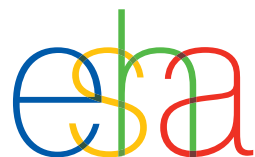




# esa magazine

February 2011

## Human Capital is Your Most Important Property



European School  
Heads Association

ESHA magazine is the official magazine of the European School Heads Association, the Association for school leaders in Europe. ESHA magazine will be published ten times per school year. You are welcome to use articles from the magazine but we would appreciate it if you contacted the editor first.

## **Subscription**

The ESHA e-magazine is free of charge. You can register through the internet at [www.eshamagazine.org](http://www.eshamagazine.org)

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# In this issue

February 2011

- 4 Column Ton Duif
- 6 Guest Column Fred Verboon
- 11 Agenda
- 12 Human Capital is Your Most Important Property
- 18 News from Catalonia
- 22 Crisis at school
- 28 The Children's Mental Health Coalition
- 32 Taking command



## A Wake Up Call!

On Wednesday, 9th February, twelve thousand angry teachers, school heads and governors met in Utrecht (Netherlands) to protest against budget cuts on education for children with special needs. The new Dutch government proposes savings of 300,000,000 euros from special education funding. Together with an earlier budget cut of 100,000,000 euros it's a significant downsize of investment in the future generation. And, maybe this is not the end. I've received the same disturbing messages from other European countries.

The problem is that most politicians will agree that investing in education is the best investment for the future of all – families, communities and the nation itself. There is also recognition that such an approach towards investment saves a lot of money on the longer term. But they do not act accordantly. It is calculated that every early school leaver will cost the Dutch society the average sum of 200,000 euros before they reach adulthood through money which has to be spent on youth care, youth crime, social security etc. Over a life time this adds up to more than a million euros in real terms costs to the economy!. So, a failure to not invest in education is really penny wise and pound foolish and a demonstration of short term vision.

School leaders face not only a lack of money; the additional problems in our schools and their communities increase in both numbers and in complexity. It's not an easy job to grow up in this complicated and often very unsafe society. It is fast becoming clear that in the immediate future a lot of children across Europe are facing serious problems sometimes in complex learning disabilities, mental health and well-being and often with significant behaviour problems demonstrated in school. Furthermore, parents are more and more demanding for their expectations for and from schools – don't we all aim for a perfect society?

Good education is a pre-condition to an almost perfect society. It's time for a political wakeup call!!

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'D' followed by a horizontal line and a vertical stroke.



# The Community Perspective

## It is all about you

I remember it clearly. I was 12, my father proudly presented an encyclopaedia to me and my two brothers. It was his moment. This encyclopaedia would certainly improve our academic achievements. All the 16 books have cost my father a small fortune. Only the best for his sons.

My second epiphany came when I was 32. My father's persistence to support some kind of academic achievement has resulted in a job at Microsoft. Microsoft, being a good father for its employees, provided all with a free copy of Encarta. It has cost Microsoft a lot of money. Hundreds of developers and editors worked on the digital encyclopaedia. Again, it enriched my knowledge, this time with full colour pictures and virtual multi-media experiences.

In the same year, 2001, a single person launched a fairly unknown web encyclopaedia. Today, its 17 million articles have been written by volunteers around the world, and almost all of its articles can be edited by anyone with access to the site. It has become the largest and most popular general reference work on the Internet, having 365 million readers. For some reason people contribute for free at Wikipedia Corporation.

## Our challenge

Meanwhile, at the ESHA Office, we are looking for a strategy to work on the issues that the European school leaders face every day. Can we hire the best consultants available? Can we afford it?

The main learning of the market research is that many school leaders face similar problems, but some excel in areas where others face issues. If school leaders already dealt with these issues, could it then be possible that school leaders could help other school leaders? Are there enough leaders willing to contribute the knowledge base?

Being a former Microsoft employee and an enthused Wikipedia user, I would like to portrait myself as an open minded person. However, will people ever work on something without getting paid? Is it possible that people are not solely motivated by money? Don't we actually need high paid consultants? Would you help a colleague if you do not get immediate compensation?

Nevertheless, Ton Duif and the ESHA board members believe that school leaders like you will help colleagues. Based upon that firm believe that you will help your colleagues and they will in turn help you, ESHA now builds a community portal to facilitate the 86.000 school leaders to collaboratively work on the issues identified by the National associations for school leaders.

ESHA now builds  
a community portal  
to facilitate the  
school leaders

In October 2010, ESHA asked the National Associations for School Leaders to submit the top issues that their members, the school leaders, face on a daily basis. Many associations responded and the outcome is very interesting, to say the least. The top 5 issues that the National Associations reported are:

## **1 Administrative work load**

Many associations reported that their school leaders have to deal with too many administrative tasks. School leaders feel overburdened with administrative tasks and have less time to concentrate on essential matters, such as the quality of learning, the curriculum, pedagogical issues and staff performance, motivation and development.

