

Studies in Educational Leadership 20

Ciaran Sugrue

# Unmasking School Leadership

A Longitudinal Life History of School  
Leaders

 Springer

# Unmasking School Leadership

# STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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VOLUME 20

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Ciaran Sugrue

# Unmasking School Leadership

A Longitudinal Life History  
of School Leaders

 Springer

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*For Oscar, Jasper, Portia, Iseult, Fraser &  
Mark: the next (next) generation of leaders*



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# Acronyms

Acronyms included here are those particular to the Irish Education System and thus not commonly recognised internationally

BoM	Board of Management
CPSMA	Catholic Primary School Managers Association
DoE	Department of Education (1921–1997)
DES	Department of Education and Science (1997–2010)
DES	Department of Education and Skills (2010–present) ( <a href="http://www.education.ie/">www.education.ie/</a> )
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals’ Network ( <a href="http://www.ippn.ie">www.ippn.ie</a> )
LDS	Leadership Development for Schools ( <a href="http://www.lds21.ie">www.lds21.ie</a> )
LRC	The Labour Relations Commission ( <a href="http://www.lrc.ie">www.lrc.ie</a> )
NAPD	National Association of Principals and Deputies (post-primary) ( <a href="http://www.napd.ie">www.napd.ie</a> )
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment ( <a href="http://www.ncca.ie">www.ncca.ie</a> )
NCSE	National Council for Special Education ( <a href="http://www.ncse.ie">www.ncse.ie</a> )
NWCI	National Women’s Council of Ireland ( <a href="http://www.nwci.ie">www.nwci.ie</a> )
PCSP	Primary Curriculum Support Programme
SDPS	School Development Planning Support
SENO	Special Education Needs Organiser
SNA	Special Needs Assistant



# Introduction

School principals have occupied a place in popular imagination as well as the educational landscape since the foundation of State education systems, largely a nineteenth century phenomenon. The designation ‘head master’ or ‘head mistress’ continue to inhabit imagination, often being associated with authority and discipline. Contemporary principals are likely to say that ‘the buck stops with me’ while reform literature trumpets the importance of the leadership role, and the significance of having a vision that can be collectively created and pursued, preferably adopting a distributed leadership perspective. In a somewhat narcissistic manner, many principals have embraced the approbation inherent in the terms ‘leader’ and ‘leadership’ since they are perceived to reflect enhanced images of the roles and responsibilities attaching to principalship; perhaps resonant with a romanticised attachment to the heroic—Laurence of Arabia, Don Quixote, or some appropriate culturally iconic Florence Nightingale; a sort of Sisyphean (heroic) tilting at windmills. During the past two decades in particular, as the ‘virtues’ of the private sector have been loudly commended to a highly criticised public sector, central to the persistent cries for reform has been the necessity for better leaders and leadership. As old verities fall out of favour, advocacy for leadership has become something of a modern mantra, something we need more of without being specific about what it might entail.

Turning to my trusty Chambers dictionary, I am informed that a principal may be a—main, major, chief, primary, prime, key, foremost, or fundamental person; ‘the leading or most highly ranked person’—though none of these words contain a strong sense of principal as being an active leader, communicator, mover and motivator. Rather, such words convey a sense of control, continuity and stability. By contrast, the same source informs that a leader is ‘someone whom people follow’, or is ‘in front of others’ ‘the head of’ something. Perhaps then there is a sense that leadership has been carefully hidden, dormant or camouflaged within the term principal, and as contexts have altered and gained in complexity, this embedded dimension has been foregrounded, thus emphasising the necessity for agency, direction and movement rather than stability and continuity. But it is likely fanciful to suggest

that (traditionally) principals have been closet leaders, waiting for the right moment to emerge from the chrysalis of office to extend instantly their leadership wings and take flight without the hindrance of a learning curve and unencumbered by systemic constraints.

In a more competitive, global educational landscape that has altered dramatically over the past two decades, and where international league tables have had a major shaping influence on education policies, school leadership too has risen to the policy mountain top as a significant influence on ‘performance’ of learners. The research literature on school reform and the necessity for more and better leadership, dominated largely by English language and Anglo-North American-Antipodean publications, has tended towards homogenisation, and a neo-positivist search for ‘best practice’ in a manner that eschews difference, history, culture and context.

Principals’ lives and work are situated within these lexical and policy force fields. The purpose of this text is to give voice to school leaders whose lived experience of leadership is rarely represented in large scale studies. Rather, their voices, views and versions of leadership are more typically silenced or ignored by these large scale, well-funded research projects, typically conducted in or out of major urban centres and major research centres, or ‘research intensive’ universities. Part of the purpose of this text then is to insert into the discourses on school leadership from the periphery, but in a manner that speaks to the centre, to the extant literature. In this way, it is intended to redress an imbalance in the extant literature while seeking simultaneously to make a distinct contribution. Espousing a longitudinal life history perspective strengthens this potential since it documents in detail how principal-leadership has been practised over time, thus lending a ‘change over time’ perspective to a research literature that is most often a ‘snapshot’ in time only.

This book is in four parts. Although each part has a particular focus and its own integrity, the impact of the four parts is intended to be cumulative. There are 12 chapters in total. The remainder of the introduction indicates the content of each part and its respective chapters.

Part I (**Rhetorics, Realities and Research on School Leadership**) includes two chapters that set the scene and frame the remainder of the work.

Chapter 1 (School Leaders and Leadership: A Longitudinal Life History) situates the study in its contextual surroundings by indicating how the role of primary principal has evolved in the Irish context during the past half century, while situating this systemic change in emphasis over time within international discourses on leadership, and in particular the manner in which neo-liberal ideology has progressively become pervasive in policy rhetorics. While addressing this matter, the chapter indicates that attaching ‘leadership’ to the role of principal has been a rather recent phenomenon—largely grafted onto administrative and managerial responsibilities. Due to this trajectory, and its relatively recent provenance, the chapter also argues that for this reason a life history approach to this reality has potential to provide a contextualised insider perspective, grounded in the realities of principals’ lives and work, in contrast with much empirical work on the subject that largely provides a snapshot in time. Thus the chapter also provides justification for this approach, indicating the benefits it brings to the substantive

focus, while elaborating on the manner in which data were generated, analysed and the identification of ‘themes’ that make up the empirical chapters of this text. It concludes with an introduction of the informants that populate the study and the book’s subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 (School Leadership in Context: National Policies, International Influences) situates national policies on school leadership and reform within international discourses. It does this by indicating macro, meso and micro levels of leadership and how each is in dynamic inter-relationship with each other thus creating a particular leadership cocktail that is at once local, national and international; a ‘glocalisation’ of leadership literature. The lineage and importance of professional autonomy is indicated while over time it is suggested that it has been supplanted in terms of policy priority by externally imposed accountability controls regarding standards and outcomes, thus eroding the spaces and opportunities for school leaders to lead. Though the rhetoric is of leadership, the task is increasingly one of management, at the risk of oversimplification. The chapter indicates the extent to which over time, the language of NPM has pervaded wave after wave of policy initiatives, while allowing underlying structures to remain remarkably rooted in the nineteenth century, thus in many respects arresting leadership potential and capacity building while appearing to advocate otherwise. One of the more tangible initiatives undertaken was the creation of senior and middle management structures in schools as a means of distributing leadership responsibilities, but here too conservative and defensive implementation has limited leadership initiative and its capacity for development, while recent austerity measures have hollowed out this innovation. This is the evolving context in which the school leadership detailed in this book is practised.

Part II (**Career Trajectories of Primary Principals**) includes three chapters each of which connects the life histories of principals with themes in the wider leadership literature.

Chapter 3 (Perceptions of Principal’s Role: Insider Perspectives, Change Over Time) paints the first panel in a complex mosaic that is systematically extended through each subsequent chapter. It honours the commitment to espouse a change over time perspective. In recognising that taking on such a major task in one chapter would be impossible, it situates the micro politics of change at the level of the school within national policy reforms and international change forces, thus opening up an initial space in which to enable principals to indicate how change is experienced from a personal, professional and organisational perspective. Two themes are chosen for this purpose—changing social mores and their consequences for home-school relationships, parenting, and patterns of socialisation that impinge on school routines, pedagogies and relationships. The second theme addressed is the impact of changing communications technologies and how these too, though constantly evolving, create persistent challenges to principals and teachers that require re-thinking to long established as well as more recently created routines of practice, thus being a catalyst for a combination of uncertainty, instability and professional defensiveness as well as encouragements to be creative, innovative and pedagogically inspiring, while school leaders are expected to lead the charge or at

least set the tone for such dynamics. Within the broad canvas of conjuncture and disjuncture, the impact of these reforms is documented over time. In documenting the many policy shifts over a period of four decades, the chapter indicates how much change has been absorbed, while leaving open the extent to which such policy rhetorics have penetrated to core activities within school communities. Preparation for leadership in advance of being elevated to the role of principal emerges as an absolute necessity even if diversity rather than one fit for all requires adequate attention in the planning and delivery of such preparatory principal programmes.

Chapter 4 (Being and Becoming a Principal: ‘Navi-Gotiating’ Roles and Responsibilities) focuses on the manner in which principals, when newly appointed, navigate the legacies inherited from their predecessors and the dominant contours of the school culture while seeking simultaneously to (re-)negotiate aspects of both with their colleagues as a means of establishing themselves as leaders of the school community. Thus there is a tension inherent in the ‘navi-gotiation’ of this role with significance for how leadership is exercised, particularly since none of the participants in the study had formal preparation for the role. The evidence appears to suggest that in the absence of preparation—though not a panacea—there is a very cautious approach to assuming authoritative leadership, thus legacies and dominant cultural norms and values emerge as a major constraint on the agency of principals. While legacies tend to predominate, what remains unanswered is whether or not these initial years in the role create hostages to fortune from which leadership of principals only partially escapes subsequently.

Chapter 5 (Principal Professional Learning: Sources of Sustenance?) indicates that until very recently, formal preparation for the role of school leader was significantly absent in the system. Thus, learning on the job, in a serendipitous opportunist and idiosyncratic manner, was elevated to a prominent and undeserved status, particularly as the role became more complex and diversified. The evidence in this chapter testifies that being ‘thrown in at the deep end’ pressures individuals to become self-reliant, to seek sources of sustenance where they can find them, often relying on empathetic and supportive partners as sounding boards. There is evidence too that they seek intellectual stimulation, often not directly connected to the responsibilities, but these emerge as vital and sustaining. More informally, the emergence more recently of networks and support groups have become important spaces and places for the exchange of practical wisdom, but there is a noticeable absence of more systematic support. The evidence convinces that when there is strong resonance between the personal and professional, a ‘per-fessional’ energy and enthusiasm is present that increases a sense of efficacy and job satisfaction. Nevertheless, in looking to the future, given the evidence presented here of the importance of informal learning, building systemic leadership capacity it appears cannot afford to ignore the significance of informal learning, nor to over-colonise it in an enthusiastic moment of seeking to scale up leadership learning. Other issues that emerge include a more sophisticated approach to career planning and progression—since it appears that learning on the job, though always necessary, is no longer adequate and belies the policy rhetorics of the significance of school leadership. Additionally, selection processes for the appointment of principals

appear to lack transparency, not helped by the autonomy of individual boards of management to conduct their own affairs. Consequently, the politics of the local tends to take precedence over a more strategic and systemic approach that seems more in tune with the complexity of the role.

Part III (**Policy, Practice & Principals**) includes four chapters, each contributing another element of the mosaic of leadership.

Chapter 6 (Doing Leadership: The Significance of Inter-personal Relationships?), as its title suggests, focuses on the significance of interpersonal relations for the exercise of leadership. The evidence indicates that, without prior preparation for the role, there is a tendency to be overly concerned with cultivating good relations as ends in themselves. However, as the policy environment alters more towards greater accountability and performativity, there is increasing awareness that a more sophisticated cocktail of purpose, passion, vision and a 'can do' attitude that is demanding of colleagues is necessary while the need for sensitivity to individual needs as well as greater awareness of what professional responsibility now entails requires sophisticated reflexivity and ongoing cultivation. Lack of differentiation between personal and professional relations, a commonplace among principals, complicates and compromises leaders and their leadership.

Chapter 7 (Inclusive Schools: Challenging Leadership?) documents in detail how the promotion of a policy of inclusion internationally and reflected in the reform efforts of national agenda, has had enormous if significantly uneven impact on the lives and work of school principals and their colleagues. While this is frequently attributed to 'geography' or 'the luck of the draw', such sanitised sensibilities ignore that the manner in which such policies play out are hugely shaped by wider structural issues regarding employment and housing. Within the confines of schools, principals have had to engage with a much wider audience in vindicating rights and attendant entitlements of SEN children or recent immigrants. Consistent with testimony in other chapters, there is enormous variation in terms of demand on individual schools. When demand is manifest, a positive disposition on the part of the principal is critical but the evidence reveals too that such a disposition leads to moral commitment but without systemic support to build necessary professional capacity. Thus principals and colleagues, predisposed to care, are more inclined to 'muddle through' or 'make do' in the absence of systemic support. And, though unintended, this commitment may be undermining professionalism rather than enhancing it. Additionally, the most committed principals, by being welcoming, turn their schools into 'beacons' thus unintentionally allowing other schools to shirk more equitable distribution of responsibility. The evidence attests to heroism not just being confined to the principal's office, but rather commitment to care may result in caring too much leading to professional exploitation. In such circumstances, who cares for teachers and principals while the rights of learners and their parents are being vindicated? Overwhelmingly, the evidence here indicates extraordinary commitment on the part of principals 'against the odds' while tension between heroism and professional responsibility remain unattended, and many policy makers ignore their responsibilities.



Chapter 8 (More Leaders: Dissipated or Distributed Leadership?) provides another panel in the mosaic of leadership by focusing attention on the impact of a shift in policy whereby leadership responsibilities were to be distributed among colleagues by the creation of middle-management structures with potential also to build leadership capacity throughout the school community thus enabling that school to deal with change in a more coherent and sustainable manner that contributed to thriving rather than trashing to get by. In doing so, this chapter builds further on the evidence of previous chapters that while trust and good interpersonal relations are vital, in the absence of authority, passion and purpose, they will not be sufficient to transform schools. Regardless of the different cohort's experience and expertise, in a minority of cases only did middle management appear to be harnessed in a systematic manner to build leadership capacity. Rather, for the most part, it was a managerial strategy to distribute the burdens of office. In the absence of greater sense of its potential to transform schools, while there are many more 'leaders' this does not necessarily equate with greater leadership capacity.

Chapter 9 ('Performing' Leadership: Professional Responsibility in a Climate of Accountability) indicates that at a time when the downstream impacts of neo-liberal ideas permeate much of the educational landscape internationally, 'performativity' has become something of a byword and 'technologies of control' collectively impose regimes of accountability, it is legitimate to ask: 'what does professionally responsible leadership entail in such circumstances?' This chapter establishes that there is a long history and consequent legacy of school inspection in the system. This is not the most fertile ground for the promotion of school self-evaluation, the latest in an ongoing process most frequently perceived as a demand of 'more for less'. Additionally, loss of trust and autonomy has been replaced by intensifying demands for more policies and paper trails that much of the time are perceived as bureaucratic requirements rather than professionally enhancing. Due to lack of mobility in the system, there is a premium on 'good' interpersonal relations within school communities, and their long-term maintenance at local level are mostly to the fore when principals are promoting change. Part of this premium, which is finite, is that soft power is exercised by means of appealing to colleague's goodwill. At a time of rapid change and policy churn, principals are likely to thread warily even where relationships are very positive so as to avoid tipping the balance in more toxic directions. In such circumstances, change is most likely to be incremental, while a positive climate also enables collective decisions that seek to wrest control of change processes from policy-makers submitting them instead to the will of the school community, a collective confidence that paradoxically is empowering and facilitative of change that is more likely to endure than superficial adoption that is less likely to be sustained and become embedded in the school's culture. The evidence does not suggest that there is an unwillingness to be accountable; far from it. Rather, there is awareness that trust, leadership capacity and agency are inextricably intertwined with good interpersonal communication and that in their absence conformity and compliance, though ticking the boxes of accountability, on their own they are significantly less likely to cultivate sustainable leadership. Sustained

commitment to building leadership capacity rather than imposing accountability measures emerges as a major challenge in a system with shrinking resources.

Part IV (**Sustaining Leaders, Sustainable Leadership: Future Directions**) takes up more cross-cutting themes and concludes with the distinct legacies to leaders and leadership that a longitudinal life history provides.

Chapter 10 (Leadership Capacity: Cohorts, Continuity, Change) provides evidence that the major continuity over time is the necessity for very good interpersonal relations with colleagues as the basis of building trust, to allow for principled disagreement and the realisation that these need sustained attention and renewal. While inevitably newly appointed principals must in the first instance deal with legacies, these can be perceived as nostalgic remembrances in ways that imprison the future and impede possible cultural shifts or they can be framed more positively as the basis on which the future is created. Crucial to whether or not romantic rather than realistic nostalgia predominates is how challenges are engaged with thus enabling principals to overcome resistance while recognising that some degree of cultural rupture is necessary. Nevertheless, when negotiated successfully, change becomes a continuity and a gateway to constructing a better future. The evidence also suggests that given the accelerating pace of change, incrementalism may no longer be an adequate means of creating continuity, thus without much more systematic and systemic attention to leadership capacity building the gap between leadership rhetoric and schools' capacity to develop and sustain quality teaching, learning and leadership may retreat rather than being advanced. Here too lack of differentiation between personal and professional relationships re-emerges as a significant constraint on more authoritative leadership as well as on leadership capacity building, inhibited by lack of attention to systemic structures.

Chapter 11 (Leadership: Succession, Recruitment, Retirement) reveals that recruitment, retention and retirement/ succession of school leaders is increasingly being recognised internationally as worthy of more attention than heretofore since several decades of research point to the significance of school leadership for the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Against this general backdrop, this chapter charts the perspectives over time of the principal participants. The good news is that they are positive about the role and would not hesitate to recommend it to other teachers even if there is recognition also that it may not be for all teachers. Despite this positive attitude, there is considerable ambiguity about how much time in the role in any one school is appropriate, while this hesitation is most likely rooted in the realities that systemically procedures for recruitment and retention are no longer fit for purpose. Nevertheless, there appears to be a view that is rooted more in the perpetuation of heroic forms of leadership—of replacing the school leader rather than a more considered systemic necessity to build leadership capacity at all levels of the system, while the practice of 'learning on the job' without preparation for the role does a considerable disservice to schools and renders the rhetoric of the importance of leadership rather hollow when leaping from classroom to principal's office without a developed leadership portfolio.

Chapter 12 (School Leadership Unmasked: ‘Forming’ Leaders, Trans-forming Leadership?), the concluding chapter, brings together various strands of the leadership mosaic that are provided in the preceding chapters. It does this in a sequence of seven ‘leadership lessons’ that are grounded in the lives and work of the 16 participants in the study while the purpose is to synthesise in a coherent yet open-ended manner these lessons that make up the Irish case. These lessons are discussed and connected with extant literature while there is an emphasis throughout on the necessity for leadership formation to be addressed systematically and a concomitant requirement to alter significant aspects of systemic structures in order to build leadership capacity in a sustainable yet relatively unrestrained manner. These lessons, supported by international research, indicate clearly that an entire panoply of measures is required that includes early identification of leadership talent, the development of professional portfolios, greater mobility and flexibility within the system as well as greater attention to the whole selection and recruitment process and an appropriate term of office. Nevertheless, at the heart of these reforms will be professional learning of leadership that is no longer overly focused on individual leaders but a system whereby everyone will learn about leadership.

Toward the end of the chapter, the focus shifts to using these lessons as the basis for leadership formation for a more transformative leadership agenda, and connects this with contemporary international literature thus identifying key concerns as appropriate programme content, with important caveats to avoid prescription despite the prevalence of performativity policy scripts. One important means of avoiding such overly prescriptive leadership formation programmes is to have multiple providers while their programmes will need to recognise the importance of intellectual input that is evidence-informed partnered by the wisdom of practice, of mentoring and shadowing, but in a manner that leaves spaces also for informal learning. In the absence of such an encompassing programme of leader formation, the transformative potential of leadership will remain under-developed.

**Part I**  
**Rhetorics, Realities and Research**  
**on School Leadership**

# Chapter 1

## School Leaders and Leadership: A Longitudinal Life History

### Introduction

This chapter is one of two that provides background, context and theoretical framing for the longitudinal life history of school leaders and leadership documented in this book. It paints a background picture of the educational system in which the study is embedded with particular reference to the requirements specified to attain the office of principal. Additionally, while grounded in this systemic milieu, it takes a broad-brush approach to the manner in which leadership literature has evolved over time, situated and shaped by the emergence and increasing influence of neo-liberal ideology during the period under scrutiny in later chapters. The stance adopted throughout this first-half of the chapter is one that also provides a rationale and justification for taking a life history approach to leadership. The second section, while building on the first, addresses the issue of life history, its credentials and its methodological potential to contribute differently and distinctly to leadership literature while espousing a change over time perspective. The chapter concludes with a succinct account of data analysis and the creation of themes that are individually dealt with in subsequent chapters and collectively paint a composite picture of school leaders and leadership over time. Thereafter, the participants in the study are introduced to the reader as a means of contextualising subsequent chapters, orienting the reader and adding to the rationale for the approach adopted as a distinct contribution to leadership literature.

### *Background and Context*

The school where I received most of my primary or elementary education half a century ago had two rooms and three teachers, two male, one female. Colloquially these were known as the ‘little’ and the ‘big’ room. The former contained the

three most junior classes (4–7 year olds) and were taught by the ‘mistress’, while the large rectangular room was divided by giant cupboards and a blackboard to create two classrooms, with another three classes (second, third and fourth) in one with fifth and sixth in the ‘master’s’ room, nearest the only entrance. There was electricity (lighting, no sockets), no running water (dry toilets), no radio, television or telephone, no bookshelves—no library, and heating was provided by a large open fire fuelled by turf donated by parents, tended by pupils. The rules for national schools (DoE 1965) indicate clearly that at this time four categories of teacher were recognised in the system: Principal, Vice-Principal, Assistant and Junior Assistant Mistresses (JAM, unqualified female teachers). The rules continue—apart from a teaching qualification, satisfactory service for a minimum of 3 years was required to be appointed as principal of a school with less than 80 pupils, while in a larger school, 5 years of satisfactory service was required; males could not be appointed to principalship in girls’ schools. Seniority of teachers was determined strictly by length of service in a particular school. Teachers and principals were hired by the local school manager, a clergyman, and not by a local authority or district office; all were paid by the State. Today, the minimum teaching qualification continues to be the specified requirement to be appointed to the position of principal or deputy.

### *Role of Principal*

The Rules specify that the principal “... should keep the Register, Daily Report Book and Roll Book accurately, neatly and according to the instructions prescribed by the Minister” (DoE 1965). The administration of corporal punishment was another responsibility but each teacher seemed at liberty to administer corporal punishment at will.

Such prescriptions and predictabilities are a far cry from the heady leadership that principals are expected to provide in contemporary schools and classrooms. A recent OECD publication suggests that its focus “is on school leaders” though “not ... confined to school principals” (Pont et al. 2008, p. 18). Instead a much broader canvas is envisaged on which school leaders are expected to leave an impression: “leadership ... may encompass managerial and administrative tasks as well” (p. 18) If the word leader or leadership was encountered during the period of my primary schooling, it was most likely ascribed to leaders of political parties, or to dead heroes, and within the post-colonial mindset that pervaded several decades of post-independent Ireland (1922), there was no scarcity of contenders in that heroic pantheon of fallen leaders, recent and remote! Schools requiring leaders then is a rather recent phenomenon.

## ***From Principals to Leaders—Transitions and Transformations***

While school may have ‘All changed, changed utterly’ (Yeats 2000) aspects of school routines continue to be rooted in tradition. Despite a stated preference for ‘leadership’ rather than (mere) principal-ship, the term continues across systems to have major currency. Retrospective viewing strongly suggests that Principalship “is rooted in the industrial model of schooling where one individual bears the prime responsibility for the entire organization” (Pont et al. 2008, p. 18). By contrast, leadership is portrayed as “a broader concept” within which “authority to lead does not reside only in one person, but can be distributed among different people within and beyond the school” (p. 18).

### ***From Administrator to Manager***

The rules for national schools strongly suggest that the principal of my childhood was an ‘administrator’; the parish priest the ‘manager’. The advent of ‘progressive’ education in Ireland was late by international standards, but when the ‘new’ curriculum was published in 1971 (DoE 1971), it was generally perceived to be a ‘radical’ departure from the past (Coolahan 1981; Ó Buachalla 1988; Sugrue 1997). Principals were expected to procure resources to support a much more diversified curriculum provision and active pedagogies, provide professional development opportunities for colleagues, and to interact with parents and other outside agents and agencies. Specific mention was made of the necessity to keep centrally: “a Record of Progress that portion of his [teacher] annual scheme of work dealt with during the month” as a kind of minimum accountability from teachers and “regular assessment of pupils’ progress” was also required. Implicitly, however, leadership possibilities were being created:

He should avail himself of opportunities to visit classrooms to become familiar with the quality of the teacher’s work. He should give encouragement, advice and teaching demonstrations or arrange for teaching demonstrations, particularly in the case of weak teachers and teachers on probation. (DoE 1973)

Apart from the more obvious absence of inclusive language, many principals throughout this era became major resource providers to support teaching and learning, in the vast majority of cases there was a reluctance to breach the privacy of the classroom citadel (Lortie 1975) and a culture of ‘individualism’ continued to prevail (Hargreaves 1994; Hargreaves and Goodson 1996) even if collaboration was increasingly being advocated. In this regard, an OECD (1991) visiting team remarked on the ‘legendary autonomy’ of Irish classroom teachers. Consequently, particularly beyond the period of probation for beginning teachers formally adjudicated on by an inspector, principals tended to visit classrooms sparingly, and certainly not explicitly to observe or assess teachers. Regardless of what circular 16/73 appeared to encourage, accountability was externally taken care

of by the inspectorate, thus there was an invisible line of demarcation in the minds of principals and they were generally pleased to remain ‘on side’, in solidarity with teaching colleagues, and to give some credence to the primary teacher union construction of the principal’s role as *‘primus inter pares’* (INTO 1991, p. 3). More than a decade later, in a report commissioned by the Irish Primary Principals’ Network (IPPN), the Hay group commented in rather different terms: “A critical aspect of the leadership role is the willingness and capability to handle the issue of teaching standards and under-performing teachers” (Drea and O’ Brien 2002, p. 3).

Meantime, the principal’s role was much more demanding than the previously circumscribed administrative duties; it was exciting, had variety, and for administrative principals without teaching responsibilities it was an attainable challenge. This period continued the perpetuation of the ‘heroic’ leader—a super individual of either gender who frequently sacrificed personal and family life to do the job (Copland 2001; Reynolds 2002). However, this lone wolf leadership was on borrowed time, and as the role expanded in all directions, it became increasingly unattractive to teachers and increasingly impossible for mere mortals to undertake and sustain (Sugrue 2003).

### ***From Managers to Leaders—Underlying Assumptions?***

IN 1991, an OECD visiting team remarked: “no one concerned with Irish education disputed that the amount of in-service education and training (INSET) available was grossly inadequate” (OECD 1991, p. 129). From a leadership perspective “a significant expansion of leadership and management training would be required . . . if schools were to be able to respond to the assumption of greater autonomy, and . . . greater responsibility for their own affairs” (p. 133). Dimmock recognised the changing nature of the role and the intimacy of its various elements when he stated:

Irrespective of how these terms are defined, school leaders experience difficulty in deciding the balance between higher order tasks designed to improve staff, student and school performance (leadership), routine maintenance or present operations (management) and lower order duties (administration). (Dimmock 1996, p. 137)

However, in less stable and predictable times, responsibilities within and between these elements of the role have increased exponentially and fluctuated erratically depending on local and policy contexts. Nevertheless, a word of caution provided in leadership literature is worth noting: “Although leadership has consumed the bulk of the writing in education over the past decade or so, we believe that management is also critical” and, for this reason, “it is difficult to lead without managing” (Spillane et al. 2009, p. 88).



## *The Rise and Rise of Neo-liberal Ideology*

In a 1980s trans-Atlantic pincer movement coupling Thatcherite and Reganomic policy agenda, accelerated by the dramatic fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, a new or revitalised ideological discourse gained momentum (Stiglitz 2002, 2003, 2006). The language surrounding this general trend is complex and confusing, embracing a melange of terminology—globalisation (Beck 2000) and ‘its discontents’ (Stiglitz 2002), but fundamentally (at the risk of oversimplification), driven by blind adherence to market forces as the optimum and only regulator of everything (Ball 2012; Couldry 2010/2012; Harvey 2003, 2011; Lazzarato 2011). While very much in the intellectual tradition of Adam Smith (1723–1790) and his economic theories propounded in ‘The Wealth of Nations’ (1776), an economic liberalism receiving further impetus from Keynes and Friedman, more recent cheer-leading of this doctrine is most frequently attributed to “Fredrick Hayek’s excoriating analysis of collectivism” (Ball 2012, p. 3). The language and logic of neo-liberalism is one of deregulation and the roll back of the State, thus leaving all aspects of life (education, health, welfare) to be ‘ruled’ by market forces. Cloned from the same ideological gene pool, New Public Management (NPM) has become the staple policy discourse of the vast majority of governments and includes the following megatrends:

... to *slow down or reverse government growth* in terms of overt public spending and staffing ... shift toward *privatization and quasi-privatization* ... the development of *automation*, particularly in information technology, in the production and distribution of public services; and ... the development of a more *international* agenda, increasingly focused on general issues of public management, policy design, decision styles and inter-governmental cooperation, on top of the older tradition of individual country specialisms in public administration (italics in original). (Hood 1991, p. 3)

While it is generally recognised that the manner in which such ideological trends continue to play out within national borders varies, this understanding does not deny the unrelenting influences whereby the language and logic of ‘the market’ never sleeps, but rather seeps surreptitiously into everyday language and lives (Furlong 2013). For example, such influences are abundantly evident in the impact of PISA results on national educational policies, their consequences for curriculum, teaching and learning and the lives and work of teachers and principals; the ratcheting up of competitiveness and the ongoing imposition of more ‘technologies of control’ (Ball 2007). The European Union’s increasing encroachment on national educational policy spaces (Lawn and Grek 2012) is mirrored in the US by increasing federal intervention that applies market ‘principles’ to public services. Paradoxically, the deregulation of financial markets has also generated a “demand for audit and other forms of evaluation and inspection” since trust has been eroded, more accountability measures are imposed to fill the void” (Power 1999, p. 44). Such reform packages are invariably gift wrapped in policies that promote efficiency and choice that not uncommonly privatise schooling and other services through quasi-markets.

Suffice to say here that, as demands for competition, efficiency, effectiveness increasingly trumped more traditional notions of ‘public service’; as the ‘global’

forces gathered momentum (Fullan 1993, 2003), Gross Stein captured the dominant Zeitgeist whereby instrumentalist use of language in a dispassionate technical rational sense denudes the body politic of a sense of soul; individualism goes feral (Gerhardt 2011) and greed is good. She declares:

In our avowedly secular age, the paramount sin is now inefficiency. Dishonesty, unfairness, and injustice—the sins of the past—pale in comparison with the cardinal transgression of inefficiency. (Gross Stein 2001, p. 2)

More recent austerity measures have been described as—“privatise profits and socialise risk; save the banks and put the screws on the people” (Harvey 2011, p. 10). In bending everything to market forces, the language of efficiency hollows out more inclusive meanings, and we are the poorer for it:

*Efficere* translates from the Latin as ‘to bring about, to accomplish, to effect’. Only in modern times do we separate effectiveness, efficacy, and efficiency, and our public conversation is consequently fractured—and impoverished. (Gross Stein 2001, p. 17)

Such sentiments in an educational orbit result in ‘performance training sects’ whose sole purpose is the improvement of test scores and teachers professional lives are reduced to “micromanaged careers of teaching to the test” (Hargreaves 2003, p. 71; see also; Lasky 2012). More generally, even before economic meltdown, uncertainty, insecurity and attendant identity crises had tended to characterise contemporary realities; individualism and consumerism (Gerhardt 2011) coalesced into a cocktail labelled ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman 2000/2006). This heady set of circumstances has had a major influence on the field of leadership. As society became less certain, and more insecure about its educational aims, increasingly this void of uncertainty was being filled by a market-forces ideology characterised by competition (a quasi-market) and dominated by outcomes in a Darwinian rush towards the survival of the fittest, principally determined by various testing regimes (Ball 2008a, b; Whitty 2008). In such circumstances, ‘the spirit level’ is tilted significantly in favour of those who already possess considerable social and cultural capital (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). This is far from being the whole story, but at the time of writing, this ideological wind is far from abated; it continues to mutate, metamorphose and chameleon-like, continue to colonise. Its increasingly pervasive presence in policy rhetorics makes inevitable its influences on the lives and work of principals as it has evolved over time, thus the necessity to be mindful of its aura in the construction of life histories.

## Leadership for Changing Times

Leadership was increasingly in demand even if there was disagreement about what it entailed and suffered from under-supply. As the pace of change accelerated beyond anything previously encountered (a further influence of neo-liberalism), the educational research community scrambled to keep up with the blizzard of policy reforms raining down on schools, often produced by partisan ‘think tanks’

(Rich 2005) or global ‘networks’ (see Ball 2012, pp. 1–16) where principals in particular were expected to incorporate these into daily routines without pausing for breath. What dominated the leadership discourse?

### ***Dominant Discourses on Leadership***

In a rapidly changing globalised world, our habitus, researching leadership becomes a means of looking beyond the boundaries of tradition, thus creating new horizons of understanding and practice but this is not neutral terrain since research funding has been increasingly channelled in particular directions; proliferation of think tanks with particular agenda to pursue have in many instances rendered research more partisan (Ball 2012; Rich 2005; Sugrue 2008). And, yet, it is necessary to recognise that “times change, and productive leadership depends heavily on its fit with the social and organisational context in which it is exercised” (Leithwood et al. 1999, p. 3). However, given the pace of change, frequently fuelled by policy churn, today’s ‘fit’ is tomorrow’s misfit, yesterday’s solutions for emergent problems. In approaching the leadership literature therefore, the dominance of English language publications needs to be borne in mind, as well as the implicit imperialistic epistemic ramifications of that reality, linguistic, cultural and ideological.

### ***Leadership: Present and Absent***

There is no universally agreed definition of leadership, and as the concept gains in complexity such agreement is less likely (Leithwood et al. 1999). However, there are clear suggestions above that it includes more than management while conjuring associations with imagination and creativity, allied to some recognition also that such dimensions are contextually embedded and engender a wide variety of possibilities. Such ‘ingenuity’ (Homer-Dixon 2001) finds ready resonance also with ‘adaptive capacity’ (Bennis and Thomas 2002), an alternative expression of the need “to continue learning . . . an essential skill of leaders” (p. 1). Some are more reckless in suggesting that leadership entails cutting loose from the moorings of tradition, to “break all the rules of conventional wisdom” (Buckingham and Coffman 2005, p. 3). However, what might appear at first glance to be an argument in support of professional autonomy, discretion and the necessity of spaces for professional judgment, breaking the rules has potential to become licence rather than leadership as recent events across the globe bear abundant testament. Such leadership hubris has given way to more recent nemesis, intimating that such practices are the very antithesis of leadership: “there was a time . . . when the voices of great leaders lifted us up and made us want to do better. Where have all the leaders gone?” (Iacocca 2008, p. 5). Such laments are most suggestive of the necessity to “listen to the echoes of . . . history” thus being more cautious about abandoning the rules

suggested by conventional wisdom (Deal and Peterson 2009, p. 197). Iacocca asks rhetorically: “Where are the curious, creative communicators? Where are the people of character, courage, conviction, competence and common sense? (p. 12). The only one of his 10Cs of leadership absent from these questions is charisma, “the ability to inspire” and to engender ‘trust’ in followers (p. 9). Significantly, work on ‘capabilities’ takes such articulations considerably further by connecting the freedom or autonomy necessary to realise one’s capabilities with responsibilities for our actions, ‘deontological demands’ that confer duties (Sen 1999, 2009), thus autonomy, capability and justice are inextricably linked. Leadership understood in this manner seeks a balancing of autonomy with duty and responsibility, thus it is not simply a matter of breaking all the rules; it is necessary to think and talk about the ‘*intertextuality*’ of leadership, its multifarious influences, shifting solidarities and power relations (Anderson 2009). In the context of a more persistent if not hegemonic neo-liberal policy climate, such professional conversations are more demanding and fraught, as well as urgent and necessary.

Such competing interests begin to explain policy-makers’ impatience with the rules and routines of public schooling, public sector workers and their trade unions, perceived as being too preoccupied with ‘stability’ when more ‘movement’ is necessary (Deal and Peterson 2009, p. 219; Weiner 2012). However, the conventional wisdom promulgated by Joni Mitchel in big yellow taxi continues to capture the public imagination—‘you don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone’, thus serving as a timely reminder that the future cannot be conjured out of thin air; it requires ‘bricolage’ from past and present. However, in a world progressively characterised by ‘fear’ (Furedi 2002) induced by an “increasingly fluid, ‘liquidized’, ‘deregulated modernity” (Bauman 2000/2006, p. 125; 2001), it becomes more difficult to create alliances of “mutual interests” (Kohn 2008; Stone 2002). Such circumstances suggest “leaders who innovate are generative, creative, able to think outside the box, and willing to challenge the norm; they are adaptive as learners and creative in problem solving” (Allen and Kayes 2011, p. 108). Such tensions present recurring dilemmas for the researcher and leader, for, as Bauman suggests:

... courage is a quality which intellectuals once famous for their obstreperous radicalism have lost on the way to their new roles and ‘niches’ as experts, academic boffins or media celebrities. (Bauman 2001, p. 125)

When we become “*surfaces*” to each other, self-interest becomes a self-referential defensive disposition that renders extremely difficult the possibility of holding mutual interests. Exercising leadership in such circumstances implies the capability of moving beyond self-interest to forms of collaboration whereby “change occurs through the interaction of mutually defining ideas and alliances” in the perpetual political motion of power, politics, policy-making and the exercise and re-conceptualisation of leadership (Stone 2002, p. 54).

There is increasing recognition, however, that an “incremental approach to reform” although “achieving a certain degree of stability and consensus” is insufficient to meet emerging needs in a more ‘coherent’ manner (OECD 2008, p. 24). Creating a more efficient public service necessitates making available

to public servants “more managerial flexibility and problem solving autonomy” as well as “more interesting career tracks” (p. 26). Yet, in many instances such leadership has resulted in bonuses being paid on top of very attractive salaries regardless of the quality of the stewardship provided in a vein that is uncannily similar to the manner in which senior financiers in the private sectors have ‘earned’ colossal bonuses, sometimes in inverse proportion to actual ‘performance’. Such irresponsible behaviour (rather than leadership) ignores long established lessons of conventional wisdom such as *‘festina lente’* or simply ‘don’t throw the baby out with the bath water.’ It is through the lens invoked by these competing horizons—narrow self-interest devoid of duty, responsibility and accountability, a “bottom line society” (Bennis and Thomas 2002, p. 167) and the “alchemy of leadership” that includes less tangible elements that contribute to its integrity including: “moral compass . . . values, ethics, character, voice, ideals, beliefs, ideology, principles [and] philosophy” from which new horizons of leadership are created (p. 145). Such commentary strongly suggests that leadership is more than possession of the ‘right’ ‘skill set’ or being an excellent ‘problem solver’, but extends also to embrace character and commitment to a ‘common good’ that is more than market manipulation. In the wider context of more affluent societies, a similar tension exist between the freedom of choice conferred by consumerism, and “a sustainable balance between the present and future” (Offer 2007, p. 3); self-interest requires regulation in the public interest. In what ways does this larger canvas shape school leaders and leadership? Illustrative rather than exhaustive responses are provided below.

### ***Leadership: A Contemporary Retrospective***

For some time distributed leadership “is much in vogue with researchers, policy makers, educational reformers, and leadership practitioners alike” (Leithwood et al. 2009b), though I remain less certain than these authors as to its embrace by practitioners . More important, in the present context, is the recognition of *adjectivalism*, described by Gronn as “the extraordinary resilience of leadership in being able to replenish itself by generating new categories and classifications through the simple device of substituting an endless supply of successive candidate adjectives” (Gronn 2009, p. 18). While mindful of the inconsistency in adding to this adjectival store, he suggests ‘hybridity’ as a possible advance on distributed. Such proliferation is testament also to the propensity amongst the academic community to continue to extend the lexicon of leadership. An alternative interpretation that focuses on leadership rather than its proliferation of adjectival adornments is the persistence of the view that leadership, despite its conceptual ephemerality, endures in the absence of a more appropriate term, a tribute to its tractability. Though adjectivalism has its attractions it may fall prey to ‘boutique’ leadership not entirely divorced from academic celebrity whereby ‘recognition’ is won by promotion of a leadership designer label (Sugrue 2009).

There is increasing consensus also that despite the lengthy provenance and pedigree of heroic leadership it has “become out of step with the more grounded—and decidedly unheroic—leadership experienced by many of those in schools” (Leithwood et al. 2009a, p. xvii). However, even if one is inclined to subscribe to the view that particular versions of heroic leadership have passed their sell by date, there are elements of it that may need to be retained, rehabilitated even. I concur in this regard with the notion of ‘ordinary heroism’ as articulated by Zimbardo which understands such behaviours as “sociocentric and not egocentric,” as involving ‘*sacrifice*’ even to the point where such leadership practices may be injurious to health and certainly to work-life balance, a popular construction in leadership literature (see Sugrue 2009; Zimbardo 2007, p. 466).

Persistent criticism of more traditional forms of heroism—often mythologised as ‘larger than life’ charismatic characters, in part has fuelled the adjectivalism of which Gronn rightly complains, while changing circumstances too necessitate new forms of leadership. Under the influence of NPM, as responsibilities for decision making were devolved to the level of the school, the role of principal expanded to the point where there was growing recognition that lone leadership, no matter how ‘super,’ could fulfil the complex role meaningfully. Thus teacher collaboration (Lieberman 2008; Lieberman, and Miller 2004), under the leadership of an individual metamorphosed into ‘communities of practice’ (McLaughlin and Talbert 2006; Wenger 1998), shared, distributed leadership, thus the concept needed to be ‘stretched over’ the entire school community (Harris 2008; Spillane 2006; Spillane et al. 2009; Spillane and Diamond 2007). Empirical evidence gives credence to this perspective, while adding additional complexity by documenting that such patterns of leadership practice are different depending on subject matter expertise and the very nature of communication and interactions within the school community and beyond (Harris 2008; Spillane 2006; Spillane and Diamond 2007).

Stretching the concept of leadership by means of a distributed cognition perspective (Spillane 2006) is constrained considerably by a number of factors, not least of which is the extent to which different cultures are disposed towards individualism, where people become clients, customers and consumers and education a commodity (Gladwell 2001; Surwiecki 2005). Within this policy maelstrom, there are degrees of discretion regarding deployment of staff within schools to create space and opportunity for collaboration, the practice and choreography of leadership. In this sense, distributed leadership is a socialised practice, a learned behaviour that requires compromise, sacrifice even, on the part of consumerist oriented individuals. In the Irish system, for example, apart from deputy principals in very large schools, all primary teaching staff have full teaching duties with no provision for substitute cover. In such circumstances, the potential of distributed leadership is seriously if not fatally compromised—destined to live on the margins, positioned there by more traditional structures of schooling as well as fiscal constraints. Apart from mindsets, frequently shaped by legislative and policy requirements that indicate a principal’s (ultimate) responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning within the school, there are very real fiscal and systemic constraints that exist in many jurisdictions that frequently are ignored when policy-makers espouse the most recent policy fashion.

This is not an argument against the potential of distributed leadership, merely a warning that because it gains traction in one context, its transferability to other context makes hybridity a necessity, while emergent (re-)productions may be pale imitations rather than hybrid, fit for purpose mutations.

Adjectivalism recognises that leadership needs to be reinvented regularly to keep pace with change, thus it should include a ‘transformative’ dimension—be able to renew itself as a field and a practice simultaneously. School leaders are expected not merely to be good managers, to provide adequate ‘stewardship’, but must steer the school barque into uncharted waters to reach new heights of improvement and excellence. Consequently, Leithwood suggests transactional leadership has a maintenance, managerial function, and though important in its own right, needs to be balanced by a transformative agenda, although there is disagreement regarding the extent to which the latter requires a degree of charisma (1999, p. 9). Similarly, the concept of ‘instructional’ leadership has metamorphosed into ‘leadership for learning’ ([www.leadershipforlearning.org.uk](http://www.leadershipforlearning.org.uk)) where leadership practices are no longer the sole responsibility of the principal. Here too there is a sense of a necessity to break new ground, to build ‘professional capital’ (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012).

Such flux leaves the door open for others to suggest what needs to be included in constructing the future leadership of schools. In a time of rapid change fungible conceptual boundaries have advantages and leave spaces within the firmament of leadership possibilities for the moral and ethical, the contingent and the strategic, to mention but a few. For Sergiovanni ‘value-added’ leadership is about “that which is intrinsically important and desirable as in ‘what values do we believe should guide our actions?’” (Sergiovanni 2005) while value added when used by others calculates what a school has provided by way of an ‘add on’ to an individual’s previous learning (Gray 1990; Teddlie and Reynolds 2000). Not surprisingly, in this ‘runaway world’ (Giddens 2002), thoughts have turned to the creation of a more ‘sustainable’ leadership that recognises the importance of diversity rather than homogenisation, standards rather than standardisation, personally authored learning rather than prescribed or scripted opportunities to learn (Hargreaves 2003; Hargreaves, and Fink 2005). The logic of a more ‘ecological’(Barnett 2011) understanding of the manner in which leadership evolves in a more organic manner suggests that linear progression from a ‘third’(Giddens 1999) to a ‘fourth way’ (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009) is less apt than the multiple dimensions of a honeycomb approach to leadership; an appropriate metaphor capturing complexity, industry and distribution of responsibilities—a hive of distributed leadership!

## ***Volunteer Leaders***

As the drive for educational reforms have accelerated during the past two decades turbo-boosted by relentless international competitiveness, the system world has triumphed over life world concerns. Consequently, those who have the temerity to put themselves forward for leadership positions are groomed in a particular

way through a variety of programmes: leadership according to government diktat. Although there has never been so much accumulation of statistical information regarding school ‘performance’, and empirical evidence on ‘effective’ leadership and ‘successful learning outcomes’ or their converse, there is evidence also that during the past decade of reform, in both the US and UK, teacher attrition continues to be as much as 50 % during the early years (Darling-Hammond 2003; Henke et al. 2000; Ladd 2007; OECD 2005). It is time to redress this imbalance, and regardless of leadership style, recognise principals’ humanity, their ordinariness, in many instances, excellent people doing extraordinary work—being ordinary heroes. This is not to romanticise the role of leader, its challenges, frustrations, and moments of satisfaction. In contrast to the individualism of ‘western’ culture, the notion of Ubuntu has a very different fulcrum—“it does not exist unless there is interaction between people in community”. Understanding the human condition in this manner means that humanity itself can “only be defined through interaction with others” (Boon 2007, third edition, p. 26). Capturing this ‘interactive’ leadership foregrounds its essential humanity rather than quantifying its ‘success’. This is not simply a restorative project but a concerted effort to recover significant aspects of leadership that have been submerged in contemporary competitiveness and individualist discourses. How is this to be achieved?

### ***From Life World to Life History***

Sergiovanni claims that “the lifeworld of the school is its heartbeat” and this is “weakened whenever the systemworld determines the lifeworld”, when means determine ends (Sergiovanni 2005). Similarly, the heartbeat of leadership is the sense of purpose, the beliefs and values that underpin such visions, as well as the actions leaders take in the ongoing struggle to make sense of self, surroundings and the nature of schooling. It is necessary therefore to examine the lives and the work of school leaders, by asking them to articulate and elaborate how they have made sense and continue to make meaning of the realities of their leadership roles over time, the ongoing construction of identity. It is necessary to know how these life worlds are re-produced as longitudinal life histories of school leaders and leadership.

### ***Re-making Leaders’ Identities***

Contemporary leaders are construed as being more reliant on skills, expertise, and ‘capabilities’ (Nussbaum and Sen 1992; Sen 1999, 2009), rather than character and charisma, but mass reproduction of cloned leaders is neither possible nor desirable since people and the politics of the local are perpetually present:



Human behaviour is always subject to situational forces. This context is embedded within a larger, macrocosmic one, often a particular power system that is designed to maintain and sustain itself. (Zimbardo 2007, p. 445)

Such contexts (some more extreme than others), are “crucibles in which authority, power and dominance are blended and, when covered over by secrecy, suspend our humanity and rob us of the qualities we humans value most: caring, kindness, cooperation and love” (p. 444). Bennis and Thomas too recognise the significance of ‘trial by fire’:

... individuals make meaning out of often difficult events—we call them *crucibles*—and how that process of ‘meaning-making’ both galvanizes individuals and gives them their distinctive voice. (Bennis and Thomas 2002, p. 4)

In similar vein, it is also suggested that when “market mimicry is imposed on public service provision ... other policy priorities” are occluded (Coudry 2010/2012, p. 57). Less dramatically, ‘critical incidents’ (Tripp 1993) and ‘teachable moments’ (Woods 1993a, b) resonate more readily with ‘ordinary heroes’ (Zimbardo 2007). Although recognising the limitations attaching to both normativism and ‘adjectivalism’ (Gronn 2009) and in seeking to move beyond the picket fences of these conceptualisations of leadership, it is important simultaneously to recognise the impossibility of escaping the personal and the situational.

### *Narrative and Identity*

In more stable and predictable times, constraints of kin, geography and socio economic circumstances resulted in a very restricted “tool kit of options made available by our culture and society” in the construction of selves, and emigration was frequently the means of creating an alternative identity beyond the “suggested life-scripts” of the local (Appiah 2007, p. 109). Even in contemporary fluid conditions, “we do make choices, but we don’t, individually, determine the options among which we choose” (Appiah 2007, p. 107). However, with the influence of globalisation and ‘liquid modernity’, the individualism it enabled and encouraged, identity became much more fluid, unstable and insecure. Sen identifies two reductionist responses to contemporary conditions—“identity disregarded” and ‘singular affiliation’ (Sen 2006, pp. 20 ff). The former is beloved of economic theorists where, as ‘economic man,’ we act out of self-interest only; the latter insists that my identity can be collapsed into being ‘Irish’, a denial of the other multiple ‘masks’ that contribute to who I am. However, such multiple identities appear nevertheless to require some connection, a combination of ‘ontological insecurity’ and self-reflexivity ‘glued’ by narrative—“the capacity to keep a particular narrative going” (Giddens 1991, p. 54). As Taylor suggests: “in order to have a sense of who we are,” we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going” (Taylor 1989/1992, p. 105), and what enables this is our personal narrative. Identity, life, a work in progress: “The life story is a psychological construct—a

dynamic, inner telling or narration, evolving over time” (McAdams 1995, p. 385). Yet this narrative identity is not merely a psychological construct as it is also a story embedded in a particular cultural context. The socially situated nature of identity is pushed further within notions of ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger 1998).

Although narrative identity presents continuity threads within its fabric, it is a delicate weave that masks uncertainties and insecurities. A consequent purpose of this text is to unravel the narratives of participants, to understand how they are constructed, but to situate these within their cultural context. This is to recognise that the “self-defining memories” (McAdams 2008) have much in common with crucible and critical incidents that, when strung together, become something more than mere story, they are also “individuals internalized, evolving and integrative story of self” (McAdams 2008, p. 242); it is through such narratives that “*the self comes to terms with society through narrative identity*” (p. 243). But in the hyper individualistic world of economic man where consumerist narcissism is pervasive, appearance rather than substance tends to prevail so that life is lived as “though surrounded by mirrors” wherein “we search for the appearance of an unblemished, socially valued self” (Giddens 1991, p. 172). The world of school leaders and researchers is not immune from such influences, yet, identity is more than mere reflection, and though loosed from traditional ties and constraining influences fragility and continuity are evident; more evident when affective dimensions of the persona are considered. Thus, “emotional tone, motivational themes, and narrative complexity . . . show at least modest stability in individual differences” (McAdams 2006, p. 1377). Similarly, ‘story-telling’ (Young 1989) that combines an intimate relationship between individuals, their pasts and immediate contexts, enable their accounts to be termed ‘living history’ (Beiner 2007, p. 82).

The language of identity construction in the rough and tumble of lives led and reflected upon, seems at significant remove from a language of effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, performance indicators, outcome measures, to mention but a few dominant terms in the neo-liberal lexicon. McAdams and his colleagues postulate that these terms resonate with ‘tough love’—the authoritarian father (leader) who sets clear guidelines, “enforces strict rules” which leads to the “development of self-discipline” that in turn builds ‘character’ and ‘self-reliance’ and ‘responsibility’ (McAdams et al. 2008). By contrast, a liberal approach to parenting puts a premium on care and nurturing thus children reared in such an atmosphere will grow up feeling happy and fulfilled, cared for and caring towards others within and beyond immediate family. Such liberal leaning leadership creates more caring school communities, more inclusive than competitive. Drawing attention to such matters underscores the relationship between personal biography, styles of leadership and the cultural contexts in which significant moments in people’s lives contribute to the ongoing identity projects of school leaders, what they value and the values they live by. Such ‘*Metaphors We Live By*’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1981), strongly suggest competing leadership archetypes—rugged and self-reliant, inclusive and collaborative, but such archetypal leaders rarely exist in pure form.

## Narrative Identities and Life History Method

Despite the compelling nature of identity narratives they are not sufficient reason for undertaking this work; it is necessary rather to connect life narratives with understandings of life history.

Life history method has a significant track record in capturing the lives and work of teachers (Ball and Goodson 1985; Goodson 1992; Goodson and Walker 1991) while beyond the immediacy of this literature, there is an additional embrace of biography work and its attempts to capture salient aspects of teachers' and leaders' lives (Antikinen et al. 1996; Casey 1993; Coles 2000; Erben 1998; Moller 2004; Munro 1998; Sugrue 2005). Against the prevailing tide of NPM discourses with their 'performance focus' (OECD 2008) language, there is a counter flow that seeks to (re-)insert into such systems thinking a sense of the personal and subjective, captured in the following:

The current focus on acknowledging the subjective, multiple, and partial nature of human experience has resulted in a revival of life history, its lack of representativeness and its subjective nature, are now its greatest strength. (Munro 1998, p. 8)

When human subjectivity is dismissed or marked absent, "quantitative assessment and theoretical commentaries can so easily service powerful constituencies within the social and economic order" (Goodson and Sikes 2001, p. 8). Consequently, life history as a method is particularly useful since it "offers a way of exploring the relationship between the culture, the social structure and the individual lives" (p. 9). It is important therefore to know and understand what is involved in both the distinctions between life story and life history, as well as the methodological hazards or compromises in transferring from one genre to another.

Moving from life story to life history involves a move to account for historical context—a dangerous move, for it offers the researcher considerable 'colonizing' power to 'locate' the life story with all its inevitable selections, shifts and silences. (Goodson and Sikes 2001, p. 17)

Without adequate recognition of the cultural embeddedness of individual stories, their necessary contextualisation, such accounts "remain uncoupled from the conditions of their social construction" (p. 17). Within the confines of this particular study it is not sufficient to document the life story accounts of the participants regardless of the level of detail. Rather, it is necessary to re-construct them within the cultural and policy environments in which their narrative identities have been constructed and buffeted. In this sense, this methodological genre has similarities with group or collective biography, but with important distinctions also (Parke 2002). This study is about a selected 'group' of principals, individuals who have worked in that capacity for up to four decades, thus there is a period dimension to the study, while the primary focus remains the individuals and what gives them a group identity is that they have all been or continue to be principals. As Parke (2002, p. 111) suggests: "group biography depicts the social, personal and professional interactions of a definable association of individuals," but life history

insists that without painting the period sufficiently, it becomes extremely difficult if not impossible to reconstruct adequately either persons or periods. The contribution of life history method therefore is most succinctly summarised as ‘*a narrative of action, but also a history or genealogy of context*’ (Goodson 1992, p. 240).

Important as such symbiosis is to the integrity of life history, this study adds two further dimensions that extend the interpretative layers still further, thus also the hazards alluded to above. The accounts that follow are necessarily embedded in the (national-international) policy environment, thus context is understood as both immediate and remote, ‘glocal’ (Beck 2000). The challenge is to enable the distinctiveness of the individual voices to be heard while contributing to a polyphony around leaders and their leadership. Since these accounts extend over a decade and describe some individual’s principalship over four decades, a significant longitudinal change over time dimension is added in contrast to more typical snapshot studies. Such extended perspectives facilitate ‘periodization’ which “amounts to considerably more than recurring cycles, waves, or swings of the pendulum”, extending to major forces external to schools over which principals have no control, namely “major economic and demographic upswings and downswings” (Hargreaves and Goodson 2006, p. 3). Consequently, sustaining leaders and underwriting sustainable reforms that endure is revealed as a much more challenging task in a rapidly altering educational landscape.

## ***Participants***

More than a decade ago, I was invited to contribute to and participate in an international comparative life history study of school leaders (Sugrue 2005). Each of four participating countries selected principal participants who were either—recently appointed (0–3 years), experienced (4–14) and veteran (15+). This was a purposive sample, where gender, school type (single-sex or coeducational), school size (teaching and administrative principals), as well as length of time in the role were all criteria that helped identify participants. My own extensive knowledge of the system, personal contacts, and various networks influenced access to possible participants. These criteria were adhered to when the additional cohort was added to the original sample. Each participant was interviewed three times, the third interview being largely focused on emergent cross-national themes. When in 2007–2008, I returned to interview all of the original participants and added another recently appointed cohort, this latter group was interviewed twice only. Interviews were conducted variously—in my office, in the principal’s office or less frequently in the individual’s home. Regardless of whether or not the original dozen were still in the principal’s role, they were interviewed and included, thus adding a retrospective dimension to the work.

### ***Data Analysis: Identification of Themes***

Interviews varied in length from 1 to 2 h; all were transcribed verbatim, entered into NVivo and open coding was used as a means of organising the data while not overly imposing on it. A total of 56 interviews form this extensive data base.

As part of the process of becoming familiar with the extensive data set, a total of 73 open codes in NVivo were created. A significant proportion of these codes charted participants' personal and professional trajectories in terms of their own schooling, teacher education, teaching careers and further study, thus forming an important backdrop as well as interpretive lens for more focused attention on their ascent to principalship and how they subsequently navigated the role and responsibilities, how they articulated their insider perspectives, their lived experience. Throughout, a predominantly 'abductive' stance was adopted, what Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000) describe as "reflexive interpretation" (pp. 247–257). This stance implies a multilayered analysis, moving between extant literature and the narratives emerging from interview data. However, since my primary consideration was to construct life history accounts it was necessary also to be mindfully reflexive to avoid more obvious bias. Nevertheless, there is a double jeopardy, consistent with the views articulated above, when engaging in a contextualisation process that transforms life stories into life histories by embedding them within local circumstance, national policy rhetorics and international discourses of reform and their shaping influence of leadership policies and practices. A further consideration was to paint as comprehensive a picture as possible, albeit from principals' perspectives, thus codes were regrouped as themes that are reproduced as individual chapters, yet are intended to be cumulative, contributing particular elements of the mosaics of leadership, rooted in personal narratives, re-configured through an abductive process into life history narratives, appropriately embedded in a glocal mix of local context and international literature, all within a change over time perspective. In this manner, the traditions of the Irish educational system, coupled with the narrative histories of the participants, speak back to the globalising and homogenising tendencies of policy-making as well as to their influences on leadership as a literature and a set of practices. The intention is to put real life back into school leadership—a process of infused illumination from below. Figure 1.1 provides a thumbnail sketch of the 16 participants and their school context, while [Appendix](#) offers a biographical note on each.

### ***A Note on Cohorts and Themes***

As indicated above, there are four cohorts of principals in this study—recent, experienced and veteran with an additional cohort of recently appointed principals added to the original 12, thus a total of 16 participants. Given the timeframe during which interviews were conducted, participants moved from one cohort to

	Pseudonym	Recent	Experienced	Veteran	School Size	School Context	Appointed Principal	Began teaching career	Retired/ moved on
1	Jack			20+	20 +	Suburban Disadvantaged	1978	1971	2007 R
2	Fred			20 +	3	Rural	1971	1969	2010 R
3	Alison			20+	20+	Suburban	1979	1968	
4	Jim			15	4	Rural	1985	1971	2014 R
5	Michelle		10		17	Suburban WC	1992?	1978	
6	Conor		10		17	Large Town	1992	1971	2010
7	Maggie		8-9		8	Small Town	1991	1968	Alternative employment-2004; 2012 R
8	Eddie		10-2 schools		5	Rural	1993	1982	Alternative employment-2006-
9	Dick	5			6	Rural	1994	1984	
10	Kate	3			17	Large Town	1997	1963	2007 R
11	Rose	2			16	Urban M/C	1999	1983	2001-alternative employment
12	Denise	2				Suburban Irish Medium	1999	1991	
13	Janice	1			10	Village	2007	1984	
14	Ben	2			12	Small Town	2005	1989	
15	Sadie	2			16	Suburban multinominal	2006	1977	
16	Brent	2			20 +	Suburban	2006	1988	

Fig. 1.1 Professional profiles of principal participants

another—thus recently appointed principals became more experienced, the more experienced became veterans, while some veterans retired. Consequently, apart from the blurring of boundaries, with consequences for continuity and change, one of the challenges in terms of the writing of individual chapters as part of creating a comprehensive (if partial) account of leaders’ lives and work over time, has been to determine when cohort experiences contribute a distinct set of insights, understandings and practises. In general, a cohort approach to the construction of the life history narratives has been observed, while in a small number of chapters deviation from this methodology seemed appropriate. Where this has occurred, this departure is indicated with appropriate justification.

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## Chapter 2

# School Leadership in Context: National Policies, International Influences

### Introduction

At a minimum, contemporary school leaders are required to be Janus-faced: acutely sensitive to the ecology of the school community, while simultaneously attuned to the external educational landscape. Such leadership requirements are more redolent of Daedalus than Icarus: it is necessary to occupy the swampy lowlands, indicate the future by being able to soar above, yet extremely mindful of the policy thermals that can cause instant instability. Leadership in such turbulent and unstable circumstances is more akin to paragliding than being the ‘company man’. It requires being intimate with local circumstance, yet capable also of ‘reading’ the national and international panorama—the macro, meso and micro policy environments of school leadership. This chapter sets out to indicate these three layers while seeking also to signal the manner in which these distinct spaces of practice are colonised—with particular reference to how the language, logic and attendant accountability technologies on NPM have been progressively insinuated into National policy rhetorics; a process of policy tessellation where one is over-shadowed and shaped by the other. This approach also becomes instrumental in indicating the significance of the potential of the Irish ‘case’ to inform and illuminate international discourses on leadership. I begin in the higher altitudes of this policy atmosphere—the international macro ‘social movements’, their dominant discourses and shaping influences.

### Leadership: It’s Macro Shaping Influences

School leaders, as the gatekeepers and boundary spanners between the internal school community, its immediate context and wider policy environment are continuously positioned on the threshold of change—a lonely borderland of turbulence that

requires considerable navigational nous accompanied by instant decision-making. Such snap professional judgements are part of the lifeworld (Sergiovanni 2000) and lifeblood (Sergiovanni 2005) of principals' practice that may have serious and long term consequences. These are the swampy lowlands (Schon 1987) over which the national policy (cumulus nimbus) clouds are suspended, while further out the (Cirrus) international policy atmosphere increasingly rains down a variety of ideas that frequently take on prescriptive proportions in national policy documents prior to entering the schoolhouse door. These layers are interconnected, while their precise connections are dynamic, shifting and therefore also difficult to predict. The school, education and public policy interface is similarly dynamic and unstable, yet, rather like the weather, over time patterns are discernible despite global warming. How autonomous are principals as they engage in these professional judgements?

## **Autonomy: Evolution of a Conceptual Policy Pillar**

Some researchers have drawn attention to "the popularity of the autonomy concept" and suggest that it "stems from evolutions on the practice of public management in OECD and other developed countries" (Verhoest et al. 2004, p. 101). The coupling of such practices to international organisations provides evidence of the influence of such organisations on national policies. Verhoest et al. (2004) indicate that "the theoretical underpinning of this movement is found in economic neo-institutionalism" (p. 101); other commentators express a preference for terminology such as 'supercapitalism' (Reich 2008), neo-liberalism, economic rationalism, neo-conservatism, while in general there is growing 'convergence' that the collective impact leads inexorably towards the conclusion that "we will have to pause from our relentless competition in order to survey the common challenges we face" (Sachs 2008, p. 5). This is clearly a monumental leadership challenge, but where does this leave professional autonomy?

Autonomy, promoted by such agencies as the OECD, and a variety of 'think tanks' (Rich 2005) have been fuelled by globalisation. There is considerable agreement therefore that: "Most nations have become part of a single integrated system of global capitalism" (Reich 2008, p. 4). Consequently, "what we want as individual purchasers of goods" has fuelled individual consumerism, yet "what we want together as citizens" has become proportionately more difficult, fractured and fractious (p. 5). The consequences of such economic autonomy for society are no secret: "it is heartbreaking that global society has evolved a highly efficient way to get entertainment to rich adults and children, while it can't get 12-cent medicine to dying poor children" (Easterly 2006/2007 see also James 2007; Putnam 2000; Putnam, and Feldstein, with Cohen 2004). Similarly resonant conclusions are evident in the following: "over the past two decades the most important and underreported story is how the market trumped politics. . . . 'we've become a 'bottom-line' society" (Bennis and Thomas 2002, p. 167). From a policy perspective, Stone indicates that "the model of society underlying the contemporary rationality project

is the market”, our life as consumers trumps our life as citizens” (Stone 2002, p. 9). She captures the psychological disjuncture to which such instrumental rationality contributes, when she states: “the major dilemma of policy . . . is how to get people to give primacy to these broader consequences in their private calculus of choices, especially in an era when the dominant culture celebrates private consumption and personal gain” (p. 23). Such bifurcation between individual citizen and society results from protective privileging of economic autonomy.

At an earlier stage in the roll out of the industrial revolution there was a growing realisation by its more reform minded entrepreneurs that “they could not simply leave their own poor to wallow in deprivation, disease, and hunger without courting crime, instability and disease for all” (see Owen 1991; Sachs 2008, p. 4). However, the consequences of the pervasiveness of this particular form of ‘economic man’ (*Homo Economicus*) has far reaching consequences for the manner in which individuals, as citizens are ‘treated’ by public services. This shift in emphasis, perhaps even to the point of fetish, or ‘cult’, is captured succinctly by Gross Stein (2001) in the previous chapter; the logic of the market and regimes of accountability hollow out meaning and sensibility (Englund and Solbrette 2011). Thus the primacy of choice and value for money has re-configured understandings of autonomy, its attendant values with major consequences for schooling and its leaders.

Although the word autonomy dates back to ancient Greece, it is generally accepted that autonomy as self-government, the freedom and responsibility to exercise judgement for oneself, independent of existing rules and regulations, is quintessentially a European Enlightenment concept with Kant frequently recognised as its progenitor (see Schneewind 1998/2005). By late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, professionals, ‘called’ to provide a particular public service, to profess, to declare publicly, their commitment to professional community and society and this ‘web of commitments’ (May 1996) implied discretionary judgement, the autonomy to behave in a professionally responsible manner (see Dyrdal Solbrette and Sugrue 2011). At the risk of over-simplification, the reincarnation of neo-liberalism, combined with decline in public ‘trust’ (Hardin 2008; Kohn 2008), specialisation and expert knowledge, have combined to loose the ties of earlier accepted versions of ‘social trustee professionalism’ (Durkheim 2001; Johnson 1972). The impact of such international intellectual, socio-cultural and economic shifts have profound consequences for public education and its leadership.

### ***Autonomy: From Enlightenment Concept to Policy Chameleon***

In a recent European (Eurydice) report (*School Autonomy In Europe Policies And Measures*) (Coghlan and Desurmont 2007), Fiegel, Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, declares:

Schools are at the heart of all education systems. More than this, schools lay the foundations for the societies of the future, because they play such a crucial role in forming the citizens of the future. They are also decisive for our future prosperity, which depends greatly on

the skills – in the widest possible sense of the word - and knowledge which schools are imparting to their pupils now. (p. 3)

Individuals are not mentioned, only in the sense that they are the raw material for ‘forming the citizens of the future’, while ‘future prosperity’, confined here one assumes to the economic sphere only, is about preparation for the workforce, to fuel the avaricious need of the market; described as “bicycling to authority—working hard, following orders and being punctual” (Spring 2007, p. 208). What remains ambiguous is the extent to which such a ‘citizen’ is homo economicus, a market and marketable avatar, or is there a wider ‘possible sense’ of knowledge and skill in this context that creates spaces and opportunities for becoming a valued and valuable participating citizen in the social as well as economic spheres.

The report goes on to indicate that how the concept of autonomy has been understood and altered chameleon-like as a policy rhetoric:

The school autonomy movement has developed gradually over three decades and the associated reforms reflect a range of schools of thought which vary according to the period in which they were introduced. (p. 10)

The report recognises that across the 27 member states of the EU, and its associated free market countries, in almost all of these national contexts “school autonomy is not a ... tradition” (p. 9). Rather, at the forefront, driven by an ideological agenda, was the Education Reform Act of 1988 in the UK, that had as its primary objective the bypassing of Local Education Authorities construed as bureaucratic and inefficient public sector quangos, the legislation “provided for an increase in school autonomy through the transfer of responsibilities for the management of finance and human resources, historically held by local education authorities, to schools” (p. 10). It was in the decade of the 1990s that this policy chameleon donned the mantle of New Public Management (NPM), with the avowed purpose of applying “private sector principles to the management of public services”, consistent with its neo-liberal parent ideology as indicated in the previous chapter (p. 12). Five ‘tenets’ are identified as axiomatic within this doctrine, namely:

- placing the customer at the centre of state activities and thus eroding the public sector mentality;
- decentralising responsibilities to the level closest to the field of operation;
- making government officers accountable to the community;
- emphasising the quality of services and efficiency of public bodies and, finally,
- replacing traditional procedural controls with evaluation by results (Coghlan and Desurmont 2007, p. 12)

In this post-Thatcherite period of Reaganomics, there continues to be blind faith in the power of the market to maximise efficiency, while there is nothing original in pointing out that schools and classrooms have features that make them distinct from the conveyor belt of production and its various quality assurance mechanisms. Free up, grant autonomy to public sector workers, teachers in this context, and then hold them to account for the ‘results’ that are manufactured. As a head teacher of a secondary school in England indicated to me recently in

a conversation, such a preoccupation with target setting and measurement of results does not take cognisance of the ‘raging hormones of the adolescent population that inhabit my school’ thus rendering such neat linear planning and projection a rather less predictable and more unstable game. More importantly, there is a recurrence of language that appeared in preceding sections—autonomy and a relocation of the locus and fulcrum of decision-making to the local level, with an expectation that this is more ‘efficient’ (whatever about efficacious) while it’s ‘effectiveness’ will be judged by measuring ‘results.’ In a process of re-centralised decentralisation, the pillar of autonomy metamorphosed into the twin towers of autonomy and accountability, new intimates within international policy rhetorics of school reform.

## **Autonomy and Accountability: Inseparable or Incompatible Policy Siblings?**

The Eurydice report is very obviously aware of a wide variety of interpretations of the concept of autonomy as applied to schools, and sought to create indicators of degrees of latitude in decision-making by focusing attention on—the use of public funds, the degree of discretion regarding curriculum and pedagogy, including the selection of textbooks, and the management structures that govern schools (see pp. 17–38). These considerations provide insight into the relative autonomy enjoyed within school communities in a comparative manner, and in some circumstances it appears that these measures have contributed to more democratic participation in education both within schools and between schools and their constituent communities and beyond. Nevertheless, the elephant in the room has become regimes of accountability. The report states that once NPM became the dominant discourse of reform, considerations of what would count as evidence of reform narrowed:

Taking account of the myriad of schools of thought at work across the different experiences in school autonomy, the principle of accountability was not, initially, at the centre of thinking in all countries. However, from the middle of the 1990s this concept became increasingly important and assumed different forms in different countries. (Coghlan and Desurmont 2007, p. 39)

New Zealand led the way followed by the UK (creation of Ofsted, post ERA) followed by the US with the passing of No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB) (2001), while the UK regimes of accountability continued to push the boat out:

But from the outset the English approach was widely seen as stronger, bigger, bolder and as providing an important test of the validity of the basic logic of competition as the driver of improvement (Whitty et al. 1998). (Levin and Fullan 2008, p. 290)

Significantly, however, after the dismissal of the Tory government from power (1997), the mantra education, education, education, espoused by Blair, in many respects stole the clothes of his Tory predecessors, thus privatisation and targets with a relentless pursuit of improved test scores continued to define the approach (Ball 2007, 2008a, b). Across the multiplicity of EU states, due to different traditions,

systemic trajectories and political power plays, very different combinations of autonomy and accountability spawned hybrids. For example, at the beginning of the 1990s, an OECD visiting team (US & UK ‘experts’) commented that the Irish school inspectorate lacked focus, its duties were ‘*sui generis*’, thus it would be necessary to shed significant aspects of its work in order to focus centrally on “the overall evaluation of the school system”. Although reports on the work of individual schools was perceived as useful, these “are not a substitute for a sophisticated and continuing review of what is happening inside the entire education system” (OECD 1991, p. 44). In this regard, two major inadequacies were identified: “a lack of development of teacher and school self-evaluation at the periphery and the inadequate data collection and analysis at the centre.” Such considerations, however appropriate in the setting, may be construed from a policy perspective as evidence of decentralisation of decision-making to the level of the school and granting of autonomy to principals and teachers to engage in ‘self-evaluation’, while exercising greater control from the centre through a process of data collection, thus sending clear signals as to what would be counted as significant. Additionally, behind the rhetoric of devolution of decision-making to the local level, is a considerable circumscription of autonomy- to exercise professional judgment but on our terms. Of course, such reports also provide indefatigable evidence of the increasing influence of international (economic) agencies on national educational policies, thus tightening the nexus between education and economy, and education as preparation for work.

These policy shifts have been described in the UK context as ‘de-centralised centralisation’ (Karlsen 2000). School inspection in the Irish context is perceived as being a much more benign process when compared with its near neighbour, though it has taken on heightened significance since the Minister in May 2006 indicated that henceforth reports would be made available publicly on the DES website (Sugrue 2011). Suffice to say that the tentacles of accountability while initially grafted onto the policy roots of autonomy, have spread wide and deep whereby accountability rather than the parent sponsor has come to dominate. With unprecedented decline in the performance of Irish 15 year olds in the PISA results (OECD 2010), the accountability stakes have been raised dramatically with regular national testing and publication of results being announced as integral to a national literacy and numeracy strategy (DES 2011); intensified further despite considerable improvement in the most recent results (see Perkins et al. 2013).

Inevitably, emphasis on accountability has impacted on leadership—theoretically and practically. A recent OECD report states:

School leadership is now an education policy priority around the world. Increased school autonomy and a greater focus on schooling and school results have made it essential to consider the role of school leaders. (Pont et al. 2008, p. 3)

Much more recent austerity prescriptions dictated by unelected European technocrats, provide further evidence of increasing encroachment on national policy by international agencies. These undemocratic, somewhat Olympian pronouncements are recognised as: “largely laid down under national legal



frameworks which demonstrate a top-down model of decision-making process without any identifiable driving force coming from schools themselves” (Coghlan and Desurmont 2007, p. 14). The assumed policy expectation is that national policies be shaped significantly by the policy rhetorics that precipitate from these macro perspectives. Such policy precipitation clearly influences meso policy when macro and meso ‘fronts’ collide.

## **Conjuncture and Disjuncture: The Interstices of Macro and Meso Policy Rhetorics**

What happens when ‘cosmopolitan’ policy perspectives meet established tradition—‘the way we do things around here’! Ireland, in this regard, may be regarded as an exemplary case study for reasons identified by the OECD more than two decades ago when it declared:

To understand contemporary Ireland, it is necessary to recognise how much its remote as well as more recent history still affects public values and attitudes and offers a key to understanding its institutions, not least its system of education. (OECD 1991, p. 11)

These lines were penned just a few short years before the ‘baptism’ of the Celtic Tiger in 1994 (see Allen 2000), while in more recent years the Tiger’s demise and the flight of its cubs (to Australia and Canada in particular), (see for example, Cooper 2009; O’Toole 2009), provides plenty food for thought on Ireland’s warm embrace of neo-liberalism. This became very pronounced as fiscal rectitude became a ubiquitous term during the economic recession of the late 1980s. As part of the reform process, the OECD visiting team identified many areas in education that needed attention, and of particular note in the present context was the need for systematic and sustained professional support “to prepare principals and senior staff in the schools for their onerous duties” (p. 132); there was recognition also that “the amount of inservice education and training (INSET) available was grossly inadequate” (p. 129), while the inspectorate too would require additional capacity “so that they can monitor schools more effectively” (p. 106). It may be suggested therefore that the pillars of new public management were already manifest in views expressed in this OECD report.

As the 1990s progressed and the pace of change gathered momentum there was a dam burst of initiatives that overwhelmed principals in particular. As part of the partnership approach to consensual policy making, there were some key landmark moments in the process—A Green Paper (Ireland 1992), a national consultative conference to build consensus with the key partners (Coolahan 1994), followed by the publication of a policy White Paper (Ireland 1995), and this paper avalanche culminated in the Education Act (Ireland 1998).<sup>1</sup> Although this wider educational

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<sup>1</sup>This may seem very tame in comparison with the turbulence experienced in other jurisdictions. However, there was a raft of other reports on education too—Adult Education, Early Childhood

reform landscape is important, the primary focus and interest here is autonomy and accountability and their downstream impact from a policy perspective on principals in particular, as well as the extent to which reform rhetorics have been imbued with the language of new public management—the neoliberal turn. In this manner also, the work reported in subsequent chapters become a ‘case study’ through a longitudinal life history that speaks out of a particular history to the larger neoliberal forces at play globally. In this manner, the unique case, has potential to illuminate leadership matters more generally (Stake 1995).

### *Autonomy & Accountability: The Irish Experience?*

The foreword to the Green Paper (Ireland 1992) states:

Throughout the developed world at present, including the OECD countries, there is a widespread consensus on the need for radical reappraisal of traditional approaches to education policies, to take account of the complexities of modern living and the extension of education to all and for a longer period of life. Ireland cannot stand apart from these developments. (foreword, np)

Buoyed up by ‘widespread consensus’ and spurred on by international economic agencies such as the OECD, “radical reform” was necessary to “introduce a spirit of enterprise in our young people and to prepare them for a new world”—that of international competitiveness (Gleeson 2010). This Green Paper is now more than 20 years old. Consequently, revisiting it engenders a sense of how out of date it now is, the extent to which change after change has been heaped on a system whose structures continue to owe more to the nineteenth than the twentieth or twenty-first centuries. Nevertheless, the language of NPM came into its own during this decade (1990s). Consequently, this Green Paper was a catalyst in changing the language in which education was now being discussed. Six key aims of reform were identified, and these were:

1. To establish greater equity in education—particularly for those who are disadvantaged socially, economically, physically and mentally
2. To broaden Irish education—so as to equip students more effectively for life, for work in an enterprise culture, and for citizenship of Europe

(continued)

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Education, as well as legislation on a variety of other issues—Health and Safety, NEPS, 1999, Education Welfare Act (2000), the establishment of the Education Welfare Board (2002) EPSEN Act 2004, Freedom of Information, Data protection etc. all of which impinged on the lives and work of principals directly and indirectly. Services such as SLLS, 2001, PCSP, 1999, SDPS, 2000, LDS, 2002 contributed to an increasing sense of freneticism.

