



Successful leadership in times of challenge

**Report on the ISSPP/National College/University of Nottingham
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Resource

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Introduction and aims

The Successful leadership in times of challenge seminar was a two-day joint international event led by the International Successful School Principals' Research Project (ISSPP) Network, the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (National College) and the School of Education, University of Nottingham. It brought together senior education professionals and lead academics globally to share best practice and learning about how to grow and sustain the successful leadership of schools.

More than 120 delegates took part in a series of workshops, presentations and discussions in which they attempted to draw out lessons about the common qualities, skills, attributes, approaches and practices of school leaders who have continued to improve outcomes for children and young people over a prolonged period of time.

Delegates included members of the ISSPP set up in 2001 by the University of Nottingham, to create case studies examining successful school principalships across the world. They were joined on day two by leaders of schools and children's centres in England who, as members of the National College's research associate programme, have engaged in their own research that highlights the insights and findings that benefit the whole system.

The energetic and collegiate event was characterised from the outset by the high level of professional respect and regard between participants.

The first day was spent examining international perspectives through the work of the 14-country ISSPP, whose members led workshops in which they explored the implications of their findings internationally, for school leadership in England and for individual school leaders in their own contexts.

The second day focused more sharply on the English context and on the perspectives of UK practitioners. National College research associates led ten workshops and there was further input from ISSPP colleagues regarding values, culturally responsive leadership and capacity building.

What emerged over the two days was that while different countries face their own social and organisational changes and the language and phraseology used can differ, the problems facing educators are very similar across the world. While solutions are localised, generic themes can be identified such as closing the gap and sustainability and there is growing international consensus about what makes a good leader and a good school.

Both days closed with a plenary from which key issues were identified that will help inform the National College's research agenda going forward. Delegates therefore had an opportunity to reflect on and adjust their own practices as well as influencing the direction of policy and research in the UK and potentially across the world.

"One of the real surprising things in this project [ISSPP] is that when we started in 2001/2002 we could never agree with colleagues from other countries what a good school is, because the Nordic way of looking at schools was very different from America and England. These days we seem to agree more: we all know what a good school is."

Lejf Moos, Denmark

The international successful schools principalship project (ISSPP)

Christopher Day, Professor of Education at the University of Nottingham and founder of the ISSPP gave a brief introduction to the ISSPP. The project had been set up in 2001 at a meeting he had convened in Nottingham with academics from eight nations. Their aim was to work with leading practitioners to create a range of case studies examining successful and sustained school principalships in Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, England, Norway, Sweden and the United States.

Over the last nine years the ISSPP had produced more than 100 case studies, contributed more than 70 papers to internationally refereed journals and produced three books. More recently, another six countries had joined the project – Cyprus, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa and Turkey – contributing to what had now become the largest and longest running research network on successful school principals.

On day two David Gurr, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, Australia, gave further insights into the work of the ISSPP.

Schools were selected by the project on three broad criteria, They had:

- received positive external review/inspection reports, particularly with regard to their leadership
- had improved their test results over time at an exceptional rate
- were led by principals who were acknowledged by their peers as being successful.

The selection requirements had to be flexible, however, because not all countries produced league tables of test results or inspection reports.

The project found that in addition to the four core leadership practices of setting direction, developing people, developing the school and leading learning and teaching, successful principals in the ISSPP:

- ensured a physically and emotionally safe environment
- clearly articulated core values
- constructed context-sensitive improvement plans
- established trust progressively
- were visible in school
- influenced teaching and learning
- worked collaboratively in the broader context to develop new opportunities for students.

Some countries in the ISSPP had gone on to develop their own frameworks for successful school leadership. Australia's model, for example, talked about three levels of educational leadership from contextual influences through school capacity to teaching and learning.

These successful schools were not successful in every way however, and their upward trajectories did not rise evenly: it was a bumpy ride of highs and lows. Many successful principals also routinely worked 75 hours a week which impacted on their relationships outside school and they were often less concerned with their own well-being than the well-being of their pupils and staff.