## **2 School leadership skills**

Effective school leadership is a major factor in shaping the overall teaching and learning environment, raising aspirations and providing support for pupils, parents and staff, and thus in fostering higher achievement levels. It is therefore of key importance to ensure that school leaders have, or are able to develop, the capacities and qualities needed to assume the increasing number of tasks with which they are confronted.

## **3 Reduced or too low budgets**

Many school leaders face reduced budgets due to the economic recession. Although The European Commission and Mc Kinsey stress that investing in education and training is of crucial importance for both the economy, many colleagues will face lowered budgets making it almost impossible to improve the standards of education

## **4 Autonomy of schools**

The levels of autonomy of schools vary in Europe. Some associations reported that individual school leaders can only spend very limited time on school leadership tasks and some cannot even hire the teachers they prefer. The obvious question is: how can school leaders be accountable for achieving high academic results, if they cannot even hire their own staff?

## **5 Quality of education**

Teacher education programs need to be of high quality, relevant to needs and based on a well-balanced combination of solid academic research and extensive practical experience for preparing teachers and school leaders to carry out their responsibilities and ensuring school leaders' continuing professional development



The site and the new portal will be launched in March. This portal will replace the old site at [www.esha.org](http://www.esha.org).

### **What you can do?**

The ESHA Magazine will publish interesting articles on the issues and is the starting point of all our community efforts. You can help just by subscribing to this free magazine at [www.ESHAMagazine.com](http://www.ESHAMagazine.com)

Fred Verboon lives in Katwijk, The Netherlands, is married to Karen and father of Lisa and Vivianne. He is an independent strategy advisor specialized in community building and turn-around management. He currently works for ESHA and his main task is to build the community for school leadership.

Subscribe  
today to the free magazine  
at [ESHAMagazine.com](http://ESHAMagazine.com)



# Agenda

## 2011

February 24-27

NASSP convention in San Francisco

March 8-10

ICP board meeting Amersfoort Netherlands

March 16th

Convention Vocational School Managers Denmark

March 18th

AVS Convention in Utrecht

March 24th

VO-raad Convention in Utrecht

April 1st

Launch new ESHA e-platform

April 1st -2nd

ESHA General Assembly Amsterdam

April 7th-10th

NAESP convention in Tampa

April 29th-May 1st

NAHT convention in Brighton

August 15th-18th

ICP convention in Toronto (registration now open)

October 12th-14th

Fourth German Speaking Region conference Pécs Hungary

# Human Capital is Your Most Important Property

The last few years have in many countries changed the direction of the National Economy and the new decade was entered in terms of economic instability. When the value of the capital measured in currency is staggering, the human capital deserves special emphasis. This capital is built on one's upbringing, experiences of life and work in different stages, as well as education in knowledge and skills. Raising the amount and quality of education means increase of human capital.

JUKKA KUITTINEN

Counsellor for Education

ESHA Board Member, Treasurer

ICP Council Member

Vice President for Finnish Association of Principals

## Pursuing the Right and Useful Knowledge

Currently and in the coming years, education and increasing human capital are of special interest when the nationwide quality criteria of the basic education, the curricula and the internationally comparable learning results are being pondered. The future school is, besides

teaching, supposed to promote general civic and multicultural skills. The school encourages the realization of each individual's hidden creativity. Especially in countries belonging to small linguistic areas, such as in the Scandinavian and Baltic countries, the acquisition of a versatile knowledge of foreign languages needs to be promoted.

Beside the areas of development mentioned above the school systems of all countries need efforts to promote citizens'

social skills. Our society and living environment, being constantly built more and more on ICT, takes each of us daily to the realm of knowledge and presents many choices. We have to choose between what is important and unessential, between good and bad







knowledge. The school's basic task is to take its students to the source of the right and useful knowledge in order to provide them with capability to manage in swordplay's in knowledge in their lives and to exploit the gained knowledge in an ethically worthy way.

### **Don't Forget the Wisdom of the Popular Tradition**

Unfortunately enough, a lot of modern people don't realize the value and importance of popular tradition and popular wisdom. In Finland we can see that the fascinating tradition of Kalevala\*, our National Epic, lives in the Finnish culture in many ways. Kalevala appears in

\* Kalevalais regarded as the national epic of Finland and is one of the most significant works of Finnish literature. The Kalevala played an instrumental role in the development of the Finnish national identity, the intensification of Finland's language strife and the growing sense of nationality that ultimately led to Finland's independence from Russia in 1917.

one way or other in the street view, the names of many enterprises, products as well as the forms of artistic performance. With good reason we can say that the cultural influence by the National Epic, gathered by professor Elias Lönnrot on his wide expeditions, has since being published reached wide outside the literature proper.