3. To make the best use of education resources—by radically devolving administration, introducing best management practice and strengthening policy-making
4. To train and develop teachers so as to equip them for a constantly changing environment
5. To create a system of effective quality assurance
6. To ensure greater openness and accountability throughout the system, and maximise parent involvement and choice

(Ireland 1992, p. 5)

The language of NPM is very much to the fore in these stated aims: efficiency, devolution, quality assurance, accountability and choice resonate remarkably, while preparing teachers for a ‘constantly changing environment’ foreshadows what has been subsequently identified as ‘performativity’ (Ball 2008a, b).

### *The Rhetoric of Autonomy*

There is little doubt that the Irish education system was significantly over centralised leading to considerable delay, inefficiency and frustration as part of the decision-making process. However, as principals have indicated, the rhetoric of devolution frequently resulted in the relocation of the bottleneck from centre to periphery, particularly if the structures and process at the local level were unequal to the additional burdens that policy dictated should be carried out at the level of the school. Nevertheless, the rhetoric went under the ‘principle of devolution’ “that everything that can be administered effectively at individual school level should be done there; only matters that cannot be administered effectively at that level should be done elsewhere” (p. 17). However, the statement immediately following seems to suggest that this was in the interest of the central administration rather than for the benefit of the school: “the effect of this principle would be to shift decisively the responsibility for day-to-day administration from the Department of Education, freeing it to concentrate on strategic issues allied to policy-making” (p. 17). Efficiencies at the centre would accrue from devolving responsibility to the local level—a centralised prescription. With this policy, Boards of Management (BoMs) would become “the new centre of gravity” to be “equipped with effective powers” (p. 17). Boards would be required to “draw up a formal School Plan” and to provide an annual report to parents. In relation to finance, there would be “some flexibility . . . allowed in how schools allocate spending” while “discretion over schools’ budgets would be increased progressively” (p. 18). Principals, within

this devolved system would be “chief executive” and apart from “executing the School Plan” would also be responsible for “evaluating individual teachers’ capability,” and henceforth principals would be appointed on “a fixed-term contract (such as 7 years) rather than permanently.” This new departure was intended “to encourage mobility and career development” but despite this, the title of chief executive and the fixed term contract disappeared from the subsequent White Paper. Nevertheless, “effective management and leadership at all levels within the school” was deemed essential and this too would require considerable internal restructuring (pp. 146–148). There was recognition also that devolution of decision-making would necessitate the creation of “effective management structures in the schools” and towards these ends “training in management functions would become a stronger element on both initial and in-service training for teachers” (p. 20). Many of these initiatives were necessary and overdue, it is how they have evolved subsequently that is perhaps of more interest. In addition to a rhetoric of autonomy, attention was also paid to quality assurance—accountability and transparency.

### *Accountability and Transparency*

School inspection in primary schooling in Ireland has had a persistent presence from the foundation of the national education system (1831) (see Coolahan, with O’Donnovan, P. F., 2009). An important shift in emphasis would entail “the collection of quantitative data about students’ performance” and, rather like the UK system, “students would be assessed by standard methods around the age of 7, 11, and 15” but these proposed departures too fell on fallow ground, only to be imposed in the wake of PISA results (2010) and the imposition of a Literacy and Numeracy strategy (DES 2011) Nevertheless, the rhetoric made explicit that the price of autonomy inexorably required greater accountability: “following directly from increased autonomy is the need for adequate systems of accountability” and this requires “a much greater degree of openness at all levels” (p. 27). Such accountability and transparency would enable parents to “make a more informed choice in the selection of schools for their children” thus signalling also that market forces thinking was already part of the repertoire of the policy-makers. However, even if the language of NPM was more in evidence, its progress can sometimes be temporarily slowed, even when the international juggernaut is unstoppable—a non-linear trajectory always seeking an opportunity to ‘progress’. The assumption too that autonomy requires accountability rather than trust is most questionable. Rather, “autonomy is centrally associated with the notion of individual responsibility” (Dworkin 1988, p. 102), an essential ingredient for building trust (Bryk and Schneider 2002).

### ***NPM: White Paper (1995)***

In response to stinging criticism of the Green Paper due to the absence of any underpinning set of ideas or principles, the first chapter of the White Paper sought to redress this lacuna with a chapter entitled ‘Philosophical Framework’. While the principles of—quality, equality, pluralism, partnership and accountability are espoused, there is considerable evidence also of an increasing pervasiveness of the language of economic rationalism. The rhetoric of ‘partnership’ is retained but now divided into two categories—more immediate partners such as—“parents, patrons/trustees/owners/governors, management bodies, teachers, the local community and the state” (Ireland 1995, p. 7), and the “social partners”—“businesses and the professions”. Nevertheless, there is evidence also of deference to institutional church with specific recognition of a school’s ‘ethos’ as having a “critical intangible character . . . which encompasses collective attitudes, beliefs, values, traditions, aspirations and goals” (p. 9) (see Gleeson 2010).

Although the Convention Report (Coolahan 1994) may have tempered the language of the White Paper, the language of NPM is evidently present. For example, “the State should . . . develop rigorous procedures for the evaluation of the educational effectiveness and outcomes.” (p. 8). Since the State was increasing expenditure in this sector, it is entirely appropriate that it should “evaluate the effectiveness of educational policy, provision and outcomes”. Consequently, nothing less than “full public accountability” would suffice and this would require that “effective systems . . . for evaluating effectiveness and efficiency with which resources are used” (p. 8). However, there is a strong sense of accountancy about such a policy stance that does not indicate what would count as value for money. As Biesta suggests:

... the idea of accountability has been transformed from a notion with real potential to a set of procedures that have stifled educational practice and that have reduced normative questions to questions of mere procedure. (Biesta 2010, p. 50)

The White Paper devoted individual chapters to school Governance, In-School Management and the school plan (pp. 151–159) where leadership, management, effectiveness and instructional leadership broadly redolent of prominent international research literature during this period are ghosted. In short, “organisations [such as schools] must be changed to make them auditable” (Power 1999, p. 47). In recognition of the increasing importance being attached to the leadership function within the school, professional development and support would be vital. Many of the provisions for principals were to be provided during the next 5 years, and despite such policy commitments the Leadership Development for schools (LDS) ([www.lds21.ie](http://www.lds21.ie)) support service was not created until 2001, more than 6 years later. Principals were also to serve a probationary year, and appointed “for a maximum period of seven years”, and “potential candidates for leadership and management positions” were to be identified and afforded “the opportunity to gain practical experience in a wide range of curricular and administrative duties” but these more imaginative proactive policy intentions have not come to fruition.

However, there was growing recognition that schools were becoming far too complex to enable even heroic principals to operate effectively, but since distributed leadership had not yet become part of the leadership literature ‘effective delegation’ was espoused (p. 154). The school plan was advocated as a significant conduit to “implement and manage change and improve the quality of education” yet concerns expressed during the National Convention were repeated in the White Paper that recognise the limitations and possible consequence of imposed top-down reforms:

... that the production of a final document might be used as a rigid accountability mechanism for evaluating schools; if this were to occur, the planning documents may not convey the realities of school, but rather become marketing devices. (p. 157)

Consequently, distinctions were made between ‘the *relatively permanent features of school policy*’ and a ‘*development section*’ which would focus on “a limited number of small-scale development projects” but this does not appear to have reduced the proliferation of documentation. In the circumstances, it may be understood as a (vein) effort to retain relative autonomy in the face of increasing accountability.

In terms of quality assurance, major reforms of the inspectorate were envisaged. It was proposed to have a central and regional inspectorate but this became less plausible and acceptable when proposed Regional Educational Boards (rather like Local Authorities in the UK) were not established. Henceforth, the inspectorate would concentrate much more than in the past on “evaluating and reporting on the quality and effectiveness of the provision of educational services” (p. 185), and would publish “an annual report on the quality of education” something the inspectorate had failed to do for several decades (see O’Donovan 1992). As part of its remit to concentrate more on its evaluative and policy making functions, the inspectorate would also develop “performance indicators and criteria” (Ireland 1995, p. 187) for the compilation of such reports as well as providing more systematic data on the system in general from accountability, transparency and policy making perspectives. There was particular awareness of the increasing influence of international agencies when reform of the Department of Education itself is discussed, while this too is indicative of an increasing influence of OECD, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and Eurostat, all of whom are mentioned (see p. 193). Penetration of international social movements to the local level is very evident as the language of NPM is promoted by these international agencies- such that thinking and behaviour are challenged:

Development of international comparators is receiving attention at present. Considerable progress has been made in recent years, through the work of the OECD on educational statistics and comparative indicators, in their comparison of different national systems of education and the macro level. It is possible to compare systems in terms of inputs (expenditure, staffing), results (graduation), outputs (student achievement, labour market outcomes) And processes (rates of participation, pupil-teacher ratios and indicators of school decision making). However, much work remains to be done in developing these indicators ... (p. 193)

Nationally, in response to such international influences, “**performance measures**” were increasingly integral to this elaborate data generation process to the extent that a “value for money system in all government departments” was rapidly becoming the new orthodoxy (p. 194). Apart from the more obvious pervasive presence of the language of NPM, the degree of external prescription by policy-makers, emboldened by the increasing influences of international agencies, professional autonomy is simultaneously being curtailed and circumscribed; the system world is increasingly invading the life-worlds of school leaders. By contrast, others see autonomy as “a characteristic of agents who are emotional, embodied, desiring, creative and feeling as well as rational creatures” (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, p. 21). The adoption of a longitudinal life history perspective to leadership has the potential to redress this increasing partial strangulation of the life world while indicating what happens to that life and work when professional autonomy is curtailed.

## **Autonomy & Accountability: From Meso to Micro Realities**

As the decade of the 1990s progressed, and the dam burst of reform initiatives cascaded into schools, principals increasingly felt put upon and unable to cope, and their concerns and frustrations became manifest in a number of ways. There was clamour from teacher unions for additional salary in recognition of increased workloads, but there was a sense also in which principals felt that their concerns were either being ignored or inadequately recognised. Until then, principals were members of the same teacher union as their teaching colleagues at both primary and post-primary levels. In the case of the former, the primary teachers Union (Irish National Teachers’ Organisation) had resisted successfully attempts by cohorts of principals to establish an association, often with coercive tactics. In order that principals voices would be heard, particularly at the policy-making table, the National Association of Principals and Deputies (NAPD) ([www.napd.ie](http://www.napd.ie)) was formed in the late 1990s to represent post-primary interests while in 2000 the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN, [www.ippn.ie](http://www.ippn.ie)) was also founded. The vast majority of members of these associations continue to retain membership of their respective unions. Both bodies have gained formal recognition from the Department of Education and Skills thus they have a voice at the policy making table, while they provide considerable professional support both formally and informally for members, as well as run annual national and regional conferences and seminars. These have been important developments within the national arena that have brought considerable focus on school leadership issues. A ministerial review committee established as a consequence of lobbying by primary principals led to the publication of a substantial report on primary principalship (DES 1999). A further outcome was the belated establishment of a DES funded professional support programme for school leaders—Leadership Development for Schools ([www.lds21.ie](http://www.lds21.ie)) and provision of these important services has been extended to other leadership roles that have evolved in the past decade.

### ***Middle- Management Structures—Shared Responsibilities***

Since the 1970s, both primary and secondary teachers had access to ‘posts of responsibility’ in two categories—A and B, with the former being approximately twice the value of the latter in terms of additional remuneration—currently, these allowances are respectively: €8,520 and €3,769, and subject to percentage increases when additional salary is awarded.<sup>2</sup> When first created these positions were awarded solely on seniority, and individuals were assigned additional duties such as school library, audio-visual equipment, school tours etc. Throughout their history at primary level, the general axiom was that such additional responsibilities could not interfere with class teaching duties, but neither was a teacher obliged to fulfil these additional responsibilities outside of normal school hours. Persistent vociferous complaining by principals regarding workload and responsibilities towards the end of the 1990s resulted in the creation of more definite middle management structures with additional ‘posts’ in a concerted effort to create more robust management structures to accommodate devolved responsibilities. Vice-principals were re-designated as deputies, while A post holders became assistant principals and B post holders were re-designated as ‘special duties’ personnel. The intention was to create a management team approach as opposed to individuals being assigned specific tasks. As a consequence, within the re-designation, assistants and special duties teachers would have three elements to their portfolio of responsibilities: managerial, curricular and pastoral. After initial teething difficulties where there was ambivalence and ambiguity as to the extent to which seniority or meritocracy would apply within school communities, these new structures have been of considerable assistance to principals in making the school as an organisation work more efficiently while making the role of principal more tolerable. Approximately 50 % of teachers held these promoted positions until the introduction of a moratorium on replacement (2009) with limited alleviation introduced more recently (DES (2014)), an austerity inspired move that has seriously undermined the potential of school leadership. In the primary sector, where other than a tiny number of deputies in the largest schools who may not have any teaching responsibilities, there are limits to what this system can achieve since teachers have full-time teaching duties.. Nevertheless, creation and expansion of middle management structures provided an important opportunity to rethink school leadership, roles and responsibilities, but the global winds of change were shifting in favour of increased accountability, inevitably curtailing professional autonomy.

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<sup>2</sup>However, since the loss of financial sovereignty (2008; restored January 20014), as these leadership positions have fallen vacant due to (early) retirements, they are not being replaced, thus many schools are being denuded of management structures deemed vitally necessary in a policy context of devolved responsibility. The Press office of the INTO indicates that 46 % of Assistant Principal posts remain unfilled while 29 % of special duties positions continue to be vacant (16/5/2013).



## ***Internal and External Accountability: Increasing Performativity?***

Many of the policy initiatives that fermented during the 1990s were enshrined in the 1998 Education Act. Part three, *inter alia*, indicates that the ‘inspectorate’ would have responsibility for visiting schools to—“support and advise . . . evaluate the organisation and [its] processes . . . evaluate the education standards . . . assess the implementation and effectiveness of any programmes . . . assess the implementation of regulations” (section 13). The research and policy remit of the inspectorate was also strengthened—it would conduct research, benchmarked against “international practice and standards” as well as advise on matters of policy. While these responsibilities had existed prior to the legislation, there was a significant concentration of effort, thus new demands on principals and teachers also.

Such demands found their most significant expression in the evolution of Whole School Evaluation (WSE). Through a series of centralised partnership agreements (commonly referred to as national understandings), productivity in exchange for salary increases meant more planning, and accountability through WSE, productivity being an important element of NPM. Such consensus building strategies became an easy conduit for the further insertion into policy and increasingly practises also of NPM inspired accountability measures, but were ‘sweetened’ significantly by salary increases; teachers and principals as ‘consumers’ bought the policy, while in turn were bought by it.

It is generally accepted internationally that “self-evaluation and external evaluation reinforce the commitment of all of the key players, in and out of the school, to evaluate what they are doing” (MacBeath and McGlynn 2002, p. 25). Until relatively recently, in the Irish context, school inspection was seen as the prerogative of the inspectorate to be endured by teachers from time to time (see Sugrue 1999). Through a combination of policy borrowing and the influence of international agencies, there is a growing confluence of policy influences. In Scotland, England and Ireland, for example, the following policy documents arrived in sequence: *How Good Is Our School?* (SOEI, 1996), *School Evaluation Matters* (Ofsted 1998), and *Looking At Our Schools: An Aid to Self-Evaluation in Primary Schools* (DES, 2003). However, when self-evaluation is promoted as being virtuous by those with responsibility for external accountability, there is considerable potential for sending mixed messages, as well as ratcheting up the performative dimensions of accountability. In the UK, re-centralisation through regimes of external accountability led to the emergence of ‘performativity’:

. . . not in any simple sense a technology of oppression, it is also one of satisfaction and rewards, at least for some. Indeed it works best when we come to want for ourselves what is wanted from us, when our moral sense of ourselves and our desires are aligned with the pleasures of performativity. But there is always the possibility of slippage between pleasure and tyranny within performativity regimes. (Ball 2008b, p. 52)

When accountability morphs into performativity, it becomes critical that principals and teachers have a very clear view of their responsibilities as professionals, to

‘speak for themselves’ (MacBeath 1999). For internal and external accountability to function in complementary ways an appropriate synergy is required between: goals, their ongoing monitoring, well documented evidence regarding specified goals and criteria and being transparent regarding an adequate audit trail while making this evidence available for appropriate scrutiny (MacBeath and McGlynn 2002; Rudd and Davies 2000). National policies have been influenced in significant ways by a general move towards more tightly scripted regimes of control internationally (Sugrue 2006). Suffice to say that the OECD report in 1991 was something of a catalyst (OECD 1991), while the sequence of publications provided in the ensuing decade is an important ‘audit trail’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985) of the manner in which subsequent national policy evolved (DES 1996, 2002, 2005, 2006a, b, c, d, e, f; Sugrue 2008).

The basic structure of internal and external accountability was articulated by the inspectorate in ‘Whole School Inspection’ (DES 1996). This policy has largely remained focused on:

- The quality of school management
- The quality of school planning
- The quality of teaching and learning (p. 27)

It was reiterated subsequently in ‘looking at our schools’ (DES 2003), followed by the Guide on Whole-School Evaluation (DES 2006c). Other systemic developments had a catalytic effect. After the Revised Primary Curriculum was published (Ireland 1999), as part of the implementation strategy, two important support services were created—the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP), and the School Development Planning Service (SDPS), subsequently amalgamated (2008). Both services were under the control of the inspectorate, while staffed by a significant number of seconded primary principals and teachers. There is a sense therefore in which SDPS in particular became the Trojan horse of the system, promoting self-evaluation, policy devised at the centre to be imposed on principals and teachers but mediated to principals and teachers by seconded colleagues. Apart from making the addition of ‘support for students’ there is little that distinguishes internal from external evaluation as indicated above (Fig. 2.1).

‘Themes for school self-evaluation at primary level’	The evaluation framework
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Quality of school management</li> <li>■ Quality of school planning</li> <li>■ Quality of curriculum provision</li> <li>■ Quality of learning and teaching in curriculum areas</li> <li>■ Quality of support for pupils (DES, 2003, p. iii)</li> </ul>	<p>The WSE team evaluates and reports on the operation of the school under the following headings or areas of inquiry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The quality of school management</li> <li>■ The quality of school planning</li> <li>■ The quality of learning and teaching</li> <li>■ The quality of support for pupils (DES, 2006, Section 3.2, p. 10)</li> </ul>

**Fig. 2.1** Self-evaluation and whole-school evaluation

These policies clearly indicate a convenient seamless confluence of the internal self-evaluation as an aid to external evaluation, an agenda underpinned by the Education Act (1998). A significant element of the SDPS brief was school planning, thus in terms of demands for paperwork alone, there was a proliferation of policy documents and inspection reports reflect this emphasis on planning (Sugrue 2011). These changes, allied to a decision to ‘go public’ with WSE reports in 2006 (published on the DES website), has certainly added to a feeling among teachers and principals that they are subject to considerably more surveillance than heretofore. A better educated parent population is more likely to be more enquiring regarding the progress of their children, and more likely also to question or challenge teachers, spurred on by the same neo-liberal rhetorics of choice and competitive advantage. In the case of principals, despite the creation of middle-management structures, their role is more complex, varied and diffuse. In 1991, the OECD report commented on the ‘legendary autonomy’ of the teacher in Ireland, consistent with Lortie’s (1975) depiction, while under the Education Act (1998), principals are to be held accountable for the quality of teaching and learning as well as “regularly evaluate students” and “periodically report the results of the evaluation to the students and their parents” (section 22, 2a, (b)).

## Conclusions

It would be inappropriately pre-emptive to indicate how changes in educational discourses selectively documented throughout this chapter have impacted the lives and work of principals and teachers in the Irish jurisdiction. Rather, the purpose of this chapter has been to indicate the manner in which the language of new public management has invaded and pervaded policy rhetorics while simultaneously signalling how international agencies and social movements have shaped and influenced these national reform agenda. As a predominantly English speaking country, on the periphery of Europe with a very open economy highly dependent on exports, as well having been a major beneficiary of EU development funds for three decades, and with strong historical ties to the US, and proximity to the UK, it may be the case that for all these reasons and more, educational policies have been particularly susceptible to these external influences, more so perhaps than mainland European countries, protected as they are to some extent by language and more deeply rooted commitments to notions of education as a welfare issue, stronger intellectual traditions and a more bifurcated politics of right and left (Esping-Andersen 2000; Esping-Andersen, with, Gallie, Hemerijk, and Myles 2002). However, I am mindful also of inherited intellectual traditions allied to the residues of post-colonial mindsets that coalesce in the Irish context into what have been identified as the ‘say/do dichotomy, and a capacity for delusion: “traditional Ireland is characterised ‘less by hypocrisy than by a capacity for self-deception on a heroic scale’” (Lee 1989, p. 652, quoted in Gleeson 2010, p. 17).

Even in post-Celtic tiger Ireland, as various facets of school leadership are critically scrutinised, it will be necessary to bear in mind internal systemic structures and cultural forces as well as the external winds of change. Nevertheless, if changing language changes discourses, and a premium is placed on the twin rhetorics of autonomy and accountability, as is evident above, then their impact on the nature and nurture of leaders and leadership should be evident in several respects. The ‘case’ of Ireland, viewed through a longitudinal life history lens, while unique, has potential also to insert its own perspectives and insights into school leaders’ lives and work thus contributing to leadership literature in its own distinct manner. Constructing this tableau as it has been buffeted over time by these increasingly influential external forces, and shaped by the biographies, thoughts and actions of school principals in the setting is the focus and purpose of subsequent chapters.

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**Part II**  
**Career Trajectories of Primary Principals**



# Chapter 3

## Perceptions of Principal's Role: Insider Perspectives, Change Over Time

### Introduction

As indicated in Chap. 1, the life histories of the principals in this study are re-constructed through a series of themes. In this chapter, the themes are parents and resources. These are contextualized against a backdrop of a changing Ireland on the one hand, and changing international discourses around schooling and school leadership on the other. Additionally, through a change over time perspective, the chapter indicates conjunctures and disjunctures in the lives and work of principals; their embrace of and resistance to a changing educational landscape, how they lead and how their leadership is shaped by the local context, national policy and international forces. This is one of two chapters where a strict reliance on cohorts is not followed for the following reasons. First, the voices of the veterans have more to say on the selected themes than more recently appointed principals, with the more recent participants less prominent, while the emphasis on continuity and change throughout is maintained. Second, this approach enables the reader to become acquainted with participants while not being overwhelmed by meeting all 16 at once.

### The Role of the Principal: International Perspectives, Local Circumstance

Internationally, there is a growing literature that suggests a 'crisis' of recruitment and retention of principals (MacBeath et al. 2009). Evidence presented here points to intensification over time (Brunner 2000; Galton and MacBeath 2007; Marshall 1986), while stress and workload considerations (Hess 2003; Troman and Woods 2001; Woods et al. 1997) have become commonplace with an increasing sense that principalship is "greedy work" (Gronn 2003). There is evidence also that deputy principals of large schools in particular are content to be leapfrogged by colleagues

for the position of principal (see, for example, Goldhaber et al. 2008). While under researched, there is evidence also that aspirant principals frequently feel bruised by the selection processes (Gronn and Lacey 2004).

It is frequently forgotten how recently this evidentiary pastiche has emerged, in parallel with NPM in many respects, though this is not the sole influence (Starratt 2011). Many of the principals in this study were appointed before this much more turbulent educational landscape became the new reality. An important challenge in this chapter therefore is to document and provide firsthand accounts of how principals have perceived this evolving kaleidoscope, as actors in the drama (Starratt 1993). Another aspect of this unfolding drama is considerable disparity between metropolitan contexts and rural communities, between the realities of leading a large urban school and the relatively quiet backwater of a small rural school where the role of class teacher and school principal are typically combined. Such conjunctures and disjunctures are important elements of the reality and change over time that deserves attention, even if the account can be partial only, dependent on subsequent chapters to contribute cumulatively to more panoramic perspectives.

The longest serving principal, Fred, assumed the role in 1971, as principal of a two-teacher rural school having completed 2 years teaching in a large urban boys' school. He voluntarily took 'gardening leave' in August 2010 (without having reached compulsory retirement age). By contrast, Janice, the most recently appointed principal who participated in this study, was appointed in 2007 to an eight-teacher village school, where she was the only internal candidate, replacing her older friend who had just retired. She had 20 years' experience as classroom and resource teacher.<sup>1</sup> It was not uncommon for males of Fred's generation to be appointed to principalship on their very first day in the classroom (Corcoran 2000). There was no interview; Fred became the 'anointed' principal. Janice was the only candidate interviewed; 'outsiders' called for interview did not attend. Neither Fred nor Janice had any formal preparation for the role, nor is it a specified requirement, as indicated in Chap. 1; they bookend the participants in this study.

Collectively, participants identify a variety of societal changes, as well as policy influences that combined create complexity and uncertainty. It is appropriate initially to situate these varying micro-political processes within their socio-historical context, as a more general backdrop to subsequent thematic analysis of their perceptions of the role.

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<sup>1</sup>Traditionally, such teachers were identified as 'remedial' teachers where the practice was to withdraw 'weaker' pupils from their classrooms for literacy work, and less frequently numeracy. When a policy of inclusion became a new orthodoxy, remedial teachers were re-designated as 'resource' teachers and strongly encouraged to work collaboratively with classroom teachers, thus avoiding stigmatising learners by continuing to withdraw them from their classrooms; a policy initiative that is ongoing and in some instances controversial. (see Ní Bhroin 2011).

## Change Over Time: General Contours

Stagnation rather than change characterised Irish society during the first half of the twentieth century (Lee 1989), in many respects a failed economic entity, haemorrhaging youth its dominant export; its ports and airports gateways to a more secure and optimistic future (Mac Laughlin 1997). National curricula were preoccupied with language revival and cultural nationalism (Coolahan 1981; Gleeson 2010; Ó Buachalla 1988; Walsh 2012). While this tide of emigration gradually turned, a significant catalyst came in the mid-1960s with the publication of *Investment in Education* (OECD 1965). Major education changes followed—the introduction of ‘free’ (universal) secondary education in 1967, the abolition of the Primary Certificate Examination (PCE),<sup>2</sup> and a ‘radical’ departure from established orthodoxies with the introduction of a ‘progressive’ primary curriculum in 1971 (see Sugrue 1997). Though gradual, gentle even, in subsequent decades, this trickle of change evolved into a veritable tsunami—even in the extent to which publications sought to capture elements of these persistent torrents of change (Cleary 2007; O’Carroll 2002; Peillon and Corcoran 2004; Peillon and Slater 1998), and more recent offerings in this socio-economic commentary category capture the rise and demise of the ‘Celtic Tiger’<sup>3</sup> (Allen 2000; Cooper 2009, 2011; O’Toole 2009; Ross and Webb 2010). Of course, there have been cycles of boom and bust in the intervening periods; school reforms are caught up in these ‘change forces’ (Fullan 1993) while their cultures often remain highly resistant to mandated change (Cuban 2009; Fullan 1991; McLaughlin 2008; Sarason 1990, 1996).

Within this wider panorama, pupil teacher ratios have improved dramatically. For example, in 1965/1966, the ratio was 33:1 (a figure that includes special schools), the most recent figures (05/06) indicate a ratio of 17:1, a reduction of almost 50 %. Other major changes, reflective of policies on inclusion indicate that in 2005–2006, a total of 7,410 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) were employed in Irish primary schools. Provision of secretaries and caretakers to larger schools has occurred during this time although financial resources remain inadequate. However, school design, in terms of staffroom provision etc., has been very slow to adapt to significantly increased adult numbers in schools, posing considerable challenges to principals, while creating tensions also between professional and ancillary staff, particularly when staffroom space is very restricted and has to be shared, not necessarily at the same time (see also Clarke 2010; Darmody et al. 2010). Apart from the presence of personnel, a more diversified curriculum, an extended pedagogical repertoire with greater emphasis on active learning, as well as ICT facilities, and the use of

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<sup>2</sup>This ‘terminal’ examination was no longer seen as appropriate if all were to be entitled to a secondary education. Until the state provision of universal secondary education, very late in its provision by international standards, a minority only transferred to secondary school, even though fees were very modest, heavily subsidised by the incomes of the religious who largely owned and taught in them.

<sup>3</sup>According to Allen (2000, p. 9) “the Celtic Tiger was baptised in 1994 by an economist working with the Morgan Stanley investment bank.”

space both internally and externally in the immediate school environment call for considerable imagination and sustained capital investment. Due to current austerity, many of these accumulated benefits are being eroded or threatened.

It would be impossible in one chapter to do justice to the detail of principal's perceptions of how the complexities of principalship have grown within the timeframe considered here. However, it is possible to indicate through a lens of change over time, the manner in which insiders have sought to capture societal and policy changes and to make sense of them within daily routines as well as the rhythms of the school year—and in this manner paint a picture of those realities. As indicated above, these themes are:

- Parents, parenting, children and the 'crisis' in authority
- Resources—funding, facilities, ICT

The former documents principals' perceptions of how changing social mores have impacted on their roles and the dynamics of schooling, while the latter indicates how provision of resources have impacted the role, the nature of teaching and learning, and the school milieu as a space for learning.

## **Theme One: Principals, Parents, Children and Authority**

Boards of Management (BoMs) were established in the context of Irish primary schools in the mid-1970s. Until then, the pervasive culture was that 'teacher knows best', thus in general, parents offered up their children to the school system and in large measure had little connection or involvement with the day to day learning of their offspring. After the establishment of boards, parents' associations too began to be established, even if they were perceived by principals and teachers as potentially interfering with their professional autonomy, and preferred that they confine their energies to fund raising for the school, to supplement minimal funding by the State. However, as attitudes to children and childhood altered, and notions of arms-length relationships primarily focused on matters of discipline and behaviour were replaced by more enlightened views regarding parental rights, partners in the education of their children, and, in more recent times, learners' entitlement to have their 'voices' heard, have changed the climate and context of schooling exponentially. In general, principals welcome these changes, and in many instances have fostered and encouraged such relationships in pioneering ways. For example, given the school history Fred inherited in 1971, he realised from the outset that connecting with parents would be critical as he sought to build trust with parents, particularly those who had enrolled their children elsewhere. He was aware also that resources were needed, thus over the next three decades he has continued to develop and extend such partnerships in a variety of ways. With a strong sense of community, he pioneered card playing in the school during winter months as a means of building a strong sense of community, with the school at its centre. In this manner, he has also been able to engage in other developments – a computer initiative for the benefit

of parents and the school. Such initiatives continue to evolve, and in more recent times, a student council has been established in the school which he describes thus: “I think the students’ council has been brilliant in a sense that the kids feeling its ownership and then it feeds back.”<sup>4</sup>

As further evidence of how giving voice to students empowers then, the following vignette is illustrative, while in the intervening decades, Fred’s school now has eight teachers, itself a major change:

You saw today, at assembly every week, every teacher nominates a child of the week in their class, the golden book, and I read the citation and the kid gets a little certificate for up on the fridge and they get presented by a member of the student council . . . . Students’ council said to me last week, we want to give every teacher a certificate. I said, what do you mean? You know, exactly like you give us, we want to have a citation for every teacher. So they had and it wasn’t just every teacher, it was every adult that was working in the school. I thought that was lovely, but I had to mention it to the staff beforehand because I didn’t want them to be caught . . . . (Fred, Int. 4, 2007)

Forewarning the staff in such circumstances is more than mere courtesy—empowering students carries certain risks and potentially challenges teachers’ and principals’ authority. However, the authority of the principal is not only buffeted by more self-confident and articulate children, similar challenges to more traditional notions of authority come from colleagues internally as well as more assertive parents externally, where sometimes also children become pawns in the games played by adults across these various borders and boundaries, that are also increasingly blurred and porous. Of course, attitudes to children in particular are culturally bound up with perceptions of childhood (O’Connor 2010), and some measure of such attitudes may be gleaned from the fact that corporal punishment was not ruled out of primary schooling in Ireland until 1982.<sup>5</sup> However, attitudes rarely change at a single stroke of a pen, but the general pattern becomes evident that from principals’ perspectives, erosion of authority as well as more *laissez faire* parenting styles have added to the complexity of their role and put a premium on interpersonal capacities.

More than two decades after Fred was appointed, Dick became school principal in the vicinity of his native heath too in 1994. Unlike Janice, he was an external appointment, and considerably junior in age to his teaching colleagues. Though relaxed at the interview, in contrast with other interviews he had done for principalship, he was very aware of the authoritarian views of the chairperson of the Board of Management (the local parish priest), thus responses had to be suitably tailored. When the question of teaching religion was raised, Dick responded:

I remember my own answer and I said all – religion systems and texts are all fine and well but you have to get across a sense of your own faith because that’s what’s important, if I am

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<sup>4</sup>It should be noted in this regard that, while the Education Act (1998) encourages secondary schools to create student councils as part of a process of giving them a voice, this encouragement does not extend to the primary sector (see Part VI, Section 26).

<sup>5</sup>As was the practice at the time, prior to the more recent education act (1998), the system was governed by ministerial circular, and one issued by minister John Boland in 1982 outlawed corporal punishment in primary schools (see Circular 9/82 for details).

passionate about something I can teach it, and religion is the same with me – I practice my own religion – I'm confident about it and I think that comes across when I teach it and the priest said yes, yes I agree with you and he ignored the others on the panel for a second – and I said there might be something on here. (Dick, Int. 1, 2000)

Borrowing from popular culture he continues: “Faith by George Michael, you gotta have faith – was the answer that got me the job. I'm not that insincere but I remember it as the thing that got me the interview.” (Int. 1, 2000). Such comments are redolent of the notion that you can do as you like once you say the right thing, and this perspective is vindicated by an evident pragmatism in response to more secular questions regarding his possible stewardship:

I would have been asked – you know plans for the school and I'll be straight and honest . . . under the old priest . . . I wasn't going to change the world but at the same time I was going to talk about improvements and making sure that all the curricular areas were taught. I mean that an interview is a strange thing, you do what you do to get the job, then you look at what has to be done after that, it might be something different than what you said. (Dick, Int. 1 2000).

Dick has a practical vision for the school that was not going to challenge aspects of the status quo as represented by key players on the opposite side of the interview table. As the only male from this particular community to have become a primary teacher, there was tremendous good will towards Dick, and an enormous sense of pride that one of their own had attained this status position.<sup>6</sup> He describes this as follows:

. . . it was extraordinary – people around here and in the country areas have high regard for school and for teachers. Though it's changing, it is still one of those professions that is still up there. And there was a huge. . . . Around here people felt intensely proud of me that I had actually had achieved this, even though people around me with other degrees were achieving marvellous things but the fact that a local lad was after getting to be principal of a school that was a big thing with the people. (Int. 1, 2000)

Whatever the initial euphoria of a personal and communal nature, on entering a relatively new school building for the first time, and while knowing there hadn't been any internal candidates, Dick's initial enthusiasm for a new broom approach were tempered by initial visual evidence:

I noticed on the way in – on the wall to the school on the inside wall, there was a picture of the staff, on the last day that the old school had shut [six years earlier]. . . and all of the present staff were in that picture and that rang a few alarm bells with me, that all these people would have their own set ways and opinions and so on and I'm not going to change them too easily. (Int. 1, 2000)

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<sup>6</sup>As a consequence of the dominance of cultural nationalism in post-independent Ireland, and its emphasis on revival of the national language- Irish, the vast majority of primary teachers came from the western seaboard, where the language had survived, and where the government had created a network of secondary schools, known as preparatory colleges, where those who gained entry were guaranteed a place in teacher training. In such circumstances, and a good example of an unintended consequence of policymaking, those from the midlands did not consider primary teaching as a career. For further information on preparatory colleges, see Jones 2006. This social geography of primary teachers has altered dramatically during the past 30 years—in this regard see Sugrue, 2006.

Initial strategy was two pronged—a charm offensive on the staff and a cultivation of parents, the latter deliberate to garner good will, support and thus also leverage for reforms. Regarding the former, he states: “I called a staff meeting fairly early and the first thing that I said to them that I would like to thank them all for the very generous welcome that I received and that I was honoured by it and touched by it” (Int. 1). To allay any fears he went on: “[we are] a team and the team has to have a captain” and while he would take decisions if necessary he wanted to be consultative, and felt that with these soothing and reassuring words “there was a sense of relief falling around that place”. Nevertheless, Dick’s relative youth, the age profile of the staff, and despite his best efforts: “I still felt that I was outside looking in a little bit” in a manner that Wenger (1989) might suggest he continued on an ‘inbound’ trajectory while continuing to hanker after an ‘insider’ positioning. There had been a history of mistrust between the previous principal and parents due to disagreement regarding curricular content, and given Dick’s inbound trajectory, he needed allies as well as recognising the necessity to mend fences. He also had considerable local capital due to family ties, yet he was self-consciously aware that cultivating this constituency was vital to the wellbeing of the school.

I always got on with parents [in previous teaching positions] and I started making friends with parents, you know parents who would help you with a team that might voluntarily do something. . . . I knew a lot of people in the area and I’d say after six months I knew more people in the area than some of the teachers knew who have been there for years. (Int. 1, 2000)

While such circumspection and cautious approach to change may seem conservative to outsiders, in other jurisdictions being able to discuss evidence-based practice, performance indicators and school improvement require similarly deft footwork at interview. Whatever initial motivations might have been, it is evident from the selected data presented here that cultivating parents has become an increasingly significant element of the role. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence also that, in the absence of preparation for the role, it seems more inevitable that the politics of the local predominate in the shaping of perspectives rather than national or international policy directives.

Local influence too is clearly evident in Janice’s case. Although she had the goodwill and support of colleagues, she was surprised by the expectations of parents and the extent to which she was rapidly propelled into being a community leader, and a role model of sorts to whom parents and the community more generally looked to for direction. Despite being already well known to parents, Janice was also aware that as principal she would need to take on an air of authority not previously warranted. In this regard, she recognised the necessity to create an appropriate synergy between that air of authority with some humility, to avoid pretending that she knew it all. She says:

I wasn’t an unknown quantity but you know, there’d be a lot of new parents that I’d have to welcome to the school etcetera but at the same time, I did feel that you know, you do need to take on the air of well, this is the job I’m going to do now and I’m going to do it well. I think that anybody who’s a bit apologetic, you know, I’ve no problem as I say, saying

I don't know that but I'll check it out for you, which is a positive statement but if you're too negative and say, ah no I wouldn't know that yet, well you shouldn't be the principal anyway I suppose. (Janice int. 2, 2008)

This perspective resonates very positively with Kelchtermans' research that teachers and principals are expected to merge successfully passion, purpose and vulnerability, a sense of authority with appropriate humility (Kelchtermans 2009, 2011), rendered more complicated in all of these instances in the absence of formal preparation for the role. It is the visibility of this and the greater expectation in its regard for principals that necessitates a combination of authority, visibility, and vulnerability, while recognising that vulnerability may be perceived as weakness as well as strength. Nevertheless, Janice is conscious of the increasingly porous boundaries between school and community, yet feels compelled to provide (moral) leadership (Coles 2000), and cites the following episode:

... I know you've to be careful about your role in the school and your role... it does cross into the community but you've to be careful where the boundary, you know, where it stops but I did hear complaints that some of our children were making life miserable for a couple of elderly people in the community on their way home and we would have a few kids who would... they come from very nice parents but possibly struggling a little bit and the kids are out and about in the evening and they're knocking on doors and causing a bit of grief. That, you know I've talked to the children about that and I have told them that I would follow it up and I would ask how things are going. Now I know that isn't necessarily within my remit but I feel that if we don't do that here, who will do it? (Int. 2, 2008)

By taking such a stance and being prominent in the community at times of celebration, Janice has garnered positive feedback. After participating in a communal activity, she comments:

I talked to the parents and whatever and it was nice to be there for that and the fact that staff cooperated and the fact that it was such a pleasant night and that you felt good vibes from people, you do feel the good vibes from people. (Int. 1, 2007)

However, she has quickly learned also that in occupying this 'public' role of principal of the local primary school, you hear from parents about domestic conflicts, financial difficulties; empathy and solidarity in times of tragedy is also a necessity while exercising a duty of care both within and beyond the school community. In this regard, Janice talks about a tragic death in the community that necessitated 'care' for the pupils, as well as visibility in the community (O'Brien 2011). She says: "And it occurred to me that the children needed to be minded a little bit, they needed someone to say, are you alright?" Beyond this sense of duty to care, she consulted with a trusted colleague regarding her responsibility to the community when it came to attending a funeral. She expressed her concerns as follows:

I came in the morning of the funeral and I said it to [names teacher], and he said, and he never gets overly excited about anything but it wouldn't be... I don't want to become a professional funeral goer,<sup>7</sup> I think I could have said that to you before but like that he said to me, somebody should be representing the school at that and then I knew if he said that,

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<sup>7</sup>It is frequently suggested in the Irish context that politicians, members of Parliament (Dáil) are 'professional funeral goers', consequence of pervasive clientalism and proportional representation.



I should be there. That's another thing, there are expectations in the community, you are now a community figure. (Int. 1, 2007)

It becomes evident that perhaps visibility in the community is more of a demand in village or rural communities than in comparison with urban contexts, while acknowledging that even in such circumstances the local continues to be important. There is considerable continuity thus far across these appointments, spanning four decades, of the extent to which local circumstance and the inherited legacy within the school and its community influence how principal's perceptions of their role and responsibility are more immediately local, despite the extent to which policy is increasingly shaped by international influences. Additionally, the male principals thus far cited appear to embrace this more public role in a less self-reflexive, taken-for-granted manner that may well be gender related.

One of the veterans, Jim (1985–), has learned from experience that, due to a local history of divided loyalties among parents, as well as a longer history of plantation and settlement, that it is all too easy to disturb local sentiment, while signalling also that perspectives do alter over time. In this following extract, he challenged the behaviour of two boys for bullying another resulting in confrontation with the parent:

I had an occasion where I corrected a child for something very serious, 2 brothers of the same family who were making life fairly tough for another lad who had a speech impediment and I corrected him and I didn't punish them very severely, I just gave out to them. Their mother was into me the following morning; that I had wronged them, that one of them didn't know what he was doing and he was only doing it because the other was doing it. So I told her that he knew what he was doing and one thing led to another and she told me that she was the one rearing him and she was responsible for him more so than I was. But anyhow after all that, that evening on my way home I had to go to the chemist and in I went and who was there before me but this lady. I said hello to her. She turned her back on me as if I didn't exist. . . . correct somebody else's child, you can make an enemy for a long time. But it was my duty to correct him. (Jim, Int. 1. 2000)

In his more recent interview, I asked Jim to put such changes in perspective; he commented as follows while also providing an important illustration. He says:

I'd say teachers have become more careful, we've all become much more conscious of the law, very much so and conscious of procedures that are laid down. I had an awful experience a number of years ago, it wasn't that many years ago I suppose two years ago. A complaint was brought against me through a complaints procedure. It turned out to be a long rigmarole of a thing that went on for a year or more. It came as a shock to me that this was the procedure. . . . It was a bullying case where I had for a long time, I had tried to solve a bullying case and I eventually caught the individual involved red handed and his mother wouldn't accept that he was . . . And I, I won't say I lost my temper with her, but I got annoyed with her and I maybe said things I maybe shouldn't have said. One thing led to another anyway and she brought a complaint. She said I was unwelcoming and I was whatnot. It went on and on and on to the board of management, to the department [DES] and I had an inspector to come and interview me and it amounted to nothing in the end but it was an awful lot of my time taken up again for nothing. (Jim, Int. 4, 2007)

It is sometimes asserted that teachers have significant preparation in dealing with children, but much less in dealing with adults, leaving them ill equipped

for contemporary interactions with parents. Nevertheless, apart from Jim's various experiences with parents, others too are more cautious and circumspect while recognising also that having the courage to take a stand is also part of being a leader, integral to 'professional responsibility' (Sugrue and Solbrekke 2011).

Rather similar to Janice's experience, and perhaps hankering after a time when adults perceived the authority of the teacher to extend beyond the playground to the community at large, Ben (2005–) provides the following example, of being approached by a parent, while the vignette is ambiguous as to whether or not it is a complaint about pupil behaviour rather than parenting, or the lack of it. At any rate, Ben makes a polite comment in his small town context that "standards of behaviour are expected everywhere" and chooses not to get involved.

I have met parents who've come into me on things that they think I would have a role in even though it has absolutely nothing got to do with the school. One case in point would be a parent [who] met me over the Christmas holidays when I was in buying paint or something like that and saying, you know the children you let out from school, some of them hang around the playground up at the public playground half a mile away and that they wait there till five o'clock in the evening till their parents come home, now I smile and say oh I didn't know, thank you very much for telling me; I wouldn't see myself as having any role there (Ben, Int. 2, 2007)

As part of the changing mores, he cites another example of a gathering in a sporting context where medals were being presented to several boys. He takes up the story:

... when I first started out and there was a GAA [Gaelic Athletic Association] medal presentation and this ... and sure being a Saturday night and the kids had orange and crisps and sure they were hyper and this old gentlemen tells me, you tell them now to be quiet, you know and I turned around and only for the fact that I knew the old gentleman I'd have told him where to get off but it didn't happen. The expectations parents have is that they could run the school a specific way and when it's not run the way they see it as being run ... (Ben, Int. 2, 2007)

Ben's professional judgement call as part of changing perceptions of the principal's role, community expectations and social mores, that disciplining boys on a Saturday night was not his responsibility, while also evading the issue regarding unsupervised children after school as not his responsibility. Veteran Jim put this in perspective when he suggests that one of the consequence of a more litigious public and a rights perspective, there is a consequent decline in voluntarism, in sharp contrast to the more collectivist if somewhat authoritarian views of the 'old gentleman' expressed immediately above. Jim states:

People are not that keen to serve on boards [of management] because procedures are being implemented more and more for less and less things, everything now must be investigated, the smallest complaint has to be investigated and comes to the board and inevitably it's neighbours' children you're dealing with and people don't want to be involved. (Jim Int. 4, 2007)

Consequently, he ventures later:

Correcting anybody's child is always a hazardous business but at the same time I think it has become more so, you have to be more prepared, you have to have more evidence. People

are less willing to accept the word of a teacher to say your child needs to be taught some manners. That's just not as acceptable as it used to be. (Jim, Int. 4, 2007)

An alternative interpretation of Jim's perspective is that respecting pupil's voices almost inevitably means that parents feel obliged to vindicate the child's perspective, with a concomitant failure to see matters from the perspective of the school—a view that principals are obliged to promote and defend. It certainly suggests that dealing with parents, while having positive features that benefit learners, there is a less desirable impact whereby appropriate behaviour is often less clear cut and has to be constantly negotiated, with less expectation of parental support, while principal authority has to be (constantly) earned rather than taken for granted. The cumulative impact of such evidence suggests that as communal commitments to shared values erodes, trust declines, paperwork, rules, regulations and procedures fill the void, and a sense of moral purpose has greater difficulty finding its bearings, thus rendering the role of principal considerably more complex where paper trails of accountability become more of a necessity, evidence of the advancement of NPM. This leads to a more defensive more risk averse approach on the part of teachers and principals that may be detrimental to learning (Furedi 2002, 2004; Gronn 2011).

... everybody is so conscious of litigation now that very few people are inclined to anything at all beyond what they have to do. Taking children... I remember a time when they wouldn't think twice about loading up the car and taking children to the football match in the evening or a quiz or anything like that now. (Jim, Int. 4, 2007)

Nostalgia aside, and an increasing sense of 'Bowling Alone' (Putnam 2000) Jim is more than capable of putting change in perspective when he suggests that it is individual parents rather than parents in general that can be something of a handful. He says:

There's another thing that there are houses where the children are in charge, not the parents in charge. That can cause problems. But I don't think that the parents generally have become more demanding. That wouldn't be my experience now really, in fairness it wouldn't be my experience at all. (Jim, Int. 4, 2007)

Alison (1979–), another veteran, acknowledges that part of change is that principals can no longer defend indefensible or unreasonable behaviour on the part of teachers. She illustrates the issue by reference to a teacher who told a nine year old female pupil that she could not play a game in front of her peers, thus diminishing the child, and when the child's parents complained the teacher tried to argue that she meant something different. However, Alison's view was as follows:

So her parents become more demanding, yes but somebody needs to speak up for that child and not allow the teacher... what about the other children that she's doing the same thing to? Too often there are teachers who have done that to children. (Alison, Int. 1, 2000)

While Alison is emphatic that parents have become more demanding, she simultaneously recognises that principals need to remain focused on the good of the school as well as the individual learner, and this is always a professional judgement call. She says:

So have the parents become more demanding? Yes. I think if they're too demanding the principal needs to say, sorry. I have found with parents that if you show that you are trying to do the best for their child you generally come away with a result, no matter what they're like you come away with a result. (Alison, Int. 4, 2007)

Thus, it is not about always being right; it is about being reasonable, as well as focused on learners and the good of the school. Such realities are more demanding on principals, and challenge their interpersonal skills while more traditional forms of authority protected them from more democratic engagement and resolution of issues and conflicts. Alison expressed it thus:

... and again it depends again on the skill of the principal. If the principal is not skilled enough you quite often have parents who are over demanding and all of that, but you have to tell them if they are crossing the line, in that case you have to say, sorry, we are running the school and this is it and this is what we can do for you and whatever. (Int. Alison, Int. 4, 2007)

As always, however, context is important, and occasional tiffs are significantly different from an atmosphere all too real in many disadvantaged school context where misbehaviour of varying degrees of disruption, admittedly by a minority, is a constant, with ongoing potential to have a wildfire effect; an additional source of concern and anxiety for principals in such circumstances. In his most recent interview veteran Jack (1978–2007) talked about communicating with support services—family and school psychologists, something strongly echoed by Michelle in similar social circumstances, while then summarising the situation as he perceived it in more recent times:

And I know everything comes back to the family but when the family fails the child what happens then? Now, they're kind of extreme examples. Probably the thing, the part that worried me most about that, apart from concern for the child, is the fact that that kind of thing will spread very very ... well I think there's a potential for it to spread kind of quickly and undermine order and discipline in the school and so on. Kids would be very aware of that child's behaviour, language, assault – both in school and more particularly even out of school. There's a sense in which it was always like that but I suppose a certain tiredness sets in if you want to put it that way and maybe somebody coming with a fresh approach. I don't know ... the fresh approach has kind of defied me. (Jack, Int. 4, 2007)

Where support services are poor or inadequate, what is clearly evident is that traditional forms of authority, no longer acceptable or even operable, struggle to find appropriate alternatives that are effective, not only for the individuals concerned, but for the school community as a whole. In the absence of support services, 'resilience' (Day and Gu 2010; Day et al. 2007) is more difficult to sustain, and an understandable 'tiredness' may set in.

There is an increasing sense of vulnerability as traditional authority is eroded, while the politics of the local tend to predominate, thus stability rather than change tends to dominate with external circumstances largely being absorbed in more reactive rather than transformative mode.

In general, there is recognition among principals that parents have become more demanding, and as boundaries between home and school have become blurred there

are many positive features of more recent and more democratic relationships that benefit learners and contribute to more positive learning environments. Nevertheless, there are times when both teachers, parents and principals transgress in these increasingly less well defined borderlands and in contexts of declining trust such encounters are likely to tax even the most talented principals and their interpersonal skills (see Gronn 2011). The perspectives indicated and illustrated above suggest considerable change, while recognising also that the process of democratisation, giving voice to parents and pupils inevitably reconfigures established power relations in ways that are complex and shaped significantly by the courage, capabilities and values stance of principals. But, as an illustration of complexity, this is only one aspect of the role that is always present even on a good day, but may unexpectedly escalate thus, side by side with courage and character, there is vulnerability and uncertainty also. And, in more Biblical terms, this is merely the morning of the first day! Other themes contribute to this high wire act, on which the world of principalship spins (McCann 2009).

## **Theme Two: Resources—Funding, Facilities, ICT**

The report, *Teachers Matter* (OECD 2005, p. 9) asserts that: “The quality of teaching is determined not just by the ‘quality’ of the teachers—although that is clearly critical—but also by the environment in which they work”. Critical to the environment in which they work is “school leadership as a key to continued organizational learning and improvement” (Robinson et al. 2008). These authors identify ‘resourcing strategically’ as a key element of leadership practice, while readily recognising that influence is both direct and indirect. In the absence of such empirical evidence, it has been accepted generally that the principal’s leadership is pivotal to the quality of teaching and learning in schools. It is rather surprising therefore to learn that Irish official annual statistics do not record the number of teaching or administrative principals in the primary system until 1985–1986. It is as if they are an invisible presence, pillars of continuity and stability rather than catalysts for change; schools without the necessity for leaders. Thereafter, as part of increasing urbanisation, amalgamations and/or closures of smaller schools, and in more recent years, in recognition of the impossible burden of school leadership on teaching principals, a reduction in enrolments necessary to be an administrative principal, the following pattern emerges (Fig. 3.1).

Although there is a gradual shift, and while recognising that a proportionate number of pupils are enrolled in larger schools, there continues to be close to two-thirds of schools with teaching principals; the deep structures of the system remain remarkably consistent over time. This is the national and international backdrop to participants’ perspectives on resources and being a resource provider.

While on paper primary schools receive identical funding, additional resources are targeted through various initiatives in relation to schools designated

Year	Total No. of Schools	Teaching Principals	Admin Principals
1985-'6	3270	2657	613
1990-'91	3235	2597	638
1999-2000	3172	2464	708
2009-2010	3165	1969	1196
1010-2011	3165	1918	1247

**Fig. 3.1** Teaching and administrative principals: 1985–1986 to 2010–2011 (These data have been extrapolated from the annual statistical data base available at: <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Education-Statistics-Database/>)

disadvantaged.<sup>8</sup> Each school is provided with a capitation grant per pupil enrolled. Despite this apparent equity, the resources available to individual schools for the procurement of IT hardware and software, as well as subject resource materials varies enormously depending on the socio-economic background of parents. Many schools in middle-class communities have a policy of seeking 'voluntary' contributions from parents, a specific figure is expected and specified per child, sometimes with no reduction for more siblings enrolled in the school. While insisting that this levy is 'voluntary' it remains legal, but does not prevent principals promoting it and pressuring parents into compliance, whose perception often is that unless they contribute their child or children will be short-changed or discriminated against by teachers. These parents frequently perceive this additional funding as an investment in their children's education, and much more 'user friendly' than interminable sponsored walks, swims, and cake sales, while teachers too have a positive perspective freed from the headaches that attach to the organisation of such events and the hassle of collecting money subsequently. In less favoured economic circumstances their peers struggle to raise even modest funds for various school initiatives, and feel guilty about the pressure that ensues for hard pressed parents. Principals as resource providers are only too well aware of the necessity to have some funds, while in more recent years additional 'grants' to schools for—computers, science, electronic white boards etc. have proliferated; now due to austerity they have all but disappeared. Per capita spending on teachers' salaries in Ireland is well above the OECD average, leaving relatively little for resource provision (OECD 2013).

<sup>8</sup>The most recent and current of such initiatives is DEIS- Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. The department of Education and Skills website describes the initiative in the following terms: "A standardised system for identifying and regularly reviewing levels of disadvantage and A new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) . . . which will bring together and build upon the following existing schemes and programmes. The cumulative and targeted nature of the 'package of programmes' is captured in the following: "The DEIS initiative is designed to ensure that the most disadvantaged schools benefit from a comprehensive package of supports, while ensuring that others continue to get support in line with the level of disadvantage among their pupils. While there are benefits in individual interventions and programmes, a more integrated and joined up response to the issue of educational inclusion is required" ([www.des.ie](http://www.des.ie)). It is noteworthy to observe that this 'package' is termed 'inclusion'.

In the Halcion days of these additional resources, Connor (1992–2009) indicates: “I tell you now what I spend a huge amount of time on, accounts.” His BoM has a treasurer whose responsibility it is to have oversight of all expenditure, but depending on local expertise and the mindset of the principal, the latter is often quite prepared to do the accounting in the interest of being able to have some discretionary spending at his or her disposal. In other school context, with a banker or accountant occupying the treasurer’s role on the BoM, control of funding may reside off campus so to speak. In the absence of local education authorities where such accounting is more likely to be done at district or regional level, there is enormous variation as well as duplication of effort.

One of the areas where such local supplementation of official funding becomes critical is in the appointment and payment of Secretarial and Caretaking staff. These are not ‘salaried’ personnel in the strict sense. Rather, schools are provided with ‘grants’ for the payment of these employees—grants that are inadequate to say the least.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, schools are forced to find creative means of providing more adequate remuneration, thus adding further necessity for fundraising, while disadvantaged schools struggle in such circumstances.

Prior to the mid-1970s, and the establishment of BoMs, school bills were paid by the manager—typically the local clergyman, and depending on disposition, paid heating and lighting, sometimes begrudgingly. From principals’ perspectives, they had no financial responsibility, and were dependent on the good will, interest and commitment of the manager, a situation exacerbated by the fact that, at the time, 10 % of capitation per pupil was provided locally—effectively from parish funds, thus lending legitimacy to church control. As Irish society became more secularised, and particularly in working class urban areas where church attendance hovered around 5 %, increasingly it became impossible for some Boards to provide such funding and went into debt, a debt that was sometimes absorbed by Diocesan coffers. Thus, for example, when Alison (1979–) was appointed principal of a large suburban school she found the princely sum of £2-12-6 (approximately €5) in the school account, which came as a “huge surprise”, but she quickly set about rectifying this challenge by organising a decathlon. She puts this effort in perspective as follows:

We ended up . . . it was one day and it was sports and the whole sporting element took over whereas in fact I did it for money and we used to get about €16,000 a day, . . .

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<sup>9</sup>While some schools have a “full time secretary under the 1978/1979 schemes” they frequently do not have funding for a caretaker (or visa versa) such schools are “entitled to receive additional grant assistance in respect of caretaking or secretarial services” (Circular 0005/2013). However, as indicated by the figures reproduced here, these grants are inadequate to say the least. The circular states: “The grant is based on the enrolment figure on 30th September 2012. The grant paid to small school is based on a minimum enrolment of 60 pupils, while the maximum grant paid is based on an enrolment figure of 500 pupils. Standard rate of €147.00 per pupil to cover both secretary and caretaker (Full grant).

Standard rate of € 73.50 per pupil to cover either secretary or caretaker (Half grant)” (Circular 0005/2013).

Such impressive amounts of funding were deployed for curriculum materials sorely lacking:

Well I did it purely because we had nothing and we ended up able to buy equipment, maths equipment for the children on the table that you should have. I was taught in [names College] that you have to have the equipment; no one ever told me that it's no good when the teacher has it, that the child has to have it. So . . . that's what I did to cure that. (Alison, Int.1, 2000).

This tale is illustrative of underfunding generally, but also of the extent to which principal as resource provider is then tempered by the disposition, priorities and energies of principals to overcome such challenges, in collaboration with colleagues, parents and community. However, it does help to explain the enormous variation in a small and relatively homogenous system, and due to the invisible nature of local fund raising impossible to establish with any accuracy the extent to which state funding is sub-vented by local effort. What is abundantly clear however is that as more funding was gradually made available to schools, creating appropriate paper trails added significantly to the responsibilities of principals, as suggested above by Connor. Nowhere is this more apparent than in relation to provision of computers as they became more pervasive.

### *The Case of ICT*

While it is well documented internationally that the provision of technology does not guarantee transformation of teaching and learning (Cuban 2009; Cuban et al. 2001), in 1980s Ireland establishing a computer room in the local school became an important statement of identity, and in a context of declining enrolments something of a progressive marketing tool. As parental choice gathered momentum in large urban centres, a competitive edge to school identity also emerged, consistent with a market forces ideology. It has entered local lore among principals that a well know entrepreneur funded a computer room in his children's former primary school. A parent member of the school's BoM spotted the entrepreneur in the local hostelry having adjourned there after a management meeting. On spotting the business man on the premises, the parent reminded colleagues that this individual had made a commitment to make a donation to the school, but only after his children had left. Bolstered by this collective remembering, the parent approached the businessman, apologised for the intrusion, and enquired if the commitment still stood. The entrepreneur, true to his word, promptly removed a cheque book from his pocket and wrote a cheque for £25,000 that provided a state of the art computer room in the local primary school. For many others, in the absence of state funding, securing resources for PCs, let alone appropriate furnishing of a computer room, was much more challenging and hard won. However, in the absence of adequate funding, and the significant effort led locally by principals, the professional development element of resource procurement and provision was frequently neglected if a local champion was not on hand to engage with colleagues and to share their expertise, thus impacting on classroom pedagogies.



However, this is not universally so. Jim (1985–), a veteran teaching principal and computer enthusiast with postgraduate qualifications in the field, appears to have cracked issues of supply and technical support, thus enabling him to integrate technology, teaching and learning with 17 PCs in his own multi-class classroom. His enthusiasm for ICT is abundantly evident from the following:

Oh, I'm delighted with it, I'm absolutely delighted with it, I really am. I'm very fortunate that I have a past pupil who just keeps me supplied and keeps the machines up to date. I can look for help and it'll be available and they can be replaced as well if I want to, so it's a good position to be in. The children enjoy it, they have no fear of computers, have no fear of machines; have no fear of technology at all. (Jim, Int. 4, 2007)

Jim goes on to indicate how using some 'good' software has rekindled his enthusiasm for teaching, while signalling also some of the attendant frustrations even for the enthusiast when adequate resourcing remains elusive:

I'm delighted with . . . it's given my teaching a new buzz that it needed and please god it will continue that way. The only worry is that we're not getting money to upgrade our stuff and the broadband service is poor speed so that's two things. The children should at least be able to expect stuff at school that would be on par with what they have at home and now I find they bring in their own laptops because they don't like the computers that are here. (Jim, Int. 4, 2007)

Similarly, Fred's (1971–2010) entrepreneurial skills were to the fore when in the mid-1990s he persuaded a Hewlett Packard representative to include his school in a computer initiative by inviting the representative to the school and getting her to talk to the pupils and their enthusiasm won the day. He takes up the story:

Yeah, I got her down to the school and she met the staff and she was kinda like you haven't got much of a chance. And I brought her up to meet the class, the kids are good for coming out and asking questions and they like people coming in, they're interested in people and she was very bowled over by them. So she said put in an application, so we did and our computer project has been used four nights of the week by members of the community. Seven different schools in the area bus their kids to our project. Now they probably won't do that from now on, it's going to run down, because a lot of them are equipping themselves. . . . So our courses are, would be basically word processing, and finding their way around a computer, so basically kids become experts on the computer. They can be working away there, and they can do everything and not bothering the teacher. (Fred, Int. 1, 2000)

Even if there appears to have been an element of self-interest on Fred's part, and his pedagogical motives may have been less than pure, this vignette illustrates increasing demands on principals, and this is exacerbated considerably when there is an absence of clear policy and resource commitment. In such circumstances, such entrepreneurial initiatives may not penetrate sufficiently to the classroom, and another policy opportunity comes along with potential to grab entrepreneurial attention, thus superficial adoption may be increased through over-ambitious or acquisitive entrepreneurial leadership (Bryk et al. 1998; Cuban et al. 2001; Cuban and Usdan 2002; Sarason 1990, 1996). As the need for additional resources in a more diversified curriculum in tandem with the promotion of more active participative pedagogies in a more consumerist acquisitive society, principals were

expected to become more entrepreneurial. It is possible also that being a resource provider, while indirectly influencing classroom routines, may also have helped to perpetuate the status quo in terms of the 'legendary autonomy' of classroom teachers (OECD 1991).

## Conclusions

While the 'grammar of schooling' (Cuban 1993) may have remained remarkably consistent over time, there is little doubt that the realities of principals' lives and work during the four decades under scrutiny here have altered considerably. Nevertheless, while there is evidence of entrepreneurialism, that also perhaps perpetuates superficial understandings of autonomy and discretionary judgment, lack of adequate resourcing of policy creates and perpetuates a climate where policy implementation is perceived as discretionary. Consequently, there is a tendency to react to change, to absorb it, as part of the way the world now is, and this creates a defensiveness over time, increases vulnerability and uncertainty, where many taken for granted traditions of schooling, including the role of teachers and principals, are parked in the interest of conflict avoidance and the absence of traditions of deliberative engagement. The local continues to be important, perhaps even creating the illusory discretionary notion that local circumstances permit an arms-length relationship with national policy. Additionally, in the absence of preparation for the role, and regional structures, principals are relatively isolated, running their own independent republics shaped significantly by the vicissitudes of the community served rather than a more conscious awareness of national policy. As part of an emphasis on the local, there appears to be considerable difference between school leadership in rural communities whereby there is an additional onus to increase visibility beyond the school with a moral dimension that requires being seen to do the 'right' thing. There is evidence too, however, that circumspection regarding a community leadership role is advised, particularly where parenting and pupil behaviour are under scrutiny. Nevertheless, while increased visibility has advantages, it also increases vulnerability and uncertainty, thus when coupled with a decrease in voluntarism, a more rights conscious climate, and more demands for paperwork provide evidence of accountability and possible litigation, principals find themselves less inclined to defend colleagues at all costs, with potential also to find themselves isolated in a borderland between parents and teachers. As traditional mores are eroded, authority has to be continuously earned rather than assumed, thus creating its own uncertainties, while propelling principals to 'take a stand' rather than relying on traditions of authority. This chapter has demonstrated that it is frequently the case that processes are altered regularly and rapidly while underlying structures remain intact. Subsequent chapters investigate elements of these changes in more depth with a view to providing a more comprehensive picture through the eyes of principals themselves.

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## Chapter 4

# Being and Becoming a Principal: 'Navi-Gotiating' Roles and Responsibilities

### Introduction

Principalship is rather like parenthood, nothing prepares for the reality; no matter how much prior learning or anticipation, getting to grips with the reality is a shock to the system. This is a combination of *navigating* ('to find one's way and keep one's course') the contours of a role that is occupied by many others, thus travelling a recognised course or route, while simultaneously (re-) *negotiating* ('to bargain . . . for the purpose of mutual arrangements') the responsibilities that the position entails on individual terms, and within the distinct culture of a particular school community (Wenger 1998, pp. 60–61). Becoming a principal therefore is a process of on-going navi-gotiating that is shaped significantly by tradition, school culture, policy environment and international social movements, and the interpersonal (inter-) actions of the main protagonists in the school drama-principal, colleagues, pupils etc. As Starratt suggests, principals are challenged "to look beyond the present realities and the scripts that control them, to improvise on those inherited scripts, and to imagine a different kind of performing school" (Starratt 2011, p. 9). This is what is entailed increasingly in the 'new work of leaders' (Gronn 2003). This chapter then is intended to shed light on an under researched area and how such roles and responsibilities have been navi-gotiated over time.

The primary focus of this chapter is on being and becoming a principal during those initial formative years in the role, the point of entry, and whether or not one is an inside or outside candidate, the selection process- its rigour and transparency, as well as the biography of the successful candidate and how this is perceived by new colleagues all have a bearing on the 'kick off' within the role. It is important therefore to indicate that, this too is an under-researched area. Whether or not the focus is selection or preparation, these issues are contentious and problematic as the role becomes more challenging and complex in northern our southern hemisphere contexts (Myung et al. 2011; Onguko et al. 2012). These crucial contextual details are woven into the fabric of the chapter since, regardless of the route into

principalship, all informants find themselves in the principal's office, and having to create and wear the mantle. None of the informants had attended a programme specifically for the preparation of principals prior to appointment. Even if they had, some suggest that it is 'still an act of faith' (Cowie and Crawford 2007). From such beginnings, how did their navi-gotiations of the role and its responsibilities proceed beyond the 'looking glass' of the interview process.

## **Legacies, Lives & Leaders': Roles and Responsibilities**

In recent times, succession planning has emerged as a significant concern in the field of school leadership (Harris 2007; MacBeath et al. 2009). The flawed and idiosyncratic system of selection is itself implicated in navi-gotiation of roles and responsibilities. For newly appointed principals, the immediate assumption of the role has instantaneous and potentially long term consequence for how they forge the role and exercise its attendant responsibilities. Such immediate legacies leave important residues that become integrated into the on-going weaving of the leadership fabric of the school in the form of leaders' perpetual re-negotiation of professional responsibilities, buffeted by internal interpersonal dynamics and the rapidly altering kaleidoscope of policy prescriptions. The general lack of preparation for the role in the setting, at least until very recently, not surprisingly leaves its mark on these early forays into being and becoming a school leader. Cohorts are dealt with chronologically while continuities and changes over time are identified and chronicled.

### ***'Veteran' Leaders (Cohort One): In at the Deep End***

Three of the four leaders who entered the study in this category (Fred, Jack, Alison) began principalship in the 1970s, with Jim joining them in 1985. These were calmer, more stable and predictable times, despite the introduction of a 'progressive' curriculum in 1971 (Sugrue 1990, 1997).

Fred was in his second year of teaching when appointed principal of a two teacher school that had been threatened with closure. With energy, enthusiasm and commitment he set about cultivating the parents, and this general community orientation was something he continued throughout the next four decades. When he opted for early retirement in 2010 to pursue other interests, he was an administrative principal proud of his achievements even if he continued to be somewhat unorthodox. Similar to many other rural school principals he tended to perceive the school as his personal fiefdom with a tendency also to bend the rules in pursuit of goals he deemed in the best interest of pupils, parents and community (Sugrue 2011). Initial efforts to '*keep a particular narrative going*' (Giddens 1991, p. 54) are undertaken by 'maintaining habits and routines' (p. 39) that, in the absence of more formal preparation for the role, resort to an 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie 1975)

that is most frequently based on vicarious 'tacit' knowledge (Polanyi 1958) that is also deployment as a 'protective cocoon.' Such influences suggest working from a (pre-) prepared script, more navigating than negotiating.

The protective cocoon is essentially a sense of 'unreality' rather than a firm conviction of security: it is a bracketing, on the level of practice, of possible events that could threaten the bodily or psychological integrity of the agent. (Giddens 1991, p. 41)

Being on an 'inbound trajectory', whether appointed as an outside or inside appointee, assumption of the role inevitably contains continuities and discontinuities (Wenger 1998). However, as the evidence in this chapter indicates, when classroom teachers assume the mantle of the principal in the absence of formal training, their 'lay theories' (Holt-Reynolds 1992) of leadership are likely to tend towards 'securing' continuity though it is "a mistake to assume that practice is erratic or can be modified by decree" (Wenger 1998, p. 98). Personal traits are modified as the meaning making in the everyday situation buffets the biography. Early formative influences are of major significance in two senses—who principals are due to their learning trajectories to date, and the context in which they assume the role.

As Fred went in at the deep end, he says: "it was a challenge. And I like challenges, I suppose, that's the sort of guy I am. I'm always looking for some windmill to tilt at" (Int. 1, 2000). Part of such 'tilting' is a commitment to community which he indicates thus:

... money wasn't my father's chief goal and ... there was ... many a time, he was always very committed to helping people out. He'd ... never let anyone down. And maybe spend more time, and my wife still points the finger at me, I spend more time out doing feckin' community stuff, than I do in my own home. (Fred, Int. 1, 2000)

Conscious of the community perception of the school, he took up the challenge of rallying the community around the school, and this became a pattern that was sustained throughout his career through several initiatives. Initially, however, turning the tide was his major preoccupation while being perceived as a community leader, and circuitous feedback reinforced this particular style of leadership. He says:

Well I'll tell you what gives me a buzz, kids walking out of our school feeling that they are important. Feeling that our school is a good school, feeling loyal to the school, saying I like that school it was a very good experience for me. (Fred, Int. 1, 2000)

While the nature of that sense may have altered over time, it fits very comfortably with notions of motivation and resilience, a complex melange of personality and context (Day et al. 2007). Fred's initial foray as school-community leader metamorphoses as times change, but there are underlying continuities that anchor the leadership, thus, over time issues about care and standards become a potent mix as boundaries between school and community become more blurred with time and trust. The initial leadership mask chameleon-like conceals the underlying continuities as times change:

I think every kid feels it's their school. That's the first thing, the children. I think the teachers are committed and it's not just a job to them. I think the ancillary staff we have, whether



it's ... part time teachers' aides or SNA's, they feel valued. There's flexibility here too. Like, if a teacher has a problem and needs some time off, I'll cover for them. Cover for them in the sense that I'll take their classes on. You have to look on it that we all have other relationships outside the school. (Fred, Int. 4, 2007)

His sense of community, within and without the school means that he will bend the rules to accommodate colleagues in the interest of maintaining a positive climate, while continuing also to be lord of all he surveys (Sugrue 2011).

Jack (1978–2008), was appointed principal of a 'green field' site (literally), of a school that had yet to be built in a new suburban context of public housing that continues to be designated as disadvantaged. Thus initially accommodation was found in a 'temporary church and prefabs', while in a new suburb there were constant enrolments as families moved in. There was a pioneering sense characterised by on-going "crisis management" yet an important motivating factor was his own working-class roots, thus, 'if he could make it so could they'. Despite his three-decades at the helm, he sees his stewardship in two phases. The first of these:

The rapid build up to the stage where there were over 700 kids in the senior school alone and there were over 200 kids in 6th class and there were a few years of that sort of thing.<sup>1</sup> While there was more than crowd control, crowd control was a fairly big aspect about it. Whether it was in the yard, whether it was in classrooms, whether it was in assemblies, whether it was in the queue outside the office everything was about numbers and multiplicity ... (Jack, Int. 1, 2000)

The personal resources and dynamism he brought to these early days, like Fred, are rooted in his own biography:

You know my entry into teaching was the notion of a religious vocation to teaching, and there's a real sense in which that never left me. In that sense I was very emotionally involved in it. I liked it and I suppose I probably had the feeling that my commitment to it and my liking it kind of compensated for some of the administrative weaknesses I would perceive myself as having. (Jack, Int. 2, 2000)

While Fred might have had the luxury of being allowed to creep before he walked, no such opportunity was available in the circumstances in which Jack found himself. For Jack and his colleagues there was a frontier dimension to the rapidity of expansion, and as the captain he felt an obligation to steady the school craft while turbulence prevailed. Despite the perpetual motion, he began to see beyond immediacy and innovated a monthly staff meeting, novel at the time. He conveys the feeling thus:

There was a sense that you were almost hanging on by your fingernails and at the same time there was also, I felt, a strong obligation to supporting teachers, in other words to

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<sup>1</sup>Initially, in rapidly expanding sub-urban context, a new school typically begins as a junior school—catering for 4–8 year olds, on the assumption that housing will be allocated to recently formed or young families. As enrolments increase, such schools typically divide into junior and senior, on the same campus but with separate roll numbers, principals, deputy principals etc. notionally creating two 16 teacher schools. This principle has not been universally applied, thus some schools continue to be 'vertical' schools, with more than 40 teaching staff and a significantly higher salary for the principal and deputy.

keeping a sort of a calm front if you want to put it that way. I wouldn't like to think that it was pretence but the calm front . . . was to reassure them that everything, not so much everything was alright but that we were going to come through this together. That would be one of the guiding things. But there was also . . . a great sense in which the teachers . . . pulled together as a team . . . (Jack, Int. 4, 2007)

In the context of the time and the particular circumstances, Jack got into the role groove of leading from the front, with a strong moral commitment to making a difference. He acknowledges that passion, purpose and moral commitment, though important and necessary, are insufficient to fulfil the role successfully. Leadership in that initial phase is a roller-coaster ride that binds the pioneers together but as other staff members quickly follow, it is most likely only with hindsight that the necessity to create time and space for 'engagement' as a "place for imagination to land, to be negotiated in practice and realized" becomes apparent (Wenger 1998, p. 217). Jack acknowledges that leading from the front continues as part of his protective cocoon and his perpetuation of a particular leadership style.

When Alison (1979–) was appointed principal of the large suburban girls' school she had attended and taught in, she very definitely wanted the position, but significantly underestimated the sense of loss that lingered in moving from classroom to principal's office, a loss not acknowledged in the literature and perhaps something to which preparation programmes could profitably pay more attention (Horne and Sayger 2012). She recalls:

I hugely missed teaching children. For a long, long time the fact that I didn't have a class of my own really, really bothered me. Twelve years after I became principal I still you know when I give out the classes I still missed the fact that I wasn't getting a group of children of my own to teach, to the extent that I thought there was something wrong with me. (Alison, Int. 1, 2000)

Despite being an 'inside' appointment in a school where she had taught for a decade, and a track record of confidence and competence, there were some initial surprises that were somewhat unsettling. The first of these was financial:

I can't remember anything that surprised me. I know what surprised me was that I had no money to run the school, I had £2.12.06 [€5 approx] to buy everything, to buy stamps, envelopes, equipment, everything. (Alison, Int. 4, 2007)

There was another disquieting shock in store also regarding the attitude of her deputy principal: ". . . she wouldn't apply for the job but also she was very annoyed that I got it. She didn't apply because she knew she wouldn't get it . . . But I still had to handle that and get on with it" (Int. 3, 2007). Nevertheless, she confides, "I definitely felt that I had made the right decision. I never regretted. I never doubted for one minute that I had made the right decision" (Int. 2, 2000).

However, her general *modus operandi* was motivated by keeping the peace, pouring oil on troubled waters, regardless of personal cost. Fourteen years in the role, and on the death of a close friend, her reflections went as follows:

I remember thinking, if that happened to me, would I have any regrets? And I thought, no not one in the whole world and then I suddenly thought, yes, I would regret that I allowed

some people in the school treat me the way they did. I was absolutely amazed at myself and I thought, no more. (Alison, Int. 4, 2007)

As a consequence of this insight, on the next occasion someone 'barged' into her office, the light bulb moment was activated: "I suppose, learned how to handle things differently, whereas if that was before I would have just talked about it rather than addressing it openly" (Int. 4, 2007).

She continues that far too many principals in the Irish context have too 'softly, softly' an approach to conflict and this is a consequence of lack of professional preparation.

Continuity is much more prevalent in Jim's (1985–) initial period as principal of a four-teacher rural school, where he had been teaching for more than a decade with an additional 5 years' experience in urban schools. As a teaching principal, such continuity is understandable, and the legacy of a poor building engendered stoicism rather than significant expectations of change.

In those times people weren't as quick to complain as they are now. I remember having 24 children inside a cloakroom and I had them all packed in there along with myself and when the Cigire [Inspector] would come to the door I'd have to move the chairs and their desks out of the way to let him in or anybody else. But we accepted it, . . . and we didn't see any great point in making noise about it and things carried on like that. (Jim, Int. 4, 2007)

Jim simply got on with teaching as best he could, while contemporary Health and Safety legislation would render such inadequacies untenable.

Teaching has remained a significant element of his responsibility thus more recent performativity in the form of 'pointless paperwork' has been a major challenge to his professional narrative:

. . . it has overwhelmed me. I don't mind spending any amount of time preparing stuff for school, for the kids or the children because I know it can be used again and again and again. But I resent my time going on drawing up policies and this that and the other and my time is gone. . . . Your time is limited and I don't like my time being eroded with what I see as pointless paperwork, there really is a lot of pointless paperwork. (Int. 4, 2007)

I had the privilege of spending time in his classroom in 2007 prior to conducting the final interview, where there were 17 PCs, and much evidence of self-motivated, self-directed learners enthusiastic to demonstrate their learning.

What all four principals in this cohort indicate is a strong emphasis on continuity and stability, more pronounced perhaps in the case of the teaching principal; feeling their way into the role. Lack of preparation for the role, and without the benefit of expertise in conflict resolution, or even deliberative communication, keeping the peace becomes a default position. There is evidence too and a sense of frustration regarding increasing emphasis on 'pointless' paperwork, while the local and its legacy weighs heaviest rather than awareness of broader policy concerns. In their relative isolation, their learning too is slow, non-linear, if also resourceful and resilient. Yet, there is evidence of agency, of the significance of school culture, a tradition of 'making do', a necessary pragmatism, tintured with moral commitment.