The international workshops

On the first day, delegates were invited to select and attend two workshops from a menu of five. The workshops brought together representatives from Sweden, Denmark, Australia, the US, Cyprus and South Africa to present their findings under specific themes of school leadership. A list of workshops and presenters can be found in the Appendix.

Workshop 1: how successful leaders build and sustain success

This looked at the findings of case study work with six successful schools in Scandinavia, visited in 2002 and again in 2008 to ascertain how they sustained success in a changing political and educational landscape.

Scandinavian trends included increased recognition of the need for a broader comprehensive and social education as well as traditional academic subjects, and the need to build stronger relationships with parents. This was creating relatively new tensions for principals in balancing external pressures to improve test scores with concerns about taking care of the whole child.

Key points:

- Principals have to be aware of political and educational changes but at the same time remember the basic principles of schooling and why they are there in the first place: “Tests and league tables are not the reason for what we do, they’re just what we have to do to stay in office.”
- Self-renewing schools shift the focus from leaders to leadership, from individuals to communities. They distribute leadership and place increasing emphasis on team deliberations and negotiations to get consensus.
- As leadership is successfully distributed over time, principals are able to take a step back and turn their attention toward observing, supporting and mentoring staff in their teaching and learning practice.
- Successful principals use a range of different leadership strategies and action as they move from scenario to scenario to build and sustain relationships with parents, teachers and pupils.

Workshop 2: leadership for change

The first part of this workshop looked at research with district superintendents and four principals at different school levels in the US to find out what their definitions of success were and to try to answer the question: “Change for what?”

The second part looked at how three successful principals in Australia have approached change within their schools in very different contexts. The research aimed to uncover common characteristics in leading processes of change and sustainability.

Key points:

- Successful principals are all driven by a core vision and values that they are able to articulate and share with the school community. They work continually to build relationships with staff, parents and students so that everyone has a voice and ownership of change.
- Building trust is two way, principals have to establish their own trustworthiness as well as trusting others and distributing leadership.
- They register external pressures and translate relevant information to the rest of the school community, but they are also governed by a greater purpose that leads them to take risks and have ‘creative resourcefulness’ in ensuring students get what they need.
- They recognise that change is an emotional journey, so are sensitive in getting the timing and pacing right and finding ways to make people feel excited about change.

Workshop 3: leading teaching and learning

This three-part workshop focused first on five successful school principals in Cyprus to draw out common themes about their leadership. It then looked at how three very different but equally successful principals in Australia have influenced learning and teaching in their schools.

The third part examined four case studies of successful school principals facing different kinds of cultural diversity and challenge in the US where, like the UK, external pressures of testing and measurement are high. It examined how principals mediate some of the pressures for their teachers in order to provide a broader holistic education - beyond test scores - for children.

Key points:

- Successful school principals model good teaching themselves. They allow teachers to observe and discuss their teaching and they in turn give specific feedback on their staff's practice.
- The principals were very hands on and omnipresent around school. They insisted on high standards from students and teachers, but they consistently praised hard work and used creative management strategies in leading teaching and learning.
- There is no generic framework for successful leadership because every context is different, but there are common strands of focus:
 - vision and direction
 - developing people
 - managing change
 - teaching and learning.
- All the principals were successful with regard to outcomes but they defined real success as being for the whole child, and they used external accountability structures to leverage improvement.

Workshop 4: community and leadership

This focused on relationships between schools and their communities in the US, specifically high poverty communities. In New York State there were schools with 100 per cent free school meals and many were seen as an outside force by the communities they served. The workshop looked at how one outstanding headteacher had led the transformation of a school from being the worst in its district to the best.

The second part of the workshop looked at a preparation programme for aspiring principals in San Antonio, in which participants were encouraged to connect with their communities by going into the homes of students to make multi-media education documentaries.

