Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

# Leadership development and school improvement: contemporary issues in leadership development

Tony Bush*

*Institute of Education, University of Warwick, UK*

There is great interest in educational leadership in the early part of the twenty-first century. This is because of the widespread belief that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes. In many parts of the world, including both developed and developing countries, there is increasing recognition that schools require effective leaders and managers if they are to provide the best possible education for their students and learners. More governments are realising that their main assets are their people and that remaining, or becoming, competitive depends increasingly on the development of a highly skilled workforce. This requires trained and committed teachers but they, in turn, need the leadership of highly effective principals with the support of other senior and middle managers.

**Keywords:** leadership preparation; mentoring; coaching; networking; training

## The case for leadership development

The case for specific preparation for school leaders is linked to the evidence that high-quality leadership is vital for school improvement and student outcomes. Leithwood et al. (2006, 4) show that "school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning". Leadership explains about five to seven per cent of the difference in pupil learning and achievement across schools, about one quarter of the total difference across schools. These authors also note that there would be a 10% increase in pupil test scores arising from an average headteacher improving their demonstrated abilities across 21 leadership responsibilities. They conclude that: "There is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership" (Leithwood et al. 2006, 5).

While the argument that leadership *does* make a difference is increasingly accepted, there is ongoing debate about what preparation is required to develop appropriate leadership behaviours. This relates to conceptions of the principal's role. In many countries, school leaders begin their professional careers as teachers and progress to headship via a range of leadership tasks and roles, often described as "middle management". In many cases, principals continue to teach following their appointment, particularly in small primary schools. This leads to a widespread view that teaching is their main activity (Roeder and Schkutek 2003, 105).

*Email: tony.bush@ntlworld.com

This focus on principals as head *teachers* underpins the view that a teaching qualification and teaching experience are the only necessary requirements for school leadership, although that may be modified in twenty-first-century England where the extended schools movement means that differently qualified professionals may be appointed as principals. Bush and Oduro (2006, 362) note that:

> throughout Africa, there is no formal requirement for principals to be trained as school managers. They are often appointed on the basis of a successful record as teachers with the implicit assumption that this provides a sufficient starting point for school leadership.

The picture is similar in many European countries, including Belarus, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, the Netherlands, and Portugal (Watson 2003a).

In the twenty-first century, there is a growing realisation that headship is a specialist occupation that requires specific preparation. The reasons for this paradigm shift include the following:

- The expansion of the role of school principal.
- The increasing complexity of school contexts.
- Recognition that preparation is a moral obligation.
- Recognition that effective preparation and development make a difference (Bush 2008).

### The expanded role of school leaders

The additional responsibilities imposed on principals in many countries make great demands on post holders, especially those embarking on the role for the first time (Walker and Qian 2006). These demands emanate from two contrasting sources. Firstly, the *accountability pressures* facing principals are immense and growing, in many countries. Governments, parents and the wider public expect a great deal from their schools and most of these expectations are transmitted via the principals. Crow (2006, 310), for example, referring to the United States, points to enhanced societal demands within an "increasingly high stakes policy environment". The pressures facing leaders in developing countries are very different and even more onerous than those in the world's richest nations, factors that need to be taken into account in planning leadership development programmes. In many countries in Africa, principals manage schools with poor buildings, little or no equipment, untrained teachers, lack of basic facilities such as water, power and sanitation, and learners who are often hungry (Bush and Oduro 2006).

Secondly, the role of school principals is expanding as a consequence of the devolution of powers from local, regional or national bureaucracies to school level in many countries. Brundrett, Fitzgerald, and Sommefeldt (2006, 89), referring to England and New Zealand, say that the "single largest change" in both countries has been the introduction of site-based management, linked to increasing accountability, leading to principals being positioned as "the public face of the school" (90). Watson (2003b) notes a similar trend in Europe, arising from increasing demands from local communities to have a greater say in the ways they are governed. Watson (2003b, 6) adds that devolution produces increasing complexity in the role of the head of the school and heightened tensions for principals.