## Experienced Principals (Cohort Two): Formative Encounters

By the time experienced principals (Michelle, Conor, Eddie, Maggie) were interviewed for the fourth time in 2007–2008, they too had become veterans, while two (Eddie and Maggie) were no longer employed as principals though still in education. All four were appointed to principalship in the early 1990s. The time of year at which the appointment commences has potential to create greater urgency, a sense of freneticism as appointees are instantaneously immersed in the immediacy of the role.<sup>2</sup> By the 1990s, and following an OECD report (1991), the pace of change had accelerated significantly, with substantial policy stirrings.<sup>3</sup> Michelle (1992–) took the helm in May, at a rather chaotic time in the routines of schools—First Communions and Confirmations are in full swing, school ‘tours’ are underway, and, from teachers’ perspectives—there are insecurities regarding the assignment of classes for the following year, with the actual transition occurring before school is ‘out’ at the end of June.<sup>4</sup> Given Michelle’s particular circumstances, and a history of conflict and resentment regarding previous appointments in the school, it is not surprising that she asked of herself: “what have I left myself in for.” Finding herself at the helm however, she had no option but to act, though clearly the situation took its toll:

In the very beginning, when I got over the shock, I would say I had a . . . I felt I had to go in and pour oil on troubled waters because they were troubled. I’d say servant leadership<sup>5</sup> is the closest, just making sure things are going ok and making things happen. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

There were moments of satisfaction too for a newly appointed principal who was also the mother of two boys when an older colleague commented: “it’s great to see someone like you coming in, because it means there’s life after children;” that career ambition and domesticity were not mutually exclusive. Yet, her inbound trajectory was rendered more insecure since she was conscious that her teaching experience

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<sup>2</sup>Another appointee (Rose) in the next cohort- the first novice group, commenced her appointment in January, mid-year.

<sup>3</sup>In order to illustrate this point, at the very time these principals were appointed there was a Green Paper (Education for a Changing World) in 1992, followed by a National Convention on Education in 1993 (see Coolahan 1994), culminating in a White Paper (Charting Our Education Future) in 1995.

<sup>4</sup>Additional disruptions and uncertainties are created by—fragmented contact/instruction time due to bank holidays and the departure of the 6th class (2nd if a junior school), while some colleagues too may be on the move for a variety of reasons, while the excitement of ‘sports day’ is another distraction, and depending on social context, parents too may take family holidays thus attendance in general is less predictable than at other times during the year.

<sup>5</sup>It is worth noting that this is the first reference thus far encountered in the data that alludes to a leadership literature. Michelle here is referring to the work of Robert Greenleaf and his work on Servant Leadership (1977). This is evidence also of Michelle’s engagement with postgraduate work, something that emerges as part of her biographical disposition.

had been in the senior school (9–12 year olds), thus she felt a credibility deficit among new colleagues who were teaching 4–8 year olds. She remarks:

It was very stressful. I remember getting my first bout of tonsillitis within 3 weeks of the job and it was pure stress and exhaustion but then after that it was fine. Having said that, there was a lot of organisation, there was a lot of having to think and having to negotiate with people but there was also a sense that things had been a bit shaky for the previous couple of months because there was a lot of uncertainty but by September things seemed to have settled down a bit. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

Departure of a principal itself creates uncertainty and instability that becomes part of the legacy inherited by the newly appointed leader. From her student days, Michelle had learned the importance of a well-orchestrated campaign, and began to see the change process in school in the same light, the first being to secure disadvantaged status for the school (see Sugrue 2005, pp. 141–148). Additionally, her commitment to learning kicked into action once she found her feet, and immediately began to audit University modules on leadership, since her “whole notion of management and tick box management didn’t actually fit what was actually happening with me” (Int. 4, 2007). She recognised that she was on a learning curve and sought out support. She connected with principal support groups close at hand thus she had access to the “horse sense” provided by more experienced hands. In at the deep end, and struggling initially to find a rhythm, she sought to build on existing strengths, while in the larger scheme of things, the 1990s had seen the emergence of principal support groups due to intensification (Sugrue 2003). Within school, Michelle continued to build her knowledge base while building professional bridges with colleagues:

There was a system prior, where you know he [principal] would have taken classes during course days<sup>6</sup> so I was quite happy to do that because it got me into classes and I got to know the kids and I got to feel more comfortable with the junior school curriculum. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

Michelle’s situation was radically different to what Conor (1992–2010) faced once he assumed the role. His immediate challenge was an unwanted legacy:

We had leaking roofs, we had water falling down through the ceilings with lots of classrooms with holes in the plasterboard to allow water down which was being collected in dustbins . . . . The physical environment was very very poor and you’re talking about a period when it was very difficult to get any money from the department of education. You had to have a real hand in there to get anything, so that was a major problem. The quality of the school yard, the playground, was very poor as well. It was small, far too small for

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<sup>6</sup>Primary teachers who attend professional development courses (that are ‘sanctioned’ by the DES), typically during the first week in July, the week immediately after schools close for Summer holidays, they are entitled to take 3 days personal leave during the school year—known as EPVs (extra personal vacation). However, this concession frequently causes major headaches for principals since the leave conceded to individual teachers does not entitle the school to substitute cover. In a school with 20 classroom teachers, all of whom have entitlements to EPV days, this would amount to 60 absences for which no substitute cover is available. In many instances, teachers do not take these days, but they do like to have them in case of a family emergency.

the huge numbers of kids we had and the surface on it was very poor, you had a lot of water logging on it. So there were major issues that had to be tackled as quickly as possible. (Conor, Int. 4, 2007)

However, the scale of infrastructural deficit did not end there: “there was no accommodation for a secretary, no accommodation for the principal as such, I had to endure all that . . .” (Int. 4, 2007). However, confident of agreement on my part, he states: “When you walk in the door you can see that the place is very well kept and in good repair now.” There is a sense in which this initial agenda, and Conor’s liking for accounting procedures etc., his inbound trajectory as resource provider, and custodian of the teaching-learning environment created a kind of Faustian bargain between himself and his colleagues that stopped short of intrusion into their classroom spaces. His general approach appears to be from a scouting perspective—be prepared—and if you are, then you are much more likely to be able to deal with whatever is thrown at you by policymakers. He says:

Have your files and have everything up to date in so far as you can have it because a sort of haphazard approach to that is certainly not going to work it’s going to make the situation worse. But if you’re well organised and you have your files and you’re able to put your hands on things fairly quickly, that’s a big help. (Conor, Int. 4, 2007)

A persistent thread of his leadership trajectory that was fostered by his initial encounters in the role that also suited his disposition has been to be as ‘efficient’ and to be ‘on top of things’, supportive of teachers while leaving the teaching to them.

When Maggie (1991–2004) assumed the role, she came with some feminist issues. She was resentful of the traditional cosy relationship between male principals and their male clerical managers, a somewhat misogynistic alliance, while having raised a family and pursued academic interests, she was confident of doing a good job. Maggie, partly perhaps because she was engaged in formal study at the time of her appointment, is the first of the experienced cohort to articulate a sense of vision and purpose—thus her initial sense is that she wishes to be a principal who is “liberal and open.” However, an identifiable characteristic of Maggie’s was one that would not necessarily serve her particularly well in a role that requires a degree of diplomacy. She says:

I am quite driven to get the job done always and to as high a standard as possible. The person who was on the interview board, who knew me, lectured me to a certain extent after I got the job saying that that is a characteristic of yours that you set very high standards for yourself and it’s not necessarily going to work as a principal . . . which was good advice in fact. So I’ve had a lot to learn I suppose with regard to people buying in and buying out of anything and building how to work collaboratively, learning for myself and learning it for others. (Maggie, Int. 4, 2007)

She had to work hard at delegating, ‘trusting’ other colleagues to do the job but not necessarily to the standard or within the timeframe she would prefer; she had to resist her inner ‘super’ (Copland 2001; Reynolds 2002) principal in the interest of collegiality and survival also, though in a school of 10 teachers it is more feasible to indulge one’s ‘super’ efficiency persona than in a school with considerably more

staff. Re-casting the super persona was a painful process, hammered out on the smithy of personal encounter, and the benefit of hindsight:

You only identify these things afterwards, if you're going at ninety miles an hour most of the time. But there was a blow [up] at Christmas time when everybody was stressed anyway, on the day I had asked her [a colleague] something and she hadn't come back to me and I went down and asked in the classroom and I said I asked you such and such and you didn't come back to me. She said, I couldn't leave my class and I said, well I've had to leave my class to come down here to talk to you. Anyway, that cost me a lot because people rallied behind her rather than behind me, fine. It was a learning experience for me and it was really painful. (Maggie, Int. 4, 2007)

Keeping the peace, forging alliances, building relationships of trust are challenging at the best of times, but doing so while attending to teaching and a myriad of other demands on one's energy and attention is a high-wire act, where some colleagues may relish a stumble or worse!

Regarding positive relationships and their importance, Eddie (1993–2006) was under no illusions very quickly as to why as outsider he was appointed principal of a 5 teacher school. Pressured into accepting the offer within hours of exiting the interview, during the ensuing days, Eddie's account is rather like the old adage: 'marry in haste and repent at leisure', he explains:

I took the job but in the following few days it emerged that there was a lot of trouble in the school, that I hadn't researched, that there were two camps within the staff of 5 teachers and that the vice principal had been in for it but somebody from the opposite camp had [applied] to queer the pitch on her and that I was the outside candidate of choice and I was brought in to kind of keep an eye on the situation. (Eddie, Int. 4, 2007)

He was immediately cast in the role of peacemaker and says: "And it was a baptism of fire really" (Int. 4, 2007). Over the next 7 years as referee between these warring factions, Eddie struggled to keep the peace and to make improvements by preventing the two tribes from using any particular agenda item as a means of skirmishing. If others had inherited tensions, in Eddie's context, there was latent civil war, requiring a constantly Janus-faced leader.

... it was very, very challenging in the sense that there were lots of interpersonal relationships to be mended. Staff meetings could be dragged down to the level of, you know, items to do with the building or resources, anything other than keeping the focus on the teaching and learning and the curriculum leadership, that was the agenda, the hidden agenda there and it was a big challenge to keep bringing the curriculum to the fore . . . (Int. 4, 2007)

Nevertheless, there is evident intent to negotiate an instructional leadership role despite a combination of factionalism and resistance. Within the fishbowl atmosphere and relative intimacy of a five-teacher school, space in which to hide scarcely exists, save in the 'privacy' of one's own classroom (Lortie 1975). Nevertheless, Eddie states: "I made lots of improvements and I certainly managed to keep the lid on things but it was quite stressful" (Int. 4, 2007). When asked if he regretted his haste in accepting the position, in his own inimitable, understated manner he responded: "Maybe the fact that my MEd thesis was stress levels and the

role of the primary principal might be an answer to that, you know!” That said, he quietly adds:

... there were also times when there was success within the school and when you saw people working together even though you knew that the personal agendas were completely apart, you could take some kind of satisfaction from that. (Int. 4, 2007)

Eddie’s determination and commitment to equity and fairness regarding enrolments and other issues within the school and persistently putting the learner centre stage, while drawing on a strong moral sense and personal stoicism, emerge as hallmarks of his leadership, no doubt shaped and honed in the particular cauldron in which he found himself.

These early 1990s principals were in many respects naïve regarding the role and its increasing responsibilities though clearly they were ‘up’ for the challenge. Less time than the earlier cohort to find their feet, it was initially stressful, though in Eddie’s case the persistent presence of factionalism continued to be burden that he struggled to overcome by focusing on teaching and learning. Here, beliefs, values and commitments emerge with considerable significance as embedded in the role and its responsibilities. While all inherited particular legacies, the inadequate environment enabled Conor to indulge his penchant for accounting and being resource provider. There was evidence too of a newly emerging vocabulary that included—servant, vision, collaboration while insisting on high standards and being impatient for results cannot be pursued at the expense of leaving colleagues behind. There is evidence too of principals beginning, out of necessity to find support through collective conversation while postgraduate pursuits too as well as a proliferation of policy documents provide evidence of the advance of NPM, of a changing discourse and a more rapid pace of change, whereby ‘lone wolf’ leadership is both increasingly impossible and inadequate to the task of leadership, making ‘growing into the role’ a much more challenging if impossible prospect (Sugrue 2003).

## **Recent Leaders (Cohort Three): Initial Navi-gotiations of the Principal Role and Responsibilities**

This cohort of principals was appointed almost exclusively in the 2nd half of the 1990s—thus they are now mostly veterans! (Dick, Kate, Rose, Denise) a period during which the pace of change accelerated further. Kate retired in 2007, while Rose moved to another area of education in 2001, less than 2 years after her appointment.

When Dick (1994–) was offered the position of principal in a six teacher school there is a sense in which he’d fallen on his feet, yet if there was immediate euphoria he also indicates: “after getting the Principal’s job I began to panic I suppose.” Recognising that he would outlast his septuagenarian priest Chairperson whom he identifies as conservative and dictatorial, he determined that his initial foray into principalship would be characterised by “steady as she goes.” This caution was



reinforced on an initial 'survey' of his new school surroundings. Unlike Conor who had major renovations to contend with initially, Dick was very happy to note a new building whereby he "had no work to do in that area anywhere" (Int. 1, 2000). However, as indicated in the previous chapter, his perusal of the school staff photograph indicated clearly that he was both outsider and neophyte.

As the youngest member of staff, he felt rather vulnerable in dealing with these older colleagues. Consequently, rather like Fred above, he went out of his way to build alliances with parents and the community as a means of garnering support for possible change internally; an outside-in approach to build alliances externally to create agency and support for change internally (Fink and Brayman 2006). He says:

But I found with the staff – none of them had worked anywhere else for years and some hadn't worked for anyone else so despite the fact that I was younger they hadn't the range of experiences. Whenever I mentioned something that went on somewhere else, I felt that there were one or two . . . pretty vocal and . . . said that well it might have happened there . . . – at start I felt that this one was frosty enough and I was also cautious . . . and that did play on my mind a little bit that I had to make sure that procedurally I had to be right and organised and everything . . . (Dick, Int. 1, 2000)

Dick is describing a slow burning approach and, as he says: "even though I got on well with the teachers to an extent I still felt that I was outside looking in a little bit". Despite a degree of agency evident in all cases, there is powerful evidence also of the shaping influence of context and the personalities of colleagues. He tacitly recognised also that his life was in transition, he was becoming 'government' rather than 'opposition', necessitating some re-calibration. Such responsibilities were not without their 'costs':

I'll be honest, I went home and I found it hard to sleep at night and for the first couple of years it was very difficult and I wondered had I made a bad career choice even though I felt I was succeeding and I was looked on as a popular principal among the parents but I knew that the outer were going well but some of the innards, shall we say, were all tangled up. (Dick, Int. 3, 2007)

Kate (1997–2007) had been in an acting<sup>7</sup> capacity for some time when appointed principal. She had been the first lay member of staff to be employed in this convent girls' school in the 1960s. Rather like Maggie, her children were 'grown up' thus she was at a time in her life when she states: "I was free" to take on the responsibility. The extent of continuity and apparent seamlessness may be garnered from Kate's account of those early days:

Well I suppose my biggest surprise was that I didn't have any big problems, you know Ciaran you were listening to all the pressures and all and suddenly if things are going reasonably well, you start thinking well there has to be some things we are doing right, and we are all doing them right together. (Kate, Int. 1, 2000)

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<sup>7</sup>In schools, particularly where a member of a religious congregation had been principal, the Board of Management in these cases would make a temporary appointment to the role- an 'acting' principal, and most commonly such responsibilities fell to the existing deputy principal, thus effecting a seamless transition from religious to lay leadership of the school.

While Kate's 'acting' period may have contributed to a seamless 'no problems' on being appointed, 'in at the deep end' emerges as a major continuity since retiring principals often abandon 'ship' at the end of June, leaving the newly appointed principal to pick up all of the pieces during Summer vacation. She indicates, as did others:

Well, the first Summer, I don't think I was at home for a day, I was here all the time. – Well the nuns were here forever – you know I feel that's my business, I don't have a class, the least that I can do is to have the place nice for when they come back. (Kate, Int. 1, 2000)

In terms of navi-gotiating a new role, while an experiential base is critical, its relative narrowness is troubling and at best a limited resource, rendered more restricted by the particulars of school legacies, including their personnel.

What Rose (1999–2001) has in common with Kate is that she too was the first lay principal of what was in effect a suburban convent girls' school. She was an 'outside' appointment where there were four 'inside' candidates. With hindsight, she suggests, rather like Eddie above, that she was quickly encouraged to sign up to the position, and the Chairperson of the BoM "arranged for me to go in and meet the staff very quickly" (Int. 4, 2007). From a domestic point of view, there was less than an enthusiastic endorsement: "... well the view was, well that was very nice, well done on getting the interview but you're not really going to take this now are you?" (Int. 4, 2007).

She acknowledged subsequently that her period in the role was too short (18 months) to bring about substantial change, but of more significance here is her initial forays into navi-gotiating the role and its responsibilities — necessitating an initial 'reading' of the internal landscape. It was a very settled staff (17 class teachers and a remedial/resource teacher), many of whom had never taught anywhere else, echoing Dick's experience above. Thus, she avers:

I think that even judging from my colleagues here, they might have seen the job as being a nice administrative job. Maybe that is why four of them applied for it and whenever the previous principal was absent the secretary could run the office, so it was fine. But then I'm not sure how much they confronted some of the real issues in the school, whether they were curriculum or management ones, even ones to do with posts of responsibility. (Rose, Int. 4, 2007)

Implicit in this 'reading' of the school culture is that the life cycles of schools have major shaping influences on change processes and the manner and pace at which new leaders seek to create a 'moving' school (Fink and Brayman 2006; Fink 1998). Anxious to change, to impact teaching and curriculum in particular, Rose felt that in the first instance it would be necessary to begin to address a "culture of contentment" within the staff, and it would take a considerable period of time as an outsider to penetrate these cultural norms.

Denise (1999–) was the only 'inside' candidate when appointed. Endorsed by her colleagues, she was much better placed than Dick above to appeal for time and space in which to learn leadership on the job. Her principal had opted for early retirement; in her late twenties she was catapulted into a role she "... could see myself doing it at about thirty five to be honest" (Int 1, 2000). However, while she

would not have been prepared to apply for principalship in another school at this career stage, neither was she prepared to let the opportunity pass. In a system where such opportunities, particularly for internal candidates may materialise only once in a career, she might have regrets. She says:

Here I saw the system that was in place and there was a lot of it I admired and recognised and saw it as being good. There were elements of it that I wanted to change. So I was put in a situation where I just had to decide. There was a lot of deliberation. I knew that it was a job I wanted in about four or five years time. Again it was a question of do you gamble. If someone else came in that was the same age I was I could be sitting there. (Denise, Int. 1, 2000)

From a personal and professional perspective, she recognises in a Kirkegaardian sense that 'life must be understood backwards but lived forwards' and it is in this rear-view reflection that narrative continuity is forged, dependent on "the balance of learning, identity and agency" (Goodson et al. 2010, p. 129). She says:

I don't know I suppose it was the same when people asked me at 21 when are you getting married? It was just something that there was no way in the world was in my head and it would have actually would have frightened me. I think that you do come through live at different stages and just say yeah ok ... I suppose that I just looked at it a bit more and probably was more aware of what the job of principal involved. (Denise, Int. 1, 2000)

Without any formal preparation for the role, and something still vague on her professional horizon, it is not surprising that her initial foray felt like threading water:

When I went down and said, "Look I am going to try this or I want to this." They were 110 % behind me. ... It is only now that I realise how stressful that first year was and how tired I was because I am enjoying it so much more this year. It is more enjoyable this year and you can start to make the changes you want. Last year it was just swimming to keep your head above water. (Denise, Int. 1, 2000)

In such circumstances, while forging a sense of leadership there is significant navigation of inherited legacies, there is evidence too of negotiation, even if such tentative inbound trajectories are inevitably tempered by 'realities', in the absence of preparation, support and articulated 'vision', possibilities are inevitably constrained and a more cautious disposition practised.

Among this cohort, there continues to be a naïve approach to principalship that does not appear to look beyond satisfying personal ambition rather than a more searching examination of individual capacity and preparedness for the responsibilities. As the pace of change accelerated, the role becomes more complex, the continuing sense of 'in at the deep end' is striking while stress, sleepless nights and vulnerability emerge as the immediate rewards; being 'tangled up' emotionally. Clearly the notion that principalship 'is a nice admin job' is far from their perceptions of their role responsibilities even if during this time that traditional view persists. The local and immediate continue to be prominent influences, while greater awareness of a school's culture and consequent leadership needs do not appear to have been factored into recruitment or succession considerations, thus a kind of pragmatic filling a vacancy persists; likewise, preparation for the role.

## Recent(ly) Minted Leaders (Cohort Four): ‘Celtic Tiger’ Cub Principals?

The four principals in this cohort (Ben, Sadie, Brent, Janice) were all appointed in the latter half of the noughties a period of turbo optimism and consumerist binging until the property bubble burst with massive social, economic and educational consequences in 2008 and subsequently. While they may not be Celtic tiger cubs in terms of age, their recent teaching careers occurred during a time of unprecedented economic prosperity, and rapid and radical departures from more traditional cultural anchorings as indicated in Chap. 1. Three of the four had completed a master’s degree when appointed, while Brent and Sadie in particular had comprehensive professional portfolios. How did they experience navi-gotiation?

Ben (2005–) too was in at the deep end, exacerbated by the absence of a carefully constructed transition period as part of succession planning. Rather like others above, his predecessor took to the lifeboat of retirement leaving him to navigate the Summer transition on his own. Ben laments:

... the system is wrong I think by not making you principal from, say 1st of July because my work started 1st of July because I had to get new teachers in, I had to get a cleaner in, I’d to get the painters in because he [retiring principal] absolved himself of all that. Now he was retiring on the 31st of August but in his mind on the 30th of June he was gone. I know every new principal has to do that. (Ben, Int. 1, 2007)

Simply acknowledging this as a *fait accompli* is unacceptable, a form of systemic carelessness regarding succession planning and transition that continue to give the lie to rhetorics that attest to the critical significance of school leaders’ roles and responsibilities.

Though on paper Ben was *au fait* with recent Government policies, legislation etc., when faced with the reality of being a teaching principal on Sept 1st 2005, there was immediate recognition that he was on a steep learning curve, despite being an inside appointment. In the absence of a more planned career structure this steep learning gradient is likely to continue with untold and unknown consequences for the development and exercise of school leadership, the immediate grounds on which the fragile and uncertain leadership narrative is being constructed:

And I was teaching principal of 27 lads in 6th class [in a boys only school]. Everything came at me, sure I hadn’t a clue, special education, forms left, right and centre, meeting the SENO [Special Education Needs Organiser] and trying to justify jobs frightened the daylight out of me. Meeting new parents, first class parents, who had had an administrative principal down in the girls school who they could meet to suddenly having a principal they couldn’t meet.<sup>8</sup> And suddenly there were questions asked about supervision, early morning

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<sup>8</sup>Where the sexes continue to be segregated, it is often the practice that for the first 2 years of primary schooling, the boys attend the girl’s school, thus they transfer to the boys school when they transfer into first class. This arrangement is also reflective of the fact that traditionally male teachers neither taught nor were considered suited to teaching 4 and 5 year olds! Additionally, this ‘division of labour’ was reflected in initial teacher education, thus it was not until post 1971 when

supervision and stuff like that. I said look, I'm a teacher in a class. It took a while; it definitely took a long time to get used to it. (Ben, Int. 1, 2007)

Some respite was at hand: "My first relief was the Misneach programme<sup>9</sup>; to meet others in the same boat as myself. I probably had more knowledge" but without experience, preparation for the role, he was definitely in at the deep end. Becoming an administrative principal after little more than a year provided Ben with the space and opportunity to reflect more on his role, and to begin to be proactive.

Sadie (2006–) was of more mature years (generally) on her appointment, and had more comprehensive and varied professional development experience and formal qualifications accumulated over two decades. Thus, she both wanted the position, and had been selective about pursuing it, and felt that she had what it takes to fulfil the role. Consequently, she says: "Put it like this, I remember I was here about 6 months and I said to myself, I've come home" (Int. 2, 2007).

She had found what she was looking for and while an outside appointment, this comment strongly suggests that the resources she had at her disposal to call on, she took to the role like a duck to water rather than being in at the deep end. In a more expansive and reflective 'voice' she puts her sense of efficacy in perspective:

I am where I really wanted to be and I'm glad I'm here because sometimes you think you want something and when you're there you say, my god what am I doing there? So that's a lot of what I feel about [names school]. Now, a lot of it might be that we knit together. I'm not the perfect principal by any means, I will make mistakes, I will do stupid things and handle something badly for example, but I think that people know me well enough now to say, Sadie come on, sort yourself out, what's wrong with you? I don't mind people saying that, in fact I would prefer if they did but I suppose it's about fit. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

Of course, feeling at 'home' in a role renders negotiation less fraught and tentative, while the inherent self-efficacy leaves one poised to negotiate rather than merely navigate to avoid hazards. Her experience, thus far, is the exception rather than the rule but strongly suggests that adequate preparation is a crucially important ingredient.

Similarly, Brent (2006–) had completed an MEd and had accumulated considerable experience in CPD and its provision. However, more than Sadie, he had been a member of staff in the school and put himself under pressure by really wanting the position. He says: "I was ready for a new challenge". Additionally, he had been quite strategic in leaving this school to develop his professional portfolio. As he indicated subsequently: "this was the job that I wanted." Consequently, he confides: "that's pressure in itself." He had worked in a professional capacity with some members of the interview board through a professional "network . . . interviewing, sharing interview boards with them" and this too he construes as added pressure that "one doesn't want to be diminished in anyway, there's pride and vanity and all of that involved . . ." (Int. 2, 2007). Despite the fact that this was a large girls'

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colleges of education became co-educational that male student teachers were prepared to teach the entire primary age range.

<sup>9</sup>Misneach is the Irish language word for 'courage' and the title given by the LDS team for the programme provided for newly appointed principals—see [www.lds21.ie](http://www.lds21.ie)

school with approximately 40 teachers, the following comments suggest that given his experience, confidence and competence, he was indeed ready for the challenge, and was well placed to begin to negotiate and establish priorities rather than navigate daily fractured freneticism. Having described an appropriate ‘handover’, something absent from most of the accounts thus far, he rather confidently asserts: “I suppose I had been prepared, to a certain extent. My experiences . . . meant that the shock wasn’t as enormous as it might have been.” Rather like Sadie, though he did not say it—he had come ‘home’ or certainly had attained the position he had his eye on for some time. There is a confidence in his ‘voice’, a sense of priority and what is important, not articulated by the others:

. . . there were issues that needed to be addressed, there were circulars that needed to be taken account of, there were forms that needed to be filled and . . . all of that. In some respects that’s the easy part of the job because you can train anyone to fill a form . . . . Once you’ve done it once it’s not a big deal, . . . . (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

As a consequence of his professional trajectory, rather like Sadie, he is far from overwhelmed. Rather, he is already forging a disposition that is proactive. The impression he creates is of being considerably ahead of the curve:

It was comfortable in one sense because I felt that I had developed some skills that were going to allow me to interact comfortably with staff, with pupils and with parents and I had confidence that I had been through the process of chairing a staff meeting, you know keeping all the balls in the air . . . . Having done all of that, having addressed parents . . . I wasn’t, you’re still anxious and you’re still nervous and you still want to do a good job but it’s not as intimidating as it might have been. So to be in a position to focus on just those elements in some respects, in terms of the learning curve, was of great assistance and I suppose it throws up the question of, in most cases, people go from the classroom into the principal’s office with no real training, meaningful training, no real in-career development, shall we say, and I was lucky enough, yes ok, . . . I had the space to learn and I had a 5 year in-career [opportunity] . . . (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

Such professional opportunity enables Brent to articulate a sophisticated understanding of continuity and transformation and how, as leader of a large school community with a particular history and tradition, his leadership embodies the inevitable tensions.

One of the things would have been around [names religious order] ethos and so on and ensuring that the school, while embracing change and ensuring that we were offering all of what’s best to the children entrusted to our care, that that . . . philosophy of education and that ethos and that characteristic spirit of the school<sup>10</sup> wasn’t diminished or lost in anyway and that was something that would have been part of my own vision for the school

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<sup>10</sup>Here he is using the language of the Education Act (1998) –‘the characteristic spirit of the school’ while this legislation has proved to be controversial as the immigrant population increased dramatically in the noughties and enrolment policies discriminated against those who were not of the Catholic faith. In effect, the Education Act protects such discrimination from the application of Equality legislation (2004). More recently, as a consequence of this perceived structural inequality, a forum on school patronage was established—see Coolahan et al. 2012, and in September 2013 draft legislation was published to regulate school entry- <http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Legislation/Draft-General-Scheme-of-an-Education-Admission-to-Schools-Bill-2013.PDF>

anyway so it sort of sat neatly with that. No restrictions were placed in terms of how I might operationally effect what things we're doing. Now, obviously it's prudent when you do start a new post, to observe and to build confidence and to affirm and all of that. (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

By his use of 'we', he situates himself comfortably within the tradition, while appropriating some elbow room his articulation resonates with the assertion that "the ability to learn is a defining characteristic of being human; the ability to continue learning is an essential skill of leadership" (Bennis and Thomas 2002, p. 1).

Janice (2007–) is the most recent appointee— an insider in an eight-teacher school where the tradition has been to appoint the principal from within. Her initial concern, rather like Denise above, appears to be how she will be 'leaderly' or 'do leadership' (Gillies 2013, p. 29) in front of her peers:

... the first week in September I thought, ok I have to be the one now to ring the bells and make sure that people leave the staffroom because [names predecessor], the previous principal, said to me that really you have to make sure that there are people in classrooms when there are children there and she said it's not always the easiest of things and I've been in that staffroom and I sit on my tod too over the time and I thought, well now, I have to carry this off that really you could easily be open to ... well she wasn't too hot on answering the bell herself when she wasn't the principal so ... (Janice, Int. 2, 2007)

This initial negotiation contains elements of 'self-government'—"technologies of the self, the means by which individuals act upon themselves in order to transform themselves" (Gillies 2013, pp. 60–61) in conformity with leadership expectations while signalling also elements of power and surveillance. Such practices may also perpetuate a kind of hierarchical dependency, whereby good time-keeping needs to be policed by the principal rather than being an individual and collective professional responsibility (Solbrette and Sugrue 2011). She sought the cooperation of colleagues while acknowledging: "but I couldn't in conscience start pretending that I was always perfect because I certainly wasn't, ..." (Int. 2, 2007). There is a sense also that in persistently referencing her female predecessor, to whom she was very close, she is appropriating her authority as a means of asserting her own—with the expectation that this shadow will become substance. Her previous role within the school as resource teacher created a particular set of relationships with pupils and she describes re-negotiation of these given her new role and responsibilities:

I did actually bring them in [children with behavioural challenges] here [principal's office] and talk to them, just talk to them and try to get them on side as best I could and I suppose they did get the message that I was going to continue with consequences and I was certainly going to reward the good behaviour, I was going to follow up on things. (Janice, Int. 2, 2007)

Being firm and consistent with errant learners had the additional purpose of signalling support to colleagues:

... I felt the teachers needed to know that I was going to support them and also I would feel very strongly, ... Now I know there's a huge amount of admin work but that can be done, you know you can do that in your own time but a lot of my day would still be spent involved with the classes. (Janice, Int. 2, 2007)

The pattern emerging appears to be that while being self-aware is critical to the role, the less preparation the greater the insecurity and thus also an apparent tendency to ingratiate with colleagues, an anxiety to move from a 'peripheral trajectory' to that of 'insider' (Wenger 1998) but on colleagues' terms rather than a transformational narrative for the school. Evidence among this cohort with few exceptions, appears to err on the side of conservative and tentative leadership characterised more by navigation than negotiation. While 'in at the deep end' persisted, there is evidence too of a more assertive language, of being 'at home', being confident and comfortable, an emergent embryonic sense of the necessity for appropriate 'fit', thus the requirement for a more systematic approach to succession planning and recruitment. Inevitably, there is evidence of anxiety, but less sense of stress and vulnerability despite an accelerating pace of change.

## Conclusions

The most persistent thread across the cohorts as described above is lack of formal preparation for the role, thus almost inevitably leading to a cautious, conservative approach to gaining a sense of the role and its responsibilities; a consequence of 'in at the deep end'. The evidence is also convincing that this continuing process of 'growing into the role' is shaped significantly by the local, the immediate, the schools culture and predecessor's legacy, thus wider meso or macro influence, while making cameo appearances, are largely absent, thus also suggesting that principal agency is almost invariably tempered by responsiveness to the status quo, the immediate, the local. Nevertheless, as the pace of change accelerated, and the role evidently became more complex and varied, in the absence of preparation, stress, anxiety, vulnerability appeared to increase, thus, in the early days at least, leading to being 'tangled up' emotionally. Such tensions seemed to take on heightened significance if the principal was young on appointment relative to the established staff. While principals, no more than the population generally, cannot escape who they are, in the absence of professional preparation, it appears that their leadership is more likely to become an extension of their personal preferences rather than a more considered sense of giving direction.

As the role changed over time, and there was some evidence of a new language of leadership, the deep structures of schooling, including recruitment of principals, remained largely intact thus leaving principals pragmatically to play the hand they were dealt, although there was an emerging sense of the necessity for leadership learning and a collective voice. Nevertheless, in Foucaultian terms, leadership as evidenced here has been largely "left to develop 'naturally'" in sharp contradistinction to the "transnational leadership package" (Gillies 2013, p. 55). If internationally "the rapid turnover of school leaders and principals . . . creates significant barriers to educational change," lack of mobility too can be a major contributor to stasis and resistance to change (Fink and Brayman 2006, p. 86) as well as contribute to the sense of having time to become a leader on the job; of leadership postponed.



There is an emerging sense that the rhetoric of policy statements regarding the significance of school leaders' roles and responsibilities is not matched by adequate systemic support, but this is a thesis that will be tested further through the evidence presented in subsequent chapters.

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## Chapter 5

# Principal Professional Learning: Sources of Sustenance?

### Introduction

Since the advent of NPM, in its various iterations (see Chap. 2), it is generally accepted that the role of principal has become more ‘scripted’ (Gronn 2003, 2011) and so too has preparation for the role, and the on-going support provided for those in post (Hess and Kelly 2007; MacBeath et al. 2009). Such intensification and increased performativity became more evident in the Irish context during the 1990s, in the wake of an OECD report that specifically called for ‘management’ training for principals (OECD 1991). Henceforth, there has been a gradual infusion into policy documents of the language of NPM—targets, learning outcomes, accountability etc. (see Green 2010). What becomes evident in this chapter then is the increasing colonisation of the life worlds of school leaders by the system world increasingly being imposed by the pervasive influence of NPM, and how principals struggle in various ways to retain a sense of the purposes of education that are beyond the reach of or excluded from the mainstream by making their work more ‘auditable’ (Power 1999) by various ‘rituals of verification’; mainly paper trails and Whole School Evaluation (DES 2006). There is a gradual alteration of school ecology as the infestation of the lifeworld of principals and teachers becomes pervasive (Sergiovanni 2000). Learning in such circumstances may hasten the process through scripted preparation programmes, a form of ‘governmentality’ (see Gillies 2013, pp. 66–84) or build resistance through informal networks and unscripted learning.

Of the 16 interviewees in this study, 11 had completed masters degrees, while others too had sought out further learning opportunities. In the case of the veterans and experienced cohorts, masters degrees were completed in mid to late career, while three of the four principals in the most recent cohort already had a

masters qualification when appointed, though at different ‘professional phases’.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this evidence suggests that “modern educational leadership ... requires the individual concerned to shape their lives in such a way as to meet the required criteria” (Gillies 2013, p. 79). The total number of primary teachers in the Irish primary education system who actually hold a masters degree is approximately 11 %, suggesting that principals manifest a considerable commitment to their learning compared to their teaching peers, albeit in a rapidly altering landscape.<sup>2</sup>

## Leadership Legacies: Lacunae

There was little by way of professional support for principals in the Irish context during the 1970s and 1980s. What individuals availed of was largely fortuitous and serendipitous. As the decade of the 1990s advanced, principals began to feel their responsibilities were being expanded exponentially (Sugrue 2003). Teaching principals in particular felt acutely put upon, while principals generally became more vociferous in their demands, and began to complain about workloads. However, there were historical legacies that worked against principal agency.

School management was overwhelmingly controlled by the Catholic Church. Teacher unions were primarily concerned with teachers, while principals too were members of the same unions. Various efforts through the 1980s and 1990s to create a principals’ association were repeatedly stymied by the primary teachers’ union. Nevertheless, throughout the latter half of the 1990s, annual conferences were organised by principals and these culminated in the creation of the Irish Primary Principals’ Network (IPPN) in 2000 (see [www.ippn.ie](http://www.ippn.ie)). Since its emergence as a network, IPPN has gained official recognition from the DES and other ‘partners’ in education, including the managerial bodies. The IPPN has become a significant ‘home’ for principals and deputies and an important source of support and sustenance at a time of unprecedented change. It is not surprising that since the establishment of an overdue state sponsored Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) in 2001 (see Morgan and Sugrue 2005) strong working relationships have been forged with IPPN. Such emergent patterns have international resonances whereby “more head teachers move away from members of the traditional teacher

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<sup>1</sup>In the VITAE four-year project completed in England, an important distinction is made between ‘career’ and professional life phase—“the former relates to out of classroom responsibilities and promotion. The latter relates to broader professional characteristics, concerns and needs (see Day et al. 2007, p. 101).

<sup>2</sup>According to the following website (<http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2008-06-04.1531.0>) in June 2008 there were 2,183 primary teachers with a Masters Degree.

unions, instead forming and joining professional associations dedicated to leaders and heads” (Gillies 2013, p. 79).<sup>3</sup>

While leadership literature is replete with preferred leadership styles, concepts and types, in the absence of preparation, participants in this study have had to make their own way in the world. Their learning and leading progressed in tandem, in unanticipated and fortuitous, serendipitous ways but with an emerging pattern of more scripted possibilities, while simultaneously creating support networks where information and mutual help is the currency being bartered; individual expertise is shared for mutual benefit, and the (retrospective) (re-)creation of a ‘per-fessional’ (a fusion of *personal* and *professional*). For Gadamer, such fusion is the creation of “historically effected consciousness” (Gadamer 1975/1989, p. 307) while for others the challenge is to ‘keep a particular narrative going’ (Giddens 1991), recognition that within a life history perspective “people do adjust their interpretations and evaluations of their past in the light of new experiences” while this does not necessarily lead to the production of “a completely different story” (Goodson et al. 2010, p. 7). Despite the ‘fluid’ ‘liquid’ contemporary world, the palimpsests of the past create tension in the present while simultaneously providing the ‘bricolage’ for the construction of the future (Bauman 2000/2006). Learning, formal and informal, is the threshold upon which the future is perpetually navi-gotiated and the ‘per-fessional’ (re-)constructed.

## Unscripted Learning of Leadership? (Cohort One: Fred, Alison, Jack, Jim)

From his earliest days as principal of a rural two-teacher school (1971–2010), Fred was “getting a buzz from putting my own stamp on the school and maybe being my own boss” (Int. 1, 2000). Taking on challenges is part of the palimpsest of his leader’s life. Subsequently, a stint teaching in a sub-Saharan context about mid-way through his principal career, reinforced Fred’s belief in the power of learning and that age is no barrier to it. What such ‘critical incidents’ (Tripp 1993) seem to suggest is that learning is more powerful when it is voluntary rather than prescribed.

Fred perceived his role as extending to community leader and activist. Consequently, when opportunities presented themselves for gaining computers for the school, his school was favoured precisely because part of his plan was to make them available for adult classes. Similarly, when the school was being renovated and

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<sup>3</sup>It should be noted that, in the Irish context, the vast majority of primary principals retain membership of their union—INTO—while being members of IPPN also; another example perhaps of ‘an Irish solution to an Irish problem’! Fees for IPPN membership and attendance at annual conference are frequently borne by Boards of Management, at a time when school funding is hard pressed, while such support suggests local recognition of the necessity to support principals and their deputies.

extended in recent years, he persuaded the community to provide funds so that the dimensions of the school hall could be greatly extended, again for the mutual benefit of school and community. Such commitment has been one of the hallmarks of his stewardship, while in his personal world he has continued to engage with aspects of farming and animal husbandry. Fred indicates also that there were members of religious communities in both sides of his family, contributing to a general sense of vocation that retains elements of self-sacrifice and commitment to the common good (Sugrue and Solbrekke 2011). Consequently, he reflects that the gendered division of labour domestically has enabled him to follow his leadership inclinations:

My kids did not see as much of me as other kids saw of their parents. That now is a missed opportunity. . . . Luckily in a sense [names partner] was the homemaker and probably still is the homemaker. When I'm down making hay [literally!] and pruning Christmas trees she's still the homemaker. So that's a regret, that's a regret. (Fred, Int. 1, 2000)

He concedes “that teachers like me who have that kind of attitude often their own families suffer” while other commentators suggest that such ‘partnership’ arrangements unwittingly collude in the perpetuation of the disproportionate number of males in leadership positions (Lynch et al. 2012). Such mutually reinforcing elements of individual narratives—in this instance—professional activist/community leader, may unwittingly over time be less than beneficial to the changing needs of the school community; in less scripted times, Fred was able to perpetuate ‘my way’, thus cultivating a positive and powerful professional script.

In the early 1980s, Alison (1979-) undertook a BA (part-time) while having two small children, and found psychology in particular very stimulating. Meanwhile, in the large suburban school, opportunities were availed of through access and personal networks to use the school for piloting the standardisation of national tests, then in their infancy, while fund raising also enabled the acquisition of significant teaching resources, particularly for junior classes where Alison had a particular commitment since her initial teacher education. Her commitment to and enthusiasm for learning may be gleaned from the following:

Now I am very interested in psychology and in the whole business of inter personal relationships and all that. That was certainly huge staff development for me. Now I did a course every summer of my life and I always looked for what might be the most suitable for me. It was seldom one specifically for principals because they tended to do the same stuff all the time. I would always go to a conference. (Alison, Int. 1, 2000)

This enthusiastic commitment, coupled with an opportunism and keen eye for practical application, and the avoidance of predictable principal courses, led to collaborative teaching between classroom teachers and resource (remedial) teachers when it was standard practice within the system to operate a withdrawal system for those identified as needing support. As a significant innovation then ahead of its time, it demonstrates practical leadership by bringing serendipitous opportunities together. By starting small, existing prejudices were not challenged too much while initially “. . . in the staff room the reaction of the teachers was, are you crazy letting her into your room but as time went on they could hear them [colleagues] talking about it and so on” (Int. 1, 2000).

And, as collaborative, planned evidence based practice took hold in more classrooms, received wisdom gave way to demands for reform as teachers' attitudes softened:

This took quite some time, then the teachers started to complain, when are we getting it? So then this moved and moved and moved to the extent that . . . The difference it made was absolutely huge. First, there were two teachers instead of one. Secondly you had to have the programme very well planned because if the two of us are going to teach it you can't go in and teach off the seat of your pants . . . (Alison, Int. 1, 2000)

The kind of teacher individualism and privatism (Lortie 1975), began to give way to more collaborative approaches, stimulated arguably by Alison's interest in psychology, and promoted by her courage, conviction and commitment to lead. There is a sense in which she was already learning to negotiate successfully between academic concepts, and their potential to address identifiable challenges in the world of schooling, to transform school culture. However, it was left to the initiative and imagination of the principal to make such connections and to act on them within the school community. When Alison subsequently undertook postgraduate work, this pattern became more pronounced. She says: "I always wanted to do a Master but I didn't want to do a Masters for the sake of it". She describes the experience thus: "it was fantastic. I had a ball. . . . I just loved the whole thing. It opened up loads of new literature to me that I wasn't aware was around. I did my dissertation in the area of administration." (Int. 1, 2000)

Having completed a masters degree, she was invited to provide some lectures on administration to final year BEd (Primary) student-teachers. This was "huge personal, professional development because obviously I had to really know what I was talking about" thus it was "very satisfying from a personal point of view and also from a developmental point of view" (Int. 1, 2000), further evidence of the significance of the 'professional' in motivating and sustaining innovative leadership.

When preparing lectures, ideas were first 'road tested' in her school: "I tried to incorporate them here. I found them a great help." This is unscripted leadership development where the onus is on the principals to make connections and test relevance and fitness for purpose within a particular school community, while providing evidence also of 'commitment and [developing] expertise' (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). Of course, given the current pace of and demand for change, it may be argued from a 'performativity' perspective that such 'discretionary' judgement is a luxury that the system cannot afford. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests caution regarding overly scripted learning, where sufficient autonomy is accorded to the agency of actors, particularly school leaders and the needs of their particular school communities. Her teaching of student teachers "reawakened for me, maybe restarted my whole principalship again." She continues: it was a whole learning experience that kept me going again." Despite a hectic schedule, she confides: "I was working as a principal and I was lecturing part-time in [names institution] apart from being on committee's or all the other things . . ." yet, she adds: "But all of that gave me an extra maybe excitement in my principalship." (Int. 3, 2007)

Such renewal in relatively late professional life gives the lie to the inevitability of gradual decline and disengagement (Huberman et al. 1993), possibly more evident among females when parenting responsibilities recede, enhanced by embracing other opportunities in her private life (Christopher Day and Gu 2010; Day et al. 2007; Lynch et al. 2012). She says: “I am interested in all sorts of things. I am very interested in Music. I go to concerts. I go to the gym. I haven’t been for ten days, but I will get there. I will do that and I am terrific for a while and then I don’t. I read a lot” (Int. 1, 2000).

What emerges also within this wider canvas of informal learning pursued through personal interests is that despite rather than because of the system, committed and resilient leaders sustain their commitments across different professional life phases, even if there are hints of increasingly scripted agenda and ‘performativity’ (Lambert 2007; Lynch et al. 2012). However, as the system increases in complexity and demands for performativity intensify, a re-configuration of the personal and professional and attendant supports are necessary, while there is an important balance to be struck between professional autonomy to enable individual agency and professional responsibility to flourish. It may be construed therefore, that at a minimum it is no accident that work precedes life in the perceived necessity to reconfigure work-life ‘balance’ (Charles and Harris 2007; Lambert 2007).

Veteran Jack (1978–2007), became an active member of a principals’ support group in the 1990s. During his first interview in 2000, he sought to put the lack of professional support and opportunity in perspective. He says:

... over the last ten years through the principal group, I have attempted to come to terms with professional development. I’ve certainly thought seriously about it and I like to think, I’ve made some bit of progress... if at the end ... I can’t come to grips with. How is any amount of professional development... (Jack, Int. 1, 2000)

He recognises that professional development is absolutely necessary, even if its content and purpose remain contested, implicitly also he recognises that it needs to be continuous and sustained. He acknowledges that a narrow experiential base as a preparation for principalship limits horizons, and, of course, increasingly, this is unacceptable.

The down sides of having no preparation. For one thing ... since I left the training college I have experience of two Irish schools. Now the first thing about that ... they [were] two almost of a kind ... so I have no notion, what the potential is. In other words, I’m constrained by the narrowness; ... (Jack, Int. 1, 2000)

Jack’s commitment to his own learning was pursued continuously through active participation in a principals’ support group for almost two decades, during which time he also completed an MEd degree. This commitment, an indication of changing times, is in rather sharp contrast to his first period as principal:

... certainly in the first 10 years I attended very little in terms of courses, I was not a member of a support group, there was none of those kind of things and I just ploughed along. I had this traditional notion what school was about. I was almost putting a bigger



version of the last school I was in and I was very chuffed and pleased with myself and I thought I was doing wonderfully well . . . (Jack, Int. 1, 2000)

At best, there was learning in the doing, yet there is recognition too of the limiting effects of a narrow experiential base. Nevertheless, neither are support groups a panacea: “there has been years when I sort of say, is this much more than a social gathering and maybe we should just go to the pub and have a chat instead of going to some classroom.” He suggests that being familiar with “what the academics are saying” is vital to create a “breadth of vision” as schooling becomes more complex and “if you are to prepare kids in any way adequately for what is going on out there.” However, this might also be construed as an internalisation of NPM and the policy rhetoric of preparing even primary school pupils for the world of work. Nevertheless, one of the benefits of intellectual input into principal support groups as well as engagement with leadership literature while completing a masters, is a broadening of horizons, whereby this principal acquires tools for thinking as well as an understanding of the ‘big picture’. Consequently, the local can then be re-interpreted through this macro lens, itself a source of sustenance and (possible) empowerment. One of the continuities in per-fessional life has been music, working with choirs regularly in school, while he has been an enthusiastic golfer who plays regularly all year round weather permitting. Thus, there has always been ‘time out’ built into his commitments, something that could not have been achieved without his wife taking the lion’s share of responsibility for parenting etc.

As the previous chapter indicated, a major continuity in Jim’s (1985-) identity is that of teacher, as a teaching principal. He completed a Masters in computing rather than a more traditional MEd as this was what was available within his geographical domain. This is his passion while other professional learning opportunities in the context of role intensification are perceived as intrusive. When professional support arrived in his school unannounced (in the noughties), declaring that he had been “pencilled in” for 2 h, he responded: “you’ll have to pencil me out- I have a class”. This prioritisation caused considerable offence, and when an after school rendezvous was arranged subsequently, his dissatisfaction is evident from the following:

. . . she gave me templates, they were no more than tables – blank on a page and that’s all.<sup>4</sup> Why would you send people around the country to hand out those things when you could e-mail them and people could do them up themselves if they wanted. And that’s all we got. Now things improved lately because people just won’t accept that anymore – we’re now getting actual sample policies for certain areas. (Jim, Int. 3, 2007)

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<sup>4</sup>In the wake of the launch of the ‘revised’ Curriculum (DES, 1999) two competing rather than complementary services were provided—the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) which organised 6 ‘curriculum days’ annually, while School Development Planning Services Programme (SDPS) concentrated on the necessity for planning, and part of this element of the support included school visits by a designated individual. The personnel who provided both of these services were seconded principal and teachers.

Thus, as a ‘survival’ (Woods 1984) mechanism, and as schools are to become more auditable, policies come ready-made—inducing compliance mode. However, as suggested by Green (2010), such paper trails may enable schools to ‘hit the target’ but ‘miss the point’. Jim identifies his professional needs as being:

... with very practical things, with classroom management, with group work in classrooms, actual help with preparing exercises for children in the different areas of the curriculum, practical help with the subjects but the policy thing has had very little impact on us. (Jim, Int. 4, 2007)

His frustration with demands for policy compliance is in sharp contrast with his passion for computing. On the occasion that I visited his classroom prior to completing the final interview, I was impressed by the work being done by the learners on all 17 PCs in the room, even if computer use was largely confined to his classroom. He too, like Alison, has been invited to provide courses in computing where he completed his masters, thus having invested in their own learning they become net contributors to others’ learning rather than receivers in the ebb and flow of professional learning. This dual carriageway of learning becomes even more evident in more recent cohorts, and another important element that needs to be planned for in the making of comprehensive provision. The rush to formalise learning through ‘professional development communities’ (Hord 1997), should not be myopic regarding the significance of informal opportunities to learn while not relying on them exclusively either. However, formalising them may also dilute their significance and contribution (OECD 2010).

Sport has been important to him all his life, as an avid handball player, while commitment to school football teams has been on-going throughout his career, again something that has been facilitated by his partner.

While the informality of learning emerges as significant amongst this cohort, all engaged with formal learning too at advanced stages in their careers, and this certainly broadened horizons in significant ways, thus is idiosyncratic ways they all attest to the necessity for more formal leadership learning and the role and its responsibilities became more complex. And, yet, there is also a strong per-fessional Leitmotif (Sugrue 1997)<sup>5</sup> to their stewardship, thus Fred’s leadership is peppered with being a ‘community activist’, Alison a ‘learning leader’, Jack ‘lead from the front’ while Jim continued to define himself as a ‘teacher leader’. Such Leitmotifs reinforce the per-fessional sense of growing through learning (mostly more informal than formal) into leadership while there is an emerging sense too that informal alone is inadequate for the increasing complexity of the role and its responsibilities no matter how powerful.

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<sup>5</sup>In this work, the term Leitmotif is used to convey the sense of a ‘leading theme’; borrowed from orchestral work it suggests “a kind of musical tag that identifies a particular character or idea that recurs ... at appropriate moments, often with subtle variation” (Sugrue 1997, p. 138).

## **Intensification of Learning Leadership?** (Cohort Two: Michelle, Conor, Maggie, Eddie)

Maggie began her teaching career in the late 1960s, Michelle and Conor in the seventies, and Eddie in the early eighties, while all were appointed as principals in the early 1990s. They entered the role at a time of increasing intensification. Conor has recently taken early retirement, Michelle continues in her role, Maggie now works in higher education, Eddie works in another sector in education. Three of the four completed Masters shortly after being appointed to the principalship, while Conor completed a BEd part-time. As the pace of change increased, what becomes apparent with this cohort is a bottom-up response to new policy rhetorics and more self-conscious investment in learning and an emerging sense of the necessity to build systemic capacity, a more collective response.

The palimpsest of Michelle's (1992-) learning trajectory had the imprint of the benefits of learning and the value of campaigns that continued to fuel her professional trajectory (Sugrue 2005). Having completed a masters, she sought to broaden her horizons further, and became an associate of LDS programmes that involved partial secondment from her position. In a more pronounced manner than the previous cohort, she became a net contributor to others' learning while investing in her own, thus building systemic capacity in a bottom up manner—building 'professional capital' (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012).

From the very beginning, Michelle (1992-) sought out opportunities for learning, and was pleasantly surprised to find herself among like-minded principals. The following comments should dispel any notion that the informants were exceptional, while not wishing to deny their particular agency and learning trajectories. She says:

Remember I was telling you about this support group that I was involved with in [names geographical area] and then coming on from that then, we had a group of us that used to meet in [names another geographical area]<sup>6</sup> and then there was the Cork principals' association had their conference and we all went down to it.<sup>7</sup> (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007).

Subsequently, she was a founding member of a new principals' support group closer to her own school, and began to take a leadership role in others' learning:

... we had an IPPN support group then in [names place], we set up our own and I was running it for a short while and that was good because what you ended up doing was, number one, there was sharing of expertise, people sort of advising and alerting people to things, but the other thing was that it created relationships between principals that ... didn't exist. We actually got to know each other socially as well which was good. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

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<sup>6</sup>Effectively, one support group begot another, as more principals learned of their existence they wished to become part of such learning communities.

<sup>7</sup>As indicated previously, these initial conferences, organised by a group of Cork principals transferred to Dublin and eventually in 2000 metamorphosed into IPPN.

While her enthusiasm for these learning initiatives is palpable, as always, there could be a darker side to such gatherings, echoing Jack's concerns above, as follows: "The only concern I'd have about it is that sometimes there could be a whinging element of it and that irritates me" (Int. 4, 2007). These criticisms suggest that at a time of rapid change, reliance on informal learning may no longer be adequate, while recognising that such networks have a contribution to make; a significant and recurring challenge when 'educating the reflective practitioner' (Schon 1987).

As a mother, a principal who invests in her own learning, work-life balance is challenging and complex. When the subject is raised, her immediate reaction is: "We won't even go there!" (Int. 4, 2007). In a previous interview she had mentioned her interest in gardening and its therapeutic benefits. Subsequently, consistent with others, being able to retreat even irregularly to this personal space is an anticipated as well as real reward, an opportunity to re-connect the personal and professional, silent moment of reflection

The garden still exists but it doesn't get quite so much attention as it used to, but I would consider it my haven. If I got out once every six weeks to have a really good day in the garden, that's good. I get great satisfaction out of it. The two lads are gone so it's just the two of us and the cat. My parents, [I] was just saying the other day that it's almost like I'm now organising my life around them the way that I used to around the two boys when they were much smaller. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

For female principals perhaps more than their male counterparts, apart from a changing role, other demands may frequently impinge on commitment to care, and self-sacrifice may trump work-life balance, thus spaces and opportunities for renewal rather than a perpetual treadmill become more important throughout professional life stages (Blackmore and Sachs 2007; Day et al. 2007; Lynch et al. 2012; O'Brien 2011). When she commenced the role, it was the kitchen table and the invaluable support of her spouse that got her through: "I actually had someone safe . . . sorta lay it all on, and it wasn't goin' to back anywhere".

For Conor (1992–2010), the emergence of both IPPN and Union fora<sup>8</sup> meetings and more formal courses were important even if it was what was learned informally appealed to him most. Additionally, he retains a pragmatism also that, back in school, you have to get on with the work with the implicit caveat that momentary collegial togetherness does not mitigate the isolation of principals:

. . . I'd say the biggest benefit you get from attending those fora or attending various classes or whatever is that, I suppose meeting other people that have maybe the same problems as yourself, that you're not the only person with these particular problems or you might get an idea from somebody or you might give somebody an idea, this is how I organise this or that, but having said all that you still have to come in the next day and . . . (Conor, Int. 4, 2007)

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<sup>8</sup>As a response to the emergence of IPPN as a new 'power' in the system that was most unlikely to go away, the INTO responded by establishing 'principal fora' while some principals found objection to the manner in which these were organised through existing branch structures whereby the chair and secretary might be class teachers in your school, leading to a sense of surveillance.

Conor indicates that in terms of preparation for the role prior to appointment, he had “none whatsoever” nor does he intimate that he felt the need for induction. However, 2 years into the role, the teachers’ union made such a course available, and he states: “I would safely say it was one of the best courses I attended” (Int. 1, 2000).

Such comments implicitly suggest that learning on the job, or indeed insights gained from informal encounters, need more formal learning opportunities also, perhaps all the more significant given principals’ relative isolation. Consequently, more elaborate learning that connects individuals to overcome isolation not only contributes new ideas, but facilitates also emotional connections that help towards renewal and the avoidance of burnout (Day and Gu 2010; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012).

From a work life balance perspective, he finds time for various interests: “. . . bridge<sup>9</sup> and golf I suppose would be my main interests and horse racing. They’d be the three things I’d be most interested in” but he admits that between September and Xmas, he has not played as regularly as he would like; all of which has to be facilitated by his teacher partner.

As the 1990s progressed the teachers’ union and the DES became increasingly aware of the need for leadership capacity building, while there was competition also for hearts and minds. Maggie (1991–2004) availed of “what the INTO put on for Principals” while also she “actually did the department one and I thought it was actually very good – way back in 1992” (Maggie, Int. 1, 2000). Consistent with the suggestion of being net provider rather than recipient, Maggie was able to access funding to organise CPD on a whole school basis, and on identified needs within the school community. Nevertheless, such funding was never allocated to schools on a systematic basis, thus securing professional learning opportunities remained unpredictable, leading to unequal access. Such experiences suggest a growing systemic awareness of the potential of professional learning communities, while commitment to their funding continued to be perceived as optional rather than essential.

Maggie is committed to her own learning and that of her colleagues, and clearly delights in the opportunities presented to other female colleagues by career breaks to enable them to invest in child-rearing and various forms of renewal. However, she has been prepared to sacrifice work-life balance as the following self-reflective and self-critical moment indicates:

In my study, that’s what I invested in, not in myself you see. If I’d walked and looked after myself I’d be a lot better off probably, I wouldn’t [be] heavy. But anyway, that was my choice you see. (Maggie, Int. 4, 2007)

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<sup>9</sup>When I arrived in Conor’s home town to conduct the second interview in December 2000 by prior arrangement, I eventually discovered that, along with approximately thirty other adults, he was in a local hostelry playing cards for a Christmas Turkey! In the circumstances, the interview was conducted the following day!

In her case, she suggests that sacrificing work-life balance in pursuit of further learning was, for her, a sacrifice worth making. From a life history perspectives also, this time was hers, having reared her family, thus life stages rather than career stages may be a significant influence individual choice. More generally, Michelle appears more committed to collaborative learning, for Conor more opportunistic, and for Maggie individual.

Eddie (1993–2006) is the youngest of this cohort chronologically speaking. He was also the youngest at the time of appointment to principalship. He was already investing in a principalship trajectory as he was registered for a postgraduate diploma in management, an informally recognised ‘requirement’ to be in contention, as part of professionalising the principalship, particularly younger applicants. There is a gender dimension to his learning as well as professional trajectory evident in the following:

... going back to 1992 [the year prior to his appointment as principal] I was in the middle of studying for the diploma in educational management in [names institution] and a number of colleagues on that course had been applying for principalships and I had been thinking about it also. (Eddie, Int. 4, 2007)

Amongst his male peers when a student teacher, apart from a degree of bravura, there was an awareness of their male minority status (Drudy 2009),<sup>10</sup> thus on a fast-track to principalship: “I remember a number of the fellas in my class talking on a number of occasions, ... about how many years it would be before you would be principal” (Int. 1, 2000). He contrasts his initial teacher education experience with his more recent desire to learn:

I suppose I would have felt that the theory was quite isolated from the actual classroom and I found later on in my career going back as a post grad student that relating the theory to the practice and the experience that was what motivated me in later studies. That was absent in my initial training. (Eddie, Int. 1, 2000)

He was also keen, like Alison, to find practical application for more theoretical constructs he was now encountering:

I had learned from my management course ... the celebration of success and I deliberately would take a personal backseat in receiving applause for anything that was done at school level, I would always stress the team and ... and I think that motivated people as well. (Eddie, Int. 4, 2007)

The following vignette also speaks to changing times, of recognition that the role of principal was becoming increasingly complex and demanding. He explains that a disappointed internal candidate commented:

... what has he done study for or what has he got that I haven’t got and somebody said, well he’s done a bit of study or he’s into management or something and she says, well he’s not running a supermarket, like does he think he’s running a team or a supermarket or what would you need it in ... a 5 teacher school for. ... within 3 years, she had followed on the same course ... (Eddie, Int. 4, 2007)

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<sup>10</sup>For more than two decades, the number of male entrants to primary teaching in the Republic of Ireland has remained remarkably consistent at approximately 10 %.

Such comments are indicative of changing times, where learning is perceived as more than accumulating experience, more explicable through the lens of “culture, ethnicity, personality and political ethos” (Brookfield, 1995, quoted in Day and Gu 2010, p. 28). In the absence of systemic support for principals, they frequently turn to those closest for sustenance. Eddie’s partner (a teacher and subsequently a principal too) provided empathy and support: “I certainly would have got a lot of help from my wife . . . and I would discuss a lot with her at home and we would both learn from each other. . . . (Int. 1, 2000).

Courses he attended for principals organised by the teachers’ union, were “quite good” but they frequently reiterated material he had already encountered during his Diploma and Masters programmes. However, on such courses, he was irritated by an apparent default position that in matters of contention between teachers and principals the union perspective was: “that the principal was always the bully.”<sup>11</sup>

He was not a regular attender of principal network meetings because, like others’ perceptions: “They were sort of agony aunt type assemblies . . .” (Int. 4, 2007). Consistent with the disposition of others, he began to share his expertise: “I gave a course for teachers in ICT and I have become involved in tutoring for Science for . . . [courses]. I gave a course along with a colleague to 40 teachers during the Summer” (Int. 4, 2007).

Amidst this maelstrom of learning and leading, he also supported his wife as she completed a Masters, but he provides evidence also that capacity is finite and sustainability a necessary watch word. He can switch off, and prefers to leave school matter at the schoolhouse door, though contentious issues have a habit of following you home! His DIY interests provide a haven similar to Michelle’s garden:

Well apart from doing administrative things on the computer at home I would tend to leave most of the work where it is. Emotionally I don’t like to bring things with me. . . . My hobbies are very much in the DIY sort of thing and if I get stuck into a good engine I forget about school. Something completely different. (Eddie, Int. 2, 2000)

Commitment to learning, having confidential and empathetic support, and a safe haven in which to ruminate on work and life emerge as the necessities built into the professional life raft of principals in particular, without suggesting that they are sufficient (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). There is accumulating evidence also that support groups may not always be learning communities, or not at all, and the evidence among this cohort continues to suggest that learning leadership is a personal choice even if it becomes more of a necessity due to increasing complexity, systemic support for it, though evident in some respects is ad hoc. But is such self-selected learning to be jettisoned when intensification and performativity roam the educational landscape?

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<sup>11</sup>In this regard it should be noted that it continues to be the case that there is no ‘grievance procedure’ whereby a principal may take formal issue with the behaviour of a teacher.

## Leadership Learning—Intensification and the Role of the Informal?

(Cohort Three: Dick, Kate, Rose, Denise)

To avoid unnecessary duplication throughout the remainder of this chapter, additional dimensions of professional learning are the primary focus, while simultaneously attempting to retain the significance of context/life history.

All four were appointed to principalship in the latter half of the 1990s though only one (Rose) was in the process of completing a masters. Dick (1994-) the youngest member of the staff by some years, recalls with a tone of considerable anxiety: “I didn’t know who I was to turn to for support, there really was nothing.” By the time the formal programmes provided by LDS were available, he was “. . . well established as a principal so it was more what the likes of me could give to LDS, so I was a mentor organiser here for [the area].” Being the youngest member of staff, and without additional qualifications, he laid bare his vulnerability as follows: “I don’t know more than these people, I had just taken on the role of being captain of a team and that’s the way I had to treat it and I made that clear to them. I’m just the team captain . . .” (Int. 1, 2000). He describes the advent of IPPN annual conferences as akin to “a shot of adrenaline” but his confidence betrayed him initially: “I remember I didn’t even go to the dinner, I just felt sure, who will I talk to! But by the following year, I felt a little bit better, . . .” (Int. 4, 2007). His subsequent and ongoing contribution to the shaping of the network indicates his input into his own and others’ learning/capacity, where per-fessional engagement integrates in a cumulative manner *social capital* with *professional capital* (see Hargreaves and Fullan 2012, pp. 78–102). The nature and benefits of networks are evident in the following:

I made such friends out of it, I have friends all over the country, a network of people who were expert in all kinds of areas that I could draw on. I found I had areas that I could help with and throw back in return. It has been extraordinary and I think we have done, I don’t like to overestimate . . . but in terms of bringing schools to where they are today I think IPPN is right up there and I think, even undervalued, even at government level, . . . (Dick, Int. 4, 2007)

When interviewed in 2007, Dick’s circumstances had evolved—the family had 3 children, his wife was principal of a small rural school and his enrolments had grown sufficiently to enable him to be an administrative principal. When asked as to how this had impacted, his combined sense of irony and humour revealed: “Well, my biggest change was that I began to be able to sleep better and that was the biggest physical change.” (Int. 4, 2007). His trajectory indicates also how when personal circumstances alter, it is necessary to re-calibrate commitments, thus drama, sport and other extra-curricular contributions have to be balanced with increasing family responsibilities, even in circumstances where job satisfaction is very high: “I think I have a very manageable job now and it’s a job I absolutely love, I’m very very happy at it and I wouldn’t change.” Nevertheless, “Life is very very busy, work is the one constant in it in many ways. I can see why people mightn’t want to change that if they have young children” (Int. 4, 2007).



The very notion of work-life balance and per-fessional resonance therefore varies from person to context, time and place, but when things are going ‘well’, there is a kind of thriving, where capacity, multiple responsibilities and challenges work in tandem, creating and re-creating energy and enthusiasms in the process. Such per-fessional dynamics capture what others have described as “an interior conversation” whereby individuals “work out their position on things define courses of action; create stories and life missions, . . . a person’s map of learning and way of understanding of how they act in the world” (Goodson et al. 2010, p. 133). However, as the role of school leaders becomes more complex and prescribed, what is “personally significant” is vulnerable to being “colonised by educational, economic and social systems” (Ibid.). Consequently, there is a thin line between thriving and the treadmill of performativity:

I have lots of time to spend with my kids. I’m not saying I go home every evening energised to look after them; there are times when the very nice principal in school that gets on with the kids can be a troll of a daddy! (Dick, Int. 3, 2007)

Kate (1997–2006) came to the role of principal at an advanced professional life phase. Like others (Rose, Maggie and Brent) she was the first lay principal in the school. At the time of her final interview, she had recently taken early retirement.<sup>12</sup> Despite being the most senior staff member, lack of preparation did not instil confidence:

None whatsoever, and I remember people would come in and ask me different questions and I would say how would I know that, because I had the small background, because you don’t worry about the administration of it, you know the rules and the regulations, but that was all totally new to me and even still I don’t know if I - well I do, I read up on what I need to get me through. (Kate, Int. 1, 2000).

From the BoM perspective, there was continuity, and a ‘safe pair of hands’ was being given the tiller, and this was prioritised over preparation for the role (Sugrue and Furlong 2002). Her sense of responsibility is “taking care of everybody” and despite significant continuities, there was awareness too of legacies to be redressed: “I remember back and thinking well this is one of the best staffs and nobody ever told us that you know.” Unlike Dick, at a significantly earlier career phase, Kate appears to operate within a received principal paradigm, while having peripheral participation on national and local networks, preferring “if you kinda open your eyes and ears” rather than anything approaching ‘systemic leadership’ (Hopkins 2007) now deemed necessary and the building of ‘professional capital’ for such sustainable improvement (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). Her preferred approach to dilemmas being: “. . . I’d probably ring up someone who has far more experience, I would pick out the fella who knows all these things . . .”. She portrays a sense of

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<sup>12</sup>Consistent with her cohort, Kate could have had 40 years of pensionable service on or before reaching the age of 60, thus beyond 60, for many remaining until 65 becomes optional, thus depending on personal circumstances and the perceived sense of the demands of the role, principals may choose when to retire, at any point during the school year, something that is disruptive and signals a lack of attention to succession planning, and a disregard for the significance often attached to school leadership in policy rhetorics.

continuity: “But again you see I suppose a good beginning was good relationships and that everybody was working together for the good of the children so when you start there it was easy to . . .” (Int. 4, 2007). No matter how positive the social capital evident in local network relationships, it is highly unlikely that on its own, it has the capacity to build adequate human capital (expertise), particularly professional capital sufficient to transform school communities (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). Though parenting her six children is no longer an issue, she recognises that it is necessary to set limits to ‘greedy work’: “You could be out 5 nights out of the week and you have to be selective at the end”. She applies the same selectivity to course attendance while for her getting respite by “Go[ing] . . . for a walk [on the beach] as often as I could, you know. I suppose walking . . . I suppose.”. Kate’s testimony suggests that preparation for the role is vital if more than maintenance of the status quo is required.

Rose (1999–2001) indicates that the time she spent in principalship was too short to have real impact or to see the fruits of one’s efforts to transform the culture of a convent girls’ school. Rose was an outsider in mid-career. She had completed post-graduate work, had taught abroad, had worked in a school with a reputation for innovation, and in many respects was keen to advance here career while being ambitious and impatient for change. The stresses of putting one’s hand on the tiller without any direct preparation for the role, become evidence. Consequently, the tone is one of mild disbelief that the job entails meetings with parents, who are often distressed:

I kept tissues in my desk because they’d [parents] often be crying there as well. In fact, towards the end of the period I got a very nasty pneumonia which I’m pretty sure I could put down to one interview with a particular parent who came in with it, . . . (Rose, Int 4, 2007)

Similarly, there is a sense that the role is more physically demanding: “. . . you’re on your feet a lot because just the physical aspect of watching kids in the yard and bringing them in and you’re up and down a big old building, lots of stairs” while time commitments eat into family time: “I didn’t get to parent teacher meetings for my own children during that period, because of my commitment to the school and wanting to be there” (Int. 4, 2007). However, there were aspects of her considerable professional development portfolio that she could draw on: “making presentations perhaps, . . . planning a curriculum or planning a policy in relation to . . . and negotiating. Getting your way and not getting your way and how to get your way.” (Int. 4, 2007). Nevertheless, she is very definite that much more support is needed at this particular stage—“there is no support in the system” and “that ad hoc in the system is very frustrating” (Int. 1, 2000).

Familiarity with the role emerges as axiomatic, while professional development pursued exclusively in one’s own time appears to run counter to how ‘professional capital’ is increasingly understood, cultivated, enhanced and sustained. She says:

I think of professional development as something I do in my own time. I do not really want to be in principals . . . groups because if they are in my own time then it is too much like work which should happen in work time. I do not quite know really. I think a lot of it is actually informational things, financial things, administrative things. It is knowing totally what might be required and expected also within the role, . . . (Rose, Int. 2, 2000)

Perhaps her personal preference for academic work as a place of respite from leadership responsibilities, strongly suggests not only better preparation for the role but much more sophisticated processes of selection:

I would have to say my greatest relief during all of that was any kind of academic work, or any kind of, or even a little bit of reviewing or working on tail end of my masters, or anything like that to me was complete zone out from the minutiae of the day to day. (Rose, Int. 4, 2007)

Though her partner too was involved in education, she avoided the kitchen table as a community of practice. She remarks, while others “have their golf or they confide in their spouses about all those things but why labour them with all those little conversations – he said, she said kind of stuff” (Int. 4, 2007). Postgraduate work emerges as inadequate preparation for the role, even if personally fulfilling, while there appears to be considerable dissonance between the personal and professional.

Denise (1999-) provides both an interesting and informative contrast. Younger, less experienced, having taught in one school only, by her own admission the principalship fell vacant too soon for her. Nevertheless, her commitment and resilience in getting to grips with the role and its attendant learning curve are instructive. Being an Irish language medium school, there is a sense in which her extended community of practice was more clearly delineated, while having the advantage of a strong cultural identity. When I visited her home early in 2008 due to the fact that she was on maternity leave for the second time, she indicated that ‘being away’ had taught her a valuable lesson: “having . . . gone away, I know I’m not indispensable and . . . and if I never went back to it, it would still be in very capable hands so there’s a great realisation there as well” (Int. 4, 2008).

Rather like Dick above, Denise too, due to her relative youth and inexperience, felt somewhat out of place and self-conscious: “there weren’t many of my peers who would have been principals and you’d go to something and I felt they were all an awful lot older, looking at me going, you big eejit [idiot], what are you doing going into this job? I did feel intimidated by the others around me.” Her testimony indicates clearly that from classroom to principal’s office in one leap may have a learning gradient that is insurmountable even if: “as the years have grown . . . I have felt more confident in the job”. However, she laments the absence of preparation and support when she commenced the role:

. . . when I started off the LDS thing for newly appointed principals wasn’t there, I would have done that in a flash and I think it would have been great, it wasn’t there, . . . and it was so difficult, you know, even to get your feet on the ground as a newly appointed principal and I think that’s a huge thing, it’s a huge help and I think newly appointed principals who’ve done that course, they’ve built up networks and links and so on. (Denise, Int. 4, 2008)

She applauds the creation of networks by the LDS team, and her testimony is evidence that, at the beginning of the noughties, there is emerging evidence of a system on the move, of bottom up (IPPN) and top down (LDS) support though it is noticeable that the focus is between principals as leaders rather schools as communities of practice (Morgan and Sugrue 2005). Nevertheless, she

expresses reservations regarding ‘forced’ alliances on a geographical basis—a kind of professional ‘balkanization’ (Hargreaves 1994; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). Her comments immediately below also suggest the seduction of ‘group think’; a pre-occupation with the local and immediate to the detriment of the bigger picture:

... so I think you just gravitate towards those people who are at the same stage in development or of the same profile of parents or of children or of staff or whatever and that you sort of gravitate towards them. (Denise, Int. 4, 2008)

Such gatherings may become sheltered safe havens that restrict opportunities to learn.

Perhaps this perspective is best summed up by acknowledging the necessity for ‘loose ties’ rather than ties that bind, with potential to ‘blind’! (Achinstein 2002).

Early in her tenure, the revised primary curriculum was launched (1999) and with it unprecedented levels of professional support. More significant however is her testimony of a staff taking responsibility for its own learning and through collaboration building capacity as a learning community; where initial top down is inverted, and there is a note of excitement and delight in her voice as she recounts:

In the beginning I suppose ... all this planning issue was kind of new to everybody and how to structure planning and so on, ... I found that unless you planned for the planning days .. there was nothing fruitful on the day. We learnt that, kind of quite quickly as a staff and so ... if we plan for a day ourselves, ... we were actually able to achieve an awful lot more as a staff ourselves so you know, ... but again just through learning as a staff and we have come on a huge distance in terms of computers and networking in the school, that we were able to do that. (Denise, Int. 4, 2008)

There is intensification as the informal is more colonised by external demands, requiring a more collective performance. She was grateful from the outset for support from local principals, and if she needed advice “I would have given somebody a ring.” Consistent with other testimony, her ‘out of hours’ support was to be found at the kitchen table, particularly since many of the issue that arrive on a principal’s desk are qualitatively different from issues in your classroom. When staff relations prove difficult and contentious, support is vital, but arguably should not be left to one’s personal circumstances. She says:

In terms of my own health and sanity it was at home, ... Had he [husband] not been there to say cop on and stop worrying it would have been very hard. It would have been very, very hard last year. ... When you have a problem as a principal a lot of them are confidential and things that you can’t discuss with the staff. ...” (Denise, Int. 2, 2000).

Thus, the kitchen table is an oasis of reassurance: “but [names partner] was just brilliant in terms of me coming in wrecked and just worrying. He could take that step back and say hang on there.” Consistent with others and despite having 3 children under the age of three, her appetite for learning is apparent: “On a personal level I went back to doing French and went through doing all the levels again.” She recognises also the importance of being connected to a larger community of learners: “I wasn’t involved in the IPPN last year, but I hope to become involved this year. I feel that it is important” (Int, 2, 2001).

It appears that commitment and resilience are renewed and revitalised through a combination of per-fessional learning, while the precise cocktail combination is not easily determined, varies for individuals depending on context and personal circumstance, while professional career phase too features as significant; necessary wellbeing, while there is increasing evidence that more is needed for transformative leadership (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012) that is sustainable (Hargreaves, and Fink 2005).

## **More Scripted and Performative Leadership Learning?** (Cohort Four: Ben, Sadie, Brent, Janice)

The four principals in this cohort were appointed between 2005 and 2007 at which stage three of the four held masters and had considerable professional development experience. They were already well versed in the give and take of adult learning, albeit in very different context—Sadie and Brent in Dublin’s leafy suburbs, Ben in a small provincial town, and Janice in a rural village.

Ben’s (2005-) enthusiasm for learning speaks to intensification, a combination of ‘self-government’ and systemic performativity, perhaps. While completing his masters degree his single-mindedness meant that he added three and a half stone to his girth, jettisoned his girlfriend, and set up his PC in the bedroom! While still engaged in masters work, and ICT use became more widespread, as Ben says: “the whole came together” but more for entrepreneurial rather than altruistic reasons: “I had started doing night classes, giving computer classes at the time and that helped fund my course and I worked really hard.” Nevertheless, he was growing in confidence while extending his learning. Meantime, he indicates that the pedagogy deployed by his Open University (UK) tutor: “gave me huge confidence.” Having satisfied himself of his academic capability, while simultaneously whetting his appetite for learning, and increased his self-confidence, he subsequently undertook a postgraduate diploma in Special Needs. He was anticipating that because of mainstreaming/inclusion, this was an issue that would grow in significance. His combining of SEN and computer expertise gave him competitive advantage which he deployed to good effect for the benefit of the school:

I had a graduate diploma done so I understood a lot of the conditions and I understood what was needed. SENO’s [Special Education Needs Organiser] were only starting at the time so I followed that and then the documents started being produced online before they were even sent down by post and I was able to get a lot of applications in, so much so . . . I meet the SENO 4 or 5 times a year whereas most schools only meet her once. (Ben, Int. 2, 2007)

However, deploying his expertise entails new responsibilities that extend to principal ‘activism’ (Sachs 2004), making demands on the system:

. . . it’s huge workload because no matter how tired you are with it, it’s the child you’re trying to benefit and if that child has a need you’re going to send off that application and you’re going to fight for it and then when the SENO says no, you’re still going to fight for the child because you know that that child has a problem . . . (Ben, Int. 2, 2007)

When I commented to Ben that this appeared to represent a major commitment on his part, he responded: “I’d say when things are real busy, it’s about 60–70 % of my job at the moment.” In a system where each school has to battle to secure resources for individual learners, even if sporadic and intermittent, it represents a major addition to principals’ workload, something that is exacerbated considerably when the ‘rules of the game’ are frequently altered, often with the deliberate intent of making it more difficult to secure learners’ entitlements.<sup>13</sup> It becomes evident too that his combination of computer skills and understanding of SEN gives him access and competitive advantage, something that NPM would commend.

During the most recent interview, Ben had married (his temporarily jettisoned girlfriend); enrolments had increased sufficiently to enable him to be an administrative principal, thus he felt more in control and up to the challenges while finding regular time also to practice his golf swing. Nevertheless, intensification is evident, while his learning appears more strategic from a career advancement perspective, thus also more scripted to systemic needs.

