

AUTUMN 2002

# Passion and Intuition:

The impact of life history on leadership

How we work and how we lead depends to a significant extent on who we are, which is in turn a product of what we have been.

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## **Contents**

Context of the research	3
Headteachers in the study	4
Methodology	7
Background literature	9
Life histories	14
Findings	32
Implications and recommendations	36
Bibliography	40
Acknowledgements	41
Appendix 1	42

## **Context of the research**

### **Introduction**

The question at the centre of the research is a simple one: how does life history impact on a headteacher's leadership style? Although the question is straightforward, the real and potential answer(s) to the question pose much more complex issues with regard to selection, preparation, training and sustaining effective leadership in schools. A key theme running through the research is encapsulated by Starratt's (1996) assertion:

That we work as we live and have lived. How we react to situations will be coloured by our personality, by our personal history, by our cultural roots, by our class, gender, ethnicity etc.

In other words, how we work and how we lead depends to a significant extent on who we are, which in turn is a product of what we have been.

The research was carried out between April and July 2002. The five headteachers selected all work in schools in challenging contexts. For all of them it is their first and only headship and they have had considerable experience of the role ranging from 4–12 years. Each of the schools appeared in a league table published by the Technology Colleges (TC) Trust in September 2001 which highlighted specialist schools that had made spectacular gains between 1998 and 2001 in terms of the percentage of their students gaining 5+ A\*–C grades.

### **The schools involved**

The schools represent a real geographical mix, from Ripon in North Yorkshire to Lambeth and Barking in London. All of them serve tough, uncompromising neighbourhoods and were at the time of these heads' appointments losing popularity among real and potential stakeholders. In three cases – Wodensborough, Greenwood Dale and Ripon – they were being threatened with closure. Their student rolls currently range from 650 to over 1500, and there is no evidence to suggest that there has been any significant change in the cultural, ethnic, social or ability range of the students they are serving.

Each of these schools has, however, gone through a period of significant change and growth, and all of them have single-mindedly pursued a highly proactive agenda of school improvement so that they are now perceived as successful, vibrant organisations where the competition for places is fierce. The question at the heart of this research is asking what quality, experience or combination of qualities make these heads so effective at school improvement. In other words, how much of what they do is learnt, taught, acquired and how much is intuition – the product of their life histories – over which they perhaps have little or no control?

## **Headteachers in the study**

### **Paul Lowery**

Paul Lowery was appointed to the headship of Ripon City School (now Ripon College) in April 1996. At the time of his appointment, the school was a very small secondary modern which was deemed to be failing and perceived by the whole community as the sink school in the area. Numbers were continuing to fall year on year and the threat of closure was real when Paul was appointed. The fact that support for selection to Ripon Grammar School was intense and had been given national television coverage in the mid-1990s served to intensify the difficulties. The problems facing Paul when he was appointed were, therefore, immense. The school was bottom of the North Yorkshire league tables, the buildings were dilapidated and the general mood of the local community was that it was being kept open to service the reputation of Ripon Grammar School. Added to this there were only 342 students on roll, a situation exacerbated by the number of itinerant students moving into Year 10 and 11 from nearby army bases.

At the time of the research, Ripon City School has been transformed into Ripon College, a popular and rapidly improving specialist school. The roll in 2001/2 was 560 and still expanding although the governors do not want it to go much higher. The college now teaches A-level courses to a significant number of students from Ripon Grammar School and has a vibrant and growing community programme. The OFSTED report of 1999 described Paul Lowery as a headteacher with “assured effective leadership and a clear vision for future development”. The appointment of a deputy head in 1999 and the recent creation of a director of learning and a technology college manager have been key to managing these developments. The buildings have been upgraded and refurbished and significantly, in terms of this research, the percentage of students gaining 5+ A\*–C grades has risen from eight per cent (1998) to 29 per cent (2001), this with a population where nearly 40 per cent of the students have special educational needs.

### **Lesley Morrison**

Lesley Morrison was appointed initially to the headship of St Martin-In-The-Fields in April 1998 having previously been deputy head for seven years. The school has a long history. It was founded in 1699 and is one of the oldest church schools in the country with its ethos firmly rooted in the Christian faith. Originally in Charing Cross Road it moved in 1928 to its present Lambeth site. It is as Leslie says “a multi-ethnic community proud to celebrate its cultural diversity whilst acknowledging its shared humanity”. The majority of the students come from black working class backgrounds. It is a single sex (girls) 11–18 high school where 32.5 per cent have English as a second language and 23.7 per cent have special educational needs. In the late 1980s and early 1990s it had the reputation of being the sink school in the borough.

Under Leslie’s leadership the school has gone from strength to strength and is now a school where competition for places year on year is fierce. It has received national recognition for its gospel choir singing and is proud of its record of performing in front of all bar one of the Royal Family! The school achieved technology college status in 1996

and between 1998 and 2001 the percentage of students gaining 5+ A\*–C grades rose from 30.4 per cent to 54 per cent. Considerable investment has gone into the campus development and at the time of writing, the school is preparing to admit its first sixth formers. Tied in with this is a significant new building programme which will include state-of-the-art sports facilities.

### **Hazel Farrow**

Hazel Farrow was appointed head of Loxford High School in April 1990. The school was renamed Loxford School of Science and Technology after it became a technology college in April 1996. Loxford was built in 1970 and was the first fully fledged comprehensive in Redbridge. At the time of Hazel's appointment there were just over 900 students on roll and numbers were falling. In 1991, 12 per cent of the students obtained 5+ A\*–C grades. The buildings were in a state of disrepair and the school's reputation within the community was low.

Since Hazel's appointment there has been considerable work done on campus development, not least moving from a split site to a single site and significant investment in its information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure. At the time of writing, Loxford has 1500 students on roll, speaking 54 languages: 84.4 per cent of the students have English as an additional language; 90 per cent are from ethnic minorities; 14 per cent are refugees; and 31.3 per cent have special educational needs. Within that context, the percentage of students gaining 5+ A\*–C grades has risen steadily since 1991; between 1998 and 2001 the percentage moved from 34 per cent to 51 per cent.

### **Dave Seddon**

Dave Seddon was appointed headteacher of Wodensborough High School, Sandwell, in January 1992. At this time the school was threatened with closure. Serving a predominately white working class population the roll had fallen to 432 and only eight per cent of the students that year had gained 5+ A\*–C grades. The school had been built in the early 1960s and was in urgent need of repair. Dave remembers very vividly that the prevalent mood of staff, students and parents was that Wodensborough was second rate, deserved to be second rate and had no right or justification to be anything else.

Under Dave's leadership the school has made dramatic improvements and the school role is now 1350. He has secured a great deal of private and public sponsorship. When the school achieved technology college status in September 1996 it changed its name to Wodensborough Community Technology College. Within an area of considerable hardship and deprivation, where 48 per cent of the students have special educational needs, the school's standing in the community has grown to the point where it is now popular and oversubscribed. A particularly notable achievement was the public recognition from OFSTED of the school's improvement since its first inspection in 1994, when it was very close to being placed in special measures, to its second in 1998 when 97 per cent of the teaching was judged satisfactory or better and 66 per cent good or better. By 2001 the percentage of students gaining 5+ A\*–C grades had risen to 40 per cent.

## **Barry Day**

Barry Day has been headteacher of Greenwood Dale School in Nottingham for 11 years. When he took over in January 1991, the school roll was just over 500 and falling. He said that on first seeing the school it epitomised for him just what a failing school looked like: graffiti, broken windows, kids hanging round (and off!) the buildings and an overwhelmingly prevalent sense of chaos and neglect. Greenwood is situated in the east of Nottingham city centre and serves a working class deprived area which presents a range of ethnic backgrounds. It was built in 1973 at the time of comprehensive reorganisation in Nottingham but by the time Barry took up post, the school's reputation had identified it as the sink school in the area and one that was being strongly considered for closure.

In April 1993 Greenwood Dale became grant-maintained, the first school to do so in the city of Nottingham. The opposition was intense and personal and put immense pressure on Barry and his governors but it is a decision he has never regretted. In September 1995 the school was awarded technology college status and obtained the go-ahead to introduce a sixth form. Barry considers the establishment of a sixth form and gaining specialist school status to be defining moments in Greenwood Dale's history. The school roll has now risen to over 1000. Investment in ICT has been huge; the school has over 1000 computers and laptops on site. Greenwood Dale is perceived as being very successful and forward looking. The buildings have been transformed, the school is heavily over-subscribed and the examination results have improved significantly. In 1998, 30 per cent of its students gained 5+ A\*–C grades; in 2001 it was 49 per cent. (This is in a context where 38 per cent of the students have special educational needs.)

## Methodology

### Gathering the data

Dimmock and Donoghue (1996) interviewed six Australian principals who had been extremely effective in implementing successful restructuring in their respective schools in order to examine how their life histories had impacted on their particular leadership styles. One of their conclusions was that:

If we meant to create adventurous principals who are comfortable handling change and who in turn succeed as change agents we cannot afford to ignore the person as well as the person's life history in the critical equation.

Although such a contention is, at first sight, hardly revolutionary in its thinking, the reality is that very little research has been carried out on how life history impacts on a leader's style or on his or her ability – real or potential – to be an effective change agent. Dimmock and Donoghue expand on this by asserting that:

It is imperative that individuals' current state of knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as the significant and the relevant events in their life-histories and past experiences, be acknowledged as key filters and lenses through which meaning of best practice and principles are distilled.

The methodology for data gathering was qualitative in approach, centring on three in-depth taped and transcribed interviews of approximately two hours for each of the headteachers involved in the study. In approaching these interviews, it was important to keep at the forefront of these structured conversations the important distinction made by Goodson (1992) between life story and life history:

The life story is 'the story we tell about our life'; the life history is a collaborative venture, reviewing a wide range of evidence. The life story teller and another (or others) collaborate in developing this wider account by interviews and discussions and by scrutinising of texts and contexts. The life history is the life story located within its historical context.

