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# Lost Quality in Emergent Leadership?

The identification and development of inexperienced teachers as future school leaders

How might we identify teachers early in their careers who would make effective heads? What qualities will they already possess as emergent leaders? How should we train and develop them?

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## **Introduction**

This study seeks to explore how headteachers attempt to recognise headship potential in inexperienced teachers. As they reflect on their early experience of headship, they explain the difficulties they encountered. These recollections influence the attributes they now look for in teachers who they see as potential leaders.

When teachers become headteachers many things change. People regard a new head in a very different manner and have different expectations of him or her than they might of a new teacher. Responsibility and accountability increase and the challenges and demands are many. This study attempts to replicate the experience of new headship by placing teachers in new contexts where leadership and direction are expected. The participants reflect on critical incidents and their feelings and actions are recorded in journals. As the teachers lead training or coaching initiatives they meet resistance, challenge and uncertainty, such as might be expected in headship. The study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of such experiences in the learning leadership process.

## Statement of the problem

The identification of 'the problem' developed from a personal perspective, following 24 years in primary teaching and experience of seeing emergent leadership qualities in inexperienced teachers being 'lost'. The intent of this study is to add to the wealth of knowledge about leadership behaviour and training which looks to prevent teachers becoming disenchanted and subsequently lost to the profession, and in many cases to headship.

My view is that it is possible to identify future school leaders after two or three years in teaching. At a meeting (January 2002) of approximately 30 headteachers in one local education authority, there was no hesitation in establishing a group of headteachers to help with this research. Equally there was a general and firm agreement among those present that it was indeed relatively easy to identify teachers with leadership qualities very early in their careers.

Only two in five deputy or assistant headteachers currently in post have any desire to become heads, according to a report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate (Ofsted 2000/1). This would indicate a potential shortfall of headship applications in the future. Evidence is already emerging that applications for posts are falling. Male (2002) reports that those who are making it through to headship are either self-motivated, encouraged by existing headteachers or are "thrust into the role in the absence of other suitable candidates". The Fast Track Teaching programme was introduced by the government in September 2001. The programme "focuses on the rapid development of professional excellence in the classroom as well as leadership" (DfES, 2001). It seeks to identify and reward teachers with the "greatest ambition and potential".

The initiative may make up some of the shortfall of headteacher applications in the future, although in September 2002 only 110 teachers had successfully survived the first year's training, from over 1,500 applications for the programme in September 2001. The Fast Track initiative invites teachers with at least a 2:1 honours degree to apply, but there are many other teachers, without similar academic qualifications, working in our schools today who could, I suggest, lead a school effectively. The initiative acknowledges how many excellent teachers have been fast-tracked in the past by 'visionary headteachers'. There appears, to date, to have been little enquiry into how they have done this or to make use of their ideas and training strategies.

This study presupposes that headteachers should and could play a significant role in the process of identifying emergent leaders. It explores how headteachers are preparing teachers for headship already and proposes a strategy for developing the leadership capacity of young teachers using real and challenging contexts and reflective journals.



## Rationale for the study

Approaches to headship preparation need to continue to evolve. The number of people working in schools is increasing; many primary school classrooms now have two paid adults, a teacher and support worker. According to Brighouse and Woods (1999), "staff are looking for actions to match the words of the newcomer". They expect change. The newcomer needs to be confident in his or her own philosophy and able to understand the emotions of others, in order to motivate actions in favour of a shared vision and educational direction. The work of Goleman (1996) has raised the status of the debate about the centrality of the emotions to our understanding of all aspects of social behaviour. There is no one way to be an effective school leader, but the need to create, "a collaborative culture in which there is a unity of purpose" is recognised in Southworth's work (1998). According to West-Burnham (2001), "the relationships that exist in our schools make everything happen...or otherwise".

The effective engagement with others is not presumed easy. The teachers in this study were placed in new, challenging situations and asked to reflect upon the critical incidents they experience, as they write in journals. Some teachers acted as consultants in their own schools, others in one not previously known to them. In one instance, a one week internship was organised. A teacher assumed the role of leading mathematics teacher for a full-time teaching week and subsequently responded to discussion and questioning about his teaching from colleagues employed at the school. In both the consultancy and internship situations, the engagements with other staff were many and real (as opposed to those experienced in role-play scenarios). The initiative was designed to provide challenging interpersonal experiences, such as might be expected in a new headship.

The purposes of the study were to:

- investigate whether it was possible to recognise leadership characteristics which could be used to identify potential future headteachers early in teachers' careers
- trial consultancy and internship experiences as strategies for developing appropriate interpersonal skills for aspiring young leaders

The questions which followed from these purposes were:

1. What do practising headteachers identify as leadership qualities for potential headship?
2. What do practising headteachers say about inexperienced teachers they perceive as having emergent leadership qualities?
3. Can these teachers learn about effective leadership through reflecting on their own behaviour?