Sadie (2006-) was particularly strategic in seeking a principalship, while at the time of appointment her extensive professional portfolio was impressive (see Chap. 4). Despite this accumulation, she identified finance as a gap in her expertise from an early stage. The matter was complicated further by the particular history of the school and the personalities and expertise of parents involved. Consequently, much of her first year was spent spending very little and since her former treasurer controlled the finances, she no longer wished to operate in the dark. However, she seized the moment to fill the gap in her learning, and had the confidence to further her own learning proactively:

So then I began to negotiate with the accountant after the treasurer resigned. We got a new treasurer and we were all kind of learning together so I asked for an electronic package and I want training. He got me an electronic package and he trained me. Now, I’m entering everything, we’d get to the stage where [name’s school secretary] [would] be entering and I’m checking and the treasurer’s checking and the accountant’s checking so it would be check, check, check, check. So we’ve got that to a good stage where the accountant said our books were magic at the end of the year, that we had a small surplus, that we had spent well, what did he say, he said we’d caught up on spending! (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

Crucially, there is a learning curve to get on top of finances, but not as an end in itself, but as a means of furthering her vision for improving the quality of teaching and learning:

Obviously there were drains to be fixed, you know, so there was the capital stuff, . . . . We spent a fair bit on classroom materials, I’d say that was my biggest focus. . . . since September this year we upgraded all our I.T. equipment so we have good working I.T. equipment in every classroom and in the general areas where we have computers . . . . (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

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<sup>13</sup>On June 25th 2013, Carl O’ Brien reported in the Irish Times that “Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn has reversed planned cuts to special needs supports following a public backlash.” In this instance it is parent power rather than principal power that led to this reversal. However, it is illustrative of the fact that, principals as advocates, receives heightened significance in times of austerity (See Anderson, 2009).

But, being a good resource provider, dealing with maintenance and upgrading the learning environment generally suggest vision and proactive leadership; collaboration and sharing of expertise is axiomatic to Sadie's vision for developing the school. She illustrates this by reference to the necessity to integrate learning support into mainstream classrooms and strongly suggests that resisting such reforms is unacceptably professionally. As she says: "you don't choose whether or not you have an SNA, you don't choose whether or not to introduce best practice, it's just a matter of how you introduce it." A combination of experience, expertise, vision, confidence and a strong sense of what being principal entails results in the following:

That is really how I feel about it and I think sometimes when you feel strongly about something you can promote it, not necessarily shove it down people's throats but it's kind of fait accompli, how else would you do it? . . . It's just not on in this day and age and I don't think anybody needs to have a row about it or even to state it terribly strongly. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

Such positive assertions are a considerable remove from the tentative and tepid initial forays other informants attempted as they found their feet. Her extensive provision of CPD has taught her that resistance to change is frequently because "they don't understand a lot of the time. Most of it is, I can't work out how to do it." There is a very definite commitment on her part to collaborative learning that moves teachers beyond classroom isolation, and this agenda has been furthered in an imaginative manner whereby the assistant principal in the school has combined it with the mentoring of NQTs, thus melding important capacity building issues into a significant CPD initiative within the school community. Effectively, the assistant principal has "linked mentoring and learning support. . . . She's introducing little projects and programmes in the classrooms and, for the people who are actually new, she sits down with them and goes over their planning with them, she gives them ideas, she observes things in the class, she does demo lessons." She comments also that this collegial, bottom-up approach to building capacity has potential to transform school culture, thus "people respond, really respond to that because its collegiate, it's not somebody looking down and saying that's how it has to be done." Nevertheless, such re-forms are made easier by an external policy environment the rhetoric of which is more performative (Ball 2003).

But, building sustainable learning communities also necessitates challenging colleagues to re-think what professional responsibility entails. Sadie recognises this as a delicate balancing act that may be difficult to get 'right'; it's corrective rather than coercive effect is often determined by the quality of relationships and a positive climate more generally within the school:

I like people to get on. I like people to make an effort. I see professionalism as a given . . . but I would step in when I see that something is not right and I found it very hard in the beginning to say, I need to have a word with you. . . . I did it and I didn't produce a stick and the place didn't fall down and somebody wasn't falling apart after I did it, so I obviously didn't hit them too hard. I found it didn't take as much out of me over time. It was hard . . . to eyeball another adult and say, that practice really isn't something that we would accept here. I wouldn't put it even like that. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

By contrast, it took Alison 14 years to cross this particular Rubicon. Sadie is a highly organised person, and she suggests that this helps her to keep a good work-life balance, something she is proud of:

I don't have the secret, no, I don't. Sometimes I think if you work hard enough during the day and manage to concentrate enough during the day you actually get things done . . . . . sometimes . . . things happen and you end up not being able to do what you set for that day, that week, that month or whatever but you have to set for the day, the week, the month. You have to be organised, you have to have a system of some kind that works for you. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

Her partner is self-employed and works a 12-h day so domestic responsibilities fall to her, including homework supervision of two teenagers. She is critical of principals whom she has encountered in network meetings whom she describes as “living the job as opposed to living their lives.” When I’m here [in school], I live the job and I go home then and it’s homework, homework, homework and dinner, dinner, dinner and then it’s the evening” (Int. 2, 2007). She retires early and rises “at quarter past six and walk for half an hour with the dog and then I’m in work mode. I try to keep my life separate, I don’t like getting text’s and phone calls at home or at the weekend” (Int. 2, 2007). Clearly, being confident and competent allows for a more assertive leadership that challenges colleagues while there are implications also that lack of preparation for the role results in principals being ‘married’ to the job. Although there are echoes of a more constrained school culture, there is evidence too of challenging colleague’s sense of professionalism and responsibility that builds ‘professional capital’ (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). However, there is a sense also of an emerging ‘governmentality’, of a discourse on leadership that is more scripted, and in a particular language with potential to be “a subtle form of discipline” rather than leadership (Gillies 2013, p. 26).

Brent (2006-) too had an impressive professional portfolio when appointed as the first lay principal to this middle-class girls’ school, but he was initially surprised that some parents needed reassurance of continuity; that “the identity of the school would be preserved” and that the “new principal . . . he’s going to change the uniform”. However, he regards these as minor distractions that should not divert attention from priorities: “ensuring that the learning experiences that we’re providing from junior infants up to sixth are of the highest standard, . . . that the school is always progressing” (Int. 2, 2007). Consequently, he appears to forge an acceptable synergy between the language of NPM and the school’s traditions when he says:

. . . they’re the real challenges of the job, to make sure that the standard that’s associated with [the religious order that ran the school] . . . has been traditionally associated with an academic standard as well, which is very important because that’s what the business of school’s about, but it’s more than that, it’s about holistic education, it’s about every aspect of the curriculum being offered in the way that you’d hope it to be offered and keeping all of those balls in the air. (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

He articulates clearly more than any of the other informants a recognition of the school and system need to build capacity, while talking about his role with a keen eye to the future and the past:



... it's very easy for new principals to bury themselves in the issues that are more easily accessible shall we say, ... the writing of a draft of policy. That's unthreatening because you're not interacting with people, you're not trying to influence what's happening, you're not trying to lead change, you're not trying to lead people which is the more challenging aspect of the job and the one aspect of the job that, I suppose it's only now that we're beginning, or I'm beginning to feel that I'm influencing, is that leading curriculum and leading what it is we're doing in the classroom, .... (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

Some readers may identify this as highly performative, providing evidence of the language of NPM, yet his sense of purpose is combined with a set of values that provide a moral compass when it is necessary to stand up to a self-interested parent:

It was a real test of character at the time and I suppose it brought home to me at an early stage, how the strength of character that is required to stand your ground and say, even though this is unpopular, even though I know you don't agree with me and you're not going to be happy with me, I know this is in the best interest of a) the school as a whole and b) probably your child .... (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

In standing up to certain individuals, apart from being a test of character, inherent in such encounters also is commitment to particular beliefs and values; what others have identified as "moral purposes, care, courage and hopefulness" (Christopher Day and Gu 2010, pp. 190–192). He recognises also that in a school of this size in particular, 'heroic' (Lowney 2003) or 'super' (Copland 2001) leadership is not an option but distributing leadership may also represent "a subtle form of discipline ... how [leaders'] shape themselves and understand themselves [and their colleagues] within the leadership game" (Gillies 2013, p28):

... because you can never adequately do every aspect of the job to the standard that you would like ... because that's impossible but then that's where you have to learn to delegate and that's where you have to include your team and that's where you have to make sure that if you do delegate, that it's delegation with responsibility, it's not delegation that they feel that they're going to show you what they have done and then you have to .... (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

For some, such a narrative recognises the significance of distributed leadership (Spillane and Diamond 2007), for others the 'business' of schooling suggest a colonising influence of NPM. Such considerations notwithstanding, it is a distinct advantage if you embrace the role, and are emotionally connected and engaged (Day and Gu 2010):

... I love the job and therefore in loving the job, it doesn't take as much of an emotional toll because you know that elements of it are part of the job and therefore either a) you put up with, you get on with them or see them as an opportunity for turning it into a positive .... (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

Nevertheless, in order for him to pursue his passion, his wife resigned a very well paid position to be the primary career of their two children:

... I couldn't do the job here if she was to continue with the demanding job that she had which in some respects was ... far more demanding but equivalent to principalship, ... She was much better paid than I was and yet something had to give and she was the person who was prepared to give. (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

As a consequence of this sacrifice and support, and, of course, considerable loss of income, he is spared a certain amount of guilt: “you always feel guilty, but not as guilty as I might have done about trudging back out” in the evening. More importantly, from his perspective, he “can give that commitment to the job because I have that support and then having a young family of 2 children, . . . and when I go home, I’m home and whatever is happening here, it rarely impacts and impinges.” Yet, he does admit to the odd sleepless night where “you wake up, either with an epiphany or with a cold sweat, you know that kind of thing!” (Int. 2, 2007). He is passionate about sport, and says: “I love my golf but haven’t played in 4 months, that tells you something” yet he appears to recognise this as a current necessity since: “I’ve buried myself more in the family in the last while, only because I recognise the sacrifice that [names wife] has made and I feel that the least I can do is to, when I’m not in school . . . that I’m there [home] and I’m helping out. I enjoy it anyway. That’s the work/life balance at the moment.” (Int. 2, 2007). The ‘at the moment’ dimension recognises the inevitable metamorphoses of per-fessional life phases more likely to be anticipated rather than passively received. Though perhaps still in honeymoon phase in the role, there is an emotional jiving of the per-fessional that is palpable, even if elements of a more performative culture are evident also.

Janice, (2007-), in the role a matter of weeks only when first interviewed and without formal preparation, indicated: “I’m still in the honeymoon period” (Int. 1, 2007). Being principal of a village school, she did not anticipate the extent to which she would be a public figure. Thus, parents “whose lives aren’t going quite so well at the moment” seek both advice as well as a shoulder to cry on, while matters that happen in the community are more likely also to impact within the school such as tragedy and bereavement. She remarks: “I didn’t realise it as much—how much of a community figure you are, that didn’t occur to me.” By contrast, veteran Fred recognised and relished his community leadership role from the outset.

She has been in the fortunate position of being able to recruit new staff and recognises the advantage conferred on her since “they look to their first principal as their role model as such.” Being a staff of 9 teachers she can be a mentor for these NQTs, thus providing important leadership in a low key manner. Her commitment and enthusiasm are very evident in the following, while evidence too of an identity in transition is presented: “I mean I love this job, I know it’s still the honeymoon period, I enjoy this job, I do sometimes miss the kids, I mean miss the actual the kids coming in, . . . (Int. 2, 2007)

In the absence of formal preparation, similarly, she is surprised by what the role entails particularly regarding maintenance and furniture, remarking: “there’s more of that than I thought there would be” (Int. 2, 2007). Amusingly, she relates that a local dog was adding to her responsibilities in the school yard: “I was going around every morning putting cones over pooh so I didn’t expect that certainly, I did not” (Int., 2, 2007). Such are the realities of leading a village school! There are hints too of how and why the immediate takes precedent over the important when she declares, “. . . a plan not being done won’t affect the day to day running really but something not working in a classroom or whatever, door not being open, will affect and will cause a lot of grief” (Int. 2, 2007). She recognises that there

is “a huge amount of admin work but that can be done . . . in your own time” thus she has already prioritised being “involved with the classes” (Int. 2, 2007). Her sense of the role thus far is that she has the confidence to project an air of authority, without the pretence of knowing everything. She has found her initial meeting of principals through the LDS programme for newly appointed principals very useful, especially the informal conversations, but at the time of interview she had yet to attend her first IPPN meeting or INTO forum. Since she commenced the role, her family have remarked: “Gosh, you’re spending a lot of hours” while she does not intend to stay in post until she is 65. She regards herself as a ‘private’ person, sociable, but not given to too much socialisation with colleagues. When colleagues who live more locally talk of family, children and local issues, she prefers to keep her own counsel. Her testimony suggests that lack of formal preparation for the role leads to several surprises, with consequences as to what is prioritised within the role.

This cohort, as might be expected, emerges as more strategic regarding their own learning, thus it is less informal, less serendipitous, while there is evidence too that the language of NPM seeps into their narratives. Consequently, the policy climate, coupled with the pace of change requires a more formal approach to learning, while this leaves learning more vulnerable to being colonised by the language and logic of NPM, a more scripted approach to leadership and capacity building with potential to be coercive as well as empowering. Preparation for the role emerges also as more likely to encourage proactive, agentic leadership rather than being pre-occupied with legacies as matters to be dealt with delicately rather than being the basis of transformation. Domestic and family support continues to be important, while networking and cultivation of a professional portfolio becomes more of a necessity within this more scripted terrain.

## Conclusions

Across the four principal cohorts, the sources of sustenance shift over time from an overwhelming reliance on informal, serendipitous opportunities to learn coupled with domestic and family support and sacrifice, to more formal, accredited and strategic approaches to per-fessional portfolio development. While the veteran cohort was allowed to grow into the role, this too facilitated a sense of leadership as an extension of personality, personal bent and inclination. As the role becomes more complex, this sense of personal leadership leitmotif fades in favour of more scripted learning. While informality remains, and continues to be important, the emergence of the IPPN as well as LDS, bottom up and top down to the increasing complexity of the role and its responsibilities, these opportunities to learn render the process more susceptible, precisely because it is more organised and centralised, to the colonising influence of the increasingly pervasive discourse of NPM, leading to a more scripted approach to leadership. And, while there is evidence that such scripted perspectives have potential to cultivate capacity within school communities,

there emerges too a sense that power relations are altered. There is less an awareness of macro influences, while awareness of national policy diktats and their attendant language has become more evident.

Work-life balance emerges as both real and ephemeral. As long as golf, gardening, forestry, mechanics, and walking are available, they provide a kind of imaginary as well as real safe haven where time for one's self and reflection are available and necessary source of renewal. What is not clear is how long these spaces remain unused before even their imagined availability any longer contributes to a sense of balance, of well-being. Sadie and Brent in particular suggest that preparation for the role is vitally necessary so that individuals are not overwhelmed by its responsibilities, while such perceptions implicitly suggest also that when this does not occur, individuals are more likely to be defined by the role and its particular school legacies, rather than shaping it significantly. Without such preparation, particularly at an early stage in the role, having the character and moral compass to take a stand becomes less likely. Rather, an incumbent is more likely to be overwhelmed by the sense of obligation, as evidenced in the previous chapter, to keep the peace and to respect legacies. While there may always be a place for the comment that the role entails 'more than I thought' its increased complexity strongly suggests that preparation, a judicious mix of the informal and the formal, has potential to enable leaders to begin with a vision, a greater 'business' sense even, to transform the school community rather than take over as the principal. Thus, for all its attractiveness and potential, it emerges also that individual learning trajectories of principals, no matter how well executed, are unlikely to build the kind of 'professional capital' that systemic reform evidently now entails (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Hopkins 2007). If every school is to be 'a great school' then there needs to be much more evidence of the 'layering of leadership' in its various phases, in the life cycles of schools and the career stages of principals (Day et al. 2011). The personal and professional continue to be important; how these are configured in a context where scripted learning has become more dominant is a matter to be revisited, even if there is recognition that principals are increasingly being obliged to develop "biographical solutions to structural problems" (Beck 1992, p. 137).

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**Part III**  
**Policy, Practice & Principalship**

## Chapter 6

# Doing Leadership: The Significance of Inter-personal Relationships?

### Introduction

There is general recognition among participants that staff relationships are critical to positive working environments, to everyday routines, and moving a school forward with a degree of collaboration, purpose and cohesion. However, in a system where teacher mobility is more static than stable, heavily circumscribed since teachers are employed by individual schools rather than districts, there is a tendency to privilege ‘good’ relationships. Principals are acutely aware that the interstices of these interpersonal dynamics as both conduit and constraint on their agency as leader and their professional (re-)formation. Consequently, personal agency through which leadership is enacted entails elements of exchange that are functionally transactional but, depending on their quality, regularity and density have potential to build trust in ways that sow the seeds of transformation. These exchanges become more pressured and intense as versions of NPM increasingly find their way into policy prescriptions; principals are obliged to deal with the tension between demands of performativity and the maintenance of positive professional relationships. How these interpersonal leadership (in-)tensions are ‘navigated’ over time is the focus of this chapter. They create what I describe as the Zone of Proximal Distance (ZPD) with significance for leadership preparation and CPD more generally.

Trust has been in retreat for some time (Putnam 2000). Trust in institutions—international and national, and in the people who populate these leadership positions—has been betrayed too often by some leaders in various professional spheres (Sugrue 2011). Yet, there is increasing evidence that relationships are critical to the health and vitality of organisations, including schools (Bryk and Schneider 2002). But trust as a term is attributed meanings that are “many, varied and often opaque” (Hardin 2008, p. 42). De Toqueville wrote of nineteenth century Americans that they understood “that the interests of others are entwined with their own” (see Kohn 2008, p. 82). From a policy perspective a sense of trust is vital if self-interest and a sense of the common good are to be held in productive tension



(see Stone 2002). Although trust is elusive, the interactions, their nature, density and quality, are immediate and visceral since they create mutual interdependence that recognises ‘vulnerabilities’ while seeking not to be paralysed by them.<sup>1</sup> The work of Bryk and Schneider (2002, p. 43) highlights the fact that key characteristics of such interpersonal relations have their rootedness in the individual—“respect, personal regard, core role competencies and personal integrity.” The primary concern in this chapter therefore is the cross-over between the personal and the professional through interpersonal relations. Although power dynamics in the Irish context may have placed a particular premium on the fostering and maintenance of good interpersonal relationships within the school community, international research too has established the significance of ‘relational trust’ (Bryk and Schneider 2002). The particular contribution of this chapter then is close scrutiny of how such interpersonal relations alter over time as they are buffeted by a changing policy environment, and their impact on how leadership is enacted and understood. From a methodological perspective, while the integrity of the cohorts is maintained, threaded through their testimony over time, is how interpersonal relations are enacted and how these impact on the practise of leadership.

## **Interpersonal Relations: Maintaining Continuity** (Cohort One: Fred, Alison, Jack, Jim)

While Fred (1971–2010) regards “staff relations as vital” and himself as “a consensus type person” he admits good humouredly that his spouse “will say I’m a feckin’ demagogue”. He puts this in context with colleagues when he declares:

I would say, I have certain ideas and I’ll put them out and if the staff buy into them fine, and if they don’t buy into them fine I’ll still go ahead with them. I mean in my own class it does filter through the school. But I would never impose on other people this is what you should do, this is what you will do. I’d never do that because I think that if you do that people are unwilling. (Fred, Int. 1, 2000)

Fred likes to think that his colleagues: “would see me as consensus type of person. They would see me as having a healthy disregard for red tape. They would see me as maybe being a little bit confrontational with Cigirí [inspectors] because I expect more off them,” yet he does not appear to demand the same high standards of his colleagues. Rather, he appears to do as he pleases in his own classroom but with some expectation of a ‘trickle down’ effect. Within the larger cultural context, he is a product of an authoritarian patriarchal society (Hofstede et al. 2010), thus suggesting a predisposition to the Davy Crockett school of leadership—‘be always sure your right, then go ahead’!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For an in-depth analysis of the significance of ‘vulnerability’ in the lives and work of teachers see—Kelchtermans 2009, 2011 and on principals- see Kelchtermans, Piot and Ballet, 2011.

<sup>2</sup>According to Wikipedia, Colonel David Crockett (August 17, 1786 – March 6, 1836) was a celebrated 19th-century American folk hero, frontiersman, soldier and politician; usually referred

Of their cohort and generation, Fred and Jack are predisposed to leading from the front, and their interpersonal engagements are couched in these terms where ‘doing’ and its immediacy is relatively intolerant of the deliberative process. Rather, as Jack states: “The thing about sitting around and playing with stuff is all very fine, but there is a job to be done here kids, and I would have kinda persuaded others”. However, he immediately retreats from what he perceives as over-statement: “I was going to say imposed it on others, but almost imposed it on others, but not so much against their will but as something that I believed works, . . .” (Jack, Int. 1, 2000). Other data are supportive of the view that he has a strong orientation towards making his mind up, and then seeking to persuade others. However, as the school grew from green-field site to a larger teaching staff and a non-teaching role for Jack, the manner in which he related to colleagues altered:

I think that my initial leadership style was I was one of the boys, we are all in this together and we will all move on, and if you come up with something . . . we will all try to incorporate that in. In other word, we all kinda did our own thing. Now that was good. (Jack, Int. 1, 2000)

It was ‘good’ due to a sense of them all pulling together rather than merely ‘doing their own thing’. Nevertheless, Jack was not blessed in the relationship he had with his deputy over several years, and this tended to make it more difficult also for him to trust colleagues. After the initial pioneering period, he was taken aback to discover that colleagues were now competing for access to the principal. He says: “I found that very disconcerting, because it took a long while for it to dawn on me as to what was happening. Again, even though, you might think that I’m reflective, I obviously wasn’t reflecting on that aspect of it” (Int. 1, 2000).

His retrospective analysis suggests that efforts to gain his attention were seeking ‘favour’, thus a betrayal of trust. What emerges is a tension between engagement and distance and the extent to which trust suffers when there is defensiveness in the interactions. It may be suggested also that in the absence of a sense of (shared) vision, gaining access to the principal, being an ‘insider’ puts a premium on such relationships rather than common purpose; good interpersonal relations as ends in themselves.

From his ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (Lortie 1975), given that he was particularly close to the principal of the school where he was deputy principal prior to his appointment, Jack indicates that they made decisions and then: “we kinda sucked them in as well to be honest.” Such an apprenticeship seems to have created a particular pre-disposition to interpersonal exchanges:

If you are right about this shared management, there is a sense in which these people these people should be writing their own job descriptions, alright and that’s a bit too big for me. Because I don’t trust people enough or perhaps I don’t trust particular individuals enough or whatever. So there are all those issues around. (Jack, Int. 1, 2000)

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to as Davy Crockett and by the popular title “King of the Wild Frontier”. He represented Tennessee in the U.S. House of Representatives, served in the Texas Revolution, and died at the age of 49 at the Battle of the Alamo.

Intellectually, Jack understands the potential of shared or distributed leadership, but his comments suggest that, in the hands of some at least, it has potential to become licence to write their own leadership script thus potentially undermining his authority as principal, while not necessarily making a contribution to the leadership of the school. Yet, he describes his colleagues as “an extraordinary good bunch of people”. He recognises that disposition and circumstance combine to create a dominant mode of interaction:

... collaboration and people working together is not, I think, a notion that people are actually committed to it. Now that may be again as much a statement about me and it may be the reasons why, I failed in that aspects of principalship, that I fail in. (Jack, Int. 1, 2000)

Individualism tends to prevail, due to the interpersonal dynamics, thus leaving Jack with no option but to lead from the front, even if he harbours some doubts regarding its veracity, reinforced by a perceived lack of commitment to collaboration, a kind of leadership ‘balkanization’ (A. Hargreaves 1994).

Alison (1979–), never wanted to be principal anywhere else other than in the school where she taught, and was a pupil. There is a strong suggestion of contextual continuity in the following:

... I knew what it was going to be like because in the last two years of the principal’s life she was very ineffective and we had thought for a long time that she was just doing things to us as young teachers and then I discovered that she just wasn’t able so, in fact, for her last two years I did all her typing for her, did all her photocopying, so I really knew a lot of what was going on. (Alison, Int. 1, 2000)

While her initial tenure therefore might be characterised by significant continuity, she was determined to initiate certain ‘projects’, yet not rocking the boat too much as well as being cautious in dealing with colleagues, keeping in mind relationships and the good of the school as a whole. In the following, she indicates how she approaches issues, revealing aspects of engagement with colleagues, an approach consistent with her ‘learning leadership’ identified in the previous chapter.

If something comes up and it puzzles me or I couldn’t find an answer I would go and read and read or find out or talk to people to try and find a way or even think about it and talk to people. When people talk at staff meetings I would talk to the staff and let them discuss something and if people weren’t happy about it, I’d let it sit for a month or two and I might put it back on the agenda again and bring it up again if I felt they weren’t ready for it. If I had an idea that I thought really would work I would put it back again. (Alison, Int. 4, 2007)

There is persistence, while recognising also that timing, patience and deliberation are necessary rather than forcing the pace of change. There is a sense also of a more leisurely pace to change, determined by internal dynamics rather than the diktats of NPM. There is evidence also that there are positives to be gained that enhance the process of reform when colleagues are trusted and given the space and opportunity to shape the future.

And it’s not really to push my agenda but to get ... they might have better ideas about doing than I would but I think that if you’re faced with a problem no matter what the problem is, there are ways around it and the ways around it don’t have to be the ways we’ve been

presented with. As I say, it's our school, it's up to us, if it's best for the child, think about it and see what we'll do. (Alison, Int. 1, 2000)

As the following indicates, it took her all of 14 years to learn that while listening, and keeping one's counsel and being inclusive are conducive to fostering positive personal relations, that there are limits too, that the role requires an agentic assertiveness.

Because a number of people were older than I was, I remember all the time you were trying to include people, I remember thinking that there are a lot of things that I accepted as principal that I would never have accepted if I was just a regular colleague on the staff. That's one thing that certainly struck me after quite a number of years and I made a conscious decision, no more. I think as principal of a school you are conscious always of the team, of keeping everything on an even keel. Now I'm a person as a staff member anyway who wouldn't particularly create waves but if somebody said something to me I would address it, fairly casually or on the spot but as principal you would accept a lot of stuff because you are looking after the greater good of everybody and I decided, ... in about 1994<sup>3</sup> I made a conscious decision, no more. It was a very very good decision staff wise. (Alison, Int. 4, 2007)

While Jack's distrust of his deputy coloured relations throughout the school community, Alison adopted a 'move towards the danger' (Fullan 1992) disposition in relation to her deputy whom she describes "causing havoc" among colleagues, but "I trained myself to love her because she was my deputy principal and because of the importance of the deputy principal in the school" (Int. 4, 2007). "As a vindication of the worthwhileness of this approach, she confides further: "I put huge work into it and I loved the whole dynamic of all of that and how you work at it" in terms of cultivating a positive school climate" (Int. 4, 2007). It may be more accurate to say she formed a professional relationship with her. She is insistent that principals should not settle for 'bad' relationships. Rather, role competence suggests that while "primary teachers in Ireland, a lot of them ... get these notions in their head and they get vindictive and therefore hurt and the whole thing is a vicious circle and that's why you have these relationships in schools that go wrong" this should not be accepted, thus: "It doesn't mean they can't be cured" (Int. 4, 2007).

Her disposition and effort suggests that keeping the peace at any price, privileging good relations is not a 'legitimate compromise' (May 1996). Her testimony indicates that leadership necessitates creating positive working relations that create a climate conducive to more collaborative endeavours. The density of such communicative interactions may be a necessary pre-condition for the cultivation of a distributed leadership perspective within school communities (Hardin 2008; Leithwood et al. 2009; Spillane 2006; Spillane and Diamond 2007). Her conversion to 'taking a stand' also suggests that leadership entails having a 'moral compass'; as Brent suggested in the previous chapter, having the character and courage to

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<sup>3</sup>It should be noted that this was 14 years into her principalship, while it should be noted also that by then, intensification and complexification of the role was proceeding apace, while for Alison herself perhaps she was growing tired of letting matters of staff relations 'slide' to preserve the peace at the expense of transforming the culture of the school.

confront, in a positive sense, particular behaviours; that these are concerns that transcend inter-personal relationships, whereby the common good is promoted. Moral compass includes the virtues of “honesty, care, courage, fairness and practical wisdom” (Sockett 1993), and these may also be the grist in the mill that enables principals to distinguish between personal and professional relationships (see also Falkenberg 2007; Osguthorpe 2008).

Jim’s (1985–) professional persona is primarily shaped by his teaching rather than his principal responsibilities (see previous chapters). While there are very laudable aspects to this dedication, in a four teacher school it restricts collaboration and in many respects perpetuates a culture of individualism (Hargreaves 1990, 1994) reinforced by the cellular architecture of schools (Lortie 1975). Despite more recent efforts at reforms and the promotion of paperwork, Jim’s reaction to such external demands is to perform. He says:

Well now the paperwork is left to me. It’s a bit harsh I suppose to say that but it is. Maybe it’s my own fault, maybe I’m too willing to take it on but like I said I can’t very well refer the Cigire [Inspector] to somebody who promised to prepare some stuff for me two years ago. I’m the one who’s expected to have it so I’m the one who’ll be asked for it, the other’s won’t be asked for it so . . . it falls to me. Collaboration in other matters, no I’d have to say we have our own little independent fiefdoms and we’re . . . (Jim, Int. 4, 2007)

He takes on the additional responsibility, avoids the necessity to negotiate with colleagues and to insist on them making an appropriate contribution. However, he describes staff relations as very good, yet indicates how fragile (and unstable) interpersonal ecology can be while ‘critical incidents’ have potential to create fixed positions inimical to building goodwill and trust. One of his colleagues “had great difficulty in understanding that she had to stay in her classroom, . . . and she asked for time off for this that and the other”. And, while he readily recognises the necessity for “give and take in every job” when such requests became a weekly occurrence, asserting his role responsibility was difficult to avoid.

The teacher told me at one stage she had permission from the Manager<sup>4</sup> of the school, of course she hadn’t and then she accused me of checking up on her and she actually left the class and went home. This led to all kinds of rows and at the end of the day I had to say to her you either take the class or you won’t have a class. I have a duty to report this. She is now no longer in the school. It was a severe shock to me at the time but it was a learning experience and I had to sit down and ask myself how I would deal with it all over again. (Jim, Int. 2, 2000)

Such episodes clearly illustrate the constraints that accrue from an over-reliance on seeking to ‘keep the peace’ while asserting authority. Jim had some difficulty reconciling the notion of a team with recognition that he has ultimate responsibility:

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<sup>4</sup>Significantly, Jim refers to the Chairperson of the school’s Board of Management as the ‘manager’, a throwback in terms of language use to pre 1975 when the local clergyman was the Manager, without the democratic presence of other board members. Evidence, perhaps, of how perception and cultural change is a slow and incremental process that is embedded in language use.

We are part of a team. It is really a pretty new idea to us. If someone is in charge of others then the idea of a team is really a false description. Yes there is a team captain but the team captain doesn't call the shots like a manager and while the idea of part of a team sounds good and it would be good to try implement but at the end of the day, if you ask any of the teachers who are they answerable to they would tell you the principal. I am very conscious of the fact that the buck does stop. (Jim, Int. 2, 2000)

His testimony suggests that relative isolation while keeping the peace constrains the building of trusting relationships thus when difficulties arise, there is little basis on which to negotiate. Being a 'teaching leader' pre-disposes Jim to confine his authority to his own classroom, thus responsibility for paperwork continues to reside with him (exclusively), while classroom isolation is perpetuated, thus also there is little basis for or perceived necessity for collaboration (Hargreaves and Fink 2005).

This cohort, perhaps not surprisingly, manifests characteristics of 'heroic' leadership (Copland 2001; Lowney 2003) that circumscribe the extent to which interpersonal relationships with colleagues allow them to be assertive as school leader. In many respects, Alison's (belated) conversion to prioritising the common good over and above the interpersonal tends to reinforce this general disposition; exclusive reliance on personal relationships is an insufficient basis for leadership.

## **Interpersonal Relations: Getting to Grips with the Ecology of Leadership**

(Cohort Two: Michelle, Conor, Maggie, Eddie)

In contrast with Jim's relative isolation, Eddie (1993–2006) is disposed to "a team" approach. He says: "I would always work on a team basis especially in a small school because you are more likely to succeed with issues if there is a team and unified approach to it". The way to enact this approach is through "having small informal meetings about issues, by continually visiting each teacher each day, and keeping updates on information internally. Also by gathering people together when needs be to make decisions" (Int. 2, 2000).

By increasing the density of interactions informally and formally, more trusting relationships can be created even in unpromising contexts but not without intellectual understanding, insight and commitment and awareness of local as well as national legacies.

Well I think teamwork is key to the role of Principal no matter what the size of the school, I think you will achieve more by trying to take a teamwork approach to that. Teaching itself within a classroom, there is an element of isolation there and I suppose all the ideas on reflective teaching and collaboration etc., they have shown us that we have been slow to break down the barriers between the classrooms and it is something that has been handed down from the time of people coming in to do Inspector work, nobody seems to visit your classroom except to make a judgment and in many cases it would be a poor judgment and not a lot of praise. (Eddie, Int. 2, 2000)

His language is resonant with prevalent discourses on leadership of the time, and this appears to reinforce a personal preference for the cultivation of a ‘collaborative culture’ while interpersonal relations are subservient towards that end (A. Hargreaves 1994). He has a strong preference for a more consultative approach, and that a “talk down style” is likely to lead to principal isolation. He is convinced this “would not suit [him] . . . very well” and his approach has the advantage that he can “discuss matters with staff members and find out the problems” rather than issuing “an edict” only to have to “draw my horns in much later on” (Int. 2, 2000).

Eddie’s personal preference appears to commit him to a collaborative approach that builds relational trust that strengthens the bonds of community; a “resourcefulness” more consistent with understandings of *‘sustainable development’* (Hargreaves and Fink 2005, p. 192)

Michelle’s (1992–) inbound trajectory (see Chap. 4) and understanding of the school’s legacy, suggested the need to pour “oil on troubled waters” while feeling vulnerable. However, this propelled her to build bridges (and her self-confidence) by creating a visible presence in classrooms, building rapport with colleagues, thus increasing interpersonal density. She was able to harness “that . . . great energy among the staff, and there was always a kind of roll up your sleeves and get stuck in.” However, this was not getting stuck in for the sake of it. Rather, harnessing positive energy had a purpose, primarily to disseminate her (vicarious) observations of good practice. She says: “. . . before I came in, my vision for the place, if you could even call it a vision, was to keep what I would have seen in particular classrooms around the school”. As her confidence and team developed in tandem, she sought to maximise benefits for all learners: “you don’t just do it in one class, it has to be the whole school.” (Int. 4, 2007).

While all of this was going on, she refused in her own quiet but determined manner to remain outside “the staff cliques” and this was done “just not to listen and not to engage in any of it”. Consequently, as time passed “more people would come and talk to you about what was going on in the community” because they felt she could be trusted. By addressing these community issues the internal relational bonds were strengthened further through this engagement because “you can’t close your eyes to that so it changes there” (Int. 4, 2007). Paradoxically, maintaining a (respectful) professional distance, that is also about autonomy and personal integrity, enhances relational trust that in the ‘micro-politics’ of the school, creates power through colleagues and enhances one’s own agency as well as strengthening commitment to a shared enterprise (Blase 1998; Blase and Anderson 1995).

Michelle’s testimony conveys a sense of sustainable improvement, of building ‘professional capital’ while simultaneously indicating ‘layered leadership’ whereby trust, vision, listening, remedying legacies while moving forward come together; finding higher gears of leadership influence in an ecological manner.

As work intensified in the late 1990s and into the noughties, the emergence of middle management structures was harnessed as part of the process of sharing leadership while building community so that “work got divvied out.” In such circumstances, dealing with change while maintaining adequate equilibrium to

avoid paralysis through destabilisation is a delicate balance, demanding teamwork and flexibility. She says:

It goes with the territory, you do get on top of it and I think the other side of it was the fact that I did have people eventually who came on board and they took some of those responsibilities and that helped. I think if we had been in the situation where we were reviewing school plan on top of all of that, I'd have been in right trouble. Maybe in one sense, it forced me to look for that sort of organisation. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

Harnessing the opportunity offered by middle-management structures put the team on a different footing thus colleagues were “able to shine.” However, interpersonal relationships are rarely a succession of positives and significantly less likely in challenging circumstances. Thus even the most resilient principals may, at times, underestimate the ‘emotional labour’ involved. Her testimony regarding supports for other professionals puts in high relief the necessity for professional support beyond the collegial positives derived from informal networks.

One of the things I would have found very difficult emotionally would have been with children in trouble, when you have case conferences. I remember being really peeved about it a few times because you're at a case conference representing the school and . . . there's all these other health professionals there and they're . . . you know when they leave, they actually have a supervision system, they have somebody to . . . [unburden themselves to]. But you can't. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

Michelle readily recognises her own personality at play in these exchanges, while nevertheless she states “you grow with the role” to the point where “you might even anticipate certain changes that are coming down the line”, thus also suggesting that potential for school transformation is enhanced when trusting relationships are aligned through a shared sense of purpose—service to the learners. Nevertheless, with hindsight, she also recognises the possibility to “demand different things” and even though great strides have been made in providing school plans, her anticipatory antennae also aver: “how do you know they're implemented . . . what's actually happening with the plans” thus the agenda evolves, and the bar is raised through the fabric of the inter-per-fessional, as well as the external pressures for accountability

Difficult circumstances are rendered more challenging when, as Michelle indicates: “I didn't know who I could trust” and neither did she wish to “be imposing on people.” This very vulnerability was harnessed in the creation of a collaborative team through sustained engagement, suggesting that agency too is enhanced, but like Kenny Roger's Gambler, this too is tempered by ‘knowing when to hold' your counsel—at times, a strategy more important than intervention. Her testimony strongly suggests that having a sense of vision (even tentative or provisional) cultivates a disposition that seeks to build trusting relationships for the purposes of moving the ‘herd', ‘roughly northwest' while implicitly acknowledging also that isolation inhibits such possibilities (Elmore 2004).

Conor (1992–2010) states: “I get on very well with staff”, and he regards them as “excellent”. He recognises that some ‘luck' is necessary but making ‘good' appointments have potential also to create loyalty and thus also enhance interpersonal relations:



I have been very lucky with . . . the people that I have appointed, I would be very happy with them and they're excellent people and there's a very good atmosphere around the school. Anybody . . . that would be awkward, let's put it that way, would kind of . . . wouldn't have been appointed by me and would probably have moved on somewhere else anyway, you know what I mean? (Conor, Int. 4, 2007)

He professes that “the door is always open . . . whether it's parents or teachers” (Int. 4, 2007), yet, he finds himself resistant also due to his value stance regarding policy on parental involvement. He says:

. . . I'm not totally in agreement with this new policy that they have out there of involving everybody. My argument with this is, the more people you involve with something the harder it is to get anything done and get agreement, . . . whatever it is, you involve the parents and you bring them in and then they're disagreeing with this and there's some problem and then the whole thing gets put on the back burner and nothing gets done again. (Conor, Int. 4, 2007)

This evidence suggests that, he is aware of the external policy environment, but feels free to interpret it in a bifurcated manner—remaining in favour of consultation but on his terms, while tempered by the view that “to a large extent most parents are quite happy to let the school get on with the business of teaching children”. Consequently, it is “a really really small handful are only out for the interests of their own child” and not “the good of the whole school at heart” thus the necessity for ‘arms-length’ relations that protect the relative autonomy of the school but limit the potential of collaboration whereby the many are excluded due to the perceived excesses of the few. Such protectionism may suit teaching colleagues yet set limits to engagement of school and community, particularly in a more ‘client’ oriented culture.

Maggie (1991–2004) sets herself very high standards, and has similar expectations of others, but she has a tendency to do things herself rather than giving others space and time to deliver. She recognises: “intellectually I was prepared for it [principal's role], but in reality I wasn't.” Subsequent comments suggest that it was the more emotional, interpersonal side of the role that was more of a challenge, particularly around professional engagement and distance, a key consideration in interpersonal dynamics. Emotional preparedness may reflect a more general cultural (in-)capacity to deal with uncertainty; a blind spot regarding recognition of the fact that “ineffective rules can also satisfy people's emotional needs for formal structure” (Hofstede et al. 2010, p. 209). Such emotional predispositions are also connected to relative connection and distance with colleagues, as the following attests:

I would value conviviality and would have always had friends, . . . I am aware that being the Principal is lonelier as you can't be friends much as you want to – they choose not to be friends with the Principal and there is a hurt involved . . . I read that somewhere else somebody talking about . . . – there is a hurt involved in being – it is the hierarchical –thing involved, if you are set up for pot shots then there is a hurt involved and so that is something that I had to accept . . . –, but my workplace is no longer a seat of friendship for me, even though I get on very well with all the people I work with . . . (Maggie, Int. 3, 2007)

Maggie's testimony suggests that the emotional labour, “the dissonance that can be experienced in donning a professional mask in order to present an appropriate

emotional face at work” is seriously underestimated, yet increasingly recognised as a critically important dimension of calibrating interpersonal dynamics (Gunter et al. 2010, p. 208), ‘emotional well-being’ is at stake while it is necessary also to distinguish between friendship and interpersonal relations in professional settings (Bryk and Schneider 2002; Day et al. 2011). Perhaps in the fish-bowl environment of small schools in a small system, there has been a more general failure to distinguish between the interpersonal and the inter-professional. While not ignoring the ‘personal in the professional’ (Day and Sachs 2004), privileging the former at the expense of the latter does appear to inhibit capacity building and, a sense of shared enterprise and leadership.

While Eddie and Michelle recognise the significance of ‘team’ and work to promote it in a evenly placed but committed manner, Maggie and Conor recognise the significance of ‘good’ ‘conviviality’ and appear more content to not push the boundaries.

## **Interpersonal Relations: Building Professional Capacity** (Cohort Three: Dick, Kate, Rose, Denise)

Kate (1997–2007) had been acting principal for a few years prior to being appointed permanently, and she was also the first lay principal in the school. Kate indicates, there were “good relations all round” and “we all work hard at relationships”. From a career-stage perspective, she was ‘free’ to lead, while the role appears as pre-ordained, thus suggesting maximum continuity:

... and having been in [names school] all my life you could say, my career, I knew exactly what was expected of me and I suppose from my own personal point of view my children were all grown up and for me it was a kind of a challenge, it was kind of my time, my career really. I went to school and if I didn’t feel like coming home till 5 o’clock or 6 o’clock and if I felt like going to a meeting on a Saturday in relation to school or any time during the holidays I was free, you know. (Kate, Int. 4, 2007)

Despite continuity, position alters perception: “you see people from a different point of view” and though her colleagues “knew me fairly well” she provides evidence also of incrementally moving beyond the legacy of the religious community, from inheriting a role to re-shaping it:

Nuns had done a great job, there’s no question about it but it was different. From the point of view of money we had no problems. We had a nice few pounds in the kitty, that there was no problem that way. We’ll say for example, nuns again, I was the first person to say, maybe bring them a few scones at lunch time, not every day, special occasions. They reacted very cooperatively to that, it kind of made a difference. [It] had never been done. (Kate, Int. 4, 2007)

Such incremental endeavours include “taking care of people” but continuity is maintained when the performativity of paperwork became more prevalent. She remarks: “it was easier for me to do a lot of it”, while in the process of

appointing colleagues to middle management positions she stayed with the tradition of promotion on seniority; destabilising the status quo was avoided, while dealing with paperwork is remarkably similar to the views expressed by Jim above

She cites the provision of basketball facilities in the school as a major achievement, as well as the mainstreaming of traveller children, while determining to exit in advance of compulsory retirement age was timed to avoid the challenges of becoming a co-education school, the need to refurbish Gymnasium facilities—“it’s time for you to go” when school development planning became a systemic priority, time to appoint “someone new and fresh and move on” (Int. 4, 2007).

Her testimony indicates clearly that care is important in terms of creating a positive working environment, and enhancing facilities, being a resource provider contributes also, but in a more demanding climate, no longer sufficient. Here too there is a sense that good personal relations rather than more challenging professional relations are settled for.

Rose (1999–2001) was impatient with the pace of change when appointed but was also aware of the necessity to build relationships, characterised by openness and trust, while this was premised on her ‘outsider’ status and her reading of the school’s culture:

I think it is early days; probably overall trying to create more openness and dialogue. More involvement and that hopefully is bringing more commitment. So that in the very first day I started here they might not have been many people who wanted to do that and I think in building up trust and openness I think we are creating just a better community. We can talk about it more, I am not the principal behind the locked door . . . removed from people. A lot of things are happening, but mainly the people are talking to each other. (Rose, Int. 2, 2000)

There is implicit recognition that openness and access are vital to communication, not as ends in themselves but as the basis of building community. Towards that end, she seizes the appointment of new teachers to accelerate the process of change:

I think I have had the best opportunity where I have had the opportunity to employ people and I have been able to emphasize things when I was interviewing them and I have found that I can, very gradually, have influenced them and they are working together. (Rose, Int.2, 2000)

Although she is critical of the legacy of keeping parents at arms-length, of the practice whereby: “nobody goes near the teacher without an appointment,” she recognises also that in order to challenge that tradition, in the first instance “I would have to respect that tradition.” She recognises too that the process of transformation inevitably entails that “you get a few knocks and you think oh disaster, I made a mistake” yet she holds the view “I would like to think that overall that is where we are going”—moving in the desired direction (Int. 2, 2000). Deciphering which elements of a school’s legacy may be challenged forthwith requires confidence and courage that is more challenging to professional relationships but arguably these do not ‘bind’ to the same extent as privileging personal relationships. As Achinstein suggests:

In teacher professional communities with a more traditional vision, schools are seen to promote consensus and alignment with dominant values in society. In teacher professional communities with more democratic visions, schooling may play a crucial role in fostering critique in order to transform society (Achinstein 2002, p. 11)

A further element of challenging the status quo is evident when she suggests a meeting of middle-management: “and there was almost a riot! – ‘We’ve always done things as a staff, why would you take out one group’, which was a kind of irony as well, we’ve always done things as a staff but only at a very low level” (Int. 4, 2007). When disequilibrium can be so easily provoked, agency and ingenuity must be carefully calibrated as well as seizing the momentary opportunity. Consequently, when posts of responsibility were being re-defined, she remarks: “I did have control over two or three of those, in terms of devising the duties and advertising them and all that kind of thing” thus incrementally pursuing an alternative vision (Int. 4, 2007).

Insight too, comes in many forms. When contemplating relationships with former colleagues in an innovative school, and their friendship she continues to value, she “suddenly realise[d]” that her new colleagues “were lifelong friends with each other and that I was coming in . . .” (Int. 1, 2000). While still on an inbound trajectory, this realisation led her to the view that being true to what she stood for was her preferred approach to leadership:

I though you can’t demand loyalty, you have to work on that and you cannot do, I mean certain leaders do it through charm or through having credible charisma of some sort or another . . . I felt that the only thing I can do, the most important thing I can do is be myself and be as honest as possible and I’m not going to be what might be expected of me (Rose, Int. 1, 2000).

Being more self-consciously aware of what you stand for is perceived as being integral to interpersonal dynamics and gaining the trust of colleagues, but here too there appears to be lack of differentiation between personal and professional relationships while being oneself may not be sufficient for the role and its responsibilities.

Dick’s (1994-) prior experience was in large urban schools where he evolved the view that “you work and play together” thus in his new rural surroundings he found it difficult to deal with the lack of collegiality. His initial cautious approach evident in previous chapters perhaps paid dividends subsequently in building collegial trust when he confides: “I have to say we haven’t had a serious row in 6 years, we have disagreements over things,” suggesting perhaps that rows are unhelpful, but disagreements are necessary in building relations.

Similar to Rose, on an inbound trajectory, resistance needs to be met with persistence if moulds are to be broken:

. . . whenever . . . I mentioned something that went on somewhere else, I felt that there were one or two women pretty vocal and . . . said that well it might have happened there and I felt that no one else would open their mouths and it was often put down at that so I have learned to be a bit more persistent if I have a point of view it would get a bit of an airing . . . (Dick, Int. 1, 2000)

Such comments are reminiscent of Hargreaves's 'contrastive rhetoric and extremist talk' (Hargreaves, 1984), but it had the effect of prolonging his 'inbound' trajectory as one individual in particular was 'frosty' towards him, thus his perception that: "I was outside looking in a little bit." But over time, he has learned "to be a bit more persistent" and this was helped significantly by going out of his way to build bridges with parents, while this too repaired fences as there was a legacy of mistrust due to the dictatorial attitude of the former chair of the BoM. His perception is that cultivating positive relations with parents provided leverage and credibility within the immediate school community.

However, his vulnerability is evident also when feeling professionally inadequate when he viewed the art work completed in a neighbouring classroom. Rather than harness this expertise for the benefit of the entire school community, he perceived this as competition, perhaps perpetuating the notion that 'good' teachers are those appointed principal.

I sometimes felt that she was competing a little bit and she would be extraordinarily organised and she would be teaching the class that was coming in to me every year and everything would be beautifully presented and I always felt that I had to keep me own pecker up to keep up with her in some ways (Dick, Int. 1, 2000)

Nevertheless, he enjoys the challenge of "turning negatives into positives" and being more confident and strategic, a combination of commitment, time and experience, though more recent intensification renders learning on the job more difficult.

A common thread emerging amongst this cohort is recognition of the necessity for change but a sense of relative powerlessness to make it happen, and failure to distinguish between personal and professional relations and a consequent tendency in the face of a school's legacy to privilege the former; transformation remains more of a challenge.

For Denise (1999–), still in her twenties when appointed from among the staff, and though enjoying the unqualified support of colleagues, threading water in the first year was a necessity. She describes her relationships thus:

They were 110 % behind me. It really made for that first year . . . It is only now that I realise how stressful that first year was and how tired I was because I am enjoying it so much more this year. It is more enjoyable this year and you can start to make the changes you want. Last year it was just swimming to keep your head above water. (Denise, Int. 1, 2000)

Nevertheless, there appears to be some reluctance on her part to assume the authority the role conferred or perhaps she is unconsciously seeking to put some distance between her and her more authoritarian male predecessor when she says: "I made a conscious decision of not coming in as the principal giving out or saying would you get to the classrooms because I was the very one 3 months previously [who] would be grabbing the extra 5 min in the staffroom" (Int. 1, 2000). However, she seems tacitly aware that in assuming the role of principal she does not wish to lose the trust of colleagues. Rather, having their trust will be conducive to release (pent up) talent.

I don't look at myself being up there. I look at myself as being the spokesperson or the co-ordinator in the place. They all have such great ideas and they have a wealth of experience. There are some more experienced than I here, but they just don't want to be the spokesperson for that. I look at myself being on the same level as them. This year I feel it is a lot easier to go in and say I need this today. Last September it was feeling my way. (Denise, Int. 1, 2000)

Denise acknowledges that it is early days yet, thus she perceives herself having time on her side to make changes, while for now "continuing with a lot of what was here" because her reading of the landscape is that "the structure in the school was very good and it was a well-run school". Nevertheless, she sees herself as being different in her approach to the learners in particular: "I would say I am a little bit more personal and a little more open with the children." Towards, this end, she remarks: "I make sure that I go into classrooms, that I do yard duty and that there is interaction. I don't want them to feel that I am the baddie in the office and that the only reason that they talk to me is when they are in trouble. That is a personal input into the job" (Denise, Int. 1, 2000).

Her reading of the leadership legacy is that her predecessor initiated and colleagues complied, while her cautious building of trust with colleagues has become the basis of releasing potential, consistent with research (Bryk et al. 1998, 1999; Bryk and Schneider 2002). She says:

... when I come in and say are we going to do something like this, people are jumping at it and saying can I do this or they have other ideas of their own that they would like to go ahead with. I think that is great because it gives people a sense of belonging and ownership of the school of the decision making and it shouldn't be my school or what I want to do with the school if I can co-ordinate everybody's efforts without letting it get too busy and everybody doing too much and nothing really being realised. I think that is the way it should go. (Denise, Int. 2, 2000)

From her perspective, with time on her side, she can afford a slow burning approach to cultivating colleagues' trust, yet also contribute to managing the pace of change in a manner that builds relations and capacity "in a meaningful way." Consequently, colleagues take substantial responsibility rather than being given what she describes as "Mickey Mouse jobs that I don't like doing like filling in the roll books and things like that".

In addition, by attending LDS courses for Deputies and Principals she has strengthened the team approach, and found such experiences "fantastic". And, when more recently she encouraged her deputy to undertake an LDS course for deputies, and though reluctant at first, he sent her a text at the end of the course saying: "it was the best course he had ever done..." (Int. 4, 2008). Thus, building trusting relationships also extends to providing learning opportunities for colleagues. She confides: "I think we've learnt and grown together as a staff ... very much and working together" (Int. 4, 2008).

However, after the advent of the revised curriculum at the turn of the millennium, professional support increased as did demands for paperwork, yet that support appeared to give her and her colleagues a sense of confidence to manage the pace of change through harnessing the energy and insight provided by external

support which suggested that it was not possible to do an “entire policy” at once, but to simplify and set realistic targets. Thus, this engagement engendered “the confidence” to realise and take ownership of the reality that:

... it doesn't all need to be done all at once ... that we can do it a little bit at a time and that we have all grown in confidence to say, no we are working, we are planning, come in I will show you what we have done over the years, there's our planning folder so don't tell me we're not planning, it's very much a live, working ... (Denise, Int. 4, 2008)

Despite the evident air of confidence and being in control, such ‘simplifying’ may be a recipe also for superficial adoption rather than substantial change—as Elmore suggests, this may be doing ‘rain dances’ rather than “connecting instruction to management, organization, and accountability” for in his view failure to do this is “behaving irresponsibly” (<http://www.uknow.gse.harvard.edu/leadership/leadership001a.html>, accessed most recently, 27/06/2014).

This cohort provides evidence that career stage at time of appointment is significant in terms of appetite for change. Recognising the necessity for change and having the vision and expertise to bring it about is a more complex concern. Part of that complexity is a capacity to see beyond immediate school legacy, and to distinguish between personal and professional relationships, intimate though distinct.

## **Interpersonal Relations: Capacity Building in a Climate of Performativity**

(Cohort Four: Ben, Sadie, Brent, Janice)

Since at the time of initial interview this cohort were all new to principalship, change over time in interpersonal dynamics cannot be dealt with in any depth. Consequently, initial dispositions and the dynamics that flow from initial courtship of relationships as well as the legacy inherited from the previous incumbent are the primary focus.

Janice (2007-) was in the position for 2 months when first interviewed, and the sense of a honeymoon period was audible. As an insider, there is a strong sense of continuity, while being mentored also by her predecessor. As a single woman in mid-career, she has enjoyed a good relationship with colleagues for approximately two decades. Unlike the other three in her cohort, all of whom had completed Masters in education, Janice had not, but felt hugely affirmed both by the interview process and the very positive references that had been provided on her behalf. She says of her apprenticeship within the school: “it has always been a friendly school and I knew that they wouldn't be thinking “she can't hack it because I knew by the fact that they appointed me anyway that they felt that I was good” (Int. 1, 2007).

Although keen to continue the legacy of a ‘friendly’ school, Janice describes herself as a private person thus maintaining a distance is important:

I am a private person and its best to a certain extent to keep your private life away. Do your own thing, come in and work, get on well with people as best you can and go away then and socialise at staff do's. I think maybe it's not a good idea to socialise too much, it can be a little bit overpowering. (Janice, Int. 1, 2007)

Feeling the necessity to maintain distance may inhibit the building of relational trust and this is further complicated by the exposure and inherent vulnerability that stems from being principal of a village school, particularly when predecessors have been local and thus also community members. She appears surprised by the expectation regarding playing a leadership role between Church, school and community. Having attended sessions in the local church as part of preparation for initiation into the sacrament of communion, she comments:

I don't go to all of them, I don't intend to go to all of them, but I came up last Saturday night and people were very appreciative that I was there. I didn't realise that I was that important. (Janice, Int. 1, 2007)

There is further evidence also of continuity, of maintaining the status quo when she comments that having attended principal network meetings (IPPN) and a course for newly appointed principals (LDS), received wisdom has it that when appointed as an insider candidate without internal opposition is advantageous. There seems little sense that being an insider also constrains since existing relationships have to be re-negotiated if leadership is to be exercised.

... and all these people, that, did anybody in your school go for the job and that is very positive when you haven't got anybody who's a little bit offended and also it can be hard for an outsider to come in if, say, two people from the staff went for the job or one person, it can be difficult. (Janice, Int. 1, 2007)

Rather like Denise above, since her colleagues knew her well, asserting authority, while necessary to encourage them to be punctual etc., she was self-consciously aware also that "They know your cracks and all you see!" Since her predecessor taught as well as being principal, Janice feels that she has a particular responsibility to prioritise the children, suggesting that this is pastoral with a sprinkling of disciplinarian rather than academic, this avoiding threading on professional toes.

I feel to justify the job that I do considering that [names predecessor] did it and taught that I would feel that probably the biggest part of my job would have to do with the children. Now I know there's a huge amount of admin work but that can be done, you know you can do that in your own time but a lot of my day would still be spent involved with the classes. (Janice, Int. 1, 2007)

There is a sense nevertheless that when she exercises her agency and makes decisions, although "you could get it so wrong" it may be necessary also to be decisive.

... they have recognised now that I am the principal ... and ... consultation is one thing and it's very important, sometimes you just have to make the decision because if you start discussing too many things, little things that don't matter, ... you're as well to make it and then it's easier ... instead of just messing about for days and not knowing what we're doing, you know. (Janice, Int. 1, 2007)



While this may be regarded as being rather cautiously decisive, she appears more agentic and strategic when attention is turned to recruitment of new staff, recognising that this confers advantage in terms of relationships.

... I was involved in interviewing the new staff which I suppose was an advantage as well but because they're very new they look to their first principal as their role model as such. That's easy enough, they've never known another principal, ... you know what I mean? (Janice, Int. 1, 2007)

Ben (2005–) too was a teaching principal when first appointed, but quickly became an administrative principal. Like Janice and others he struggled initially when dealing with distance and vulnerability while re-forming relationships with colleagues when donning the mantle of principal. He says: "I found it very difficult. I did personally". While this was not particularly apparent "on a day to day basis" his vulnerability is evident when he says: "I used to have to watch my P's and Q's especially when there were decisions that had to be made near any of [staff social] events." By way of illustration he cites the following:

The first one I found awkward was posts of responsibility, we had the interviews end of November and there were 3 people applied for 2 jobs and the person I ended up sitting beside at the Christmas meal was the person who didn't get the job and I was still in the dog house for that one. So it made me wary and over time, ... I did notice the difference over time but the staff were very good to me. (Ben, Int. 1, 2007)

Nevertheless, he differentiates between relationships between older colleagues and newly appointed teachers: "The senior staff, the ones who were here when I was a teacher, ... they will always be friends and they have never treated me any differently," when "new staff are wary at times" something he describes as "the natural wariness of teacher and principal" (Int. 1, 2007).

While caught in the tension of this delicate balancing act, external demands for more transparency and accountability complicate such on-going internal dynamics. In such circumstances, tension between capacity building and performativity become more intense. This is evident in his struggle to defray his predecessor's legacy regarding the absence of school policies, a legacy he can't ignore. He says:

Originally, when it started I felt under huge pressure to catch up because the previous principal did nothing about policy development. So suddenly within the space of the first year I managed to come up with a few administration policies and then when we had a presentation on assessment for school development planning I did an assessment policy but ultimately it was me providing the first draft to the staff ... and the staff adapted it. (Ben, Int. 1, 2007)

However, in the process he becomes aware that his anxiety to 'perform' perpetuates forms of heroic leadership that is inimical to building capacity and creating a sense of professional community:

But I find the difficulty now with policies is that because everyone's in class, I start the policy, I'm expected to research it, follow it up, change it. It's ultimately all down to me as an individual whereas we haven't got time as a staff to get around to dealing with policies. Now I'm hoping with the post holders meetings that we'll identify, right the two of you post holders, I want you to target this policy and by our next meeting in two months' time

I want the first draft. If I could do that, now that hasn't happened yet because ... (Ben, Int. 1, 2007)

Despite his avowed intentions to use emerging middle-management structures to distribute professional responsibilities, when faced with the choice of providing a staff laptop or mathematics materials he accepted the wishes of staff to purchase the latter when his desire was that they become more computer literate and less dependent of his ICT skills. Nevertheless, he is building collaborative relationships and says of his deputy, she has “helped me overcome the fixes I put myself into and she has been very good at advising me,” while his executive decision to purchase an electronic bell for the school in his view has improved punctuality and extended instruction time. He elaborates somewhat on how more relaxed time-keeping has succumbed to the greater regulation of time—electronically:

... but the one thing it has done, it has made the school run on a timer and the breaks are on time, and we finish on time and we start on time whereas before the bell might run 5 min late or 10 min late and if it was a lovely day it could run 15 min late. (Ben, Int. 2, 2008)

Whatever the benefits of technology in the more efficient running of the school, his increasing reliance of the political nous of his deputy may be further evidence of continuity, suggestive of ties that bind when she advises: “look we know what you're trying to do, we're not trying to change what your aim is but maybe go at it a different way.” There is clear evidence from Janice and Ben that despite being insider appointments, there is considerable adjustment to me made in terms of re-negotiating relationships, and that they have difficulty differentiating between personal and professional relationships, particularly among their own peers and colleagues, as power in such instances is more evenly distributed. In such circumstances, when more demands for paperwork are imposed, personal relations prevail, and the principal performs, rather than harnessing the external policy environment to build capacity internally.

Brent (2006–) and Sadie (2006–), though at different career stages are identifiable as having the most comprehensive portfolios of professional experience regarding leadership and agency at the time of appointment. Is this experience and expertise evident in their initial forays into their relationships with colleagues?

Brent talks about the offer of principalship with unbridled enthusiasm rather than apprehension: “I was just so thrilled at the notion that I was given an opportunity to actually shape something.” He can't wait to ‘shape’ something, yet he is realistic and eager to build on the school's legacy. Though the school was “particularly well run” with an “extremely professional staff” he recognises also that although “everybody is somewhat fearful of change, there was a willingness to embrace it and overcome the discomfort of that, ...”. Brent was where he'd wanted to be; the position to which he was now appointed had been in his sights for some time—suggesting a sense of career trajectory and risk-taking. Much of the language he uses speaks to a ‘can do’ self-confidence, but with a strategic sense also of what he was bringing to the role and what his priorities would be. He could improve communications as a key link between the BoM and his colleagues, while being more transparent about finance, but he readily recognises that “I can change that without really upsetting the

equilibrium of the school” though there is a sense that these are more than cosmetic. However, in asserting such moves, he immediately recognises a hierarchy of priority when he states: “. . . but if I was giving advice to a principal in relation to what’s the most important thing that you can do when you come to a school is work at establishing the relationship with each of the individuals.” Regardless of school size, this task is “always onerous” since:

. . . you have to make sure that everybody feels that they’re a stakeholder in this operation, that everybody feels that you’re there to listen, to, not always respond but at least take account of what the concern and the anxiety is or where they are in relation to it, to know them as people because if you establish that and you understand what makes them tick and what are the things, the factors that are influencing attitudes or reactions or all of those, maybe, obstacles to change, all of those things, then you can more easily, not necessarily definitely, but more easily overcome those difficulties. (Brent, Int. 2, 2008)

Such investment in getting to know colleagues is ultimately connected with creating a ‘shared mission’:

And when the relationships are right, when they’re characterised by trust, mutual trust, when they understand that there isn’t a hidden agenda, that you’re being largely upfront about this, you may not share the same view of things exactly as other people but if you’re upfront about what your view is and if you’re willing to hear what the other view is then very quickly you can establish a sense of, well, there’s a shared mission here. (Brent, Int. 2, 2008)

It is by building such trusting relationships that it is possible to be confident about “the things that unite us here, the things that we all buy into” while suggesting also that “every new principal has to go through that.” By way of further elaboration, he makes it clear that he is straddling a boundary between the personal and professional, thus also suggesting that if such relationships are to be trusting, they cannot be entirely instrumental. There is a paradox at the heart of such endeavours which suggests that personal closeness becomes the basis of establishing professional distance when disagreements arise. He says:

. . . recognising that every school is a human institution, it’s made up of personalities, it’s made up of people who have lives outside the gates and you need to take account of that. It really is about building the bridges so that when issues arise that you have a background of interaction with that person that has been positive so that you know this isn’t about me and you as personalities, this is about our view of things and how best can we resolve this. (Brent, Int. 2, 2008)

At a time when many other principals and schools were feeling overwhelmed by increasing demands for paperwork, there is less sense of the fire-fighting evidenced above. Nevertheless, the following suggests that paperwork is not something on which to collaborate and to build a sense of shared mission while there is recognition that influencing what happens in classrooms is critical:

. . . it’s very easy for new principals to bury themselves in the issues that are more easily accessible shall we say, the policy formation, the writing of a draft policy. That’s unthreatening because you’re not interacting with people, you’re not trying to influence what’s happening, you’re not trying to lead change, you’re not trying to lead people which is the more challenging aspect of the job and the one aspect of the job that, I suppose it’s

only now that we're beginning, or I'm beginning to feel that I'm influencing, is that leading curriculum and leading what it is we're doing in the classroom, . . . (Brent, Int. 2, 2008)

It is remarkable the number of times the word leadership is evident here when it is a term frequently avoided by many of the other informants. Brent's testimony as well as the nature of the language he deploys elegantly testifies to the increasing complexity of the principal's role and the necessity for the capability of principals to be more than equal to the challenge inherent in leading schools in changing times.

Sadie (2006–) had come through what she regarded as “the most professional interview” she had undertaken, with a consciousness also that “my philosophy fits with the school”; a sense that she had chosen the school as much as having been offered the position. This sense of control, confidence and capability due to a potent combination of experience and formal learning, creates a sense of being in the driving seat from the outset:

. . . the planning demands I could do those in my sleep, I could nod off and it would happen. I could set up a plan, I could work it, I know how to action plan dates, responsibilities, next meeting, what will we achieve by then . . . All of that, that's the easy stuff, very easy stuff for me. . . . Then with all the putting it into practice with many many schools [through CPD] . . . I found that aspect really easy. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

Though confident and self-assured, with recognition of the significance of process rather than preoccupation with product, she provides evidence also that she had underestimated what implementation of policies actually entails, beyond the ‘buy in’ of colleagues:

I was used to going into a school, ton of work done by the end of the day, three or four major plans and there was a year to implement them or whatever or they would review. We can do that here but it's actually getting that subsequent work done. Not only getting the subsequent work done but getting people to buy in on a daily basis to the actual implementation and the changes it demands of them in their daily role. That's a very difficult one. . . . (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

While Brent appears to suggest that investing in interpersonal relationships develops a degree of density that becomes the platform on which more transformational work is built, Sadie seems to focus more on the target, the desired change (Elmore 2004). Her stance is that it is not about the policy document:

I don't mind doing the mechanics, the clickity click or have somebody do the clickity click but the important thing is that people are involved in the decisions of what is actually written and that what's written reflects practice because you can write a wonderful plan that wasn't to do with anything and it doesn't impress anybody in the end, it's just a waste of paper and this is a green school so we try not to waste paper! (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

Saving trees aside, an (over-) emphasis on ‘what works’ may also set limits on the transformational potential of such policies and their pedagogies (see Biesta 2007). However, rather than hang too much on a word or phrase, other aspects of Sadie's comments are redolent of a ‘moving school’ of the importance of collaborative capacity building and in this regard she cites initiatives such as a mentoring programme, input from a former colleagues at a staff meeting on the

teaching of mathematics rather than relying solely on internal expertise (Fink 1999). Regarding the former:

So I don't see myself as someone who came out and got all the expertise and came back into schools and now I'm going to do it all myself. I think it's wonderful to bring in another face and me to sit down, to be able to contribute as well as to be able to allow everybody to interact with somebody else with a different style and have an objective view and have somebody say, is that the right way to do that? And do you really think you should do that? I think that's really important. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

Her leadership here is represented as providing bridging capital between the school community and her network beyond its walls, while recognising that building capacity is more systematic and of its nature a slower but incremental challenge that works through the interpersonal interstices within the community—building capacity while discussing evidence-informed practice. She illustrates this with reference to a recent staff meeting where standardised test scores were discussed; making sense beyond the 'numbers':

We were all saying, god that's wonderful and then we were saying, what exactly does that mean? Then we looked at what that meant at the class level and there's huge figures in the centre and then they're not so huge in the senior classes so now we're going to look at how can we work with the senior classes. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

From her perspective, this is "a more demanding programme" and it is significant that initiative "was coming from the staff, not from me so they're tremendous people so it's to be able to create those opportunities where they can say, well we could do that better and how could we do that better? (Int. 2, 2007)

Being confident, having a sense of mission, understanding the importance of process for interpersonal engagement and the possibility of (transformative) pedagogical traction in classrooms, enables Sadie to bring prior learning, immediate reading of school culture and capacity to establish priorities into productive tension:

I think there's a very small number of things that you get away with when you're brand new. If you choose them very carefully, you can introduce extremely good practice but you have to work quickly in assessing and you've to find people who might be with you and you've to work that way. I chose a few things that had to be sorted. One of them is, I think, working quite well if not very well and the rest I think we've more or less sorted. The one that's working quite well, if not very well, is a major piece of work, it's a whole change in approach. It's learning support and resource and class teacher co-teaching and we have got it working in all the classrooms to a different degree but what we have to do is we have to refine the concept of what co-teaching means and all the varying ways of co-teaching and how to make it a *modus operandi* as opposed to something. . . . (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

Inherent in her view is that working collaboratively builds capacity while the vision remains pliable. She acknowledges that principalship is a very different job to classroom teacher, she keeps the demands in perspective, yet she communicates a strong sense of impacting actual practice, ambitious vision coloured by what is attainable:

The use of equipment, manipulative's, group work, play, discussion, drama, gymnastics etc. very alive, that classrooms are not silent but they're not chaotic, that they have a buzz, I'd

like a buzz. Structurally I would do a lot with this building, I'd start with a bulldozer. I'd love to demolish it but in the meantime get it painted. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

There is a passion and purpose in her language and tone that even if it carries the seeds of NPM, recognises also that times have changed and being professional necessitates rising to that challenge:

... when you feel strongly about something you can promote it, not necessarily shove it down people's throats but it's kind of fait accompli, how else would you do it? I don't want people in this day and age saying I want third class because they won't have an SNA next year and I don't understand people saying that I work on my own and I know how to do it and I won't liaise with learning support. It's just not on in this day and age and I don't think anybody needs to have a row about it or even to state it terribly strongly. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

Enlightened leadership or conformity to external policy prescriptions, the centrality of the interpersonal is not in doubt. What Brent and Sadie bring to the conversation is a new vocabulary that enables them to articulate a vision of leadership this is imbued with passion and purpose, yet respectful of individual perspectives; an interesting juxtaposition of person and project or initiative. Too much emphasis on the personal, limits the extent to which professional horizons may be challenged, while investment in personal relationships too creates a context for less acrimonious professional and principled disagreements.

## **Conclusions: Learning Leadership and Interpersonal Relationships?**

The evidence presented here overwhelmingly endorses the necessity to keep interpersonal relations at the centre of leading schools. However, the evidence also makes clear that privileging good relations, often little more than 'keeping the peace' or 'mending fences' may be necessary but not sufficient to fulfil a leadership remit. Internally appointed principals struggle to re-establish relationships with long-established colleagues, to put them on a professional footing, while externally appointed candidates struggle to establish inter-personal relations, and are often cautious about pushing professional reforms. In both cases, lack of distinction between personal and professional relations, particularly when accompanied by lack of preparation that contributes to lack of clarity about role, responsibility and the exercise of leadership, there is a consequent tendency to privilege personal 'friendships', being on good personal terms, as largely an end in itself, and the cellular structure of the school facilitates this (Lortie 1975, 1998). Lack of clarity too regarding role and responsibility appears to contribute to the pursuit of 'friendship' as a means of overcoming isolation, or, as Jack suggested 'being one of the boys'.

Lack of a sense of a 'community of learners' propels some principals to see paperwork as primarily their responsibility (Jim, Ben) rather than an opportunity to build professional relations, shared commitment, and professional capacity for

school transformation. It took Alison all of 14 years to take a stand; to have the courage and confidence to challenge colleague's professional behaviour, while both Brent and Sadie provide interesting insight into being task oriented or people oriented. In the case of the latter, investing in strong personal relations appears to create space and opportunity for 'principled disagreement' (Hargreaves 2003) on professional matters, while being task oriented challenges colleagues to engage and commit, to get on board, and the sky does not fall. While there is substantial evidence that vindicates the intimacy of the 'the person in the professional' (Day and Gu 2010, pp. 26–39), critically important for a sense of 'wellbeing', lack of differentiation between inter-personal and inter-professional leads to the privileging of the former, thus inhibiting the building of professional community, capacity building to enact change, and actively build a sustainable future rather than living day to day.

What emerges from this analysis is a sense of the necessity for inter-professional relationships. Hyphenating the personal and professional allows for an understanding of the necessity within personal relationships to create proximity, while forming professional relations simultaneously requires some distance. The glue that both binds and separates these simultaneously is moral compass, that a necessary and unavoidable part of leadership is taking a value stance. The fact that a general and relative inarticulacy regarding the necessity to 'stand for something' among informants is all the more ironic since all but one practises the craft of leadership in Catholic managed schools. Crucial within this 'Zone of Proximal Distance' is a distinction between communication and (professional) conversation. Building relational trust, a vital necessity for capacity building, also necessitates space and opportunity for ongoing 'authentic conversations' that are considerably more than 'good' communication (Clark 2001; Lieberman and Miller 2001). Lack of such insight and awareness, leaves school leaders more susceptible to the vagaries of external policy climate, particularly when there is increased prescription through NPM.

Apart from issue of lack of mobility within the system, until very recently, there was also very limited provision of time where teachers and principals could engage in professional conversations, other than staff meetings that frequently eroded teaching time. There is no reduction in full-time teaching duties, while only in 2011, due to austerity, was provision made for an additional 33 h per annum (outside normal working hours) in which CPD, school planning etc. could be addressed (see DES 2011).<sup>5</sup> Given such structural constraints until very recently, it is hardly surprising that a premium has been put on 'good' relations. It also means that for those firmly committed to 'team' building evident above, space and opportunity within existing structures is all but non-existent. In such circumstances, perhaps principals more cautious approach is understandable, if constraining in terms of

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<sup>5</sup>This agreement was reached between the education partners after protracted negotiations, and the quid pro quo was that in return for this 'productivity' teachers would not be subjected to further salary cuts between 2011 and 2014.

exercising leadership. From an inter-national policy perspective, leaning on school leaders to bring about reforms while failing simultaneously to bring about systemic structural changes to facilitate this, is largely ineffective. Such rhetorics of reform, no matter how laudable, remain largely disconnected from the lives and work of school leaders, and place undue expectations on their shoulders, particularly in the absence of professional preparation and sustained support. The basis on which relational trust can be fostered and sustained does not exist, thus ‘friendships’ rather than professional relationships prevail.

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# Chapter 7

## Inclusive Schools: Challenging Leadership?

### Introduction

Policy rhetorics and school reform agenda resound with aspirations to be inclusive. Internationally:

From the 1970s to mid-1990s there was a clear trend across western democracies towards the increased recognition and accommodation of diversity through a range of multiculturalism policies and minority rights. (Kymilcka 2010, p. 97)

While this policy trend provides further evidence of macro influences that penetrate meso and micro realities, there is evidence too that there is considerable contestation of and dissent from such positive policy aspirations (Kymilcka 2007). Reflective of this wider international policy trend, Ireland has its own particular brand of a policy on ‘inclusion’ that chameleon-like seeks to meld four distinct policy trajectories. Though Kymilcka has in mind multicultural education in particular when he states that it is necessary “to move beyond lists of best practices to look more carefully at the preconditions that enabled these practices” to make a positive contribution is particularly apt in this national context (Kymilcka 2010, p. 110). Core policy tension pivots around diversity and cohesion.

The inclusion policy in the Irish context is woven from the thread of ‘Traveller’ education, an indigenous population of approximately 7,000 whom “historically, . . . were often marginalised in the education system” (Author 2005, p. 4). A second thread is that of children with special needs and the recent report by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) provides a comprehensive overview of this sector and its evolution and current challenges (NCSE 2011). Historically, these threads share in common a system of segregation whereby special classes in mainstream or special schools kept such minority groups hidden from view or separated from their peers, until the international tide turned and ‘mainstreaming’ became policy orthodoxy. The third strand of the inclusion policy is educational ‘disadvantage’ that has had its own history and trajectory whereby the current

initiative (DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) seeks to build on earlier initiatives (DES 2005).<sup>1</sup> The most recent addition to this policy cocktail has been marked by the publication of ‘Guidelines’ to school on ‘Intercultural Education’ the intention of which is evident from its sub-title: “Enabling children to respect and celebrate diversity, to promote equality and to challenge unfair discrimination” (NCCA 2005). Their arrival in 2005 is indicative of the fact that until very recently Irish society was characterised by its homogeneity rather than its diversity.

As immigrants (and asylum seekers) flocked to Irish shores during the Celtic Tiger era (1994–2008),<sup>2</sup> and citizens of new EU accession countries<sup>3</sup> sought employment opportunities ‘inter-cultural’ education was added to this expanding smorgasbord (NCCA 2005, p. 222). Collectively, over time, these strands have been combined to create the contemporary policy cocktail: ‘inclusion’.<sup>4</sup>

In popular Irish imagination, cultural homogeneity decrees that we have never been racist, while this myth has foundered under the weight of recent experience and scholarship (Lentin and McVeigh 2002). The Irish diaspora (not a homogenous group to begin with) in nineteenth century America, for example, became ‘white’ escaping their ‘smoked’ designation and in the process frequently becoming racist towards their African-American neighbours with whom they competed most directly for employment (Ignatiev 1995, p. 81). A combination of Western Catholic imperialism, “subordinate privilege” within British Imperialism, as well as the repatriation of “diasporic racism . . . when Irish emigrants returned home” has tended to merge with “endogenous organic racism” [that] has predisposed us to a construction of the other as ‘Gall’ (literally ‘foreigner’) in direct contrast to ‘Gael’ (Irish) or ‘fíor Ghael’ (truly Irish)” (Lentin and McVeigh 2002, pp. 17–21).

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<sup>1</sup>For a comprehensive account of contemporary policy and its antecedents see <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools/>

<sup>2</sup>According to Allen (2000, p. 9), “the Celtic Tiger was baptised in 1994 by an economist working with the Morgan Stanley investment bank.”

<sup>3</sup>In 2004, significantly on May 1st, an additional ten countries became part of the existing 15 member EU—Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and this number was increased in 2007 with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria. It should be noted also that Ireland, UK and Sweden were the only existing EU countries that did not set limits to number of ‘new’ EU citizens who could ‘migrate’ internally. Thus, it is argued, the influx of migrant labour in these three countries was significantly greater than across the EU. This pattern was particularly significant in an Irish context where emigration rather than inward migration had been the dominant pattern for more than a century, while consequently, homogeneity rather than heterogeneity characterised the population.

<sup>4</sup>In this regard, The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) “is a statutory body established under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004. Since our establishment, we have concentrated on developing an organisation which provides a timely and efficient service to schools in sanctioning teaching and Special Needs Assistant (SNA) resources to support children with special educational needs” ([www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie)).

