school operations (Torrance & Angelle 2019). These developments contributed to the growing body of school leader's responsibilities and have added pressure to making difficult daily choices about the use of school leaders' own time in addressing competing priorities (Honig 2006).

These developments incited the interest of implementation researchers regarding how multiple policy demands can be simultaneously implemented at the school level (McLaughlin 1991; Honig 2006; Young & Lewis 2015). Policy implementation and education scholars recognize the critical importance of school leadership for the 'school success' (Hallinger & Heck 1996; Leithwood & Levin 2005; Day et al. 2009; Young & Lewis 2015; Teodorović et al. 2019, referencing Fullan, 2014). In supporting education reform agendas, governments across the world are looking at school leaders as 'agents of change', putting reform ideas into practice (Fullan 1982/2001). One of their tasks is to facilitate the translation of national education policies into school practices as well as to lead their (re)design (Ball et al. 2012; Priestley et al. 2015; Hall 2015a). As Young and Lewis note, "daily responsibilities of principals [are now perceived] as a key factor" of the principal's ability to respond to a specific policy demand, "a key factor in impeding or modifying implementation of educational reforms" (Young & Lewis 2015, 11). This is consistent with the McLaughlin's observation from the early '90s suggesting that the "change [is] ultimately [...] a problem of the smallest unit" or of "the individual at the end of the line" (McLaughlin 1991, 189). However, "the perspectives and experiences of those enacting the policy, school-level leaders and teachers" are still insufficiently addressed (Young & Lewis 2015, 10).

While contemporary leadership theories have not been rounded as yet, the Bush and Glover (2014) analysis helps researchers organize the accumulated thought around the concept of leadership by emphasizing its *individual*, *collective* and *contextual* character. In the elaboration of their contribution (Table 2), we analytically separated the areas of leadership influence (instructional, managerial, transformational, and moral/authentic) from the spread of influence (distributed, including teacher leadership, and system leadership) and have articulated a school leadership typology which also indicates the location of influence (individual, collective or mixed) as well as the exploratory power of the observed types (partial or holistic).

Unlike 'school principalship' as a legally defined working position within any school, the term 'collective' in this text puts emphasis on the participatory nature of school leadership as a (policy) influence process.

Similarly, the 'contextual' dimension of leadership is analysed in recognition of the importance of the school as a 'place' (Honig 2006). As previously discussed, this physical/territorial dimension looks at the school as an ecosystem, a 'container' of education processes, but also as a venue of the emergence of school culture as a phenomenon, as presented in Table 1 – a group of factors named 'schools as small cultures'.

Table 2: Leadership typology: individual vs. collective, partial vs. holistic

Type of leadership	Location of influence	Exploratory power
Limited to the areas of influence: Instructional Managerial Transformational Moral/authentic	Individual	Partial
Limited to the spread of influence: Shared/distributed Teacher System	Collective	
Contextual and multidimensional: Contingent/integrated	Individual and collective	Holistic

Author's presentation based on the Bush and Glover discussion (2014), and Hallinger (2003).

Each of the influence 'types' sheds light on a portion of school leadership practices while the contextual and multidimensional leadership recognize "that a range of approaches can be valid" (Bush & Glover 2014, 564). Being contingent on the setting, this type of leadership is also pragmatic and not necessarily 'normativistic'/prescriptive, which seem to be the weaknesses found in the transformational and moral school leadership types. As the concept of contingent leadership may risk reducing leadership actions to the contextual factors alone (Bush & Glover, 2014), we emphasise the necessary *contextual integration of the various areas of influence in recognition of the multifaceted school leader's role*[1]. Such an approach is sensitive to environmental factors (external context), as well as to those within the school (Hallinger 2003).