### The increasing complexity of school contexts

Hallinger (2001, 61) notes that "the rapid change around the world is unprecedented". This arises from global economic integration leading to widespread recognition that education holds the key to becoming, and remaining, competitive. Inevitably, this has led to increased accountability pressures on site-based leaders, who have to deal with increasing complexity and unremitting change. Crow (2006, 315) notes the contribution of technological and demographic change to the complexity affecting school leaders and comments that these changes must also impact on the nature of leadership preparation.

The pressures facing leaders in developing countries are particularly acute, including serious poverty and killer diseases, and limited human and material resources. These contextual problems exert enormous pressure on school principals who are often "overwhelmed by the task" (Commonwealth Secretariat 1996).

### Leadership preparation as a moral obligation

The additional responsibilities imposed on school leaders, and the greater complexity of the external environment, increase the need for principals to receive effective preparation for their demanding role. Being qualified only for the very different job of classroom teacher is no longer appropriate. As this view has gained ground, it has led to the notion of "entitlement" (Watson 2003b, 13). As professionals move from teaching to school leadership, there should be *an entitlement* for them to be developed appropriately; a moral obligation. Requiring individuals to lead schools, which are often multimillion-dollar businesses, manage staff and care for children, without specific preparation, may be seen as foolish, even reckless, as well as being manifestly unfair for the new incumbent (Bush 2008). Watson's (2003b, 14) question about whether the employer has "a professional or ethical obligation to develop headteachers" should be answered with a resounding "yes".

### Effective leadership preparation makes a difference

The belief that specific preparation makes a difference to the quality of school leadership is underpinned by research on the experience of new principals. Daresh and Male's (2000, 95) research with first-year principals in England and the USA identifies the "culture shock" of moving into headship for the first time. Without effective preparation, many new principals "flounder" (Sackney and Walker 2006, 344) as they attempt to juggle the competing demands of the post. Brundrett, Fitzgerald, and Sommefeldt (2006, 90) argue that leadership development is a "strategic necessity" because of the intensification of the principal's role.

Avolio (2005) makes a compelling case for leadership development based on the view that leaders are "made not born". Those who appear to have "natural" leadership qualities acquired them through a learning process leading Avolio to deny that "leadership is fixed at birth" (2). This leads to a view that systematic preparation, rather than inadvertent experience, is more likely to produce effective leaders.

There is a widespread *belief* that specific preparation makes a difference. Lumby et al. (in press), for example, claim that "leadership development actually makes a

difference, be it in different ways, to what leaders do in schools". However, empirical support for such assumptions is weak and usually indirect. Heck (2003) uses the twin concepts of professional and organisational socialisation as a lens to examine the impact of preparation. Professional socialisation includes formal preparation, where it occurs, and the early phases of professional practice. Organisational socialisation involves the process of becoming familiar with the specific context where leadership is practised. His review of research in one US state shows that "the socialisation process accounted for about one-fourth of the variance in administrative performance" (Heck 2003, 246).

## The nature of leadership development

Bush and Jackson's (2002) review of school leadership programmes in seven countries led them to conclude that there was little difference in the outline curriculum offered to leaders. Watson (2003b, 11) asks the key question: "is training to be related to the needs of individuals, to those of the school or to the needs of the national system?" Where there is a mandatory or recommended qualification, as in England, France and Singapore, it is inevitable that national needs have primacy. A national qualification requires a measure of consistency to reassure those recruiting leaders that all graduates have achieved at least threshold competence.

### *The content of leadership development programmes*

Bolam (1999, 196) argues that leadership development can be grouped into four modes:

- Knowledge for understanding.
- Knowledge for action.
- Improvement of practice.
- Development of a reflexive mode.

Content-led programmes, particularly those provided by universities, may be regarded as predominantly aiming at "knowledge for understanding". Each programme has a "curriculum" that gives an indication of the topics to be included. In the United States, the content is linked to the Standards for School Leaders, developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). Bjork and Murphy (2005, 14) claim that such programmes "tend to place greater emphasis on the application of knowledge to improve practice than on theoretical issues" (14).