Within this cauldron of conflict, contradiction and denial, Irish society, and its schooling system in particular, has had to re-adjust to the presence of ‘non-nationals’, the term most frequently used as a designation for immigrant children (Devine 2011; McGorman and Sugrue 2007). There is an inevitable contradiction therefore between the assertion of universal rights through international declarations and the power of the State to determine citizenship, while similarly being the signatory to more recently emerged ‘cosmopolitan norms’, thus playing the role of gamekeeper and poacher when citizenship and international rights come into conflict (Benhabib et al. 2008, p. 45). As a consequence of such on-going cultural conditioning and taken for grantedness, what “you see depends on what you believe. What it’s reasonable for you to think, faced with a particular experience, depends on what ideas you already have” (Appiah 2006, p. 39). When a new (emergency) school opened in North County Dublin in September 2007 the total enrolment were black. The publicity surrounding such apartheid provided something of a national wake-up call that inclusion and inter-culturalism required more than aspiration, more than mere rhetoric to enable the majority population to be self-indulgent about the international image of ‘Ireland of the Welcomes’!<sup>5</sup>

What principals and teachers see and believe in relation to ‘inclusion’ has been ‘smoked’ by socialisation, professional experience and value stance. The purpose of this chapter is to re-create their struggles to make sense of reforms as these international ‘change forces’ have played out within their respective school communities. A recent empirical study in the setting indicates clearly that inclusion was much more likely to become a reality in schools if principals worked closely with other personnel such as special needs coordinators, language support teachers etc. In these case study schools “they set the tone, expectations, attitude and gave status to special educational needs or minority ethnic issues in the school” (Travers et al. 2010/2014, p. xviii). The concern here is not the policy per se, but how individual principals and their colleagues have engaged with these considerations over time, while consistent with previous chapters it is reasonable to anticipate intensification over time as the policy has evolved and more diverse school enrolments have become the norm, for some.

Each, in their own particular way, becomes a microcosm of these change forces. The emerging pastiche that evolves over time indicates very clearly that, in more recent times particularly, constant policy change creates a very turbulent climate that frequently requires enormous energy commitment and considerable agency on the part of principals to engage with a new, ambiguous, and evolving policy context while continuing to keep a firm grasp on the tiller of the school to avoid succumbing to unforeseen hazards while attending to or being distracted by the latest inclusion issue to alight on their in-tray. Documenting principals’ ‘positional perspectives’ (Sen 2009) even their parochial engagement with the challenges they confront, is

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<sup>5</sup>Perhaps it is possible to be welcoming of strangers, ‘others’ provided they do not intend to stay, or they are such an insignificant minority that they can be ‘othered’ as somewhat (harmless) eccentric ‘outsiders’ that add colour to the ‘local’ but represent no threat to ‘who we are’. For a significant account of ‘The Ethics of Identity’ see Appiah (2007).

particularly apt in the Irish context, where, as indicated, the vast majority of schools are denominationally parochial, thus rendering inclusion more problematic as enrolment policies, apart from daily routines, are discriminatory on grounds of religion (Coolahan et al. 2012; Devine 2011; McGorman and Sugrue 2007; McGorman and Wallace 2011). Nevertheless, regardless of how local or parochial, each harbours “struggles for lives worthy of human dignity, and all contain struggles for equality and justice” (Nussbaum 2011). Close scrutiny of the agency of principals in such circumstances provides insights into their leadership as enacted over time. Here too, interpersonal relations and trust are significant, but when such concerns extend well beyond the boundaries of the immediate school community, they represent a considerable challenge to principal’s leadership as they seek to vindicate the rights of vulnerable learners while standing tall regarding securing resources and a more equitable and just distribution of professional responsibilities. As further evidence of this challenge from a more structural perspective, there is formal recognition that in a more secular, pluralist and diverse society, it is necessary that this more ‘cosmopolitan’ composition be reflected in school Governance structures (Coolahan et al. 2012); that inclusion continues to be a work in progress. How has this agenda evolved over time, and by close scrutiny of its ‘preconditions’ in various school contexts, how has it impacted on school leaders and leadership?

## **Veterans: Dispositions Towards Inclusion** (Cohort one: Fred, Alison, Jack, Jim)

It is generally recognised that “the hardest part of educational change is not how to start it, but how to make it last and spread” (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009, p. 94). This cohort of principals, due to prevailing cultural considerations in their formative years, were socialised into a strong sense of teaching as vocation, an orientation towards public service and the common good, before a more rampant individualism became a political orthodoxy (Gerhardt 2011), even if such dispositions were underpinned by Christian charity rather than commitment to social justice (see Fuller 2004). In a system characterised until recently by relative autonomy, and in the absence of policy, local circumstance obliged principals to act professionally. For example, Alison (1979–) indicates that when immigrant children registered in her suburban school in increasing numbers, action was needed, though policy had not yet recognised the scale of the challenge. Consistent with her general disposition and *modus vivendi*:

One of the things we decided to do is that we would teach the mothers English. Now, we obviously didn’t have teachers teaching English language before it was introduced in the Department [of Education] so I thought, right, I would get some of the people in the community . . . [to] teach the mothers English. (Alison, Int. 4, 2007)

It “worked fantastically for them” in the absence of any policy regarding “English language teachers.” She too made a practical commitment:

I made a point always of teaching myself how to say their names. I remember one, Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_, and she said to me, ‘you’re the only person who can say it’. As they came in I used to say to them, sorry say it again and I used write it down phonetically or whatever and teach myself. (Alison, Int. 4, 2007)

Her comments and initiative also indicate clearly that in a time of rapid change, practice frequently precedes policy, and improvisation is an important aspect of the work of school leadership.

Similarly, Fred (1971–2010) had a welcoming entrepreneurial disposition. Increasing enrolments was an opportunity to build a new school, as well as become an administrative principal, having spent decades as a teaching principal. While these enhanced the unfolding package, his disposition, sensitised by Sub-Saharan African teaching experience in mid-career, meant that he was well disposed and welcoming. Rather than ‘hassle’, such opportunities are enriching:

... if you look on foreign national children as a resource, ... well then it’s going to be a plus, going to be positive. I hear about people giving out about foreign nationals and that they’re problems because they know no English. But sure those kids have such wealth of experience and ability and culture that all you’ve to do is to turn it around and start recognising and affirming those kids and then suddenly you realise that the whole school benefits. (Fred, Int. 4, 2007)

Similarly regarding the presence of SEN learners in the mainstream, his general summation is that while it is “a lot more work” it is “a huge plus for the school” (Int. 4, 2007). By way of illustration, he continues: “We had a child, downs syndrome, who finished in 6th class last year. The wealth of stuff she brought to the school was amazing.” Such comments strongly suggest that schools provide opportunities for learning that remain unexamined by typical tests, but may be life enhancing as well as socially and civically significant. As Nussbaum advocates: “we will never have good institutions without compassionate people, so educating compassion is still critical” (cited in, Gerhardt 2011, p. 333). However, such a positive disposition is no substitute for developing appropriate pedagogical collaborative expertise between classroom and resource teachers while leaving unanswered larger questions regarding an ‘all or nothing’ policy of mainstreaming for SEN learners (Ní Bhroin 2011; Travers et al. 2010/2014; Ware et al. 2009).

“Touched” by the presence of the Downs child and against the advice of his “esteemed inspector” who suggested that an autism unit in the school would be “an awful lot of trouble,” inclusion was embraced further. He comments:

I’d like to think, even if [names Downs child] didn’t touch me, I would still have that kind of an attitude that every kid deserves a chance and every kid has talents and abilities. Ok, so it is more hassle. (Fred, Int. 4, 2007)

The pattern that emerges from this and other testimony is that when the principal’s disposition is positive, there is an acceptance that ‘hassle’ becomes part of professional responsibility as a vindication of children’s rights. His perspective

resonates very readily with the more general finding in a large-scale English study that concludes:

... the influence of age and life experience on teachers' identity and professional life growth is not a linear one, but rather depends on issues, such as their sense of efficacy, resilience and how tensions are managed, together with the impact of sometimes hard to predict life events (Day et al. 2007, p. 100)

This evidence, and that of the other veterans below, concurs with the findings of larger studies that conclude- the "large majority of these [mature/late career] teachers continue to demonstrate a strong sense of commitment to their work" (p. 101).

In Jim's (1985-) small rural school, the multi-cultural challenge has barely registered, while his primary persona as a teacher seems scarcely disturbed by provision for children with special needs. Regarding the former, he states: "... we have only one ... lad, he's from Latvia" and in response to my query as to the presence of this family in a rural community, he responded: "I'm not sure, they're here now, he's in first class so they're here a good few years. He's learned English very quickly." Such a minority presence and with a European heritage, this immigrant presence is probably rendered invisible, 'one of us'. Such a mindset is more redolent of a much more broadly based European trend towards a "discourse that emphasizes ideas of integration, social cohesion, common values, and shared citizenship" rather than inter-cultural enrichment (see also Cuperus 2006; Cuperus et al. 2003; Kymilcka 2010, p. 98) Meanwhile, SEN too appears to have been absorbed into existing routines, even with some changes to staffing:

... it has a slight impact. We have an SNA employed in the school, we have 4 children who are special needs and we have a special needs teacher and we have a learning support teacher, so that's the difference to the way things used to be. (Jim, Int. 4, 2007)

For Jack (1978-2007), on the other hand, in a senior primary school (8-12 year olds), he feels that he has always been fighting for additional resources, long before inter-cultural education became a policy and practice issue. His comments regarding the evolution of special needs provision speaks to an ad hoc evolving agenda, with lack of clarity regarding responsibilities, an absence of professional support and capacity building so that muddling through became a way of life. Thus there is simply a shift in the focus of what you are fighting for: "The same is true before foreign nationals came, the same was true in relation to disadvantage. It's not just a case of throwing money at it" (Int. 4, 2007). His first formal encounter with SEN was the creation of two special classes (1980s) in the school, and these were perceived and represented as first steps in mainstreaming, while, not uncommonly, there were unintended consequences in circumstances that were already challenging.

... we had two special classes running at one time. ... Special classes were one of the things that were seen as being very desirable and then when they became a fact ... discipline became an issue in special classes so some of the inclusion thing became kind of an answer to that. Again as one of the things I'd feel a bit badly about. (Jack, Int. 4, 2007)

Apart from a sense of guilt induced by a feeling that you are never doing enough, his comments also suggest that such provision also created a kind of internal apartheid—where the most challenging and difficult learners were segregated in ‘special’ classes with occasional forays into the mainstream, something that necessitated collaboration and planning that was foreign to the ‘legendary autonomy’ of classroom teachers in the Irish system (OECD 1991). In such circumstances, special class learners “became marginal participants in mainstream” (see Sugrue 2006) and he elaborates on the process thus:

... one of the things that happened would be that you’d have kids going back with work to do in the [mainstream]class, which definitely wasn’t included. ... It’s easy to criticise it. In an ideal world, if I’m in the special class and I’m going back let’s say for history, just going back and seeing that everybody else knows the answer is not enough, I need something to equip me to go back and participate. If that’s to happen, my class teacher and my special teacher should have some notion of what’s going on and I should be prepared for it and all that. (Jack, Int. 4, 2007)

Jack acknowledges that “. . . all of that in fairness takes a huge amount of time which genuinely isn’t there, you know”. The structure of the school day has not altered materially since the nineteenth century, thus time for collaborative planning continues to be opportunist and ad hoc, even when resource teachers are working in co-teaching situations with class teachers (Ní Bhroin 2011; see also Sugrue 2006).<sup>6</sup>

Jack is highly critical of the manner in which the system evolved whereby the role of ‘classroom assistant’ was created in the late 1980s, early 1990s to address unemployment. He suggests that many of these assistants were “unemployed and unemployable” while subsequently they metamorphosed into SNAs. Although he indicates that some were ‘fine’, more damning is the fact that “there was no attempt to give them any kind of training or any kind of preparation” or indeed for teachers: “There was no attempt to kind of up skill either the principal or the class teachers” (Int. 4, 2007). While he recognises that “we have to do it, now it’s my job to make it work” he has serious misgivings about the capacity to deliver.

From the calmer waters of retirement, Jack suggests that perhaps it was “the wrong thing to do” to implement such policies in a piecemeal manner, but being conditioned to making do in a disadvantaged schools, there is a kind of Sisyphian heroism: “growing up with the school, to kind of make things work against the odds”. In such policy contexts, making do means we do “not question this enough.” He concludes that such a major policy shift “in relation to the integration both of

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<sup>6</sup>In 2009–2010, as the scale of financial austerity for the restoration of national sovereignty became more evident, and reform of the public sector vital as a means of reducing expenditure, as part of the terms of what has become known as the Croke Park agreement, teachers unions, some more reluctantly than others, have agreed to introduce an additional 33 hours per year as part of workload. The action plan for the education sector specifically states the purposes to which these hours should be devoted: “This additional time is intended to address an existing structural deficit in the operation of our schools which results in essential activities such as school planning, staff meetings, parent-teacher meetings, national in-service provision etc., intruding on class contact/tuition time.” (<http://implementationbody.gov.ie/sectoral-action-plans/>)



support staff like SNA's or indeed disabled children, I think that's having a huge huge impact on schools" (Int. 4, 2007).

His testimony corroborates the necessity for the principle of 'reciprocity' whereby incremental demands for change are matched by incremental professional support to provide the capacity to bring about policy goals (Elmore 2004). Reforms in the absence of concerted capacity building are much more likely to lead to superficial adoption, compliance rather than transformation. (Bryk and Schneider 2002; Bryk et al. 1998). Additionally, the tradition among principals of 'making do' has the undesirable consequence of allowing policy-makers to continue to 'implement' resource neutral reforms. Such lack of resource provision in an intercultural environment in Jack's view also sews the seeds of racism:

One of the things about the non-nationals aspect, it's frighteningly easier for parents to kind of risk going public. You'll hear them on . . . the radio or quoted in the papers or whatever, my child is now not getting something because the black child or this, that and the other. That seems to be much more acceptable than to say my child is not getting it [help] because there's a young fellow in a wheelchair or there's a young fellow in a whatever sort of thing. Some of it is parallel but there is probably potential for it to explode probably sooner rather than later. (Jack, Int. 4, 2007)

He feels equally strongly that those learners who traditionally accessed a resource teacher are now being squeezed between the needs of more immediately identifiable SEN learners and the language needs of immigrants, particularly if the parents of such learners refuse to allow their children to be assessed; a perspective reinforced by empirical evidence (McGorman and Sugrue 2007) He clearly questions the somewhat heroic practices among principals of 'making do' as in the longer term such heroics may be inimical to the interest of learners, and perhaps also exceed what is reasonable to expect of professionally responsible teaching colleagues. Piecemeal reforms are 'add-ons' rather than transformative capacity building even when principals' hearts are in the right place.

Clearly within the cohort, disposition is crucial, an openness and empathy towards inclusion renders the 'hassle' worthwhile professionally, while capacity building is essential. Competing for limited resources—creates tensions that potentially foment latent racism if not adequately addressed. In such circumstances, pragmatic bolt-ons to existing practices are scarcely adequate and potentially injurious longer term.

## **Experienced Principals: Inclusion, Intensification—Leading Learner's Rights**

(Cohort two: Michelle, Conor, Maggie, Eddie)

Michelle (1992–) has an abiding commitment to special needs due to personal experience. On appointment, she secured disadvantaged status for the school. As special needs became a larger mainstream issue, she was in the vanguard, (rather like

Jack above), in securing special classes within the school—further evidence of the significance of passion and purpose (Day and Gu 2010; Day et al. 2007). However, passion and purpose render the ‘hassle’ worthwhile:

... for example when we started getting involved with special needs, it was in the mid 90’s, when that special class was set up and then we were told, no make it an integrated special class, so it was very ... it just wasn’t happening really, ... (Michelle, Int. 2, 2000)

Being ‘successful’ in the inclusion stakes has potential to increase unfairly the level of challenge in particular schools, while less committed leaders conveniently keep their heads down. She says:

... the staff were used to having children with challenging needs ... in classrooms so they were ok, they were able for it but as time went on, you would have a couple of things happening, you would have things like psychologists in our health board area saying you should send your child to that school because they ... (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

As a consequence, willingness and openness to change and inclusion became defensive, and resistant, for very understandable reasons, thus “there was a lot of kind of working on not taking them because that was not fair” (Int. 4, 2007). Such sentiments concur with the observation that “understanding resistance to change as a process of fulfilling ... and protecting ... missions ... draws attention to a positive sense of what teachers are fighting for ...” (Day et al. 2007, p. 101); resistance may be for powerful positive reasons—in this instance equity and fairness. As Michelle indicates, there can be apartheid between (as well as within) schools: “I would have even had situations where parents would have their children going to other schools in [names locality] and wanting to send their special needs kids to us, that’s not inclusion in my mind” (Int. 4, 2007). Such policy pursuits, supported and promoted by other professionals, may play out in an inimical manner at the level of the individual school, and thus also become a betrayal of individual and collective commitment, while potentially undermining passion and resilience. Policy-makers too frequently pay too little attention to the unintended consequences of their policy making, while other professionals also need to be more judicious in the exercise of their responsibilities, by paying more attention to the ‘bigger picture’, beyond the mere placement of another SEN learner (see Day and Gu 2010, pp. 156–176).

Leading an inclusive school brings additional if less obvious responsibilities and challenges that are demanding and time consuming:

... and I remember having a team meeting and her mother would have been there and it wasn’t just her mother, there was a person called a family advocate, there was a speech therapist, there was an occupational therapist, there was a psychologist and there was a ... an early childcare worker, so there was 6 people and then me and the teacher and it was a little bit over the top. I know she would have had motor issues and the mum didn’t let her play with marla [plasticine] and she couldn’t play with sand and there were certain things she couldn’t play with but other things she could and having to actually try to make educational rationale for things that she should be doing and ... (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

Similar stories of over-anxious and over-protective parents were commonplace, particularly, as was frequently the case, they had had to fight with official

bureaucracy to vindicate the rights of their child. In such circumstances, trust was often in poor supply (Gronn 2011). Michelle illustrates this very powerfully with a story regarding a downs syndrome child whose parents had expressed concern to a surgeon regarding disfigurement as he was about to undergo yet another surgery on his eyes, only to receive the rather unsympathetic retort: “what does it matter sure he won’t know”. Schools are left to pick up the pieces of such inappropriate responses, and deal with the collateral distrust and the “emotional baggage” such episodes create. The following vignette attests to the (often hidden) emotional labour of leading (Leithwood and Beatty 2008) and the complex interpersonal dynamics engendered as part of the policy process.

... because we had a policy that if you wanted to speak about the child, you spoke to the class teacher and the teacher and the SNA would meet you together because we were managing the whole teacher/SNA thing as well at the time and the SNA herself in this case, she was extremely uncomfortable about it.<sup>7</sup> It was then he told me all about the reactions he had got [from the surgeon] and I said, but you know you have to trust us, we have to be able to make decisions and to trust us and he said, first and foremost it’s his son. So I said, ‘have we ever given you any reason not to trust us’, so he said ‘no’. So we had an interesting relationship for four years. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

It may be suggested that the surgeon’s lack of empathy and interpersonal acumen effectively ‘stitched up’ Michelle to repair the emotional damage, thus demanding greater emotional investment. The addendum to the story however, is that this learner subsequently transferred to a special school as the more he progressed with his cohort, the wider became the achievement gap, and, as Michelle commented: “It took them [parents] that length of time” strongly suggesting that mainstreaming is not necessarily for all special needs learners (Travers et al. 2010/2014; Ware et al. 2009). However, such inferences do not acknowledge that mainstreaming is more than placement, thus it is also possible that it fails to meet the learning needs of SEN learners (Ní Bhroin 2011).

From a multi-cultural perspective, Michelle appears to have taken the presence of an increasing minority of immigrant learners in her stride. The school had been accustomed to a minority of Chinese pupils and in anticipation of EU accession countries in the mid noughties, numbers increased. She says:

... before the Baltic states joined the EU, there would have been a lot of Latvian and Estonian students coming over. I’d say they were just smart, all very clever, very bright, very ambitious. . . . So we would have had hours in the very early days for language support and very quickly went into a full time teacher. But we’ve got eastern European, a fair few Nigerians, Pilipino, Malaysian and Chinese so there’s quite a mixture. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

Perhaps commitment to making SEN mainstreaming work also fosters assimilation rather than an inter-cultural dynamic that respects diversity more than

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<sup>7</sup>The SNAs discomfort was due primarily to the fact that the child’s father had sought to deploy a divide a conquer strategy by attempting to meet separately with the teacher and the SNA and to sew dissension between them.

homogeneity. At a minimum these 'realities' broaden horizons such that the global meets the local providing evidence that education as a policy space is increasingly framed by international forces at the macro level (Lawn and Grek 2012). However, in the absence of any professional support when the inter-cultural policy was disseminated to all teachers (NCCA 2005), and at a time when the entire curriculum was being revised, 'overload' was already becoming an issue, while a culture of 'making do' is perpetuated (NCCA 2010).

Conor (1992–2010), a more practical, task oriented principal in terms of disposition, just got on with the challenge, while recognising its impact: "I'd say the biggest change would be in relation to special needs and also the non-nationals. They've created a huge amount of work, you know, because you have all sorts of problems with non-nationals not having the language and so forth" (Int. 4, 2007). His means of managing such challenges is "to be totally organised" otherwise "you're in serious trouble". Consequently, "if you're well organised and you have your files and you're able to put your hands on things fairly quickly, that's a big help" (Int. 4, 2007).

While being 'on top of' the paperwork is important from a managerial perspective, how one relates to these different groups of learners depends crucially on prior beliefs, values and what inclusion entails. While Conor's school has an immigrant enrolment of less than 10 % in other schools in the locality immigrants constitute 40–50 % of the learners. In such circumstances, managerial decisions not to "have prefabs . . . because that could create . . . vandalism" might be construed as limiting access. However, they did determine to alter existing school accommodation with deleterious effects on the total learning environment. He says of these arrangements that they are "not satisfactory so we'll be looking at getting extra accommodation for resource teachers but not really extra classrooms . . ." (Int. 4, 2007). However, in a town the size of where his school is located, where there are several primary schools, there is competition for enrolments. Thus:

... in [names town] there are travellers in every school ... there are non-nationals so all the schools have the same problems and to be honest about it, there are problems associated with having non-nationals and travellers, more so with travellers than non-nationals . . . . (Conor, Int. 4, 2007)

His comments appear not to acknowledge that 'problems' are different in scale while he is more overtly aware that in a competitive enrolment context the court of public perception is vital to the reputational 'image' of the school:

... they're perceived problems, that school is full of non-nationals or that school is full of travellers or whatever the case might be. There might only be a small portion of that but they have a disproportionate . . . (Conor, Int. 4, 2007)

As part of this enrolment apartheid, he names two schools in the locality that do not have immigrant or traveller children on their rolls. Class and social capital are at work and choice is being exercised in discriminatory ways. Thus, 'making do' has potential to subvert and resist policy rather than attempting to make it work. His evidence of the quasi-market circumstances that prevail amongst the primary schools in this town, a creature of NPM, strongly suggests that greater inequality may result rather than each school shouldering its responsibilities.

Though Maggie (1991–2004) had moved on from principalship when her final interview was completed in 2007, she recalled the upheaval of structural change necessary to accommodate SEN learners, and while she was well disposed towards the reform, she was under no illusions regarding the scale of the challenge. In drawing attention to such challenges, she reinforces the views of others above, that principals are frequently obliged to implement policies long before the infrastructure has caught up with the provision. The moral compass that commits principals and their colleagues to ‘making do’ may actually erode professionalism while resistance in such circumstances may be more defensible from a professional responsibility perspective in the absence of infra-structural resource allocation and professional support. Recent retrenchment due to austerity heightens this professional dilemma. Maggie makes the point that in the case of access for a wheelchair user, it is possible to secure resources to alter infra-structure, but other aspects of inclusion that impinge more directly on principals’ and teachers’ work are not amenable to ‘one-off’ solutions.

The inclusion of children who are troublesome or who have behavioural difficulties is even more difficult because it’s very hard on the teacher and on everybody else. But I think the society has to accommodate and I think that it’s actually good for the children to learn but it’s hard work. (Maggie, Int. 4, 2007)

Further comments indicate clearly that there is a learning curve for principals also as ad hoc policy making continues, thus “people don’t know how to utilise them properly. At least in my opinion they didn’t then, unless that’s all changed in five years” (Int. 4, 2007).<sup>8</sup> Apart from reinforcing the necessity for principals to ‘made do’, some are much better than others at navigating the system. Perhaps it is those with a greater sense of passion and purpose, a greater sense of vocation and a consequent commitment to the vindication of values such sense of purpose entails, so that making do may become a form of ‘advocacy leadership’—“defending the powerless from the powerful”, in this instance the marginal by the mainstream (Anderson 2009, p. 42). What emerges also is that as the pace of change accelerates and policy ‘churn’ becomes the norm, the school principal becomes much more of a gate-keeper, pressured from the external (increasingly prescriptive) policy environment to implement change while seeking internally to avoid overload and destabilisation; no longer the leader of an independent republic but obliged to chart

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<sup>8</sup>In the context of the interview, Maggie’s comment followed on from mention of SENOs (Special Educational Needs Organiser), a completely new category of employee in the education system, whose task it was in many instances to recommend or not whether a SEN learner had entitlement to SNA assistance in the classroom. District inspectors were initially given this task, but complained about the workload involved and had signalled industrial action if the matter were not addressed as a matter of priority. It was. While workload was certainly a consideration, so too was the actual and potential opprobrium being visited on officials of the DES by irate parents who were struggling to access resources for their SEN children. There was a heightened awareness of this issue due to high profile legal actions (see note vii).

a course for the school community but increasingly without stable compass readings as macro, meso and micro political considerations blur boundaries and destabilise decision-making.

Eddie (1993–2006) had been principal in a rural school for a number of years in the mid 1990s when he first encountered inclusion concerns. Since he inherited poor staff relations SEN provision became a further opportunity for dissent—a NIMBY perspective on SEN. Theoretically, this may be regarded as “uncertainty avoidance” described as “the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations” (Hofstede et al. 2010, p. 191). When a learner was enrolled with a condition that warranted an SNA, he says: “It created ructions within the school and it coincided with me doing some study.” Being *au fait* with IEPs he was able to resist the ‘extremist talk’ of colleagues who argued: “no this school isn’t, that should be a special class, a special school, nothing here, sure how would we cope with that, we won’t take her until, and so on” (Int. 4, 2007). Although the teacher in whose class she was placed had “an excellent relationship with children and she didn’t panic” this did not eliminate “difficulties at classroom level.”

Since an SNA was not made available immediately, it was necessary to ‘break the rules’ thus “. . . we redeployed the learning support teacher a little bit” in the absence of adequate support (Sugrue 2011). However, here too, there is no evidence of systemic attention to capacity building, and while this does not mean it doesn’t occur, in this instance it is challenged further by becoming a ‘magnate’ for other SEN learners. As Eddie indicates: “we had a couple of those and early management of those” with the additional uncertainty that roles and responsibilities between teachers and SNAs are poorly defined: “people were not sure of their role and were they teachers?” (Int. 4, 2007).

What Eddie’s testimony vividly portrays is that the roll out of policy is often fraught with uncertainty—the role and status of SNAs, their responsibilities vis a vis the teacher etc., and it is the micro-politics of these that are often ignored or downplayed by policy-makers.<sup>9</sup> Significantly more attention is paid to public pressure and being seen to prescribe (instant) solutions rather than building sustainable systemic capacity. Such scenarios challenge the commitment and competence of school leaders, while their success or otherwise in dealing with such demands are shaped significantly by the quality of interpersonal relations and their authority in winning people over in an authentic and convincing manner. Beyond the immediate din of dissonance, there is some recognition that becoming more inclusive evokes a more caring culture within the school but in a more competitive climate becoming more inclusive has potential also to increase inequality. Competitiveness potentially creates exclusive rather than inclusive schools; a major challenge to the disposition and leadership capacity of principals.

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<sup>9</sup>This is particularly the case in a system where there are no intermediate structures between the Ministry and the individual school and its Board of Management. Thus, massive energy is expended locally when policy is disseminated without any collective support or interpretation as to intent and practical implications; all have to be worked out within the individual school community.

As inclusion became more politicised due to high profile cases taken by parents to vindicate the rights of their child to a mainstream education, parents more generally became more assertive,<sup>10</sup> as a rights culture gains prominence. Eddie recounts a visit from a father “who didn’t speak very well” but “had been coached what to say”, asserting his “consecutinal (constitutional) right”. Nevertheless, Eddie set about having this person’s child psychologically assessed, and “we set the ball in motion”. As a consequence of promoting an inclusive school, this five-teacher school rapidly had “3 SNA’s and we had several pupils including 2 autistic pupils and that autistic pupil has been an outstanding success within the school.” As a further vindication of his stewardship in this regard he states: “they’re doing very well, within their ability level but they’re totally integrated” (Int. 4, 2007).

‘Integrated’ may be a sign of success when dealing with SEN learners, but the opposite in the context of intercultural policy. I have tried to argue above, policy shifts and attendant practical challenges rarely if ever occur in isolation. It is this multiplier effect that often results in overload and school leaders feeling overwhelmed. Eddie’s comments indicate and illustrate this multiplier effect when he says:

But ... a huge amount of Lithuanians and Latvians and eastern Europeans came to the ... area ... because there would be a lot of sort of meat factory employment and farming employment there and we already had 10–12 Pakistani’s because we always got the doctors’ children from the hospital ... we had a parent who would translate stuff into Urdu etc. so we had that going already and we weren’t frightened of the different cultures, you know. If you looked in the yard and you saw the number of Pakistani’s, they sort of stood out in a school with about 130 pupils and ... (Eddie, Int. 4, 2007)

The immigrant presence constituted approximately 10 % of the enrolment, yet some ‘stood out’. In a denominational school, it becomes an ongoing challenge to respect the spirit and the letter of an inter-cultural community. More immediately, as Michelle has previously indicated, inter-school inequities potentially materialise as a consequence of the commitment and disposition of a principal. As Eddie reflected on the rapidly changing demographics of his enrolment, he determined that his honesty and integrity were being exploited, unintentionally promoting ‘white flight’ (McGorman and Sugrue 2007):

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<sup>10</sup>At the turn of the twenty-first century, several court proceedings were initiated by parents regarding children’s rights to an education regardless of their disability. One of the most high profile of these was taken by Kathryn Sinnott, a disability rights activist and (former) politician took a high court action on behalf of her son Jamie. Though he was then 23, the court ruled that he continued to be entitled to a primary education. The DES appealed this decision to the supreme court and won its appeal on the grounds that it did not have a constitutional obligation to provide a primary education to any citizen beyond the age of 18. However, they did commit to paying Jamie compensation and to continue to provide education for him. As the number of court rulings went against the DES, a policy of mainstreaming with attendant resource implications became inevitable. However, at the level of the schools, principals had to go to considerable lengths to secure appropriate resource allocation for individual SEN learners (see Sinnott V Minister for Education 2001).

... we became rather alarmed ... because, ... where you get diversity in big numbers, the Irish start withdrawing and we were afraid of that happening, we were already providing for an awful lot of special needs and we were also doing this ...” (Eddie, Int. 4, 2007)

When he explored enrolment issues with the local “educational welfare officer” in order to stem the flow of enrolments that were gravitating to his school, he indicates:

we worked out an arrangement, myself and herself, that I wouldn’t refuse anybody but I would say, listen, you will have to get a bus to come to our school, here’s the number of a lady who will help you and instead of just applying to me for our school, she would sit down and say, where do you live, have you a car, right, you will apply to all of the schools in the parish and ... and that helped a lot them to find schools ... (Eddie, Int. 4, 2007)

In the shadow of a policy on inclusion, some principals were deploying this in an exclusionary manner. Eddie’s sense of fairness recommended this course of action, while he reasoned: “we were trying to get away from the ghettoisation without excluding people, so I think that we had a variety of needs within the school and we tried to encourage that without it becoming too much” (Int. 4, 2007).

His testimony clearly points to the necessity to be aware of the ‘bigger picture’ rather than being overly focused on one’s own school—thus these shifting policies extend the remit of principals in all manner of intended and unintended ways.<sup>11</sup> What emerges is that a policy of inclusion challenges principals to become more aware of the moral dimensions of their role and responsibilities and to act in a manner consistent with a sense of equity and advocacy—to advocate for learners while doing so in a manner that may challenge colleagues also to shoulder an equitable share of responsibility for implementation.

There is clear evidence of intensification among this cohort. Commitment to inclusion when it combines disadvantage, SEN and inter-cultural challenges ratchets up the multiplier effect and in a more competitive environment, ‘success’ can be exploited by neighbouring schools whereby exclusion rather than a more equitable sharing of professional responsibility for inclusion becomes part of school image management in terms of attempting to shape public perceptions of school communities. Absence of capacity building measures on the part of policy-makers is also exploitative of the good will and professional commitment and dispositions of principals and their teaching colleagues, thus diluting the ‘pre-conditions’ that render inclusion possible.

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<sup>11</sup>Eddie also pointed out that while a refusal could be appealed under Section 29 of the Equality Act, verbal refusals had no status. In contrast with school principals who simply indicated they were ‘full’ when being asked to accommodate SEN or immigrant learners, his practice was to provide both the school’s enrolment policy and application form on request. Such practices might be regarded as the ‘black economy’ of school enrolment, Irish style, or the ‘hidden injuries’ of enrolment apartheid in Ireland (Sennett 1993).



## From Neophyte to Experienced—Learning a Language of ‘Inclusive’ Leadership

(Cohort three: Dick, Kate, Rose, Denise)

There is comfort, compassion and a new language of inclusive literacy evident in Dick’s comments:

... if we take inclusion to mean lower incidence, we’ve had at times 4-5-6, that kind of figure, children who would have, either a child with multiple disabilities that would be multiple physical disabilities, perfectly good emotionally, she’s excellent. We’ve had children with autism, various places on the autism spectrum, Asperger’s, and one or two other things. I found that inclusion was easy in a sense, the only people that might have had hang-ups about it were adults. The children were very good to accept a child with issues. Now we have a boy with Asperger’s in one class here, intellectually brilliant but just social skills, he could throw something or he could do whatever in the class or throw a tantrum or whatever ... (Dick, Int. 4, 2007)

Yet, Dick’s positive disposition towards inclusion partly derives from respect for difference and the potential learning it creates for all. He tells of helping a child in grade 4 to remove a thorn from his hand and while doing this inquired: “am I hurting you there now?” to which his Asperger’s friend quickly replied “well you won’t hurt him because there’s no feeling in the outer layer of skin.” Dick identifies the moral of the story: “I like to think that, any difficulties we might have are more than outweighed with the positives” (Int. 4, 2007).

Positive disposition and learning environment however may be challenged in particular cases. In this regard Dick comments on a “severely autistic” girl in the school and wonders if they have the capacity to meet her needs: “because she’s so severely autistic and it’s not the management of her, that’s not the issue, I just think that for herself perhaps” thus foreshadowing later empirical evidence regarding mainstreaming at any cost and its consequences for learner (Travers et al. 2010/2014; Ware et al. 2009). Through his own professional networks he secured her the offer of a place in a school that has an autism unit, but he says rather ruefully: “but that would have required the family to make more adjustments in terms of getting her there and no they’d just send her here. We don’t have the capacity, ...” (Int. 4, 2007).

Apart from mainstream capacity limits, there emerges a tendency among parents to select mainstream for their special needs offspring that privileges socialisation. Such choices resonate with the empirical literature which states that “they mainly choose a regular school because of the possibilities for their child to participate socially in the peer group;” but in doing so tend to conflate ‘being there’ with “social participation” (de Boer et al. 2011, p. 332). Resultant dilemmas place school leaders in a difficult situation, of having to make professional judgements that honour the spirit of an inclusive policy while acting also in the best interests of the learner.

Denise (1999–) communicates defensiveness about the exclusive nature of Irish medium schools.<sup>12</sup> She indicates that while willing to enrol children with special needs, it is often the case that professionals such as “we’ll say language therapists and occupational therapists just tell parents you’d be mad and they make the decision then not to send them to us. So it’s not that we exclude them or don’t include them . . .” (Int. 4, 2008). Similarly, since for immigrant families learning English is a necessity and a priority, doing so in an Irish medium school adds greater challenge and complexity while Denise concludes: “I do think it’s an element of education that we’re losing out on for the rest of the children” (Int. 4, 2008).

However, despite the positive disposition articulated by Denise towards inclusion, she indicates also that Irish medium schools may unwittingly or otherwise become exclusive spaces that lend a cloak of respectability to class, ethnic and cultural prejudice and discrimination. As she indicates: “I did have one set of parents who came in and said to me . . . that the reason they had chosen the school was not because it was an all-Irish but that they liked the type of child that was coming to our school.” Despite lack of experience of dealing with diverse enrolments, she did commit to meaningful engagement with the policy, but the impression created is that challenging it did not exact a major emotional toll. Rather, her familiarity with “the EPSN<sup>13</sup> act and all the responsibilities that are put on you by this inclusivity and special needs” she characterises as a “minefield” but since she has only had to deal with a small number of children with IEPs, she says: “I’ve kind of familiarised myself with as much as I need to for the clientele we have in our school, if that makes sense” (Int. 4, 2008).

Her testimony makes sense as well as indicating that policy responsibilities are highly varied depending on positioning within a system, with the result that justice and fairness are often trumped by expediency; new policy may be accommodated within existing paradigms, thus merely tweaking existing provision. In such a climate other voices favour a leadership style that embraces “a more proactive advocacy role” as a necessity (Anderson 2009, p. 2). Additional testimony indicates how parental ‘choice’ and the resultant quasi-market of schooling cultivates exclusion thus “ensuring that my child is sitting beside other Irish children and not in a class of half new entrants and so on and yes that has been voiced and that is what the schools are being used for” (Int. 4, 2008). Leadership responsibilities in such rapidly changing environments cannot be left to school leaders alone.

From her earliest days in teaching, Kate (1997–2007), the education of travellers was addressed, initially often being temporary as they were prepared for the sacraments of Communion and Confirmation, the latter often being their farewell

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<sup>12</sup>Gaelscoileanna, an umbrella organisation for the sector, was established in 1973. On the Island of Ireland there are approximately 160 Irish-language medium primary schools, a number that continues to grow. The sector is vulnerable to criticism in the context of inclusion policy.

<sup>13</sup>This legislation—Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs—was enacted in 2004, and in some respects trumped issues around inter-cultural education as the latter did not have any legislation to underpin the policy.

to formal education. From such low key, segregated, unheralded and unfashionable commitments, she puts the evolution of more than two decades of work in perspective thus:

Well, first of all, the travellers. We'll say when I started teaching first . . . if anyone had said to me that I would see a day when all the travellers came to school in a uniform with a lunchbox . . . I would have said no way. I mean, that all happened. I couldn't believe it. . . . And I know it's very, very piece meal and it's very slowly, I suppose, accomplished, but it did happen. (Kate, Int. 4, 2007).

What Kate's testimony indicates clearly is that long before a policy of inclusion was even thought of, some schools were struggling to give travellers educational opportunities from which they were largely excluded. Such commitment, and quiet determination in a system is often unrewarded since the majority bear silent 'witness' that there is a certain relief that it is an-'other' school rather than their own that finds itself positioned to take on this responsibility. However, it is often only when such responsibilities become more widespread that there is greater awareness of inequities in the system and how policies, intentional or otherwise, have a capacity to exacerbate rather than alleviate injustices.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly among this cohort a more diverse society is evident to varying degrees in terms of challenges to leadership. In this regard, disposition emerges as critical, where valuing fairness and equity propel principals to accommodate, but with potential to be exploited. It also becomes evident that sustained commitment over time in order to build capacity is a vital necessity, less likely to occur in a more complex environment without sustained systemic support. There is indirect evidence too that when policy makers underestimate the complexity of policy reforms, that a professional commitment to 'making do' while laudable, may be a recipe longer term for superficial adoption, resistance in the form of as much rejection as the system allows.

### **Leadership Capacity: Diversity, Intensification, Accountability** (Cohort four: Ben, Sadie, Brent, Janice)

Immigrant labour<sup>15</sup> increases complexity, with enormous variation from school to school. When Ben was appointed principal (2005-) he had already added to his professional portfolio a Masters in ICT and a postgraduate diploma in SEN, and his early agency is marked by this expertise. He says:

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<sup>14</sup>Since Rose served for less than 2 years as principal of a middle-class school with a changing demographic, inclusion does not feature in her testimony.

<sup>15</sup>In this regard, with the presence of a hospital in the vicinity of a school, there might be major concentration of Phillipina nurses, while in other context, the building and meat industry attracts significant immigrant labour from Brazil and eastern Europe, while opportunities in the building industry have declined dramatically since the property bubble imploded in 2007-2008.

I understood a lot of the conditions and I understood what was needed. SENOs were only starting at the time so I followed that and then the documents started being produced online before they were even sent down by post and I was able to get a lot of applications in, . . . I meet the SENO 4 or 5 times a year whereas most schools only meet her once. (Ben, Int. 2, 2007)

Implicit in these observations is the cultural understanding that securing resources is enhanced by cultivating gatekeepers. Yet, access without advocacy is not sufficient:

. . . it's a huge workload because no matter how tired you are with it, it's the child you're trying to benefit and if that child has a need you're going to send off that application and you're going to fight for it and then when the SENO says no, you're still going to fight for the child because you know that that child has a problem . . . . (Ben, Int. 2, 2007)

Having indicated that in one instance it took him four years to secure an SNA his testimony elegantly testifies to the necessity for persistent advocacy to vindicate learner's rights while facing down bureaucracy:

But it's all . . . it's a circle and there are spiralling loops that will bring you back to the start or back up . . . . And I'd say when things are real busy, it's about 60-70 % of my job at the moment. . . . Form filling, phone calls, emails, making sure that forms get sent back . . . it is a case of chasing, chasing, talking because it's parents as well. (Ben, Int. 2, 2007)

His particular version of 'advocacy leadership' resonates with the view that "unless school professionals see themselves as advocates for more equitable placement of children in classes or schools, they are colluding in a . . . system that is unjust" (Anderson 2009, p. 33). His actions also vindicate the view that "we cannot . . . improve public schools by concentrating on the schools alone" (p. 30).

When the policy environment is unstable and unpredictable, seeking to secure resources for a particular child is something akin to Russian Roulette, where "Parents are looking to get the best for their child immediately" and "we're looking to do our best for the child, so you're talking all the time" but when the rules are being changed repeatedly "you're always having someone disagreeing with you and that's . . . that I actually find hard" (Int. 2, 2007). Consequently, the time and energy required to vindicate the rights of even one learner can be incredibly disproportionate, and the opportunity costs in terms of the quality of teaching, learning and leading, incalculable. In such circumstances, principal pragmatism suggests conformity to the rules, to be accountable, while principal advocacy appeals to a sense of professional responsibility that is characterised by commitments to certain beliefs and values, to what is a 'valuable' education (Biesta 2010).

While Ben was seeking to vindicate the rights of particular learners, the school was also coping with a significant increase in the number of immigrant learners on roll, thus necessitating a language support teacher. His testimony provides further evidence of the manner in which immediate external (economic) forces impinge differentially on schools, thus reinforcing the view expressed by Jack above that 'getting by' can become your default disposition due to the sheer weight of professional responsibility such unanticipated eventualities impose.

Thus disproportionality becomes endemic between schools, exacerbated by “the soft bigotry of school professionals” (Anderson 2009, p. 33). He says: “four years ago we had two poles in the place and . . . and they integrated so well, it was fantastic, one of them is . . . now . . . the best Irish speaker in the school and . . . they made friends”, they became more Irish than the Irish themselves, thus minimal disruption to cultural homogeneity. However, “suddenly we then went from 13 to 19 and now 35 since last June, 19 to 35” and the challenge to the status quo is much more difficult to ignore and the services of a language support teacher becomes further grounds for advocacy. However, immigrants are not a homogenous group, thus diversity becomes more of a challenge to an ‘integration’ mindset:

And these are all predominantly Polish and Baltic states, a couple of Russians, Moldovan, Romanian, we have 3 from Egypt and while previously we had a fellow from Algeria, they were in the country long enough to never worry about English as an additional language. (Ben, Int. 2, 2007)

Like Eddie above, he is troubled by the less than transparent enrolment policies being pursued by other local schools:

So, . . . we’ve never said no, . . . The controversy there with schools putting in Catholic and seeking baptism [Certificates], we have never done, I’ve never said no to any child who wants to come to our school and . . . (Ben, Int. 2, 2007).

His advocacy additionally increased his responsibility. Consequently: “I’ve two porta-cabins being built at the moment” with all of the attendant responsibilities that attach to site preparation. The advocacy and disposition of some facilitate others whereby “subtle and not so subtle ways” may be used by principals who admit the children of “middle-class condo owners” in preference to “the children of immigrant families” (Anderson 2009, p. 33). (see also McGorman and Sugrue 2007; McGorman and Wallace 2011).

Since Janice (2007–) was resource teacher prior to her appointment as Principal, by contrast with Ben, transition in her rural village idyll is marked by continuity. Nevertheless, she is wary of the impact of the politicisation of SEN policy by parents, and is even very careful about how she expresses such reservations, perhaps providing vicarious evidence for the more general thesis that “the accommodation of diversity has gone too far” and that it is necessary to say enough is enough (Kymilcka 2010, p. 97). Her comments appear as a little protective of the autonomy of teachers, while seeking to reconcile this with the learners’ rights and parents’ attempts to protect and vindicate them:

. . . I don’t want to get specific, but certainly we would have very few difficulties with parents really, we have some but in the area of autism there seems to be, what will I say, unreasonable demands coming from I suppose, a group of people who are fearful . . . I don’t really want to say very much on tape but I do know that we have one child with autism and he’s a lovely kid, we’re mad about him but his parents make life quite difficult, unreasonably so because I have eventually accepted that they don’t mean to . . . (Janice, Int. 2, 2007)

Her comments echo those of Michelle above, where the emotional labour of building trust is significant, while it is always prone to unravelling as ‘success’ may result in resource being withdrawn. She indicates further:

I can understand it but like that I was trying to say to them, look you don't have a row on your hands here, we will do whatever we can within the constraints of the resources that we have and that's all we can do but we will do it and more, . . . we'll do whatever we can do. (Janice, Int. 2, 2007)

Laudable though 'whatever we can do' may be, it leaves professional capacity building largely unaddressed, while above Ben's testimony suggests that is it necessary to 'fight' for resource rather than accept what the system allocates (Anderson 2009). However, when Janice is faced with responsibility for an autistic learner, she is immediately conscious of the necessity for CPD while her comments suggest a thin professional line between honesty and integrity of admitting to being on a learning curve yet potentially undermining teacher confidence as well as point out the absence of expertise.

. . . in the beginning, we said, look we know very little about autism but we have learned and now sometimes we feel like, well actually guys, we do know this now and we do know the child, you know what I mean. But you are better to say, look we've never come across this disability before because there isn't training per se, . . . there isn't enough staff training, . . . we need to be careful that the class teacher doesn't get left behind. (Janice, Int. 2, 2007)

When Brent returned as principal (2006–) to the school he had left five years earlier, he says of the inclusion landscape: "the whole learning support, special education element had changed fundamentally in the course of those 5 years." He has been hugely frustrated by the bureaucratic process of securing resources for learners:

I find that fundamentally dispiriting that I have children here in the school whose needs are not being met to the extent that they might be met because the process of availing and applying for the resources is so convoluted. (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

Brent's positioning suggests entitlement for his middle-class learners, while he is in agreement with the testimony of several others regarding the frustrations involved. Middle-class entitlement aside, Brent is conscious of the potential benefits for all learners of additional teaching, while he alludes also to policy potentially fertilising seeds of racism in a more consumerist culture:

True to form the department [DES] are prepared to throw money at this issue<sup>16</sup> [language support] . . . . Those children integrate extremely well, the language input that they're getting is hugely effective and in fact I would argue that there isn't a child in the school who wouldn't benefit from 40 minutes discrete time in a very small group purely developing their language, with children who are born and bred in [names community], who wouldn't be as linguistically developed as some of the children who've come to us from the Philippines or wherever, because they're getting that input. So culturally that hasn't impacted on us at all, there hasn't been any element of a them and us, there hasn't been . . . (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

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<sup>16</sup>This comment was made in the context of Celtic Tiger profligacy, a period when resource provision was indiscriminate with little apparent thought for consequences, intended or otherwise. A value for money report regarding the rapid expansion of the SNA provision is testimony to a profligacy on the part of policy-makers, principals and others—see DES (2011). The Special Needs Assistant Scheme A Value For Money Review of Expenditure On The Special Needs Assistant Scheme 2007/2008–2010. Dublin Department of Education and Skills.

However, when he focuses attention on immigrants in the context of inclusion, with such a minority demographic at 10 %, it is still possible, rather like Ben, to think in terms of integration rather than diversity, of melting pot rather than mosaic. He says:

...I suppose we're within the norms in terms of the Polish and eastern European community, the Lithuanian, Latvian, that sort of... the Russian and that is it really, those are the mainstays of it. We tend to find that the Pilipino children tend to gravitate towards one another, they'll play with one another in the yard, they're in communities outside of school, they don't integrate quite as well, whereas the eastern Europeans actively seek out the integration... (Brent, Int. 2, 2007).

Those who actively seek out integration may be facilitated by their skin tone and that of their Irish friends. Even in the 'open' space of the school yard, he may be ignoring the need for "a degree of security and at least a whiff of the feeling of *chez soi*, of being at home, unavailable to them outside" or within the school community (Bauman 2004, p. 81).

Sadie's (2006-) testimony provides further variation on inclusion since public perception holds that multi-denomination schools are more attractive to liberal and possibly more secular parents while this too will vary depending on school locale. Significantly, her school appears to include a disproportionate number of SEN learners:

We would have a higher proportion of children with special needs here than the majority of schools. We have a higher proportion of special needs assistants than most schools of this size, we have 9 classes and 7 SNA's, that's very high. People choose this school because of its history and its inclusiveness. We don't have as high a proportion of international children... but it's purely geographical. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

It appears that even the language of 'international' has a certain cultural capital coding embedded:

We have, for example, a couple of Israeli families at the moment. We do have a sort of a sprinkling of international parents but it's kind of one parent where the other's Irish and a sprinkling where both parents are international but the child is born here and then a lot of the people are local, ... The majority are, I'd say, middle class, driving a distance because they've chosen the school and the other 15 % are local. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

But diversity requires attention regardless of school type or reputation. In previous teaching posts she was aware of "demands being made" by parents if their child's class was going "to the church for assembly and they were demanding that the children, their children would not and that they would be supervised elsewhere", a request that seems perfectly reasonable, but difficult to execute in a denominational system. Wearing her more (pragmatic) principal's hat she suggests that inclusion might not tolerate such "significant pressure" from parents:

Well it's their entitlement to put the pressure on but what do you do with the children, who supervises them, what people [staff] do you have? Those are the practicalities when it comes down to it and you have sent you're children to, in that case [in the example she'd cited], a Catholic school. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

More generally, the following appears to advocate a kind of ‘cosmopolitanism’ that seeks “to care about others . . . who have commitments and beliefs that are unlike our own” (Appiah 2007):

One of the things I noticed when I came here, that I find unusual, is that . . . a group would go on a bus to the mosque but there was no group walking around the corner to the [Catholic] church. There are five major religions and one of them is around the corner so I think we have to keep our eyes open and our view on evenness. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

While many principals will readily identify with the practicalities of dealing with religious diversity in a largely denominational system, this tends to turn the spotlight on the role and responsibility of the State in such circumstances. Recent efforts to address the denominational nature of primary schooling from a systemic perspective (Coolahan et al. 2012), appears to be inching towards much greater recognition of the necessity for a thriving state education sector in order for denominational schooling to prosper (Feinberg 2006). School leaders however need to be suitably reflexive to avoid being seduced or suckered by a default ‘Western’ perspective that “speaks the grammar of pluralism but the idiomatic reality sounds to others more like Hollywood homogeneity” (Barber 2003, p. 187). It is easy to concur with the views that “the challenge of re-shaping the structure of primary school provision so that it is more congruent with the needs and rights of current and future citizens” is daunting and one that currently leaves school leaders occupying an uncharted no-man’s land between State, Church and citizen, a further grey area on the landscape of inclusive leadership (Coolahan et al. 2012, p. 1). Recent draft legislation is intended to bring increased regulation to this complex area (Ireland, 2013).

## Conclusions

Testimony presented in this chapter overwhelmingly attests that as the policy has evolved, influenced by international trends, punctuated by legal judgments against the State, and fuelled by an open door policy within the EU regarding migration, Irish society has rapidly and radically altered in terms of ‘inclusion’ with enormous consequences for principals and their colleagues. It emerges that the disposition of principals is crucial, rendered more difficult in a largely denominational system, but the lack of professional support sustained over time apart from not building capacity, has potential to unleash latent racist tendencies, while some schools may be overwhelmed by the cumulative impact of immigrants, SEN and disadvantage, as well as indigenous community members.

Principals and teachers, as front-line staff, are in an invidious position—branded as uncaring and selfish if they do not embrace new policies, while having difficulty becoming advocates to vindicate the rights of learners in a manner that is not represented by the media as self-serving. In some instances at least, policy-makers seem content to say ‘we have a policy’ and it is up to the principals and teachers to implement it, and point to allocation of resources as evidence of



commitment to the policy intent. However, what is often ignored are the capacity building measures that are vitally necessary to ensure that expertise is actually developed, while constant monitoring too is vital to avoid policies having negative consequences for some schools while allowing others to shirk their professional responsibilities. It is evident also that ‘pre-conditions’ for inclusion need to receive closer attention, if morale, commitment and compassion are not to be replaced by compliance, disengagement and cynicism. While ‘making do’ is laudable in many respects, sustainable leadership and capacity building for inclusive schools requires, more than pragmatic, bolt-on solutions to existing structures and routines. Without substantial and sustained professional support leadership will tend towards more managerialist ‘making do’, ‘tinkering’ rather than transformation of teaching and learning (Tyack and Cuban 1995). Positive disposition along with individual agency are necessary element of leadership, while systemic support for building leadership capacity is not an optional extra, but an essential ‘pre-condition’ for improvement in general, and the difficult and ongoing task of creating inclusive schools. It is possible also that in some circumstances, being a leader requires saying ‘no’ when pre-conditions are inadequate for policy implementation.

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# Chapter 8

## More Leaders: Dissipated or Distributed Leadership?

### Introduction

As the principal's role has become more complex and complicated, there has been increasing advocacy for 'teacher' and 'distributed' leadership by policy advocates and some researchers (Pont et al. 2009a, b). Against this international backdrop, this chapter focuses on how principals re-negotiate leadership responsibilities in a context where new management structures have been created at the national level, while internal school dynamics vary considerably. It deals with how principals re-negotiate leadership responsibilities amidst a changing school dynamic where policy rhetoric advocates a 'distributed' leadership role while legal requirements and more practical considerations constrain the enabling of colleagues to take on responsibility for leadership in a collaborative manner. The chapter provides further testimony that school culture and traditions, the inter-personal skills and leadership capital of the principal are critical in terms of the extent to which tinkering with existing provision rather than systematically building sustainable leadership capacity within schools continues to be a work in progress.

While 'hybridity' abounds in leadership literature (Gronn 2009), with consequent potential for the term leadership to become 'hopelessly baggy pants' (Sugrue 2009), nevertheless, 'distributed leadership' has very rapidly taken on the mantle of (assumed) if not actual orthodoxy; the 'great white hope' in leadership and its capacity to not just re-form schools but to trans-form them (Harris 2008) while others remain open to persuasion if not entirely sceptical (Leithwood et al. 2009). Meanwhile, policy-makers, keen to be at the 'leading-edge' of reform, susceptible to policy borrowing and the combined power and influence of international league tables courtesy of OECD PISA comparative results, new angles are perpetually being sought in pursuit of 'leadership for learning' or some similar mantra (MacBeath and Dempster 2009).

Each national policy arena has its own particular variation on this large leadership theme. The rhetoric of 'autonomy' and devolution of responsibility from

centre to the school site is ubiquitous (Coghlan and Desurmont 2007), while re-centralisation through various technologies of control is often the other side of the autonomy coin—regimes of accountability, whereby autonomy and accountability have become the ‘twin towers’ of policy rhetorics, frequently working in conflicting and contradictory ways (Ball 2008a, b; Lynch et al. 2012). Within this volatile vortex the burdens of leadership on principals have become all-consuming while various efforts have been made to re-distribute these ever expanding responsibilities. As Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) have pointed out, much of educational change literature is snapshot and forward looking, thus misses out significantly on how innovation fares over time. This chapter takes this inadequacy seriously across the various cohorts, different career stages and school history cycles while seeking systematically to understand and document how leadership capacity is advanced-enhanced, sustained or diluted over time while working through a major policy shift in how leadership is (re-) structured systemically. Meanwhile, the policy space in which these local dynamics play out is being re-shaped increasingly by the combined forces of the EU commission working in tandem with the creation of performance indicators fashioned by the OECD (see Lawn and Grek 2012).

Sharing the burdens of leadership as well as building leadership capacity in any system necessitates dealing with past legacies. The Irish system has its own distinct history and trajectory in this regard. While contemporary language of restructuring speaks of middle-management or indeed ‘senior management’—a language that owes much to NPM, such thinking has been overlaid on an older system of ‘posts of responsibility’<sup>1</sup> that have their roots in the 1970s, a system that emerged primarily as a means of creating a career structure, enhancement of salary

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<sup>1</sup>There were two types of ‘posts of responsibility’ - A and B. An additional allowance, in addition to basic salary was provided to post-holders. These posts were allocated solely on seniority. Thus the longest serving members of staff of a particular school—after the principal and Vice-Principal, and depending on total enrolment, would receive an A post and in return would undertake particular duties assigned to that post. Examples of such positions were—the school library, taking responsibility for sport, for organising the cleaning of the school while in more recent times such responsibilities might include being responsible for computers within the school etc. B posts, though worth approximately 50 % of the financial reward for an A, often carried similar duties. In primary schools the official position was that—‘while fulfilling post of responsibility duties could not be allowed to interfere with a teacher’s classroom responsibilities, neither was a teacher obliged to work outside normal school hours’. Such a formula was a recipe for inertia notwithstanding the fact that individuals made significant contributions, but such ‘rules’ resulted in enormous variation from one school to the next depending on precedent and leadership, while there was a tendency also on the part of younger staff to leave ‘responsibilities’ to those with ‘posts’—a kind of internal apartheid. Nevertheless, many younger teachers made significant contributions, particularly in the area of extra-curricular activities. Presently, the additional financial allowances attaching to these positions, all of which are index linked and part of calculations for pension entitlements, have been frozen and those who retire from such positions are not being replaced, thus a hollowing out of recently created structures is undermining a distributed leadership perspective while putting greater pressure on those who hold such responsibilities including deputies and principals. Allowances, since January 2010, are: A- €8,520 and B- €3769. The number of A & B positions in any school depends on enrolments and total number of teachers (see Circular 07/03). To put this in perspective, in March 2009, it was calculated that 53 % of primary teachers held a ‘post’ of some

and conditions in a system where largely none existed. DES Circular 16/73 laid the foundation for the contemporary position, and it states: “The Manager<sup>2</sup> should arrange in consultation with the principal teacher to assign specific duties to each teacher holding a post of special responsibility” (Education 1973). This ‘system’, through a whole labyrinth of subsequent circulars amending their predecessors, has metamorphosed into contemporary ‘middle-management’, best encapsulated in a circular issued in 2003 (DES 2003). These “revised management structures” had the following objectives:

- match the responsibilities of the posts more closely to the central tasks of the school, and clearly specify responsibilities for the various posts,
- a focus on the provision of opportunities for teachers to assume responsibility in the school for instructional leadership, curriculum development, the management of staff, and the academic and pastoral work of the school (DES 2003)

It became the responsibility of the chairperson of the BoM and the principal to devise appropriate “selection procedures . . . with the aim of ensuring that the most suitable people are appointed” which was an attempt to create competition rather than assign responsibilities to the most senior staff members, a considerable cultural shift. Within this new policy space, informed increasingly by competitiveness inspired by NPM, principals were caught in the crossfire of loyalty to long-serving colleagues, the needs of the school and its pupils and the emerging spirit of competitive meritocracy fuelled by the accelerating pace of change. The re-naming of these ‘posts’ took on symbolic significance as a signal to mark a departure from an entrenched set of cultural norms. Consequently, Vice-principals were re-designated as Deputies, A post holders became Assistant Principals, and B posts were re-labelled as ‘special duties’ teachers, embracing administrative, curricular and pastoral elements in equal measure. The re-titling may be regarded also as a signal that it was no longer tenable that principals shoulder all leadership responsibilities alone, thus being an ‘assistant principal’ strongly suggested shared responsibility, though the language of the circular persisted with the more orthodox language of ‘delegated’ responsibility.

Amidst a flurry of competing interests, principals were expected to review all of these positions, offer new contracts while being legally obliged to keep them under review (Government of Ireland 1998). Older, more established and stable staffs had little room for manoeuvre, since for the most part the restructuring led to re-assigning of duties to existing post holders, in addition to some additional positions of shared responsibility, while in new expanding schools, more scope was available

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description, while this percentage included principals and deputies. Since then, due to austerity, 14 % of Assistant Principal positions have been frozen (751) and 38 % (2,276) of Special Duties positions have suffered a similar fate as they have been vacated.

<sup>2</sup>Use of the term ‘manager’ should be noted here since in 1973 primary schools did not have Boards of Management. Rather, typically, a local school manager was the local Parish Priest, thus the school was hugely dependent on his disposition and his attitude to finance as to whether or not ‘local contribution’ to State education was generous or miserly.

through the designation of several positions at once with consequent increased competition. Since principals had been vociferously protesting the increasingly impossible circumstances in which they were expected to exercise leadership, this reform offered at a minimum an unprecedented opportunity to re-distribute the burdens of office while for the more ambitious and far-seeing an opportunity also to build leadership capacity throughout the school community (Author 2007; DES 1999).<sup>3</sup> Research literature during this period championed ‘collaboration’ (A. Hargreaves 1994), and more recently ‘teacher leadership’ (Lieberman 2008; Lieberman, and Miller 2004) and, as already signalled above—‘distributed’ leadership (Harris 2008; Jackson, *nd*; Spillane 2006; Spillane and Diamond 2007). The increasing number of ‘posts’ provided opportunities to teachers for additional remuneration and career advancement, while for principals it meant over-turning traditional promotional structures based solely on seniority within the school, to enhance the leadership and management of the school community.<sup>4</sup> Implicitly also the reform represented a challenge to more traditional understandings of leadership, of being the Boss, with potential also to build leadership capacity beyond the principal’s office. How did they fare?

## **Veteran Leaders: Re-negotiating Leadership Legacies** (Cohort One: Fred, Alison, Jack, Jim)

Among this veteran cohort the manner in which shared leadership was re-negotiated was determined to a significant extent by internal interpersonal relations, particularly the relationship between principal and deputy. Consistent with the general policy regarding seniority, the tradition has been until recently that this position too was determined solely on seniority. Appointment to the position of deputy continues also to be permanent, for life. An additional constraint on reform that is a legacy of the ‘post of responsibility’ period is a major time constraint. Release time from teaching duties is not available to classroom teachers in the primary sector. However,

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<sup>3</sup>The Report of the Benchmarking Body in 2007 made some adjustments to allowances paid to primary principals as follows: the allowance for principals in schools with 1–7 teachers was increased to €12,261 annually, while it had been €9,328 for schools with 1–5 teachers, thus these categories were merged, while for the largest schools, those with 36 teachers or more, were awarded an allowance of €31,580, increased from 29,833 (for further details, see Author 2007).

<sup>4</sup>At the time of the reform, it was widely believed among principals that, as a result of their agitation for greater remuneration for principals, given devolution of responsibility and decision-making, that the Ministry of Finance was willing to provide the bulk of the additional resources to reward principals, but that this was vetoed by the teacher unions in favour of distributing the finances across the profession, something with appeal to a broader membership. However, some years later, and under the rubric of ‘benchmarking’, an opportunity provided through one of several ‘national agreements’ negotiated between Government, trade unions and the private sector, principals received substantial pay increases by being ‘benchmarked’ against managerial positions in the private sector.

under a public sector agreement (Ireland 2010), subsequently supplanted by ‘The Public Sector Stability Agreement 2013–2016’ (LRC 2013)<sup>5</sup> in the context of national austerity, teachers, as “public servants will have to increase their flexibility and mobility to work together across sectoral, organisational and professional boundaries” (Ireland 2010, p. 2), thus there is commitment to an additional 33 h per annum, outside of specified school hours. Nevertheless, principals continue to appeal to and rely on the good will and cooperation of colleagues to share leadership responsibilities. Some principals were concerned that more competitive promotion procedures would foster a ‘them’ and ‘us’ division between promoted and non-promoted colleagues.

For Alison (1979–), in advance of these new management structures becoming policy, she appears to have been ahead of the curve in terms of promoting colleagues’ professional growth and shared responsibility. Whether this is devolved or distributed leadership is unclear, but it does appear to have contributed significantly to capacity building, even if the old language of ‘posts of responsibility’ persists:

Now in our school everybody had a curricular area to look after, they had a pastoral and they had an administrative area to look after. It took quite some time again to train teachers if it’s something to do with maths or whatever . . . (Alison, Int. 4, 2007).

At staff meetings she would “let the teacher take the floor” to engage with colleagues, she would “work with them beforehand, we’d plan the whole thing” if necessary, while in the course of the CPD she “would sit like a regular staff member”. She concludes that giving such responsibility “gives credibility to them in front of the rest of the staff” and, as a consequence, she “saw huge growth in staff because of posts of responsibility” (Int. 4, 2007)

However, persistence and resilience were necessary to convince her deputy in particular that not taking responsibility was no longer an option. Though she readily recognised that doing it herself was an immediately attractive possibility, she chose otherwise: “I went after her and after her and after her and after her and it’s much easier in management to do it yourself but I decided, I’m going to train her to do it” and with much persistence on her part. She relishes telling the story and is magnanimous in acknowledging the talents of her deputy:

. . . very very bright woman, and able to push everything onto everyone else but in the end she did and she was great, she did the timetables in the school for the parent teacher meetings, and she would do them better than I would, even when I say that I laugh because I like that story but she was excellent. (Alison, Int. 4, 2007)

Perhaps Alison relishes retelling this vignette because it rekindles the endorphins—“positive emotions . . . [that] over time build psychological resilience, not just reflect it” (Chris. Day et al. 2007, p. 196). However, the message from

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<sup>5</sup>In the first of these two agreements, public sector unions signed up to pay cuts of between 5–10 %, and agreed not to undertake any industrial actions, while in the second, productivity agreements were reached, particularly regarding supervision, in return for no pay cuts for the duration of the agreement.



the following addendum to the vignette seems to suggest that persistence pays dividends, while not every principal might be quite so resilient: “And it took a lot but she did. So when people say you’re accountable and people won’t do it, they will do it if you organise them or keep at them or whatever. I think the system is absolutely fantastic” (Int. 4, 2007).

This interpretation is vindicated by the following where that positive sense of contribution was dispersed through collegial collaboration on the part of all staff: “I’m thinking of some people who don’t have posts and they did all sorts of things. There wasn’t a climate at all of I’m not paid for . . . and I’m not doing . . . you know?” (Int. 4, 2007).

Jack’s (1978–2007) relationship with his deputy by contrast appears to take a different ‘long view’ that privileges good relations over more authoritative leadership. At the time of his fourth interview he was in the process of retiring, thus perhaps reflecting on his experience with additional honesty and openness. In a disadvantaged school context, there may be a temptation to avoid contributing to instability on the premise that trouble enough comes your way without being the author of it. Jack is rather critical of how he handled the opportunity afforded by management restructuring. He says:

... when I was faced with the whole business in 1998 of setting up the new management and changing the ones [posts of responsibility] that were there, that while I mightn’t have made a complete dog’s dinner of it, I certainly wouldn’t be proud of what I achieved with it. That’s the very first thing that I would say. (Jack, Int. 4, 2007)

In relation to the bigger issue of systemic reform, he is critical of the teachers’ union suggesting that their primary concern was securing more positions and increased allowances for the largest possible number of members, in contrast with Alison’s perspective that she was already empowering colleagues prior to these reforms:

... and they [union] were so busy, as is their wont being a trade union, they were so busy doing that that I don’t think there was any thought put into what are we going to do with this when we get this. (Jack, Int. 4, 2007)

These comments suggest that policy regarding structural reform is a blunt instrument, frequently as clear as mud, precisely in order that actors are enabled to interpret in a multiplicity of ways that suit local circumstance (Lipsky 1980). In Jack’s case, he mistrusted his deputy, whom he suspected of exploiting the renegotiation for self-interest. Consequently, there was more of a slide-rule approach adopted whereby responsibilities were being ‘weighed’ proportionate to the amount of money being earned rather than a focus on organisational need.

He, [deputy] became the biggest bug bear at the time, and I think that affected both me and . . . On reflection, had I been big enough to see beyond it, I might have handled it better, not so much in terms of how I managed him but in terms of how I felt that it was influencing others down the way. . . . I think what it certainly did was it put me on my guard because everything had to be proportional. He was the one who was getting two thirds of my allowance and the next person down was only getting half of that and the people below were only getting half of that, everything became disproportionate . . . (Jack, Int. 4, 2007)

Through lack of trust at the top, the potential for collaboration was diluted, while unlike Alison, Jack did not feel he could bend the will or ‘train’ his deputy to a more collegial sense of the enterprise, with negative consequences, while vindicating the view that “trust develops from shared activities and responsibilities”; in their absence trust declines, and forms of avoidance the norm (Kohn 2008, p. 68).

Despite mistrust his considered view is that the new structures did distribute responsibilities: “It certainly made my job a bit easier in the sense that I did feel some sense of shared responsibility for some of the academic parts and indeed some of the other parts of school planning as such.” With hindsight, if he has any regrets it is that he did not devote more “time or whatever to look in a bit more depth”, evidence perhaps of the immediate taking precedence over the important. Despite such assertions however, Jack returns to his mistrust of his deputy, and the absence of a professional colleague with whom school issues could be discussed openly, he remained something of a solo performer with recognition that matters might have been different had he “a good deputy or a good senior middle management person with whom you could discuss openly and professionally” instead of tiptoeing “around personalities.” Instead, “When you’re dealing with it on your own, and I’m not using that as an excuse” he feels that he “fell down on in relation to . . . things that I should have been more assertive about at certain times but they were the kind of things that crept up on you and that I didn’t systematically look at, whereas if you had management, . . .” (Int. 4, 2007).

Perhaps with leadership rather than management “you could schedule a definite meeting once a week or whatever, they’d be the kind of things that I would want to do again.” In the absence of trust and more frequent communication, distance appears to promote a management mindset, while he appears to recognise that a better internal dynamic would be likely to be more transformative.

Fred (1971–2010) too espoused the necessity for a confidant when he states: “If I am unsure I can admit it to the vice principal” (Int. 4, 2007). For much of his career as principal, Fred was a lone ranger in a rural two-teacher school. By mid noughties however, there were eight classroom teachers on the staff and he became an administrative principal. Despite such growth, Fred’s testimony suggests he continued to operate as a lone ranger while having his deputy become his ‘sounding board’:

Before I make decisions I will bounce it off her. I find that as regards responsibility, I have never sat down with the vice principal and defined her duties.<sup>6</sup> If I ask her anything it is done. She does a good job and I am quite happy. (Fred, Int. 4, 2007)

In the absence of significant professional development, Jack and Fred, unlike Alison, appear to operate out of an older paradigm. While Fred could not recall

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<sup>6</sup>Circular 07/2003 specifically states that: “the Deputy Principal is required to assist the Principal teacher in the day-to-day organisation and supervision of the school. In addition to his/her teaching duties the Chairperson should assign the Deputy-Principal specific duties. Before assigning such duties to the Deputy-Principal the Chairperson should discuss the matter with the Principal teacher” (Appendix to the circular).

with clarity how many middle-management positions there were within the school, saying: “I don’t know, maybe, I’m not certain,” nevertheless, he was clear about the advantages that accrued: “. . . the middle management here would be specifically almost subject leaders. That has made a big difference” particularly since policy development has been more widely shared. However, Fred is concerned about a ‘them and us’ and the emergence of cliques. He meets weekly with the deputy for 30 min and “we just kind of go through how things are going and what things we need to tweak” but he quickly follows: “But I don’t like that too much because I don’t like this thing of, . . . we have our own little clique . . . and . . . the middle management, that’s another clique.” Instead, he has weekly staff meetings, rather rare in rural schools, to maintain a whole-school approach whereby “everyone has ownership of the thing” since, in his view, “there’s a danger if you have that management group, the others are left outside” (Int. 4, 2007).

Clearly, school size, social context, principal disposition and expertise matter, and in the absence of sustained professional development, local circumstance and leader’s capital are likely to have a dominant shaping influence where tension between continuity and change play out daily in the interpersonal interstices. In larger systems, where there is a stronger sense of career and mobility as part of a process of building a career, there may be greater awareness of providing such opportunities for promotion and advancement, thus mobility creates a more competitive climate among colleagues while making it evident also to principals that if promotion is not available in a particular school community, it may be pursued elsewhere. Perceptions of current problems rather than emerging possibilities may propel principals towards minimising risk, disequilibrium and discontent rather than being aware of and seizing the transformative potential not merely to share the burden of leadership but to invest in the leadership capacity of the entire school community.

Jim (1985–) continues to labour in a four-teacher rural school and is insistent that the system is far too top heavy with management, with much of its systems and processes unsuitable for rural communities. After we established that he has a deputy and another promoted post, thus, three of the four staff members have leadership responsibility, he elaborated further:

That’s three people involved in management and we have 8 people involved in the board of management. If you tot those up, what are they all managing? . . . I’m sure a lot of schools don’t have 8 teachers, you can nearly have one person in management for every teacher in the country. (Jim, Int. 4, 2007)

Apart from policy efforts to democratise schooling (see Coolahan et al. 2012),<sup>7</sup> it is necessary to distinguish between internal school management and the role of BoMs, and with regard to the former, Jim is very pragmatic, clinging to his view that he is first and foremost a teacher, and so are his colleagues. Thus, he says: “I know

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<sup>7</sup>Boards of Management were not established in the primary education system until the mid 1970s. Prior to this, schools were managed almost exclusively by the local clergyman, as evidenced in earlier chapters. In a much more secular and pluralist Irish society, having close to 90 % of the

... we have the duties, they're more practical than anything but when you describe it as a management team, the description doesn't seem to fit. We don't really need to ... do things as a team ...” since “everybody has a class to teach as well. This is the big thing, work is your class and you become principal [referring to himself] when there's a problem” (Jim, Int. 4, 2007).

However, many of his teaching principal colleagues argue that it is impossible to teach and provide leadership, while his way of coping is to prioritise the former.<sup>8</sup> In this manner, the possibilities for leadership and building leadership capacity are curtailed.

Among this cohort, the evidence points to leadership style as a personal preference, an extension of personal disposition. Significantly in this regard, Alison, as the only female among the veterans, emerges as promoting and building leadership capacity and shared leadership even in advance of policy. However, without professional support for school leaders, and after due allowance is made for local context, there remains enormous variation, while trust and interpersonal relations continue to be crucial.

## **Experienced Leaders: Building Leadership Capacity?** (Cohort Two: Michelle, Connor, Maggie, Eddie)

Michelle's (1992–) comments lend legitimacy to the view that the teachers' union sought to have the 'leadership' funding disbursed more widely rather than being concentrated on principals only. Perhaps, these cross purposes resulted in a fatally flawed policy from the outset; from a union perspective it was primarily about enhancing teachers' pay, while from an official policy perspective it was about enhancing school leadership. Michelle felt better informed than many by being a member of a principals' support group; a sense of empowerment:

I was involved in ... a principal support group ... going back to when I started and that evolved over time and I know coming up to that post of responsibility there was serious rumours going on about the great increase that principals were going to get and then it all went down the tubes. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

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country's primary schools managed under the patronage of the local Bishop in whose dioceses the school is located is perceived as increasingly anachronistic. During the term of the present Minister for Education and Skills, school Governance has become a focus of attention. In this regard, see Coolahan et al. 2012.

<sup>8</sup>Due to pressure exerted by teaching principals through both IPPN and INTO, some respite was provided for teaching principals whereby depending on school size they were entitled to a specified number of release days annually whereby substitute cover would be provided thus enabling them to attend to other responsibilities, particularly policy formulation amongst others. However, if all other colleagues are engaged in teaching, this leaves the principal isolated, with little or no opportunity for collaboration without disrupting teaching.

Additionally, while Michelle continued to be an active member of the teachers' union, and a number of her colleagues held administrative positions at branch and district levels, she was very heartened when one such activist came to her and expressed the view regarding the restructuring of management that: "I don't want to be paid for something I'm not doing and I want people to know what I'm doing" (Int. 4, 2007).

This comment may be confidently read as a reference to the fact that in many instances there was a lack of transparency regarding responsibilities for 'posts', frequently perceived as entitlement rather than responsibility, long service increments, notwithstanding the fact that many holders made distinct contributions but with enormous variation depending on traditions within school communities.<sup>9</sup> Michelle's colleagues made identical comments at a staff meeting. This public stance further emboldened by the solidarity of the principal support group, Michelle adopted the view: "this is our opportunity, we can't let it go, so if you're going to make it work, you're going to have to make it work yourself." Forearmed with the knowledge that even her union activist colleagues were well disposed towards a new departure, she pressed on; they created a fit for purpose process the outcome of which was: "people took it on, they signed their contracts and they were happy to". A year later when the union suggested a reversion to the old dictum that it was not a requirement to fulfil such responsibilities outside of school hours, Michelle was aghast, and though: "It was a complete roll back" in terms of policy stance, she determined: "I just actually decided, no, I'm ignoring that, I'm not even discussing it" (Int. 4, 2007). At such systemic disjunctures, there is a growing sense of the necessity to be accountable as a consequence of NPM, and maintenance of or reversion to the status quo, putting principals in the position of having to 'take a stand'.

As a consequence of the mixed if not contradictory messages emanating from various quarters, in Michelle's view some "people who sort of drew back and actually missed the boat because they didn't engage with the staff because they allowed them, well maybe it's not fair to say they allowed them, but the climate was such that there was kind of mixed messages coming from the union" (Int. 4, 2007). Nevertheless, despite Michelle's commitment to seizing the opportunity notwithstanding, legacies could not be abandoned entirely, thus when it came

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<sup>9</sup>I recall sitting in a staffroom approximately 15 years ago during teaching practice supervision in a large suburban disadvantaged school, having a cup of tea and sharing a conversation with the then Vice-principal and other teachers. A knock came to the open staffroom door, and, as I was nearest the door, I answered the call. Present was a salesperson of books wishing to speak with the teacher who had responsibility for the school library. When I turned to the teachers to inquire as to who held this post, the question drew a blank initially and only after repeated false starts were they able to identify the person concerned as a collective process of trial and error. As these reforms were being implemented, along with approximately 20 primary principals we undertook an analysis of the responsibilities assigned in as many schools for 'A' and 'B' posts. What became abundantly evident was a complete lack of consistency—in some schools, special duties teachers had been assigned more onerous responsibilities than those who were now assistant principals in others.

to stated contractual obligations—distinctions were made between ‘senior’ and ‘middle’ management that she regretted:

We didn’t write it as regular meetings of middle management but regular meetings with the deputy and the assistant principal. I was sorry afterwards I didn’t do it but in fact that happened. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

Her experience resonates with the view that in a climate of unprecedented change and in a disadvantaged context where uncertainty and insecurity are part of the fabric of daily life, “it takes courage to continue to believe in and be actively engaged in one’s moral purposes and not to default or care less due to the pressure of the effort and energies required to fulfil instrumentally dominated agendas” regardless of their source (Day and Gu 2010, p. 191). From a leadership perspective, in standing for something—to be an advocate, it necessarily entails forsaking of or foreclosing on other possibilities. I am in agreement with the view that principals need to be clearer regarding where they stand in order to practise advocacy leadership (Anderson 2009) even if this inevitably entails dealing with conflict (Achinstein 2002). Her testimony indicates also the NPM required greater transparency and accountability, thus contractual arrangements had to be made.