We need to have greater understanding of how effective future headteachers can be identified, developed, supported and challenged within their roles. Gronn (1999) suggests that the time is long overdue "to take seriously the documented experiences of people as they go about acquiring a sense of themselves as leaders and to pass on the benefits of those insights to those coming up behind them".

History pays tribute to many people who have risen to the challenges of their times and provided extraordinary leadership. Gardner (1996) defined them as "persons who, by word and/or personal example, markedly influence the behaviours, thoughts and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings".

The enormity of present-day challenges and changes in education, and indeed the accompanying pace of them, is an overwhelming factor in choosing to conduct this particular study. The changing relationship of the school to the outside world, the pressure to raise educational standards and the accompanying accountability have raised the essential focus of the headteacher's role to one of leadership. This is not to suggest that the management and administrative aspects of the role no longer exist, rather that the pressure of being responsible for the results of students has led to an increased onus within our schools to make decisions based on the particular contexts headteachers work in. The increased delegation of funding directly into schools, following the Education Reform Act of 1988, increased autonomy for headteachers. Sometimes this means being bold, and taking risks. Ultimately it means having the support of the necessary people to implement the curricular and organisational initiatives agreed. The complexity of headship can be explained by the judgements and decision-making being made at the right time, in the right way and involving the right people. I suggest that the way in which headteachers motivate, influence and enthuse others is critical to the effective leadership of the future. The identification of leadership potential early in teachers' careers, and the trialling of innovative training strategies as proposed in this study, comes at a time when high quality leadership is consistently acknowledged as being the pivotal force behind successful schools. It also comes at a time when there is an apparent reluctance by deputy headteachers to take up the reins of headship. The 'new' leadership needs to be able to respond to turbulent conditions and promote confidence throughout the institution. Beginning a headship during a time of radical and persistent change gives the post holder little time to establish themselves professionally. This study is focused on the need to identify potential headteachers early in their careers and provide planned opportunities to lead others, in order to develop their interpersonal skills, which I see as being a key ingredient to school effectiveness over the coming years. In an attempt to find one solution to the potential shortfall of headteachers in the future, the study is focused on emergent leadership and nurturing leadership potential through early identification and effective development.

## Leaders and leadership

Decades of academic analysis have, according to Bennis and Nanus (1997), “given us more than 850 definitions of leadership”. Literally thousands of empirical investigations of leaders have been conducted in the last 75 years alone, but no unequivocal understanding exists as to what distinguishes leaders from non-leaders. Leadership may well be described as the most researched, but the least understood, of many concepts. At the beginning of the 21st century it is important that the profession develops its understanding of effective school leaders and leadership behaviour.

A wide variety of terms have been used to describe leadership styles including: autocratic, charismatic, democratic, instructional, invitational, situational, transactional and transformational. Preoccupation with leadership styles continues. Although Hammersley (1977) warns against being oversimplistic, some categorisation seems to be necessary to compare and contrast the various styles and to recognise that each gathers significance dependent upon events, external forces and the individual, particular contexts of schools. If an early identification model of leadership potential is to be accepted, then it is highly relevant to reflect upon what is already known and understood about leadership characteristics and styles.

It is not surprising that transformational leadership is a current, popular perspective on school leadership. Transformational leaders deal effectively with the busy transactions and challenges in their daily lives which typify that of headteachers at this time. Bennis (1984) identified five competencies which transformational leaders possess:

- vision – create and communicate a compelling vision which induces commitment from others
- communication and alignment – gain support for the vision from a multiple of constituencies
- persistence, consistency and focus – maintain direction even in difficult circumstances
- empowerment – can tap and harness the necessary energies and abilities to bring about results
- organisational learning – find ways and means to monitor performance. Capable of abandoning and rearranging when faced with new or adverse conditions

The current climate of constant and pervasive change, new technology, and increasingly faster communications is probably what has brought transformational leadership to the forefront of leadership ideas, together with the responsibility given to the headteacher to manage change and raise standards.

There can be no blinkered view about which teachers can be trained to lead. My view is that staff should have professional development opportunities to develop their leadership skills from the outset of their careers. The capacity of individual teachers to take on increasing leadership responsibilities will vary. Not all will have the capacity to respond to the challenges of leading in the most senior of positions, but a culture openness, security and trust is supportive of staff making personal, informed decisions about their own professional development and future career paths. It will also be supportive of teachers being in a position to recognise their talents, which might otherwise remain latent.

This research study proposes that headteachers can play a crucial role in identifying future school leaders at early stages of their teaching careers and are in a strong position to enable and promote leadership experiences, both internally and externally, from which to learn. If quality time for such leadership activity is not preserved and promoted, then the opportunities for effective school leadership development in both individual and global contexts may well be diminished.

