

Vital Pivot for reflexivity: Reframing leadership for sustainable futures

Introduction

My thesis explores the philosophy and methods of Victorian educationalist Charlotte Mason (1842-1923) towards a vital pivot, that is, revitalising management theory and practise for leadership aimed at the public good. The requisite learning theories applied to organisations and their hybrid forms have yet to develop leadership for sustainable development, failing particularly to comprehend the inclusive call of ‘no one left behind.’

At this nexus are the most pressing questions facing business and society. These include wicked challenges as far ranging as catalysing local capacity for gender equity among rural Fijian agribusinesses and defending US-based ESG investing as ‘woke capitalism’. Mason’s method was ‘complete’ and ‘aimed at the public good’. It accounts for citizenship, lifelong learning, understanding of the natural world, abstract knowledge, reflexivity and character development. How can her emancipatory pedagogy become the basis for a novel approach to developing leadership for sustainable development?

Related Work

My research brings a critical lens and seeks to bridge:

- The management and organisational research on sustainability leadership (Redekop et al, 2018; Bendell & Little, 2015; Kempster et al, 2019; Balda & Stanberry, 2021; Stanberry et al, 2022; Balda et al, *invited article*)
- Social learning for sustainability transformations, broadly understood (Drucker, 1985; Senge, 1990; Scharmer, 2009; Whiteman & Cooper, 2011; Orr, 1992; Latour, 2012; Patton, 2019; Freire, 1970)
- and more narrowly viewed as ecological reflexivity in Earth System Governance (2018) (Clark & Harley, 2020; Scoones et al, 2020; Dryzek & Pickering, 2018; Biermann et al,

2017; Bodin, 2017; Stanberry, 2022; Balda & Stanberry, 2022; Stanberry & Balda, 2023; Stanberry et al, *manuscript under review*).

Preliminary Methods and Results

In its first six months (Oct 2022-March 2023), and lead-up, my preliminary research connects the past to the present through archival research at the Armit Library (Ambleside), netnography, and action research approaches (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019) to Q Methodology (Stephenson, 1953; Brown, 2005) in North Lancashire and Cumbria, UK. I have focused on private governance and contextualising the SDGs to understand the role of knowledges and competencies in developing leadership for sustainable development (Stanberry, 2022; Stanberry & Balda, 2023; Stanberry et al, *Manuscript under review*; Stanberry, *Accepted presentation*, Balda et al, *Invited article*).

Proposed Work & Discussion

I am currently scoping the structure of the thesis. In its present form I intend to craft three parts. First, a bibliometric and thematic analysis describing the basis and nature of leadership for sustainability (as a broad discourse), and more specifically sustainable development. I will critically assess various approaches that seek to create the conditions for collective leadership (Ciulla, 2018; Day et al, 2014). I will identify business and society formulations that attempt, as Peter Drucker advanced in 1955, ‘To make what is good for the country good for the enterprise’ (p. 339).

Second I will craft a novel reframing of Charlotte Mason (1925) as a social entrepreneur, advancing and applying her philosophy and methods as a key lever for what Amartya Sen (2013) describes as the shift from viewing [and ‘developing’] people as ‘consumers’ to agents of change who can agitate, and building agency as citizens (Alexander, 2022) through learning as ‘friction’ towards original thinking (Faunce, 1923). Third, case study examples will address the tensions of the framework across cultures and scales.

Conclusion & Key Questions

At the PRME Doctoral Consortium I hope to receive feedback on the bones of the thesis in preparation for my transfer panel in October. My intent with this research is to take Mason's work and shape a resurgent theory of learning for leadership. I see the Vital Pivot framework as a temporary structure to attract scholarly attention, useful to organisations, practitioners, and scholars who take seriously the aim to leave no one behind.

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