Finally, we have considered the contribution of Aarons, Ehrhart and Farahnak (2014) who differentiate between the concepts of 'general' and

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1   In the Hallinger's discussion (2003), the term 'integrated' is limited to the integration of the instructional and transformational leadership,

'implementation' leadership. In their study of the role of leadership in policy implementation within the front public health service organizations, these authors consider 'general' or 'transformational' leadership to be about the types of leadership behaviours directed toward inspiring and motivating others to follow an ideal or a course of action, as opposed to "implementation or strategically-focused leadership" (Aarons, Ehrhart & Farahnak 2014). Drawing from Schein (2010) on organizational culture and leadership, Aarons and colleagues see the 'implementation leadership' as conditional on the creation of a 'strategic climate', observable through the presence/absence of the 'embedding mechanisms' conducive to (successful) policy implementation. While primary 'embedding mechanism' relates to the leaders' ability to project behaviours that are expected, supported and rewarded, the secondary ones are reinforced through the alignment of structures, processes, and communications (Aarons, Ehrhart, Farahnak & Sklar 2014: 6), signalling the value associated with the achievement of policy objectives.

The practice of 'exercising influence' (the 'how')

In addressing the question about how school leaders affect policy implementation, we have explored three 'mutually supportive' concepts – a recently elaborated concept of policy capacity (Wu et al. 2018), the concept of capacity to influence (Yukl 1981/2013) and the renewed concept of 'agency' as defined by Priestley and colleagues (2015). We have used them to relate the process of influencing education policy implementation, exercised by school leaders, with the factors that literature has shown significantly impact implementation results. In our interpretation, we assume that policy capacity is an inherent feature and a precondition for successful policy implementation. However, in exploring how this capacity is used, we complement it with the notions of 'capacity to influence' and 'agency', where the former entails the ability to exercise influence, while the latter implies the 'intentionality' to engage in order to realize policy capacity – and achieve the desired policy outcome. These notions emphasize the dynamic character of the process of policy capacity deployment. When combined, the above concepts enable a holistic approach to an analysis of policy implementation from the perspective of micro-level actors; in this case, the actors leading schools, including the in-school policy implementation.

As a prominent concept within the field of policy analysis, policy capacity has been defined in different ways. As a part of 'governing capacities', Painter and Pierre (2005) take policy capacity to be the government's ability to make 'intelligent collective choices', implying the simultaneous presence of (policy) coherence, public regardedness, credibility, decisive-

ness and resoluteness (Painter & Pierre 2005). In this view, it is assumed that "the chances of policy success in a particular sector will clearly be affected by generic institutional arrangements" (Painter & Pierre 2005, 3). A somewhat broader definition of policy capacity is found in Davies (2000), where policy capacity also includes the ability of governments to effectively implement the preferred course of action in choice situations (Davies et al. 2000).

In developing the 'nested model of capacities', Wu and colleagues (2018) argue that the concept of policy capacity is not confined to a part of a policy process or limited to the central government, but rather it covers the entire policy process – from agenda setting, through formulation and decision making, to implementation and evaluation (Wu et al. 2018). The authors look beyond the government and recognize a wider range of policy actors, including political parties, non-profits, private businesses, international organizations and various government agencies – all of which, it is argued, "affect the government's [overall] capacity to perform" (Wu et al. 2018, 4). Wu and colleagues introduced an operational framework which makes it possible to observe policy capacity at an intersection of skills and competences (analytical, operational and political), on the one hand, and resources and capabilities (at the individual, organizational and systemic levels), on the other (Wu et al. 2018). Such definition of policy capacity provides the framework for situating the analysis of individual and organizational level actors within a wider (education) system for investigating types of skills and competences, as well as resources and capabilities needed for successful policy implementation at the school level.