Key points:

- The language is 'we' not 'I' and the understanding is that no-one can do this alone: "We are all in it together".
- The outstanding head made herself highly visible, listened to what the community wanted and acted on what people said in order to build trust. She had a strategy and a system for everything so that "no-one could say they didn't know what to do".
- Maintaining school success is harder than getting a school to where it needs to be: "Principals have to pay attention to everything because nothing will happen or continue by itself".
- If teachers do not respond it is sometimes better to suggest the school is not the right place for them: "I will work with a teacher longer to improve their teaching craft but I will not work with a teacher who doesn't care and they know that".

Workshop 5: closing the gap

This workshop examined the notion of the achievement gap and how it is viewed by schools in different national contexts. An elementary school in New York went from being one of the lowest achieving schools in its urban district to one of the highest achieving, while a small high school in Massachusetts raised achievement with adolescent immigrant students who had little success in traditional high school settings.

Two rural South African schools – part of the Dinaledi or ‘star schools’ for mathematics, science and technology education – had demonstrated outstanding learning achievement to become two of the top achieving schools in the country.

Key points:

- The importance of establishing trust and working in partnership with the community and families.
- The need to ensure that basic needs like food and emotional support are provided for in order to create the right environment for learning.
- The success of the Dinaledi project has been dependent on the availability of quality teachers who can teach high-level maths and science and develop students’ proficiency in English.
- Common elements included offering additional instruction to learners after normal teaching hours and at weekends, as well as financial support from donors and school-community partnerships.

Ten strong claims

Christopher Day, Professor of Education at the University of Nottingham, shared some of the headline findings from a three year national research project commissioned by the Department for Education and the National College which investigated the impact of leadership on pupil outcomes in schools in different contexts.

The report 'Ten strong claims about successful school leadership', is a digest of this mixed methods study which had used survey and case studies of primary and secondary schools in England that had experienced progress in their pupil attainment under the leadership of the same headteacher for at least three consecutive years. The digest is available through the National College website.

The study identified eight key dimensions of successful school leadership and several broad phases of school development related to context, disposition and values.

The real new learning in the report, however, was in the way in which the school leaders had layered the use of different leadership strategies as the schools moved from poor performance to outstanding. They began, for example, by concentrating on improving pupil behaviour and building relationships in the initial phases, adding other strategies later – such as distributed leadership – once trust had been established.

The findings highlighted the application of professional wisdom in clustering strategies for improvement according to a school's context and in relation to teachers, pupils, parents and employers.

“Research tells us that success is achieved over time through the values informed application of combinations and accumulations of context sensitive strategies. These are based upon the head's diagnosis of the concerns of policy and parents, the professional needs of staff and the best, broad educational interests of all pupils. It is the relative intensity with which these are applied and sustained in particular phases of the school's improvement journey which makes the difference. This is at the heart of what successful leaders do in achieving and sustaining success.”

Christopher Day, England

The English context

Toby Greany, Operational Director at the National College looked at the English context for school leadership.

In addition to the 'macro' challenges of climate change, community cohesion and skills development, there was the efficiency challenge. The new coalition government was committed to cutting the budget deficit and it was likely that the schools' budget overall would go down. The government's manifesto also included strong moves to give schools more autonomy, increase the number of academies and introduce the new concept of free schools.

The immediate name change from the Department for Children, Schools and Families to the Department for Education signalled a shift in approach from schools 'integrating' in the wider system of social care and health, to schools being more directly responsible for addressing disadvantage and raising achievement, albeit in partnership with other services.

There were three key challenges for the system and for leadership:

- reducing variability within schools as well as between schools, here middle leaders were the critical engine room for change
- closing the gap, not one gap but lots and the larger ones are to do with ethnic group and socio economic class
- enhancing sustainability, growing the next generation and making the job doable and enjoyable so that more people want to stay in it

A survey conducted by the National College showed that while many deputy and assistant heads under 40 were thirsty to step up to headship, they also felt they were not being given opportunities to take on additional leadership responsibilities. It was crucial for headteachers to distribute leadership and bring on the next generation of leaders.

Around 60 per cent of headteachers were now undertaking roles outside their own schools - mentoring new headteachers, becoming national leaders of education (NLEs), local leaders of education (LLEs), school improvement partners (SIPs) and executive heads of two or more schools.