Singapore is a major centre for leadership development, the pioneer in Asia and one of the first countries to focus strongly on preparation for principals. The Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Education launched the Diploma in Educational Administration, a one-year full-time programme for prospective principals, as early as 1984 (Bush and Chew 1999). This was replaced by a new course, "Leaders in Education", in 2001. Chong, Stott, and Low (2003, 1700) stress that "delivery" is the main concern of the new programme. This comment illustrates a widespread shift in emphasis in the twenty-first century, from content to process, from "what" is included in development programmes to "how" they are designed and delivered.

**Leadership development processes**

Bolam's (1999) categories of "knowledge for action" and "improvement of practice" (see above) suggest a focus on process rather than content. Instead of the adoption of a prescribed curriculum, leaders are developed through a range of action modes and support mechanisms, often customised to the specific needs of leaders through what is increasingly referred to as "personalised" or "individualised" learning.

### *Individualised learning*

Burgoyne, Hirsh, and Williams (2004, 3) conclude that there is no single form of management and leadership capability that enhances performance in the same way in all situations, and no single way in which management and leadership development creates this capability. Rather, there are many different forms of development that can generate management and leadership capability, which in turn can increase performance in various ways. Individualisation can be achieved through facilitation, mentoring and coaching.

### *Facilitation*

Rigg and Richards (2005) show that facilitators in a number of public service leadership settings, including health and local government, play multiple roles:

- The facilitator of the process.
- A source of subject expertise.
- As mentor to participants.

Facilitation is used extensively in programmes provided by the English National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and is often one of the widely applauded dimensions of such programmes. It is particularly effective where the facilitators have specific knowledge of the contexts in which participants work. For example, facilitators who have experience of leading small primary schools are seen to have a deep understanding of the management issues facing such leaders (Bush, Glover, and Harris 2007).

### *Mentoring*

Mentoring refers to a process where one person provides individual support and challenge to another professional. The mentor may be a more experienced leader or the process may be one of peer mentoring. Bush, Glover, and Harris (2007) note that mentoring is becoming more person centred with an increased awareness of the need for careful selection of mentors, sensitive matching of mentor and mentee, effective training of mentors, and that there is time, support and understanding of the reflective process. Crawford's (2009, 105) notion of "emotional transaction" is an appropriate way of conceptualising the support role of mentors. Hobson and Sharp's (2005) systematic review of the literature found that all major studies of formal mentoring programmes for new heads reported that such programmes have been effective, and that the mentoring of new heads can result in a range of perceived benefits for both mentees and mentors. Pocklington and Weindling (1996, 189) argue that "mentoring offers a way of speeding up the process of transition to headship".

*Coaching*

Coaching is in the ascendancy as a mode of development in NCSL programmes (Bush, Glover, and Harris 2007). Bassett (2001) states that coaching differs from mentoring because it stresses the skills development dimension. Bloom et al. (2005) add that coaches provide continuing support that is safe and confidential and has as its goal the nurturing of significant personal, professional, and institutional growth through a process that unfolds over time.

Simkins et al. (2006), looking at NCSL approaches, conclude that three important issues affect the coaching experience: coach skills and commitment, the time devoted to the process, and the place of coaching within broader school leadership development strategies. Coaching appears to work best when training is thorough and specific, when there is careful matching of coach and coachee, and when it is integral to the wider learning process (Bush, Glover, and Harris 2007).

### Group learning

Despite the tendency to emphasise individual leadership learning, group activities play a significant part in many development programmes. While this may sometimes be an opportunity for an essentially didactic approach, delivering a "body of knowledge", there are several other group learning strategies that may be employed to promote participants' learning.

*Action learning*

An enhanced focus on action learning arises, in part, because of an increased recognition that leadership and management are practical activities. While knowledge and understanding serve to underpin managerial performance, they provide an inadequate guide to action (Hallinger and Bridges 2007).