It was important throughout these extended interviews to steer clear from the purely anecdotal and peripheral and maintain a clear focus on how these headteachers' life experiences influenced and shaped their respective approaches to their school leadership roles. Clearly there are advantages and disadvantages to be found in adopting a wholly qualitative approach to research. The amount of data gathered may be huge and the potential for the intriguing but ultimately fruitless pursuit of less relevant tangential routes is considerable. The primary challenge has to be making sense of the data and looking for links, connections and any possible contrasts or contradictions which help explain these headteachers' approaches to school leadership. Any conclusions reached, in the absence of any quantifiable data, will clearly be subjective but nonetheless based on clear evidence emerging from these case studies.

## **The interview schedule**

Each headteacher was interviewed over a period of two weeks. The first two interviews were conducted on consecutive days and the third was held two weeks later to allow time for reflection. (The one exception was Barry Day where for logistical reasons the first interview was followed by two consecutive interviews ten days later.) The first interview centred on the headteachers' current role. The areas covered dealt with the immediate challenges facing them on taking up the post, the early goals and objectives including their initial successes and failures and what they considered to be the main driving forces and obstacles. In broad terms, these questions related to the first phase of their headship.

The second set of questions targeted the second phase and dealt with management structures, enabling and constraining factors, and the strategies employed for establishing the right cultural ethos. The next set of questions targeted the current phase of their headship and the school's development: the key goals, the real successes and failures, the impact on teaching and learning and their future plans. The final sector dealt with their identification of and response to stresses and stressors and the impact of significant individuals, moments and trends in their improvement strategies.

The second interview concentrated on their life before teaching. Areas covered included their early childhood, family life, school history, professional training, their roles, respectively, as sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, husbands and wives. They were also asked about critical incidents in their lives which had made a real and lasting impact and important individuals and/or events which had been instrumental in shaping their philosophies and approaches to school leadership.

The third and final interview examined their professional careers up to the time they took up their current post. Areas covered included their own development: why they had chosen to apply for particular posts, their reasons for moving on to new jobs, factors which motivated them, their achievements and failures, their developing attitudes and work habits and the people who had had a marked influence on the way they now did their jobs. They were also asked about strongly held convictions and the possible reasons for their existence. They were then asked to describe their own leadership styles as they understood and recognised them. Finally, they considered what training they had found to be of value and what they would consider to be relevant professional development from this point on which would, in their view, deepen their understanding of the role of the headteacher and enhance their effectiveness as school improvers.

(See Appendix 1 for the basic interview schedule.)

It should be made clear that the researcher did not personally know any of these six heads prior to this project. Their selection was on the basis as described above. No pre-knowledge of the kinds of people they are/were existed therefore. This is important to note so that any similarities and generalisations in relation to characteristics that might be found would have genuine validity and not be based on any predetermined idea of the 'head as person' which the researcher might already have.



## **Background literature**

### **Introduction**

In view of the fact that over 30,000 books on leadership have been written in the last 70 years, it is somewhat surprising that so little has been written on the impact of life history on leadership. A current major emphasis is on the notion that leadership is inextricably tied in with the person carrying out the role. There is, therefore, less emphasis now on leaders' abilities measured by competency models and far more on intrinsic values and attributes and how these particular qualities come together in the way in which leaders carry out their leadership roles. If one allows that leadership can be seen as being made up of four elements – knowledge, skills, values and attributes – then this shift of emphasis can be described as away from knowledge and skills, which lend themselves more naturally to competency models, to attributes and values which form an integral part of a person's make-up and his or her unique leadership style.

Howard Gardner (1997) develops this theme when he says:

The ultimate impact of the leader depends most significantly on the particular story that he or she relates or embodies.

What makes leaders successful, he contends, is the fact that they arrived at a story that worked for them and ultimately for others as well. He believes that:

Leaders present a dynamic perspective to their followers: not just a headline or snapshot, but a drama that unfolds over time, in which they – leaders and followers – are the principal characters of heroes.

Gardner's belief that the way in which a particular person carries out a leadership role is greatly influenced by the niche that the leader's set of stories ultimately points much more directly to an individual's values and attributes, the product of life history, than knowledge and skills gained by the acquisition of competencies.

### **Biography and leadership**

In Gronn and Ribbins' (1996) significant work on exploring the links and causal factors between biography, leadership and careers, argues that life histories can help our understanding of leadership. They believe that they may be inspected for evidence of the development and learning of leadership attributes and as analytical balance sheets. They also contend that they may very probably provide potential answers to questions such as whether particular sets of leaders, sanctioned by their societies and organisations as worthy to lead them, share common attributes and whether those same societies and organisations screen their leadership cohorts in any way to guarantee conformity to preferred cultural types or models.

Answers to these questions may begin to throw light on an obvious, but nonetheless complex fact of life, namely that many people will embark on a career determined to

reach the top but only a relatively few will actually achieve this particular objective. After all, headteachers only make up approximately five per cent of the teaching profession and yet all the evidence from OFSTED would suggest that the vast majority of teachers in today's schools are well educated, resourceful and career-minded. It may well be, therefore, that there is something significant in the life histories of educational leaders which makes them much more likely to reach the top of their profession and, even more pertinently, relish the opportunity of exercising the leadership role. Once again, there has been very little research carried out on key aspects of leadership careers in education. Gronn and Ribbins (1996) note:

There is an absence of any systematic understanding in the literature of how individuals get to be leaders, an ignorance of culturally diverse patterns of defining leadership and knowledge of the culturally different ways prospective leaders learn their leadership.

### **Who become leaders and why**

More work on looking at any commonalities, and marked differences, in the life histories of successful leaders may help determine who will become successful leaders and who will not. Gronn (1999) develops this further when he points out that we are still comparatively ignorant about who become leaders and why and know relatively little about the lives, careers and developmental needs of school leaders:

The field of leadership studies lacks a sound comparative point of reference against which to map leader's biographical experiences and activities. It is one thing to scrutinise leaders in isolation, but the field has remarkably few benchmarks or parameters for examining the circumstances of leader's lives in relation to one another and also in respect of the culture and societies from which they emerge.

If, as has already been argued, the concept of leadership can be broken down into four elements – knowledge, skills, values and attributes – then perhaps it can equally well be argued that in acquiring the leadership competencies, namely knowledge and skills, a person is learning **how** to be a leader. However, if a leader's values and attributes form the blueprint for his or her moral and philosophical approach to leadership, then perhaps these qualities are shedding light on **why** they become leaders. Life history surely plays a crucial part in developing moral values and attributes; it is very likely therefore to be a deeply influential determinant as to why people aspire to leadership.

### **Leadership and spirituality**

Life history must be instrumental in highlighting and developing those internal drivers that equip successful leaders to strive for challenging targets, not least the quest for continuous improvement. In a paper delivered to an NCSL Leading Edge seminar on leadership and spirituality (see [www.ncsl.org.uk/leadingedge](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/leadingedge)), John West-Burnham (2002) argued that one of the most significant trends in the study of leadership in recent years has been the move from the external to the internal, from the tangible to the intangible. He argues:

It is in the essence of what it means to be a person that the foundations of leadership are to be found. It is impossible to conceptualise leadership without a model of the essential components of an effective person.

Howard Gardner (1997) echoes West-Burnham's views when he says:

To some, leadership is an added ingredient – somewhat like a clever remark that someone can use to spice up an already drafted speech – rather than an essential way of thinking about the thoughts, behaviours and feelings of human beings.

West-Burnham developed his ideas on spiritual leadership by stressing that in order for effective leaders to be successful change agents and people managers, they have to be emotionally as well as technically strong. They need time and space in which to develop, reflect and make decisions. They need to be able to create opportunities for transcendence where they are able to think deeply, introspectively and meaningfully about themselves. Only by so doing will they maintain and sustain the capacity for renewal and, as he says, “keep the reservoir of hope full – particularly when events have nearly run it dry”.

## **A knowledge of self**

If leadership language and behaviour are exceptionally powerful drivers of an organisation, then creative oases for leaders to reflect, regroup and realign their own values and moral priorities are not luxuries but necessities. A knowledge of self aligned to a keen awareness of individual life histories may well be essential if such opportunities are going to be best utilised. After all, if the person is the essence of leadership, then clearly the lives of those persons are at the centre of their leadership, and they must take special responsibility for what is going on inside themselves. Without self knowledge, leaders will never be able to communicate and demonstrate personal visions for their respective organisations with any vigour, persuasiveness or conviction.

Kouzes and Posner (1996) defined leadership as, “the art of mobilising others to want to struggle for shared aspirations”. In a survey they carried out in 1995 on characteristics of admired leaders, the quality that came at the top of the list was honesty. It is interesting that even in the last decade leadership literature has introduced an ever-lengthening list of adjectives to encapsulate what constitutes effective leadership: transformational, empowering, instructional, democratic, distributed collegial, visionary, charismatic, etc. It is ironic that the word ‘honest’ appears far less frequently. In an article in *The Times Educational Supplement* (TES) (2002), Stephanie Northern and David Newnham quote Paul Taffinder, a psychologist, who claimed that leadership, a phenomenon people have always tried to grasp and understand, hadn't changed for a millennium:

‘Leadership,’ he claimed ‘is about taking risks, setting directions, breaking new ground and sharing deep conviction. It is about inspiring people to contribute more than they would otherwise. It's also about experience, about failure and knowing yourself.’