Let's tell a Kalevala tale as an example of a swordplay in knowledge. Young, defiant Joukahainen challenged old and wise Väinämöinen to a knowledge contest. However, Joukahainen's whole knowledge was bare unimportant fragmentary knowledge, not wisdom. Having seen he was losing the contest, Joukahainen seized his sword. Then old Väinämöinen got angry and chanted Joukahainen to sink in the swamp. He can only be rescued by promising to give his own sister to Väinämöinen as a wife. Väinämöinen is conciliated and the tale continues. Surely you can guess that Joukahainen's sister was not very delighted by his brother's promise. Kalevala's lessons completely accord the contemporary spirit. It's worth pondering to which extent Joukahainen's fragmentary knowledge is comparable to surfing the Net and the unanalytic use of knowledge gained this way.

“The power of culture and knowledge is the rescue of a nation.”

### **The Important Aid of Festival Traditions**

Memories of festivities and highlights interrupting everyday toil from childhood and youth remain in one's mind throughout life. The preparations of these were exciting but on the other hand, the

permanence connected to festival tradition, following a certain pattern, repetition of things as always in the past, have given us safety and security. It's about transferring cultural or festival tradition from one generation to the next ones. In many cases we in one way or other follow traditions which have given a rhythm to everyday life for centuries.

“Training students to tolerance and respect for others.”

Cultural heritage and festival traditions belong to all of us and maintaining them is a duty of all of us, regardless of nation or state, but maybe with a certain emphasis among small nations.

Cultural heritage is not taught as a distinct subject at least in Finnish schools, doubtfully anywhere else. Instead, curricula have integrated it in several school subjects. It's also important that through school festivities many valuable things of life are learned, which would be difficult to practise otherwise.

### **Youth is a Time of Attachment to Culture**

During school years a young person should get onto the way to education and stay on it throughout the whole life. It's about life-long learning and continuing gathering of knowledge and culture. Education can never be complete or perfect.

The leading idea of Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806-1881), a Finnish cultural trend-setter and social politician, was: “The power of



culture and knowledge is the rescue of a nation.” Wisdom contains the knowledge of the factors contributing to success of Finland and individual Finns in Snellman’s time in the 19th century well as in our days, both in arts and culture and in sciences and technology. Snellman’s social philosophy combines respect for national culture and mother tongue with European international thinking in an atmosphere respecting all other people.

An important question arises: Does the present-day education lead young persons to independent and creative enough thinking and further to an ennobled and judicious personality? Does the present-day youth have time to get attached to culture?

### **Education and the Right Values**

It goes without saying that the demanding task of the school is, beside transferring knowledge, to train the students to obtain the right values. Training to tolerance and respect for others and to humanity and unselfishness certainly help perceive one’s own living environment with its strengths and faults.

Learning to critically observe knowledge helps to cope with the constantly increasing flood of information in the future. These skills are supposed to be the most versatile for we don’t know what the world is like in which our present students live their most effective working age in the 2040’s and 2050’s.

It’s self-evident that out of the Finnish viewpoint, at least, the demands for international skills and versatile knowledge of foreign languages keep increasing all the time. However, we have to remember that in the end, competing with oneself is more noble and important than competing on arenas.

# News from Catalonia

Catalonia is a small nation within the Spanish State. It is in the north-east of the Iberian Peninsula. There are 7 million inhabitants in Catalonia, and two official languages, Catalan and Spanish. Around half of the population has Catalan as their mother tongue.

BY JAUME PRAT, PRESIDENT OF AXIA, THE CATALAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL MANAGERS

Catalonia has political autonomy and education is run by the Catalan Ministry of Education, a branch of the Generalitat (the Catalan Autonomous Government).

Axia is the Catalan Association of School Managers. Axia is a small organisation with 150 members. Axia is member of ESHA and member of the Spanish umbrella organisation FEDADi (Spanish Federation of Associations of School Managers).

In Spain there is a general framework for the whole State, written in the Education Act. Every autonomous community (like Catalonia) develops its own laws, decrees, and rules. Nevertheless school leadership has always been very different from the whole Europe. Since the end of Franco's regime, schools have been ruled by teachers, chosen by the teachers, formally by the school board, where teachers, parents, students and other staff represented each section. So being a head teacher has always been a temporary



job for a teacher, who hardly ever had some chances to deal with leading a school. As a result of this structure people did not apply for the job, only some people with a strong moral commitment to their schools decided to behave as if they were professional head teachers.

Things have changed a lot in the last decade. Since 2005 head teachers are no longer elected but selected by a committee chaired by an inspector, but still with a majority of teachers in it. Applicants for the position have to write a project for four years. After this time, the school inspector evaluates these four years, and if the result is positive, and the head teacher wants to manage the school for another four years, he is appointed again.

