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Developing School Leaders: an international perspective

Edited by Mark Brundrett and Megan Crawford, 2008

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Developing School Leaders: An International Perspective offers a valuable contribution to the current debates on what constitutes effective preparation for the unique role of headteacher. The text is arranged in eleven chapters beginning with an introductory overview of the global context before focusing on leadership development in ten diverse cultural contexts. The views of some of the most senior commentators in this field are brought together to trace historical and recent developments in leadership preparation. Explored throughout the text, are five key questions or themes, which encapsulate the issues and dilemmas currently facing all of us within the field, regardless of the different contexts and specific challenges facing individual countries.

Internationally, the importance of school leadership continues to attract considerable attention, having been identified as a key constituent of effective schools, particularly in the UK (Gunter 2001; Leithwood et al., 2006; MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001). In recent years, leadership and management development has attracted increasing interest by those engaged in the field of educational leadership and management. The apparent headteacher/principle recruitment crisis being globally experienced, has led to engagement in discussion as to what constitutes effective preparation for headship. This being set against a background of concern related to the changing role of the headteacher, within a predominantly global shift towards the devolved governance of schools.

The text is of particular interest to this reviewer who manages the development of the Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH) programme for the South East (SE) of Scotland Consortium (based at University of Edinburgh). The five key themes explored throughout the text are extremely pertinent to the continual development of the SQH programme. The SQH programme introduced in 1998 first as a pilot and then as a national programme was originally delivered through three consortia. Each consortium comprises a collaborative partnership between Education Authorities and at least one university who work in a unique partnership to oversee, deliver and develop the programme. That partnership ensures dialogue and mutual consideration of the operational priorities of the employer and the concerns of University staff to situate current Scottish practice in a broader literature and academic framework. Revised in 2005, each consortium introduced key changes born through experience of working with the programme, situated within the specifics of local contexts. Given the limited numbers of candidates undertaking the programme, the then Scottish Executive sought to develop alternative routes to achieving the Standard for Headship (SEED, 2005) in a drive to attract more candidates into headship. In chapter three, Cowie explains that although reaction to the proposal was mixed, the CPD Leadership Group recommended that a pilot be established to test flexible approaches to meeting the Standard. Following a request from the national SQH consortia, the Scottish Executive agreed to fund an alternative route pilot through one, the SE, Consortium. The Western Consortium elected to fund its own pilot alternative route.

The first of five themes explored through the text is that of achieving an appropriate balance between academic and practical considerations. In chapter three, Cowie argues that a distinctive feature of the SQH programme is its alignment of a

professional and an academic qualification and alongside this, a strong commitment to work-based learning. Indeed, within the revised SE Consortium's SQH programme, the emphasis on work-based learning is increased throughout the five courses until work-based learning comprises half the double module time of the final course. As Cowie observes, the programme is grounded in school experience, as participants are required to lead and manage a whole school project, integrating reading and professional dialogue and applying what they have learned, reflecting upon, analysing and evaluating their experience of leading and management practice.

The second of the five themes explored through the text is whether provision should be located within or out with higher education institutions. The fifth theme explores which model(s) of accreditation should be promoted/developed. Both those themes are directly relevant to current tensions in Scotland where the Scottish Government still hold the Standard for Headship and award the Scottish Qualification for Headship; the GTCS is responsible for the accreditation of the programme; and each University is responsible for the validation of their programme and the award of the Post Graduate Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management. The CPD Leadership Group is charged by the Scottish Government with the development of the national flexible route pilot, the budget for which has been extremely generous.

In chapter two, Brundrett (drawing on the work of Bush and Glover, 2005) argues that knowledge of theory, research and practice is vital in order to ensure that leadership draws on more than the individual's own professional and personal biography. A key strength of the SQH programme observed by Cowie in chapter three is its emphasis on the development of theory in practice through 'workplace learning' (Reeves et al., 2002).

The current drive to develop alternative/ flexible routes to achieving the Standard for Headship should be motivated by a need for quality candidates rather than volume of candidates required for headship. A misinformed view of the SQH as being overly academic is perhaps rooted in a historic perspective of academic programmes, a position which Brundrett explores through chapter two as having changed since the early 1990s when a growing acceptance developed of workplace skills and professional needs forming an integrated part of academic programmes without sacrificing academic rigour.