Having the courage to pursue one’s convictions in this instance appears to have paid dividends. Michelle suggests that ensuing deliberations had a catalytic and energising effect: “One of the really good things that came out of it was myself and the deputy, we meet every Tuesday afternoon for 2 h, an hour and a half or two hours after school, so it was great.” In an expanding school context, it was possible to build on this new dynamic, thus:

... as the other roles evolved, what happened then afterwards was that every time there was a new appointment what happened, was it in the early 2000’s we got more staff, so we all of a sudden got more posts of responsibility so when those extra posts came in that was an opportunity to review all the posts. So that was good. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

Despite the leadership shown by Michelle and some of her colleagues, they underestimated the agency of their fellow teachers to enact their own version of the status quo and the pull of tradition by determining among themselves who the applicants would be, thus diluting the openly competitive nature of the new departure:

One of the interesting things was that ... if there was two posts of responsibility or three posts of responsibility, that was the number of people who’d reply [to internal advertising] and in my naivety I never actually considered that they’d all talk among themselves and decide. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

However, with strong resonances of Elmore’s (2004) principle of reciprocity at work, the recent policy environment that demanded a plethora of paperwork at the level of the school, new management structures became an important conduit for developing these, while not all teachers were comfortable with the responsibility, although in this school a committee structure facilitated a more inclusive dialogue where the post holders collaborated with non-post holding colleagues in a dynamic very similar to that reported by Alison above. Michelle describes the dynamic as follows, where she takes on the role of professional support to colleagues rather

than being centre stage: “Yeah, post holders . . . took responsibility, other teachers would opt in to a sub-committee or whatever.” However, other teachers needed more professional support and Michelle was on hand to work collaboratively, to scaffold their needs, building capacity:

But there were a couple of teachers who wanted to do it, who had the responsibility and who needed to do it, but they were uncomfortable putting the policy down. There would have been a couple of people I would have worked with and we would have written the policy together and written the draft together and at least, it wasn't for them at the time and they got more comfortable with it, . . . (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

Despite the apparent collective endeavour, when such matters as financing the purchase of additional resources for the teaching of mathematics, a policy on discipline or matters pertaining to SNAs, invariably these matters returned to Michelle's desk as they had ramifications across the entire school community. In such circumstances, Michelle indicates that in terms of interpersonal dynamics and trust responsibility and authority in many respects are reconfigured since a colleague has responsibility while ultimate authority, particularly if things go wrong, resides with the principal, and this 'authority' is enshrined in legislation (Education Act, 1998). Consequently, despite shared leadership, the principal is “responsible for the day-to-day management of the school, including guidance and direction of the teachers and . . . accountable to the board for that management” (Part V, Section 23a).

Significantly perhaps, from a gender perspective, Alison's and Michelle's testimony provides evidence of professional support and building capacity in others, more than evidence from Fred and Jack, suggesting perhaps that building 'collaborative cultures' creates somewhat more dissonance for those with (latent) concepts of leadership that include 'leading from the front' or the 'do your own thing' style of leadership that both males espoused in previous chapters.

Conor's (1992–2010) testimony too conveys a greater sense of delegation, of giving individuals responsibility for particular tasks that the principal then does not have to deal with. When this mindset is coupled with the constraints of time regarding the fulfilling of designated responsibilities, particularly when it comes to school planning, control more than trust appears to be his primary concern: “you have people running around from one area to the other doing this, doing that, doing the other, you know?” Nevertheless, he continues: “Having said that, the posts of responsibility are a great help and you can assign duties to various people.” However, since teaching responsibilities are the first priority, he indicates a major systemic constraint due to the absence of release time:

. . . one of the big problems I see with this middle management with regard to primary schools is that apart from myself . . . , I'm the only person that doesn't have charge of a class. So if I'm making a decision, we'll say on the duties of a post holder, be it deputy principal, assistant principal or ordinary special duties teachers, you have to gear those duties in such a way that it doesn't involve the person leaving their class and wandering around the school to find out this or find out that because in that instance you'd be better off doing it yourself. (Conor, Int. 4, 2007)

His predisposition to maximum efficiency and the smooth running of the school appears to preclude possibilities for collaboration. Conor determines to organise ‘responsibilities’ with individuals as follows: “I’m going to give you this job to do, it’s a job that you can maybe do for the most part out of school time and the things that have to be done during school time I try and organise to supervise myself (Int. 4, 2007)

Nevertheless, when drafting the job descriptions he included regular meeting after school hours and specified these on a monthly basis. However, he also recognises the dynamic nature of this process, changing need and the need for regular review, as well as the desire to be involved, even if the emphasis appears to be more on delegation rather than on building leadership capacity.

People like to be involved, they like to do. It’s great relief for me if there’s a certain area that I can hand totally over to somebody. It’s very hard to set out duties because in one way the duties that are relevant today might be irrelevant in 2 years’ time or a duty that starts off as a relatively, we’ll say, not too difficult duty, might escalate into a huge one. (Conor, Int. 4, 2007)

He cites the manner in which ICT has expanded: “when that [ICT post] started off a number of years ago there wasn’t a lot but then that person who was really only a special duties teacher, her work load increased a lot because we had the broadband coming in and a whole lot of . . .” (Int. 4, 2007).

In such circumstances, disparities in the extent of responsibility shouldered by assistant principals and special duties personnel have potential to become contentious. However, Conor, who has a penchant for being organised, has evolved his own system for keeping matters under review, a tendency towards ‘managerialist accountability’ rather than building leadership capacity (Green 2011).

What I have here, this is what I call a teacher profile, now this is not something that I’ve seen anywhere . . . . This is in order of seniority and what position they have if any, like if they have a promoted post and what their function is within the staff. So if you take say now, . . . the deputy principal, all the duties are listed, you see. (Conor, Int. 4, 2007)

Conor’s penchant for efficiency, being organised, having files ready to hand, suggests an orientation towards being accountable, a managerialist mindset, reinforced by a system that, until recently, has made no provision for collaborative time. Thus, the pre-conditions for agentic leadership have remained largely more conducive to efficiency rather than building leadership capacity.

Eddie’s (1993–2006) persistence with a team approach in a small rural school sought self-consciously to build capacity regardless of formal role responsibility rather than foster division between three promoted posts and two colleagues without. Instead: “. . . without putting pressure on people, I said, look everybody will be involved. The idea of subcommittees or a middle management team in a 5 teacher school, excluding two, to me was ridiculous” (Int. 4, 2007). The manner in which he set about team and capacity building drew on his own apprenticeship as a younger teacher, combined with his understanding of leadership from completing a masters in leadership. Thus, he had a vision of ‘sustainable leadership’—“prudent



and resourceful . . . that wastes neither its money nor its people” (Hargreaves and Fink 2005, p. 191):

. . . by giving people responsibility, I got responsibility for things when I started off and they lead me on my way and I reckoned that if people were happy with that and they didn’t feel that they were compelled to do it, that it would bring people in and it might train people for management in the future. (Eddie, Int. 4, 2007)

As a consequence of this approach, he indicates “people felt valued by it;” he sought to identify strengths and to build on these. Although being aware that “as principal you had overall” responsibility he nevertheless “tried to build a team and always in the back of my head I had the idea that I might move on at some stage and that the whole house of cards doesn’t have to fall with the changing of the guard, you know, . . .” (Int. 4, 2007).

Uniquely he appears to have engaged quietly in leadership succession, while building sustainable leadership. Precisely because he had thought of ‘moving on’, his sense of leaving a leadership legacy was present from the outset. While revolving door approaches to school leadership have potential to promote superficial and cosmetic legacies, being appointed for life, the norm in the system, may promote a sense of ‘staying the course’ rather than building a leadership legacy through investing in colleagues.

Consistent with others’ testimony (Michelle and Jack), Eddie too was conscious of the mixed messages disseminated by his union and provides the telling anecdote that, having secured significant financial rewards for teachers, they could in effect: “fight it out in the staffrooms over these. When the system of promoted posts went from being long service to being a combination of service and suitability; that caused a lot of division . . .” (Int. 4, 2007).

His intentions, observations and actions clearly indicate that transformation is significantly dependent on the agency of the principal to use a policy initiative in a constructive, positive manner to move matters forward. Thus far, there appears to be those who see it as more work, a means of divesting themselves of responsibilities in a delegated manner, or those committed to building capacity and sustainable leadership in an inclusive manner, in various patterns of combination and emphasis. Regarding the policy more generally, Eddie concludes: “I suppose schools come in so many shapes and sizes, that there’s no one size that’ll fit all. That’s where the leadership at school level is so important.” (Int. 4, 2007).

He has good reason also for suggesting that “what is crucial about middle management in the future is that people should be appointed upon criteria to do with the job and not solely on seniority”. His evidence concurs with Michelle’s but in a less acceptable and disturbing manner when he discovered that power relations working informally that he labels “bullying really” prevented more junior staff from applying for a special duties post while he felt “it would have been wrong for me to make an individual approach on that issue” (Int. 4, 2007). Much to his disappointment also, when appointed to another small school, he discovered that immediately before he commenced, a special duties position had been awarded to a member of staff who had been a disappointed candidate for the position

of deputy principal. The chairperson of the BoM (acting with the ‘autonomy’ once vested in the ‘manager’) had approached another member of staff privately: “. . . and encouraged her not to apply, so that the disappointed candidate for Vice Principal might be given his reward through B post. This caused resentment and I feel that this could hinder team work” (Int. 4, 2007). Such episodes indicate the manner in which policy intentions are violated in the ‘service’ of local needs. When powerful stakeholders in the system send mixed or contradictory messages regarding leadership pre-conditions, then the moral courage principals to act in a professionally responsible manner is more severely tested and transformative capacity building more difficult to cultivate.

When Maggie (1991–2004) reflects on her time as principal, her difficult but intense relationship with her deputy, she frequently wished that her colleague would take more initiative. With hindsight, she distilled the following:

I learned that there . . . are lots of ways of doing things. I think that’s the wisdom that comes with age, but I certainly would have learned that. I learned that it’s harder on yourself not to be on good terms with people so it’s better to expend energy for yourself and for the wellbeing of the crowd, of the entire team, to expend energy on building team than it is on getting the task done. (Maggie, Int. 4, 2007)

Being overly task oriented her evidence suggests can be transactional, and in the short term while there may be satisfaction in completing tasks to your own standards, longer term little by way of increased leadership capacity may be achieved. Other elements of this testimony recommend ‘the wellbeing of the crowd’ over task completion, but this too can have its limitations with potential to stymie leadership initiatives.

Evidence from this cohort indicates that it is possible to build leadership capacity even in less than ideal circumstances. Such capacity building is premised on good interpersonal relations that facilitate the creation of space and opportunity for a more strategic and sustainable approach to self-sustaining and self-renewing communities, coupled with the courage to act. The evidence also suggests that even with a strategic vision and enthusiasm to build leadership capacity, lack of mobility in tandem with the resistance and subversion of colleagues have considerable capacity to domesticate major restructuring, while the climate and context for transformation is rendered considerably more difficult when major stakeholders seek to subvert rather than support policy reform.

## **Becoming an ‘Experienced’ Leader: Building Leadership Capacity?**

(Cohort Three: Dick, Denise, Rose, Kate)

Over time, neophyte school leaders transition to being ‘experienced’ leaders. However, whether this transition makes a shift in mindset also whereby the focus alters so that learning leadership also entails investing in the leadership capacity of

colleagues is less certain. Evidence from elsewhere attests to the ‘individualism’ and relative ‘isolation’ among primary teachers of different generations (Lortie 1975; Nias 1989; Nias et al. 1989) and advocacy of collaboration had remained largely undisturbed by posts of responsibility. However, the policy intentions of undermining “the foundations of the individual school’s culture” may be as “profoundly disturbing” to varying degrees (Nias et al. 1989, p. 124). When such potentially disturbing possibilities are combined with the legacy of existing interpersonal relations, ambiguities regarding—seniority and meritocracy, the necessity to provide job descriptions that don’t discriminate regarding claims to expertise,<sup>10</sup> and the on-going ambiguity regarding the ‘time’ during which responsibilities will be fulfilled, perhaps more recently appointed principals lack the leadership capital necessary to challenge inherited legacies, at least initially?

Dick (1994–) responds to the issue of middle management as follows: “You noticed me laughing? . . . like a lot of principals, I am waiting for a circular which is due out on middle management.” In this policy lacuna, he has more questions than answers indicating a degree of apprehension than leadership ambition.

. . . for instance, ICT is a big issue in a lot of schools and the next person in line for a job [post] knows nothing about computers and you really need to put somebody in charge . . . and you have to have the capacity to appoint the best person suitable,<sup>11</sup> . . . (Dick, Int. 4, 2007)

Apart from facing down the thorny issue of seniority and meritocracy, such considerations are complicated further by “The time out of school” that may be required to deal with additional responsibilities, while also paying attention to the issue of equity: “how many things can you load onto the person who has the post, what is full capacity for a post holder, what is the capacity to ask them to do other things . . .” (Int. 4, 2007). He readily recognises that a shift in mindset is a requirement, away from ‘designated duties’ to being a team player.

. . . these things have to be cleared up, to what extent the post is just rigidly the post and doesn’t go outside the job description and to what extent you are now a member of a leadership team and must be flexible. (Dick, Int. 4, 2007)

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<sup>10</sup>A dilemma frequently referred to by principals was in describing a set of duties that entailed ICT; such duties were often perceived as favouring younger staff members thus discriminatory against more senior colleagues, with potential for contestation and appeal.

<sup>11</sup>Messages being received by principals during this policy implementation phase were suggesting that responsibilities could not be determined in a manner that would put some staff at a disadvantage, especially more senior staff, but this too may be understood as (a) a further attempt to maintain the established culture of promotion strictly on the basis of seniority, and (b) being more difficult to develop capacity and the school’s capability to enhance aspects of curriculum, teaching and learning, if the person with the greatest expertise in the area could not be allocated these responsibilities. Where teachers felt aggrieved by the outcome of such internal competitions, the process could be appealed and when principals realised that this practice was being availed of freely, many became more cautious in their approach whereby continuity rather than change was likely to be favoured.

Whereas Alison has a sense of the possibilities afforded by 'creative ambiguity', and though similarly aware of, and positively disposed towards the possibilities, Dick is cautious in the absence of clearer policy directives: "I think it needs to be made clearer that a post holders meeting needs to happen outside of school [hours] and that post holders would be expected to be there" (Dick, Int., 2007). Despite such ambiguities, others quoted above insisted on regular meetings outside of school hours and wrote this into individual contracts.

Rose (1999–2001) discovered to her (initial) cost that relatively modest policy shifts are frequently perceived as a 'big deal' at the local level. Shortly after appointment she suggested the necessity for a meeting of those with designated duties, and quickly discovered that lack of leadership capital accumulation renders resistance easier: "there was almost a riot". The collective cry from colleagues was "We've always done things as a staff," and while she acknowledges that this assertion may have a ring of truth, her view is such collective activity occurred "only at a very low level". Nevertheless, she persisted finding "other ways around that down the line" (Int. 4, 2007). Her early experience resonates with the more general finding such resistance and nostalgia is . . .

. . . not only a consequence of age and stages of life and career (Huberman, 1989), it is also related to what teachers experience generationally—memories formed and situated in particular historical periods that retain and sometimes increase in importance as these teachers mature. (Goodson et al. 2006, p. 43)

Rose's experience, apart from indicating that persistence requires a repertoire of alternative strategies, suggests resistance is rooted in the specific culture of an individual school where 'avoidance of uncertainty' is strong (Hofstede et al. 2010); a salutary reminder of the necessity of knowing the previous history of an individual school and its policy context so that "amnesia [is replaced] with mindfulness" as well as "purpose and vision" (Deal and Peterson 2009, p. 47).

Kate's (1997–2007) experience appears to exemplify a gentler gradual approach to change that does not threaten. To begin with, she had difficulty recalling how many 'posts' were already in the school, yet spoke very positively about positive relations and a willingness to help, with a recognition on her part also that consultation on bigger issues are necessary. She says: "... they [teachers] would always take the initiative, say if I am stuck in the office, and I am supposed to be supervising, they will go along and do the supervision in the yard." Additionally, regarding specific tasks she says: "we know that it will be all done" while "... if there is going to be a big decision that has to be made, you can kinda call them together, and their opinions count" (Int. 3, 2000). When asked more directly if responsibilities had been reviewed and existing responsibilities re-written including the necessity for regular meetings, she responded: "We haven't, we were talking about it, but you know, a whole year goes and a load of things we say we'll do, we kinda don't" (Int. 1, 2000). While she acknowledges that younger staff does "Trojan work" they must wait their turn for financial recompense, suggesting that seniority prevails. Evidence here suggests that good relations in the absence of leadership capital matched with purpose and vision, the potentially transformational impact of policy is tamed considerably, at least initially.

Denise (1999–), still in her 20s when appointed and younger than many of her colleagues, indicates a very positive relationship with her deputy, when she states: “the deputy principal and myself would be very close and we get on very, very well and would have very much the same, you can’t say exact same vision, but very much a very parallel vision for the school which works great” (Int. 4, 2008). This positive shared vision is further enhanced by lack of distinction between those with designated duties and the remainder of the staff, thus there is a whole-school dimension to what she describes: “the middle management are very good and they would all do . . . everybody would do extra in the school anyway”. Nevertheless, Denise has tended to cultivate this good will rather than address significant restructuring of middle-management. She states:

so I know there’s more that I could do in terms of actually structuring . . . the middle management meetings and making it . . . but again it’s something that I would have, I accept needs to be done but I would have gone at it tentatively so as not to create the divide because I’m so aware of the amount that everybody gives within the school and I don’t want to create a them and us . . . . (Denise, Int. 4, 2008)

However, she then indicates that due to a legacy of conflict in the school regarding the allocation of a B post which was appealed, “I would have gone at it [middle management] tentatively, . . . I took it very slowly and gently, just again, as opposed to coming in the heavy,” thus at the time of the final interview, reallocation of responsibilities had not occurred (Int. 4, 2008). Nevertheless, she readily recognises: “it’s something that I could develop a bit better and we’re at a stage as a staff . . .” where this is now more feasible (Int. 4, 2008). Here too, the burden of recent experience sets particular preconditions where caution and tentative steps are perceived as the judicious leadership action.

Though the external environment had become more demanding for reform, the pace of change had certainly accelerated, and policy documents urged new middle-management structures to facilitate the distribution of leadership responsibilities, all four, to different degrees approached the possibilities this structural reform represented in a rather defensive and cautious manner primarily due to lack of clarity or conflicting messages and local legacies.

## **Learning Leadership: Building Leadership Capacity in a Climate of Accountability?**

(Cohort Four: Ben, Sadie, Brent, Janice)

Appointments of the four principals in this cohort came in the wake of the introduction of middle-management policy. Consequently, at a time when they were generally getting their sea legs in leadership, within their respective school cultures they were obliged to build a leadership team. They all entered the Leadership programme (Misneach-courage) provided by the DES sponsored Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) programme having taken up their positions (see [www.lds21.ie](http://www.lds21.ie)).

However, their prior learning, both experiential and theoretical, as well as their ‘inbound’ trajectory into the school’s culture appear to predominate (Wenger 1998). During this period also, inspired by NPM and external demands for accountability and transparency, there was increasing emphasis of policy development, and this became an important incentive for principals to devolve responsibility to colleagues for aspects of this work.

Brent (2006–) put the entire managerial shift in perspective, while simultaneously signalling a clear set of priorities focused on instructional leadership, though he does not use the term. His strategic vision seems informed by a combination of Masters work as well as his CPD portfolio. Whether “taking on a post of responsibility for the first time” or being a new principal, “it’s very easy . . . to bury themselves in the issues that are more easily accessible shall we say, the policy formation, the writing of a draft of policy.” Not everybody would agree with his perspective that such paper work is “unthreatening because you’re not interacting with people, you’re not trying to influence what’s happening, you’re not trying to lead change, you’re not trying to lead people which is the more challenging aspect of the job.” Yet, he appears to recognise that paperwork is ‘safe’ precisely because it may not intrude into classroom pedagogy. He has identified the necessity to penetrate this ‘privatism’ when he says: “I suppose it’s only now that we’re beginning, or I’m beginning to feel that I’m influencing, . . . is that leading curriculum and leading what it is we’re doing in the classroom, . . .” (Int. 2, 2007).

In a large suburban school with 29 classroom teachers, and 17 colleagues with ‘responsibilities’, he readily recognises that marshalling these troops into a coherent leadership task force is primarily the means by which he is most likely, even indirectly (Robinson et al. 2008), to influence the quality of classroom interactions. His views appear to resonate with the following:

Teachers with transformational principals seek out their principals more often for work-related and personal advice, thus enabling principals to exert control over the (new) knowledge that gets disseminated within teams. (Moolemaar et al. 2010, p. 655)

Brent indicates that to get around to all classrooms in a meaningful manner could take an entire school year, thus such solo leadership recognises the significance of teaming as a bridge between direct and indirect influence on classroom practice (Hallinger and Heck 1998; Leithwood and Mascall 2008; Robinson et al. 2008). He states:

. . . to be there influencing those who are also assisting in the leadership of curriculum, our special duties post holders. That’s one of the way’s we’re addressing it at the moment, what are the tasks that assistant principal should be doing, how can they lead people, lead the team, looking at them taking responsibility for class groupings or particular classes, to mentor, to induct, to be a sounding board, to nip certain things in the bud before they ever become large issues . . . (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

While seeking both to build and to lead a team he is acutely aware of time constraints and the multi-dimensional aspect of the process that includes planning, implementation, influence and communication, seeking out opportunities while being aware that such efforts at transformation: “can be intimidating” (Int. 2, 2007).

That kind of strategic vision receives implementation impetus from eight planned staff meetings per year, as well as six management meetings, though he also indicates “we’re at the start of this” the emphasis seems to be on melding a team for managerialist rather than leadership reasons: “creating that sense that we are a team, that we are a management team and that by signing up to a post of responsibility we are accepting that we’re part of a team” (Int. 2, 2007).

Such evidence conveys a strong sense of team building and shared responsibility rather than being confined to having responsibility for particular tasks, though this is not excluded. His testimony is peppered with phrases such as ‘ownership’, the ‘information loop’, ‘ongoing communication’ and cultivating ‘a sense of belonging’. Yet, there are constraints too. While the meetings occur outside of school hours, as yet this is not written into contracts, thus interpersonal dynamics and good will continue to be paramount in contributing to a positive climate:

... we’re reviewing their contracts at the moment. What we have said is that attendance at those meetings isn’t compulsory but having said that, and I’m lucky in the sense that I have a staff who wish to do that, those who haven’t been able to attend to date have had very good reason why they weren’t there and they have been at the next one, if you know what I mean. (Int. 2, 2007)

His testimony points to an ‘innovative climate’ described as a “collective willingness to adopt an open orientation toward new practices and change and to collectively develop new knowledge, practices, and refinements to meet organizational goals” (Leithwood et al. 2010, p. 627).

Brent recognises also that given the nature of the role, its complexity and bottomless demands that it is impossible to do everything to a preferred standard, and even with prioritisation, a team approach, beyond delegation is vital. In this regard, he readily recognises the importance of a sense of responsibility imbued with trust:

... that’s where you have to learn to delegate and that’s where you have to include your team and that’s where you have to make sure that if you do delegate, that it’s delegation with responsibility, it’s not delegation that they feel that they’re going to show you what they have done and then you have to... you have to be kept apprised of what’s going on but you have to trust the person to do it as well. (Int. 2, 2007)

His testimony clearly suggests that, coming to the role with considerable experience and expertise means that you do not have to be in situ for a protracted period before significant reforms may be undertaken. However, an increasing degree of performativity inherent in external policy lends urgency to the restructuring agenda, thus there is timeliness also to his leadership endeavours.

Janice (2007–) was an insider, and was only in role for a few months at the time of interview. Nevertheless, there is evidence of her struggle between tradition and transformation as she describes how she approached the filling of two special duties posts with colleagues, consistent with the experience of others above, breaking with tradition is a challenge:

You still don’t have everybody applying by any means... I was trying to say to them, look you can apply, seniority is one aspect of it but they do know that seniority is still a strong aspect of it but they’re still hesitant here to go up against each other so for the two posts we’ve two people, do you know what I mean, ... (Janice, Int. 2, 2007)

This evidence suggests that even after the kind of clarity desired by Dick above had been provided, teachers' own behaviour too has to change so that the new order is not subverted by the status quo. There is a sense of relief palpable in the following: "they tell me on the principals' course that it's the one issue that causes most grief" (Int. 2, 2007).

Ben (2005–) had the opportunity to fill three special duties positions early in his tenure. However, since he felt that he had a significant gap to fill after the departure of his predecessor, particularly with regard to policy statements, he took on the task of filling the deficit himself and this predisposed him to perceiving the responsibilities as a means of sharing the paperwork. Despite his best efforts thus far, his initial enthusiasm, coupled with his strong IT skills created something of a dependency culture that will be a challenge to wean his teaching colleagues away from, while time for collaboration appears to exacerbate this situation:

I find the difficulty now with policies is that because everyone's in class, I start the policy, I'm expected to research it, follow it up, change it. It's ultimately all down to me as an individual whereas we haven't got time as a staff to get around to dealing with policies. Now I'm hoping with the post holders meetings that we'll identify, right the two of you post holders, I want you to target this policy and by our next meeting in two months time I want the first draft. If I could do that, ... (Ben, Int. 2, 2007)

However, as his testimony indicates, personal and professional sensitivities are ever present and a consideration while inching towards building a team and shedding dependency:

... we had two staff members had family pass away so I didn't push it but I'm hoping now when things settle down again now that we will do it and I'm hoping that two post holders, that instead of feeling that there's just the two of them that I'm there as well, there's a third person if they want help producing drafts [of policies] (Ben, Int. 2, 2007)

In terms of interpersonal dynamics, he recognises also that colleague's circumstances change over time. He mentions a female colleague who due to personal issues presented as somewhat disengaged. However, more recently, in fulfilling her 'duties' she has turned a corner: "And her role has evolved in a way so ... she's probably doing a management role but beyond what the original duties were which is part of evolution" (Int. 2, 2007). His testimony lends further veracity to the view that each school culture creates its own dynamic, and this is the starting point when new principals are appointed and what they bring with them to the reform table.

Sadie (2006–), as a former member of a middle-management team in her previous school, is a strong believer in its potential contribution, while she humourously comments on the lack of mobility/promotion due to 'seniority' in that school: "The school I was in was one of these one's where a shot gun would need to be applied to get an A post. They were going to be there as long as I was". In her new situation, along with her deputy, she has an assistant and three special duties staff. They meet every second week for approximately an hour after school, and their meetings have a dual purpose: "One of them is used to prepare the staff meeting and the other is for on-going work" (Int. 2, 2007).

While this seems managerialist, she is conscious also of potential for a 'them and us' perception with such regular meetings, but tries to off-set this by inviting others



to attend depending on the agenda. However, more generally, she is concerned about a whole-school perspective and inclusion as the composition of staff alters significantly:

One of the things that I'm trying to work out myself at the moment is how to involve the SNA's. We have a seniority with SNA's and I'm considering; . . . what I'll do is sit down with the 7 people and I'll ask, 'would it be possible if one of you would just come to the post-holder meetings' and I'm thinking of the most senior person, for example and that when we're preparing staff meetings, that we look at it from the view point of the SNA's as well because we're actually looking at it probably from the viewpoint of teacher all the time really. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

Her foresight and strategy signals also that in more complex school environment, there are increasing challenges to issues surrounding communication and promoting a sense that each contribution is valued regardless of who is concerned. She is alert to the changing needs and responding actively and sensitively to changing realities in order to lead them in desired directions.

Amongst this cohort, there is greater awareness of the external environment, the necessity to distribute leadership responsibilities through restructuring middle-management, but a realisation too of possible hazards due to local legacies. Nevertheless, there appears to be considerable commitment to team building, more so than leadership capacity, while there is evidence too of some strategic vision and how this propels leaders to act in particular ways, with varying degrees of awareness of the role of principal in creating that more distributed leadership future.

## Conclusions

While the evidence presented above provides some indication that the most recent cohort is more aware of the external policy environment thus obliged to act more strategically, across all four cohorts what seems more significant is the dynamic interplay between the internal relations within the school community and the policy hinterland. Based on their reading of that landscape, some principals are more courageous than others, while the more general approach is one of caution, particularly where the perception is of mixed messages regarding policy interpretation and implementation. When stakeholders use their power to dilute the intended impact of policy change on the status quo, principals are much more likely to be cautious rather than courageous.

In the Irish context, there is additional vulnerability since there are no intermediate structures between the ministry and the individual school (save for the BoM). In a system where traditions of staffing and timetabling do not allow space and time to facilitate collaboration on the part of principals and teachers, evidence from elsewhere suggests that 'add-on' periods after school hours are inadequate for building communities of learning that build leadership capacity (Hargreaves and Fink 2005; Hargreaves and Shirley 2012). Consequently, in this instance, creating middle-management structures to facilitate distributed leadership is unlikely to

work other than peripherally in a tokenistic manner if space and opportunity for collaboration are not also created as integral elements of the capacity building process.

In light of this consideration, it is not entirely surprising that there seemed to be more of a commitment to creating a 'team' rather than a conscious awareness of building leadership capacity. Perhaps, it is necessary to do the former as a precursor to the latter, but in order to achieve this in a more compelling and deliberate manner, it seems necessary to, (a) differentiate more clearly between management and leadership while not denying their interdependence, and (b) principals need to be supported in re-defining their roles and responsibilities as facilitators of colleagues' ongoing learning, if the leadership capacity of the entire school community is to be enhanced. Left to their own devices, they may be more likely to build teams with hierarchical relations to themselves, rather than re-thinking leadership so that 'distributed' does not mean diluted or dissipated power of the principal, but enhanced leadership capacity within (and beyond) the school community.

Finally, it is entirely evident also that 'scaling up' leadership capacity density systemically cannot be left to the individual commitment of principals and their colleagues. Thus, evidence here further reinforces the need for sustained commitment and support for leadership, while relationships of trust and respect continue to be of paramount importance. In the current climate however undertaking such a complex task in a manner that avoids too much prescription asks much of 'trust' that seems significantly absent from policy rhetorics.

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# Chapter 9

## ‘Performing’ Leadership: Professional Responsibility in a Climate of Accountability

### Introduction

In some jurisdictions, external accountability mandates have been blowing consistently at gale force, while in other national contexts they have been more like a persistent Westerly, and Ireland is one such location (Green 2011; McNamara and O’ Hara 2008; Sugrue 2006, 2011a, b). This chapter begins by positioning external and internal evaluation policies in Ireland within international policy trends. It then goes on to document the impact of more recent policy shifts regarding Whole School Evaluation, and the promotion by the Inspectorate of school self-evaluation (SSE). School leaders are increasingly expected to comply with externally determined standards and requirements, to be accountable, while leading innovation within the school community—leading in the shadows of the twin-towers of autonomy and accountability with attendant dilemmas for individual and collective senses of professionally responsible leadership. An accelerating pace of change, curricular reform, rapidly altering demographics with attendant language challenges to schools, and a more general NPM climate that clamoured for public sector reform (OECD 2008), coalesced into an intensifying set of demands on school leaders from several sources simultaneously. Thus the sense of ‘performativity’ became more characteristic of education reform efforts nationally, its essentials being described as

... not in any simple sense a technology of oppression, it is also one of satisfaction and rewards, at least for some. Indeed it works best when we come to want for ourselves what is wanted from us, when our moral sense of ourselves and our desires are aligned with the pleasures of performativity. But there is always the possibility of slippage between pleasure and tyranny within performativity regimes. (Ball 2008, p. 52)

Earlier chapters provided considerable evidence that in a small system with attendant lack of teacher and principal mobility, interpersonal relations tend to be privileged, thus rendering incremental change more attainable than organisational transformation, while recognising that these are not mutually exclusive. However,

externally driven reforms increase in-school pressures to perform to pre-determined standards, thus potentially disrupting carefully calibrated trade-offs intended to 'keep the peace' and to ensure as far as possible an even keel in the delicate and fragile ecology of school communities. This gradual transformation may also be understood as the increasing invasion of the 'life world' of schools by the 'system world' of external accountability (Habermas 1987; Sergiovanni 2000). In such circumstances it is often the moral compass of school leaders that sets the climate for how professional responsibility is continuously re-negotiated, with compliance frequently competing with collaborative collegiality as discretion and professional judgement are exercised in the pressure-cooker of everyday practices. When the web of relationships becomes tauter due to increased tensions created by external (performativity) demands, commitments are rendered more fragile and fraught, professional relationships frazzled and fractured, while sometimes also sponsoring collective cohesion.

There are two distinctive features of this chapter to be noted briefly here. First, there is a coalescence of various 'themes' from earlier chapters—such as the significance of local legacies for the tenacity of school cultures, the privileging of personal relationships, the lack of mobility, intensification over time due to the pace of change, the importance of trust, and policy churn. Second, nowhere is this more evident than in relation to the external demand for greater accountability. Thus, the theme of 'performativity' and the tensions created by external policy dikats between accountability and professional responsibility are given prominence; their impact on how leadership is understood and enacted. Third, since much of this policy shift has occurred during the past two decades, the substantive focus is on the theme rather than the cohorts and the introduction situates national policy within its macro context, while the presentation of empirical evidence facilitates a 'glocal' analysis. This approach is also bolstered by the evidence in previous chapters that the cohorts and distinct periodization emerges as less significant than might be anticipated; individual disposition and school community dynamics having a more prominent influence in many instances.

### **Autonomy, Accountability, Self-Evaluation: Systemic Trajectories**

Contemporary struggles between professional autonomy and external 'technologies of control', particularly those imposed by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in the US or the accountability demanded by the Office For Standards in Education (Ofsted) in England, are, to use a financial market term,—'derivative' of neo-liberalism. The shifting boundaries and solidarities that create this 'run-away world' (Giddens 2002), this 'new imperialism' (Harvey 2003), this 'liquid modernity' (Bauman 2000/2006) may be classified as 'creative destruction' of an established order (Harvey 2011). The orthodoxies of schooling—order, stability and

continuity are increasingly pitted against- change, choice and competition. These macro policy atmospherics are dynamic and changing but include “transnational flows and networks of people, ideas and practices across ... borders”, and in a European context the “direct effects of EU policy” as well as “international institutions and globalization” (Lawn and Grek 2012, p. 8). For example, a recent EU report declares that “Although reforms have been going on for several decades, school autonomy remains a key issue on the political agenda of many if not most European countries” (Coghlan and Desurmont 2007, p. 3). It recognises also that such a policy direction has had different, competing and conflicting impulses including—‘democratic participation’, ‘efficient management of public funds,’ and more recently, “school autonomy ... as a tool to be used to improve the quality of education” (p. 13). Such policy spaces are increasingly being shaped at European level, though they continue to be ‘refracted’ within national policy arenas (Goodson 2004). Nevertheless, Ireland is a very good example of how “‘local’ policy actors are using PISA as a form of domestic policy legitimation or as a means of defusing discussion by presenting policy as based on robust evidence” (Lawn and Grek 2012, p. 134). When it emerged in the fall of 2010 that Irish 15 year olds’ performance on PISA tests represented the most dramatic decline in the history of these comparative studies (OECD 2010), the schools inspectorate acted swiftly to address this perceived deficit by creating a ‘national strategy’ for ‘literacy and numeracy’ with attendant emphasis on national testing, very redolent of policies initiated in other jurisdictions during the past decade or more (DES 2011).

The strategy recognises the necessity to ‘build the capacity of school leadership’ as critical to this endeavour; its primary emphasis in attaining this is to “Support principals and deputy principals in implementing robust school self-evaluation, focussing in particular on improvements in literacy and numeracy” (p. 40). While self-evaluation has been part of policy rhetoric in ministry publications for more than a decade (DES 1996, 2003, 2006a, b), such emphasis has intensified with the publication of the strategy. Primary schools in Ireland have had inspection since their foundation (1831), and the influence of the inspectorate has waxed and waned during that period (Coolahan 2009). Consistent with the Europeanisation of education policy-making, school self-evaluation “represents the culmination of a long process of Europe-wide policy development aimed at the improvement of school performance” (Lawn and Grek 2012, p. 135). Though the publication of school reports in 2006 marked a major departure from established practice in the Irish context, analysis of their content suggests that self-evaluation scarcely featured, being trumped by more summative evaluative comments on the quality of teaching and learning in schools (Sugrue 2011a, b, c, d). Rendering data comparable between jurisdictions is facilitated by organisations such as the OECD, while networks such as the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) contribute also to making schools ‘auditable’ (Power 1999). In such circumstances, self-evaluation may be interpreted as a tool of accountability, of compliance, of conformity or a more generative principle where professional responsibility is re-imagined.

There is little doubt that, thus far, the rhetoric of self-evaluation has been primarily “a top-down model of decision-making process without any identifiable driving force coming from schools themselves” (Coghlan and Desurmont 2007, p. 15). In such circumstances, exacerbated by recent austerity, it is not surprising that the profession is suspicious of ‘more for less’ consistent with the experience elsewhere of decentralised recentralisation (Whitty 2008).

### ***Professionally Responsible Leadership?***

In sharp contradistinction between the ‘logic of accountability’ that privileges ‘policy by numbers’ (Lingard et al. 2003), and the ‘logic of responsibility’, it is instructive to identify the different languages they deploy. The former makes prominent use of terms such as—standards, control, compliance, and external accountability, while the latter has a strong preference for terms such as—moral rationale, negotiated standards framed by professionals, relative autonomy, and a proactive rather than reactive stance on the part of professionals (Solbrekke and Englund 2011). Durkheim (2001) argued that professional responsibility entailed providing a service connected with the “moral regulation of society” (Solbrekke and Sugrue 2011). Similarly, Parsons advanced the view that: “professions are formally coupled to the public enterprise of being ‘collectively oriented’ rather than ‘self-oriented’” (quoted in Solbrekke and Sugrue 2011, p. 13). As a Canadian author suggests: “education and health care do not meet only our personal needs; they are the core of our relationship as citizens to our governments, and they reflect the ways we think about ourselves as citizens in society” (Gross Stein 2001, p. 4). Professional responsibility includes a sense of agency, to act in the interest of the profession and the common good—there is a collective responsibility on the individual professional. It may be particularly important to re-assert this perspective at a time of rampant individualism; what has been labelled “the age of selfishness: the credo of self, inextricably entwined with the gospel of the market, has hijacked the fabric of our lives” (Gerhardt 2011, p. 11).

This is the wider landscape and immediate context in which professionally responsible leadership in Irish primary schools plays out. All of the participants in this study were socialised into teaching at a time when the pervasive view was that inspection was something external, imposed and largely to be endured; that having been probated, you would largely be left to labour in the privacy of your own classroom (Sugrue 1999). This is the legacy that is challenged by evolving and more contemporary policy perspectives and re-conceptualisations of leadership. As these reforms have been relatively recent, largely pursued during the past 15–20 years, this chapter breaks with the practice of representing the cohorts as distinct trajectories, and deals with the emerging tensions regarding professionally responsible leadership in a climate of performativity.



## Probation: Shaping Attitudes to External Accountability and Professional Responsibility

The probationary period for beginning teachers (NQTs) was changed from 2 years to one in the 1980s thus acknowledging the graduate status of primary teachers.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 50 % of the participants in this study served a 2-year probationary period. This early socialisation into the profession leaves a lasting legacy in terms of perceptions of external evaluation or accountability. It is not by accident that the ‘legendary autonomy’ of Irish teachers is remarked on by the OECD (OECD 1991, p. 4). Nevertheless, as earlier chapters attest, experiences and perceptions vary significantly despite size and relative homogeneity of the system. Initial encounters with inspectors and external accountability create lasting legacies with significance for professional responsibility and the exercise of leadership.

For example, Eddie (1993–2006)<sup>2</sup> regarded his probationary encounter with external accountability (1982–1984) as an:

Absolute nightmare because I hadn’t one but two inspectors. One of the inspectors was under training and I feel that it was a more thorough inspection because of this. I felt that the junior inspector was taking all sorts of steps to find anything at all that could be wrong, from a negative point of view and duly reporting them to his master. I felt that about it. Also there seemed to be little comprehension of the difficult group of children that were involved in it. I haven’t good memories of my first diploma. I have much better memories of my second one. (Eddie, Int. 1, 2000)

The emotional hurt and vulnerability are both palpable in these remarks, seared into memory. Apart from the process, the purposes of external accountability are called into question—to affirm or to ‘find fault’; an Irish version of ‘naming and shaming’. He remarks that the presence of two “put me off my stride” and there was a lack of perspective due to “too much attention to what I would see now as slightly minor aspects of the work rather than concentrating on fundamentals”. By way of illustration in rather sarcastic tones, he states: “My notes on vocal technique were not up to speed and, it is a long time since anybody has [spoken to] me about vocal technique since” (Int. 1, 2000).

Veteran Jim’s (1985–) experience more than a decade earlier (1970s), contrasts sharply with the account above, both sensitive to context and most affirming.

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<sup>1</sup>A Bachelor of Education (BEd) was introduced in Ireland as the entry qualification to primary teaching in 1974 with the first BEd graduates conferred in 1977. This degree programme replaced a two-year Diploma programme, thus for the first time in the history of the State, primary teaching became a graduate profession. Consequently, the primary teachers’ union (INTO) argued successfully for the reduction of the probationary period. Teachers are not entitled to salary increments until they have successfully completed probation, an external evaluation undertaken by the primary inspectorate though there are plans, consistent with school self-evaluation that principals take responsibility for the probation of NQTs.

<sup>2</sup>I continue the practice established in earlier chapters of providing the dates during which each informant has been principal, while dates regarding probation also feature in some cases, and both sets of dates should not be confused.

I remember teaching first class [6–7 year olds] in a prefab, it was a very big class; there must have been nearly forty children in it. I found he was very understanding. He understood that I had a very tough job, that I had a big number and a small space. And he was more anxious to encourage me than to criticise me and I was pleased with him. (Jim, Int. 1, 2000)

These brief vignettes vividly illustrate the very personal nature of teaching, the significance of context in tempering expectations and standards. Being on probation, there is a heightened sense of teacher 'vulnerability'; attendant emotional and professional exposure means that long after the event such encounters live in the memory (Kelchtermans 2011), especially if power is perceived as having been exercised unfairly (Nye 2008). Such performative vulnerabilities may be said to "serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection" (Ball 2003, p. 216). Even when positive, they reinforce a view that accountability is external, extrinsic to the exercise of professionally responsible leadership. A heightened sense of vulnerability and potential grievance are all the more significant when external 'inspection' is perceived as individual and idiosyncratic (see Sugrue 1999).

Having taken up the position of principal of a two-teacher school (1971), Fred sought the assistance of his Divisional Inspector to construct a timetable to deal with the complexity of having four class groupings in his classroom. He sought external support:

He ... came in about two o'clock and I'd given the kids work to do and we were working away at it. At about half four [4.30 p.m.] he said to me, 'have you no home to go to?' And we still had no home found for nature studies and something else. So that was it, he never came back to me on that particular one, so the timetable never really got finished. It was an impossibility I suppose. (Fred, Int. 1, 2000)

Such (formative) encounters help to perpetuate stereotypical images of inspectors, complicating also their dual responsibility of advisor and external evaluator.<sup>3</sup> Prior to being appointed principal, Sadie (2006-) toyed with the possibility of becoming an inspector as a career choice, but made the following determination:

I thought at times of the inspectorate but never could commit in my mind that it was something I really wanted to do. It wouldn't suit my personality, I wouldn't want to be poking at people's roll book and saying, that's actually the wrong shade of black. (Sadie, Int. 1, 2007)

Even in a tacit manner, this comment strongly suggests a distinction between being accountable and being professionally responsible; that the latter entails more

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<sup>3</sup>Policy shifts in more recent years, and the recently published literacy numeracy strategy (DES 2011) collectively suggest that the inspectorate is increasingly concentrating its energies more narrowly on 'evaluation' and informing policy, leaving professional support increasingly to The Teaching Council. This re-focusing was strongly urged by the OECD in 1991 where inspectors were to withdraw from inservice support to concentrate on core business. Nevertheless, there continues to be a tension between an advisory role and that of external evaluator even if the general policy climate has tended to reinforce and give greater priority to the external accountability agenda.

than mere compliance. In a less standardised system that allows for professional judgment in the exercise of professional responsibility, Brent's experience suggests that differential power relations and a degree of reflective circumspection rather than a slide-rule approach has much to commend it. During his probationary year (1988–1989), when asked how he approached the teaching of the Irish language, he responded that he 'did his own thing' since he considered the programme to be 'a little old hat', while it slipped his mind that the inspector concerned had been one of its primary architects years earlier.

... [It is] to his eternal credit that he never held that against me, he didn't even mention, he didn't even remark about it at the time but of course, as soon as he was at the door, it dawned on me anyway but he was unfailingly affirming and polite and gave me great confidence that I was doing a good job ... (Brent, Int. 1, 2007)

Clearly, perceptions of interpersonal dynamics are critical to the formation of early impressions of external accountability that continue to be embedded in the personal reservoir of principals, with attendant implications for contemporary on-going interactions. In this regard, Dick's (1994–) commentary is instructive, where 'power-distance'<sup>4</sup> and the exercise of power appear as significant.

... the one inspector I have had since I became principal, ... he is of the old school and ... I have not warmed to him should I say but I have not annoyed him in any way either as far as I know and we get on okay but it is more on his terms I think you know, I think if I called him by his first name he might be taken aback to be honest. Now if I was a bit older and I called him by his first name maybe he wouldn't be. Actually I despise having to call him mister sometimes, I do not call him anything even if I leave a message on the phone ... (Dick, Int. 2, 2000)

As he warms to this topic, there is considerable indication of vulnerability, a principal's sense of isolation, and the need for affirmation when there is evidence of 'good work' (Gardner et al. 2001), as well as perpetuation of more traditional perceptions of a persistent impulse to 'find fault', whatever that might be. Dick remarks: "I do not think he needs to be digging holes" while the inspector's general disposition seems to be "never pass a compliment", preferring, rather akin to Eddie's experience above, to comment negatively on minutiae such as "there is a lot of marks on those desks," comments that Dick finds annoying. Yet, he hears back from colleagues that the inspector has commented in other schools that "he [Dick] is a nice fellow and "he is doing a grand job" but he would not say it to me." The inspector has made similar comments to Dick about other colleagues, conduct that may be deemed unprofessional. When Dick has reported to colleagues in other schools that they "have made a good impression on the Inspector" they have

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<sup>4</sup>'Power-distance' is defined as "extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede et al. 2010, p. 61). In Irish society where it is commonly asserted that 'everyone knows everyone else' and in a teaching career where there is little opportunity for mobility and promotion, informality tends to be the norm, thus reducing the power-distance gap, whereby interdependence is favoured and emotional distance kept to a minimum.

been “flabbergasted” (Int. 2, 2000). Such approaches to external accountability are unlikely to instil trust in the process while colouring negatively the internalisation of accountability practices.

Praise and criticism, self-evaluation and externally imposed standards clearly create tensions, rendering a sense of professional responsibility and agency more fragile and tentative due to asymmetrical power relations. One reason why such concerns are intriguing is precisely because school inspection in recent decades has been relatively benign when compared to other jurisdictions. Yet, there is ample evidence above of vulnerability. Nevertheless, in more recent years, as the pace of change has accelerated, there are significantly greater demands for policy documents, curriculum planning and pupil records, while through various iterations, Whole School Evaluation (WSE)<sup>5</sup> continues a very real presence in primary schools; a major systemic continuity, even if the *modus operandi* evolves and conceptions of leadership alter.

## **Principals' Sense of Responsibility, Systemic Demands for Accountability**

In order to understand principals' sense of professional responsibility, and the agency they exercise while fulfilling the role, it is necessary to understand this as a web of relationships that imply commitments. It is the 'power-distance' dynamics entailed in these relationships that are both internal and external to the school and shaped by the policy environment that influences to varying degrees the energy that is devoted to particular aspects of the role at any one time. In turn, these dynamics influence how responsibilities are conceived, priorities determined, and on-going relationships re-calibrated. Previous chapters have indicated that there is enormous variation, while inherited school legacies cast important shadows on the life and work of principals. For example, when Ben was appointed (2005) he learned very quickly that, not only was the cupboard bare, but that the school was in debt. Nevertheless, in an effort to address perceived priorities, the debt escalates, precipitating greater necessity to face up to financial responsibilities. His initial shock at becoming aware that “we were €12,000 overdrawn” and because a particular grant was paid twice to the school by the DES, “we hadn't repaid over €6,000” and, as a consequence: “suddenly I was €18,000 overdrawn”. Shifting from 'we' to 'I' suggests he had assumed responsibility to deal with this debt, exacerbated further by having taken on some repairs, thus: “at the end of the first year I was €25,000 overdrawn, going the wrong way” (Int. 2, 2008).

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<sup>5</sup>It should be noted that, one of the concessions won by teachers' unions in relation to Whole School Evaluation is that, since such reports are about the work of a school in general, it is not permitted to name an individual teacher in these reports.

The impact on the quality of teaching and learning as a consequence of either having no funds, or the reluctance on the part of the chairperson<sup>6</sup> of the BoM to think beyond 'the bottom line' that creates a within-school disposition inimical to optimising the learning environment:

... for years the notion was we'd no money and as a result we'd no resources ... and we were always struggling, we either made our resources or we did without them, like concrete learning didn't come in with the new curriculum [1999], it came in when we started to get resources ... (Ben, Int. 2, 2008)<sup>7</sup>

The only means of rescuing this situation is to raise funds, mostly through the parents' association. However, as Ben's testimony indicates, their priority is their own children's education rather than historical legacies. For three successive years, parents raised €15 K, but "The sad reality with their money is that it's gone into the bottomless pit of the overdraft and while we're beating it, they want to spend it on the children" (Int. 2, 2008). Nevertheless, as a consequence of taking responsibility for the legacy financial burden, future prospects are brighter:

But 3 years down the line, we're now starting to overcome that. I could now invest €2,000 in maths equipment, I can now look at hopefully in a couple of years being ready to apply for the digital schools competition and I'm hoping that in a couple of years' time we'll be able to do the green schools rather than worrying about how much things cost. (Ben, Int. 2, 2008)

Such agentic leadership seems professionally responsible while external evaluation criteria may not accord much recognition or credit to the principal for such endeavours. . Without positive relationships with the parents, reflected in Ben's comment: "the parents' council in fairness to them" is all the more positive in some respects since he adds: "you spend your life giving out about them". While he has built a partnership relationship with them, there is recognition also of their ambitions for their own children's learning and the manner in which it has been constrained by inadequate accountability in the past.

These vignettes are significant in their drawing attention to principals' sense of responsibility, the web of relationships and attendant obligations. These are ties that bind in the sense that to build trust, essential to the maintenance and furthering of relationships, they both temper leadership through the honouring of commitments inherent in the exercise of agency, while it is precisely from the weave of such ties that agency is activated and energised. Such commitments are much more than accountability. They are "characterised by Brint (1994) as 'social trustee

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<sup>6</sup>As indicated previously, in many instances, the chairperson of a Board of Management, particularly in rural Ireland and its small towns, continues to be the local clergyman. Consequently, depending on deeply ingrained attitudes regarding money, as well as towards education, they continue to have enormous consequences for the learning environment in schools.

<sup>7</sup>It may be more accurate to suggest that the Piagetian concept of 'concrete operations' had been part of progressive ideology in the Irish context since 1971 when a 'child-centred' progressive curriculum was introduced (see Sugrue 1997).

professionalism', by Sullivan (2005) as 'civic professionalism' and Barnett (1997) as 'critical professionalism'" (Englund and Solbrenke 2011, p. 60), each in their own way indicating the exercise of agency within community ties.

While there is little doubt that the changing nature of school inspection in recent years, and its more public manifestation through the publication of WSE reports, have contributed to intensification along with demands for paperwork in the form of policies, curriculum planning and record-keeping, there continues to be a ritual performance dimension since WSE occurs in schools every 4–6 years. Such accountability therefore may be regarded as episodic, a kind of performativity that is cyclical rather than perpetually present.<sup>8</sup> With the increasing complexity of the role, accelerated pace of change coupled with demands for accountability and transparency, it is extremely difficult to have the time necessary to invest in building these relationships of trust that are necessary if there is to be a collective sense of positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. These demands result in increasing 'surveillance' of the principal by each of these various constituencies. Consequently, while inspection as a major means of being held to account is the most official and public dimension of technologies of control, this needs to be understood within the overall network of responsibilities. This more panoptic approach has more potential to reveal the full panorama of commitments of school leaders and the exercise of leadership rather than an exclusive focus on external accountability only.

For example, in her early months in the role Rose (1999–2001) wrestled with the multifaceted nature of the position. She was self-conscious regarding her increased vulnerability through greater visibility, while an unreliable heating system, and the presence of empty alcohol bottles and hypodermic needles in the school yard after a weekend, rendered her relationship with the place, the building, her sense of security and commitment more tender and tentative: "Now that, for me certainly coloured my relationship with the building, my sense of being safe and being warm." Yet, she feels that "WSE has driven things in a certain direction one cannot ignore." However, despite this sense of performativity, her comments suggest that this represents intensification without direction. Rather, "we're still no better off, we've just got busier, we've just got distracted with a lot of legislative things whether it's child welfare and so on and the whole special needs thing" (Int. 4, 2007). She seems overwhelmed at this early stage by the sheer volume of demands while not having had time to establish priorities. Her sense of isolation and vulnerability are palpable in the following:

Accountability, I often think that I am most accountable to the lolly-pop lady because I think she is the one who sees so much of what goes on in the school. She sees the children coming in and she sees them going home. (Rose, Int. 2, 2000)

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<sup>8</sup>While 'incidental visits' by inspectors to schools have been part of the fabric of external accountability in Irish primary schools, their introduction to the post-primary sector has been a recent phenomenon. That they have become known as 'drive bys' is indicative of how they are perceived by teachers and principals.

Since there is an immediacy and continuity regarding her presence in comparison with the relative remoteness of members of her BoM or indeed the Minister, she states:

I feel that I have a duty to her as somebody who works here whose little form I sign every week, I am accountable for her and she represents to me the world out there. Of course the minister too, but he doesn't see things on a day to day basis. (Rose, Int. 2, 2000)

Her 'peripheral' and 'inbound' trajectories' (Wenger 1998) appear as yet not to have acquired necessary interpersonal traction to build trust and professional wellbeing. She is critical of what she terms the lack of "dialogue about where we might be going, what the priorities should be for the school, no sounding out, no mentoring, no training, no nothing" but it might be suggested that this is her responsibility as school principal. As is often the case, she is critical of the remoteness of the DES and policy makers while indicating a positive relationship with the local inspector:

That is not to criticize the individual inspector who is here who I am very fond of but again the system does not support that inspector to support me and other principals in the locality. There is no support in the system. (Rose, Int. 2, 2000)

Perhaps being appointed at a particular juncture when there was frenetic activity as a consequence of the introduction of the revised curriculum (1999), demands for planning—policies and curricula, lack of preparation for the role, and a consequent struggle to establish priorities is rendered more challenging and problematic. Being new to the position of principal, and the attendant exposure it now entails, a sense of responsibility can be overwhelming. Her experience suggests that when responsibility is stretched and dispersed too thinly, agency is diminished; in the absence of an enabling web of relationships that build trust and traction, the supply of agency is reduced (Benson 2000). Nevertheless, Rose is not alone in recognising the general intensification. Eddie had been in the role for some years, thus with more of an 'insider' trajectory, could put things in perspective, even if there is a sense also that this confluence of influences was contributing to performativity. He says:

And at that stage educational change was stepping up its pace and we were coming towards the time for the new curriculum [1999] and we were coming to the sort of whole school planning and lots of continuing professional development was happening and the idea of whole school was being floated, probably had been piloted that time of the whole school evaluation or whole school inspection, so things were going in that direction. (Eddie, Int. 4, 2007)

Within a short space of time, these 'realities' had "become institutionalised". Part of his perceived responsibility in such circumstances is to inform as a means of connection and getting collective buy-in within and without the school. Consequently, Eddie indicates:

I talked at parent meetings and I talked about the revised curriculum and I talked about what's different about it and why it's being done differently and what the value is and that your child might be doing this and also held information days for the parents of new infants etc [4/5 year olds] so that they could strike a chord with what was going on in the school

and so they could make a judgement, oh my child was doing SPHE [Social, personal and health education] today, we know it wasn't just sitting around and having a chat around a camp fire or something, you know! (Eddie, Int. 4, 2007)

Despite inherited poor staff relations, Eddie seems at least tacitly aware of the incremental nature of building the necessarily expanding web of relationships and its significance for trust and agency, differentiating between core and peripheral concerns: "I moved from early days where the argument was about what colour would we paint the staffroom, to, you know, can I get hot water for the staff toilet, to can we get yellow lines outside the front door" and having 'ticked these boxes' it was possible to "start moving" to "core issues ... the core issue in the school is the teaching and learning and to me when the focus ... shifted back to improvements on that, that was centre stage for me ... (Int. 4, 2007).

His sense of responsibility extended further to consistency in reporting on children's progress whereby 'excellence' in one class equated with all others, while being mindful also that teachers have their own agenda, namely projecting a particular image of themselves within the school and the wider community. In these and other circumstances, integrity, honesty and consistency regarding standards become vital. He readily recognises the contribution standardised tests can make in such circumstances, and the importance of moving towards evidence-informed decision-making, while acknowledging also that such evidence is part of the story only:

... we were using the Micra-t [<http://micra-t.com>] and the Sigma-t<sup>9</sup> and then looking at the social aspect about the child and would we agree on what's good ... and all of these things. So we had our own agenda on that and I don't think the changes coming in from outside would have impacted that much on us. (Eddie, Int. 4, 2007)

Building internal capacity while strengthening the web of relationships internally and externally is evidence of agency; congruence appears as facilitative also of a positive dynamic, while seeking incrementally to shift perceptions of what counts as 'good' teaching:

So that goes back to what I'm talking about getting the straight message out there and you see some of the added value in terms of visual arts and the non-core curriculum and the new methodologies etc., people looked at them sceptically and said, right, not sure that's decent teaching at all, decent teaching is when you've a ton of maths done out of your maths book and you've all the workbooks finished and so on. (Eddie, Int. 4, 2007)

His testimony signals important distinctions between accountability and responsibility. In the case of the former, a 'ton of maths' would tick the appropriate boxes, while an impoverished pedagogy, teaching to the text, as well as to the test,

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<sup>9</sup>These are one of two sets of standardised tests (the other generally referred to as the Drumcondra tests), that are specifically developed in the Irish system and are ubiquitous throughout. However, until relatively recently, their use was heavily circumscribed: they were deployed as a means of determining entitlement to 'remedial' support, now referred to as 'resource' teaching, and, to a lesser extent in 'banding' for some subjects, particularly mathematics, as well as in the formation of ability grouping within classes.



would be likely to fall short of behaving in a professionally responsible manner. ‘Added value’, the language of accountability and NPM, is re-articulated in the more progressive language of the contribution of the arts to a more holistic education, thus inscribing a particular disposition and value stance about educational purposes considerably more resonant with a sense of professional responsibility.

## **Responsible Leadership: Discretionary Judgement Not Compliant Accounting**

Building capacity within the school community confers on the members a greater sense of agency; that being responsible, particularly given the pace of change, includes being able to say no on occasion rather than being swept along like flotsam and jetsam on a tide of re-form. Michelle (1992–) communicates this sense of positive resistance to overload as part of a process of (re-) claiming a degree of control over professional space: “Schools are just saying hang on a minute, if it goes much faster the whole thing is going to explode. It is not going to be able to be maintained.” By way of example, she cites a notification inviting the school to participate in a science curriculum project. When she put this to the staff and witnessed “people’s jaws just dropping at the thought of another change”. Having decided not to participate, she indicates:

I think it is good to be able to say that to the inspector or whoever. It does not mean that they would listen to you but you would feel in authority now to be able to do that whereas previously that might not have been the case. (Michelle, Int. 2, 2000)

Providing such authoritative leadership is distinct from the behaviour of “compliant line managers” but when school leaders are curtailed sufficiently by a confluence of impositions, the consequences are “increased responsibility but diminished autonomy” (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009, p. 95). Principal’s testimony regarding relations with their respective BoMs are instructive in this regard, with the usual degree of variation, exacerbated in this particular instance by social context, whereby the pool of parents and public available with appropriate expertise ranges from having an accountant or former bank manager as treasurer to illiterate parents who, if asked to contribute, fail to turn up at subsequent board meetings. Nevertheless, with hindsight, as veteran Jack (1978–2007) indicates, even in his disadvantaged context, agency and trust are important elements of building capacity. He says:

... there is a sense in which I don’t feel that the boards of management have evolved at all ... over the time in the sense that to a large extent, they are people, we kinda gathered together whenever we had a meeting and they kinda rubber stamped whatever I say and its back to Jack with what he wants us to do. Now I have recently started to use them a little bit as kinda increased authority ... (Jack, Int. 1, 2000)

In the absence of local authorities, individual schools are isolated, and there is a significant systemic silence about BoMs and the extent to which they impede or

support school leaders. In this regard, veteran Jim (1985) has major concerns about confidentiality in a rural community where children, parents and teachers might be the focus of agenda items, and he remains to be persuaded that lay persons can be trusted more than clergy! Additionally, he sees volunteerism in retreat, and, as a consequence of potential conflicts of interest in a more rights driven culture of individualism, exercising responsible leadership in a climate of accountability and declining trust is more of a challenge.

Getting community reps is not that easy now. People are not that keen to serve on boards because procedures are being implemented more and more for less and less things, everything now must be investigated, the smallest complaint has to be investigated and comes to the board and inevitably it's neighbours' children you're dealing with and people don't want to be involved. (Jim, Int. 4, 2007).

Since he was the focus of a 2-year investigation as a consequence of taking to task a pupil for bullying another child, the protracted and, as he saw it—disproportionate nature of the process, leaves him much more circumspect about exercising his responsibility in future, consistent with those cases cited by Gronn (2011).

I'd think twice maybe which I shouldn't. I should make every effort to solve it but I probably would think twice before going to solve another one. That came to me as a bit of a shock . . . . And it was all paperwork again, statements were required from me for the department and had to go to here, there and I had to [attend] meetings to give account of my stewardship and what not . . . . (Jim, Int. 4, 2007)

Jim is less trusting of structures that he perceives to have been created primarily to support (rather than undermine) his work as school leader, thus he is more circumspect about his exercise of agency and responsibility. And, in this regard, his particular experience corroborates “findings of Bryk and Schneider (2002), [that] trust building is increasingly acknowledged to be a key capability for professionally responsible school leadership (see Gronn 2010; Robinson 2010)” (quoted in Gronn 2011, p. 91). Gronn (2011, pp. 93–96) also makes the point that ‘slow trust’ in people takes time and effort to construct as opposed to the kind of ‘swift’ and often transient trust temporarily invested in structures or abstract procedures.

Another commonplace in the lifeworld of principals, is the necessity, as Conor states, to be “absolutely accountable” for the finances, thus in this regard, being accountable is entirely appropriate, but it also entails more than merely accounting for expenditure. For example, during the Celtic Tiger years, capital sums known as ‘Summer works’ to refurbish schools, build extensions etc. were frequently provided. Thus, many principals, in the interest of ensuring the quality of work and its completion in a timely manner, frequently became the unpaid ‘clerk of works’ on the site, while extending responsibility to being proactive in seeking improvements to the learning environment, inevitably incurs additional obligations. Conor captures this neatly:

Absolutely, more money means more work, for example the summer work scheme now, that's going to tie up a lot of your Summer holidays because we've had something going on for the last couple of years. At the moment now, I applied and got a grant . . . for

improvements in the school yard and that's been going on, that's just finishing up now more or less but there's a lot more paperwork attaching to that. A certain amount of that, a good lot of it falls on the principal you know. (Conor, Int. 4, 2007)

However, these many obligations, and the sense of responsibility they engender may restrict or release the agency of the principal. Additionally, WSE reports are unlikely to record that the principal is an excellent manager of the school's finances or that oversight of Summer works was exemplary. At the time of her appointment Sadie (2006–) had accumulated an impressive professional portfolio, but financial management was not included. Nevertheless, as school leader she was not content to leave school finances solely in the hands of a very competent treasurer and accountant to 'account' for school expenditure, partly because she was left "spending as little as possible and worrying all the time and not having any control over it" (Int. 2, 2007). This legacy was an affront to her sense of professional responsibility. But not content with these legacies and precedents and the limits they set to her leadership, Sadie seized the moment:

We got a new treasurer and we were all kind of learning together so I asked for an electronic package and I want training. He got me an electronic package and he trained me. . . . So we've got that to a good stage where the accountant said our books were magic at the end of the year, that we had a small surplus, that we had spent well, what did he say, he said we'd caught up on spending! (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

By asserting her authority, Sadie shed dependency, while taking on additional responsibility, she was able to purchase much needed resources for teaching and learning. However, having ascended the appropriate learning curve, she passed some of the more routine elements of 'accounting' to the school secretary, while retaining oversight. In the process, she lends substance to the view that being a leader requires a knowledge base that is commensurate with the diversity inherent in the role, something that is continuously evolving, while in the process the very nature of professional responsibility positions leaders and leadership beyond the realms of accountability. Rather, principals are catapulted into relational webs of obligation that necessitate on-going deliberations that are unpredictable and indeterminate in their outcomes, whereas being (merely) accountable would render them entirely predictable (Sugrue 2011a, b). Such predictability, while holding individuals or groups to account, is overly narrow and restrictive of professional agency, and a major constraint on school leaders' exercise of professional responsibility. When Dick describes the "iron fist" of his first chairperson, who "drip fed grants" in a manner that curtailed his leadership to the point of being close to infantilisation, his testimony provides additional evidence that constraints on agency can be very local or have their locus more centrally in a system while the degree of proximity or remoteness may be a poor predictor of actual impact. However, rather like Sadie, a new broom enabled Dick to negotiate a new set of relationships with a chairperson who had excellent computing and accounting skills, and, he relays jocosely:

I have to give credit for that to my current manager who's extraordinarily gifted on computers and taxation, so two great gifts to have in a school manager! He also does some work as a parish priest as well . . . . (Dick, Int. 4, 2007)

Dick appeals to popular culture as a means of indicating that being well informed—itsself an aspect of professional responsibility— becomes intrinsic to professionally responsible leadership:

... he has made it very very easy for us to manage money, we know what's in every grant, ... at any particular moment ... it was one of the Marx brothers who said money doesn't bring you happiness but it brings you a more decent form of misery, or maybe it was Spike Milligan, I'm not sure! (Dick, Int 4, 2007)

It is noteworthy also that the chairperson in this local context had assumed the responsibilities of treasurer, indicating clearly that the exercise of leadership invariably necessitates engagement with local actors regardless of what central scripts in the form of policy diktats, rules and regulations might decree (CPSMA 2007).<sup>10</sup> All such locally negotiated relationships have implications for the quality of leadership and ultimately, even if indirectly, impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

The evidence thus far indicates clearly that pre-occupation with issues of accountability fail to take due cognisance of this wider network of relationships that are increasingly essential for the exercise of school leadership. What emerges also is that concentrating leadership solely in 'the head' renders its exercise impossible no matter how 'heroic' the principal, thus the necessity for 'teacher leadership' (Lieberman and Miller 2004) or a more distributed perspective (Harris 2008; Leithwood et al. 2009; Spillane 2006; Spillane and Diamond 2007). At the heart of the responsibility-accountability nexus, agency, trust, and professional judgement are being re-imagined though some might prefer to say re-engineered. When, in the Irish context, WSE school reports were made public on the DES website (May, 2006), this was giving reality to the policy rhetoric of transparency and accountability. From an official perspective, it was intended to give more substance to the legislative responsibility on principals since the Education Act (1998), to "be responsible for the day-to-day management of the school, including guidance and direction of the teachers and other staff of the school, and be accountable to the board for that management, ..." (1998, Section 23, (2)a). During the past decade, such responsibilities have translated into: (a) principals being given responsibility for the probation of NQTs, as well as the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. Though the former has not yet been implemented, the latter is increasingly putting pressure on principals. When the stakes are raised in this manner, they have potentially profound implications for the network of relationships that it is necessary for principals to create, nurture and enhance as part of their professional remit. Such pressures also force principals to re-define their roles and responsibilities in ways that may undermine leadership rather than enhance it potential for school transformation. It is to this high stakes climate that the remainder of this chapter turns its attention, while continuing to view leadership through the lens of responsibility-accountability and the tensions this creates.

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<sup>10</sup>It is worth noting that the 'Management Board Members' Handbook (Revised 2007) provides a set of job descriptions for board members that clearly separate the role of chairperson from that of Treasurer (pp. 43–44).

## 'Performing' Leadership: Raising the Stakes on Principals' Professional Responsibility?

There is a general awareness among participants of the change of language deployed in policy statements. Even if awareness of neo-liberal ideology and NPM public sector reforms are remote, the macro language, through a succession of policy documents, of which there have been many regarding WSE, has become inscribed into their own narratives in a variety of ways. This language engenders varying responses from downright hostility to cautious acceptance with certain caveats and criticisms. For example, veteran Fred, who prides himself in having played 'fast and loose' with rules and regulations reacts to recent changes as follows (see Sugrue 2012):

And you know the Department's trying to bring in performance management. I've a severe problem with that because it would put me in an inspectorial role over the staff here. I think we have to depend on a teachers' integrity. And integrity, I would define it as to do your best knowing no one is looking over your shoulder. (Fred, Int. 1, 2000)

Suggesting as he does that the professional responsibility of the teacher implies autonomy, space to do one's best seems almost incongruous with the prevailing language of accountability. Yet, his comments resonate with research evidence which demonstrates the necessity for schools in these competitiveness dominated times to "promote not only academic skills but also help children to develop *happy, likeable and pro-social personalities*"(quoted in Day and Gu 2010, p. 15; Layard et al. 2009, p. 156). In responding to his own question he is emphatic that his responsibility extends much beyond mere accountability:

I don't think it is. I think that's only a small part of it. And I think unfortunately, with all the planning that's and so on, the department is kind of measuring . . . what's measurable, like, you notice at assembly this morning, our junior infants [4-5 year olds] last week did assembly, and they were only 6 weeks into school. And they all stood up in front of the whole school, and did their little songs, and huge big bualadh bos [applause], huge big affirmation – so, that's teaching too. (Fred, Int. 4, 2007)

His concern is what will 'count' in an increasing climate of performativity. He is not alone in his view that surveillance of teachers' work will alter significantly interpersonal relationships. Dick situates this responsibility within a wider frame of reference of change processes, and acknowledges that, despite his comments above regarding deference to the Inspector, teachers' attitudes have been changing as the policy environment has altered, even if it is slow and incremental:

I'd say the relationship with the inspector and the attitude towards inspectors has changed, they're seen more now as a resource you use, . . . whereas years ago you were hoping the inspector would lose your school address! That has changed, young teachers and old teachers alike, know that you have to have accountability in the system and they are to a certain extent, accountable to me. That's why we have those books of *Cúntasáí Míosúla!* [monthly progress notes].<sup>11</sup> That's a certain amount of accountability. (Dick, Int. 4, 2007)

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<sup>11</sup>The Rules for National Schools, last published by the DES in 1965, states that teachers are obliged to provide three types of written work: long term preparation (usually understood as termly or yearly scheme of work), short-term preparation (weekly schemes) and a monthly progress

While the actual rule states that the principal should have 'custody' of such records, it does not suggest that his responsibility extends beyond that, thus enabling Dick, with a certain irony, to intimate a 'certain amount of accountability' only. More revealing is his elaboration on how he perceives his responsibility to meet minimal accountability requirements, and the potential difficulties of moving beyond such bureaucratic obligations:

The whole idea still disturbs me that we might be involved in the disciplining of staff, naturally because I've a very good relationship with the teachers and we all get on, we're friends as well as everything else. You don't work in a place for this long without being friends with the people and if you're anything other than at least a decent acquaintance with the person there's a conflict issue so you try to avoid that. The job of the principal can be lonely and if teachers were to think as you walked into the class that you might be assessing them every time you walked in, then the job would get much lonelier I think. (Dick, Int. 4, 2007)

Such rendering of a changing reality appears to minimise accountability while being resistant to being responsible for the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Though consistent with earlier chapters this disposition continues to privilege personal relationships over professional responsibility; there is the proximity of personal relationships, the ties that bind, without the necessary professional distance that would facilitate more robust encounters regarding professional responsibilities—a persistent malfunction in the Zone of Proximal Distance (ZPD, see Chaps. 6 and 12) Although there is considerable evidence of a changing system, of more collaborative planning, shared leadership and responsibilities, cooperative teaching between resource and class teachers (see Ní Bhroin 2011), there is evidence also of reluctance on the part of principals to take greater responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning, and on the part of teachers to relinquish their cellular isolation by appealing to professional autonomy. However, this sensitive and contentious issue is being addressed in several ways.

For example, Ben (2005–) is particularly aware of special needs and resource support for underachieving pupils, and the necessity for information to seek additional resources, while providing evidence also of intensification around planning and paper work, even if accountability continues to be understood as teacher's individual responsibility while the principal's role is cast more as resource provider rather than orchestrating school self-evaluation. He says:

I think that ... each teacher is accountable in their classroom and I think planning has improved from that point of view. The new teachers ... plan a lot better than the older teachers, myself included. They work hard and they're bringing in this new curriculum because new curriculum is quite accountable too because every child goes home saying,

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report—more traditionally interpreted as a record of what the teachers 'has done'—a content driven perspective—rather than what the pupils have learned. Rule 126 indicates that: "at the close of every month the portion of the syllabus dealt with during the month should be noted in a progress record. This progress record is an important school record, the custody of which is one of the duties of the principal teachers. It should be available in the school at all times and should be kept for at least one complete school year after the completion of the year to which it relates" (p. 74). Traditionally, the prevailing attitude among teachers regarding this required paper work has been to minimise its content, thus providing the bare minimum on which to be held to account.

we did this today and parents I think, because the children are enjoying things, parents are getting a picture of how it's going. Accountability to inspectors we're developing because we produce items like assessment report and if an inspector asks me, well I'll give it. (Ben, Int. 2, 2007)

He mentions use of standardised tests to secure additional resources for pupils with learning difficulties, and this is in-keeping with more traditional use of such tests. However, he provides evidence also that these data are being used to monitor rather than inform classroom practice, yet incrementally moving in a desirable direction: "but now it's moved onto a level where there's more communication with the class teacher and seeing can x, y and z survive in the classroom situation without falling further behind and if they're in that situation, well then we monitor them in the classroom." Such testimony suggests that unless there is sustained professional support that encourages collaboration and the interpretation of evidence to inform pedagogical approaches, professional responses are more likely to be compliant rather than an enhancement to professional judgement and more sophisticated forms of professional responsibility. Ben's final comment regarding change intimates that changing practice is incremental and slow: "At this stage now, we're working on changing our own mental approach to it and I think we're slowly starting to get there" without necessarily being clear about what that 'terminus' looks like. It appears that at this point Ben is conflicted if not confused between providing 'evidence' in order to be accountable to the inspector, and the use of evidence internally as a means of making informed professional judgment, thus enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, preferably without intruding on teacher autonomy—a particularly delicate balancing act.

Veteran Jack (1978–2007) expresses some confusion regarding a hankering after 'standards' associated with more traditional teaching, and an increasing emphasis on "everyone" having "their own individual education plan" while teachers simultaneously "have to be able to account for this [individualisation]" (Int. 4, 2007). As he reflects on the necessity for a more balanced approach, like others, he recognises the merits of a holistic attitude even if it is not easily measured.

Now for all of that, ... then I reflect a bit and say I look at some of the creative stuff and whole class stuff that some of the teachers have done that have kind of linked in with kids on a multilevel that there is no amount of accounting and charting will actually reflect that. I'm not saying it's not valued but it's not being valued by the accounting system. (Jack, Int. 4, 2007)

With a particular interest in music, Jack is very conscious of the necessity, particularly in a disadvantaged community, to provide learners with a comprehensive curriculum. He makes the interesting point that, as resources became more widely available, it may well have created a mindset among classroom teachers that difficult challenges could be off-loaded to others—an unintended consequence of a performativity culture. Jack avers:

Now one of the things that probably would have irked me in say the last four or five years would have been the expectation by class teachers that every ill, every child that had any kind of ... learning difficulty, you sent them out to so-and-so to get that cured ... (Jack, Int. 4, 2007).

Nevertheless, despite the fact that such evasion is no longer a possibility in times of austerity as resource teacher positions are suppressed, the staff response to the announcement of a WSE inspection, shortly after he had assigned new responsibilities to post holders, indicates that when presented with a challenge (or an external 'threat'), colleagues are capable of a collective response, even if it entails elements of performativity:

The Tuairisc Scoile (WSE) came after the posts of responsibility were all set, . . . . So it was actually a very good time because people who had posts were able to shine, so they were able to get themselves organised and they got involved. Things were serendipitous if you like in a way. (Jack, Int. 4, 2007)

Serendipitous perhaps, but availed of nevertheless as part of shared leadership and a more collective sense of responsibility, and orchestrated by the principal. Promoting ownership and a sense of shared responsibility in a policy context of greater performativity, leadership becomes more critical if embracing professional responsibility is desired more than compliant accountability. "The kind of leadership" perhaps "that reconciles and integrates external accountability with personal and collective professional responsibility" (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012, p. 45).

Such organisational capacity must be nurtured and cultivated if the greater complexity of school life is to be embraced rather than merely endured. In this regard, Brent's (2006-) perspectives on the rapidly changing landscape are instructive. His comments indicate that performativity has been extended:

. . . they did introduce a circular in relation to the SNA's and about performance management of SNA's without any guidelines or training for principals or anything like that, so we're supposed to sign off on the fact that they're doing their job satisfactorily without anything to fall back on which is a dangerous thing to do and the fact that coming down the tracks at us now is the whole notion of performance management of existing teachers and probation of new teachers which is going to fall into the domain of principals. (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

Though he welcomes the responsibility for "ensuring the quality of teaching and learning" and says: "I'm not afraid of it" he nevertheless expresses a strong desire "to be given some measure of in-career development to equip me to do it better out of justice to the teachers". He is at one with Fred above when he states that performance management is "something that I think is going to fundamentally change the way principals operate in the next few years" (Int. 2, 2007).

Since data for this study were generated, loss of economic sovereignty has resulted in—reduction of teachers' salaries in the order of 20 %, the suppression of middle-management positions, increase in teacher pupil ratios, the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy strategy and additional working hours. More recently, school self-evaluation has been added to the litany of reform policies (<http://schoolself-evaluation.ie/primary/>), while funding for CPD has been reduced drastically. In such dramatically altered circumstances, rising to the challenges inherent in professionally responsible leadership beyond the limits of performative accountability is much more likely to remain *terra incognita*.



## Conclusions

For the most part, the tradition and its legacy of external ‘inspection’ casts long shadows over principals’ embrace of responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning in their schools; resistance and apprehension prevail. There is clear recognition also that the language of NPM, increasingly pervasive in policy documents, does not give credence or credit to the many responsibilities that principals regard as significant such as procurement of learning resources, enhancement of the learning environment, oversight of finances etc. However, such evidence also suggests considerable role diffusion rather than coherence even if such testimony also provides evidence that principals’ resist being corralled narrowly by what external accountability measures prioritise. However, such role diffusion may also be embraced to avoid perceived encroachment on classroom sovereignty thus evading collective professional responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning in a climate of evidence-informed practice. In a system that lacks intermediate structures between Ministry and individual schools, the role of BoMs, their voluntary nature, and their members widely varying expertise, has major consequences for the exercise of and support for leadership within the school community that largely goes unrecognised. If leadership is to be cultivated and supported, such structures need to change; currently they are most likely to contribute significantly to considerable disparities in the system.