In 2009 the Catalan Parliament passed the Education Catalan Act, which set a basic framework to professionalise school management

in Catalonia. In 2010 two basic decrees were issued by the Catalan Ministry of Education, the decree of autonomy of schools and the decree of management of schools. In the last one, the role of the professional school manager is now set. This is very important for our school system.

“... a head master is different from being a teacher. It has been a tough task to tell, explain and convince our politicians and our society that not doing so is a big mistake.”

Axia was founded in 1999 and its main goal has been the professionalization of the school management. Axia has told over and over again that the European school management model makes it perfectly clear that being a head master is different from being a teacher. It has been a tough task to tell, explain and convince our politicians and our society that not doing so is a big mistake.

Axia has organised several conventions and a conference through eleven years. ESHA has always supported Axia, and a good number of presi-

dents, executive board members and GB members have attended our conventions and have supported Axia in its task, disseminating the European models and ideas on professional school leadership.

Our last convention took place last November. Solveig Dahl attended it on behalf of ESHA. The issue was the professionalization of the school leader. The opening ceremony was held by the Catalan Minister of Education, who supported the changes in education



in Catalonia, the Education Catalan Act, as well as the two new decrees. Solveig Dahl told about the objectives of ESHA for the next two years, the new ESHA Magazine and the project on the European School Leadership Network. There were two main speakers, Mariano Fernández Enguita (complutense University), whose speech was “From uncertainty to innovation: autonomy, coordination and accountability”. The second main speaker was Jaume Graells (Baccalaureate and Basic Education General Director) whose speech was “The Ministry of Education and the professional school leader”. There were also professional business leaders who spoke about how they deal with professional management at their sectors.

Axia is looking forward to seeing a new time for education in Catalonia. In spite of the tough crisis, hitting the whole society, education is the main road to achieve the future.

# Crisis at school



The more or less daily messages we hear about violence and accidents demonstrate that peaceful school life can very suddenly be disrupted by shocking events. Even if the dramatic event does not take place at the school itself, the impact can be all too clear. School leaders and teachers are often expected to undertake activities that have nothing whatever to do with their day-to-day work. This also often involves situations in which stress levels and emotions run very high and the capacity to deal with this effectively can be significantly undermined.

INE SPEE, SENIOR ADVISER AND DISASTER TEAM PROJECT LEADER  
KPC GROEP, FEBRUARY, 2011

Processing this type of occurrence is a serious business; members of staff and teachers have their own emotions to deal with and, on occasion, it is no longer clear who the professional is. Sometimes, pupils can demonstrate sudden leadership qualities or become extremely proficient at supporting fellow pupils and teachers. In times of confusion and chaos, certain people can excel themselves far beyond their expectations or, indeed, demonstrate themselves to be less decisive than they had imagined.

Schools that have been part of such drastic events point, without exception, to the need to be prepared in some way. The method of dealing with crisis situations requires a delicate touch even though feelings of despondency and powerlessness will be running high at the time. Nobody likes preparing themselves for threatening situations. The school, however, bears responsibility for the wellbeing of the teachers and the pupils and preparation for this type of extreme event is part of that responsibility. Human suffering, inherent in disasters, cannot be avoided entirely but the manner in which the school responds before, during and after shocking events can determine subsequent reactions, how the trauma is processed and the restoration of ordinary life.

## Unawares

The school is caught unawares by a pupil's suicide: there were very few signs beforehand and it was an enormous shock.

The school leaders decided not to publicise the method of suicide as this could give other pupils ideas. They thought it was best to pay as little attention as possible to the death.

In the meantime, however, the rumour-mill had started to turn. The pupils were upset and sad, their teachers lacked information and were inconvenienced and parents rang the school to find out how they would prevent this from happening again.

Eighty percent of the schools in the Netherlands have a crisis protocol but this is often inadequate if a dramatic event takes place. No protocol can every deal with a school leader who is murdered in cold blood or a fire, such as in Volendam, in which hundreds of school pupils were involved. In extreme situations, the reality is always more bizarre than can what can be predicted by any protocol.

Nonetheless, a good protocol does provide a guideline if the school

is involved in dramatic events. It provides guidance in times of panic and helps schools gain an oversight of the aspects involved in a catastrophe, even if this only involves the need to form a crisis team and which people will be involved.

“Communication and after-care play an extremely significant role in this type of protocol.”

Huge disasters and calamities cannot be practised but there are other crisis situations, that do not instantly turn the school completely on its head, in which a protocol would be a useful tool.

A pupil aged 15 had been missing for several days.

People began to think in terms of the worst case scenario.

The school leaders drew up various protocols for the various moments at which they could receive the bad news: at

the weekend, in an evening and if the message came in during the school day.