This last sentence shouts life history! Without doubt, a certain level of technical expertise is essential for any leader to be at least satisfactory, but technical expertise allied to a secure grasp of what the job involves on a mechanical level, does not make for great leadership. It does not give people the courage to move from what Collins (2001) has described as level 4 leadership (first what then who?) to level 5 leadership (first who then what?) which is needed if organisations are going to manage fundamental change effectively. It does not give people the confidence and bravery to fail magnificently. However, honesty, courage, creativity, emotional intelligence, trust, honour, resilience, passion and conviction which come from self-knowledge can enable leaders to move from the functional to the inspirational.

If life history has nothing else to offer, in developing a leader's ability to develop a healthy and positive level of self-critical awareness and a knowledge of who he or she is and why, it will play an exceptionally important role in defining what makes for effective leadership. Bennis and Nanus (1985) accurately encapsulated this when they said:

So the point is not to become a leader. The point is to become yourself, to use yourself completely – your skills, gifts and energies in order to make your vision manifest. You must withhold nothing. You must, in sum, become the person you started out to be, and to enjoy the process of becoming.

## **Leadership and trust**

A leader who works at becoming him or herself, withholding nothing, is probably more likely to engender an ethos of trust, loyalty and honesty. Handy (1997) would argue that:

An organisation with mutual trust at its core can be both creative and efficient. People obviously work better if they are not looking over their shoulders for the next job. They work more creatively if they respect the people around them and believe in what they are doing.

Covey (1992) develops the same point when he says that:

Trust is the highest form of human motivation. It brings out the very best in people. But it takes time and patience, and it doesn't preclude the necessity to train and develop people so that their competency can rise to the level of that trust.

The self-knowledge which can be acquired through a clear understanding of a person's life history is in no way going to guarantee that the climate Handy and Covey are alluding to here will exist. However, it must be true that leaders who have the confidence to accept and utilise the skills and talents that they have acquired through life will be much more likely to achieve such a climate.

## **Conclusion**

Gunter (2001) makes a key point when she is discussing the concept of biographical leadership. By taking much greater account of the lives of effective leaders, she argues, we are able to shift the emphasis away from focusing on the abstractions of role and

effectiveness and on to how a complex professional life unfolds. In other words we can, by adopting this approach, concentrate far less on the characteristics of leadership and far more on the characters of leaders. It is, therefore, as Dimmock and Donoghue (1993) stress:

Imperative that a leader's knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as the significant and relevant events in their life histories and past experiences, be acknowledged as key filters through which meanings of best practice are distilled.

If we want to create adventurous and confident headteachers capable of leading and managing successful change then we cannot afford to ignore the person, together with his or her life history, in both recognising and nurturing the special qualities they bring to this pivotal role.

## **Life histories**

### **Personal lives**

#### **Early childhood**

All of the headteachers grew up in secure family homes. Hazel, Dave and Barry came from a working class background while Paul and Lesley were born into middle class households. The fact that Paul's father was a pilot in the RAF meant that they moved frequently, sometimes only staying in one place for a few weeks. As a consequence, he has almost lost count of the number of schools he attended up to the age of 14. His father was frequently away on RAF duties and it was not uncommon for Paul to fulfil some of his father's duties/tasks around the house. He was encouraged to try things out for himself and was given an immense amount of freedom as a child – to the extent of travelling round Germany on his own when he was 12.

Although the constant moving was unsettling, this freedom he was afforded together with the added responsibility of, for example, caring for his ill mother on his own when he was only seven, gave him a great deal of independence, courage and self-confidence – characteristics that have stayed with him and very much influenced the way he has approached his work. As he said:

I've never been particularly worried by authority. I don't see things in hierarchical forms so I've never had any problem speaking to people regardless of their rank, reputation, position or seniority. So, I will talk to a Year 7 in exactly the same way as I would to my deputy head or my chair of governors.

Dave and Barry also saw little of their fathers during their formative years just outside Rochdale (Dave) and in Stevenage (Barry). Dave's father was a plumber and Barry's was a master carpenter. Both worked extremely long hours and at weekends so that they were away before the children were up and not back until they had gone to bed. Although all their fathers took their role as parent and husband seriously, their prolonged absence perhaps contributed to the fact that neither Barry, Dave nor Paul described their relationship with the respective fathers as close.

Hazel was born in Wombwell, near Barnsley, into a working class mining family. Her early recollections are dominated by the fact that at a very early age she had to go and live with her aunt for six months while her mother recuperated from a serious illness she contracted following the birth of her second daughter. She remembers being appallingly badly behaved while she was at her aunts:

I did awful things – trapping my cousin's fingers in the mangle, running up the street in my underwear, making egg-powder pies on the stairs, etc! However, although a psychologist may well read into such behaviour all the hallmarks of an uprooted, disturbed childhood, the reality was that I actually got on quite well with my aunt!

Although she says the episode is ingrained in the family history, her return to family life was seamless and painless. Her father was a beltman who was badly injured in an incident at work when Hazel was 10. He was at home for a very long time convalescing, after which the union found him a job in charge of the Miners' Welfare Club so that Hazel's teenage years were spent living in the back half of a Georgian mansion complete with high ceilings, chandeliers and oil paintings. Her father was particularly active and taught her a lot about Marxist socialism but as with Paul, Dave and Barry she would not consider that she had a particularly close relationship with her father.

### **Parental influence**

A factor common to all five headteachers is the fact that all their fathers wanted their children to do well – to obtain qualifications and secure jobs which would give them financial security and job satisfaction. Lesley remembers her childhood as being close to idyllic. Her parents had come from Jamaica (where they still owned a house) to an airbase in Lincolnshire where her father was a flight sergeant. As an only child, she was not only totally indulged but equally totally adored by her extended family:

It was an incredibly comfortable and secure childhood; I led a charmed life. My parents thought the world of me, my friends' parents doted on me and my relations were completely besotted!

However, she did experience conflict when she informed her father that she wanted to be an actress. He told her that she would achieve her ambition “over his dead body” and would instead look to pursue a more sensible, respectable career – his own preference being a barrister.

Not surprisingly, their mothers also figured largely in these heads' childhoods. In three of the cases, they exercised the traditional role of managing the house and ensuring that everything functioned smoothly (although less so in Hazel's case when her father was at home for a long time following his accident). Dave's mother believed very much in education and always helped him with his homework! Paul and Lesley did not consider their mothers to be particularly interested in education, preferring instead to try to ensure that their children were happy and secure. Lesley's mother was, even then, quite old-fashioned in her outlook, believing that girls had no real need of an education and that a woman's major role in life was to look after her partner and provide a secure, efficient environment for him and their family. Hazel's mother was awarded a scholarship to the local grammar school but her parents were unable to finance it. Dave's mother went to university but had to leave before completing her degree because she contracted polio.

None of these heads claimed to be especially close to their parents, although all of them talked about their mothers and fathers with affection and a real sense of gratitude. The fathers all made it clear that they wanted the best for their children and worked hard to ensure that the environment their children grew up in was stable, reflecting the values and ambitions they themselves advocated. These heads could look back on their childhood and acknowledge the extent to which it nurtured and fine-tuned characteristics which influenced directly the way they do their jobs. Dave admits to being intensely competitive, a trait he traces back to his early life:

I believe I got my intensively competitive attitude from my upbringing. It was a combination of my parents' determination that we should make a success of our lives and a sense they engendered that I would and should do it through my own efforts.

Barry acknowledges that his own grit and determination to succeed reflects his mother's approach to life. During the war, she decided that the country needed telephonists so she would volunteer – even though she lived in Romford and the exchange was in Central London.

Having once decided on this course of action, there was no stopping her. She cycled from Romford to Central London (a round trip of 40 miles) every day during the Blitz and would not have considered for one second that it was a reckless and dangerous thing to do. She saw it as her duty. Incidentally, she still has the same bike!

Paul considers that his independence and self-confidence stem directly from the experiences he had as a child and Hazel considers that her long-held political inclinations owe a great deal to the conversations she had with her father when she was young.

### **Role as spouse/partner**

Four of these heads – Dave, Barry, Lesley and Paul – are married to partners only one of whom is currently teaching, although Dave's wife trained as a teacher and is now a management consultant. Paul's wife used to teach and is now a policy and development officer with North Yorkshire. Lesley's second husband, James, (tragically, her first husband, Tony, died of a brain tumour at 32), was originally a PE teacher and is now in a school management role. Hazel is divorced but has a long-term partner. All of the heads acknowledge the support, friendship and counsel their partners give them. They use them in varying degrees as sounding boards although they are actually mindful that their jobs can be immensely intrusive and that job satisfaction at school can lead to job saturation at home if it is allowed to. Barry spends a good deal of time away from home on school business as it is and is keen therefore to provide his wife with quality time at home and not take advantage of her:

I tend not to use my wife as a sounding board. I spend so much time away from home, the last thing I want to do is burden my wife with my problems when I am at home. Sometimes, we do talk about work, but it's more likely to be about her job than mine.

Dave, Lesley and Paul acknowledged that they did use their partners as sounding boards and both needed and valued their views. Paul said:

I use her as a sounding board. I trust her judgement – she was a senior teacher in a big GM school and could easily have been a deputy head/head. We don't always talk about education but she's an attention to detail person whereas I am a strategic thinker.



However, all of these heads were acutely aware of how easy it is for their job to become the only, all-consuming topic of conversation which they all acknowledged was not a recipe for a healthy family life.

### **Role as parent**

Lesley, Hazel and Dave are all parents having, respectively, a son and a daughter, a daughter and a son and daughter. Barry is a stepfather to two daughters but, like Paul, made a conscious decision not to have children of his own – he has always liked his own company and has never altered in that respect. Although his stepdaughters have always called him by his first name, he considers that he has been a 'pretty good dad' to them but this has never influenced his original decision. Paul always felt early on his relationship that he did not want to have children and his wife also made the decision early on in their relationship not to have children:

I've never yet had a hankering to have kids – I like my own space, my independence. Perhaps it goes back to me not being a family person. However, it doesn't make me judgmental about people's parent skills. Generally I think I wouldn't want that job.