In responding to the question how policy capacity is mobilized, we turn to the relational concept of 'capacity to influence', introduced in Yukl (1981/2013). Yukl's definition relates to "the absolute capacity of an individual agent to influence the behavior or attitudes" of persons within an organisation (Yukl 1981/2013, 186). This concept could also be applied beyond the field of interpersonal influence and used to analyse the school leader's ability to influence the policy implementation process or, more specifically, the factors affecting it: (i) the within-school factors, and (ii) the factors located outside the immediate school domain. We contend that only those actors who possess policy capacity will be able to exercise influence in support of the implementation of the observed policies. Further on, as the "basis for evaluating the success of an influence attempt", we use the notion of 'influence outcomes' understood as the commitment to, compliance with, or the resistance to the observed policy (Yukl 1981/2013, 187–188). Each attempt at exercising influence will result in an 'influence outcome', where compliance with a given policy and, potentially, commitment to it, are expected to lead to the successful policy implementation.

This might include the school leader's ability to successfully respond to (initial) resistance by teachers and/or parents. Resistance as an 'influence outcome', on the other hand, will likely lead to the suboptimal policy implementation results.

Finally, we see the concept of 'agency' as complementary to the concept of capacity to influence. Together, they give us the conceptual tools to distinguish between different positions school leaders can take in relation to specific policies – leading to different implementation/influence outcomes. We assume that policy capacity will be realized through the mechanism of influence only if policy actors display 'agency'. Following Priestley and colleagues (2019) who understand 'teacher agency' as teachers' "active contribution to shaping their work and its conditions" (Priestley et al. 2019, 1), we have adopted the term 'agency' defined as "[not] as a capacity of individuals, that is, as something individuals can claim to 'have' or 'possess', but rather... as something individuals and groups can manage to achieve – or not (Priestley et al. 2019, 1)." This renewed concept of 'agency' also emphasizes the significance of the overall context ('environing conditions'), which enables or hinders individual actors' agency, i.e., "an achievement that is the outcome of the interaction of individual capacity with environing conditions" (Priestley et al. 2019, 17), rather than one person's individual capacity alone. Thus, the term 'agency' is understood differently from the well-known sociological 'agency–structure' debate (individual agency vs. structural determinism) (Lingard et al. 2003, in discussion on the use of Bourdieu's concept in the study of school leadership), but is rather indicative of the intentionality and a value stance taken by the (implementation) actors toward a specific policy objective.

Conclusion

This article presented the challenge of building a coherent conceptual framework to serve as a starting point for the development of an empirical research model of the policy implementation process from the perspective of micro-level actors, those front-line service providers whose daily actions may facilitate or block the advances towards the desired policy implementation outcomes. As it was shown, carrying out empirical research focused on the perspective of micro-level actors requires close examination of a number of interrelated concepts, useful for identification of the knowledge gaps, broadly speaking, but also for the demarcation of the future research area. Based on this reflective presentation, we argue that the study of the phenomenon at hand requires a holistic approach and can guide an exploratory qualitative research inquiry aimed at describing, analysing and advancing the understanding of school leadership practices in successful schools and their role in education policy implementation. Some of the

key research questions include in what way school leaders contribute to translation of the national education policy goals in the course of education policy implementation, how they adapt national education policies to their students 'needs and how they (re)create school-specific policies in order to support and improve their schools.

The proposed approach to the study of policy implementation is novel in at least two ways. Firstly, it looks at the study of school leadership as a relational and dynamic process, as opposed to other frequently used contemporary approaches focusing on the legally prescribed role of a school leader; their preparation and competences; or their influence on students' learning (Ärlestig, Day & Johansson, Eds. 2016). Such multi-level analytical framework enables shedding light not only on what school leaders and leadership teams do or could do but how they contribute to the aggregate multiple education system policy outcomes. Secondly, the focus on the policy influence process is not confined to the school as an 'isolated' venue; the extent and nature of school leaders' influence beyond the schools is factored as well. Finally, in recognising limitations of the proposed approach, we expect that its holistic nature would require an exploratory empirical research angle focusing on the deployment of qualitative methods – at least in the first step. However, a multiple case study of school leadership practices with focus on the implementation of a specific novel education policy likely would not be sufficient to provide an assessment of – the hypothesised – (varying) degrees of policy influence over specific implementation factors, which will remain the research task for the future.

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