When the news finally came in, alongside all of the grief, the fact that the various officials in the school knew exactly what to do provided a sense of security.

Communication and after-care play an extremely significant role in this type of protocol.

How do you ensure that communication to parents, colleagues and pupils is transparent?

How do you ensure that the crisis team’s information head-start does not lead to bungling among the teachers who do not feel they



are being listened to? How do you avoid teachers telling their own story in each class? How do you make sure that parents know that their child is still safe at school?

How do you ensure that your contact with the media takes the right line? These components of crisis communication are precisely the aspects that determine whether (or not) personnel, parents, pupils and the environment feel listened to and recognised.

After news that a family murder had taken place, and that two children from the school had been involved, the school immediately formed a crisis team.

All information from the police and judiciary was processed by the crisis team and they took the interests of the pupils, personnel and parents into careful consideration.

These considerations, however, were not communicated to the personnel; the members of staff occasionally read about decisions the crisis team had taken in the newspapers before hearing it at school...

Despite the care taken by the crisis team, personnel did not feel that they had been considered to a sufficient degree.

When a disaster involves a school, the attention paid to pupils is usually sufficient but teachers and school leaders who are part of the crisis team are often forgotten because it seems as though they have everything under control and are managing the situation effectively.

“Decisions of the crisis team had taken in the newspapers before hearing it at school.”



“Others cannot bear  
to think of lessons  
and just want to talk  
and talk.”

Six months after the event at a school, those involved are often still dealing with heightened emotions and are doing so without much attention having been paid to them.

At school, the supervision of a terminally ill pupil was managed by a very committed teacher. She had intensive contact with the pupil and his parents and invested a great deal of effort in methods to prepare the children and allow them to process the events.

When the youngster finally died, she led the entire farewell process, contributed towards the funeral and maintained contact with the parents. The school was extremely proud of her.

Four weeks after the death, something snapped for the teacher: school (life) had returned to normal and the teacher only then noticed how alone she had been and how her own ability to process the event had been left behind while the school had been working through the event.

Unambiguous advice for schools in certain crisis situations is not possible. Every situation, school culture and prior history demands different interventions. In some situations, some pupils and teachers want to get back to the timetable and the fixed structure of lessons as quickly as possible. Others cannot bear to think of lessons and just want to talk and talk. Schools often seek rituals in order to put an unsafe situation 'to bed' and make a new start together.

In Littleton, America, the school board wanted to break-up after a violent shooting incident involving several pupils. The remaining pupils, however, did not want to; they wanted to celebrate their graduation at their own school.

They decided together – as a ritual, they chose to paint the school together and, as a result, give the place a new and safe appearance.

# The Children's Mental Health Coalition

One of the greatest challenges facing a school leader is coping with the tragic death by suicide of a student. Unfortunately such tragic events are becoming more and more frequent in our schools. NAPD is part of the Children's Mental Health Coalition and has briefed the Coalition on issues to do with education. The Coalition was invited to make a submission to the Independent Monitoring Group on A Vision for Change, the government's mental health strategy. NAPD participated in meetings with senior Department officials to progress the agreed priorities in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, the Education System, the Youth Justice System and the Care System.



## **45% Of SEN children have mental health difficulties**

As part of the submission on the field of education, the Coalition has called on Government to take steps to ensure schools and early years settings engage in mental health promotion and provide early supportive intervention. The Implementation Plan from the National Council for Special Education noted that of the 190,303 children with special educational needs (equivalent to 18% of all children under 18 years of age), 86,083 – or 45% – have mental health difficulties.

Sadly, there is no evidence that an appropriate level of services has been put in place to meet the needs of these children in a school setting. As a result of personnel constraints, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) must concentrate most of its work on making assessments of disability rather than focusing on working with schools for best outcomes for students who

are so assessed. Instead, the needs of children and young people with mental health difficulties are responded to via the local health services, which, for similar reasons, do not seem capable of providing speedy early interventions.

### **SPHE must be available to all**

Furthermore, implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004 [EPSEN] has been deferred indefinitely. There is a need to clarify the work of NEPS: when it is appropriate to refer a child to NEPS and its role as a point of referral for children's mental health services

A Vision for Change also highlighted the importance of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum for mental health promotion. The deficiencies in the delivery of the SPHE curriculum, including the lack of ongoing training for teachers, gaps in school leadership and lack of a follow on programme for Senior Cycle, have been identified in a number of reports.

The mental health component of SPHE is still not offered to every student. Given the expected increases in class sizes and the public sector recruitment embargo, this is of even greater concern. SPHE should have a dedicated and mainstreamed focus on mental health and well-being for students in every school year. The Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) Support Service should be extended.

Guidelines on  
mental health  
should be  
developed for  
schools.