There was a significant growth in collaboration between schools and other services and school leadership teams were larger, which was partly to do with the development of important new roles such as school business managers (SBMs).

England had the second most devolved and autonomous system in the world and it was becoming increasingly diverse: a typical local authority would have trusts, federations and many other collaborative structures, all of which created a complex environment for school leaders.

Research for the National College showed that successful leaders for change constantly worked to bring together the big picture. They saw the opportunity of new money and a new approach and they integrated it with their vision for their school. Finding time was a big issue though, and while a lot of time was spent on operational day-to-day issues, still comparatively little time was spent on strategic issues and working directly with teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

A framework for leading change and improvement, developed for the National College, showed that moral purpose and the core business of teaching and learning were the centre of all activities, but organisational improvement, being outward facing and the development of others and of oneself were essential factors for success.

School leaders needed to develop themselves by spending time working in other schools. They also needed to take time out to reflect: to "spend time on the balcony as well as the dance floor". Many schools were now successfully using research as a tool for improvement and were involved in continuous inquiry and reflection as part of their everyday work.

Since 2001, the National College had funded and supported 200 school leaders and children's centre leaders to undertake research as part of the research associate programme. Their research was critical in informing the work of the National College and was considered by school leaders to be among the most valuable and important for improving their practice.

"You can have lots of conversations about leading for change, but if you don't ask the initial question 'change for what?' you are heading down the wrong track."

Gary Crow, US

The practitioner workshops

On the second day, delegates were invited to select and attend two workshops from a menu of ten. Members of the National College's research associates programme shared the research they had undertaken into the challenges and issues that school leaders are facing in England. A list of workshops and presenters can be found in the Appendix.

Workshop 1: can federations help stars come out? Exploring the unique contribution of federations to the development of school leaders

This looked at the link between federations of schools and the continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers.

Key points:

- Research showed that staff benefited from schools federating under a single governing body because it enabled them to hold joint CPD sessions, share good practice, experience working in other settings and even permanently move roles across schools.
- Federation led to efficiency savings, especially if schools shared a school business manager (SBM) across the federation.

Workshop 2: no more heroes? Does collaboration spell the death of the heroic leader? and flourishing, finite, fading or floundering? Building a sustainable collaboration

This two-part workshop looked first at how to start partnerships and collaborations and then how to continue to make them flourish.

Key points:

- Transformational leaders are often charismatic, but unlike heroic leaders, they succeed in collaborations through a belief in others rather than a belief in themselves.
- To be successful, collaborations need to:
 - agree objectives
 - plan a time frame (if finite)
 - manage conflict and changes to leadership
 - articulate and share the benefits
 - facilitate rather than dictate change
 - plan to flourish

Workshop 3: a culture of coaching: changing perceptions over how schools improve

This looked at the impact coaching can have on classroom standards through developing and empowering staff.

Key points:

- Coaching makes a difference because it ensures staff teams are motivated and challenged, which is vital in securing improved outcomes for young people.
- Times are changing and there is a tangible move towards greater peer support, with more coaching and structured professional dialogue. Teachers are beginning to feel less vulnerable about swapping ideas and observing each others' practice.

Workshop 4: congruence or conflict: using the Every Child Matters agenda to support leadership succession planning

This investigated the extent to which schools were able to use the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda to further their leadership succession planning.

Key points:

- Headteachers can use ECM and the projects and initiatives that stem from it to give middle leaders more leadership responsibilities, such as healthy schools, after school clubs and walking buses. This impacts positively on both the delivery of ECM and succession planning.
- As external training becomes more expensive in relation to budget sizes, developing the leadership potential of staff in this way is highly cost effective.

Workshop 5: the importance of emotional intelligence to effective school leadership

This workshop sought to simplify the notion of emotional intelligence as well as looking at the importance of self-analysis in the leadership role.