Resistance, not for its own sake, but understanding it as “a process of fulfilling, preserving, and protecting the missions and memories of one’s generation” (Day et al. 2007, p. 101) as well as a means of managing the pace of change through marshalling a collective sense of priority, has capacity to empower and restore a sense of being in control, thus being better placed to exercise leadership as well as build its collective capacity—including the basis for it—the more painstaking task of cultivating ‘slow trust’ (Gronn 2011). In such circumstances, external pressures, when harnessed in this manner, depending on the extent of relational trust, leadership capacity may be enhanced. However, lurking just below the surface, with variation being supplied by degrees of confidence and competence of principals and their respective dispositions, is the more perennial issue of personal friendships rather than professional relationships. A more professional frisson if harnessed appropriately has potential to generate traction that can be converted incrementally towards transformation. However, as earlier chapters attest, (six in particular), when the necessary tension within the Zone of Proximal Distance (ZPD) between the personal (proximate) and the professional (distant) continues to privilege personal friendships, while conflict is avoided, the degree of distance necessary for professional dissonance that seems essential for the cultivation of relational trust as well as principled professional disagreement is continuously avoided. Consequently, leadership capacity building is constrained. The *mutual esteem* that characterises friendship needs to be differentiated from *integrity and moral obligation* implicit in professional responsibility. In a system that makes

almost no provision of space and time in which professional relationships can be cultivated through deliberative professional conversations, collaboration continues to be systemically circumscribed, with major consequences for building leadership capacity. In such circumstances, the pre-conditions for promoting collaboration that builds leadership capacity by distributing it more widely within communities is much more difficult to realise. It is also possible that external pressures will preempt a more collective internal response, but existing preconditions may result in conformity to an increasing audit culture; prompting accountability rather than professionally responsible leadership.

One such precondition is investment in CPD for principals and teachers. If building professional capacity to embrace new, more complex, sophisticated, appropriate and widely shared senses of professional responsibility that move beyond naïve views of professional discretion and overly controlling and simplistic accounting procedures require sustained investment in principal and teacher professional learning, leaving principals holding the (leadership) fort is both unrealistic and unprofessional. There is ample evidence to support the contention that there are no shortcuts in this regard (Hargreaves and Shirley 2012). In a systemic context where recent policy shifts towards a combination of greater focus on literacy and numeracy and more systematic and more frequent national testing, careful calibration will be necessary if performativity is not simply ratcheted upwards at the expense of more desirable and more sustainable forms of professional responsibility. Short-term gains on test scores are no substitute for “deepened and demanding learning [by teachers as well as pupils], professional quality and engagement, and invigorated community development and public democracy” (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009, p. 109). Unless immediate priorities are clearly contributing to these longer-term, sustainable goals, they need to be abandoned. Performative leadership is no substitute for cultivating professionally responsible leadership. Finally, this chapter provides incontrovertible evidence of the extent to which the macro language and logic of accountability, of NPM, has penetrated the meso layer of successive national policies, and is increasingly evident in the narratives of school leaders. Perhaps then it is time for school leaders’ collective action on such matters internationally if this tide is to be turned and professionally responsibility leadership cultivated, promoted and sustained. Is it possible that ‘technologies of control’ (Ball 2003) can be subverted by collective use of social media?

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**Part IV**  
**Sustaining Leaders, Sustainable**  
**Leadership: Future Directions**

# Chapter 10

## Leadership Capacity: Cohorts, Continuity, Change

### Introduction

As argued in Chap. 1, a longitudinal life history approach to the study of leadership facilitates a change over time perspective, something absent from snapshot in time studies. While earlier empirical chapters indicate clearly that there has been intensification over time, particularly in more recent years, as neo-liberal ideology and NPM discourses have become more pronounced in policy documents, thus national policy has become more susceptible to international macro policy movements, performativity has become a more prominent feature of the realities of principals' lives and work. As the pace of change has accelerated, and demands for reform increase and intensify, such pressures bring performativity and capacity building into high relief, as a challenge to school ecologies and the role played by inter-personal relationships and trust in building a sense of purpose, vision and shared commitment to leadership. What this chapter sets out to capture is how continuity and change have played out across the four cohorts over time but in a thematic manner rather than the strict linear cohort way that most chapters have been structured. This thematic approach, across the tension created between continuity and change, performativity and capacity building, and the cohorts, seeks also amidst this tension to indicate and illustrate what the constants have been across the decades, the most persistent challenges; those matters which inhibit and facilitate the building and sustaining of leadership capacity over time.

In recent empirical research on the impact on teachers, principals and schools as organisations of unprecedented policy shifts, 'resilience' has become something of a byword for those who survive and thrive, and, in some instances also relish the challenge inherent in the turbulence of our times (Day and Gu 2010; Day et al. 2007). However, since the participants in this study were not selected for their resilience, and none received formal preparation for the role in advance of taking up appointment, in such circumstances, their respective dispositions become the major resource they bring to the position. Others have determined

that resilience “is not a quality that is innate. It is both a product of personal and professional dispositions and values, and socially constructed” (Day et al. 2007, p. 198). Arguably, therefore, due to more turbulent times and the accelerated pace of change, acquiring resilience is another dimension of disposition, deemed more necessary than heretofore given the complexity of the role and its demands. Frequently also, flexibility and adaptability are cited as necessary elements of an appropriate leadership disposition. However, these demands are open to abuse by excessive demands and in the current austerity climate the mantra that ‘there is no alternative’ frequently gets translated into ‘suck it up’—meaning that all concerned are obliged to come to terms with this changed reality. An additional consideration therefore is the confluence of conditions that are more likely to foster a positive disposition in a climate of more for less that is more institutionalised than ever.

Needless to say, the local, the culture of the school, and the existential habitus of the individual principal continues to be paramount in the on-going construction of professional disposition, the capacity to ‘*keep a particular narrative going*’, (Giddens 1991, p. 54) that is simultaneously robust and fragile. The latter: “. . . because the biography the individual reflexively holds in mind is only one ‘story’ among many other potential stories that could be told about her development as a self” and the former “because a sense of self-identity is often securely enough held to weather major tensions or transitions in the social environments within which the person moves” (p. 55), in this instance—home, school community, and beyond—the habitus of principals. Within leader’s dispositions, what are those constants as they grapple with change and continuity?

## Leadership: Inter-Personal Relations

One of the more consistent recurring features of participants’ stewardship over time is relationships with colleagues in particular and with the wider community. Given the general lack of mobility within the Irish system, ‘divorcing’ colleagues is not an option, since teachers are employed by individual B o Ms, thus moving school is always an individual discretion rather than being moved by the school leader. Additionally, since all promoted posts of responsibility within school management structures—deputy and assistant principals as well as special duties personnel—are promoted from within school communities, where until very recently seniority<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In 2014, and operable from April of that year, the Department of Education and Skills issued Circular 0039/2014 which makes major strides to reduce significantly the impact of seniority on the outcome of interviews for these promotional managerial positions. An elaborate mechanism for calculating marks for ‘length of service’ is indicated, up to a maximum of 20 marks, while making some provision for service provided in another school. Additionally, the other four criteria, each also being allocated a maximum of 20 marks are: “Knowledge, understanding and capacity to meet the needs of the job; Capacity to contribute to the overall development of the school; Interpersonal and communication skills; Capacity to contribute to the overall organisation and management of



played a significant part in securing such advancement, and it is not possible to retain seniority when moving school,<sup>2</sup> remaining in a school for the long-haul has been one of the surest means of gaining promotion and additional remuneration.<sup>3</sup> Such structural arrangements place a premium on the exercise of ‘soft power’ on the part of principals, even if more recent legislation indicates that they are accountable for the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. In this regard, the Education Act (1998) indicates that in order to fulfil this responsibility the “Principal shall have all such powers as are necessary or expedient in that regard” (Sect. V, Sect. 23 (3)). Explicitly this section recognises that the exercise of power is necessary in fulfilling the role of school leader, even if it is rather vague on what is ‘necessary and expedient’ in such circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

According to Nye: “power is a relationship whose strength and domain will vary with different contexts” and previous chapters attest to this (Nye 2008, p. 27). He indicates that “power is the ability to affect the behaviour of others to get the outcome you want” and that there are three means by which this can be achieved: “you can coerce them with threats, you can induce them with payments, or you can attract or co-opt them” (p. 27). Superficially, given the reality that approximately 50 % of all primary teachers in the setting hold promoted positions,<sup>5</sup> this suggests

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the school” (Circular 0039/2014). This supersedes circular 0028/2011a which continued to award a maximum of 30 marks for ‘length of service’ while the other four criteria just quoted were allocated a maximum of 15 each. However, due to austerity, at the time of writing, the moratorium on filling vacant management positions remains in place. Significantly, the word leadership is not mentioned.

<sup>2</sup>The general agreement had been that when interviewing internal candidates for any promoted post in a school is that one-third of the marks are allocated to seniority (see circular 0028/2011a). In such circumstances, it was very difficult for more junior staff to be promoted ahead of more senior colleagues. Additionally, if a more senior staff member was ‘passed over’ in allocating these promoted posts, the outcome was often appealed, and awareness of such a possibility discouraged principals from being more meritocratic in their determinations. Regardless of years of service or previous position held, when a teacher moves from one school to another, they become the most ‘junior’ member of that staff, and vulnerable to ‘going on the panel’ (being redeployed) should enrolments decline as part of a policy of ‘last in, first out’.

<sup>3</sup>Due to major cutbacks in the public sector, currently there is an embargo on filling any promoted posts should they fall vacant, with very few exceptions. At a time when significant numbers of senior staff are taking early retirement to protect their pensions and lump sums from taxation and/or erosion, there is an increasing number of both assistant principal positions and special duties positions that are falling vacant, and if this arrangement is sustained into the future, the impact on school management and leadership will be even more significant than is already becoming apparent.

<sup>4</sup>An additional contextual factor in the Irish primary sector is the reality that, while it is possible for teachers to take a ‘grievance procedure’ against a principal, no such industrial relations machinery exists to enable principals to pursue a grievance procedure with a teaching colleague. This factor is frequently cited by principals as iniquitous while it tends also to reinforce their view that in the exercise of their leadership role they are more reliant on soft rather than hard power to navigate the school barque in desired directions; bark without bite you might say!

<sup>5</sup>This was the percentage prior to the current Government embargo on filling vacancies, thus that figure is considerably less now. However, there is also limited alleviation of the embargo for vacant

that principals have considerable discretion regarding inducements; opportunities to exercise ‘hard’ power. In reality, however, even with those who are members of middle-management structures, principals are largely reliant on “*soft* power [in] getting the outcomes one wants by attracting others rather than manipulating their material incentives” thus in the context, principals are most reliant on co-option rather than coercion (Nye 2008, p. 29). Consequently, principals have identified inter-personal relations as the most persistent concern even as the external climate of accountability alters and there are more demands for paper work, particularly through the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) process, and more recently, School Self-Evaluation (SSE) (DES 2012). However, there is a tendency when focusing on inter-personal aspects of change processes to ignore or down play the importance of both gender and power (Fletcher 2004). Rather, power may be exercised as a means of perpetuating more transactional forms of leadership rather than building capacity for organisational (and individual) transformation. The dynamics of soft power leadership were summarised insightfully by Eisenhower, even if this occurred during a period when heroic leadership enjoyed particularly privileged status, when he stated that it is the ability “to get people to work together, not only because they instinctively want to do it for you . . . . You don’t lead by hitting people over the head; that’s assault, not leadership” (quoted in Nye 2008, p. 32).

The agency of principals and their exercise of power is also situated within larger ‘change forces’ (Fullan 1993, 2003), whereby their lives and work are influenced by disposition and colleagues, as well as changing school demographics and policy contexts. Thus, not only are resilience and vulnerability inevitable elements of evolving (leadership) scripts, but so too are reactions and resistance to change. There is a consequent necessity to recognise that change is buffeted by nostalgia, for times past, a lost ‘golden age’, ‘critical incidents’ (Tripp 1993; Woods 1993a, b) that are formative, particularly in early career and during initiation into principalship that become indelible elements of how leadership is enacted. Nostalgia therefore may be regarded as one of the anchorings within school leaders’ dispositions that are played out in the dynamic of interpersonal relations. Attachment to the past, nostalgia:

... acts as a prompt and a guide to action and commitment in the ongoing, everyday life of teaching and schooling. It is a source of resistance to changes that threaten patterns and purposes that teachers have cherished for decades. For these reasons, teachers’ nostalgia cannot be trivialized as a maudlin emotional indulgence of little social or political consequence. (Goodson et al. 2006, p. 43)

Continuity and change, nostalgia, resilience and vulnerability are inextricably intertwined in the lives and work of principals, in their dispositions in the ongoing dalliance of everyday work where confidence and trust advance and retreat in the changing continuities of the dance of leadership, its meanings and memories.

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Assistant Principal positions while the moratorium continues for the lifetime of the Haddington Road Agreement (see DES 2014, Circular 0004/2014).

Change implies a ‘rupture’<sup>6</sup> with the past, thus the pull of orthodoxy and the push for the new and novel are ‘saturated with emotion’ (Hargreaves 2004) but this should not be allowed to occlude the moral dimensions of leader’s dispositions. Rather, it is the dalliance between continuity and change that disposition is both influential and renewed and at any one time an option for continuity rather than change may be exercised. However, without consideration of the values and beliefs that contribute to disposition, it is more difficult to understand how this dynamic may be harnessed to build leadership capacity or to re-create the past.

## Leadership Legacies: Re-living the Past

All but Jack (1978–2007) among the interviewees inherited a leadership legacy. Arguably he brought his with him from his previous school. to a green field site. Reading an individual school culture as you enter the school’s precinct is immediate and visceral, as is evident from commentary provided by Rose (1999–2001). A middle-class girls’ school, where she was the first lay principal, she found a major contradiction between the lack of resources in classrooms, and a major commitment to charity. She says:

... there was a huge commitment to charity work ... there was this huge, I suppose kind of missionary, kind of convent sense, of we will do anything for charity, we will raise money for charity, but don’t ask us to look too closely to the kind of resources that the children handle in the school in a way. You know that kind of dichotomy. (Rose, Int. 4, 2007)

These comments highlight distinct features of this school’s culture, largely taken for granted and reinforced by a stable female staff, many of whom had attend this school as pupils, and in which some had undertaken teaching practice during their initial teacher education. These cultural blind spots are readily visible to outsiders, but taken forgrated by insiders, thus their entrenched, embedded and invisible influence. When this is coupled with the legacy of leadership disposition that cultivated and perpetuated this culture, stasis rather than change is the overwhelming feeling engendered and a consequent resistance to altering the way things are done around here. She describes the leadership legacy as follows:

... everything I heard about the previous principal who’d been there for about 10 years, was that it was a very strict, controlling regime, and a divide and conquer and one that instilled fear in many members of staff and that even when they wanted to know about what class they might be teaching the following year, they were brought to the office, all these veils of secrecy and forms of control that one could use and people might have left in tears.

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<sup>6</sup>The word ‘rupture’ comes from the Latin word *rumpere* meaning ‘to break’. It is worth nothing in this regard as Byrne (2012, p. 4) points out that the word corruption has the same root and in this regard “a legal understanding narrowly interprets the concept of corruption as obligations defined by legal statutes” whereas a moral definition more broadly focuses on “behaviour characterised by a broader moral compass”. This distinction, particularly in a climate of rapid change is worth bearing in mind in terms of being ‘accountable’ rather than professionally responsible.

And the ancillary staff was paid in cash. It was handed to them as, kind of, their reward . . . .  
(Rose, Int. 4, 2007)

Such a disposition to the exercise of power has an infantilising rather than transformative impact on teachers. In other respects, the legacy was sparse: “There were no report cards of any substance. There were no details of policies of any substance” (Rose, Int. 4, 2007).

In a climate and context where increasing demands for change and performativity through paperwork proliferate, it is not surprising that others inherited similar situations, thus producing policies, playing catch-up was a way into such a culture while also creating a ‘deficit’ perspective—necessitating ‘getting up to speed’ with the paper trail as soon as possible. For example, Ben (2005–) describes a somewhat similar legacy. He states:

So suddenly within the space of the first year I managed to come up with a few administration policies and then . . . I did an assessment policy but ultimately it was me providing the first draft to the staff and the staff adapted it. (Ben, Int. 2, 2008)

However, in dealing with the deficit, Ben too began to create his own more immediately legacy, one of dependency, whereby he would continue to develop policies. Though his disposition is to lead from the front he was aware also of fostering and perpetuating dependency, and recognised that it would be an up-hill struggle to empower others.

But I find the difficulty now with policies is that because everyone’s in class, I start the policy, I’m expected to research it, follow it up, change it. It’s ultimately all down to me as an individual whereas we haven’t got time as a staff to get around to dealing with policies. Now I’m hoping with the post holders meetings that we’ll identify, right the two of you post holders, I want you to target this policy and by our next meeting in two months’ time I want the first draft. If I could do that, now that hasn’t happened yet because . . . (Ben, Int. 2, 2008)<sup>7</sup>

Implicit in Ben’s comments is recognition of an unsustainable heroic form of leadership but he has to thread softly through soft power co-option to persuade colleagues that in the emerging mosaic of requirements for members of middle-management, there are attendant responsibilities that they have agreed to take on and are remunerated for. Additionally, without strategic vision, and a sense of ‘in at the deep end’, initial succumbing to the legacy becomes a default position, more difficult to overcome subsequently; millstones that colleagues, unwittingly or otherwise, may be happy to hang around the necks of leaders.

Legacies are in and of themselves a means of perpetuating cultures and depending on how they are engaged with, the process of change and transformation can be

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<sup>7</sup>Since then as part of a public sector agreement (The Croke Park Agreement) (Ireland, 2010), primary teachers are obliged to work an additional 33 h per annum, roughly 1 h per week in an effort to provide space and time for collaboration, while in the context of austerity such additional hours are categorised as productivity. The implementation of this agreement is detailed in the DES circular 0008/2011b. The more recent Haddington Road Agreement (LRC 2013) supersedes the 2010 agreement, and some of its detailed implications are articulated in Circular 0039/2014.

delayed or postponed (indefinitely), even when there is understanding of how such legacies were created. He describes how a previous principal had been on extended sick leave for some time, and the then deputy principal was acting in his place.

... the vice principal ... stalled everything, even though he was doing the job well, I don't think he was being progressive, he was just holding the fort. ... he wasn't looking to advance the school, he was looking to hold it and he did nothing to encourage advancement ... (Ben, Int. 2, 2008)

As a consequence of such caretaker leadership, he avers: "I think we all stalled, we all got stale." This testimony provides a stark reminder that legacies belong to the past but with critical import on present and future that require proactive leadership, a particular kind of disposition that considers the responsibility of 'being able to bow to the past but not be bound by it'.<sup>8</sup>

But legacies are the basis for renewal, and in some instances the impetus may derive from immediate and radical alteration to the school community, pivotal moments in the life of a community where millstones are transformed into milestones that give future direction.

### *Leading Legacies: Change Becomes a Continuity*

When Michelle (1992–) was appointed, she describes the school legacy thus:

So when I came in, it was on a downward slope ... Well staff morale was pretty low, because ... what the previous Principal said – this school is going to become a disadvantaged school and I'm getting out ... he actually said that to them so that ... there was that sense of morale, we're goin' nowhere ... (Michelle, Int. 1, 2000)

As she and her new colleagues grappled with this new reality—"where children were failing academically" and "causing huge disruption," her disposition as a 'campaigner' (see Sugrue 2005) immediately influenced her relationship with her colleagues.

So we started a campaign to get [psychological] assessments and after gosh – I can't remember all the years, but I think it was about a year later anyway that the health board brought in a psychologist and ... she assessed the children and found 11 children who needed special education ... (Michelle, Int. 1, 2000)

As a consequence of this and related campaigning, the school was granted disadvantaged status, a special class teacher, and additional funding. Very quickly therefore due to the particular circumstances of the school, a downward trajectory was halted and reversed. She says: "I suppose and they [teachers] could see that we got something at the end of it as well—like there was a success" and on the back

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<sup>8</sup>These were the remarks of Queen Elizabeth II in the Queen's speech at the Irish state dinner on May 18th 2011; see <http://www.royal.gov.uk/LatestNewsandDiary/Speechesandarticles/2011/TheQueensspeechattheIrishStateDinner18May2011.aspx>

of a successful outcome to their campaigning, they were encouraged to build—buoyed up by a change in morale, they quickly moved to integrating members of the special class into the mainstream, before ‘inclusion’ was adopted as a policy. While campaigning for disadvantaged status, there were additional positive outcomes also: “I would say after we got the disadvantage status then . . . hot on the heels came our early involvement in early start and that is probably where that came from . . .” (Int. 1, 2000). Capacity building builds further capacity to find continuity in change.

Not surprisingly, then, as indicated in earlier chapters, Michelle’s disposition and engagement with colleagues has been a series of campaigns in the interest of learners, with a galvanising effect on morale and collegiality whereby through professional community ‘professional capital’ is increased (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012).

What Eddie’s (1993–2006) testimony adds to the significance of disposition is a capacity to identify aspects of tradition, elements of legacies that contribute to building the future, even in his case in a community that was divided. A major continuity that provided steadfastness in times of particular turbulence was his consistent commitment to an old agenda:

I suppose the rights of the child, that the child would be central to learning and that the school would be there to serve the child, rather than to serve the staff or any other community demands. Also with staff, to try to maintain a sense of fair play and to motivate and try improve in small steps. (Eddie, Int. 2, 2000)

His anchoring disposition to vindicate the rights of the learner enabled him to create a sense of purpose and vision that far from shackling him to past practices enabled him to harness changing circumstances to lend renewed vitality to existing commitments:

All of those new issues, there are new ways of serving the old agenda and I think I would take them as tools that would help in the service to the children and suppose I would like to support the staff in the change that they bring as well. (Eddie, Int. 2, 2000)

His words, and his way of being in the world indicate an understanding that continuity and change are two sides of the same coin. In the school year 1999–2000, when the pace of change had increased exponentially, and there was a veritable avalanche of policy demands to take on new challenges, he indicates that change itself, through building capacity, can become a continuity:

Well it has become institutionalised really. I remember when I heard, you know Fullan talking about educational change and all of that, when I heard it first, I was wondering what’s this about so that would have been early on in my principalship but towards the end you could see that it was tangible, that it was happening all around you. (Eddie, Int. 2, 2000)

Mention of readily recognisable international figures is testament, not just to his own learning antennae, but evidence also of the impact of international discourses of reform. The legacy he inherited was rather toxic and when he moved to another school relations there too were strained. Nevertheless, his disposition committed him to persistence and a sense of continuity that are sustaining and potentially transformative. His disposition, his enduring commitment to learners, is a constant in an otherwise unstable environment.

... there was a sour relationship between parents' association and certain members of staff. This has to be repaired and repaired very gently and the erosion of time will ease its passage. I suppose if I could create the same sense of community within the area, it would be one of the big points for me. (Eddie, Int. 2, 2000)

The exercise of soft power, in a consistent and even-handed manner, that combined steely resolve, a certain stoicism, quiet 'ordinary' heroism (Zimbardo 2007) has its desired transformative effect even if it is slow, sometimes faltering, yet incrementally building a platform for more collective engagement that intuitively or tacitly recognises the necessity for an "ideal and some orientation points for the journey" (Goodson 2013, p. 123). He says:

But if you were the sole innovator within a school, I think it would devalue other members of staff and it devalues the Team. Yes you certainly have some good ideas and you certainly have some good vision etc., but you are not unique in that respect and other ideas from within the Team are very important and when other staff members or Team members come up with ideas, if you can take them on board, if they fit into the broad objectives for the organization, then I think it is quite wise to do so, but not to claim the credit for it if it goes right and to share the responsibility for it if it goes wrong. (Eddie, Int. 2, 2000)

As a further elaboration on this collaborative thesis, he recognises a necessary symbiosis between leadership and management if transformation is desired:

... you can be both innovator and steward in the fact that some of the ideas are your own, but you are also stewarding what is coming from the rest of the organization. (Eddie, Int. 2, 2000)

His words carry significant weight given the negative climate in which he sought to build trust and shared vision—a phronesis hard won on the anvil of praxis (see Dunne 1993; Green 2009, 2011).

### ***Learning from Legacies: The Role of Nostalgia in Change and Continuity***

A more perspectival view of change and continuity introduces nostalgia as "important in understanding change for a number of reasons. It is a testimony of teachers' experience of change over time" and this is more readily apparent in the commentary of veterans in the study (Goodson et al. 2006, p. 43). In this regard it may be worth distinguishing between nostalgia that romanticises the past in that 'rose tinted spectacles' manner and a recognition of a positive nostalgia that can be mined for its ballast as a basis for the future- the capacity to turn millstones into milestones. Jim's comments below harbour element of the contribution of nostalgia as part of disposition.

There was a time when the girls did the knitting and the boys did the algebra or play football. You might laugh but we had great knitters and we had great footballers. Now we have neither footballers nor knitters. (Jim, Int. 4, 2007)

He also recounts other notable features of the local calendar that marked the rhythms of the school year such as closure for a local fair day, remarking that “it all died away”.

His testimony is a reminder that there is inevitable rupture with the past, whether seen perhaps more as nostalgic loss of knitters and footballers, and the sense of good riddance to other cultural practices; a disposition that can distinguish between leaving the past behind and being personally persuaded that what no longer appears on the cultural menu represents progress. The balance sheet created through inter-personal exchanges (and intra-personal reflections) is both an individual and collective sense that such changes that are wrought bring about a betterment, improvement, advancement, words that are slippery in their (ambiguous) meanings. Recognising that a nostalgia lens is an important aperture through which meaning is made when past, present and future are brought into view (Goodson et al. 2006).

### ***Resisting, Relinquishing, Risking ‘Rupture’ for Renewal***

But nostalgia is not the preserve of veterans or experienced school leaders. Rather nostalgia is for everyone and supplies loose ties and ties that bind, ‘blind’ even! (Achinstein 2002). Consequently, it is to be expected that there will be on-going struggles around “*shared norms, values and visions* about teachers, students and schooling” (pp. 12–13). Or, as Biesta (2007) has suggested, there needs to be a constant revisiting of the ends of education due to changed and changing circumstances, if blind faith in ‘what worked’ in the past is to be avoided. While nostalgia may bind us to the past, to its legacies, what it asks is that what is valuable is not carelessly jettisoned or allowed to disappear through inattention. In the absence of formal preparation for the role in advance of being appointed, there is a tendency towards caution and conservatism rather than radical rupture; a significant reliance on soft power, particularly in a system where the lack of attention to the changing of systemic structures has tended to impose additional responsibilities on school leaders. Consequently, these additional responsibilities continue to rely (almost) exclusively on the exercise of soft power. Though Rose’s initial reading of the school culture (above) seemed somewhat musty, she also wanted the “good reputation” of the school to continue even if that meant a significant departure from dominant routines; she created an initial cultural balance sheet that juxtaposed established continuities and how these might be changed, while writing herself into the cultural script.

I suppose the school had a good name and . . . I certainly did not want the school to go down in any way. There was a lot of things being done that were very very good . . . So while I wanted to keep the good standards and good reputation, I do not mean standards just because of the narrow focus on curriculum or anything like that I mean just a good focus on learning and it had a good reputation in music also which I was attracted to. (Rose, Int. 2 2000)



However, the other side of the cultural balance sheet recognised the necessity for change if the school's reputation was to continue: "Some of the things horrified me in the beginning. I could not believe that . . . things could seem so archaic, so 1960s, 1970s feel" (Int. 2, 2000). However, even this particular perspective was coloured by the disposition that had been cultivated in part by her previous school context, She explains:

. . . having come from a developing area with young new staff. To find oneself in a kind of more restrained kind of environment and think how does a school miss out, why does a school maintain these things. (Rose, Int. 2, 2000)

Clearly, context matters, and to paraphrase Yeats, there was recognition also that change 'comes dropping slow' particularly when reliant on soft power. She says:

I also worried a little bit about the methodologies that were being widely used by this staff, I thought I would not change anything drastically but would keep an eye. Yes I respected what they did. What I wanted to maintain, if I were to stand over something I would need to know exactly what was going on, I would need to be able to influence it in some way. One of the things we tried to move quickly on was science, bringing that into the curriculum, one of the first responses was we do not do science, we are a girl's school. (Rose, Int. 2, 2000)

There is an interesting shift from an 'I' to a 'we' in this testimony, while the creation at this time of middle-management structures provided the opportunity to wrest change from established routines thus creating elements of a more collective approach, while harnessing one of the few structural changes that provided leadership leverage, a moment of hard power, exercised with 'kid gloves'.

We had an opportunity to redesign the post responsibility when it came up. We also got it filled by somebody who was enthusiastic. We also got some inservice and we arranged that in our own time. . . . Again we have just created a post responsibility for PE where it would not have been there. There are so many different dimensions to it. (Rose, Int. 2, 2000)

In seeking traction to become a moving school, there appears greater awareness on her part of "Probably trying to create more openness and dialogue. More involvement and that hopefully is bringing more commitment;" of building professional capital (Elmore 2004; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). Despite a certain impatient disposition to wring change from tradition, the visibility engendered by the role creates vulnerabilities too, thus in the eyes of parents, particularly in a Catholic school, you are obliged to indicate what you stand for, opening up 'scary' possibilities:

Your values and your beliefs become institutionalized and personified in many ways. You are Principal you stand for pro this and anti that, that is shocking when you think, oh now everyone knows how I feel about this and they are talking about it. That is a bit scary but on the other side of that it is an opportunity because you think if you go for a job like this you can influence things in some way. . . . If you do not feel too spooked by it you can make things happen. (Rose, Int. 2, 2000)

Such testimony signals that the values you espouse contribute considerably to your disposition while what seems disconcerting is that you have to make these explicit for the first time in a rather public manner given the visibility required of

the role. The evidence also points to how competing values are embodied in the dispositions and visions of the teaching staff, the distinct trace elements embedded in the school's culture as a consequence of the previous leader's style, and the newly appointed principal's positioning within the school community. This new palette influences the school's cultural tapestry while it is simultaneously being unravelled and re-woven at any given moment; maintained through management and transformed through the exercise of mainly soft power persuasion, while occasionally relying on hard power engendered through structural change. Retrospectively, Rose reflected that her press for change derived some urgency from her "perception . . . that, well, you know nothing new has happened here for a long time" (Int. 3, 2007). Such vulnerability is likely to remain a liability rather than an asset without greater control over moral compass—something to which preparation for the role should attend.

It is through the interstices of these on-going interactions that trust is built or eroded. However since "trust is so ubiquitous we hardly notice it" (Tschannen-Moran et al. 1998). Rather, "Most of us notice . . . trust most easily after its sudden demise or severe injury. We inhabit a climate of trust as we inhabit an atmosphere and notice it as we notice air, only when it becomes scarce or polluted" (Baier 1985, p. 234 quoted in Tschannen-Moran et al. 1998, p. 235). But trust is created and with it professional capital largely through daily interactions, thus trust and the interpersonal are inextricably intertwined. When trust is in scarce supply, rather like children suffering 'separation anxiety' (Rutter 1972/1981), adults too may cling to their cherished routines as a veritable security blanket when faced with the challenges of change, the uncertainties and insecurities they pose. It is in the working out of these uncertainties and insecurities that growth occurs—and a sense of professional responsibility is rendered (temporarily) secure. Not surprisingly therefore "Whatever the excitement of new opportunities, many changes that teachers and other adults encounter are accompanied by profound feelings of loss" (Hargreaves 2004, p. 288). Additionally, as earlier chapters attest, when responsibility without accompanying structural reforms that shift the axis of power, the persistent tendency is to place a premium on personal friendships, rather than professional relationships, and in this regard the formation implied through the cultivation of a moral compass is crucial.

### ***Leading Continuity and Change: From (Initial) Loss to (Perceived) Profit***

Spearheading change as principal, winning hearts and minds challenges to create a climate and context where initially perceived losses are converted to perceived and actual gains. This too is dependent on a professional disposition that includes a moral compass. It is not surprising that informants, none of whom had any formal preparation for the role of principal, tend to be cautious, tentative, testing

the temperature of the waters of change, in advance of charting a very definite new direction—feeling one’s way to the future. Denise (1999–) captures the emotion of this experience very succinctly:

It is only now that I realise how stressful that first year was and how tired I was because I am enjoying it so much more this year. It is more enjoyable this year and you can start to make the changes you want. Last year it was just swimming to keep your head above water. (Denise, Int. 1, 2000)

Throughout that first year the emphasis, of necessity, was on “continuing with a lot of what was here.” Yet, she also sought to redress a lack of connection with learners and colleagues that she perceived to be part of the leadership legacy.

I would say I am a little bit more personal and a little more open with the children. That is very important to me that I don’t lose contact with the kids. So I make sure that I go into classrooms, that I do yard duty and that there is interaction. I don’t want them to feel that I am the baddie in the office and that the only reason that they talk to me is when they are in trouble. (Denise, Int. 1, 2000)

While it might be suggested that she is suffering separation anxiety, no longer having a class of her own, she is simultaneously seeking to create a different school climate, different in terms of emotional proximity to learners and as a way of being leader in the school, while with some expectation also that this too will create a different dynamic with colleagues. In her most recent interview Denise was able to put perspective on her agency and accumulated incremental change, first for pupils:

Also, little things, I mean they’re only small little things but others say it has affected the overall thing in we’ve gone from being . . . [Ms \_\_\_\_\_, to being addressed by their first names by pupils], so like a gentleness or a difference maybe in the relationship that was there before with the them and us, I think that has probably happened, evolved more so than being imposed, . . . I think it’s just something that has evolved in the school. (Denise, Int. 4, 2008)

This gradual alteration of the school climate and culture (left behind by her male predecessor) has created the conditions for more open collaboration whereby: “I think the children are more involved in the school, again that would be through committees” while a generally more open and democratic approach, as well as the external demand for curricular reform, has created a more bottom-up, distributed approach to professional responsibility. She cites the following in this regard:

Definitely there is far more participation through needs in planning and teachers being engaged and involved in planning but that is something that we’ve had to change with, you know, I wouldn’t say that’s because of me, it’s because of, I suppose . . . The evolving of the state of schools and I think that has changed and teachers are more involved and do have their say, definitely come in and discuss more, there’s a lot of openness . . . (Denise, Int. 4, 2007)

Though not claiming major credit for these incremental changes, she recognises how external demands have influenced internal dynamics: “I just think the nature of staff meetings and the nature of what’s coming in circulars from the department and so on, requires that in schools and it’s been kind of a gradual approach” (Int. 4, 2008).

Here also, there is a noticeable move away from ‘my’ school to one where “I would look on it as our school and I would very much, I would see it as being a shared vision” (Int. 4, 2007). This collective shared vision facilitated, reinforced and consolidated through more interactive and dense interpersonal communication translates into building trust and professional capital.

... now if a teacher is showing that sort of enthusiasm, well, why don't we? Once the parameters are ok and the slat tomhais [yard stick] is for the good of the children, I mean if the children are going to benefit educationally ... (Denise, Int. 4, 2008)

Such democratic leadership impulses require a dexterity that seizes the moment thus enabling a colleague to add another brick in the wall of change and their own capacity to create the future. Incremental changes, small steps, are also cumulative, but perhaps also go relatively unnoticed, thus their capacity building potential is under used. When change, though incremental, becomes embedded, it is a benefit rather than a perceived loss.

### ***Leadership: Beyond Incremental Change, Capacity-Building or Performativity?***

However, trust sprinkled with soft power can quickly move from genteel change to performativity, with ‘*initiative overload*’ and attendant ‘*change related chaos*’ described by Abrahamson as:

... the continuous state of upheaval that results when so many waves of initiatives have washed through the organization that hardly anyone knows which change they're implementing and why', and no-one remains to keep the organizational memory of how things get done. (Abrahamson 2004, p. 3, quoted in Hargreaves 2004, 288)

Although Denise appears pleased with the gradual evolution of a more participative and democratic change agenda, she displays unease and vulnerability too when she states: “there's a lot more to be done but bit by bit” while she somewhat nervously characterises these achievements as merely: “they would be just, I suppose they're small changes”. Yet, she recognises that small changes are initiatives that grow organically out of the agency of community members, but when change is imposed through successive mandates, it takes on a very different hue:

... but there's always frustration because there's so much more that I would like to do, ... when I say like to do, I know we're all moving very slowly in the right direction but there is definitely more that we could be doing, I feel and that's just me putting pressure, just kind of saying, you know, you know you want this policy done, I want that and again ... (Denise, Int. 4, 2008)

Implicit in her reflection is a recognition that managing the pace of change, attuning it to the internal rhythms and existing capacities of the school community rather than policy imperatives is part of the challenge of leadership if increasingly problematic; intuitively she is differentiating between being accountable and taking

a professionally responsible stance towards sustainable development; that managing the pace of change is increasingly part of the role of the school leader, while simultaneously building the capacity to cope with change.

... but then you have to check yourself because a lot of these policies are being done and they're just not written, so they're not there on paper for you to see but they're actually being enforced in the school, so it's trying to balance the kind of, the bureaucratic sort of requirements that are being dictated from above with what's actually happening and making meaningful time for planning and for progress ... actually being part of the process of moving there. (Denise, Int. 4, 2008)

When demands for change are imposed and increase in volume and intensity, there is potentially a reaction, resistance, feeling put upon, more vulnerable and unappreciated and if the meaning making to which Denise alludes is not possible in such turmoil, it is not surprising that demoralisation and disengagement may follow (Hargreaves 2004).

## **Building Leadership Capacity: The Road to Continuity and Sustainable Reform?**

There is broad consensus among interviewees that, as Michelle indicates, "you grow with the role". As this occurs, there appears also to be a general move, as an insider within the community, whereby relationships and trust have been carefully cultivated, leaving principals and their school communities better placed to build capacity for sustainable change. Dick's (1994-) sense of irony and humour aside, he declares: "Well, it has remained the same to the degree that I'm still in charge. There are things that I have to make sure are done but there's a great deal more to do now and I think my capacity to carry it out has increased." But experience alone has limitations as veteran Alison (1979-) indicates:

It certainly becomes easier as you become familiar with the shape of the year and I think that's true of any job. So you learn and experience teaches you a certain amount and I think then you reach a certain plateau and if you don't re-evaluate and change you could just sit on your laurels but different things happened to me along the way that make me change different things we did within the school. So it does become easier, it certainly does. (Denise, Int. 4, 2007)

Evidence thus far suggests that building relationships, growing more confident, and trusting more in colleagues, may have sufficed in more stable predictable times, contributing to change with stability, but Alison is forthright when she indicates this may no longer suffice in the face of exponential growth in the range of responsibilities.

It has changed dramatically. From a time point of view first of all. No matter how much time I put into the job and no matter how hard I work I still feel that there is more to be done. I say that as someone who really uses my management team and I delegate even though it is difficult. I have delegated. Some people are terrific at accepting responsibility while there are others who are not. I still have worked at pushing that. Having said that, there is still so

much work to be done. The duties and responsibilities have expanded with the years and . . . nobody, nobody, has stood up and said this far and no further. The amount of paperwork, the accountability just life has changed anyway. (Alison, Int. 1, 2000)

Though times have changed, her testimony suggests that capabilities are not infinitely elastic. In such circumstances, you either re-define the role and priorities or as the evidence above intimates you become consumed by the ‘greedy work’ (Gronn 2003). As Michelle (1992–) indicates:

I think you grow with the role, you gain confidence, you probably even define the role in a way whereas in earlier days you just did the job and you grow into it, so almost in a sense, you might even anticipate certain changes that are coming down the line . . . (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

However, proactive leadership is always dependent on bringing the community with you, and this entails respecting the degree of demand and pressure colleagues are already under—the sponge of continuity is not infinitely porous in its capacity to absorb change. As the pace of change intensifies, the relative luxury of being able to find your feet by growing into the role may no longer apply, as Michelle suggest regarding a colleague:

. . . she retired from principalship last year but she became principal about 6 or 7 years ago [approximately 2000] and first year was tough, but the first year is always tough and the second year was tougher and the third year and it was just relentless, and it was only when I was talking to her was it really clear to me how much it had changed and she would have, . . . and she wouldn’t have had much support. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

This tale suggests that when the pressures of intensification mount, individual resilience without adequate support is unlikely to be adequate while recognising that individuals differ in their ‘narrative capital’ that is necessary in order “to link our personal narratives to narratives of wider social purpose” (Goodson 2013, p. 129). Resilience is not merely a matter for individuals. If, as some researchers quoted above have suggested that it can be learned, there is a systemic obligation to provide such learning opportunities that need to encompass what I have labelled the Zone of Proximal Distance (see Chap. 6), where “where personal and professional dispositions and values” are addressed and renewed (Day et al. 2007, p. 198) For Michelle, a recurring continuity in the renewal of her personal and professional disposition continues to be “pouring through the book shelves” to find reading material pertinent to her most recent challenge, while for veteran Fred (1971–2010) it has been ‘community’, but this major continuity has rather chameleon like been re-invented at various stages, while for the latter its more recent manifestation has been: “I think it is very important these days that kids have a sense of place and a sense of where their roots are” in an otherwise ‘liquid’ and ‘fluid’ world (Bauman 2000/2006, 2004). Serving the school and its community has been Fred’s anchoring disposition that has influenced his actions, but this too is subject to change and renewal even if it appears as a constant. It is only a constant precisely because it is nurtured and renewed on an ongoing basis. In the absence of renewal it becomes a millstone, not a touchstone.

Well what I'm saying is a lot of my job in the school is when even post comes in I have to see how that can be used for the benefit of the school. Like the old computer project, that would have taken a fair amount of wangling and playing loose with the rules, manipulating things. (Fred, Int. 1, 2000)

Through manipulating the opportunities that changing times present, continuity can be found, capital enhanced that enables him to say with some confidence:

I still hope, maybe I have my head in the clouds, maybe I'm not a realist, but I still hope that we're doing a good job, that the parents believe we're doing a good job. . . . that the children come out of the school prepared for the challenges that lie ahead. So I don't have any regrets on that. (Fred, Int. 1, 2000)

These words serve as a timely reminder of the significance of the components that make up, develop and renew disposition. But what if the policy climate ratchets up the degree of turbulence? Does this engender a siege mentality, where battering down the hatches to weather the storm of change is perceived as the preferable option, or are new leaders and forms of leadership emerging where navigating in such waters becomes commonplace and with support enables new continuities to be crafted and sustained?

### ***Leadership: When Change Is the Continuity- Sustaining Capacity-Building***

The evidence thus far suggests that change is often slow, halting and incremental, but in more recent times has become relentless, a challenge to even the most robust leaders, while sharing the burden through middle-management structures has been positive, the school community is a fragile ecology that can all too easily be destabilised, thus risking resistance and reversal of gains. In such rapidly changing and unstable environments it is important to acknowledge, as many interviewees do, sustainable change takes time. Kate (1997–2007) puts this in perspective while implicitly articulating the importance of retrospective narration, while suggesting also that it is only with the passage of time that gains may be appropriately assessed rather than seeking almost instant evidence of success—itself an important illustration of the demands imposed by a performativity culture.

. . . when I started teaching first, if anyone had said to me that I would see a day when all the travellers<sup>9</sup> came to school in a uniform with a lunchbox . . . I would have said no way. I mean, that all happened. I couldn't believe it. . . . And I know it's very, very piece meal and it's very slow, I suppose, . . . but it did happen. (Kate, Int. 4, 2007)

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<sup>9</sup>A distinct Irish ethnic group of nomadic people, though many of the community are settled, or partially settled. Some live in England while a distinct group continue to live in Murphy Village in North Carolina.

As we enter into the choppy waters of performativity, it is conveniently forgotten by politicians and policy-makers that substantial rather than surface change takes time and concerted commitment on the part of those who are charged with making it happen. It is important to remember therefore that “someone who acts only out of . . . external concerns . . . will have no reason to do the right thing unless she thinks she might be discovered” (Appiah 2010, p. 181). For change to be meaningful therefore, it cannot be arbitrary; rather it is chosen by the ‘street level actors’ because their disposition suggests to them that it is desirable, in the interests of their learners (Lipsky 1980). In the words of McLaughlin (2008): ‘you cannot mandate what matters’ (see also McLaughlin and Talbert 1993). When external mandates avalanche and overwhelm, such external change mandates are “seen to be driven by governments and bureaucracies who . . . failed to understand classroom practice” (Hargreaves 2004, p. 293). In the absence of sense-making on the part of principals and teachers, change is arbitrary, compliance rather than increased capacity to absorb change promotes superficial adoption with increasing potential for demoralisation, de-professionalisation and disengagement (Bryk and Schneider 2002). Even as Denise asserts, change has “crept in slowly over the years”, there is a degree of acceptance also for the changed reality that creeping incrementalism is no longer adequate.

### ***Leadership and Performativity: The Struggle to Build and Renew a Professional Disposition***

When the external environment is perceived as inhospitable, school communities in some instances at least are drawn closer together through the intensification of inter-relations in ways that build trust thus increasing capacity to cope meaningfully in ways that make sense of mandated changes for themselves, colleagues, learners, parents and communities. However, it is only with the passage of time that it can be determined with some certainty whether or not this creates ‘balkanized cultures’ (Hargreaves 1994) rather than trust and capacity, thus implode when the pressures expand the fissures of mistrust and lack of capacity as external policy ratchets up further the demands of performativity.

Three of the four most recently appointed principals in this study had completed Masters degrees prior to their appointments. Additionally, they had varied professional portfolios, all of which included substantial engagement with teachers in leadership roles and the provision of professional learning. This general investment in ongoing professional formation is evident among older, more experienced and veteran principals, but in a somewhat more uneven and idiosyncratic manner, though perhaps no less significant as a consequence. However, this most recent cohort signals a general trend whereby it is increasingly becoming the norm that to be



considered for principalship such investments are essential.<sup>10</sup> Confidence and self-efficacy coupled with more elaborate and complex understandings of the change forces that buffet and shape systemic reform efforts, are important ingredients in building continuity in and through change. Ben's (2005–) testimony puts this in perspective when he says:

In a staff they're prepared to take on different responsibilities year on year so change is now inbuilt into the system. . . . I think we're managing change a lot better than we did. When I started studying for the M. Ed. in 1998, this huge chapter on change was a frightening aspect, how would you get people to change but unbeknownst to us, because things are changing, because we're applying for new things, because we're trying new methods, change is an inbuilt part of the job. (Ben, Int. 2, 2008)

This does not mean, as Kate intimates that “good relationships” are not vital and pivotal, but rather that they are “very valuable to keep and to develop.” In addition, although she was appointed to the position of principal in relatively late career, her disposition over the years within the school was one that modelled flexibility and collaboration, thus providing her with moral authority when exercising leadership. She states: “When it came to my turn I wasn't asking anybody to do what I didn't do. I was in a strong position from that point of view” (Int. 2, 2000). Similarly, Conor (1992–2010) recognises implicitly that without that capacity to absorb change through the meaning making process, change has potential to destabilise, to become a treadmill that depletes rather than builds capacity:

I think you have to be very slow to think about too many changes too quickly because you cannot achieve everything overnight. The difficulties we have with the pace of change is kind of pacing ourselves, it is almost very difficult to keep up, like being on a treadmill. . . . But nevertheless change is taking place and there is nothing that we can do about it. (Conor, Int. 2, 2000)

Being resigned to change in a fatalistic sense is not a viable option, nor is that primarily what he intended. Instead, it is necessary to take ownership of it and credit for the extent to which it is absorbed, while there needs to be thought also devoted to harnessing such changes for the better. Thus the position of principal as a significant broker between continuity and change is increasingly where agency and leadership are exercised. Similarly, in his rural domain, Dick recognises: “I mean if we want to be regarded seriously in this profession we have to be able to embrace changes” (Int. 2, 2000). Brent (2006–) too indicates this new reality in his suburban context as he forges relationships with his colleagues while giving new orientation to his professional disposition.

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<sup>10</sup>In a recent conversation with the principal of a large suburban primary school in the greater Dublin area, he indicated that eight members of his staff are currently engaged in masters programmes despite financial austerity resulting in significant cuts in teachers' salaries. Such sacrifices and personal investments augur well for the future. It may also suggest that resilience comes in many forms, and career stage, ambition, promotional prospects, all mutate in different and unanticipated ways as the next generation of teachers assume greater leadership responsibilities within schools and systems.

They're an extremely professional staff, there's a great interest in education in general. Change, while everybody is somewhat fearful of change, there was a willingness to embrace it and overcome the discomfort of that, yet . . . (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

There are several aspects of the 'yet' and the manner in which discomfort is converted into professional capital that increases capacity to remain calm under fire, and central to this is recognition of the centrality of interpersonal communication and attendant dynamics. The cumulative impact of—

. . . small things largely, mainly in the area of communicating with staff, bringing people into the information loop shall we say, board of management procedures was another, particularly in the area of finance, that sort of stuff, reporting, accurate reporting and being systematic about letting people know the things . . . so you spot things that you feel, well yes I can change that without really upsetting the equilibrium of the school but . . . (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

But, as he elaborates on his perspective, it becomes clear that the kind of communication he has in mind is not an end in itself; it is complex, nuanced and demanding, a sophisticated exercise of soft power.

. . . the most important thing that you can do when you come to a school is work at establishing the relationship with each of the individuals. Now, depending on the size of the school that's either a huge task or not so much, it's always onerous because you have to make sure that everybody feels that they're a stakeholder in this operation, that everybody feels that you're there to listen, not always respond but at least take account of what the concern and the anxiety is or where they are in relation to it, to know them as people because if you establish that and you understand what makes them tick and what . . . factors are influencing attitudes or reactions or all of those, maybe, obstacles to change, all of those things, then you can more easily, not necessarily definitely, but more easily overcome those difficulties. (Brent, Int. 2, 2007)

His disposition clearly suggests the necessity to get to know colleagues as fellow professionals, to cultivate professional relationships, but as a matter of respect rather than merely a good investment. He recognises that when such "relationships are right" they are "characterised by trust, mutual trust" and this combination of respect and trust become the basis of more: ". . . if you're upfront about what your view is and if you're willing to hear what the other view is then very quickly you can establish a sense of, well, there's a shared mission here" (Int. 2, 2007). Being up front is about self-awareness through appropriate (moral) compass readings of what you stand for, and how that disposes you towards certain educational priorities.

Brent's colleagues recognise the need for the on-going exercise of soft power as part of the process of building relationships while bringing about change. However, there is recognition also that in the absence of structural power, there are limits to harnessing the good will of teachers, though that clearly continues to be a necessity. Veteran Jack (1978–2007) puts this challenge and delicate balance in perspective where appealing to colleague's good will, despite intensification, is preferable than coercive compliance that is neither capital enhancing nor transformative.

I suppose what I would be fighting to retain would be to continue to be able to elicit that good will. I am also conscious of the fact that I am almost colluding with the people who are pushing through reforms. One thing that concerns me is, while teachers have been extremely

generous with their time and the number of people who have been willing to serve on committee to meet after school and so on, I don't know how long we can keep trading on that. (Jack, Int. 2, 2000)

Part of that on-going conversation he suggests is a shift from 'my' to 'our' school, an implicit recognition of the growing necessity for shared or distributed leadership. But the existential too plays a role and in a system with limited mobility there is an understandable tendency and temptation to privilege good relations in a system that, even in austerity, continues to rely primarily on soft power. This is illustrated by Alison who indicates that it took her 14 years in the role and the death of a dear friend who, having been diagnosed with cancer was dead within 3 months. With such a critical incident she reflected if she suffered a similar fate, would she have regrets, and after some thought determined—yes, indeed she would—the manner in which she had been treated by some colleagues. Initially shocked by the thought, she resolved: “and then I suddenly thought, yes, I would regret that I allowed some people in the school treat me the way they did. I was absolutely amazed at myself and I thought, no more” (Int. 4, 2007).

She went on to illustrate how her resolve was subsequently exercised: “So I suppose, I learned how to handle things differently, whereas if that was before I would have just talked about it rather than addressing it openly . . .” (Int. 4, 2007). This and other similar critical incidents cited by other informants indicate that even in the exercise of soft power, it can be done in a hush puppy way or in a more assertive and authoritative manner that challenges the dispositions of others and their sense of professional responsibility. Such a realisation is not a denial of the reality that structural reforms also require attention in the dynamics of building leadership capacity and in supporting the agency of school leaders to enable such developments.

## Conclusions

This chapter confirms what is already well established, namely that there has been pretty dramatic intensification of the leadership role in school over time. However, such intensification does not necessarily lead to re-definition of roles and responsibilities in ways that meet such complexities in an entirely purposeful manner.

In the first instance, in the absence of formal preparation for the role, existing leadership legacies and cultural norms in schools weight heavily on newly appointed principals. Consequently, even though they may be impatient to bring about some changes, these are most frequently to the learning environment or policy writing, and often do not intrude into the privacy of classrooms. There is awareness of the necessity to have a 'team' approach, but this can be more in a transactional rather transformational mode, the cultivation of collaboration without necessarily understanding such cultural shifts as stepping stones to building leadership capacity

by distributing responsibilities more widely within the school community. Additionally, in the absence of formal preparation, personal disposition rather than inter-generational perspectives seem more significant, while more recent cohorts do appear to be more committed to team building and collaboration rather than leading from the front, a general pre-disposition of some of the veterans. All informants, to varying degrees, have become more aware of the prevalence of the macro language of NPM in policy documents, but appear to receive it as a matter of fact rather than a predatory language laden with ideological baggage. This is problematic from a capacity building perspective, where matters of professional renewal, of renewing constants rather than providing pragmatic responses to external demands are at stake.

Central to these processes are the dynamics of inter-personal relationships, but these need to be understood in the shadow of legacies and their systemic structural context. Given the lack of mobility in the system and the apparent failure to alter fundamental structures around career structures, promotion in a dispersed system, principals are largely conservative, cautious and careful to cultivate and maintain ‘good’ personal relationships, and to privilege these over more robust professional relationships. Given the absence of time and space for collaboration, other than ‘add-on’ hours in more recent years, where extended and ongoing professional conversations can be facilitated, not causing offence, keeping the peace, becomes all but an end in itself. Such relationships are hugely dependent on the exercise of soft power on the part of school leaders, where maintaining the ‘good will’ of colleagues is paramount. In such circumstances, taking on additional responsibilities becomes something of a personal favour to the principal rather than a matter of professional obligation. Such power dynamics also appear to inhibit principals in their efforts to re-conceptualise the role of leader and its responsibilities, even in the context of the opportunities seized by some to use more recently emerged middle-management structures to leverage change. Another dimension of such school dynamics that appears to be arrested is a greater emphasis on building a shared vision and more clearly delineated shared purposes. All such undertakings appear to be broached to the extent that they do not undermine good personal relationships and erode good will. Policies that increase principal responsibilities without appropriate structural reforms that alter power relations are a major reason why perceptions of the role by many are increasingly unattractive—responsibility without power.

And, yet, this is not the whole story. There is evidence too that even if leadership legacies and attendant cultural baggage loom large initially on principals’ horizons, they demonstrate capacity also to separate positive aspects of tradition on which to build. Many remark on change being incremental, ‘small things’ but in the process appear to underestimate the cumulative impact of several small changes to transform school communities. It would appear therefore that the absence or underdevelopment of shared strategic vision (for which there is largely no time and space) to enable small changes to be cumulative, there is a more collective failure to see the potential of incremental change as a more substantial and sustained contribution to capacity building. Rather, what the dynamic politics of small things appears to cultivate is a sense of the fragmented nature of change without taking

credit for their introduction, thus such changes may have as much capacity to disempower, to be at the whim of external policy forces, as much as being able to harness them towards purposeful ends. Emphasis on personal relationships also inhibit the development of a professional language through which deliberative conversations are created, consensus and disagreement identified, and professional relationships that enhance capacity are cultivated.

But there is evidence too over time of finding continuity in change. Becoming comfortable with change to the point where change is the continuity. However within this dynamic see-saw, there emerges too what I have called constants. These are core elements that require renewal, but also provide stability. They provide the balance, though that is an inadequate word, they regulate the sense of self-efficacy in dealing with intensification of change both in terms of its pace and the external demands for yet more changes. What enables school leaders and their colleagues to turn the millstones of legacies into building blocks for the future is a capacity, underpinned by the values, beliefs and educational commitments that shape professional disposition, a moral compass more than a capacity to ‘bounce back’, that at once holds change and continuity in productive tension (Day et al. 2007). It is not therefore that disposition remains unaltered over time, but that through ongoing learning and reflection, individually and with colleagues, dispositions are renewed sufficient to embrace the personal and the professional in a generative tension that holds constant while change and continuity are finely calibrated to build leadership capacity that simultaneously enhances the entire school community and beyond.

Intensification and attendant performativity have potential to disrupt this cycle of renewal, and without a capacity to manage the pace of change through establishing priorities, effectively dancing to someone else’s tune does not allow for the re-creation of constants sufficient to feel in control and thus also professionally responsible. Becoming merely accountable rather than professionally responsible becomes a technical matter, devoid of anchoring commitments that over time depletes morale, engagement and the energy necessary for renewal. It is the capacity to be able to renew and replenish the constants that enable school leaders to build capacity to transform. When intensification reaches a particular pitch, different for each school community depending on existing leadership capacity, the see-saw will remain on the side of performativity, a downward trajectory that may be difficult to reverse.

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# Chapter 11

## Leadership: Succession, Recruitment, Retirement

### Introduction

As the pace of change has accelerated over the past two decades, and external demands for school reform have created what many principals perceive as perpetual turbulence, many teachers have turned their backs on principalship as an attractive career choice, leading to a perceived crisis in recruitment and retention (Lee and Spillane, <http://www.principalpolicyresearch.org/P3/Reports.html>) (Gronn and Rawlings-Sanaei 2003; Hobson et al. 2003; MacBeath et al. 2009). While focus on the issues of a shrinking leadership talent pool is on-going, there is a suggestion also that early forays into the ‘crisis’ tended to deal with symptoms rather than causes, and relied too much on anecdotal evidence (McGuinness 2005). What emerges from this literature is that many moulds are being broken regarding the nature of the role of school leader and conceptions of leadership, while the unrelenting pace and complexity of school leaders’ lives and work begin to explain the burgeoning ‘adjectivalism’ (Gronn 2009) within the literature as researchers seek to make sense of principals’ experiences.

Against this international backdrop, this chapter focuses on principals’ perspectives; the ‘real life’ stories behind the statistics regarding applications, and the extent to which systemically there is a need for a more radical re-think about leading schools. The informants in this study appear more optimistic about the future, despite performativity and accountability agenda. However, there is concern about the duration spent at the helm and the inadequacy of current structures to enable principals to ‘step down’ without major loss of income etc. In 1992, when a consultative Green Paper (Education for a Changing World) was published, that signalled the influence of neo-liberalism in its espousal of ‘a spirit of enterprise in our young people and to prepare them for a new world’ (Ireland 1992, p. foreword) it evoked widespread criticism for its perceived naked instrumentalism by some of the educational establishment (Hogan and Dunne 2004). In the post-Celtic Tiger era, and the forward march of neo-liberalism in the interim, such concerns seem rather



tame when compared with the greater penetration of the language of New Public Management (NPM) into policy discourses and documents (see Solbrekke and Sugrue 2014). There was criticism then of the presence of private sector language regarding the role of the principal, particularly the notion of “the principal as the chief executive of the school” (p. 148), while it was suggested also that: “. . . in the interests of mobility, career enhancement and the vitality of school leadership, a strong case can be made that future appointments of principals should be for a fixed term of, say, seven years, in all but the smaller schools, and with the option of reappointment by the Board of Management” (p. 168).

While this was to be “discussed with the concerned interests” it ceased to gain traction as a reform item, and disappeared without trace. Consequently, recruitment, retention and retirements continue relatively undisturbed. This is in rather stark contrast to international practice where “regularized rotation of principals by their districts every 3–5 years has more of a negative than a positive effect on improvement efforts” (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012, p. 167).

The reasons for the perception of a leadership crisis internationally are many and varied, but generally centre on the increasing complexity of the role and a consequent necessity to share responsibility, to distribute or re-distribute leadership in a more effective and sustainable manner (Harris 2008; Leithwood et al. 2009; Spillane 2006; Spillane et al. 2009; Spillane and Diamond 2007). Whatever about the changing nature of the role, it is generally accepted that: “the challenges of leadership succession, of leading across and beyond individual leadership over time are at the heart of sustainable leadership and educational change” (Hargreaves and Fink 2005, p. 19). It is important also to acknowledge that ‘effective leadership’ in the short term may not be sustainable either, and in this regard successful leadership needs to include more than test scores and outcomes (Day 2007). Rather, successful principals are those who “demonstrate sustained commitment and passion for their work under what are often intellectually and emotionally challenging circumstances. More importantly, they demonstrate resilience over time (Giles, 2006; Day & Gu, 2007)” (Day 2007, p. 14). Similarly, retention, though important, is only one aspect of the problem. Additionally, once appointed, “maintenance of motivation and commitment” are vitally necessary also for successful and sustainable school leadership (Day et al. 2007, p. 213). Others complement and extend understandings of leadership success and sustainability by pointing to the necessity for attention to “ethical ways of managing social and political relationships” and a more dynamic understanding of leadership rather than a more static typology of styles (Blackmore and Sachs 2007, pp. 266–267).

In the constant flux in which leadership as a practice is perpetually (re-) enacted, it may be more appropriate to consider “how much time heads are in dialogue about how they get an increasingly impossible job done, in ways that do no harm to themselves, their colleagues or the students” (Foster and Gunter 2009, p. 79). Part of that dialogue, an internal as well as external conversation, is about how the future of leadership is perceived, while there is an emerging consensus around the necessity to develop “leadership capacity . . . through leadership practice” whereby leaders become “agents of change through supporting others instead of by delivering

changes demanded by others” (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009, p. 98). This chapter contextualise recent literature with a view to providing more grounded perspectives; by surfacing the relationship between leadership practices, conceptualisation of roles and responsibilities and their systemic structures, it becomes evident the extent to which leadership capacity building is constrained and curtailed in the absence of addressing deeply embedded systemic structures; limited and limiting leadership rather than building leadership capacity (within and beyond school communities) while sustaining leaders and school leadership.

## ‘To Be or Not to Be’—A School Leader—Please Advise?

Perhaps, surprisingly, participants did not identify a crisis in leadership in their jurisdiction. Although there is general agreement regarding the manner in which the role has grown in complexity, informants provide overwhelming evidence of enjoying the role and feel confident in recommending it to those who seek their advice, while readily recognising that it may not be a career move for all teachers. Michelle (1992–) suggests that though the research is “fairly skimpy” she considers that “the real problem is in the smaller schools” where a dual mandate makes the role impossible.

I know from talking to teachers about taking on principalship, the answer usually is, yes, if I can be an admin principal or I like being a teacher so I want to stay being a teacher. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

Such concerns are compounded by a lack of mobility, and transparency regarding the selection process.

So then that means that if you’re in Wexford<sup>1</sup> you sit there and wait and then there’s a sense of, which I’m also aware of being said, well look, you’ve to put your head above the parapet and then if you don’t get it then, there’s issues of transparency around the selection process. So that’s a problem. (Michelle, Int. 4, 2007)

Janice (2007–) was the only candidate interviewed when appointed. She is aware of an ‘outside’ candidate who did not present for interview. This evidence tends to confirm a prevalent belief, particularly in rural areas, that the internal candidate has an ‘inside’ track. She says: “And it’s not right actually. I would be the first to say that it’s not right” (Int. 1, 2007).

However, perceptions of the impossibility of being a teaching principal are not universally shared. Jim (1985–) has rationalised his position as follows and is willing to recommend the position to others when he says:

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<sup>1</sup>Wexford is a county town, with a population of less than fifteen thousand. Her comments regarding ‘sitting there’ speaks to the lack of opportunity and the calculated risks within a community where everyone knows your business that there is potential loss of ‘face’ if you are a disappointed candidate.

Well, it's difficult for me, I barely regard myself as principal. My job is teaching my class, I'm principal when I have to be. . . . As a principal of a small school where they'd be a teaching principal, I'd advise them to go ahead, I wouldn't see any great . . . I wouldn't advise someone against it. I don't see all the stress that people talk about being attached to the job of principal. It just doesn't hit me, I'm not aware of it except for this one blight of this paperwork; that is the one thing. (Jim, Int. 4, 2007)

Fred (1971–2010) was originally appointed to a two-teacher school and became an administrative principal in the noughties when the school grew rapidly. He has clung to a teacher identity in his new role, perhaps now as instructional leader:

I don't know anyone who'd go for a teaching principalship anymore. Even though I'm still teaching and I make sure I teach every day because I didn't start on this road to be an administrator, to be a form pusher, form filler, my forms are always late for the department because to me, interacting with the children, interacting with teachers is the key. That's my job. So, spending a bit of time teaching every day, teaching principalship. (Fred, Int. 4, 2007)

Yet, despite this assertion he says of his final year with a dual mandate: "I nearly cracked here the last year of my teaching principalship" (Int. 4, 2007)

### ***Recruitment Without Preparation***

Well intentioned advice however, is no substitute for adequate preparation for the role. Additionally, the testimony provided indicates that personal and family circumstances as well as the particularities of the lifecycle of the school as a community have significant influence rather than a sense of the 'big picture'. For example, Ben (2005–) had completed a Masters programme, specialising in ICT, and a postgraduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs prior to his appointment. His immediate reaction to being offered the position: "I was thrilled . . . and I had a written acceptance in before I started school the following morning", yet, he quickly added:

But I was totally green, I'd gone into a situation that I knew I'd prepared for and the shock of it, "What was I going to do now?", I was 36 years of age and here was my career goal on my doorstep, what would I do next? (Ben, Int. 2, 2007)

The 'story' he had well-honed for interview purposes<sup>2</sup> seemed suddenly to be of little practical use when faced with the complexities of the role. Veteran Fred recognises in his testimony the necessity for career planning rather than mere succession planning, yet, his conversations with colleagues when he began to think about his own departure from the school appears to be as much about ensuring an internal appointment rather than ensuring an appropriate successor. He recognises

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<sup>2</sup>Ben had confided earlier in his second interview that he had applied for as many as ten principalships prior to being offered the position in his own school.

that a commitment to one's own professional learning has more recently become a pre-requisite for appointment to principalship, when he says:

I suppose nowadays to go for principalship you have to have either some sort of education management qualification – this is what we're told anyway – or diploma or masters. I don't necessarily agree with that because I think maybe you could actually work as a principal and then do the actual qualification because it would be then far more relevant to you . . . .  
(Fred, Int. 4, 2007)

Such a suggestion, of learning on the job seems to hanker after a more stable and predictable past where an individual would have the luxury of growing into the role. And, while some elements of that might remain, without a professional portfolio that provides evidence of a career trajectory progressively accumulating leadership experience and expertise, the foregoing chapters provide ample evidence that such an approach does a disservice to the importance and complexity of the role.

When it comes to succession planning Fred's view seems too local, too short-sighted, too focused on the advancement of an internal candidate rather than a more balanced perspective on the needs of the school at a particular time in its lifecycle, a process of replacing the 'leaders' rather than more systematically building leadership capacity He says:

Like I'm looking here now, I'm either going to do 2 more years minimum or 7 years max, somewhere in between. And I'm looking round and I'm thinking should I now groom a successor, if I feel passionately about what we have here, and funny, I was just in a conversation with some of the younger teachers and I was saying to them, guys, are you going to do anything about this, are you going to be proactive here, I mean there could be a principal from outside coming in. You've got to have some sort educational management thing done. (Fred, Int. 4, 2007)

His comments intimate that it his younger colleagues who have responsibility for succession planning rather than the current principal having a role in building leadership capacity. Though e his thinking and advice may be laudable in some respects regarding loyalty to colleagues it may be short-sighted too in terms of seeking the best possible person for the position; fundamentally his concerns are driven by a politics of the local, rather than leadership for the school community. Additionally, succession planning is not the preserve of the principal alone. In the Irish context, with an absence of structures between Ministry (centre) and individual school (periphery), and the lack of a proactive stance on the part of many BoMs, adequate career and succession planning is a major systemic challenge, while BoMs too may be too parochial in securing the advancement of favoured locals at the expense of being more ambitious for the school community and meeting its needs. Michelle identified lack of transparency regarding recruitment as a disincentive for some, while she also points to a traditional lack of mobility, particularly outside large urban centres, where teachers are reluctant to travel distances that would be commonplace in other larger jurisdictions. Consequently, she says, more traditional mindsets continue to limit recruitment since "teachers have [a sense] that the job is already gone" while she suggests also that "teachers don't tend to move for work reasons unless they're in Dublin and they're going down the country, . . ." (Int. 4,

2007). When this occurs, they are more likely to be moving ‘home’ rather than for promotion.<sup>3</sup>

Eddie (1993–2006) the only interviewee to hold two principalships in the public system provides testament to this thesis, cutting his daily mileage by approximately 50 % while improving family circumstances, with the further possibility of a ‘growing’ school:

... particularly what turned me off was snowy mornings in January, it happened on a number of occasions that I set out from home with no snow, arrived there, the place covered in snow<sup>4</sup> and nobody around and everybody ringing in, is the school opened or closed and I had driven 32 miles to make the decision and there were things like that and there were also lots of meetings at night and my family were very, very small, I had children, 1, 2 and 4 at the time and I decided to look for something closer to home and the school to which I applied next was near home. It was 17 miles from home which was a big improvement and it was on the edge of a town and I had the idea that maybe it was ideally placed to become an expanding school. (Eddie, Int. 4, 2007)

### ***Recruitment, Gender and Work-Life Balance?***

Eddie’s testimony also raises a further concern that, as the number of male teachers in primary teaching shrinks to 10 %, a figure that has remained remarkably consistent over the past two decades (Drudy 2009), current figures indicate a disproportionate number of male principals—‘thirty-seven percent’ relative to their number.<sup>5</sup> A recent study indicates that “at primary level 80 % of teachers are female compared to 51 % of principals” (Pricewaterhouse Coopers 2009, p. 41). In the same study, “63 % of primary principal survey respondents described their work-life balance as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’” (p. 56). In earlier chapters Fred had indicated the unsung and unheralded contribution made by partners to principals, as carers both in their absence and caring for principals by being a sounding board and listening ear. Among the five participants with small, pre-school children, at the time of conducting the interviews, there was unanimous agreement of the need for a ‘step down’ facility, or for ‘job sharing’ to facilitate more time with children.

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Going down the country’ is often a euphemism for getting out of the city, but often also returning to one’s roots, and apart from securing a teaching position locally, an additional attraction not infrequently is the prospect of a site for a house on the family farm.

<sup>4</sup> Lest readers form the impression that Ireland’s Winters are severe, thanks to the Gulf Stream this is not the case; in fact Irish winters, for a country on the same Latitude as New York, has a very mild climate, only occasionally dipping below freezing in Winter. Thus, when Eddie talks about ‘snowy’ mornings, he is most likely to be talking about a light dusting of snow, one centimetre, or half an inch, no more! His evidence says more about our lack of preparedness for exceptional weather conditions since they happen only rarely.

<sup>5</sup> These data were provided by IPPN head office while working from a Salesforce data base. These data were verified most recently on 08/07/14.

Denise (1999–) was on maternity leave from principalship at the time of conducting her final interview, thus she was keenly aware of her ‘divided loyalties’, her passion for the role, and her commitment to her three children. When she talks about this however, she represents the challenge as one for her and her partner rather than a wider systemic issue about flexibility and realism, when she says:

I would love to be able to marry this, you know, having these [children] so young, they will definitely be coming to school with me anyway. I would, I’d just love to be able to take a backseat for a while in whatever form but that’s just a question of logistics for us. (Denise, Int. 4, 2008)

Significantly, while the system allows classroom teachers to job share, this facility is not extended to principals, perhaps signalling an out-dated view of the role of the ‘head’ rather than a more collective, distributed perspective on leadership (OECD 2008). As an increasing number of younger females assume the role of principal, this will become more of a challenge to current orthodoxies. She is torn between her passion for the role, and her family commitments:

There’s lots of responsibility, I wouldn’t like to give it up completely, put it like that, I’m not at the stage where I’d say, no I’ve done everything I can do in [names school], I know there’s lots of things I could still do and I’m still interested enough to want to do it. (Denise, Int. 4, 2008)

During her maternity leave she availed of online access to principals’ conferences to remain connected, to fuel her passion as well as provide intellectual stimulation (while nurturing three pre-school children), and the following captures the personal and professional:

I’d still be looking up policies here, I’d still be doing bits and as I said, it’s my only bit of mental engagement with the adult world at times you know and I would be very interested in that aspect of education. So I couldn’t see myself giving it up immediately, it’s not something I think you should sit on for years and a point will come where you know somebody else could do a better job than me, now that could be in a year’s time because family circumstance demand something different but I do enjoy it and would like to be able to go back into it. (Denise, Int. 4, 2008)

In addition to her commitment, being on maternity leave has also taught her valuable lessons: “I know I’m not indispensable . . . Just having spent time away [on maternity leave] has been very, very good for me just in terms of that but you can let it get to you, really let it get to you, you know” (Int. 4, 2008).

### ***Term of Office: In the Principal’s Office?***

Apart from her particular circumstances, there is recognition also that perhaps it is not a position one should hold for life, and this perspective is increasingly widely shared, even if there is a lack of agreement regarding the length of time at the helm afforded in any particular school (Hargreaves and Fink 2005). Janice’s (2007–) comment in this regard seems to hanker after a different time, while also

reflecting a principal perspective rather than a school/systemic need when she states: “I suppose a principalship is great to lead you into retirement, ideally” (Int. 2, 2007).<sup>6</sup> Such sentiments appear more to want to maximise pension entitlements rather than take a more strategic perspective on school and systemic leadership capacity. In a somewhat similar vein, veteran Alison (1979–) too seems to rely on her own experience more than a big picture perspective when she reflects on her own career:

When I became principal first I thought that people should have a contract of five or seven years. . . . I really knew so little in the beginning that I felt after 10 years there is so much more that I want to do that I felt that it would be too short. (Alison, Int. 1, 2000)

Given the increasing importance attaching to school leadership as indicated by research evidence, it is no longer acceptable to appoint those who ‘know so little’ to the role, something that Ben’s testimony seems to suggest is still occurring (Pricewaterhouse Coopers 2009). Given the rapidity of change and the increasing complexity of the role, though learning ‘on the job’ will always have a place, from classroom to principal’s office in one leap without adequate professional experience and expertise is no longer an option and a disservice to education, pupils, their parents and teachers. Alison expresses surprise at talk of retirement among her peers since she continues to revel in the role—suggesting perhaps that ‘plateau’ and ‘disenchantment’ are not inevitable (Earley 2004).

I have just started my 22nd year as principal and I still enjoy it. I still really enjoy my work. Would I like to give it up? People are talking about retiring. Gee I think that there is something wrong with me that I haven’t thought about that yet. (Alison, Int. 1, 2000)

While the question regarding ‘how long is a working life?’ is increasingly pervasive for economic, professional, personal and demographic<sup>7</sup> reasons, nested within this wider concern is the duration of appointments to the position of principal, given the demands and increasing complexity and range of responsibilities. Due to austerity and the recalibration of pension entitlements as well as the imperative to shed public sector employees, there is increased uncertainty regarding the length of a working life, yet recent data indicate clearly that 1 % only of primary principals are 61 or more ([www.ippn.ie](http://www.ippn.ie)). While it is generally accepted that such important individual decisions are context specific and idiosyncratic (Bullough Jr. 1989), there is evidence also that when factors such as “standardization and performativity” gain greater prominence on the educational landscape, they have a “greater impact on . . . declining motivation” (Day et al. 2007, p. 211). Despite Alison’s sustained sense of mission and commitment, given the importance of the role, it is unlikely to be acceptable that duration at the helm be left entirely at the discretion of the principal.

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<sup>6</sup>Such considerations will assume less significance into the future as calculations of pension entitlements and lump sum payments will be calculated on life-time earnings rather than an aggregate of the last three years’ salary of one’s career.

<sup>7</sup>The most recent figures provided by Eurostat indicate that male and female life expectancy in Ireland are slightly above the EU average—78 and 83 respectively.

Despite Ben’s persistent efforts to secure a principalship and his elation on being successful, he seemed similarly daunted by his new responsibilities. He admits that these conflicting emotions led him for the first time ever to consider retirement! In response to my query if he would remain in harness until age 65, he says: “No, definitely not” and continues:

... but I could [retire] at 58 with 35 years’ service. But I think ... I was thinking about it and I never thought about retirement until I took office. It never worried me, I said, once I’m healthy I’ll keep going but I feel I’ll have enough done and I actually set an age, I set 60 as the age because I saw my father; ... when he was a principal here he was sick for the last ... (Ben, Int. 2, 2008)

He reports that since his father retired, his health has improved immeasurably and he continues to enjoy substitute teaching without the stresses of the principal’s role. This evidence is consistent with other findings that suggest a positive environment, positive collegial relations and the continuing desire to make a difference contribute to resilience or disengagement or that good health is a pre-requisite to continued commitment (Day et al. 2007). Nevertheless, all of the most recently appointed cohort do not see themselves remaining at the helm until the age of 65. Janice was 43 on her appointment and states clearly: “I wouldn’t see myself doing this till I’m 65 because I’m not sure that it’s necessarily a good thing to do for that length of time” (Int. 2, 2007). Brent (2006–), on the other hand, is very clear when he states: “I’ll be working till I’m 65, I’ll put it that way” while the caveat he adds suggests greater recognition of the necessity to be committed and engaged when he says: “I don’t think anybody could give this position the energy and commitment it requires for a period of, what it would be in my case, nearly 26 years” (Int. 2, 2007). His comments appear to suggest an attempted reconciliation between demographic and pension realities and the demands inherent in the role as currently experienced. Sadie (2006–) was the eldest of this cohort at the time of appointment, already in her 50s, but retirement was not something she spoke directly about. Rather, she was much more adamant that the role she assumed is considerably different to being a classroom teacher, while in her case: “Now the fact ... that I’ve come later to it so I had kind of built up a lot of stuff.” Consequently, she states:

It’s a very different job to teaching. It really is significantly different but you need to have taught to do it. So it’s a curious mix I think. ... you can go into a classroom and manage a group of children and it doesn’t mean you can go into an office and manage a group of adults and a group of children and parents so there’s significant skills that are not in the original skill set, so people management. ... other skills that are needed having an overview, a vision of how the school should be, could be, will be and then being able to bring that down and step it forward, all the little things going along together, that’s a whole other area of thinking and skill. Then there’s the whole practical stuff of managing the office and the resources and the materials and the filing and all of that. So there’s a colossal skill set that’s not within the classroom ... (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

She regards herself as fortunate that her professional portfolio equipped her for principalship without skipping a beat— not withstanding her comments in Chap. 9 regarding finance. For this reason she says, it is those colleagues who are, by comparison, I’ll prepared, “they are the people who work until midnight” and her



tone is unsympathetic. Nevertheless, she recognises also the challenges for younger women who are in their child-bearing years, while signalling also that more mature colleagues adopt the following perspective: “a lot of people have their lives kind of organised and they think, I don’t need that hassle. I think that’s a lot of it, that’s a lot of what I hear from people, I don’t need that hassle. I go into the classroom, I know what I’m doing, I know I do it well and that’s what I want to do” (Int. 2, 2007). Such comments however, appear also to ignore the increasing demands on the classroom teacher, as part of a team, and a whole school community, not to mention shared leadership responsibilities. Nevertheless, in her own particular circumstances, domestic responsibilities are primarily her responsibility:

I am married to a [names profession] who has his own business and who works 12+ hours a day and we have to organise ourselves in a way that . . . now because the boys are older now we have child care but it’s kind of afternoon child care, but say for example, you were paying a crèche, you would not stay in the schools as a principal till 4 or 4:30 and you wouldn’t be able to afford it and coming home to small kids, it would just knock you out, you wouldn’t have the energy for the job. So people have to look at the whole of their life I think. (Sadie, Int. 2, 2007)

Yet, the scenario she describes as intolerable, is a reality for many, particularly in a policy context where child care is left almost exclusively to the private sector, thus fostering a larger gene pool of leadership talent needs to be considered in this wider welfare context (NWCI 2005). Additionally, by international comparison, many principals in other jurisdictions would feel very privileged if they could routinely exit their schools at the times indicated above.<sup>8</sup> In a national context where more female teachers will inevitably take up the challenge of principalship due to a diminishing pool of potential male applicants, such wider considerations should not be underestimated. Neither should it go unobserved that there is a general underlying assumption that classroom realities have remained rather stable when compared with the increasing complexity of the principal’s role, an assumption that may need to be challenged.