McGill and Beatty (1995) show that action learning provides for continuous learning and reflection by a "set" of people, using an "experiential learning cycle". These authors show how action learning can contribute to management development through the development of the individual manager and the organisation as a whole (209). Action learning is an important part of the "delivery architecture" in Singapore's Leaders in Education programme (Chong, Stott, and Low 2003) and in NCSL's "New Visions" programme, for new first-time heads. Bush and Glover (2005, 232) note that "this approach is perceived to be highly effective". Peer learning is a key component of this approach, recognising the cumulative experience of senior professionals. Chong, Stott, and Low (2003, 169) explain the value of action learning for school leaders:

> Participants know what they are taught, but they do not know what they will learn. They have to create their own knowledge through team learning … They know what knowledge they have created only when they come to the end of the programme.

*Networking and school visits*

Bush and Glover (2004) advocate networking as one of four main leadership development approaches (the others are mentoring and coaching, work-based experiential learning, and formal leadership programmes). Internships may be regarded as a

specific form of networking and Crow (2001) argues that this may help with professional socialisation. Bush, Glover, and Harris's (2007) overview of NCSL evaluations shows that networking is the most favoured mode of leadership learning. It is likely to be more effective when it is structured and has a clear purpose. Its main advantage is that it is "live learning" and provides strong potential for ideas transfer. Visits with a clear purpose may also lead to powerful leadership learning. Visiting similar contexts (e.g. other small primary schools) appears to be particularly valuable.

*Portfolios*

Portfolios are becoming significant elements of the assessment process in several leadership development programmes. Wolf and Gearheart (1997) define a portfolio as: "The structured documentary history of a carefully selected set of coached or mentored accomplishments, substantiated by samples of student work, and fully realised only through reflective writing, deliberation, and serious conversation" (295).

Peterson and Kelley (2001) express reservations about teacher portfolios:

(1) They are difficult to use for judgements because of a lack of uniformity.
(2) Teachers may not be objective when portfolios are used for summative purposes, particularly those related to career development.

Despite these reservations, portfolios have the potential to make an important contribution to leadership learning, partly because programme assessment can be linked firmly to their schools, the context where leadership is practised.

**Content or process?**

In the twenty-first century, the emphasis has shifted from content to process in some countries, for example in England, South Africa and the United States, because of an emerging recognition that classroom learning has a limited impact on leadership practice. There is more attention to the facilitation of learning through approaches such as *participant-centred* learning, action learning sets, and open learning. The skills required are those of facilitation, coaching and mentoring.

There is extensive material on the use of different techniques in leadership development. What is less clear is how to combine these approaches to provide a holistic learning experience to meet the needs of leaders at different career stages, and in different contexts. Bush, Glover, and Harris (2007) identify four dimensions that should underpin the design of leadership development programmes:

- The learning environment – the most successful learning experiences occur when there is a bridge between the work situation and the learning situation and where participants have the opportunity to reflect on their own practice, and then to share their response with others.
- Learning styles – the most successful adult learning appears to grow from the identification of personalised learning needs.
- Learning approaches – the literature shows that there is only limited value in didactic approaches and considerable gain from active learning.

- Learning support – to ensure effective support, there is a need for careful matching, and ongoing evaluation of relationships, and the quality of support. (Bush, Glover and Harris 2007)

These four dimensions are normative constructs, the authors' views on how leadership learning can be enhanced through these four processes. However, in practice, much leadership and management development remains content led, with a knowledge-based curriculum. Bjork and Murphy (2005, 15), drawing on experience in the United States, comment that "most courses are delivered using a lecture format that is viewed as being isolated, passive and sterile knowledge acquisition".

Finding an appropriate balance between content and process remains a very real challenge for those who design, and those who experience, leadership and management development programmes.


**The impact of leadership development**

There is widespread belief in the efficacy of development programmes, leading to the introduction and growth of such interventions in many countries (Hallinger 2003; Huber 2004; Watson 2003a). Governments are investing substantial sums in leadership development because they believe that it will produce better leaders and more effective school systems. Individuals are also contributing their time, and often their own resources, to their own professional development because they think that it will enhance their career prospects and make them better leaders. However, the empirical evidence for such assumptions is modest.