Dave and Lesley both have a son and daughter. Both talk as well about the difficulties of balancing the twin demands of two hugely responsible jobs: headteacher and parent. Lesley had to deal with the death of her first husband when her first child, her daughter, was only eight years old. She saw it was a tremendously difficult time for both of them and they still suffer the inevitable consequences of a tragedy of this magnitude:

It was very difficult but I was so determined that I wasn't going to go under. Strangely, the passion I felt for my job helped me handle the stress of dealing with things after my husband's death.

Dave and Lesley both drew attention to the dangers implicit in doing a job which is so all-consuming: Lesley said:

I sometimes felt that my role as a mother comes second. Often, I would come home so drained and tired that I just withdrew into myself.

Dave showed great honesty when he admitted:

I range from feeling OK as a father to regarding myself as an abject failure. I feel I've spent hours and hours with other people's kids but not my own. I can't resent that now because there's nothing I can do about it.

Hazel had the real challenge of bringing up her own daughter in London as a very young, single parent.

If I'm totally honest, I didn't really want to be a mother but once I saw my daughter I was in love. I knew I had to manage so I just got on with it. In the early years, I got her into a crèche run by the Methodists – they trained nursery nurses so I knew they were good. I didn't think about bringing up my daughter, I just got on with it. Fortunately, she thinks I'm wonderful!

Hazel's success in managing such a potentially complex and difficult juggling act she puts down to her own pragmatism, the fact that teachers in the 1960/70s had priority for nursery places and the unstinting support of her family.

### **Defining moments**

In looking back and reflecting on their personal lives, all of the headteachers remember defining moments in their life histories. Paul's parents' constant encouragement to allow him to go out and explore things for himself nurtured the independence which he acknowledges shapes and influences much of what he does. It did give him a sense of invincibility which was, however, dealt a blow when he had a serious boating accident which put him in hospital for a long time:

It really shook my confidence and made me realise that I was not indestructible. I felt beforehand that I could control my own destiny but this episode caused me to change my outlook. Now I am calmer because I know things like this can come along which are outside my control. I'm more philosophical about things now.

Lesley remembers a cousin of his who came over from Jamaica to a theological college in Oxford to train to be a vicar. His first parish was in Brixton at the time of the Black Panther riots:

I went and stayed with him and during my visit he made me rethink completely my own cultural background – who I was and what I should be doing. I grew an Afro (my mother was horrified!) and had an almost Damascene revelation that I was black and that I needed to teach in London where I could most effectively utilise my teaching skills. Before this visit, I was Jamaican English; after it, I identified strongly with blacks.

Hazel was the exception in that she could not recall any really significant moments in her personal life history:

I don't have any. I suspect I am very independently minded and not easily influenced or impressed.

Barry, in remembering his working class roots, considers passing the entrance exam to Alleyne's Grammar School (which only admitted the top one per cent of the population) to be a defining moment:

If I hadn't gone to Alleyne's, I would not have done so well. I certainly would not have pursued an academic career.

Dave considers meeting his wife while still at college and surviving an exceptionally tough first year of marriage when money was often non-existent to be defining moments. He was a full-time professional footballer and played 30 league and cup games for Rochdale but returned to teaching because he was not considered good enough by his club to remain as a full-time professional. He is very aware that his life could, therefore, have been so very different. Dave's sentiments capture perhaps a general awareness among these heads that their careers have been the product of a number of factors, some of which they had direct control over, others where they were being guided or

perhaps propelled in a direction because of strong influences borne out of their life histories.

## **Education and professional training**

### **Primary education**

All of the headteachers had conventional school experiences with the exception of Paul. His father's frequent postings to RAF bases throughout Europe meant that he went to so many schools prior to beginning secondary education that he has lost count. Trying to take on and assimilate different systems in different infant/junior schools was no recipe for academic success and he remembers feeling very negative about school by the time he was 10.

Lesley began her education in a pre-fabricated hut in Boston, Lincolnshire. She remembers both infant and junior schools as being full of terrifying middle aged spinsters. The whole primary experience for her was horrendous. She recalled a particularly vivid memory of a vicar coming into school one day and drawing pictures of the devil – an image which stayed with her long into secondary school.

Hazel was kept on an extra year at infant school because she could not read or write. She suffered from cross-lateral functional dyslexia. When she finally mastered the art of reading, she became a voracious reader. Although she was eight by the time she transferred to junior school, she was so academically able that she only spent two years at junior school and ended up passing the 11+ at 10 years old. Like Lesley, she carries no lasting positive memories of her time at primary school.

Dave attended the local primary school and loved it from the first minute he walked through the school gates:

I remember the headteacher, Miss S, (brogues, bun, spinster, etc) who just loved kids. Her room/office was the only one that had a carpet and I remember sitting in her office listening to classical music. The Nutcracker Suite was a particular favourite. This gave me an abiding love and appreciation of things that could be different.

He played a lot of sport, at which he was immensely gifted, but was always getting into fights. He admits to being “not very nice really – arrogant – full of myself”. He remembers being rather insular at school and inward looking – someone who never had a 'best mate'.

Barry also remembers ultra strict, ancient female spinster teachers at his local infant school. He remembers far less about any education/learning he might have received from them. He attended a brand new primary school at Stevenage where he still has vivid memories. He remembers initially being incorrectly placed in the B group and how the school set about rectifying the mistake:

I ended up in the B form probably because I was the only boy in the new entry from the local council estate. On the second day I was told in class to pick up my

books – in front of everyone – and walk into the other class, the A form. It was public, awful and humiliating. It was a hugely formative moment in my life, not least because of the ridicule I received from the other children for being the focal point of such a public spectacle.

In spite of this, Barry has very happy memories of his time at the school although he does acknowledge now that being a working class boy in a manifestly middle class environment did create its own particular problems:

I did get the economic comments. In all my schools I was always at the poor (minority) end of the equation. I wasn't particularly conscious of it at the time so it wasn't an issue. Thinking about it now it obviously was. Fortunately, I could always hold my own academically which gave me a certain level of street cred.

### **Secondary education**

Four of the heads – Lesley, Hazel, Dave and Barry – went to grammar schools. Lesley and Hazel did not enjoy the experience. Lesley found her time at secondary school “incredibly boring”. She remembers being inspired by one history teacher but little else. She did not work for O or A-levels and consequently did not obtain results which reflected her ability. Hazel felt very out of place at her grammar school. Although she was near the top academically she never felt that she fitted the ethos and aspirations of the school:

I met the middle classes for the first time, people who lived in big houses up Huddersfield Road. We had a mutual incomprehension of our respective lifestyles. I had been brought up to have the manners of a duchess but I still felt uncomfortable in their presence.

However, Hazel remembers liking the deputy head who taught her mathematics and one of her English teachers. She also remembers being the Labour candidate (a father's legacy) at the school general election. She worked sporadically but was able to do enough in her A-levels to obtain a place – at 17 – at London University to read sciences.

Dave and Barry both thoroughly enjoyed their time at their respective grammar schools. Dave, with his competitive spirit, always wanted to be top but was not sufficiently academically gifted:

I wasn't clever enough. After the first year we were set and I went into 2B – and came top. However, I turned down the offer of moving into 3A because I knew I would come near the bottom.

Barry found himself in the C stream albeit of a highly selective grammar school. Initially disappointed, he turned this experience to his own advantage:

I'm an insular person – my wife would agree with that! I like my own company and when I was put in the C stream I decided I would keep my head down, work hard and show them! I ended up getting more O-levels than anyone else in the year group.

Paul attended what he describes as “an OK comprehensive in Wiltshire”. He remembers vividly the initial observations of some teachers – “You’re thick, you’re stupid!” – because of his problems with literacy occasioned by his frequent changes of school prior to entering secondary education. However, he remembers one English teacher, who had previously always taught in public schools, as being very different:

He taught in a far less conventional way. He had the ability to inspire children and he certainly inspired me. When I was 13 he said to me, ‘Be ambitious – go to university – achieve!’ It was a 20 second conversation that made a real impact on me.

Paul remembers being sufficiently self-confident to fight his corner particularly when he felt he was being the victim of an injustice. On one occasion – at 13 – he refused to move from the deputy head’s office until they reversed the decision not to allow him to take geography for what he believed to be unjust reasons:

I wasn’t going to move from the chair until he changed his mind. I’ve never been worried by authority. I treat people the same no matter what status they are – it’s just part of my make-up.

### **Higher education/teacher training**

All of the heads went on to take A-levels – in Paul’s case against his parents’ wishes. Two of them reckoned they worked consistently hard: Dave who found written exams a real obstacle being a naturally visual learner, and Paul who responded best to what he described as traditional didactic teaching. All of them achieved the necessary grades to go on to higher education – three (Dave, Lesley and Barry) to colleges of education, two to universities. All of them very much enjoyed their tertiary experiences but none had any real intention or desire to enter teaching. Dave admitted to failing to realise that the college he had applied to was a teacher training institution:

It was only when I got there I realised it was a teacher training college! It was a shock when I found out that I wasn’t just doing sport but was training to be a teacher as well. My lecturer enlightened me!

Hazel, Paul, Barry and Lesley all saw the PGCE as a means of deferring the time when they would have to decide what to do with their lives. What is common however to all five heads is the impact that their teaching practices had on them. Paul, Lesley and Hazel remember working with highly disadvantaged children and succeeding in connecting with them. A factor common to all five is that they realised very early on that they were naturally gifted teachers. Lesley remembers vividly working with children in Bradford who were tough, uncompromising and victims of a system over which they had no control. She realised two things: how fortunate she had been to have had such a privileged upbringing and that she possessed a natural ability to help these children face their particular challenges and overcome them.