## **Support service needs to provide mental-health training for teachers**

The service should have a specific role in supporting teachers by providing training on mental health and how to appropriately respond to students who are presenting difficulties, including making appropriate supportive interventions. This extended service should develop recommendations for schools: on effective mental health promotion in consultation with stakeholders, including children and young people. Guidelines on mental health should be developed for schools. The guidelines should provide clear procedures on how teachers can raise concerns about individual students' mental health difficulties, along the lines of the Children First guidelines. A designated member of staff should have responsibility, based upon reasonable judgment, for raising such concerns to the appropriate agency, parent or family member. Training should be provided for this designated liaison person.

NAPD has been contacted by Dr Amanda Fitzgerald [of the School of Psychology in University College Dublin], who is conducting research on behalf of Headstrong, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health. The research entitled *You and your well-being* is designed to provide data on the key sources of stress for Irish young people.

One hundred and fifty schools will be contacted over the next while and asked to participate in the study which will compile responses from over ten thousand students. In the light of the increase in the number of students experiencing mental health and well-being difficulties, NAPD fully endorses this study and, while realising that there are many calls on Principals' time, it urges schools to cooperate with the researchers if requested. Anonymity is guaranteed and we will all benefit from the information gleaned as a result of the study.



# Taking command

If you haven't yet seen the movie *The Damned United* put it on your list. All school leaders can learn something from the story of Brian Clough's disastrous month and a half in charge of the enigmatic Leeds United Football Club. The story is especially relevant to those of us recently appointed as Principals or Deputy Principals.

NICHOLAS CUDDIHY, HEADMASTER CRESCENT COLLEGE  
COMPREHENSIVE SJ

Elland Road [the home of Leeds United] at the time was haunted by the ghost of Clough's predecessor, Don Revie, who had made no secret of the fact that he had wanted Johnny Giles, a former Irish international player, to take over when he left. Revie's farewell press conference was very telling:

"I'd like to think I've built the club into a family. Now, there must be sadness when anyone leaves the family. However, when one man leaves, another man steps into his place, I know whom I think that man should be, the person to replace me. And, I've made my feelings clear to the board of directors."



## **A growing community of rookies**

If like me you are in the first five years of Principalship you'll be pleased to know you are part of a growing community of rookies. It's not easy to get precise figures but the NAPD data base shows that since 2006 at least 300 new Principals were appointed in the 741 Post Primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. We also know that in 2009 alone 100 Principals retired. Cross-checking the figures that are available from various sources including the Irish Department of Education and Skills, and the data base held by the NAPD two points jump out:

The first is the obvious one; there has been a significant spike in the turnover of leaders in our schools in the last five years or so. More than one-third of all post-primary schools opened in 2010 with a Principal who was in his/her first four years. In many cases both Deputy and Principal were in this category.

The second point is based on an interesting statistic I obtained through a parliamentary question to the Minister of Education and Skills, who confirmed that less than half of the new Principals appointed since 2006 had served as a Deputy Principal before their appointment.

## **Leadership-development and succession-planning**

The pattern is reflective of an international reality in which leadership-development and succession-planning have never been more important. (Hargreaves and Fink 2006). Although in some countries, such as Cyprus and Malta, for example, school Principals have continued to be appointed largely on the basis of seniority (Bezzina, 2002, Pashiardis, 2003) it is now widely accepted that school leadership requires a more sophisticated succession-planning approach to identify and encourage promising teachers with leadership potential. (Bush et al. 2009). For many years the NAPD and others who work with school leaders have called for a

systematic approach to leadership development and support for serving school leaders. LDS has answered that call and now provides in-service for new and experienced serving school leaders as well as courses targeting aspiring and 'middle' or 'positional' leaders.

## **The world of the new Principal**

But what of the world of the new Principal? Where have these Principals come from? What do they go through? And what do they need to support them in their early years? Does their experience resound with that of Brian Clough or are they more like Declan Kidney [Ireland's national rugby coach], winning the Grand Slam in their first year! International research results present a rather challenging consensus that the world of the new Principal is filled with considerable anxiety, frustration and professional isolation (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Young et al., 2002).

I've done quite a bit of reading, reflection and even a bit of formal study since my first appointment in 2006. I've also been deliberate in my efforts to keep in touch with other rookies like myself through the school leadership programmes. During various conferences and meetings, I've also taken time to meet and listen to Principals. From these experiences, and from my reading of some of the available international research, it is possible to discern at least six notable themes in the life of the newly appointed school leader.

### **THEME ONE**

## **New Principals 'don't rock the boat'**

Beginning Principals have reported that they often face the subtle yet distinct message that they should not "make waves" (Rooney, 2000, P.77). Simply getting to know the people they share their work place with takes time. Allocations, budgets, timetables and enrolments have to take priority over any other desire to improve



or challenge the organisation or structures in the school. Different schools have particular ways of doing things at the start of the year and a set of rituals you might say, protocols for distributing results, and organising the new first years and starting the first week back. In some ways the new Principal can feel like the new teacher who wants the class to be quiet. IN this context it is not surprising that research suggests that there is a tendency for new Principals to err on the side of stability rather than jumping into any form of transformative behaviour (Weindling and Dimmock 2006).