In simple terms, the purpose of leadership development is to produce more effective leaders. An everyday definition of effectiveness is that the intended outcomes of an activity are achieved. Leadership programmes and activities need to be judged against this criterion. Bush (2008, 108) asks whether such processes produce better leaders and, critically, are certain approaches likely to be more successful than others in achieving such outcomes?

The challenges involved in designing, and evaluating, preparation and development initiatives may be expressed through a series of questions:

(1) Is the main purpose of the activity to develop individual leaders or to promote wider leadership development?
(2) Should leadership development be underpinned by succession planning, or be targeted at the needs and aspirations of individual leaders?
(3) Should leadership development be standards-based, or promote a more holistic approach?
(4) Should leadership development be content-led or based around processes?
(5) Should leadership development programmes aim at inculcating a specific repertoire of leadership practices?
(6) Should leadership learning be predominantly campus-based or field-based?
(7) Should leadership learning address issues of equity and diversity? (Bush 2008, 108–109)

There is insufficient space to address all these issues but a short discussion of succession planning, and of equity and diversity, seems appropriate given their centrality in England and elsewhere.

### Succession planning or meeting individual needs

Watson (2003b, 9) asks a key question: "to what extent does any training or other development system draw upon an individualised understanding of the developmental needs, and the particular strengths and weaknesses, of the particular headteacher?" This point connects to the key issue of whether programmes should be standardised or personalised. NCSL's new model National Professional Qualification for Headship stresses personalisation but it also links development to the national standards for headship. While it can be argued that any qualification needs an element of consistency, to ensure high-quality graduates and equality of treatment for all applicants, personalisation is necessary to take account of aspirants' diverse pre-course experience and the different circumstances likely to be encountered by heads working in a range of contexts.

A personalised approach may succeed in meeting the aspirations of individual leaders, but is unlikely to ensure that national and community needs are met. A major national responsibility for any society is to ensure a sufficient supply of leaders to meet the perceived demand. As the National College for School Leadership (2006, 5) points out, succession planning provides a "systematic approach to leadership recruitment and development", in contrast to "the ad hoc approach" that is the likely outcome of a process that is driven wholly by individual needs. Succession planning is regarded as essential "to ensure there is a supply and flow of high quality candidates for headship and leadership teams" (National College for School Leadership 2007, 16) but this is not easy to achieve in devolved educational systems.

### Leadership for equity and diversity

In many parts of the world, women are under-represented in educational leadership and management, even though they generally form a majority of the teaching force (Coleman 2002). Black and minority ethnic (BME) leaders are also marginalised in many countries, including England and the United States (Bush, Glover, and Sood 2006; Bush, Allen, et al. 2007). In South Africa, black leaders still experience discomfort and discrimination when seeking and holding leadership posts in the former White, Indian and "coloured" schools (Bush and Moloi 2007).

These problems provide a challenge for those responsible for leadership development programmes. Bush (2008, 113) asks two key questions about leadership development and diversity:

- How, if at all, should the recruitment to, and the design, delivery and assessment of, such activities reflect a focus on equity and diversity? An undifferentiated model inevitably means an approach tailored to the needs of the majority white population.
- Should the design and content of leadership programmes differ for minority groups? Lumby and Coleman (2007, 63) comment that training for BME leaders should not re-create them as "clones of their white colleagues".

Resolving such questions is not straightforward, and there are differing views amongst BME leaders (Bush, Allen, et al. 2007), but they need to be at the heart of design and delivery processes and not thrust to the margin.

*Evaluation and impact: models and evidence*

Leadership development programmes may be subject to evaluation but the approaches often employed are subject to two main limitations:

(1) They rely mainly or exclusively on *self-reported evidence*. Participants are asked about their experience of the activity and, more rarely, about its impact on their schools. This is a weak approach because it is not subject to corroboration, for example by colleagues, and because it is inevitably subjective.