For all of these heads, the experience of working with children and knowing that they had an innate ability to influence their life chances convinced them that they wanted to enter teaching. Lesley sums up a sense of commitment felt by all five:

It was not until I started teaching that I realised that this was a job worth doing. I knew I related to teenagers, plus I could act well – show my emotions – and connect with my classes. Whether or not it was arrogance on my part, I knew this was something I could be really good at.

Another common feature was the passion they came to feel for the students in their care. All five heads went into teaching with a controlled but nonetheless significant level of near messianic zeal. They never, right from the outset, saw teaching just as a job – a view they have sustained throughout their careers.

## **Professional career**

### **Introduction**

Hazel, Dave and Barry worked in four different schools before taking up headships. Dave also took up a post outside school for three years prior to becoming a senior teacher. Paul also worked in a school support role as technical and vocational education initiative (TVEI) co-ordinator in addition to taking jobs in three schools before becoming head of Ripon College. Lesley's experience was different in that she has taught in two schools, both single-sexed girls schools, and was appointed internally to her current post. Dave took one job in a grammar school and Barry in an 11–14 high school but, this apart, all the heads chose posts in tough, challenging comprehensives.

### **First post**

Paul was certain from the outset that he did not want a conventional career. He still looks, as he puts it, “for unusual, intriguing jobs” in the TES. His first post at a special school linked with a large comprehensive in Reading attracted him because it had a residential unit where he worked for 15 hours a week – night and day. He found the students in the unit, all of whom were dealing with immense problems, an inspiration:

One boy, crippled by muscular dystrophy, was determined to take his exams even though it literally killed him. He had no movement from the neck down and every 15 minutes during the exam he had to have intensive physio to lessen the pain. He finished all his exams and died a week later. Working with kids with this level of commitment and determination taught me what is possible. I had nothing like that to overcome.

Lesley's first post was in Norwood. She remembers it as being a very tough school and how strict she was determined to be from the outset. She took great pride in taking on and shaping her first tutor groups and instilling the standards of behaviour and uniform which have been key features of her approach to all of the roles she has taken on. She remembers a defining moment in her second year:

I went on a residential course with some Barnados' children. They started playing me up and I remember thinking, 'that's enough!' This was a turning point for me for two reasons: I realised acutely, perhaps for the first time, how privileged and fortunate I had been compared with these children and second, that children from

whatever context need firm guidelines. Consistency and respect – standards with love, in fact.

Hazel began her career at a large, white working class comprehensive in the Old Kent Road in London. She found that she had excellent discipline from the start, a considerable advantage in what was a very tough uncompromising environment. The school she felt was very much at the cutting edge – they had already appointed, for example, a media resources officer – and this thirty years ago. They were also heavily involved in research into what makes for effective and learning.

Dave 's first school was a small (600) high school in Whitworth. The students, he recalls, were very uncompromising – “two fists and hearts of gold!” There were lots of young staff and a liberal liberating management ethos which allowed people to experiment and challenge conventions:

I was given my head – allowed to do things that were a bit different. We had tug of wars over a stream at the end of our playing field; we used the trees for outdoor gymnastics; we had It's a Knock Out days rather than sports day – all pre H&S restrictions, of course. I wanted to make sure all the kids, not just the naturally gifted, got something out of PE.

Barry's first post was at an 11–14 high school in Leicestershire. It was not his preferred choice but his father's death shortly before he began teaching meant that he had other priorities just after completing his training so he went for a pool appointment. He remembers the school as being full of “weird failures”:

It was staffed by ex-army personnel who spent little time in the classroom. I remember one elderly teacher coming into my class early one morning and taking me out into the corridor where he immediately lit up a cigarette and told me that we didn't want to spend too much time in classrooms. I think he was trying to mentor me.

### **Career paths**

All of the heads achieved rapid early promotion. Paul was a senior teacher at 26, Lesley was on 4 points as a head of year after three years at her first school. Hazel was a senior teacher at 29, Dave a senior teacher at 30 and Barry was a head of mathematics on 4 points at 28. Paul was a deputy head at 29, the other four in their early/mid 30s. There was no sense of predetermined ambition in these rapid moves through the ranks. Just as none of them had seriously considered teaching before they had done any teaching practices, so none of them started out in teaching determined to become headteachers.

They all, however, relished challenges and none of them wanted to work in what they would describe as soft contexts. Dave did have one stint in a grammar school – his second post. He had loved his teaching practice there because it had presented him with terrific opportunities to teach his subject to students all of whom wanted to learn and develop his craft. Even here his natural competitiveness was much in evidence:

I saw this job as a wonderful opportunity to teach PE and I was able to inculcate in the students a desire to win. We used to play a lot of public schools and one year we, a grammar school, won the public schools competition. Memorable!

They also admitted to having a very low boredom threshold. As soon as one job seemed to be getting easier, they started looking for fresh challenges. Even though Lesley stayed in her first school for 15 years, she was promoted four times and never did the same thing for very long. As already mentioned, all of them felt drawn to tough, uncompromising, largely working class, generally big (1200+) comprehensives that were in decline. Paul and Dave both took jobs out of mainstream teaching as part of their personal and career development – Paul as a TVEI business co-ordinator for North Wiltshire and Dave as a recreational development officer for Wolverhampton Borough. Both of them found these posts stimulating and developmental. Paul remembers:

My boss and I did mad, crazy things! We were encouraged to think the impossible – to be change agents. I learnt so much about monitoring/evaluation and teaching and learning. I was particularly influenced by seeing how motivational vocational education could be. We did a great deal of work on quality in the classroom. Invaluable.

Dave also has equally positive memories:

It was another promotion – an opportunity to get some variety. I ran a sports complex, did holiday activities for adults and taught in primary schools. In three years we had 7000 people accessing 150 courses. We generated a great deal of money – £1.5m a year. I had six full time and 90 part time staff. When we organised our first half marathon, 4000 people turned up!

Each head went into his or her deputy head/vice principal role determined to make a difference, make an impact and be a highly effective change agent. They did not consider themselves to be brash, arrogant or overconfident. Rather, they hated standing still and in each case the schools they were moving into were either in need of fundamental change or, as in Hazel's case, already moving forward quickly from a position of weakness, having put strategies in place to improve standards rapidly.

### **Significant mentors**

Throughout their careers all these heads remember people who had a profound effect on them. The heads they worked with as senior managers were particularly significant in this respect. Dave remembers the head of the school where he was a senior teacher:

She made Margaret Thatcher look like Bo Peep. You were either petrified or in awe of her – or both! I was in awe, but not frightened. I learnt from her never to accept the status quo, always have the highest standards, remembering that you can do things without compromising your principles. She took me to levels of management I had not been to before.



Hazel remembers the first headteacher she worked for:

I learnt from him how to battle and win – his technique was to throw you in the deep end and watch you swim. He accredited me with humanising his school – assemblies, displays, soft toilet paper, etc – a lot of it was to do with relationships. He was looking for people with brains who would place a keener focus on social skills and teaching and learning. As a consequence, I consciously began to look, really look, at what makes a good school.

As a vice principal (at 31) in a big comprehensive in Leicester, Barry also believes he learnt a great deal from working for seven years with his headteacher – but not quite in the same way:

She was an appalling head – the most incompetent, irrational, damaging and dangerous person I have ever encountered in education. She ruined good teachers' lives because of her rank stupidity. The staff spent all the time in a state of siege. I spent six years perpetually angry and frustrated but I learnt so much about people management by witnessing so dramatically how not to do it!

Barry is clear that her negative example gave him a real insight into just how dangerous poor headteachers can be – to the individual and the organisation. It is a lesson he has never forgotten.

## **Conclusion**

All of these heads can look back to their formative years in schools and realise just how much they learnt from their own experiences and from mentors who helped them define their educational philosophies and hone their skills. However, qualities which were the product of their respective life histories also played a major part in defining not only where their careers would go but how they would take on the challenges implicit in each new post. Barry confirmed this when he said:

The excellence agenda I advocate very much comes from my life history experiences. I'm a workaholic – totally driven. I always have to do everything to the best I can. I started running and ended up doing marathons. I have done some stupid, extreme things but I can't help myself – it's just the way I am.

Paul accepted that his life history certainly influenced his leadership style. His upbringing gave him confidence, stability and independence, which in turn helped him to take on major challenges and run with them. He, along with the other heads, demonstrated great energy in their careers leading up to headship. Two of them, Lesley and Barry, took first degrees in their own time after they began teaching; Dave, Paul and Barry took part-time masters degrees. Managing these additional demands was far from easy and required considerable dedication.

They are all passionate about winning – or perhaps even more significantly, not losing. They hate failing. They set themselves challenging targets and then work single-mindedly to achieve them. Although Paul, Lesley and Hazel were not especially hard working or focused at school, that all changed when they started teaching. They have a real passion that the children in their care should be given every opportunity to succeed

– and the greater the adversity, the more pressing the need to ensure that that particular objective is achieved.

## **Current role**

### **Phase One**

Although Lesley has been at her current school since 1990, she has only been head there since 1997. Paul has been in post since April 1996, Hazel since Easter 1990; Dave was appointed headteacher in January 1992 and Barry in January 1991. In looking back over their headships, all of them see the development of their respective schools in distinct phases, the only difference being that Lesley would see herself and St Martin's being in the second phase of its development, whereas Paul, Dave, Hazel and Barry would consider they are in the third phase.