The third of the five themes explored through the text relates to which models of leadership studies pertain to education. In chapter one, Brundrett and Crawford recognise that, with the possible exception of North America, the emphasis on leadership as opposed to management or administration is fairly new. In chapter two, Brundrett acknowledges that the need for enhanced leadership training for schools derived from a shift to school-based systems of management, together with the increased regulatory and accountability requirement embodied in the 1988 Education Act, which transformed the role of head teachers from leading pedagogic experts to that more in line with business managers. The scope for leadership and management is much greater within the self-managed school (Bush, 2008).

In chapter three, Cowie acknowledges a tension between competing ideologies within the revised Standard for Headship, where a power dimension is evident through two opposing narratives, resulting in tension between their underpinning values and principles, as one thread about development, improving practice, self reflection, learning and improving capability, is in contrast to the other which is more to do with managerialism, accountability and policy implementation. Cowie argues there is limited reference to collegiality and participative management rather, the

leadership model advocated is expressed in terms of motivating staff and ensuring their compliance in pursuit of externally set priorities. This strikes a chord with Bush's (2008) observation that although governments would like schools to have visionary leadership, they would clearly wish for a school's vision to be aligned with government imperatives. Cowie asserts that the revised Standard for Headship reflects the ambiguous mix of bureaucratic central control with rhetoric of increased professional autonomy.

Bush (2008: 109) asks the question, 'developing leaders or leadership development?', suggesting that although the most successful adult learning appears to grow from the identification of personalised learning needs, individualised learning is difficult to organize, can be expensive to deliver and perhaps more importantly, whereas a personalised approach may succeed in meeting the aspirations of individual leaders, it is unlikely to ensure that national and community needs are met. Bush (2008: 127) also recognises that, "for 'statutory provision', in particular, it also compromises the standardisation required to justify the national programme' label". In chapter three, Cowie draws on a range of studies into the SQH programme to conclude that one of the benefits of the work-based learning model is its requirement to work productively in teams to take forward whole school projects which have a positive effect, not only on individual programme participants, but also on the culture of the school as a whole. Indeed, the SQH is premised on a set of design principles underpinned by research into professional learning (e.g. Eraut, 1994), emphasizing that learning has to influence practice and make a real difference in schools. The learning and assessment activities are designed to make connections between the personal and professional context of the individual, the policy context in Scotland and the conceptual and research framework written up in the international literature on school leadership and management, and professional development.

The fourth of the five themes explored through the text relates to the search for informed policy and strategy, based on research into the impact of leadership development. In chapter one, Brundrett and Crawford observe that although educational leadership development has become a major focus across the globe, as a field it remains under-examined and under-researched. Bush (2008) asserts that although there is a widespread belief that it makes a difference, there is very little empirical support for such assumptions, calling for well-planned and well-executed long-term studies to assess the impact of leadership and of leadership development. Brundrett et al. (2006: 104) advise, 'If school leadership courses are to be successful they must integrate the best of academic programmes and take full account of emerging research evidence' while the NCSL (2007: 18) proposes, 'a new alliance between learning on-the-job and off-site development' is required.

In chapter two, Cowie recommends that alternative approaches be integrated with the SQH, allowing greater flexibility and responsiveness to individual contexts and circumstances, whilst safeguarding meaningful, coherent and developmental opportunities for headteacher preparation. However, Cowie also recognises that where universities play a dominant role, SQH participants are required to adopt a critical approach in keeping with post graduate study and as such, are encouraged to challenge orthodoxy, look beyond their experience to social and political issues and challenge their own position and perspectives. Furthermore, that in the present political climate such an approach may not be in favour.

It would be somewhat ironic if current efforts to develop alternative routes to achieving the Standard for Headship resulted in the demise of the SQH and the retention of one route, called the alternative route. Sadly, this could become a reality

within two years if the Scottish Government do not take great care in their handling of current developments. In chapter three, Cowie cautions that the commencement of alternative routes may have serious consequences for the SQH programme. Indeed, one of the three national consortia, the Northern Consortium, no longer provides the SQH programme. In the SE Consortium, recruitment numbers on the Standard Route have already been negatively affected. Given the OECD (2007: 15; 39; 140) view that, "the Scottish Qualification for Headship is an outstanding and demanding programme" which is "of international significance" as well as its recognition that the Scottish approach to the professional development of headteachers is "world class", this would be a terrible loss.

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Deirdre Torrance, Academic Coordinator of the Masters in Educational Leadership and Management in particular, the SQH Programme, University of Edinburgh, UK.