## What sort of leadership training?

A government-backed study reported upon by Thornton (2002) found that only two in five deputy and assistant heads want to follow their headteachers into headship. The big turn-offs are seen as bureaucracy, paperwork and the endless stream of government initiatives. This study proposes that the complexity of headship is made so not only due to the pressures cited above, but also, and possibly even more so, by the interpersonal pressures which are unpredictable and multifaceted. Certainly, the more pluralistic approach to training and developing leaders advocated by Southworth (2002) in order to “take account of the inherently variegated nature of leadership” would seem to be somewhat overdue, yet highly appropriate. Leadership, if perceived as a social construction, will recognise the variation between settings and the necessary differences in styles and strategies required of a head. Southworth describes the necessary change in leadership development as a move away from the adoption of one “overarching theory” to take greater account of diversity and complexity found within school leadership today. None of the heads was found to be satisfied with the school’s current performance, whether that was underperforming or an already high-level of success.

Fink refers to learning leadership as “a journey with plenty of detours and even some dead ends” (2002). This study proposes that any detours, dead ends, disappointments or distractions should be regarded as learning leadership opportunities. What is of interest to me here is the fact that all the headteachers in the study had had early management experience. Very early in their careers, the four heads, “had received both recognition and opportunity for development early on in their career paths” (Smith, 2000). Smith’s study and this research both advocate early leadership identification and development.

The dilemma of providing relevant training and development in order to increase competence and headteacher applications is not just a priority in the UK. Johansson (2001) reports applications for headship lower in Sweden than five years ago. Very few articles offer a positive picture of headship and the demands of change are great. In Sweden, a new national headteacher training programme is in place. The training emphasises a capacity for reflection and the promotion of a working climate inspired by openness, reflection and learning. The new training recognises that “the control of related emotions and anxiety has an impact on educational leadership” (Johansson, 2001).

## Interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence

The case to be argued is that high interpersonal intelligence plus optimism for the desired outcome (vision) are prerequisites for effective leadership. Harnessing the vision and motivating teams involves operating at an emotional level with others. Being able to recognise our moods, feelings and mental states and the way they affect our own behaviour and changes to our mental states will support our understanding of the same in others. Training for leadership needs to maintain this focus and understanding.

The ability to read emotions in others, having a regard for others and being able to empathise are fundamentals for running effective schools. According to Goleman (1996), “understanding our moments of rage and fear – or passion and joy – reveals what we can do to subdue our most destructive or self-defeating emotional impulses”. In so doing, he continues, we will be able to “rein in emotional impulse; read others’ innermost feelings; handle relationships smoothly”. He looks forward to a time when education “routinely inculcates essential human competencies” such as self-awareness, self-control and empathy and the arts of listening, resolving conflicts and co-operation.

Some people do indeed seem to naturally have the capacity to deal effectively with others. In this study, it cannot be accepted that there is such a thing as ‘an interpersonal gene’. Otherwise training and development would become defunct. The suggestion by Green (2000) is that the capacity to manage one’s own emotions is a certain prerequisite to dealing effectively with others. The study proposes that placing teachers in new leadership situations with others in a planned way will provide experiences to learn initially about oneself, in order to enhance the ability to understand the behaviours of others. The dilemma and complexity of headship isn’t found in the impressiveness of a school development plan but in making people want it to succeed. Without this element of leadership, the management of writing a development plan will have little impact on the effectiveness of the school. Interpersonal intelligence recognises the potential we unlock in others.

## **Effective teachers: effective leaders?**

I want to suggest that primary schools are leadership intensive organisations. All members of the teaching staff have significant leadership roles, most running their own organisations of 30 pupils. Simultaneously, they may also carry whole-school responsibilities for subject co-ordination. There can be nothing more important in a school than responsibility for a class of children and their learning needs. It is the observations of the teachers as leaders in the classroom, and as leaders of innovation in subject co-ordination, which will help headteachers identify them as potential school leaders of the future.

Brighouse and Woods (1999) describe teachers as “the real leaders in the everyday business of schooling”. If it is accepted that school leaders have effective teaching and learning as their core function, then it is conceivable that their own application, understanding and beliefs as class teachers are useful starting points for identifying leadership potential. Exemplary leaders are not created by their headteachers, but they do need to be discovered by them. No clear and unequivocal understanding exists as to what distinguishes leaders from non-leaders, although Brighouse and Woods quote a study in which they asked pupils in one school to nominate teachers who exercised classroom leadership and received 450 nominations for one teacher.



## Training leaders

Frank Green (2002) likened the role of head to a gymnast; he maintained that to be a headteacher you have to be physically fit and also mentally very tough, perform the routines without injury, look graceful, accomplished and stylish. To use this analogy is to suggest that rigorous training is a prerequisite for headship. Traditionally though, headteachers have taught for many years during which time their strengths have been recognised and sequences of promotions subsequently gained. Preparation for headship has historically been left to chance and a graduated accumulation of skills as responsibilities increased. The climate of the 21st century recognises the fact that future heads need high quality preparation and support in order that "schools are successfully led by headteachers who exemplify and celebrate a culture of high expectations, continuous improvement and accountability to staff and pupils" (introduction to the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), Heather Du Quesnay, June 2001).

The complexity of learning leadership is grounded in the high level of sustained significant engagement with others. In the course of the head's day it is possible that all or many of the emotional extremes of joy and disappointment, anger and celebration may be encountered.