All of these heads took on schools they believed to be underachieving dramatically. Lesley and Paul inherited situations where the majority of key players were ready to support any strategies to raise standards. Barry, Hazel and Dave entered a context where there was a significant degree of hostility and unwillingness to change, largely directed at them. Hazel captures starkly the situation she inherited:

Overwhelmingly I felt that Loxford had totally missed the 80s. The staff and students had an agreement not to bother each other. Homework was optional and the place was full of pseudo-egalitarian committees which were just talking shops – excuses for doing nothing.

Dave inherited problems of a similar magnitude:

The kids were not wild or unmanageable but like the staff they tolerated and accepted low standards. Nobody thought the school was failing. Students from Wodensborough were expected to fail because they were from Wodensborough.

Barry had near identical experiences when he started at Greenwood Dale:

Most of the staff didn't really want to be here, but they didn't want to move either. They had a 'what do you expect?' attitude based on what they considered to be incontrovertible evidence that the students could not be expected to succeed at anything. The reality was it was the staff who couldn't cope, not the kids.

Three heads in the first phase of their tenure had to undergo a clear audit of the current situation and then move quickly. Again, Lesley as an internal appointment was already very familiar with the school but that almost increased the need to look at things from a fresh perspective. In all cases, they got into pupil tracking and clarifying exactly what was going on in the classroom. They also set about the difficult and delicate task of removing those staff who did not want to enter into the improvement agenda. These were hard, unrelenting times for all of these heads who often felt as though they were lone voices crying in the wilderness. Hazel felt totally isolated:

I put a real shock through the system by telling them that they couldn't buy anything over £1000 without my signature. Naked power! I got total shock. By June I was at battle stations with the whole place – apart from the kids!

Dave said that the early days were really tough. He took a tough line with any students who failed to conform and, like Barry, had no compunction excluding those whose behaviour was totally unacceptable. As a response, he had his office windows put in and his car vandalised. He also felt very isolated and on numerous occasions asked himself why he was putting himself through all this. The answer was simple:

I took a pay cut – the risk factor didn't bother me. What drove me on was a sense that I could make a difference to these kids who were very similar to me. I wanted the children here to get a fair deal. My own working class, tough background made me a champion for these kids.

In all cases, the heads won a number of significant battles in the first phase. For example, Paul did a huge amount of aggressive marketing and fund-raising to raise Ripon's public profile. Lesley dealt with a small but potentially lethal group of staff who were anti-change. Hazel broke up the senior/middle managers baronial fiefs. Dave introduced a new curriculum and secured a TSI grant of £250,000. Barry improved the discipline code dramatically, put a PC suite into the school and went grant-maintained. In all cases, strategies were put in place to change the staff and school structure to ensure that the plans for further development which would make up Phase Two would not be undermined. To accomplish this, the heads drew on qualities and strengths which had come from their life and career experiences. All of them acknowledged that the drive and determination they all had came from within, not from any teaching/management manual.

### **Phase Two: Becoming a specialist school**

All of these heads actively and successfully secured specialist school status. They had to raise the money, write the bid, sell the concept to the staff and convince the governors. All of them believed that securing this status would raise the self belief and self esteem of students, staff and parents. They are all convinced that becoming a specialist school was a defining moment in their respective schools' growth. In achieving and maintaining this status, all of them showed tremendous resilience and determination and a naturally entrepreneurial flair (for which they had had no formal training).

This phase very much put the emphasis on selling the agenda to move their respective schools forward. Lesley used a particularly effective tactic:

Every September I do a State of the Nation address – a Powerpoint presentation centred on the theme of a world class airline. It's called Soaring to New Heights and I use Air Jamaica as the analogy – how it used to be a terrible airline but now it's so much better. Next year, St Martin's is moving into the first class lounge!

Hazel uses the analogy 'Through the Glass Ceiling' as the centre point of her school improvement plan. Although Loxford was performing in the top quartile of schools in similar contexts it was only the glass ceiling, their own imposed limitations, which was preventing them from moving into the top five per cent. The staff only had to believe they

could achieve that level – they undoubtedly had the ability and talent. She is now especially proud that Loxford, as well as being successful, is technically a good school because professional competence does matter to her.

For Paul, Hazel, Dave and Barry the second phase had provided the foundation on which future success could be built. Because of her time as deputy at her school, Lesley would probably see her second phase as the school's third. All of them put in place strategies which were designed to strengthen the can do culture and banish forever the sense of failure and second-rateness they had all inherited. All of them had positive OFSTED reports and used them as informed, public impartial confirmation of what they were doing. Dave's school's achievements in this respect were especially remarkable:

Our first OFSTED put us on the brink of being placed in special measures. Our second OFSTED judged 98 per cent of lessons to be satisfactory and 66 per cent very good or excellent. The improvement in the quality of teaching and learning was a signal moment.

Four of these schools experienced significant growth during this period – a trend that has been maintained. Ripon (Paul) has nearly doubled in size at the time of writing; Loxford (Hazel) has moved from 900 to 1600; Wodensborough (Dave) from 470 to 1350; Greenwood (Barry) from under 500 to over 1000. St Martin's will begin to grow significantly when it welcomes its first sixth formers in September 2002. All of the schools have moved from being perceived by the local community as failing to being heavily over-subscribed – a telling endorsement of the improvements they have made.

### **Phase Three**

Another feature common to all these schools is the sense of being poised to make the next big move forward. The increase in the number of students added to the high (positive) staff turnover means that all of these heads have been able to bring in quality staff and elicit the support of the students, parents, governors (all of whom have been extremely supportive throughout – in particular the chairs of governors in every case) and the community in sustaining and enhancing the improvements that have been made.

A key feature of Phase Three in all schools has been a real sense of cultural change, a rapid expansion of extra-curricular activities, dramatic improvements in public examinations, significant capital investment in ICT and campus development and fundamental structural change. All of the heads are keen to point out what wonderful staff they now have and that the ownership of the improvement agenda is corporate, shared and understood.

### **Leadership styles**

In reflecting on their leadership styles, key features common to all emerge. They all have at the centre of what they do an abiding and real passion for the students in their care. They see themselves as doing whatever it takes to ensure that they have every opportunity to succeed, not least because a high percentage of their respective intakes are disadvantaged. Dave and Barry feel personally involved in this crusade because they are aware of their own background and how easily, without the security and support

they received from parents who wanted them to succeed, their lives could have been different. Lesley is only too aware of how privileged her own upbringing was and has a near missionary zeal to help children who have not been blessed with the advantages she had.

Paul and Hazel do not relate the passion they feel for their students' life chances directly back to their own experiences at school. Although neither was inspired by their own education, they were on the whole focused at school and both were keen to go to university. However, both would attribute their natural affinity to sports and their determination not to lose to characteristics shaped by their life histories. Hazel admits to having gone through a feminist stage in her life and perhaps feels that a woman has got to battle harder than a man to make an impact. She remembers, for example, her mother once saying to her that if she ever came back to earth again, she would want to come back as a man. She thought women worked a lot harder!

Paul observed:

Having had so much security at home, I'm very aware of students' insecurity. When I frequently met students with so much insecurity at home, it really affected me.

All these heads are constantly driven; all of them are naturally entrepreneurial. Their drive comes from this desire to win, but none of them was able to explain why they were naturally good at wheeler-dealing and raising money. When Paul managed to raise £128,000 in nine months, he remembers:

I went out to sell Ripon. I got to the local rich and quickly negotiated entry into the social circuit. It was very much a case of feeling my way because this sort of thing was completely new to me. I learnt rapidly!

Barry put it more simply:

I've always been very entrepreneurial – a sort of Del Boy. It comes naturally.

Barry and Dave are very direct in their approach and lead from the front. Dave believes implicitly in working as a team and even though he is an ex-footballer he does not always want to be captain! He is confident that people know where they stand:

I'm blunt and I'm straight-talking. I'm a taskmaster and I may come across as a dictator. I do have a thing about authority however – something I'm sure I get from my mother and grandfather. But people know where they stand with me. I want 'honest' as my epitaph.

Barry echoed similar sentiments:

I lead from the front, hands on. This is what I expect. I'll listen but I'll take the decisions – that's what I'm paid for.

Hazel's headship style is also direct but perhaps less so than Barry and Dave:

Leadership is learnt intuition. I do have a sense of self and what my values are and I am a reflective leader. I'm also very direct, something I get from my family and I'm naturally a control freak, although in recent years I've tried to be less so.

Paul, not being hierarchical by nature, prefers flat structures:

I'm a good team worker. I'm quite comfortable not being the leader and I'm certainly not hierarchical. My father didn't like the hierarchical side of his job in the RAF. I think his attitude also gave me the confidence and stability not to be overly impressed with rank and status.

As a committed Christian, Lesley introduced a different dimension:

I feel very much that I take my guidance from God. I think my emotional intelligence is heightened by my spirituality. I'm not autocratic but I'm not totally collegiate either and the staff don't take me on! We are all committed Christians in the management team and will frequently use prayer when we are deciding on matters of importance or when we don't have the answer.

Like all effective leaders, these heads used different leadership styles to meet particular circumstances. They all admitted to being fairly autocratic and ruthless in the first phases of their headship but the more the body of the staff participated in and understood the respective agendas of change they were putting in place, the more democratic they became. Dave encapsulated this well when he said:

I can be autocratic one minute and democratic the next. I always share my views – I'm not dogmatic. I can be led but I won't be forced. I will let people run with ideas I don't agree with, but they better be right!

### **Role as visionaries**

The extent to which they considered themselves visionaries elicited a variety of responses. Lesley sees herself as a thinker and visionary. She sets out the vision and the management team articulates it. Paul felt that for the first four years the vision was his and his alone, a situation he was not at all comfortable with. Now it is very much a shared vision and he is delighted that things happen in his school that are excellent which he doesn't have any direct part in. Dave is less certain about the whole business of vision:

I think I know by instinct what will make a difference here. Students come first, second and third. I don't have a vision as such – I just want to keep making things better.