Key points:

- Emotional intelligence (EI) is one of three key areas of outstanding leadership, along with communication and high expectation.
- A definition of emotional intelligence: “Possessing an uncanny insight into your own and others’ feelings/emotions and having an acute sense of how these can influence people’s perceptions/outlooks, and then deploying this awareness to produce positive outcomes”.

Workshop 6: federating the future, an analysis of the impact of federating schools and becoming an executive headteacher

This workshop looked at interviews with six executive headteachers to analyse the strategic, operational and personal qualities of leaders of successful federations.

Key points:

- All of the executive headteachers interviewed had replicated their current successful structures in their new schools and believed the systems they had in place could be rolled out across the country.
- All of the executive headteachers had learnt a huge amount about themselves and felt they were better leaders as a result of becoming executive heads – though they were working excessive hours and admitted to having have no work-life balance.

Workshop 7: working better together, a practical guide for embarking upon in-school collaborative development

This investigated four types of existing collaboration – a collaboration, federation, extended schools cluster and networked learning community – and presented a toolkit of good practice.

Key points:

- The benefits of collaboration include the mutually beneficial swapping of ideas and good practice across different curriculum areas and the ability to jointly access resources that schools might not have been able to afford individually.
- Six steps of the collaboration toolkit:
 - determine the objectives
 - agree a limited number of small projects
 - establish clear management structures
 - communicate the benefits
 - anticipate negative episodes
 - celebrate positive outcomes.

Workshop 8: leadership coaching, an evaluation of the effectiveness of leadership coaching as a strategy to support succession planning

This looked at the findings of a project to provide coaching for deputy headteachers in the North West of England who were National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) graduates.

Key points:

- Participants valued the personalised approach of coaching in addressing their individual learning needs and the relationship with the headteacher-coach gave them confidence and increased clarity of direction in pursuing headship.
- Coaching sessions need to be set within an agreed framework because without formal parameters, pressures of time and workload are likely to erode the engagement of all parties in the coaching process.

Workshop 9: dots on the horizon, futures thinking and its place in school improvement

This workshop looked at how useful futures thinking can be for school leaders and what methods might help them use futures thinking for school improvement.

Key points:

- Futures thinking was not about attempting to predict or foretell the future, but about scanning the horizon for trends in order to ensure the education system moved with the times and best prepared children for adulthood - theirs not ours (otherwise they would become disenfranchised).
- Useful tools for futures thinking included media items such as the Big Issue newspaper and TV's Question Time.

Workshop 10: ganging up, the impact of gang culture on school leadership

This workshop looked at how gang membership impacts on schools, and what leadership skills and strategies are needed to promote the inclusion of young people at risk of joining gangs.

Key points:

- The tension between the standards agenda and the inclusion agenda: headteachers striving for 30 per cent five A* to C grades find it easier to ignore the gang problem and exclude pupils who don't measure up.
- Engaging pupils involved in, or at risk of being involved in, gang culture necessitates:
 - an inclusive ethos
 - a whole school strategy with audit, risk and needs assessment
 - partnership working with other services and agencies
 - provision of an alternative curriculum for young people who have an early sense of failing academically.

Three dimensions of building and sustaining success in schools

Delegates were invited to attend one workshop from a menu of three led by international practitioners. A list of workshops and presenters can be found in the Appendix.

Workshop 1: values

This highlighted the core values of successful principals and how personal and professional values influence the way principals lead their schools. It compared ISSPP research findings in relation to successful principals in Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

Key points:

- Australian definition of values: well-developed philosophies shaped by role models and early learning coupled with a sense of moral purpose and a motivating hope for a better future.
- The notion of thin versus thick values, thick values such as strong religious beliefs are not open to negotiation but thin values have some flexibility and allow communities to come together on a foundation of democracy rather than dictatorship.

Workshop 2: culturally responsive leadership

This presented a framework, developed through cross-national studies, for successful culturally responsive leadership. It also looked at examples of best practice in multi-cultural schools in the US and Israel.