To propose training and development in real contexts is to accept the pressures of headship, the challenges that are met on a daily basis and to permit future leaders to make the connection between teaching/learning and leading others in pursuit of high standards. The strategy proposed does not presume to be comfortable. The recall of what was learned (in order to be of use the next time a similar situation presents itself) will depend on the quality of the prior learning hooks of the participants.

## The training proposed

Cognitive skills can be taught by lectures, but the development of emotional skills and understanding need personal involvement where the learner experiences the emotional context. Role play scenarios and presentations are typical training activities undertaken in this study. And consultancy is also a training strategy designed to make learning experiences real and increase accountability.

The participants will recognise their success (or not) as they reflect in their diaries. This process is supported by a mentor because, as Dallas et al (2000) report, self-esteem and confidence to analyse and make changes to styles and approaches improves when working with a 'critical friend'.

'Consulternships' (a term coined by Neumann and Banghart, 2001) are currently being used in the United States. Employers and academic researchers identified a gap between corporate needs and graduates' skills (Oblinger and Verville, 1998). The gap involved graduates who had little real world experience and their area of development was seen as communication and problem-solving skills. In the same way, this study proposes that real world experiences of leadership roles in schools may well realise the same benefits as the Neumann and Banghart (2001) project:

- practical educational opportunities
- research linkages
- knowledge dissemination
- in-house development for teachers
- organisational learning
- effective change management

- financial benefits (saving to school on training budgets)

In this study the teachers have nominated by their heads, and the teachers offer their area of expertise to one other or a group of others. The study recognise the potential for a win-win outcome:

WIN	WIN
<b>Consultant</b>	<b>School</b>
Personal knowledge, skills and understanding about leadership improved	Financially beneficial Knowledge, skills and understanding of consultants area of expertise transferred

### Win-win outcomes of Consulternship

Interpersonal intelligence is difficult to teach. It is why heads need to identify interpersonal skills early in teachers' careers. This is to accept the notion that we are all good at something and some people are good with other people. It is as much about recognition and 'drawing out' people as it is about subsequent training. Interpersonal leadership is about reacting to situations and dealing with complex relationships, but this process begins with yourself, your values and past experiences.

### Reflections as a training tool

According to Reynolds (1999), critical reflection involves "a commitment to questioning assumptions and taken-for-granted beliefs in both theory and professional practice". It requires participants to have the capacity to learn from their personal experiences, in order to gain genuine and sustainable understanding. It can be considered different from other thought processes in that the process of reflecting implies that there is some doubt about an existing practice or that the situations are complex. There is no doubt about the latter claim in the context of this study, as people dynamics are unpredictable and the position of leader is powerful. There is, in addition, significant danger in the leader who is so driven by achieving a vision that he or she may fail to reflect upon the motivations, viewpoints and situational circumstances of others. It is not to suggest that reflection will always be comfortable, indeed Conger (1990) recognised that leaders may avoid reflecting because "such reflection might challenge their favourable perceptions of themselves".

Critical reflection, used as a training tool in this study, has no predefined agenda. The starting point is a personal critical incident. The research used journals for such incidents to be recorded. The reflective approach is specific and rigorous and yet at the same time accessible and economical. The principle of reflectiveness is highly relevant to the never-ending sequence of judgements in the working life of leaders. Winter (1995) attempted to clarify the reflective process. He considered that, in order to make a statement, you must first imagine yourself in someone else's shoes. In trying to communicate you must first construct meaning for yourself.

The study asked participants for explicit reflection upon critical incidents using the following questions:

- How could I have managed this situation more effectively?
- How was my comment about 'x' received by individuals?

Senge (2000) recognised that leadership learning gained from “systematic and informed reflection on work” is an effective training strategy. He develops his ideas about the importance and relevance of critical reflection by giving an example of how it can be used. He identifies effective team development as a critical leadership role. Through reflection, the different ways in which different groups can be engaged and connected will bring together the relevance of theory on practice. Senge recognised that the teaching of effective leadership needs to challenge people to think about what they did and what they created, instead of telling them. The aim in using reflective journals to learn leadership is to advocate a ‘puzzling out’ of why some efforts and behaviours work and others clearly do not.

The reflective process can be viewed as a journey. The study focuses on the first step on the real journey of learning leadership. The capacity to reflect on self – to move towards an authentic awareness and understanding is the initial stage on a journey towards what is almost spiritual. The external trappings of pace and pressure are seen as secondary to a need to undertake an internal journey.

## Fast tracking

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) established its Fast Track Teaching programme in 2001 in order to “focus on the rapid development of professional excellence in the classroom as well as school leadership” (DfES, 2001). Its aims were to:

- identify and reward existing teachers with the greatest ambition and potential
- bring into teaching more of the brightest and best graduates and career changers
- develop teachers’ skills for rapid progression to senior posts

The information provided to schools in November 2001 acknowledged “the countless examples of excellent teachers already being ‘fast-tracked by visionary headteachers’ and through ‘rigorous self-development’ those who have fast-tracked themselves”.