Barry thinks that clarity of vision is essential if governors and staff are to be clear about where the school is going:

My vision comes from what I believe is important for youngsters who don't have many opportunities outside school. I wouldn't be an educated person now if people hadn't given me direction when I was young.

## **Conclusion**

What is abundantly clear from the extended conversations with these headteachers is the all-consuming sense of purpose they feel. They are determined to do whatever it takes to ensure that their respective schools reach the standards of which they are capable. Their philosophy centres on capacity-building and sustainable change, on shared ownership of common values and on a commitment from all those involved in the improvement agenda to do whatever it takes to ensure success.

## Findings

### Background

Innumerable studies over the last 20 years have examined the factors which make for effective leadership and how these factors impact on school effectiveness. At the heart of this research has been the role of the headteacher. This is because the overwhelmingly prevalent view is that a school is highly unlikely to improve without the type of leadership at the top which establishes and secures those objectives deemed central to the organisation's success. Although it is widely acknowledged that school improvement and effective leadership go hand in hand, the acquisition of these leadership skills has been far more random and haphazard than planned. At the heart of this research is a key question: is the particular leadership style a headteacher adopts more likely to be intuitive and instinctive than taught or learnt? It may well be that the manner in which a headteacher approaches the role of school leader depends to a significant extent on that leader's whole life experiences and the intuition that are the product of his or her upbringing.

There is considerable evidence coming out of the extended conversations with these five headteachers that a good deal of what they do comes from who they are and not from what they have learnt. Equally important is the acknowledgement that how they have responded as individuals to professional development opportunities has been just as much by who they are as people as by the quality of the input. This is perhaps at the heart of what Gardner (1997) says when talking of the ultimate impact of the leader depending most significantly on the particular story that he embodies. Certain similarities in the way in which these heads approach their roles can be traced back to attitudes and philosophies which are borne out of their respective life histories.

### 'Passion for kids'

All five heads used the word 'passion' when talking about the students in their charge, the majority of who come from challenging backgrounds which will inevitably impact on their life/career chances. In three cases – Paul, Hazel and Dave – they recognised and identified with their students because they had come from similar backgrounds and realised how narrow the line is between success and failure. They looked back through their own lives and realised how easily they could have ended up in jobs with no prospect – a life unfulfilled. Their passion does not come from a training manual; it comes from a deep-seated desire to help their students avoid the same fate. Paul and Lesley have the same passion but in their cases their relatively privileged upbringing was set in stark contrast to the lives of children they taught – at intensively formative times in their own development – who had had no such privileges. In their case, their determination to do everything they could to help disadvantaged children was a recognition, on reflection, of how fortunate they had been.

Three of these heads did not particularly enjoy school. They were in no way inspired by their own educational experiences and none had any intention to enter teaching. Their determination to secure the best life chances for their students, and the reason in the



end that they all entered teaching, did not spring from some intellectual exercise that convinced them that education per se was worthwhile. Rather it came from a realisation that their good fortune in having a stable family environment where the importance of education was acknowledged and promoted should never be taken for granted. Many young people had no such in-built opportunities for self-advancement. This inner drive illustrates Gardner's assertion that leadership is an essential way of thinking about how and why people feel and behave as they do. If nobody has even impressed on you that education is important, it is far more difficult to accept that it is.

It would be easy and wrong to conclude from the evidence that, as leaders are born not made, any leadership training is of little value since any and all effective leadership qualities will have developed through life history alone. However, life history will impact on professional development as fundamentally as it will on personal development and therefore any programmes/initiatives designed to identify and nurture emerging and practising school leaders will need to be cognisant of that fact. Such a view would support West-Burnham's assertion that you cannot conceptualise leadership without a model of the essential components of an effective person.

### **Maverick leadership**

All of these heads have shown that they are unconventional. Dave, Paul and Barry have been highly entrepreneurial in the way they have utilised key players from the so-called 'real world' to help them achieve their objectives. They have rubbed shoulders with captains of industry, the landed gentry and the business world in general in order to raise the profile of their respective schools and, where appropriate, raise sponsorship. Hazel narrowly missed pulling off a spectacular private finance initiative (PFI) coup which would have completely rebuilt the school. Lesley has put her school in the media spotlight on numerous occasions.

Although all of them acknowledge their talent in this highly specialised field. They cannot explain why they are so naturally good at it, or, just as significantly, why it gives them such satisfaction when they manage something spectacular. Dave, for example, did not have to get Brian Conley, Nick Gillingham, Steve Redgrave or Betty Boothroyd to be guests of honour at his speech days, but he went out of his way to ensure that they accepted the invitation! Once again, this ability to take risks and think unconventionally are characteristics that they would most probably trace back to their respective upbringings.

### **Motivational drivers: Defining moments**

All of them see the challenge of bidding for and securing specialist school status as being defining watersheds in their headships and in the development of their respective schools. The process of presenting a case to the TC Trust for consideration was in itself a key mechanism for realigning whole-school aims and objectives. The means by which they raised the sponsorship illustrated their ability to think outside the box and utilise their natural talent for entrepreneurialism. Becoming a specialist school gave their schools nationally recognised status and played a pivotal role in moving the culture from a pervading sense of being second class citizens to one where the self-belief was high and the mood was upbeat. These heads have also found the networks which now form

the backbone of the specialist school movement to be invaluable. Meeting with heads and senior staff in similar contexts has been stimulating and rewarding – excellent professional development in fact.

It is interesting to note that the qualities of drive, determination, competitiveness and commitment all of these heads bring to the workplace were not always in evidence in some of their own school careers. However, what is especially significant in determining what they were going to do and how they were going to do it, are the defining moments in their lives which have made them reflect, take stock and then decide on a course of action. Paul, Dave and Barry were hard workers at school. Hazel was a sporadic worker and Lesley saw herself as inherently lazy. Barry had a point to prove, Paul and Hazel were set, from quite an early age, on going to university and Dave had to battle with an inability to succeed in examinations.

They were all naturally gifted teachers who suddenly found a reason to teach; their innate qualities and drivers had found a focus and from that moment on, their careers were mapped out. It may well be that this particular combination – a natural talent for teaching allied to a highly competitive desire to win – is much more likely to produce transformational leaders than, for example, the completion of generic competence-based programmes. The defining moments also created the deep seated sense of vocation that these heads have carried with them throughout their careers. Gronn and Ribbins (1996) rightly make the point that there is as yet little understanding of how individuals get to be leaders. Perhaps observations such as these are worthy of further consideration.

Research will tell us that successful leaders have drive and determination. They like challenges and relish the opportunities and dangers implicit in them. They instinctively see change as an opportunity rather than a threat. All of these heads made it clear that they identified strongly with such drives. What was clear from the evidence presented was that these dynamic qualities came from within. Nobody formally had taught them to relish change, new opportunities, and fresh challenges. Nobody had trained them to develop low boredom thresholds.

Similarly, all five heads trace their competitiveness back to their roots. Their parents wanted them to do well and spent their formative years encouraging them to have ambitious targets and fulfil their potential. This must have played a part in producing five school leaders who have proved throughout their careers that they are winners. Gronn and Ribbins argue that life histories provide evidence for the development and learning of leadership attributes: these leaders' careers have without doubt been instrumental in teaching them how to win but it is their life histories which have been instrumental in shaping their intense desire not to lose.

### **Support mechanisms**

There is ample evidence that these heads have taken charge of their lives and careers and have been highly proactive in ensuring that they achieved their particular targets. However, there were other key factors in their respective life histories which played an equally significant part in shaping their careers. Having partners who shared, understood and supported their ambition, stable family backgrounds, parents who had aspirations for their children, significant mentors who shaped their thinking at intensely formative

moments in their lives – all these factors were of crucial importance in preparing these heads for their leadership roles.

Again, it would be fatuous to draw from this any conclusion that claimed that successful headteachers need to have come from one particular set of biographical contexts. What may be true, however, is that the circumstances surrounding a leader's life history will have a tremendous influence on the manner in which he or she carries out the role and the extent to which he or she is successful. There are strong echoes here of Dimmock and Donoghue's (1992) assertion that significant and relevant events in leaders' life histories must be seen as key filters through which their particular skills are honed. Of course, all leaders need basic skills, many of which can be taught, but the best leaders have idiosyncratic strengths which mark out their own particular style of leadership. The challenge must surely be to recognise and find out more about the source of these strengths and then define strategies to sustain and develop them.

## **Conclusion**

These heads have a lot in common but by no stretch of the imagination are they similar people. Their backgrounds are obviously unique to them and their life histories have helped make them all risk takers, winners, passionate, unconventional, reflective, self-confident without being egocentric, essentially anti-authority. The manner in which they have transformed their respective schools and the hurdles they had to overcome are strikingly similar but the strategies they put in place were very much their own. Their styles of leadership were people-centred and essentially affiliative in approach. However, Barry and Hazel would doubtless acknowledge the extent to which they have intuitively adopted autocratic stances in order to achieve their objectives while Paul has always favoured a much flatter management structure centred on distributed leadership. Dave and Lesley have been autocratic when the occasion has necessitated it but their natural inclination is towards collegiality and shared ownership. What is common to all of them is that as their schools have become more successful, the ethos of continuous improvement has been accepted and welcomed by all the key players and the leadership, as a result, has become the activity of the many and not the status of the few.

## **Implications and recommendations**

### **Recruitment and selection**

Reference has already been made to the immense amount that has been written on the subject of school leadership. In analysing what makes some schools more successful than others, the recurrent theme is that the nature and quality of the leadership practised by the headteacher will directly influence the nature and quality of the leadership within the organisation. Effective heads will empower others to lead; distributed leadership must, in the final analysis, always be the most likely mechanism for sustaining a climate of continuous improvement within a school.