## THEME TWO

### **New Principals find it difficult to get feedback**

A worrying trend in the research is that many new Principals have asserted that, once appointed, they have been left to their own devices. Research published in the United States shows that newly-appointed Principals often find that little further interest is taken

in them unless trouble occurs. Some of the Principals interviewed even went as far as to say that they felt abandoned by their employers (Draper and McMichael, 2000) and that they suffered from a total lack of feedback from those who appointed them (Earley and Weindling (2004).

In the absence of any hard data from the large cohort of new Principals in Ireland I am pleased to say that this has not been my experience. In two different schools I enjoyed genuine support from both the Trustees and the Management Bodies. But there is a distinct difference between support and feedback. There simply is no formal or structured feedback available to school Principals. The revised structures of Whole School Evaluation (WSE), now to be re-launched as Management Leadership and Learning (MLL) may in time provide this feedback and could go a long way to validating and appraising the work of school leaders.

### THEME THREE

## **New Principals can be haunted by ‘The ghosts of Principals Past’**

A study of new school Principals in the UK told of the new Principal walking and working in the shadow of their predecessor (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006). The researchers in this study speak of the new school Head ‘in the Hot Seat’ and observed the tendency for the teachers in a school to endow their predecessors with almost saintly qualities on their retirement, regardless of their frailties. In Draper and McMichael’s (2000) study of new Principals in Scotland (who felt pressurised by the previous Principal’s style of management.), seven out of the ten new Principals sampled in this study spoke of devoting significant amounts of time to dealing with issues brought about because of the difference in style. Hopefully none of us will have to face the hostility that greeted Brian Clough in Leeds but it surely is a natural and forgivable offence for others in

our schools to let it slip that our predecessor did things differently, maybe even better than us. Or maybe you haven't heard anyone say that...? Really?

#### THEME FOUR

### Culture eats strategy for breakfast

Linked to all of the above is the concern about the extent to which the new Principal 'fits' the established culture of the school. A 2005 Harvard Business Review study of more than 100 corporations and thousands of executive assessments showed that culture influences leadership more than any other factor. A similar study published in the Wall Street Journal in 2006 identified three significant cultural roadblocks for new business leaders in large companies

1. The time that it takes for any 'outsider' to understand the culture of an organisation
2. The fact that new leadership styles may not 'fit' the culture
3. The importance for the new leaders to clearly articulate their aspirations for the organisation

The phrase 'Culture eats Strategy for Breakfast' was coined by Mark Fisher soon after his appointment as CEO of the Ford Motor Company. As one new Principal said to me last year: 'Knowing what to do is one thing; knowing how to do it is another. But we also have to learn how things are done around here'. The challenge to move from a "stranger" to an "insider," who understands the unwritten rules and knows the real movers and shakers (Aiken 2002) is immense. Whereas the Principal appointed from within may have a distinct advantage in this regard; the challenge remains. How many times have you attended an inspiring workshop or returned from conference with a good idea or a strategy and found yourself considering the question how will this 'fit' in my school? I for one will be interested to see how the proposed extra hour in the Croke Park agreement [on the reform of the Public Service, including working



conditions for those in education] will find expression within the unique cultures of the 741 Post primary schools. One thing for sure is that it won't be the same in every school.

#### THEME FIVE

### **A sense of isolation**

This sense of isolation is perhaps the most worrying of the findings from the international research on the experiences of new Principals. UK Research this time looking at the factors that deter teachers from applying for Principalships showed that some decide to stay in the classroom so that they can “still have a life” (Rutherford, 2005, p. 290). Interestingly this particular professional isolation is one that effects the Principal promoted from within as well as those who have come in from outside (Draper and McMichael, 2000; Rooney, 2000). As well as the disconnect that is felt in common with all leaders and others in positions of authority research on newly



appointed Principals shows how the isolation finds its strongest expression in two forms;

1. Isolation from colleagues on the staff who find it difficult to socialize or connect on a human level with their new Principal. I have heard it said by more than one fellow rookie Principal that they miss their Friday evening pint with colleagues or that at least it is no longer as comfortable as it used to be. Of course this is probably because many of us used to enjoy our Friday pint most when we could moan about the latest decision or imposition of our boss.
2. A second expression of the isolation could be termed peer isolation; isolation from middle managers such as a Deputy or Assistant Principals who may have been passed over for the job. It can also come in the guise of isolation from fellow Principals, especially those nearest to the school which can be made worse if there is a perceived sense of competition between the schools. (Draper and McMichael, 2000).