My own view is that talent and potential for leadership need to be moderated by both experience and job-related competency or skill. It seems to me that decisions about entry for a fast track route into headship or early entry onto NPQH as proposed in this study are more appropriately the role of practising headteachers, who will be aware of the interpersonal and leadership qualities in their teachers. The headteacher is key to identifying and developing leadership potential in the workplace itself. It is here that the realities of the day-to-day challenges of leading others take place.

## Leadership behaviour in inexperienced teachers

### Six headteachers reflect

This section seeks to identify the leadership qualities that six practising primary headteachers believe they can recognise in teachers very early on in their careers. Their individual interviews were followed by a focus group interview with the heads together. It sought to highlight the agreed characteristics and make them succinct, in order to be of use to practising headteachers.

Following the six individual interviews, a substantial range of descriptors for identifying leadership potential had emerged. The key focus now had to be to present an agreed succinct rubric of leadership characteristics, which may be of practical use to school leaders. There was disparity and diversity of opinion within the individual interviews about how leaders could be most effectively trained, in what time-span and by whom. The headteachers in the study did not believe that the teachers they identified as potential headteachers in the future need necessarily move school for promotion. Internal moves involving additional responsibilities within their current schools seemed to be increasingly acceptable. Finally, having identified, trained them and promoted them, what do effective leaders look like and could they be effective anywhere?

There was agreement among the group that headship fell into two distinct aspects: task and people-orientated ones.

The discussion about there being something inherent in some people, which leads us to identify them as potential effective school leaders, brought disagreement within the group:

I can see leaders on the playground *as children*. I can see *myself* on the playground. Other children look at them! It's a bit like stage presence. People cannot look away from them... they give off these signals. (Edward Smith)

I don't agree! I was never one who led in the playground. I think confidence is important. I wonder if the experience of an early Ofsted is a good idea? It seems to be common (to our thinking). I think the interjection of Ofsted gives confidence, even in terms of survival...not for all people though. (Molly Dainty)

The above quotes, although apparently opposed, led to a tentative agreement in that leaders can be trained and developed, but not all teachers could, or would, benefit from the experiences that are later suggested by the group. There persisted a theme of something, almost spiritual, about identifying leadership potential:

They need to have aura...a positiveness...close to charismatic. I know charisma is out of fashion at the moment. They carry the banner! They say "*stick with me!*" (Edward Smith)

In attempting to establish some agreement about this 'factor', it was Christy who stressed the need to remain realistic. The phrase 'realistic self-belief' was coined at this point. There was a further search for words to describe a unique quality of a leader:

What's the word for someone who's got the skill to be able to see every channel of event and plot a pattern...someone who can see all the pitfalls and goes along a *certain* path...charts the path of least resistance! (Peter Siddalls)

When the word 'paragon' was suggested, accompanied by laughter, Peter was undaunted:

...someone who's got the big picture...makes success? A lot of heads haven't got *it*...it could be a personality trait. The word cautious?

As we explored 'realistic self belief', Julie described a deputy headteacher who hadn't got 'it'...or *thought* he hadn't!

My deputy doesn't see me falling apart at the seams, but he perceives me as having skills he thinks he will never have. I think my deputy is stunning at what he does and will make a superb head...but it's *his* perception of his own skills and his lack of experience!  
(Christy)

Christy was *not* an advocate of fast-tracking, calling herself an 'experience nut'. She believed that gathering the experience for headship takes time and that it was her responsibility to ensure her deputy received it. 'Conflict resolution' experience was one experience she felt had to be provided in the training situation, particularly if the Fast Track initiative was to be successful. It is possible that one's 'life experiences' may not have included the range of people interactions necessary to be an effective school leader. The debate continued around time issues. Christy had some problems with the necessary time needed to gather life skills:

I can't see how you can transport somebody after a very short space of time into some of the situations that I've had to deal with as a head. In my first two years I would have given up if I'd been 28. When I was 28 I was... quite a powerful person, quite determined. Looking back *on myself* I would have walked away and given up on it.

There was some experience within the group of seeing people come into headship too soon and subsequently being unable to cope. They had been "very dogmatic" and "didn't have the people skills". Humility was a factor within the identification of future leaders, as the teachers didn't apparently intend or set out to "command respect from others", they just did. Again, there was a vagueness as to how humility could be achieved. The teachers being discussed were "largely unaware just how good they were" (Christy). Humility was agreed, and later subsumed within the phrase 'realistic self-belief', as a necessary attribute for effective leadership.

Risk-taking, according to the heads, was important but alongside this the ability to laugh at yourself and recover from mistakes. This necessary characteristic was seen as critical to taking risks as they would inevitably lead to mistakes being made. These were seen as part of the learning leadership curve.

The ability, or capacity, to do the job was recognised as being fundamental to selecting teachers for leadership training and development. The demands of primary headship were seen as substantial. Primary school heads needed to be "good team players", have a "liking for responsibility" and "a perception of the dynamics between people and a perception of the politics".