Key points:

- There were three tenets of culturally responsive leadership: high expectations for students' achievement to move away from deficit and look at strengths; incorporating the history, values and cultural knowledge of students' home communities in the school curriculum; a critical consciousness to challenge inequities in society.
- Being culturally responsive in some cultures could pose a dilemma for principals; if they wanted to take all children to high achievement they had to challenge the influence of their backgrounds because respecting home cultures often meant giving up on the idea of students going to university.

Workshop 3: capacity building and sustainability

This looked at the findings of three of the original teams from the ISSPP who had returned after several years to schools they had studied in the US, Australia and Denmark to find out how successful leadership had been sustained.

Key points:

- The traditional view of leadership largely focused on the supervision of teachers in using a 'black box' of technologies and systems to produce traditional forms of achievement, whereas the scope of contemporary leadership was much broader and involved principals being more context sensitive, and building relationships outside school to provide a wider range of outcomes for students such as citizenship and life-long learning.
- There were five key strands to capacity building:
 - developing personal capacity
 - the professional capacity of staff
 - the organisation's capacity
 - the capacity of the community
 - social capital.

Key themes, unanswered questions and where next for research

At the end of each day, delegates broke into discussion groups to reflect on what they had learnt and pick up themes from the workshops. The emerging themes and questions were then captured in plenary sessions with input from panels of ISSPP members and National College research associates.

Theme 1: collaboration and time to learn

Delegates felt it was vitally important for school leaders and teachers from different schools to create opportunities to meet together and share best practice, whatever the country or setting. Principalship can be a lonely occupation and collaboration provides inspiration, learning and support.

It was also important for principals and staff within schools to find quality time to talk and reflect, a rushed meeting at the end of the school day when people are tired was not good enough.

“In Finland, one criteria of success is less teaching time because it means staff have more time to talk to each other and build successful teams.”

Olof Johansson, Sweden

Theme 2: does working with the community create a dilemma for headteachers?

There was recognition that headteachers and principals need to build relationships with families and local communities, but this creates a potential dilemma for principals; should they focus on the extended role or should they concentrate their efforts within school on improving standards of teaching and learning?

Distributed leadership and a team effort was the answer for headteachers and principals trying to pull together all the different external and internal components of the job.

“Successful heads influence a much broader community than the children and parents. They manage tensions and dilemmas (which cannot always be solved) in relation to engaging the stakeholder communities which they know are so important in contributing to the quality of education for children and young people.”

Christopher Day, England

Theme 3: values

All the research confirmed that successful leaders have strong core values and a clear ethical and moral purpose driving their efforts. There would always be contexts and changes to deal with, but their values helped them mediate external pressures and bend and shape policies to fit what they knew needed to be done. The political role of the principal in relation to values was expanding, with the idea of principals as ‘activist professionals’ most recently evidenced in the UK SATs test boycotts.

As well as leader’s own values, there were also cultural values to consider. A specific framework for successful leadership may be valued by one society, for example, but not another. Principals needed courage to overcome such potential barriers to school improvement.

“Are we willing to live the values that we hold?”

Olof Johansson, Sweden

Theme 4: reflection

Delegates talked about the importance of reflection on values and practice, and how to engender a need for continual reflection among the next generation of school leaders who might be too hooked up on the managerial and organisational aspects of running a school.

One of the most challenging aspects of the National College's new middle leadership programme was getting clusters of middle leaders to build reflection time into the day-to-day life of the school.

"We need to embed reflection into the psyche of middle leaders. It's a key part of preparing people for leadership."

Jill Ireson, England

Theme 5: the policy environment and pressures

There was debate on the challenge for principals in seeing how the numerous education reforms and initiatives joined up to create the bigger picture, before then translating the policy into "something sensible" in school.

Delegates felt the professional judgement of principals was undervalued by policy makers. Terms like 'contingency leadership' and 'creative insubordination' were used to describe the way successful principals adapt policies to suit their own contexts. A number of successful principals also used external mandates to leverage improvements locally, such as using test score targets to focus teacher attention on attainment.

Theme 6: sustainability of successful leadership

There was discussion about what happened to schools when charismatic leaders left. Did successful programmes fall apart because 'ordinary' principals could not live up to the standards of those who had gone before? Was it really possible to develop a system that you could confidently say would create more successful schools over time?