## THEME SIX

### Frustration

A study in Belgium found that the opportunity to develop a career, having a chance to implement a personal vision and to create opportunities for school improvement were the main reasons for becoming a Principal (Vandenbergh, 2003). The job is tough and whereas I haven't met many who complain about how hard the actual job of school management is I have found that new Principals are quick to share their frustration at the fact that our work is often dominated by interpersonal, administrative, legal, financial and even maintenance work. New Principals rarely experience the opportunity to implement their personal vision in their first years. This frustration has been increased by the fact that in some cases family life has

been found to suffer from the demands of the position (Howley et al., 2005).

### **Facing the challenges**

In the face of these challenges and frustrations it is unfortunate that there is no 'playbook for rookies'...but you knew that before you applied...didn't you? Schools differ so much from each other that it is difficult, and maybe even foolhardy, to generalise from

any specific experiences. We may have learnt some strategies and gained some insight into teaching when we were in college but the job of school leadership must almost entirely be learned by doing.

What unites the above frustrations, roadblocks and challenges is that they are all about people. We work in the coalface of human experience. On any one day we can encounter all the highs and the lows of the human condition: hope and despair, joy and

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sadness, failures and successes. I'm sure like me you've attended both weddings and funerals when the school community, like the family, has gathered to celebrate or console. There is a time and a season for everything and the Principal has to be ready to meet what the school, and more precisely what the people in the school need at that time, it may be consolation or celebration, support or challenge, or anything on the broad continuum of human emotion. For this reason we have to look inside ourselves to find the sources



of strength we need to get the job done.

If you are interested in reading further John West-Burnham's *Developing Outstanding Leaders* is available on the UK's National College of School Leadership website ([www.nationalcollege.or.uk](http://www.nationalcollege.or.uk)) and provides an excellent summary of research into the practices of outstanding school leaders in the UK (NCSL 2009). If like me you're as much concerned with remaining standing as being outstanding you may be interested in the three simple lessons I have recorded from my learning during my four years as a new Principal. As with the challenges listed above I draw these conclusions not only from the research I have read during my study but also from my own experience and from listening to the stories of others.

### **Moral leadership**

Leadership is fundamentally a moral or ethical activity. (Ciulla, J.B. 2003) Research shows that new Principals can be most effective when they are clear about what they believe in and what they stand for (Tooms 2003). Although it does not deliver short term popularity we all know and value people who remain consistent and fair in their decisions. To be consistent in decision-making it is important for us to clarify our own beliefs and stick to them. First and foremost school leadership is a moral activity. Whether you have come to Principalship from within or without ask yourself the questions: what do I stand for? What do I believe in? What are my bottom lines? What will I not compromise on no matter what? Knowing this helps you to develop what West-Burnham and other researchers call a moral compass that steers you when befogged by conflicting demands.

### **Leadership begins with listening**

Notwithstanding the isolation noted above we should also remember that schools are full of very experienced and knowledgeable

people who constitute a reservoir of wisdom to be drawn on. If you are lucky you will be able to draw on the experience and support of a Deputy Principal, post holders and others who understand the school and maybe even know and understand what you are going through. This should not be ignored. In both the schools I started in as a new Principal I found that recently-retired teachers could be an especially helpful source of wisdom. When I needed some extra advice I found many ready to help out.

### **Don't get stuck in the office**

Leadership needs to be learning-centred (West Burnham 2010). Sackney and Walker (2006) hold that the Principal should be the main learner in the school. The learning won't come to your door. Getting out of the office more often means you can live in the culture of the school and taking time to attend various social occasions, school functions, matches and other events will help to better understand the micro politics and the culture of the school you are working in (Vandenberghe, 2003).

I've lost count of the number of Principals I know who proudly display *Ancora Imparo* or some other commitment to learning on their office walls. The difficulty as we all know is where to find the time to continue the learning. In my experience staying connected to the management bodies and to organisations like LDS and the NAPD has plugged me in to a national network of people who understand. The Conferences and in-service courses they organise offer a structure to get you out of the school to devote time to important learning and fun. And yes there is good fun to be had at conferences. In my experience there's a lot to learn from the various speakers and workshops as well as from our more experienced colleagues and others you can meet in the bar.

There is no playbook for us rookies. We do remain a little behind our international colleagues but there is a growing body of research

on school leadership in Ireland. To date nobody has yet written the book that can tell us exactly what we should do in every case. Nobody can do the job for us because nobody can do the learning for us. I remain determined to continue my own learning. I may never become an 'outstanding Principal' but I know I can stay standing get better at what I do as a leaders. Education is fundamentally about growth. By dedicating time to my own learning I hope I will grow and be able to see to it that my school and the students within it continue to grow too.

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