The fast-tracking debate was lengthy and the headteachers were not in agreement about how fast fast-tracking a teacher to headship could be. Within a school it was considered more acceptable, but not to take on a new headship in another school in too short a time. Internal fast-tracking was acceptable in circumstances where headteachers had established training and development opportunities. The responsibilities the headteachers had assumed for this was impressive. There were carefully considered procedures by several heads in the study to ensure leadership training and development in-house. Overall, there was a greater belief in internally-processed development than expected. There was also an agreed assertion that, even with training strategies in place for leadership development, the initial years of headship are always going to be fraught:

It's like having a new class. That new class is always different, but bloody useless AT THE BEGINNING! (Edward)

Eventually the headteachers agreed that the six attributes were essential to being able to cope with early headship and also that the characteristics were recognisable in teachers early on in their careers:

- showed empathy
- possessed an aura
- were reflective practitioners
- held a realistic self belief
- had drive
- possessed astuteness

And the word 'capacity' was widely used as heads considered what they saw in the teachers... the capacity to cope with the demands of the role, which the heads felt in many ways defied training.

In reaching their judgements about necessary leadership attributes, the headteachers subsequently reflected on their own performance.

I don't think I'd make a good head second time around. I think we're [intimating the group assembled] relaxed now...but to be new and not have that... [experience?]  
(Peter)

As the heads pondered upon the attributes they had decided on, they discussed training and development. 'Three C's' were considered highly influential in the success and effectiveness of a new headteacher:

**CAPACITY** to do the job

**CONTEXT** of the school inherited

**PREVAILING CULTURE** and the vision of the new head

This study is focused on the first of these.



## Learning leadership in consultancy and internship contexts

This section presents a summary of the entries the consultants and interns in the study made in their reflective journals. As each teacher reflected on their behaviour and feelings at times of critical incident, they sometimes felt that if the situation presented itself again they actually would not change their actions. They deemed their behaviour to have been effective in achieving satisfactory and appropriate outcomes. On other occasions the changes they wished to make were of a practical nature. Finally, whenever the teachers felt on reflection that they would change their behaviour if in a similar situation again, it was either stated how they might do this or left open-ended. On these occasions the participants did not appear to know what had gone wrong or indeed how to correct it. The headteachers in the study had identified six essential attributes for teachers they felt would make effective heads in the future. It was now the focus of the study to see whether consultancy and internships were appropriate training strategies for learning leadership. In particular, whether there was evidence to suggest that the six attributes were developed in the processes.

A critical incident was seen as one in which the participant was questioned or challenged by others. There were unanticipated interruptions and the consultants needed to react immediately. They were the moments the consultants remembered most significantly as they wrote in their journals at the end of the day or session.

- The learning that took place was often one of confirmation and reassurance. The behaviour was seen as effective when the response was positive from the people present, and when the consultant could reflect on the reasons the actions were appropriate.
- In the instances when people could most quickly see how outcomes of incidents could have been improved, they were most often practical changes which needed to be made. These varied from changing the seating arrangements, to gathering more information about the prior knowledge of the teachers before a meeting. The role of the observer was significant at these times. The support of the observer for the changes the consultant were, most often, agreed by the observer. The observer noted more details about possible changes to behaviour, and this was helpful.
- The consultants were not always happy with the outcome of the incidents recorded, but were often able to reason why and suggest alternative strategies. At times when consultants found their experiences difficult and not going how they hoped or intended, reflections were thoughtfully considered and a new resolve for the future made. . On some occasions the reflections resulted in alternative behaviours being discounted by the consultant themselves. The process of writing in the reflective journals seemed to help their reasoning.

In concluding the consultancy experiences, the teachers were asked to respond to a simple questionnaire. The values of the reflective journal to them personally and in a wider context of learning leadership were the two areas upon which the seven consultants made comment.

Every consultant acknowledged the usefulness of writing reflective journals following their experiences. Wendy stipulated that they would be of more use over time "than in a single act". Dianne wrote that "it forces you into looking at other peoples' needs".

The consultants were asked about any surprises they'd had as an outcome of keeping a journal. Surprises came when the consultants found themselves in situations they'd previously been confident in and something unexpected happened. When unexpected feelings of impatience and accountability arose, one was taken aback. Further surprises were reported by other consultants

when a task or role they were looking forward to as a challenge, turned into a greater challenge than they felt prepared for. Positive surprise was also reported, "I was a lot calmer than I thought I would have been".