It was pointed out that the charismatic head featured in one of the workshops had empowered people within her organisation. She had put a skills set in place and invested time and energy in supporting the professional development of staff. She had worked collaboratively with the community and with a corporate bank. All of these things have built the school's sustainability so that it can continue to prosper after she leaves.

"We have our heroes but we are not talking about heroic leadership in the sense that what they do can't be done by others. When you break down what these successful leaders do, you can see that others can do it equally well, if a little differently, and the school will continue to do well."

David Gurr, Australia

Theme 7: distributing leadership

One of the key skills of successful leaders was to stop micro managing and step back in order to empower middle leaders and allow them to move forward, but some principals were unsure how to open up leadership without facing complications of changes in pay and job titles.

Some successful headteachers had provided leadership opportunities by giving middle leaders a short term pay enhancement to lead a six month or year-long project looking at a particular area of school improvement. This approach allowed more flexibility in developing leaders because the projects were not linked to permanent levels of seniority.

“Leaders need to open up leadership and that can be scary, but it is a strategic move as well.”

Kathy Sillman, US

Theme 8: vision

A number of delegates raised the issue of how principals can articulate a strong vision for their school. They felt that rather than bringing their own ready-made vision to the table, principals should encourage their school communities to come up with a collective vision so that everyone had ownership of it.

Some delegates said they would rather talk about ‘making sense’ of what was happening inside and outside school because this built on the practice of everyone involved. They felt vision suggested a far off star that couldn’t be reached, rather than a workable goal.

“Our whole purpose was to prove that with the right ingredients, teaching, parental involvement and climate our students could learn as much as, or better than, any other students regardless of their background or emotional problems.”

Yvonne Minor-Regan, US

Theme 9: the importance of context

In thinking about superimposing US or European models for sustaining successful leadership on other contexts, delegates were mindful that issues and models need to rise from the ground up because of the diversity of school contexts.

There was no single way of being a successful leader or a successful school. Models were simply a way of comparing and distilling research and saying: “These are some of the findings that you may find helpful”.

“There are so many barriers and issues for schools operating in very difficult circumstances; bureaucracy, child poverty, racial issues, language barriers, insufficient resources, social injustice, safety and security. It’s not an 8am to 3pm job!”

Connie Moloi, South Africa

Theme 10: funding

Understanding how funding linked to improved student attainment and where education systems could get best ‘value for money’ was a big issue. Investment had risen in some countries with no appreciable difference in attainment. Perhaps the systems for measuring success needed to be broadened to include impact on development of the whole child.

Delegates felt however that teacher quality and professional development was definitely a key area for investment.

“In England we measure the input of money against the output of a rather narrow set of statistics.”

Andrew Pearson, England

Unanswered questions

- How do principals build support for change initiatives and other school mandates in the face of teacher resistance?
- How do we improve our ability to attract and sustain young teachers and middle leaders in their leadership aspirations?
- It's a principal's challenge to motivate a group, so do we talk too little about the different kinds of motivation and its impact?
- Many successful school leaders are rebels who beat the system, so does inspection improve school leadership?
- Is it fair to expect school leaders to have to do all this?
- Are principals affected by globalisation?
- How do you narrow the traditional divide between academics and teacher researchers and further the links this conference has demonstrated?

Where next for research?

At the close of the seminar, delegates were asked: "If the National College was going to do just one piece of research on successful leadership in times of challenge, what should it be?"

- How the system can support system leaders.
- The different practice of headteachers in different cultures to capture not only the similar things they do, but also the different things they do in different ways according to their culture.
- How to maintain momentum in monitoring the effectiveness of schools, and how to be sure we are still researching the right stuff.
- How to address the tension between taking risks and 'zero tolerance' of failure.
- How school leaders can work with higher level education as well as across their own school settings to develop themselves, and grow the next generation of leaders.
- What leaders of failing schools don't do or do wrong.

