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Leadership and Management Development in Education

Tony Bush, 2008

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Internationally, the importance of school leadership continues to be emphasised, having been identified as a key constituent of effective schools, particularly in the UK (Gunter 2001; Leithwood et al., 2006; MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001). In recent years, leadership and management development has attracted increasing interest by those engaged in the field of educational leadership and management. The apparent headteacher/principle recruitment crisis being globally experienced, has led to engagement in discussion as to what constitutes effective preparation for headship. This being set against a background of concern related to the changing role of the headteacher, within a predominantly global shift towards the devolved governance of schools.

Leadership and Management Development in Education offers a valuable contribution to the current debates on what constitutes effective preparation for the unique role of headteacher. The text is arranged in nine chapters covering key considerations for the field. Interspersed throughout, are questions raised and possible solutions proposed. Beyond the search for quick fix solutions, Tony Bush draws on his more than 20 years experience of engagement in theories of educational leadership and management, to engage in balanced discussion of complex issues and challenging dilemmas affecting us all. He provides a thorough analysis of the underpinning issues facing a wide range of countries around the world both within developed and developing countries. Whilst recognising the different contexts and specific challenges facing individual countries, he explores a number of common themes which strike accord with efforts to continually develop the Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH) programme.

Bush cautions that careful consideration must be given in order to balance the identification and progression of candidates' personalised learning needs (as a requirement for successful adult learning) with considerations for cost effective quality provision and a level of standardisation required to justify a national qualification. Equally, candidates' individual entitlement cannot sit in isolation from national requirements.

Bush discusses whether a core curriculum should become the national or international norm, proposing a possible model of broad content to be included. However, he also highlights the issue of to what extent process or content should be emphasised in headteacher preparation and linked to that, whether the preferred learning styles of candidates should influence processes and if so, how this would be accommodated. An additional consideration is always to what extent work-based experience should be balanced with knowledge and understanding of academic theory underpinning practice and, whether one theory or many theories of leadership (a contingent model) should predominate. In part determined by that, care must be taken with the selection of staff to provide support for candidates selecting from headteacher practitioners, academics or ideally, a balance across the tutor team.

With regard to the current trend to devolve matters educational to local levels, Bush explores whether local models should prevail against a centralised model. With this, comes considerations for delivery and whether learning should be off-site or field-based. In part, this could be influenced by whether the development of candidates as

(individual) leaders should be emphasised as appears to be the current norm, above organisational (distributed) leadership development. Linking to Crow's work (2006) Bush explores within the induction process into headship to what extent the professional socialisation of candidates should be emphasised above organisational socialisation.

A number of important considerations are highlighted through an exploration of the extent to which a standards-based approach should be adopted for leadership and management development programmes and linked to that, how judgements of a candidate achieving that standard can be best made (e.g. through Portfolios). Scotland has adopted a 'standards' based approach to continuing professional development with a Framework of Standards emerging since 1998. Comparison with English standards suggests that Scottish standards are less 'technicist' and based on a broader view of education and the professional role of teachers and school leaders (O'Brien and Torrance, 2005). The Standard for Headship was first issued in 1998, revised in 2002 and further revised in 2005 (Scottish Executive, 2005). The Standard sets out the key aspects of professionalism and expertise that the Scottish education system requires of those who are entrusted with the leadership and management of its schools. It defines the level and range of competences required of effective headteachers in the early years of their headship, structured under five professional actions and three essential elements which are interrelated by design. It serves, therefore, as the template against which those aspiring to be headteachers may be assessed in order to determine their strengths and development needs. On the basis of this assessment, aspirant headteachers can plan individual development programmes that will enable them to achieve and demonstrate having met the Standard.

The text is of particular interest to this reviewer who manages the development of the Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH) programme for the SE Scotland Consortium (based at University of Edinburgh). The SQH programme introduced in 1998 first as a pilot and then as a national programme was originally delivered through three consortia. Revised in 2005, each consortium introduced key changes born through experience of working with the programme, situated within the specifics of local contexts. Education Authority and University colleagues work in a unique partnership to oversee, deliver and develop the programme. That partnership ensures dialogue and mutual consideration of the operational priorities of the employer and the concerns of University staff to situate current Scottish practice in a broader literature and academic framework.

The SQH programme offers a powerful model of professional learning by combining theoretical and practical approaches through 'workplace learning' (Reeves et al., 2002). The SQH is premised on a set of design principles underpinned by research into professional learning (e.g. Eraut, 1994), emphasizing that learning has to influence practice and make a real difference in schools. The learning and assessment activities are designed to make connections between the personal and professional context of the individual, the policy context in Scotland and the conceptual and research framework written up in the international literature on school leadership and management, and professional development.

With respect to the Scottish context, policy makers would do well to engage with the key issues raised by Tony Bush throughout this text, in relation to key considerations for the development of future leadership preparation programmes. The current drive to develop alternative/flexible routes to achieving the Standard for Headship should be motivated by a need for quality candidates rather than volume of candidates for headship. The ascendancy of coaching as a mode of development (Bush et al.,

2007) is as much in evidence North as South of the Scottish Border, bringing with it further consideration of who is best placed to deliver support to candidates in order to ward against lack of professional credibility or equally, lack of intellectual demand; lack of school leadership and management experience or equally, lack of creativity and innovation; lack of craft knowledge or equally, lack of knowledge from research findings and subsequent theory. One thing is clear, there is no simple answer or, as Tony Bush (2008: 127) puts it, no 'off-the-peg' solution as 'a judicious and appropriate balance' needs to be struck. Brundrett et al. (2006: 104) advise, 'If school leadership courses are to be successful they must integrate the best of academic programmes and take full account of emerging research evidence' while the NCSL (2007: 18) proposes, 'a new alliance between learning on-the-job and off-site development' is required. While we continue to struggle with the common themes highlighted by Tony Bush, there is much to commend the (revised) Scottish Qualification for Headship programme – if it survives the current political climate.

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