(2) The evaluation is usually *short term*. Participants' views are often sought during and/or at the end of the development activity. It is widely recognised that the impact of interventions, such as a leadership programme, takes time. It is unlikely that significant changes in leadership practice will have occurred during the training period.

Even where these two pitfalls are avoided, there is still the problem of attributing beneficial effects to the development activity when there are likely to be many other contemporaneous events that could also contribute to change. However, addressing the two limitations set out above would produce more credible, if not totally reliable, findings.

In England, there is increasing concern about whether and how leadership impacts on school outcomes. The official *End to End Review* of school leadership (Department for Education and Skills 2004) demonstrates the Government's keen interest in exploring this issue:

> Greater understanding is needed of the linkages and mediators between leadership and educational attainment and social outcomes … [there is a] lack of consensus about the contribution of different elements to the linkages, indirect effects and mediating factors for improving school leadership. (para. 22)

The Department for Education and Skills also commissioned a paper "to assist them to think about how to evaluate the impact of leadership on school outcomes" (Leithwood and Levin 2004, 2). These authors begin by noting that "linking leadership to student outcomes in a direct way is very difficult to do" (2). Leithwood and Levin (2004, 25) conclude that "a study that seeks to assess the impact that school leadership can have on school outcomes faces some formidable challenges".

*Self-reported data*

As noted above, many evaluations of leadership development activities rely wholly, or mainly, on self-reported data. One such example is the initial study of the impact of the NCSL programme "Leading from the Middle" (Naylor, Gkolia, and Brundrett 2006). The authors' responses show a significant increase in confidence levels after the course. Participants also claimed that the impact of their teams, and the team's impact on pupil progress, had increased considerably although less than their improvement in confidence. The authors acknowledge that these findings may represent "post-programme euphoria" and also note the limitations of such self-reported data. However, they conclude by asserting that "the LftM programme has had a significant short-term impact on those surveyed" (2006, 14).

A similar approach has been used in three small-scale evaluations of the Scottish Qualification for Headship (Reeves et al. 2001). Candidates were interviewed and

their work was examined to see if there were any changes in their conceptions of school leadership and management. The majority of candidates feel that they have become more reflective and evaluative as a result of their experience of the programme. They also claimed "a noticeable impact on candidates and their schools" (2001, 46). While this is self-reported data, the authors also note that 77% of candidates' headteacher mentors agreed that candidates' practice had improved and that there were benefits for their schools.

Heck's (2003) study of 150 assistant principals, and their supervising principals, goes beyond self-reporting to include the perspectives of their super-ordinates. He notes that those candidates who had progressed to the principalship "had developed a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities" (247). Many attributed this to their internship and to the support provided by mentors. These new principals had also established strong support networks that sustained them during difficult periods.

*Role set analysis*

The weaknesses of self-reporting can be addressed through adopting role set analysis. The perceptions of programme participants can be triangulated (Bush 2007) by seeking views from close colleagues at the school or workplace. This enables candidates' claims to be corroborated or challenged by the perceptions of those who should be aware of changes in practice. The present author adopted this approach in three impact studies, two for the NCSL and one in South Africa.

Bush, Briggs, and Middlewood (2006) examined the impact of NCSL's New Visions programme on school outcomes as part of a wider evaluation of this programme. The research included case study work in a purposive sample of 15 schools in three regions. Researchers interviewed four people in each school to achieve respondent triangulation, and to gauge school effects from four contrasting perspectives, the participant headteachers, leadership team members, classroom teachers, and governing body chairs.

Many participants claimed significant gains in their confidence and personal development. These changes were often confirmed by role set members who noted participants' enthusiasm on their return from New Visions activities. The heads and their role sets also noted three main changes in leadership practice:

- A greater emphasis on shared leadership.
- An enhanced focus on leadership for learning.
- Specific changes in school organisation.

Bush, Briggs, and Middlewood (2006) comment that the effects of the New Visions programme are filtered through many levels before they impact on student outcomes but they also note some modest evidence of impact at this level. They also recommend a longer-term evaluation "because leadership effects are likely to take time to impact on student outcomes" (197).