Appendix A: list of workshops

The international workshops

Workshop 1: how successful leaders build and sustain success

Olof Johansson, Professor of Political Science, Head of Department and Director of the National Head Teachers Training Programme at Umea University, Sweden

Leif Moos, Associate Professor at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Copenhagen

Workshop 2: leadership for change

Lawrie Drysdale, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership at the Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, Australia

Helen Goode, Sessional Lecturer at the Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, Australia

Gary Crow, Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Indiana University, US

Samantha Scribner, Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Indiana University, US

Workshop 3: leading teaching and learning

Petros Pashiardis, Professor of Educational Leadership and Academic Head of the Studies in Education Programme with the Open University of Cyprus

David Gurr, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, Australia

Rose Ylimaki, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Arizona, US

Workshop 4: community and leadership

Steve Jacobson, Professor of Education and Administration in the Graduate School of Education, University of Buffalo, US

Yvonne Minor-Regan, Principal of Westminster Community Charter School, Buffalo, New York, US

Chon Garza, Assistant Professor in the Department of Education Leadership and Policy Studies, University of Texas, US

Workshop 5: closing the gap

Lauri Johnson, Associate Professor of Educational

Administration at Boston College, Lynch School of Education, US

Connie Moloi, Professor at Vaal University of Education, South Africa

The practitioner workshops

Workshop 1: can federations help stars come out?

Exploring the unique contribution of federations to the development of school leaders

George Ford, Headteacher and Elaine McCue, Headteacher of the Federation of Abbey Schools, Darlington

Workshop 2: no more heroes? Does collaboration spell the death of the heroic leader?

Paul Ainsworth, Vice Principal of Belvoir High School, Nottinghamshire

AND

flourishing, finite, fading or floundering? Building a sustainable collaboration

Josephine Smith, Vice Principal of Long Field High School, Melton Mowbray

Workshop 3: a culture of coaching: changing perceptions over how schools improve

Jo Lindon, Deputy Headteacher of Harwood Meadows County Primary School, Bolton

Workshop 4: congruence or conflict: using the Every Child Matters agenda to support leadership succession planning

Gillian Woods, Headteacher of Askrigg VC Primary School, North Yorkshire

Workshop 5: the importance of emotional intelligence to effective school leadership

Kevin Bullock, Headteacher of Fordham Primary School, Cambridgeshire

Workshop 6: federating the future, an analysis of the impact of federating schools and becoming an executive headteacher

Roger Blackburn, Deputy Headteacher of The Chandler C of E Junior School, Surrey

Workshop 7: working better together, a practical guide for embarking upon in-school collaborative development

Ben Cribb, Assistant Headteacher of St Anselm's College and Upton Hall School, Wirral

Workshop 8: leadership coaching, an evaluation of the effectiveness of leadership coaching as a strategy to support succession planning

Martin Hanbury, Headteacher of Chatsworth High School, Salford

Workshop 9: dots on the horizon, futures thinking and its place in school improvement

Andrew Pearson, Headteacher of Bramcote Hills Primary School, Nottingham

Workshop 10: ganging up, the impact of gang culture on school leadership

Anne Raynor, Deputy Headteacher of Ecclesfield School, Sheffield

Three dimensions of building and sustaining success in schools

Workshop 1: values

Olof Johansson, Professor of Political Science, Head of Department and Director of the National Head Teachers Training Programme at Umea University, Sweden

Ross Notman, Director of the Research Centre for Educational Leadership and Professional Development, University of Otago, New Zealand

Workshop 2: culturally responsive leadership

Lauri Johnson, Associate Professor of Educational Administration at Boston College, Lynch School of Education, US

Dorit Tubin, Senior Lecturer and Head of the Centre for Promotion of Professionalism in Education, Ben-Gurion University, Israel

Workshop 3: capacity building and sustainability

Steve Jacobson, Professor of Educational Administration in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Buffalo, US

Lawrie Drysdale, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership at the Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, Australia

Helen Goode, Sessional Lecturer at the Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, Australia

Lejf Moos, Associate Professor at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Copenhagen

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