While there is a definite preference among all interviewees for appointments of limited duration, there is considerable uncertainty as to the most appropriate term of office. For example, veteran Alison is very clear that while she grew into the role, she realised that after 7 years in post: “I knew it wasn’t long enough” while at the same time she states: “I couldn’t put a figure on what’s long enough”. In remaining open or ambiguous, she also recognises that determination is very individual, since remaining interested in educational issues and being engaged is vital. Thus:

If you’re interested in education, it’s a fantastic job. I must say I enjoyed it to no end. I used to say in the beginning when I was appointed that a principal should be appointed for 7 years but after 7 years I knew it wasn’t long enough, it definitely wasn’t long enough . . . (Alison, Int. 4, 2007)

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<sup>8</sup>It should be noted in this regard, that since the introduction of the Public Sector Agreement (2010–2014) all teachers are obliged to work an additional 33 hours per year thus some working days as Sadie describes has been altered to some extent.

When asked directly if she would favour re-location after a specified period of time, she responded:

That might be a good idea after a certain number of years. Now, for me to be as long there as I was [in her current school], would have been too long if I hadn't done other things in the meantime. When I went off and studied in [names university], not so much studied but later began to lecture in education . . . that was a great change for me because when I was lecturing something, I used to go back and try it with the staff. (Alison, Int. 4, 2007)

While ambivalence is understandable in Alison's case, the professional development opportunities that came her way are certainly not as accessible to others if at all, thus if leaders are to be retained and sustained for long periods, there is even greater necessity for on-going professional support that is relevant, stimulating and readily accessible. In the case of almost all other interviewees, they favoured a limited period with some facility for 'step down', readily recognising that if this were to become a reality, considerable structural issues would have to be addressed—salary, seniority and security being central (Pricewaterhouse Coopers 2009). Perhaps also, the price of retaining flexibility regarding contractual arrangements is the necessity for principal appraisal.

### ***Leadership, Legacy and Finding the 'Moment' to Exit 'Ahead of the Game'***

Although in general participants favour a specified duration, when it comes to their own particular situation, and within existing constraints, understandably there is considerably more ambiguity, notwithstanding the actuarial 'reality' Dick (1994–) brings to the discussion as well as signalling a shared sense that 'getting out' at the right time is important:

If you stay as a principal of a school until 65 your life expectancy is only 67.<sup>9</sup> So there's your answer. I'm going to do this job while I still like it, while I still love it. What I'm going to do after it I'm not entirely sure. I'd love to write. I do the editorship of the newsletter . . . it keeps me thinking anyway. Perhaps even go back to the [local] radio and do a bit of broadcasting, I don't know, but something which will allow me to enjoy retirement. I certainly love the job, but I want to go out not when they're trying to wheel me out. I'd like to finish when I'm still . . . ahead of the game. (Dick, Int. 4, 2007)

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<sup>9</sup>I had heard this claim made by others prior to Dick's interview, but on subsequent enquiry, while being further informed that yes such figures are asserted, it had proved impossible to have them verified. They certainly tend to run counter to the demographic evidence of increasing longevity, and, in that regard, the necessity to remain active and engaged, though not necessarily in the pressure cooker of principalship nor indeed in paid employment.

It is worth noting that of those who have retired (four<sup>10</sup> at the time of writing), all exited before reaching compulsory retirement age, and that individual had previously departed principalship. For those in the 55+ age group who could take 'early' retirement, they too harbour the idea of getting out before disengagement, disillusionment or both set in, while decisions to depart are local and idiosyncratic. Veteran Jack (1978–2007) reflects this view:

I think, the first sort of mile stone if you like, is when you hit fifty five and you have the thirty five years done. That had an influence which sort of said, it gave me as it were, the option. And it's not that I was looking for a way out but there was definitely [not] a compulsion. And that in a funny sort of way gave me an . . . an energy to proceed but with a safety net. (Jack, Int. 4, 2007)

While Conor (1992–2010) too spoke of the significance of the safety net, Jack elaborates on it as follows:

I think once you hit 55, there's an advantage in that from a principal's point of view because you can always say to yourself, if this thing is too much hassle, I can always . . . That actually takes a lot of the hassle off you, . . . because you can always say to yourself look if . . . whereas if you were 40, you'd say feck it I can't stick this for 15 years or whatever. (Jack, Int. 4, 2007)

Altering local circumstance as well as larger change forces in terms of social mores and policy shifts inevitably influences decision-making. In Jack's case, his vulnerability increased when he found that 'bluff' would no longer work when attempting to bring the parents of troubled children on side:

I would have used an awful lot . . . a certain amount of bluff, a certain amount of pretence. . . . but there was always, there was a certain amount of encouraging, but coercion as well. The reality is that the coercion just became impossible. (Jack, Int. 4, 2007)

His testimony speaks to the necessity of providing principals with on-going professional support while indicating also that democratising educational processes necessitates more extensive welfare provision, particularly in disadvantaged contexts:

Now it wasn't that I wanted to intimidate the woman into it but to get some kind of . . . leverage. But in fairness to the woman [child's parent] she was not getting any support either. She was saying at that particular meeting, the husband's gone, but I'll talk to the family, all the rest of whom are adults and they've just washed their hands of it, they won't come on board, so I'm looking for help. And essentially what they [social services] were saying to her is we don't have any help. (Jack, Int. 4, 2007)

His testimony signals that there are limits to leadership and schools on their own cannot deal successfully with significant social challenges. As the language of NPM becomes more strident, and performativity intensified, the importance of this 'lesson' needs to be re-emphasized, otherwise, schools become the dumping ground for social ills and the responsible scapegoats when schools 'fail' to address rectify them.

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<sup>10</sup>Included in this calculation are those who retired from principalship (Jack, Fred, Kate, Conor), and not those who left the principalship at some point to take up alternative employment.

There are other considerations in significantly less disadvantaged contexts that contribute to considerations of finding the appropriate moment to head towards the exit. Kate (1997–2007) provides an example of such nested considerations, when she indicates a confluence of issues—the prospect of this all-girls school becoming co-educational while the development of a new 'gym' was also in prospect due to local circumstance, and from a policy perspective, self-evaluation, evaluation of NQTs and a more rigorous WSE system were on the horizon. All of these matters, she indicates: "They would have a bit of a bearing" (Int. 4, 2007). She creates a balance sheet in terms of legacy that indicates successes as well as future challenges:

I suppose we never had basketball . . . Ciaran, and that was the happiest day of my life when we put a basketball team together and now its flying. Hard going too, to break that down, it was hard enough to get people around but like that you get the young ones in and you appoint them and you know they're for it and they brought that on. But we'd an old gym . . . that's going to take an awful lot of money to do up. That's again, I wanted to go before that would start because if I'd stayed I'd kind of stay till the end, it would be hard to get away in the middle of it so it was a very natural place, even though there's a lot of fundraising and that needed for it. (Kate, Int. 4, 2007)

The very fact that she speaks of renovating the Gym as if it were her responsibility is significant as many principals attest that de facto the principal in many cases take on responsibilities that are vested in the BoM; another legacy of a bygone era left unattended. Time and local tide contribute to the deliberative process; as she confides: "it would have added significance, all of these things" (Int. 4, 2007), helped in Kate's case by the prospect of what lies beyond the retirement fence. When she did depart in February 2007, she was already looking forward to other pursuits: "I would love to do a bit of painting – to learn and even to read – I mean I don't have the time – I'm tired or I'm you know, that kind of thing . . . And maybe a bit of sewing that I didn't do for ages and ages, . . ." (Int. 4, 2007).

She was already anticipating an alternative lifestyle beyond institutional life. And, while this is perfectly understandable, time to read should not be something confined to retirement, thus giving rise to questions concerning leadership responsibilities and ongoing learning. Without such intellectual inputs, disengagement is more likely, hastened even, and such individuals appear more likely to reach the exit running on empty rather than getting out 'ahead of the game'. From a systemic perspective, it may appear surprising to an international audience that principals are allowed to retire at any time during the school year.

### ***Structural Reforms: Recruitment of School Leaders***

At a time when school Governance is under critical scrutiny in a more secular and multi-cultural Ireland, approximately 90 % of primary schools are owned and managed by church patrons. Consequently, there is an urgent necessity to revisit the whole issue of school leadership and a recognition that "where the children's rights are the priority concern" "positive, proactive leadership" is a requirement despite

“existing workloads” (Coolahan et al. 2012, p. 75). There is considerable consensus concerning the necessity to appoint principals for a limited period of time, while this does not preclude re-appointment for another term of office. As Rose (1999–2001) suggests, currently there is no provision for “time out” such as sabbatical leave for principals. Consequently, she suggests:

You hang on to the last minute. That again is the lack of support to allow you to move somewhere different. It is an incredibly demanding job and one should not expect that it be a lifelong job. All last year I got so fed up with people saying you are so young, I actually had 16 years [teaching] in the system, how many more years do you want. The other side of it then is you know it is actually a young person’s job because you have to have all that energy for it. . . . but if it was set up like that in the first instance and people knew that the 7 year contract was up in that school . . . certainly it could be very refreshing in the system. (Rose, Int. 2, 2000)

She would be unlikely to garner unanimous agreement among the interviewees, particularly given Alison’s comments above, that principalship should be the preserve of the young—far from it. Although Rose departed the post within 2 years, with hindsight, she recognises that a ‘revolving door’ has serious limitations; too short to create a legacy:

I would have liked to [have] stayed with it a bit longer, around seven to ten years would have been nice because I was, its everything from the policy writing that you do, sitting down with people you invest time and energy and you want to see that come to fruition. . . . because you’d like to see a whole cohort of children going through and like to have seen all kinds of other things, and the other aspects of staff development and deeper connections with individual members of staff and continuing to build on those and community and all of that too. (Rose, Int. 4, 2007)

Alone among interviewees, Eddie served as principal of two primary schools. Consequently, he brings a unique insight into current systemic constraints:

In my first Principalship I moved after seven years. I think it is a reasonable period in which to make your impact and from a personal point of view, I felt that to move on at that point in time would be the correct thing to do. In terms of school, seven years is long enough for continuity. It is long enough also for experimentation and I think it is actually good for teachers and for the organization, that there would be movement within the system, . . . I learned from every school I have been in and I hope I have given something back to each school I have been in also. (Eddie, Int. 4, 2007)

This view is widely shared among principals (IPPN 2008), yet little progress appears to have been made in resolving related issues regarding ‘step down’, attendant seniority and salary issues.<sup>11</sup> Not to address current systemic constraints on mobility and leadership is inconsistent with established practices in other jurisdictions, while it is necessary to recognise that in isolation, such changes are not

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<sup>11</sup>Since principals and teachers are employed by an individual school BoM, though paid by the State, if a principal stepped down from the role, and the vacancy was filled by an external candidate, the outgoing principal would not have a post in that school unless a vacancy arose. If there were provision for redeployment, their seniority within the next school, and how this would potentially discommode existing relativities among staff is potentially contentious but needs to be addressed.

silver bullets. Rather, such systemic changes need to become part of a wider arsenal intended to foster leadership capability throughout the education system. In systems with limited mobility due to size, there is greater need for professional support, to compensate for lack of mobility. As the gender composition of primary teaching becomes more feminised, such matters will take on increased significance. Failure to include such systemic challenges as part of reform agenda is a failure of leadership.

### *Future School Leaders*

Despite the challenges inherent in the role, interviewees had no hesitation in being supportive of teaching colleagues who expressed an interest in such a career move and were encouraging of others to consider the post. Even in Maggie's (1991–2004) case where she suggested somewhat pejoratively that many teachers were making life choices: "They're getting the kind of fulfilment that I got out of being principal and doing a good job, out of perfecting their bridge or doing other things", she nevertheless indicated clearly that if her advice were sought she would respond positively:

I'd say go for it if you want it, are you prepared for the work and stress? ... is there a reason why you want it? What do you want to do? What do you want to achieve? I would say read about the education system if you don't already know about what's happening and why and so on and go for it. That's what I'd say. (Maggie, Int. 4, 2007)

Her exhortations appear to suggest that it is up to the individual concerned to prepare adequately for the role. Maggie has demonstrated consistent commitment to her own learning, having completed a doctorate since her departure from principalship. Nevertheless, even in her case, advising to 'read about the education system' while generally laudable, is rather reminiscent of Ben's comments above—that while he had prepared well for interview, when it actually came to the role he 'hadn't a clue'. Similarly, veteran Alison's investment in her own learning and availing of CPD opportunities in the form of part-time teaching of BEd students, has enabled her to remain vibrant and engaged, much more coherent provision for leadership learning is vitally necessary. Significantly members of the most recent cohort of appointees do not currently see themselves remaining in office as long as previous cohorts. As Kate indicates rather wryly: "I think nobody should stay at it [principalship] for too long. I would favour it [a fixed contract]. I sure would" (Int. 2, 2000). What seems significantly absent from this testimony is systemic responsibility for nurturing future leaders, of facilitating the systematic support for and development of leadership at all levels of the system.

As Sadie indicated above, the complex role requires a skill set that goes well beyond the boundaries of classroom expertise, and a further recognition that complexity is not confined to the realities of schooling alone, as Conor indicates:

But like it's like every job you know. What I say to people when they're talking about the job, whether it is principals job or the class teachers job, the first thing I would say is

that nobody's job has got easier so therefore we haven't got the monopoly on harder jobs, although a lot of teachers and a lot of principals think we do because all you hear is about how hard my job has got but that's true of everybody's job . . . . (Conor, Int. 4, 2007)

His testimony generally acknowledges the impact of NPM, but only in the pragmatic sense that—'this is how the world now is' while he also recognises from anecdotal evidence at his disposal that relatively speaking 'we aint seen nothing yet'! He contrasts his situation with a French counterpart with whom his school has had an exchange programme for several years and a staff member whose sibling teachers in a New York public school:

He rang . . . the teacher, at half seven [7.30 am] in the morning and he was already in school and he said he'd be lucky to be home for half seven [7.30 pm] in the evening. Our secretary's brother is a principal in New York and he's up at half six in the morning and doesn't get home till 9 or 10 at night, some nights. . . . I'll tell you one thing, I prefer this system any day of the week because very similar to the American scene, the French principal seems to have piles of hassle, unbelievable amount of hassle, particularly in the last school he was in . . . (Conor, Int. 4, 2007).

Integral to this new and emerging leadership reality is a realisation that not every teacher is suited to the role, as Dick indicates:

There are some excellent teachers who would be very poor principals I'd say or there would be principals who would walk into bother because of maybe their capacity interpersonally whereas you might have an average teacher who might be a very good person to just bring people along. (Dick, Int. 4, 2007)

Notwithstanding these insightful observations, there appears little awareness of the necessity to provide leadership opportunities, to nurture talent rather than a more essentialist view that "you're a superb teacher, you're a great organiser, you've very good public relations because you're the face that's known in your school for lots of reasons, you're the person for that job" (Int. 4, 2007).

In a system where it is still possible in one giant leap to be catapulted from classroom to principal's office without a leadership career trajectory in preparation for the role, such dated practices are clearly inadequate and systemic structures, rules and routines and procedures for recruitment and retention that perpetuate them are in need of serious and sustained reform. Not to face this challenge is a dereliction of responsibility, a failure of leadership for which all stakeholders should be held to account—by the same NPM rules that increasingly the policy-makers impose on principals and teachers without giving them the wherewithal to build necessary and vital leadership capacity, school by school, systemically.

## Conclusions

Some significant conclusions may be arrived at based on the evidence presented above. Foremost among these is that appointing principals 'for life', until they reach retirement age in one school is no longer appropriate given the complexity

of the role and its responsibilities. While there is broad consensus that a term should be of limited and specified duration (possibly 7–10 years), it should be possible to be renewed also. ‘Successful’ principals would be likely to be in demand in other schools as happens in other systems. This does not mean that some individuals cannot serve leadership functions until retirement age, and even beyond, but rather that the importance of leadership for the entire school community is such that it should be changed with an impetus on renewal and revitalisation at pre-defined intervals. It goes without saying that the structural constraints that currently prevent such developments need to be addressed as a matter of priority, while lessons on succession planning elsewhere can inform this process (see, for example, MacBeath et al. 2009). However, it may even be the case that those who are already principals do not get too exercised about the dismantling of existing structures since their replacement would be quite likely to bring more scrutiny to their stewardship, relocate them possibly, as well as remind them of their own mortality. Their perspective too may be occluded by legacy considerations when “successful succession demands that we set aside our yearning for heroic and everlasting leadership and that we treat leadership instead that stretches far beyond any one leader’s professional and even physical lifetime” (Hargreaves and Fink 2005, p. 93). Succession planning is a systemic matter for policy-makers and far too important to be left exclusively to principals and individual BoMs.

Consistently in the above, and in previous chapters, the evidence points to the reality that principals’ roles and responsibilities have been successively rendered more complex- an admixture of intensification and performativity. Yet, traditional structures at a systemic level have remained largely intact, thus re-defining the role and its responsibilities, as well as building leadership capacity, are constrained and curtailed by allocating responsibilities without altering the power structures that would facilitate their realisation. For example, not only does there need to be a defined period of appointment of principals, there also needs to be a ‘step down’ facility with appropriate attention to salary and conditions etc. However, more fundamentally, the lack of mobility within the system makes the introduction of various flexibilities much more difficult. This is a major constraint on building leadership capacity, that is a product of nineteenth century school structures, and the governance of schooling and, in effect, Church control of 90 % of state funded primary schools. In a recent report on school governance and pluralism, it was reported that “52 % [of principals] felt that ‘it is no longer appropriate to have schools owned/managed denominationally’” but there was little sense of the extent to which current structures inhibit leadership capacity building although the IPPN did stress the “leadership role of the principal” (Coolahan et al. 2012, pp. 54 and 89). If leadership is to flourish, such structures need to be altered as a matter of considerable urgency. This necessity is reinforced by changing demographics regarding the feminisation of primary teaching, relatively recent by international comparison, and the consequent necessity to recognise this within career paths and trajectories.

Greater flexibility should not be seen as an end in itself, but an important opportunity to increase the pool of leadership talent. It is also necessary to recognise that the process of insisting that principals put a litre of leadership into a pint



container is an impossible task that retards both role re-definition on the part of principals as well as the building of leadership capacity. Systemic structures are part of the problem, thus successful succession planning requires their overhaul but in a coherent and integrated manner. If incremental change is no longer an adequate response to the current pace and extent of change, then cracking the policy whip to induce greater ‘performativity’ on the part of principals, is a most inadequate approach that actually depletes leadership capacity within the system.

While there was considerable consensus above regarding ‘growing into the role’ of school principal, such evidence also tended to emphasise just how inadequate it has become to largely ignore wider career structure within the teaching profession and somehow expect leaders to emerge at interview for principalship fully formed. In small systems that have also conspired to restrict mobility due to existing structures, there is major need to invest in the profession, in building leadership capacity that requires sustained financial commitment, and enlightened programmes that are fit for purpose. It is not simply a matter of ‘getting out at the right time’ but of asking if there is greater leadership capacity within the system as I depart, thus more secure in its ability to build a sustainable quality education for all; that would be an enduring legacy, one with “moral purpose” that “puts learning first”, the learning of leadership as well as that of learners (Hargreaves and Fink 2005, p. 266). It would also recognise that “sustainable leaders sustain others as they pursue their cause together” (Hargreaves and Fink 2005, p. 272). From a systemic perspective “stable and sustainable leadership builds “long-term professional capital across whole cohorts of teachers” creating communities of “trust with the teachers and schools they know well”, respecting them as “professionals and as people”(Hargreaves and Fullan 2012, p. 167). A very recent vision for education published by the National Parents’ Council echoes these initiatives when it states: “It is imperative that we put in place a school leadership programme” but it appears to ignore the necessity for structural changes that emerge from analysis here as being necessary in relation to the development, recruitment, retention and re-deployment of leadership talent (NPC 2013, p. 20).

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## Chapter 12

# School Leadership Unmasked: ‘Forming’ Leaders, Trans-forming Leadership?

### Introduction

There is no shortage of sage sayings regarding the nature and significance of leaders and leadership, many of which are borrowed from the mists of time, from Confucius to Aristotle, to twentieth century luminaries such as JFK and Martin Luther King Jr—dead white males as the accusation goes! While toying with the idea of using such pithy statements as a suitable means of beginning this concluding chapter, and simultaneously mindful of such contested terrain, I opted to stay close the informants that populate the preceding chapters. In making this choice, I have been conscious also of avoiding ‘leading minds’ (Gardner 1995), the contribution of ‘greatness’ to understandings of leadership, in favour of Zimbardo’s (2007) terms: ‘ordinary’ people doing extraordinary work.

Throughout this chapter, the term formation is used (as it is in the title) to indicate the changes that principals (and others) undergo in the course of their work. Formation is an ongoing, lifelong process that encompasses changes in outlook, values, capabilities, ideals, dispositions, and interpretations of experiences (see Sutphen and de Lange [in press](#)). Consequently, “formation is a concept that . . . best describes the ongoing change that individuals undergo when they enter and remain in professional practice” (Ibid. p. 4). It is ideally suited to the purposes of this concluding chapter. The overall focus is on those formative influences as evidenced by the precious chapters and the structural features of the system that either inhibit or enable the building and sustaining of leadership capacity. This approach gives prominence to the Irish case that it is anticipated will also speak to an international audience, especially to other similar sized jurisdictions. Discussion of these emergent ‘themes’ is done in an open-ended manner, conscious of an international audience, thus connections are made with international literature. This discussion accounts for approximately two-thirds of the chapter, while the remaining section builds on this by focusing more directly on what a programme

for leader formation for a transformative leadership might entail, that is grounded in the emergent themes while being connected with recent international literature on leadership formation.

Despite the commitment just given, it is difficult to do justice to the detailed evidence presented in the sequence of earlier chapters without running the considerable risk of over-simplification, of being accused of a reductionist perspective, rather than allowing the voices of principals to 'speak for themselves'. But if the former is potentially essentialist in some respects, it is naïve to consider that somehow the voices of participants jump from the page of their own volition. Thus, "the researcher cannot simply compile or aggregate the happenings, they must be drawn together into a systematic whole" and this is the task undertaken here (Polkinghorne 1995, p. 18). While as indicated in Chap. 1, such moves, carry inherent methodological risks, these are considered necessary, worth the risk, in order to move from "narratives of action to genealogies of context" thus the emphasis here is not only 'drawing together' and "understanding stories alongside their historical and cultural backgrounds" buta further distillation through such reconfigurations of what their tales entail regarding school leaders and leadership that gives voice in a general sense to the Irish 'case' for an international audience (Goodson 2013, pp. 5–6). In order to avoid either a reductionist approach or a prescriptive agenda in the final section, at the risk of being accused of being selective, I have opted for a more general discussion of connected concerns rather than 'findings', and simultaneously situate these nationally and internationally, thus also returning to the challenge in Chap. 2 of connecting macro, meso and micro elements of the leadership agenda in a layered manner; the emphasis is on lessons for leaders and leadership and their possible implications for leader formation. This is consistent with a recognition of the relationship between structure and agency, and the dynamics of power as they have played out over time in the Irish context (see Ball 1994). The emergent 'themes' are treated as a sequence of (seven) 'lessons from leaders'—with an appropriate sub-title for each, but they need to be understood as contributing to a more comprehensive mosaic on leadership. In order to avoid the use of too many sub-headings, thus suggesting a degree of fragmentation, those concerns that seem more intimately related that others are addressed under a particular lesson heading.

### ***Lesson One: Leaders, Cultures and Structures***

All of the participants in this study were 'in at the deep end' in the sense that they had no formal preparation for the onerous responsibilities of being principal. Although in more recent years efforts have been made to redress this major systemic failure, such initiatives are superimposed on structures that, as indicated clearly by the evidence, are anything but fit for purpose. While such structures remain intact,

leaders will be constrained in what they can achieve, while leadership capacity is seriously curtailed and compromised. There are several facets to this malaise, not all of which may be addressed here, but in highlighting those that appear most significant, it is hoped that these lessons will resonate with other contexts. In Chap. 2, the term tessellation was used in an effort to capture the manner in which the macro, meso and micro policy environment, rather like rock formation, become layered and compressed in particular ways thus the leadership formation that emerges from such plate tectonics is marked by a series of fissures, fault lines and tensions that render it at once stable and unstable. As the pace of change accelerates, and demands for reform through policy documents intensify, it is no longer sufficient to allow principals to make their own way in the world (Archer 2007). Rather, in order to develop leadership as a “successful social practice” it is necessary to recognise and identify the “constraints and enablements”, to understand the connections between leaders “themselves and . . . relevant structural or cultural properties” (Ibid., 9). In this particular instance, it is not merely lack of preparation for the role that emerges as a major constraint. Additionally, preparation without being embedded in a larger systemic effort to increase the leadership talent pool by creating appropriate career pathways and structures, such efforts are likely to fall short of what is necessary. In this regard, it is necessary to recognise that as a small system, mobility will continue to be problematic, but rather than lament this when compared with larger and more mobile systems, it is necessary to redress the concern by investing more in professional learning (and not less) as a productive means of addressing this systemic constraint.

In the absence of adequate preparation, principals are largely cautious and conservative both in their approach to colleagues, while being opportunist in seizing on emerging opportunities to move matters in a perceived desired direction, frequently in a chance, serendipitous manner though perhaps innovative in its own way, is hardly adequate. The evidence suggests that lack of understanding of leadership and its entailments, change processes, organisational capacity building, without intellectual tools that connect macro, meso and micro forces, principals are more likely to be pragmatic about change, to deal with it in a transactional manner that is as likely to limit as much as to build capacity, to perpetuate the status quo rather than transform it. And, yet, there is considerable evidence of principals and their colleagues absorbing change over time, but doing this in a rather mechanistic manner also inhibits their taking credit for having done that, thus soaking up such changes over time remains just the way things are now rather than being perceived as part of capacity building that needs to be understood in a more articulate proactive manner. Consequently, soaking up external demands may be understood by principals and their colleagues as oppressive when it could easily be construed as evidence of capacity to change. This suggests that building leadership capacity at a systemic level is about learning to understand change processes from an organisational and professional perspective.

## ***Lesson Two: Informal and Formal Learning, Mobility and Capacity Building***

The evidence indicates that in the absence of more formal preparation and support, there has been significant reliance on informal learning, often leaning on partners and significant others that also eats into personal and family time in a manner that distorts any semblance of work-life balance. Nevertheless, as intensification has become more acute with time, and external policy climate has become more demanding, care must be taken that a more formal approach to leadership formation, while badly needed, must not be allowed to colonise all of the spaces and places where leadership learning occurs. There will continue to be a place for the informal, and getting the balance right between both formal and informal is no easy task and will vary over time depending on the policy environment and the cultural realities of particular schools. From a structural perspective, there are several dimensions to this. First, since there is no release time for the vast majority of classroom teachers space and time for collaboration, for building leadership capacity, if they exist at all, are merely add-ons; borrowed time. There is need for a more fundamental review of the structure of the school day and year, staff-student ratios in terms of more flexible deployment so that leadership capacity building becomes part of the fabric of professional life, and not something episodic and haphazard.

Some evidence suggested that relatively informal networks, particularly those sponsored by IPPN, while valuable, have a propensity to become places for letting off steam rather than sites and sources of learning, while formal programmes are, thus far, the almost exclusive preserve of a selected group of principals. Attempting to build leadership capacity by being over-reliant on practitioners only is likely to privilege 'what works' rather than provide more intellectual challenge that confronts such orthodoxies while simultaneously providing food for the soul (Biesta 2007).

If in some jurisdictions a revolving door approach to principal recruitment and retention has been identified as problematic, evidence here is that appointments for life also create considerable concerns regarding the building of sustainable leadership capacity, exacerbated by the relative isolation of schools—with no intermediate structures between the ministry and schools' individual Boards of Management (BoM). When the processes and procedures regarding appointment to positions of middle-management are considered with a continuing emphasis on seniority (but restricted to an individual school), then there continues to be considerable constraints on rewarding as well as promoting the more talented and committed. Such considerations are part of the fabric of the system that clearly inhibit leadership capacity building. They contribute significantly also to role diffusion rather than re-definition and the identification of priorities as there is an over-reliance on good will, even in circumstances where individuals have designated responsibilities as assistant principals or as a special duties teachers. Although a more overt systemic requirement to have formal contracts regarding such responsibilities in more recent years has added an important dimension, changing the cultural mindset to that of collaborative and collective leadership responsibilities

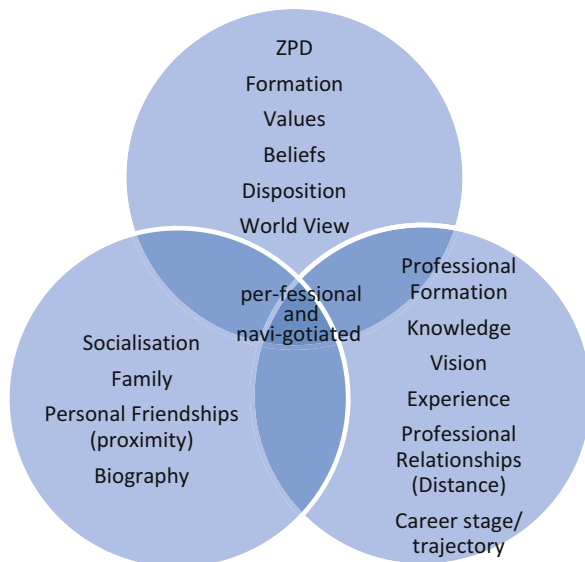
from a set of duties is a work in progress that actually underlines the necessity for leadership learning for all, and not just principals and deputies but the entire school community. Since the membership of BoMs is almost exclusively voluntary, except for the principal, depending on local circumstance, principals spend a significant amount of their time taking on responsibilities that are properly the domain of others. The combination of this reality and the pervasiveness of a 'post' mindset, and the ongoing reliance on goodwill facilitates role diffusion and justification for a lack of focus and priority.

### ***Lesson Three: Relationships, Capacity Building and the Zone of Proximal Distance (ZPD)***

Earlier chapters repeatedly attest to the privileging of personal relationships due to all of the constraining factors that have been identified above. Fundamentally, the lack of mobility coupled with being appointed to principalship for life, place a premium on personal friendships rather than professional relationships. In a system that continues to rely primarily on colleagues' good will such dynamics are understandable, if also constraining and increasingly inhibiting to the building of leadership capacity. While seeking to unravel this Gordian knot, I suggested that the term *per-fessional* in many respects captured the intimacy of the connection between the personal and the professional, but that this very intimacy is also a barrier to creating professional distance; building trust while also creating spaces and opportunities for more robust conversations that challenge without offence while allowing also for principled disagreement. In this context, the concept of a Zone of Proximal Distance was suggested.

The intimacy between the personal and the professional is frequently asserted in research literature (Day and Sachs 2004). However, in many instances, having made this assertion, it is frequently the case that the personal is parked, and focus thereafter is on the professional. Evidence in this study and elsewhere repeatedly attests that through ongoing interpersonal relationships trust is either built, enhanced and sustained, or undermined and depleted, consequently, getting a better sense of how this dynamic works in order to build leadership capacity is critically important.

In the first instance, Fig. 12.1 indicates the intimacy and inter-dependence between the personal and professional. In addition however, it also seeks to represent the mediating role of the Zone of Proximal Distance. As much of the evidence indicates in the foregoing chapters, when a premium is placed on friendships, due to lack of mobility and other structural constraints, this inhibits the development of professional relationships thus also the trust and robustness necessary for professional growth; communication is on safe topics to cement personal ties but largely do not intrude into the professional domain. Communication is largely confined to the left circle, leaving professional formation mostly undisturbed. However, if external pressures are intensified to a point where survival becomes



**Fig. 12.1** Zone of Proximal Distance (ZPD)

a major consideration, then in such circumstances it becomes more difficult if not impossible to find a degree of equilibrium between the personal sense of self and integrity, and the demands of the role and its responsibilities. When there is not sufficient time or space through the ZPD to process policy demands, their implications for self-efficacy, their consequences not just for practises and routines, but for professional integrity, there is a sundering between the personal and the professional when it is no longer possible to hold them in productive tension through the ZPD. In such circumstances, the focus shifts to the circle on the right and the ZPD finds it more difficult to make meaning for the personal (and professional) in such circumstances. In this manner also, it is possible to understand performativity as a similar sundering whereby the professional becomes technical and instrumental, no longer resonant with values and beliefs thus the personal becomes disconnected, when generative tension is no longer possible, thus a sense of professional responsibility is hollowed out, reduced to a measure of accountability, where over time meaningfulness gives way to meaninglessness. Thus, I am in agreement with the assertion that “the technical-managerial approach to accountability can in no way be reconciled with an approach in which responsibility is central” (Biesta 2010, p. 70). In such circumstances, as May (1996) suggests ‘legitimate compromise’ is no longer possible. As indicated in earlier chapters, this is not an argument that suggests permanent and immutable features of the ZPD. Rather, values, beliefs and disposition are in dynamic interplay as the engine room where personal and professional are continuously renewed, re-energised or not, while in the process of this dynamic, the general disposition and world view of the individual too is renewed or retarded.



Similarly, as the evidence indicated, there is need for both time and space to be in the zone, and in the Irish context, lack of time and space eschews the system in favour of personal friendships, thus limiting time for the cultivation of trust and professional relationships. It becomes clearer however, that it is necessary in and out of school and in considering the building of leadership capacity systemically that the personal and the professional need appropriate and sustained attention. This is not a panacea however, and though there is evidence that communities of practice and learning communities have potential to facilitate capacity building, evidence in earlier chapters also indicated that they can become safe havens for complaint in the face of increasing performativity policy demands rather than more robust places where learning is advanced and capacity enhanced.

### ***Lesson Four: Recruitment, Tenure, Mobility-Flexibility***

It may seem entirely contradictory to mention retirement in the context of appointing principals. However, the evidence presented in previous chapters suggests this as entirely appropriate. It is both contradictory and unacceptable, on the one hand, to articulate a policy rhetoric that indicates the crucially important role principal's play in leading schools, and, on the other hand, allow them to 'walk off the job' at any time during the school year, and replace them with individuals who have not served a leadership apprenticeship in any meaningful sense or had the benefit of systematic and sustained preparation for the role. However, insisting that they remain until the end of the school year (August 31st) does not appear to work either, since schools close for Summer vacation at the end of June, and the evidence suggests that the pattern is that de facto the principal is then retired, leaving the new appointee to pick up the pieces during vacation time. Whatever the historical provenance of such practises, they seem seriously misplaced in present or future appointment processes. There is a major need for a more defined transition or handover period. It should be possible to make succession appointments sufficiently in advance of retirement to facilitate adequate transitions.

Rendering this an integral and obligatory element of the process has considerable potential to enable the newly appointed principal to gain understanding of the school's history and leadership legacy, as well as insights into the middle management structures, existing roles and responsibilities and the quality of interpersonal relations, while reviewing also school policies and routines. If such periods of transition are to be practical, internally promoted teachers will have to be replaced in advance to free them up while likewise external appointees will require release from existing classroom duties. In either case, there are financial implications while taking cognisance of exemplary international practices regarding such matters would be of considerable assistance. However, these measures, while appearing practical and feasible, may amount to very little if the entire selection edifice continues to be the prerogative of individual school Boards of Management (BoM).

In an earlier chapter I suggested that becoming principal was rather like becoming a parent; nothing prepares you for the reality. Be that as it may, the evidence

overwhelmingly points to a degree of 'shock'—with the complexity, demands, isolation, visibility and vulnerability of the role, the burden of legacies, and the challenge of creating a positive progressive momentum that, once created, needs careful nurturing. Further down the leadership food chain however an unknown number of potential leaders are put off by a perceived lack of transparency regarding the selection process, described in one study as “traumatic, demanding and time consuming” (Gronn and Lacey 2004, pp. 415–416). There is a strong element of what Gronn and Lacey in the Australian context identify as ‘cloning their own’ in the Irish context due to the manner in which principals are selected (see also Mertkan and Sugrue 2014). Since the vast majority of schools are denominational, when it comes to selecting a new principal, the patron body (most typically the Catholic Church), has an ‘official’ list of personnel who are ‘sanctioned’ as suitable to sit on such interview boards. These individuals are most likely to be principals or recently retired principals whose primary loyalty is to protecting the religious ethos of schools. And, while within governance structures this priority may be legitimate, it creates the perception that the system is not transparent and that those with access to this favoured group have some advantage over those who do not belong or have access to such networks. While selection boards are most frequently anchored by the chairperson of the BoM, they may often be unduly influenced by these more ‘professional’ board members. In this regard it is worth noting that “there is no longer a requirement for the chairperson of the board of management to receive the prior sanction of the Minister for Education and Science [sic] for the appointment of the successful candidate before she/he is notified”, while by contrast with the lack of state involvement “the requirement to seek the prior approval of the patron still remains” (CPSMA 2007, p. 84).

Depending on the expertise of the board’s chairperson, knowledge of the school and education more generally, a significant influence on the outcomes may rest with the more ‘professionalised’ members of such interview boards.<sup>1</sup> Although some might suggest that such influence may mitigate possible inadequacies in the chair, it may frequently result in a mismatch between the successful candidate and the particular needs of the school. Given the complexity of the role, confining the selection process to an interview only without even requiring a presentation, seems significantly out of step with the challenging nature of the role, the responsibilities it entails, and the importance attached to it in policy rhetorics, and a denial of recent recognition that “positive, proactive leadership where the children’s rights are the priority concern” needs to hold sway (Coolahan et al. 2012, p. 75). However, such practise confirms other evidence that church ‘control’ rather than exercise of responsibility has been a major continuity in the system (see Gleeson 2010).

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<sup>1</sup>Participation in such selection process can also be quite lucrative while fees vary from one school context to another. Generally there is a sliding scale that runs from €250 per day and upwards. When middle management structures were introduced in a more formal manner in the noughties, and the number of such positions increased considerably, for those who became part of this interview circuit, it has proved rather lucrative, not to mention the possibility of being tax free!

## ***Lesson Five: Leadership Professional Portfolio Development***

To a large extent in the setting, the system shifted from ‘heroic’ leadership to a rhetoric of distributed leadership almost overnight whereas in other jurisdictions greater effort had been invested in promoting collaboration and teacher leadership in a manner that may be regarded as bridging the gap between the solo performer and a more collectivist sense of the leadership enterprise (Sugrue 2003, 2009). Thus from an international perspective, promotion of teacher collaboration and teacher leadership created the pre-conditions for a more distributed perspective on leadership to take hold. By contrast in the Irish context, where there are no specialist subject teachers in primary schools, it is more difficult for colleagues with particular talent and expertise in a discipline to take a lead as collegiality decrees that all are equal. However, with the advent of a 4 year Bachelor of Education programme, some specialisation will be possible at undergraduate level, thus contributing to the breaking of another systemic taboo.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, some international evidence points to parallels between transforming classroom pedagogies and leading the transformation of school culture. In both instances, “simplicity” flatters to deceive (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012, p. 154). Since the devil is in the detail across systems, unravelling the Gordian knot further is necessary in order to move beyond tinkering towards transformation (Tyack and Cuban 1995).

Throughout the various shifts from the more heroic ‘go it alone’ leadership paradigm as suggested above, a more grassroots movement of ‘apprenticeship’, of building leadership capacity from the ground up in many respects forms a confluence with the emergence of a distributed perspective, born in part at least out of increasing complexity and necessity. The evidence presented earlier is indicative of a more stable and predictable time where principals managed and senior colleagues (post holders) had assigned duties. Despite an increase in the number of posts (though embargoed in recent years), approximately 50 % of teachers had some additional responsibilities as members of middle-management. The evidence also indicated that in many instances, the culture of ‘posts’ has persisted while in other schools, considerable effort has been invested to create a leadership team approach. And, tentative though the evidence is, such situations appear to have made progress in moving beyond the balkanised disposition of a ‘post’ culture with positive consequences for school climate and capacity to lead schools in desired directions. While Spillane and others may legitimately assert that distributed leadership is a practice, no more and no less, it is also a mindset,

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<sup>2</sup>A 4 year Bachelor of Education (BEd) programme, replacing a 3-year BEd that commenced in 1974, enrolled students in September 2013. These extended degree programmes make provision for some specialisation. However, it will continue to be the case that all primary teachers are qualified to teach all areas of the curriculum from age 4–12, thus ‘specialisation’ will continue to be an option to be pursued within school communities rather than employing specialist subject teachers, while this development holds out some prospect of capacity building within schools as learning communities.

a disposition that legitimates and encourages leadership as a collective endeavour rather than delegated tasks. Consequently, the process of transformation with regard to the creation of middle-management in schools has a somewhat paradoxical impact. In order to share the burdens of leadership, a hierarchy is created with potential to exclude as well as create a team dynamic. However, in the absence of a shared sense of what leadership entails, then the legacy of a post mindset continues to constrain the possibilities that a more distributed perspective intimate as possibilities.

Breaking the mould of a 'duties' mindset as preparatory to the cultivation of a distributed leadership disposition is gradual but also needs to be deliberate and self-conscious. This too paves the way for the accumulation of a leadership portfolio that is much more about opportunity and the cultivation of expertise rather than the more limited completion of particular tasks. In particular, it is the cultivation of a world view that recognises that leadership is a shared responsibility; it is to understand—that the world is not neatly divided into leaders and followers, but that by everyone contributing, leadership is shared, and leadership capacity is enhanced, individually and collectively. In this regard, in the converging rush internationally to focus on more robust and purposeful leadership preparation and support programmes, the warning that this is unlikely to be successful if middle leadership, in its various guises, is neglected is particularly timely. Instead, "there is a growing body of evidence on the potential for the middle tier both to support and drive, and in other cases, to hinder and obstruct improvement in schools and learning" (Barber et al. 2012, p. 23). Perhaps if the finances currently frozed due to the ongoing embargo on the filling of middle-management positions were to be used to create more flexible staffing and release time, rather than rewarding individuals, it would be an important means of altering existing structures while contributing to breaking the mould regarding the 'post' mindset.

From a macro perspective, transforming conceptions of leadership and its various practices include some tensions if not contradictions. As part of the process of international influences on national policies, and the leadership of individual school communities, devolution of responsibility and decision-making to the level of the school has become a policy orthodoxy (Coghlan and Desurmont 2007; Whitty 2008). There is increasing evidence however, more pronounced in some jurisdictions than others, that a rhetoric of devolution, constrained by intensifying externally imposed accountability measures, significantly retract the relative autonomy and discretionary judgment just granted. Such policy duplicity suggests that compliance and coercive management rather than leadership is what systems demand of school 'leaders'; the bouncers of the education system. In such circumstances, a differentiated career structure, deemed necessary to distribute the responsibilities of leadership within the school community as well as build capacity, suggests a professional portfolio that accumulates a variety of leadership experience. However, there is considerable risk that such an approach in a climate of accountability rewards compliance as much as it may be intended to deepen a leadership talent pool and cultivate leadership capacity. Consequently, the clarion call of 'where have all the leaders gone' may invoke the response that they have

become managers (Iacocca 2008). Such exhortations to have more and better leaders may be a bridge too far in a climate where increasingly managerialist accountability policies prevail (Green 2011). These considerations and tension do not negate the necessity for a more elaborate articulation of what leadership apprenticeship may entail from a systemic perspective. Rather, they suggest a cautionary tale that fast-track approaches to leadership may result in greater orthodoxy and conformity; a management mindset rather than a leadership disposition.

### ***Lesson Six: Leader for How Long?***

There was general agreement among the participants in this study that appointment to the post of principal should not be for life. However, as one informant in particular intimated, pension entitlements and associated benefits have been such that they act as an incentive not to ‘bow out’, to ‘stay the course’ to maximise financial gain on retirement. This is now changed since for new entrants to the profession pensions will be calculated on the basis of average lifetime earnings rather than the aggregate of salary during the 3 years prior to retirement. Needless to say, it will take some time for this procedure to have real impact on principalship, particularly as regards the duration of the appointment. However, such evidence serves to underline the significance of structures and how they facilitate or constrain the building of leadership capacity.

The system has been slow to address the financial aspects of principalship and its longer term consequences, and perhaps principals themselves have been complicit in this. Nevertheless, it has allowed those who ‘act’ as principal, deputy or ‘post’ holder for a period of 5 years or more, to retain the allowance for the remainder of their careers having stepped down.<sup>3</sup> Testimony in the previous chapter indicates clearly that as principalship becomes more feminised, demands for a step down facility will intensify while a cultural shift will also be required whereby such career moves will become the norm rather than a perceived ‘failure’—a typical attribution being ‘couldn’t hack it’. It is both more honourable and professionally responsible to resign and return to a classroom if the individual concerned determines that the position of principal is a role that no longer provides adequate job satisfaction, a challenge they could do without or no longer feel they possess the necessary energy and vision to lead the school community. The potential influences of such structural changes should not be underestimated as part of a wider and ongoing process of reforming leaders and leadership. If we perpetuate versions of heroic leadership then the myth is promulgated that there is only one leader in a school community. A more distributed leadership disposition has the potential therefore to both build leadership capacity within the school community as a whole, while simultaneously increasing

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<sup>3</sup>This facility was first indicated in circular 22/99 and subsequently rearticulated with some amendments in circular 07/03, section 12 ([http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/pc07\\_03.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/pc07_03.pdf)).

the leadership talent pool, and perhaps also taking care of succession—either within that school community or in another. Such evidence points to the necessity to alter existing structures in order for leadership to flourish.

Significantly, in the Irish context, there is nowhere for principals to go other than back to a classroom<sup>4</sup> since there are no intermediate structures between individual schools and the DES, and principals and teachers are employed by individual school BoMs. These are major systemic constraints on the development of leadership capacity. A limited period of appointment to principalship would of itself create a more mobile leadership cadre, as well as move away from a mindset of 'life-long leadership' of schools thus also lifting a ceiling on leadership capacity and ambition. In a small system that lacks mobility, the impact of such modest measures should not be underestimated. There is little purpose in building leadership capacity and density if it is to be frustrated by lack of opportunity and mobility. It continues to be the case also that a 'post of responsibility' mindset, largely operated on the basis of seniority and confined to competition within individual school communities, is a further constraint on mobility even when argued that it does create a career structure, offer the prospect of promotion, it also serves to stymie mobility since moving school results in loss of seniority unless one is promoted to principalship. But there is increasing evidence also that in the absence of a more adequate step down facility, principalship has potential to be a cul de sac, for the individuals concerned, while inadequate leadership tends to discourage others from taking on the challenge. Such constraints suggest that the positions of deputy and Assistant principal should be publicly advertised rather than being confined to internal candidates only. Although such a significant structural change would have important ramifications, it would increase mobility considerably, encourage talent development and professional portfolio development with potential to reward rather than frustrate leadership capacity.

Such considerations are at a far remove from revolving door experiences of urban schools in particular in the US, yet in contemplating these structural changes, the necessity for a degree of predictability, continuity, and relationships of trust that take time to cultivate also need to be considered. Continuing to appoint principals into nineteenth century structures and procedures is a recipe for perpetuating outdated leadership practices, while continuing to frustrate the more systematic building of leadership capacity (Spillane and Lee 2013). Although this may be neither a 'crisis' nor a 'tipping point' it is a seminal moment where setting a new direction for leadership and its development become a vital necessity rather than an option (Harris 2008).

In the absence of a carefully choreographed leadership portfolio development over time, participants in this study overwhelmingly found themselves catapulted

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<sup>4</sup>However, this too is problematic since returning to a classroom in the school where you are principal requires a vacancy in order to accommodate this. The only alternative is to apply for a classroom post in another school which also means losing seniority, while principals will have a tendency to avoid such appointments as they are likely to be resistant to having a former principal looking over their shoulder.

into the spotlight, shocked by the ensuing visibility, vulnerability and, while seeking to build bridges, the tide of tradition flowing towards them, entering every pore, has potential to engulf, or at a minimum to subdue initial good intentions and (naïve) enthusiasm. Caution, threading water, getting to grips with the sheer complexity of the role and the immediacy of demands pushes back against the sense of being the new broom. Instead, there is a concerted effort to find and cultivate allies. Each in their own way, had to find their own way, to create their own leadership script. Some were fortunate in being able to make appointments, and thus also cultivate new allies, while others, in more recent years, seized the opportunities presented by the creation of additional middle-management positions to build bridge-heads of initiative, while simultaneously seeking to advance their own and the collective leadership capital of the school community. Such efforts, in such circumstances, in making a ‘successful’ transition strongly suggest that frequently transformation is postponed.

Not surprisingly, the evidence is largely silent around issues of vision and values; what school communities stand for, a major consequence of lack of more formal preparation and leadership apprenticeship, while this intellectual ‘gap’ may also be traced to governance structures; a monopoly by the Catholic church that, until largely took for granted issues around shared values and disposition. Nevertheless, there was limited evidence of increasing capacity among more recently appointed principals who appeared to isolate elements of school culture on which to build, thus elements of vision as well as conceptualisations of leadership emerge as significant. In this respect, their leadership trajectories stand out from most of the other participants, suggesting that there is a need for a more encompassing apprenticeship leadership trajectory; a recognition that some ‘formation’ experiences are more valuable and appropriate than others, and certainly not left to chance. Nevertheless, as Cocklin and Wilkinson point out it may also be the case that in high performing schools with a strong leadership legacy, such transitions succeed since they focus on “strengths, continuity and change as a growth” (Cocklin and Wilkinson 2011, p. 672); that through the ZPD it is possible to transform millstones into milestones that provide stepping stones as well as point the way towards transformation. And yet, it is important too to recognise that “considering how little we know, the confidence we have in our beliefs is preposterous—and it is also essential” (Kahneman 2011, p. 209). Kahneman’s cautionary tale is that “stories of success and failure consistently exaggerate the impact of leadership style and management practise” and this is the private sector! (p. 206).

### ***Lesson Seven: Leadership, Accountability and Professional Responsibility***

In a system where there continues to be a largely often unspoken preference for principal as *primus inter pares*, despite a more accountability oriented policy

landscape, there is an overwhelming reliance on the exercise of soft power through an appeal to good will and a sense of professional responsibility that are increasingly pressed by external policy demands for more responsive and proactive leadership. Such pressures tip over into performativity in more recent times as elements of new public management become more pervasive—more demands for paperwork, the publication of WSE reports and expectations from a more educated parent population that expects regular communication from schools and principals in particular. Principals, as gatekeepers, find themselves increasingly as boundary spanners—scanning external horizons for new policy initiatives and parental expectations while seeking simultaneously to mediate, mitigate and mine such demands for new directions when interacting with colleagues and learners. In this perpetual and intensifying tension there is a delicate balancing act to be achieved within ZPD. Such tensions may “demonstrate impressive dedication but . . . at an enormous cost because it leaves no time to address the bigger picture” (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009, p. 74).

In the recent McKinsey report, 80 % of high performing principals surveyed in England indicated that current accountability regimes were a disincentive for them to consider the position of school leadership whereas in other jurisdictions such as Alberta (44 %) and Ontario (47 %), the percentages were considerably lower. If there was anything that united the informants in this study it was their concern with regard to a policy shift whereby they would be obliged to observe their teaching colleagues, and provide feedback on their colleagues' effectiveness as classroom practitioners. From a legislative perspective, it may be inferred, rather than stated explicitly, that this is a responsibility that is already inscribed in the role when it states: “the principal shall have responsibility, in accordance with the Act, for the instruction provided to students in the school and shall contribute, generally, to the education and personal development of students in the school” (Pt V, Section 22 (1)). And while this responsibility extends to “regularly evaluate students” it is less clear that this responsibility extends to the work of teachers. As the external policy environment has become more imbued with aspects of NPM, this responsibility is increasingly becoming unavoidable, even if there is significant resistance to it. In this regard, guidelines regarding School Self-Evaluation while making (limited) provision for peer observation, do not give much prominence to the importance of it as part of the process of a more collaborative school culture or its potential for leadership capacity building. However, this may be a learned behaviour as part of a Trojan horse approach to policy shifts on the part of the Inspectorate as policy-maker. In the first instance, put it out there in a low key manner and subsequently seek evidence of its implementation at a local level. This is further evidence at a systemic level of reform by stealth that has the unfortunate consequence of leading to enormous variation regarding practice at the level of the school. Such an approach usually leads to an underwhelming impact on ‘transforming teaching in every school’ (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). Nevertheless, evidence from other jurisdictions points to the potential of SSE to enable principals and teachers to reclaim a degree of professional discretion lost to NPM, while demonstrating also in the process that they are capable of taking greater responsibility for their own



learning while simultaneously building leadership capacity within their respective schools, communities and networks. However, its promotion by inspectorates has potential also to have it perceived as a form of rehearsal for inspection (MacBeath et al. 2000; Rudd and Davies 2000).

## **Lessons from Leaders: An Agenda for Trans-formative Leadership Learning?**

When Sahlberg sought to identify ‘Finish Lessons’ for the rest of the world, he indicated that in the 1970s the Finnish education system was ‘mediocre’ and ‘elitist’ and that it took three decades to transform it into a consistently high performing PISA country; the envy of many (Sahlberg 2011). Despite Finland’s recent decline in world rankings, Sahlberg remains convinced that ‘market-based’ educational reforms are not the answer (Sahlberg 2013). Nevertheless, few would now suggest that any system can afford the luxury of three decades to effect reform since the pace of change intimates that falling behind has serious economic, social and cultural consequences, even if one disagrees with the myth of continuous improvement and readily recognises that the unevenness of the playing field has seriously tilted the ‘spirit level’ in a manner that confers considerable advantage on some much more than others (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). From other parts of the globe also, there is an emerging consensus about the necessity for systematic attention to the identification of and attention to the fostering of leadership talent, with general agreement also as to what counts as success in this regard. Perhaps the focus should be on sustained and systematic CPD for all teachers that includes attention to leadership to avoid the possibility of creating elite groups with potential to become divorced from their professional peers, a kind of Green Berets of the educational system. While some Finnish voices disagree with aspects of the narrative that Sahlberg has constructed, there is little disagreement that “there are no formal teacher evaluation measures in Finland” (Sahlberg 2011, p. 99). In such circumstances, a premium is placed on CPD, whereas much of the more critical literature internationally identifies the coercive force of technologies of control and their often reductionist impact of the quality of teaching learning and leading in schools. What of these caveats?

Transforming leadership is definitely a work in progress, and how leaders are ‘formed’ has symbiotic connections to it. Thus, if there is a reductionist approach that narrowly focuses on teaching and learning in performative, test-oriented regimes, it is legitimate to consider the longer-term consequences of a preoccupation with ‘what works’ (Biesta 2007, 2010). For example, Gunter and Thomson (2009) argue that “current leadership development is a form of make-over with direct expert control exercised through leadership development to effect permanent changes to the minds and bodies of leaders and through them, their schools”(p. 471). If such is the case, then not all leadership development programmes may be moreperformative than formative in a professionally responsible sense. Instead, as these

authors argue, “what occurs via leadership training is the production of a conformist, and relatively uniform leadership”, with the possibility that, depending on the ‘success’ of the make-over, it may be the case that in the English context “this might preclude ways of being and practising being a leader that may in turn lead to more inclusive and just schooling” (p. 479). Evidence presented through the preceding chapters and synthesised above, points repeatedly to the indispensable importance of informal learning as a significant contribution to formation. The inadequate approach to leadership formation that currently exists in the Irish context, may indeed be in need of a make-over, but *caveat emptor* may be a timely and apposite warning. Nevertheless, within this emerging orthodoxy and the recognition that there is no holy grail, according to some: “It is now accepted that you can neither discuss successful leadership without reference to leader development, or leader development without reference to what we know about why and how leadership works best” (Walker and Hallinger 2013, p. 401). Yet, there is simultaneous need to acknowledge and respect the view that “there is a real need to widen the scope of our thinking about the relation between research, policy, and practice, so as to make sure that the discussion is no longer restricted to finding the most effective ways to achieve certain ends but also addresses questions about the desirability of the ends themselves” (Biesta 2007, p. 21). Leadership preparation is no exception.

### ***Forming Leaders: Transforming Leadership?***

Even if consensus has not been achieved on what leadership preparation entails, the following appears to find increasing approbation: “The job used to be bells, buildings, budget, buses; now the pendulum has swung to instructional leadership” even if such assertions are circumscribed by the view that “nobody knows how to ensure we develop and select the best” (Barber et al. 2012, pp. 5–6). Evidence in earlier chapters also indicate that the ‘B’s’ have not gone away. Rather, they continue to require attention in addition to chasing resources to vindicate student’s entitlements due to promotion of policies of inclusion, while being continuously frustrated by the lack of time and sometimes capacity to focus more on teaching, learning and leading. Exhortation alone cannot will instructional leadership without attention to resources and leadership capacity issues. Nevertheless, in seeking to find consensus, it is encouraging that there is recognition also of “contextual differences between systems, and that what works in one system may not work in another” (Barber et al. 2012, p. 3), or as other commentators suggest “leadership programmes seem to be inextricably intertwined with local needs or local leadership cultures” (Walker et al. 2013, p. 401). There is need for national and regional policies to be informed by emerging international trends while retaining ownership of and responsibility for the devising of tailored programmes that seek to build sustainable capacity, while the foregoing underlines the necessity for changes to structures and processes if tinkering is to be avoided and transformation promoted.

Recent comprehensive reviews of international trends, have sought to build on earlier work by Leithwood and Levin (2008), Huber (2004) and others. A comprehensive review is beyond the scope of the remainder of this chapter, while in broad terms there is recognition of the necessity for a much more systematic approach to leadership than heretofore, with commonalities and differences emerging. Barber and colleagues undertook a systematic analysis of eight selected systems, while more recently other researchers isolated five of the highest performing regions as measured by PISA and examined their leadership programmes in detail (Barber et al. 2012; Walker et al. 2013).<sup>5</sup> Both analyses include many of the features identified in this chapter. What they add to previous attempts to map the leadership terrain is a degree of synthesis and coherence, something both studies clearly identify as a vital necessity if leadership is to be given the systemic commitment that is warranted by an accumulation of evidence.

Consistent with the views expressed by one of my informants, it is not necessary to burn the midnight oil continuously to be a successful principal. Rather, “they work the same hours as other principals, but spend more time working with the people in their school. They walk the halls more, spend more time coaching teachers, interact more often with parents and external administrators, and spend more time with students” but such highly interactive engagement only works in tandem with “setting vision and direction, supporting the development of staff, and ensuring effective management systems and processes” (Barber et al. 2012, p. 7). Coaching colleagues and working with students in a systematic and sustained manner emerges as something that awaits more direct attention in the Irish context while the cultures and structures that prevent such collaborative endeavours needs to be addressed.

These studies reveal that there is need for a comprehensive *framework* within which leadership is conceived that includes a systematic review of international literature, tailored to the system’s needs. Such programmes also typically involve partnerships between universities, the profession, and other providers that seek to create appropriate synergies between research and practice in innovative and creative ways. Integral to such an approach is a placement, usually under supervision or mentoring so that leadership capability is already developed and enhanced in advance of appointment rather than being exclusively dependent on ‘learning on the job’. Additionally, programme content may be tailored to particular needs such as inner-city schools in New York rather than making generic provision for all. The Melbourne programme is distinct from other preparation due to its emphasis on the school leaders as a researcher, particularly through action research and a strong academic orientation (see Walker et al. 2013, p. 413). While frameworks are typically informed by legislative and policy priorities in the jurisdiction, they also bear the distinct imprint of the providers. Consequently, the avoidance of

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<sup>5</sup>The contexts in which Barber et al. (2012) undertook their analysis of leadership preparation programmes include—Alberta, England, Netherlands, New York, New Zealand, Ontario, Singapore and Victoria, while the analysis completed by Walker et al. (2013) overlaps considerably and includes: Ontario, Victoria, Singapore, Hong Kong and New York City.

monopoly, thus providing more heterogeneous pathways to leadership perhaps with accreditation of programmes a requirement may be a healthier approach than 'national' programmes with a tendency towards one fit for all (Gunter 2008; Gunter and Thomson 2009).

The content of these analysed programmes focuses on leadership rather than doing the principalship thus in addition to learners' and community needs, there is emphasis on professional and academic content, and not merely a 'what works' agenda, which tends more to be the case in the Irish context as much of the provision is provided by principal practitioners ([www.lds21.ie](http://www.lds21.ie)). Nevertheless, there is an identifiable trend towards greater prominence being accorded the role of principal practitioners in such preparation programmes (see Walker et al. 2013). Where this works best, all partners are involved in the planning of programmes, thus there is shared ownership and commitment to its content and processes.

The operational features of these programmes typically include—entry requirements, while increasingly there is an emphasis on keeping recruitment broadly based to attract as many potential leaders as possible rather than narrowing the base of selection—to broaden rather than restrict the pool of talent. Programmes typically lead to formal awards or license, while in some jurisdictions they count as credit towards a higher degree. Where there is emphasis on broadening the leadership talent pool, such programmes are typically part-time to maximise accessibility. Consistent with early identification of leadership potential among teachers, other features of the research speak to the evidence in earlier chapters. For example, being deputy prior to appointment as principal is perceived by principals as a significant advantage, and relying solely on interview for selection is inadequate and outdated. Rather, "several education systems are reducing the weight given to interviews and tests during the selection process, and increasing the emphasis on long-term assessments of leadership skills and potential" (Barber et al. 2012, p. 13). These programmes are also characterised by a degree of intensity and engagement over time. For example, the New York programme extends over a period of 14 months that includes a 6 week intensive during Summer vacation, while other programmes extend from periods of 6 months to 2 years (see Walker et al. 2013; Barber et al. 2012). These programmes typically include placements and mentoring that can extend for up to 2 years and beyond initial appointment. Such comprehensive programmes also make provision for ongoing and systematic evaluation. Funding varies from one programme to the next, but what is clearly evident is that increasingly those who demonstrate a commitment to building leadership capacity, devote time, considerable coordinated effort and resources that move well beyond a rhetorical recognition of leadership's importance to the future of schooling. These efforts too are work in progress, and demonstrate a clear commitment and priority, even if there is need for ongoing vigilance to prevent leadership being reduced to a set of managerial tasks. Leadership, for all its confusions, contradictions, and falterings cannot be improved without it. While such evidence sound the death knell of a natural selection approach to building sustainable leadership capacity, it indicates also that within national borders, while

being informed by international trends, there is an onus on all concerned to create leadership for all programmes (plural) that is fit for purpose, while avoiding the seduction of performative leadership scripts.

The life history approach adopted throughout this manuscript gives voice to the many faces of leadership as it has evolved over time. In doing so, my conviction that these ‘real life’ accounts of doing leadership illuminates past and present in a manner that facilitates constructing the future. The emerging mosaic of leadership will have served its purpose if others take up the insights and understandings gained and interweave them into their ongoing re-formation of their leadership praxis—the collective engagements with, and contribution to, the long walk from school principal to principled school leaders and leadership with transformative potential, intent and praxis.

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## Appendix: Participants: Biographical Sketches

Participants are divided into three categories: recent, experienced and veterans. In the first category, individuals who were in the first 5 years of principalship were selected, with those having less than 3 years in role preferred. Those who were categorised as experienced had more than 6 but less than 14, while the veterans had accumulated at least 15 years, and in most instances more than 20 in the principal's office. A new cohort of recent appointees was added to the original 12 giving a total of 16. In the first round of interviews conducted in 1999–2000, each individual was interviewed three times, the third interview being largely a thematic interview to develop cross national comparisons (see Sugrue 2005). Almost a decade later, all of these participants were re-interviewed at length. These interviews were preceded by a re-reading of the earlier transcripts so that issues and considerations could be revisited—thus continuities and discontinuities were being built into the narratives being provided. The additional cohort of recent appointees were identified with the assistance of members of Leadership Development of Schools, the Irish government sponsored professional development for principals. At the turn of the century this was a very new initiative, consistent with international policy trends to provide systematic professional support for leadership development. However, in the Irish context at that time, programmes were still focused on those who had been appointed rather than preparation for the role of principal in advance of being a role incumbent. (A suite of programmes have been developed subsequently, see <http://lds21.ie>). However, since those who provide these valuable programmes are a combination of full-time seconded principals and deputies, as well as being augmented by some release time for part-time contributions, there are no permanent dedicated staff. In the current economic climate all such services, that extend across the primary and secondary support services are extremely vulnerable to harsh economic realities and there is evidence of significant retrenchment. Elsewhere I have been critical of these 'canvas' creations for a variety of reasons (Sugrue 2009).

## *Veterans*

**Jack** grew up in a working class suburb of Dublin, and attended the local Christian Brothers Secondary school. In his early teens he joined the religious order. He was altruistically motivated and imbued with vocational understandings of teaching and though he left the religious life at the age of 21, his commitment to ‘making a difference’ was something that sustained him throughout his career. In fact a leitmotif of his work and life has been: ‘if I can do it, so can they’, the learners in his school. He spent some years in the 1970 as deputy principal of an all boys inner city primary school, and in his early 30s was appointed to a ‘green field site’ in a new working class suburb. Another abiding interest of Jack’s is music, thus throughout his career he took an active interest in school choirs and in preparing them for performance in the local church particularly for sacramental ceremonies.<sup>1</sup> He spent the next 28 years at the helm, before taking ‘early’ retirement in 2007.<sup>2</sup> Like many primary teachers of this vintage, whose initial preparation was a Diploma programme of 2 years duration, he subsequently completed a BA as a part-time student and in the Autumn of his career completed a Masters in Education (MEd).

**Fred** comes from a farming background in the midlands, and began his teaching career in a large all boys school in Dublin in 1970, and, like Jack, completed a degree at night, and subsequently, having spent some time in a Developing country (while on a career break from his position), completed a Masters in Development Studies. Just as he was settling into his new career, and enjoying the city’s ‘bright lights’, destiny called—the local Parish Priest, manager of the two-teacher school in his home parish, approached Fred’s mother asking if he would be interested in the position. Further pressure was brought to bear on the youthful Fred by indicating that the Department of Education would close the school if a principal could not be found. Having taken advice, he took the plunge, and until 2010 he remained as a (teaching) principal of the school. In recent years, he enjoyed the relative luxury of being an administrative principal, but remained close to teaching, while throughout his career he continued to be a community leader, harnessing parental support for a variety of school-community development initiatives. Apart from family commitments, his background and interest in farming has resulted in a very busy and fulfilled life both in and out of school.

**Alison** grew up in a village some distance from Dublin city centre, and attended her local national school and since she ‘always wanted to be a teacher’, she ended up

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<sup>1</sup>An important element of the school calendar is First Communions and Confirmations, and there is a particularly strong tradition in Dublin working class communities of the entire family turning out in ‘style’ on such occasions.

<sup>2</sup>Primary teachers in the Irish context may retire after 35 years service at age 55. In recent years, relatively few are remaining in post until the age of retirement at 65. For those now entering the profession, it will no longer be possible to receive a pension before the age of 65, and consistent with international trends, this age is likely to be raised, and there are already moves in that direction.



teaching in the school she attended as a child. In early career, and pregnant for the first time (a reality kept hidden from the manager Priest), the principalship became vacant, the manager, knowing her family and ‘capital’ was keen to appoint her. Confident and authoritative, she was reforming when many of her colleagues saw it as neither popular nor profitable. Like the other veterans, Alison too completed a BA as a part-time student, and subsequently completed a Masters. She has subsequently undertaken part-time postgraduate teaching in one of Dublin’s universities, and she was active in various attempts to create a principals’ association, when the primary teachers’ union was quite hostile to such efforts. In recent years she has been on secondment from her principal’s role, but confidentiality precludes provision of additional detail.

**Jim** grew up in a rural community in the West of Ireland.<sup>3</sup> He began his teaching career in Dublin in 1971. Having taught in a very large school, he spread his wings somewhat and took a position in an Irish language medium school.<sup>4</sup> Like the others of his cohort, he completed a BA part-time while in the city. However, after suffering a personal tragedy, he sought pastures new, and gravitated towards his native heath, where he became principal of a 3–4 teacher school close to the school he had attended. Since he has continued to be a teaching principal throughout his career, his primary identity is as classroom teacher, and he sees many recent policy demands as secondary to this reality. In more recent years, he completed a Masters in ICT and has deployed this expertise and enthusiasm to good effect within his own classroom. Jim retired in August 2014.

## *Experienced*

**Michelle** grew up in a provincial town, one of seven children, all of whom attended higher education. Through personal experience she was very aware of special needs and the significance of inclusion. As a student teacher in Dublin, she was active

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<sup>3</sup>The vast majority of primary teachers during this era came from the counties along the western seaboard. This was, in part, a consequence of the privileging of the Irish language, strongest in these geographical areas, as well as the existence of ‘preparatory colleges’—secondary schools that were language immersion schools and that guaranteed those who gained entry through competitive examination, a place in teacher training college (see Jones, V. (2006). *A Gaelic Experiment The Preparatory System 1926–1961 and Coláiste Moibhí*. Dublin: The Woodfield Press). This educational conduit was an important means of social mobility, particularly for those who could not afford to attend university, since it was possible to have the State pay the necessary tuition fee in the colleges and to repay it during the first years in teaching.

<sup>4</sup>It is compulsory for all children to learn the official first language (Irish) of the State throughout the period of compulsory schooling. In the early 1970s, as part of international civil rights movement, as well as increasing urbanisation in Ireland, more Irish language medium schools were being opened. Today, there are approximately 150 such schools at primary level, both north and south of the border.

in student politics and learned at first hand the significance and possibilities to be realised through campaigning. So much so, her tenure as principals could be legitimately categorised as a series of campaigns. The first of these, after she became principal of the Junior school (4–8 year olds) where on the same campus she had taught in the senior school, was to gain ‘disadvantaged’ status for the school, something that had been resisted by her predecessor. Thereafter, there were similar campaigns for additional resources, staffing etc. While juggling work and family life, she frequently bought a book when a particular issue presented itself, and sought out courses and principals’ support groups both for community and learning. She too completed a Masters in education, worked also with LDS and continues to ambition completion of doctoral studies.

**Connor** grew up and completed his formal schooling in a provincial town in the west of Ireland. He began his teaching career in the early 1970s in the midlands and since he was teaching in a Christian Brother’s school, where they were obliged to appoint a lay vice-principal, at an early career stage he became deputy, but the order was happy not to burden him with responsibilities! In effect he took a demotion in order to return to his native heath, and in subsequent years when the principalship of one of the town schools in which he was teaching became vacant, he was offered the position in competition with a number of other colleagues who had a pact beforehand that each would support whoever the successful candidate might be. Particularly conscious of the lack of systems on the part of his predecessor, Connor set about putting structures and procedures in place, a considerable strength of his stewardship while particularly committed to maintenance of the school environment etc. When the opportunity to complete a BEd (part-time) became available in the mid 1980s, he availed of the opportunity and completed with honours. Since the most recent interview was completed, Connor has sought the calmer waters of retirement and has several golf courses within striking distance to improve his handicap!

**Maggie** grew up in a small midland town where her mother taught in the local school until the marriage ban put an end to her teaching career.<sup>5</sup> Having graduated with a Froebel Diploma, Maggie taught in a variety of schools in the midlands while balancing a career with family commitments. When the opportunity presented itself to complete a BEd on a part-time basis, she relished the opportunity and this enabled her to pursue her academic interests as well as further her career. She was particularly proud when appointed as principal to the very school where her mother had taught and stayed at the helm when the two schools were amalgamated (boys and girls). She completed a decade as principal. When I returned to interview Maggie in more recent years, she had moved on in her career and was then working in the University milieu, and she has also completed a PhD.

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<sup>5</sup>The Irish government prohibited married women from being members of the public service between 1934 and 1959.

**Eddie** was the only one of the twelve principals interviewed in 1999–2000 who had been principal in more than one school. He began his teaching career in the 1980s in a tough school in an industrial town, where he felt strongly that more leadership would have helped. Consequently, when the position became vacant, though he did not expect to secure the position, he applied, thus making a significant statement about where he saw his future. Unsuccessful, but having had his appetite whetted, he secured a position as a teaching principal in a small rural school that had a history of conflict, thus his calm temperament was severely challenged where keeping the peace as well as seeking to bring about reform often were uncomfortable bed fellows. During this period, he completed postgraduate studies in Educational management and administration, and subsequently a Masters, and ‘the books’ were a kind of oasis as well as support in his turbulent environment. He moved on to another teaching principalship that was closer to home as by now his wife was pursuing postgraduate studies in education while having also secured a principalship and the household had a three dependent children. Undeterred by such balancing acts, Eddie has moved on in his career, and having spent some time on secondment in a teacher education milieu, he continues to work in the education sector.

### *Recent*

**Dick** was the most experienced of the recent principal appointments to be interviewed despite his relative youth. The son of midland farming stock, with little or no tradition of availing of higher education in the community, he completed his teacher education in Limerick. However, in the late 1980s the economic climate in Ireland was such that more Irish graduates of teacher education institutions were finding work in greater London and further afield than at home. Consequently, Dick secured temporary positions in five schools, and gave serious consideration to an alternative career. When love struck however, he began to think of ‘home’ and the prospect of a site on which to build a house on the family farm was a major attraction. He secured the principalship of a nearby school and at the time of the appointment was considerably younger than the staff, a position that did not engender over-confidence during his initial immersion. His wife subsequently secured a teaching position and later a principalship in the locality, and Dick has been hugely active in sporting activities as well as making a considerable contribution to the development of the Irish Primary Principals’ Network (IPPN, see [ippn.ie](http://ippn.ie)). It was a major relief to Dick when in more recent years the school had grown sufficiently to enable him to become an administrative principal, a role he continues to enjoy immensely, while learning through the collegiality and networking of the professional association.

**Kate** grew up in rural Ireland, one of a large family where the ‘call to training’ was perceived as salvation—permanent and pensionable in a climate and context where there was continuing haemorrhaging of the population in search of employment and a better life. She began her teaching career in the 1960s and was the first and only

lay teacher in the ‘convent’ school where she was first employed in a provincial town adjacent to her home. Decades later, as the number of religious in teaching declined dramatically, she became first—acting principal for a few years, before being appointed to the position permanently in relatively late career. A practical, hand-on person, Kate’s motto tended to be—‘if I’m not prepared to do something myself, I can’t ask one of my colleagues either’. People rather than paper oriented, she found recent planning demands etc. a burden, and continued to prioritise the more interpersonal aspects of the role, supporting, encouraging and enabling. Her ‘time out’ frequently meant heading for the beach and a long walk as a means of renewal. At the time of the most recent interview, Kate too had just taken early retirement, though she continues to be active in educational endeavours in a variety of ways.

**Rose** grew up in a large family and attended the village school where her mother was principal. Thus her ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (Lortie 1975) began at an early age! As a student teacher she became involved in international networks, and this created an interest in how things were done elsewhere. Having spent her initial years of teaching in a new suburban school with many equally young colleagues, there was a collective thirst for challenges and possibilities. There followed various stints abroad, marriage and children, but with an impatience also for reform. After pursuing a number of possible avenues for such interests, she began to be more attracted to principalship and the possibility of whole-school reform. Like Kate, she was the first lay principal in an urban middle-class all girls school, and in the early days found it quite challenging to motivate a settled staff that had been largely disenfranchised by their religious ‘superiors’. Having spent less than 2 years in the position, she moved on to higher education where she continues to work in the education sector and is in the process of completing doctoral studies.

**Denise** has her roots firmly planted in the west of Ireland. While still in her twenties, the principalship unexpectedly became vacant in the school where she had been teaching for a number of years in a Dublin suburb. While she felt she was ‘too young’ for the burdens of the office, and still ‘one of the girls’, she was not prepared to let the opportunity pass, and secured the principalship. She was our most ‘junior’ appointee when the first interviews were conducted at the turn of the century. Initially she struggled with her own identity as she forged new relationships with teaching colleagues, and found her dealings with the Department of Education frustrating, but with the active support of a strong chairperson of her Board of Management, she found her feet and got into her stride pretty rapidly. She continues to enjoy the role and its challenges while having had some time ‘away’ from the complexities of the role while on maternity leave. Nevertheless, and despite the busyness of caring for young children, when the most recent interview was being conducted, she was using ICT to access union conferences etc. and was in very regular contact with the school, thus, in many respects, leading at a distance while keeping up to date also with educational matters.

### ***Recent (Since 2006)***

This cohort was added to the participants above and during the Autumn and Winter of 2007–2008, each of the four was interviewed at length twice. The interviews were primarily done in a chronological manner. The first interview was ‘tell me your life story’ and ended at the point where the individual had been appointed to the position of principal. The second interview revisited some ‘queries’ arising from the first interview, and then went on to talk about the experience of the role to date.

**Janice** has approximately 20 years teaching experience when she was appointed principal of a schools with nine teachers in a small rural village. She had taught in the school throughout her career and in more recent years had fulfilled the role of resource teacher. Her parents before her had been teachers in the general locality while her father too had been principal of a small rural school. As a single individual, who enjoys a good social life, she felt ‘ready’ for the position when it became available, but is very conscious of the need to have a balance in her life which she continues to strive for with weekends away etc. Given the nature of the role of principal in a small rural community, she is keenly aware of community issues and what happens outside the school, while recognising also that her leadership extends beyond the school boundaries in such circumstances. As the only internal candidate, she felt secure in the support of her colleagues thus, even at the early stage of her principalship, she was already getting comfortable in her new identity and adjusting to the additional responsibilities, although, given her previous role in learning support she was keen to establish with the pupils that she was no ‘soft touch’.

**Ben** grew up in a provincial small town where his father was principal of the boys’ primary school. It was in this school too that Ben was to secure his first teaching position. As part of the Celtic Tiger cub generation, he got itchy feet and took off to Australia but on his return, began to engage more with learning and life in a less hedonistic manner. He pursued postgraduate studies and completed a Masters in ICT, while achieving very high grades. In addition to increasing his knowledge base, he was also ‘testing’ his own intellectual boundaries. Meantime, when nesting instincts beckoned, he sought principalships more adjacent to where his fiancé was then working and studying. Alas, local politics appear to have defeated him in his pursuit of a principalship, thus after his father’s successor retired, with whom he did not see eye to eye on matters, he was appointed principal, and immediately began to deploy his ICT skills and interest in assessment to create whole-school policies etc. He describes himself as having been active in trade union politics for some time, thus on his appointment he was aware of the complaints and complications in principals’ lives through branch and district networks.

**Sadie** grew up in the North West where her father was principal of the local school she attended. From a very early age, she saw herself, not merely as a teacher, but as a principal. She began her teaching career in suburban middle-class Dublin and combining this professional role with family commitments created a busy if

fulfilled life. When opportunities to engage in professional support for the revised curriculum post 1999 presented themselves, she worked in that capacity for some years, and with this broad experience under her belt she secured the principalship of a school not too far removed from her place of employment. With her experience of professional support, she found planning etc. not to be as mysterious and challenging as others, and seemed to settle into the role very quickly, thus making a relatively seamless transition from classroom teacher via support services to the principal's office.

**Brent** grew up in middle-class suburban Dublin in a professional household. While there was a 'history' of teaching in the family, when Brent signalled it as his preferred career choice, it did not meet with much encouragement! Despite this he persisted, and secured his first teaching position in the large girls' school where he is now principal. While he left the school briefly, he returned in 2006 to the position. He too is the first lay principal in what was a convent school, thus, like some colleagues above, represents a break with tradition. In the intervening years from beginning a teaching career, he completed a Masters in Education, and has been involved for several years also in the design and provision of professional development courses for school networks through various religious communities. Consequently, apart from the professional capital he brings to the role, he has considerable experience and expertise also, thus he has enjoyed his first 2 years in the role, and expects to continue this into the future while uncertain if he will stay until age of retirement. His partner has put her professional career on hold while she looks after their children, and this was a sacrifice they decided on as part of the decision to pursue principalship of a large suburban school.

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