In conclusion, to the question about use of reflective journals as part of a structured training programme for future school leaders, the following comments were received:

A perfect tool for reflection, self-evaluation and improving your own practice. (William)

Useful for staff as a means of improving performance when dealing with new situations. (Wendy)

It gives you a record of strategies you have used – a bank of ideas. (Gary)

Normally, you just move on to the next crisis. It makes you stop to consider your actions. (Sheila)

It was suggested that journals were most useful when they:

- are used as a basis for discussion
- are honest
- are used in different situations and contexts
- arise from a need to learn about other people's needs
- lead to a change of direction

Both the participants and the author recognised the value of reflective journal writing, with some provisos. The 'cold comfort zone' experiences did present some challenging interpersonal situations and subsequent emotional reactions from which to learn. In other instances there was reaffirmation of perceived effective behaviour. Such confirmation is seen as testament to the learning identified by the heads as realistic self-belief. Confidence in oneself is developed through reflecting and believing that a particular behaviour brought about effective outcomes. Where leadership learning was less evident and participants did not understand how they might change, there is an expectation that mentor support would help the process.

## Conclusions

1. Headteachers are suitably placed to identify and effectively develop teachers for the interpersonal demands of the headship role. This is not to deny the benefits of NPQH training, rather to suggest that increased use of school-based experiences, planned and directed by headteachers, need to be recognised and integrated into existing programme(s). Headteachers are already providing fast-track training in innovative and responsible ways. This is largely unrecognised, poorly resourced and undervalued. The notion of 'leadership schools', in which headteachers are actively engaged in training and developing teachers for future headship roles, may well need to be accompanied by additional resources for both the headteacher and the teachers involved.

2. Headteachers in the study had recognised that interpersonal skills were critical to effective leadership. They were providing real experiences for teachers to learn this aspect of leadership by placing them in new, real contexts in various ways. They were actively exploring external initiatives and this included approaching other schools to offer the expertise of teachers to deliver training and development in other institutions. Consultant opportunities and internship placements provide valuable experience of learning about self and understanding others. Such strategies could well be developed within NCSL's networked learning initiative. Schools could play a reciprocal role in receiving support, which address their own identified areas of weakness. At the same time, participants would maintain reflective diaries about their experiences in order to develop their interpersonal knowledge and understanding of human behaviour. The use of reflective journals was considered a valuable tool for learning leadership in this study. Making explicit the implicit was worthwhile in itself. There was evidence to suggest that the leadership characteristics identified by the heads could be developed, particularly empathy, astuteness and a confidence that will ultimately be determined as realistic self-belief. There is an implication for the wider use of journal writing, for example to reflect on classroom practice, or following parent consultations. The commitment of the headteacher to the process is critical for the training strategy to be most effectively deployed.

3. Headteachers at the beginning of the 21st century are recognising the need to identify emergent leadership behaviour early in teachers' careers. The heads in the study believed that this was not difficult. Implicit in the work was an acceptance that teachers have particular strengths and these need to be nurtured and developed throughout their careers, beginning at the beginning. The six essential characteristics identified by the heads in this research resonate with those put forward by advocates of interpersonal leadership. The recognition that the 'nourishment' of people within the workforce will realise the vision, is to acknowledge that people are a school's most valuable resource.

4. The process of 'cold comfort zone' learning, as used in this study, is a proactive strategy for encouraging others to see themselves as leaders. It did not presume to be comfortable and if used within training programmes for headship in the future, will not necessarily be so. Headship is not a comfortable domain. It is challenging, multi-faceted and often pressured. The consultancy experiences emulated early headship pressures effectively. The learning evidenced in teachers' journal writings were significant. To fail to provide such leadership learning experiences would be to fail our school leaders of the future. The power to make changes in schools at the beginning of the 21st century lies in the hands and hearts of the people who lead them. The changed role of headteachers over recent years requires innovation in their training. Early identification and development of leadership potential, as proposed in this study, comes at a time when the need for support and effective training has rarely been greater. Failure to recognise this factor is to prolong the real danger of losing the leadership quality within our education system today and into tomorrow.

5. The role of the mentor was largely untouched in the study. There was an obvious need for advice and support in many instances, following the writing in the journals. There was doubt as to the value of mentorship amongst the participants in this study and this seemed to be dependent on the receptiveness of the teacher, as well as to the confidence the teacher has in their own perceptions of their own behaviour.

6. Headteachers are currently actively engaged as initiators or facilitators of leadership development. Strategies for achieving effective school leaders of the future need to be frequently reviewed and refined. School-based experiences, in which real context challenges are met provide a rich source of leadership learning opportunities for headteachers of the future.

7. Headteachers in this study recognised two distinct aspects of headship. They were aware that every headteacher needs to have developed both efficient 'task skills' and effective 'people skills'. The latter, interpersonal aspects of the role, were learned 'on the job' by the headteachers in the study and there was a strong feeling of being unprepared for this aspect of their headship roles. They had significant difficulty in suggesting how they could have been better prepared. Training and development of future headteachers was always going to be a challenge they felt, because of the suddenness and shock of accountability and ultimate responsibility.