The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) was set up in order to take on the challenge of recognising, nurturing and refining the quality of leadership in our schools. Central to this challenge must be ensuring that the people with the right characteristics are identified, encouraged, trained and placed in positions where their leadership skills will be best utilised. To date, life history has not played a significant part in determining who will be more likely to have the requisite qualities to become successful headteachers. The evidence gathered in this research presents a compelling argument for investigating further the impact of life history on successful leaders and developing strategies for gathering together and analysing life history data in order to ascertain more accurately those teachers who have a natural capacity to manage transformational leadership successfully.

Closely tied in with this is the hugely complex matter of accurately identifying and recruiting aspiring heads on to training programmes which will in turn offer appropriate experiences to enhance and direct their potential. There has been, to date, an over reliance on competence based programmes to provide this sort of preparation for heads. The major danger here is that competence based programmes may well produce competent headteachers who will be able to manage an organisation quite efficiently but lack the talent to effect the fundamental change the current government is looking for.

Leadership, as has already been argued, can be seen as reflecting four elements: knowledge, skills, values and attributes. Governing bodies faced with the daunting challenge of selecting the right candidate at interview to lead their school will be much more comfortable in identifying and measuring knowledge and skills. The problem is that if they rely solely on these criteria they may well appoint the wrong person. It is interesting to note that anecdotal evidence does suggest that governors do sometimes turn to intuition ('gut feeling') when competent candidates are equal. How much do they, and might they, use life histories in this situation?

The challenge here is to examine ways in which values and attributes can be measured. Life history ought to play a major role in this regard since it is right and proper to acknowledge that people bring different life experiences to the jobs they take on – at whatever level. After all, the recruitment and selection of the next generation of school leaders is too important to be left to chance and too complex to be solved using a

formula which calculates little more than the number of training certificates the candidate possesses.

## **Opportunities for professional development**

The heads who have been the subject of this research did a lot of what they did intuitively. However, there was plenty of evidence coming from their interviews that they both needed and benefited from a range of professional development opportunities. Barry is an admirer of business models of change management and considers shadowing good heads as offering the best practical experience. He also believes we have a lot to learn in schools from the commercial world regarding people management because business has a vested interest to get the best out of people.

Hazel has always been interested in educational theory, a habit she was able to indulge during a year's secondment with the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). She learnt about process from Tavistock and Coverdale and was in the first cohort of the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH). Dave recalled a weekend at Dudley's regional staff college where everyone had to apply for a mythical headship. At the end of the weekend the successful candidate was appointed and everyone else had extensive debriefs. He remembers the whole experience as exhausting but extremely worthwhile. He thinks LPSH and the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) to be curate's eggs – he wants training programmes that are not over prescriptive. He also finds networking with like-minded people invaluable.

Paul is also keen to look beyond education at business management styles and structures and relate it back into school – training he does not believe the local education authority (LEA) can provide. He reckons NPQH is quite useful for developing specific skills and LPSH of limited value because it is only promoting one sort of approach. He finds networking with other schools invaluable and thinks the concept of consultant leadership has much to offer. Lesley echoed the other heads in saying how valuable it is exchanging (and stealing!) ideas from other heads. She also found visiting schools to be a very effective method for reflecting on and realigning your own ideas, a view strongly endorsed by the other heads. She attended an extremely intensive course run by the Industrial Society on effective leadership in education and found it challenging but brilliant.

Two important observations came out of the conversations with these heads. The first was that training needs change, not only when you are taking on new roles but also as you are developing your current one. In the early stages of headship, the emphasis probably needs to be much more focused on the acquisition of knowledge and skills but as you grow into the role so development needs become more defined, more personalised and less tangible. These heads, for example, said that what they needed more than anything else at the current stage in their career was a sounding board. Not a mentor or a coach or a judge, rather someone they respected who would be able to give them honest advice and support and on occasions do no more than empathise and sympathise with a particular dilemma they were facing.

All of this would appear to endorse very positively the need for school leaders to have access to regular training opportunities. The evidence also supports strongly the range

of programmes NCSL is now developing for heads who are at different stages in their careers. It may be that NPQH as it stands is too one-level and dominated by skills. LPSH may, as well, be too prescriptive; heads do not, for example, want detailed explanation of the different leadership styles on offer. They are, however, more interested in finding out why they instinctively adopt a particular style in any given scenario. Perhaps this programme ought to concentrate more on responding to specific individual needs and exploring the values and attributes implicit in any leadership role in more depth.

## **Learning networks**

The value and importance of networking cannot be overstated. Headship is often a lonely occupation and the post holder can often feel isolated and bereft of ideas. The fact that these experienced successful heads all acknowledged that they needed sounding boards is significant and reinforced the view that the establishment of formal learning networks may well be an effective solution in response to that particular need. The debate NCSL is currently having, most recently at the Leading Transformation conference is, once again, a welcome response, as is the introduction of networked learning communities (see [www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc)) and the piloting of the consultant leader programme (see [www.ncsl.org.uk/leadership](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/leadership)). The TC Trust has already made considerable progress in this area in the work it is doing to integrate and rationalise the area networking that already exists in the specialist schools movement. There must be real gains to be made by ensuring that the TC Trust and NCSL liaise and pool resources because formalising such networks and ensuring a high measure of mutual professional compatibility is a huge undertaking.

## **Summary**

This research began by posing a number of implied questions:

1. If each person's experience shapes his or her approach to leadership, how should this impact on the individual's capacity to adapt, grow and change as leader?
2. Does the essentially personal and individual nature of school leadership, particularly at headteacher level, highlight the need for training programmes designed to identify and meet individual rather than corporate needs?
3. If a person's life history is, by definition, unique to him or her, is there any relevance or value in promoting corporate, group-based programmes such as LPSH, NPQH and the Leadership and Management Programme for New Headteachers (Headlamp)?
4. If life history plays a pivotal role in shaping leadership styles, values and beliefs, then is there a powerful argument for ensuring that training programmes aimed at developing and perhaps influencing how a person leads an organisation target life history as an equally central element of such programmes?

This research has not provided answers to these questions but it has, perhaps, strengthened their validity. Brundrett (2000) makes a telling point when considering the challenge of meeting of educational management training in the twenty-first century:

It is clear that mere competence is not and should not be enough for school leaders. The fact that we do place so much increasing stress on the quality of headteachers, deputy headteachers and other senior post holders should alert us to the fact that school management must go beyond competence. This is especially true in Britain where, as we have seen, competence tends to be defined in terms of thresholds of ability. We require not just competent school leaders but capable, energetic, creative, intelligent and caring ones.

He concludes by saying that if training courses for leadership are going to be successful they will have to integrate the best of academic programmes and take full account of the emerging research evidence.

The challenge now is to provide a range of training opportunities for school leaders which recognise and respond to their specific needs at particular stages in their careers. Some programmes should aim to teach those aspects of organisational leadership which can be taught and learnt; others should look to enhance and direct those aspects of leadership which have been acquired through individual life histories. It may be that keeping the four elements of knowledge, skills, values and attributes to the forefront of any current/future planning may provide effective answers to what are very tough questions. Certainly it is not a task to be undertaken by any one national agency; rather, it requires all those bodies involved in professional development working together in order to provide the quality of leadership schools in the twenty-first century demand.

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## **Acknowledgements**

Sincere thanks to the headteachers who participated in this study:

- Barry Day, Greenwood Dale School, Nottingham
- Hazel Forrester, Loxford School of Science and Technology, Redbridge
- Paul Lowery, Ripon College
- Lesley Morrison, St Martin's-In-The-Field School, Lambeth
- Dave Seddon, Wodensborough Community Technology College, Sandwell

Special thanks to the TC Trust, and its chief executive, for their interest and support in helping me to complete the project.

Thanks also to David Middlewood and Professor Clive Dimmock of University of Leicester for their support and advice.

## Appendix 1

### First interview – areas covered

- 1 Initial response/reactions
  - immediate challenges
  - problems
- 2 The early days (Phase 1)
  - early goals/objectives
  - success, failures, why?
  - driving forces
  - obstacles
- 3 Establishing the culture (Phase 2)
  - management structures
  - enabling factors
  - constraining factors
  - ethos
  - strategies
- 4 Current phase (Phase 3)
  - key goals
  - real successes/failures
  - teaching/learning
  - future/plans
- 5 Stresses/stressors
  - identification
  - responses to

6 Significant moments/moves/trends

- impact/consequences

**Second interview – areas covered**

1 Early childhood

- earliest recollections/influences
- earliest recollections of schools and teachers

2 Family life

- growing up
- siblings
- mother and father/relationships/influences
- significant moments/influences
- extended family

3 School history

- type of school
- significant teachers/friends/influences
- reasons for considering teaching
- other occupations considered/done

4 Professional training

- where, why, subjects, why
- influential people (lecturers, peers, friends, etc)
- school experiences (teaching practices)

- 5      Role as spouse/parent
  - role/effect/challenges/successes
  - impact on career
  - routines/lifestyles
- 6      Significant trends
  - critical incidents
  - life changing events
  - important influences in developing philosophy

### **Third interview – areas covered**

- 1      First post
  - why chosen
  - areas learnt/developed
  - successes/failures
- 2      Career development
  - reasons for moving
  - reasons for promotion
  - drivers/motivating factors
  - achievements
  - failures
  - significant mentors/coaches
  - developing ideas/philosophies

- 3 Attitudes/approaches to work
  - strongly held convictions
  - that which will not be tolerated!
- 4 Leadership style(s)
  - characteristics
  - specific traits/features
- 5 Training needs
  - addressed
  - not addressed
  - required

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