Bush, Duku, et al. (2007) are conducting an evaluation of South Africa's pilot Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE): School Leadership programme, funded by the Zenex Foundation. The research will provide a comprehensive evaluation of the programme in order to inform the development of the course and to provide advice to the Minister of Education on whether it should become mandatory for new principals. The early evidence is that the ACE produces a short-term decline in school leadership

effectiveness as leaders focus on preparing their assignments instead of managing their schools.

*Overview*

The global interest in leadership development is predicated on the widespread assumption that it will lead to school improvement, and enhanced learning outcomes. The empirical evidence for this perspective is limited and assessing impact is difficult because of several conceptual and methodological problems. Firstly, as we have seen, the purposes of education, and of educational leadership, are wide and varied. The efficacy of leadership activities needs to be tested against all these criteria if a comprehensive assessment of impact is to be made. In practice, however, impact studies tend to focus on the measurable outcomes sought by governments, notably student test scores. Secondly, even where improvements occur, it is very difficult to attribute them with confidence to a specific intervention, such as a leadership development programme, when there are many other contemporaneous changes. Thirdly, while leadership is widely regarded as the second most important factor affecting student outcomes after classroom teaching, it is a mediated variable with leaders exercising their influence indirectly. This makes it difficult to assess the nature and extent of leaders' impact.

## Conclusion: the future of leadership development

There is widespread interest in educational leadership and management. The generally accepted belief that effective leadership is vital for successful schooling is increasingly being supported by evidence of its beneficial effects (Hallinger 2003; Leithwood et al. 2006). Where there is failure, inadequate leadership is often a major contributory factor.

Given the importance of educational leadership, the development of effective leaders should not be left to chance. It should be a deliberate process designed to produce the best possible leadership for schools and colleges. As the NCSL (2007, 17) succinctly argues, "leadership must grow by design not by default". Van der Westhuizen and van Vuuren (2007, 431) refer to the "professionalisation" of the principalship, an explicit recognition that school leadership is a different role from teaching and requires separate and specialised preparation. The trend towards systematic preparation and development of school and college leaders, while by no means universal, has advanced to the point where the argument is widely accepted. However, there is continuing and ongoing debate about the nature of such provision.

Bush, Glover, and Harris (2007) say that the most successful learning experiences occur when there is a bridge between the work situation and the learning situation. The NCSL (2007, 17) claims that "a large amount of … leadership learning should take place in school", but they also acknowledge that such work-based learning can be "narrow and conservative" (18). There is no "off-the-peg" solution to such dilemmas and course designers need to find a judicious and appropriate balance for their specific client group(s).

The most successful adult learning appears to grow from the identification of personalised learning needs. However, individualised learning is difficult to organise and can be expensive to deliver. For statutory provision, in particular, it also compromises the standardisation required to justify the "national programme" label.

In the past decade, there has been a global trend towards more systematic provision of leadership and management development, particularly for school principals. Hallinger (2003, 3) notes that, in 1980, "no nation in the world had in place a clear system of national requirements, agreed upon frameworks of knowledge, and standards of preparation for school leaders". In the twenty-first century, many countries are giving this a high priority, recognising its potential for school improvement.

This trend is encapsulated most powerfully by the English NCSL but it can also be seen in France, Singapore and South Africa. Candidates undertake "centralised" training before becoming principals and receive national accreditation on successful completion of the activity. Much of the development work is work based, recognising that leadership practice takes place in schools. Increasingly, current or former principals are involved in designing, leading and delivering leadership programmes, showing that "craft" knowledge is increasingly respected (Bush 2008).

In many countries, leadership preparation is no longer an optional activity. Rather, new principals require certification to practise, so that teachers, parents, school communities and governments can be satisfied that their schools will be led by qualified people. Even in the United States, where provision is pluralist, the advent of the ISLLC standards has created a measure of consistency across programmes. The case for systematic, specialised training for principals is persuasive and increasingly accepted. Leadership development has been "nationalised". It remains to be seen if this model produces more successful schools.

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