8. All six headteachers believed they were working with teachers, with two or three years' teaching experience who had the capacity to become headteachers. They used the term 'emergent' to describe this phase of leadership which is very early in a teachers career, before they have acquired middle management roles. The headteachers were convinced about their ability to identify headship potential and in the individual interviews often gave elaborate descriptors about them. These teachers worked hard, were successful in the classroom, meticulous in their planning and preparation. The words 'ambitious', 'highly motivated', 'enthusiastic' and 'highly committed' were used in contexts to describe their behaviour. There was reference to 'strength of character' and the ability to command respect from an audience. Often, these teachers seemed unaware of their qualities. There was reference to the teacher holding 'a wider vision' than the immediate and a willingness to take risks. The heads recognised that alongside this was the pre-requisite of coping with failure, rejection and success. Interpersonal skills were valued highly by the heads, as well as the possession of that 'humility factor'. Some of the teachers they described were perceived as either 'too soft' or 'too harsh' and it was the interpersonal aspects of the role which most warranted intervention and development. The heads saw it as their responsibility to promote, support and facilitate such development. Some heads actively created activities and opportunities to experience some of the challenges met by interaction with others. They used temporary responsibilities and new initiatives to allow teachers to experience team-building and leadership. They planned specific training such as role-play, to allow the experience of conflict and resolution. Participating in external initiatives involving the LEA, other school partnerships and networks was actively pursued and encouraged by some heads.

9. Just as there was conviction about emergent leadership characteristics, there was equal conviction about those teachers who were definitely non-leaders. This was not to devalue their skills, rather to recognise that teachers have different strengths. The outcome of the individual headteacher interviews was an extensive list of leadership behaviour descriptions, which needed to be made more succinct to be of practical use to others in the process of early identification. The focused group interview culminated in six agreed attributes of leaders; astuteness, aura, empathy, reflectivity, drive and realistic self-belief. The word 'aura' gave the author the most cause for careful consideration with the group. Words such as 'magical' and 'spiritual' were used and remained as no more tangible than this, at the conclusion of the three hour meeting. There remained confusion and disagreement about inherited traits. The debate

was equally balanced between those who felt they could recognise leadership traits in children (in the playground), and those who reflected on their own childhood that this was definitely not the case. Non-leaders were considered recognisable by their obvious lack of interpersonal skills. The qualification of 'self-belief' to 'realistic self-belief' was unanimously accepted by the group. If a teacher's self-belief was unrecognisable or unrealistic to others, then it was considered highly unlikely they would have the credibility to motivate others in pursuit of a shared vision.

10. Even in circumstances in which the consultant teacher in the study was an experienced head, there was evidence of leadership learning taking place. The process of writing a reflective journal enabled participants to pause in their busy lives and consider their behaviour in terms of effective outcomes.

11. In considering the occasions when empathy was needed, there was also the recognition that leaders need to maintain drive and sense of purpose with their objectives. The balance between moving on regardless and maintaining a listening ear is delicate. To dissolve into an entirely empathetic stance would serve to fail both leader and follower. Such development of astuteness within particular contexts and with different people is borne out of experiences such as those engaged in the study. Reflective practice promotes an embedding of learning. Seventy one per cent of all the diary entries reported the participants unhappy with their activity in some way and there was frequently suggestion about personal change. Degrees of self-doubt confirm self-belief. Within the doubting process is an underlying recognition of need for change.

12. Although the heads in the study felt they could identify emergent leaders as inexperienced teachers, they did not believe they could be heads anywhere. There was agreement about the context of the school being a crucial and influential factor in the effectiveness of the head. This belief was substantiated by the fact that some of the heads were proactive in recruiting teachers with leadership qualities and then preparing training and development for them, for future vacancies in their own schools. These teachers were being trained within an existing culture, which it was expected they would ultimately subscribe to.

13. The heads referred to the necessity for an open climate in schools, if fast-tracking was to be a successful initiative. Failure to be open about why a teacher was receiving certain training may well build resentment and lack of co-operation among other more experienced colleagues. This need to be aware, as a new head, of the prevailing climate, culture and context of a school was mentioned often. There was considerable doubt as to whether a teacher would make a good head in any circumstance. All they could say was that they would make an effective head in most circumstances. Well-developed interpersonal skills were felt to be highly necessary for any serious consideration of rapid career progression. The most significant disagreement amongst the heads was just how fast fast-track could be. The memory of early headship experiences left several heads to conclude that early assumption of the role would not be feasible without significant experience of 'new context' learning. It was evident that some schools were used to placing teachers into new situations and using role-play as well as scenario – setting to support their development as leaders. Temporary management points and short-term initiatives were being given to teachers to enhance their experience of managing change and implementing new initiatives. Even within their own schools, the heads believed there were opportunities for learning leadership in new contexts. The only drawback recognised by the heads was that of developing a dependency culture for the teachers, in which they lacked confidence to move on and out of their respective schools.

13 All seven consultants acknowledged the benefits of journal writing. Their provisos to the process included the need for quality time to write them, the need for mentor support and the desire for headteachers to value the strategy. The author detected personality differences in how the consultants wrote the journals. Several journals were extremely self-critical and two were particularly positive. This leads the author to conclude that mentorship would be useful in

instances of self-doubt and uncertainty, but also at times when reassurance was necessary. The value of the journals would be most effective if used over a longer period of time.

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