

THE TRAINING OF SECONDARY SCHOOL HEADS IN WESTERN EUROPE

John Buckley for the Council of Europe



NFER-NELSON

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To Mary

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*Over Peover,
Cheshire,
1984.*

Introduction

There is now a rich European experience to be drawn upon in the field of training for management in secondary schools and it was with this in mind that the Council of Europe commissioned the above study, which took place during 1982 and 1983. The writer took part in a number of events during that period which were concerned with the training of heads and principals of secondary schools. These seminars and conferences were arranged by the international organizations the Council of Europe and the Commission of the European Communities, and also by teachers' professional associations: the Association for Teacher Education in Europe and the National Association of Head Teachers (in England). These meetings provided opportunities to encounter many individuals who are now holding appointments as heads or principals of schools in Europe or are engaged in the training of those who hold such posts.

The writer was head of a secondary school in England for thirteen years and then for eight years engaged in the training of heads and senior staff in schools. In addition to having been in close contact with many heads of schools in England he has also met during recent years groups of heads and of those responsible for training heads in France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Denmark, Iceland, Northern Ireland, Norway and Sweden, in the course of visits paid to these countries.

The approach of the study is a practical one and is based upon personal experience as a head and as a trainer of heads as well as upon the results of valuable encounters with others who are either heads of secondary schools themselves or are responsible for training heads of schools in their own countries. The study does not make any pretence of being an academic treatise and while reference is made to a number of research studies in the field, the conclusions are mainly personal and subjective.

Likewise, such a study cannot claim to be comprehensive because the field is so broad. Training in school management is one field of education which is expanding in Europe at a time when many other aspects of education systems are contracting. Inevitably, the study is selective and while it is hoped that significant developments in the member states at the time of writing have been identified, others are not mentioned, either through lack of space or because they have not been encountered by the writer.

However, it is hoped that sufficient experience and expertise have been gathered to offer some guidelines to those working in the field. These may be useful in a practical sense to those who may be contemplating setting up courses on the training of heads or who may wish to review their existing work in the field in the light of recent developments in other European countries. It is a particular hope that the study may be of some help to those countries which have little experience so far in training the senior staff of secondary schools and may wish to take advantage of the experience of others before embarking upon a programme of such training.

The first part of the study is an examination of some of the changes in the role of the head which are particularly significant during the present decade. Many of these changes are being brought about by the considerable pressures which are being exerted on schools from a variety of sources in society. A lasting impression derived from meetings with heads in a variety of European countries is of loneliness, of increasing day-to-day pressures and of a job that becomes more and more difficult. A series of quotations may serve to illustrate the state of mind of many heads of secondary schools:

‘We struggle for survival in arctic conditions’ (a head from England).

‘How can a head be a politician and retain his integrity?’ (a young deputy head from a village in Spain).

‘In the present conditions the head is often the symbol of rejected values and a lonely person, abandoned by all and an object of aggression from all sides’ (a headmistress from Belgium).

‘Changes in society, including changes in attitudes of

pupils, of parents and of teachers towards the head and the constantly increasing demands of local and of central authorities, contribute to making the job more difficult' (an administrator from Denmark).

'You talk about objectives; my first objective on returning to school after a holiday is to replace most of the windows' (a head of a school in Northern Ireland).

'You talk about vision when I am submerged by paper' (a headmistress from France).

Such statements suggest vividly the situations in which many heads find themselves nowadays and the feelings which they experience in those situations. They serve as a timely reminder to those who are the providers of courses and of other forms of training that our first duty is to respond to the needs of those to whom the training is being offered. Training exists for the benefit of those being trained and not for the benefit of the trainers. An onus rests upon those responsible for training to begin where the heads 'are' and not where they would like them to be. This may mean going to considerable trouble to find out where they 'are', recognizing that the situation of each head and of each school is different and that it may well be appropriate to involve the heads themselves in the planning of their own training.

One point of departure of this study is, therefore, the position of the head as it is today. That position is seen as one in which the head is assailed on all sides by a wide variety of pressures and demands which often conflict one with another. These pressures may be both internal and external to the school. They may come from students, from parents, from teachers, from politicians, from trade unions, from employers, from the media or from other sources in the local community. The strength and force of those different pressures will vary from school to school, from locality to locality and from country to country, but there is a significant degree of consensus among the heads whom the writer has met about the states of mind induced by such pressures and the levels of stress which are generated by these frequently strident and often conflicting demands. The position of the contemporary head is one of considerable psychological insecurity. The provision of support

and the building of confidence may be a priority to which the trainers should be giving a major emphasis.

However, while recognizing the immediate needs of heads which it is the responsibility of trainers both to understand and to attempt to meet in any programme of training, there are other needs which also have to be met and which may not appear so urgent as the acquisition of skills and strategies for coping with crisis but which are, in the view of the writer, equally important. These needs arise from the rapidly changing nature of the society in which we live. Social institutions are all being influenced by these changes and schools cannot expect to remain untouched. They too are changing and a significant role in this process of change is that played by the head. Consequently, a recognition of the head as an agent and indeed as a promoter of change is necessary by the heads themselves and by those responsible for their training. We are only just beginning to understand the complexity of the process of changing social institutions and in particular the process of changing schools. Nevertheless, some countries have already incorporated this element into their training programmes for heads. In Sweden, for example, the programme which has been developing since 1976 has always recognized the role of the head as a change agent. Eskil Stegö, one of those responsible for that programme, speaking at the Gatwick Conference in 1982 expressed this conviction:

The basic assumption is that school leaders play an important role in the development of a healthy school. He [the head] should in many ways be a change agent, or at least a facilitator of change. (ATEE and NAHT, 1982)

When an emphasis on that aspect of the head's role which is concerned with being a change agent is set beside the urgency and immediacy of solving everyday problems, or what is known as 'crisis management', then the major dilemma inherent in the job begins to emerge. On the one hand heads are engaged in a struggle for survival in the present, and on the other hand they have the responsibility of developing the school for the future. In the first instance, they strive to achieve stability; in the second, they are expected to facilitate

change which in its essence implies a degree of instability. Whereas in the past, while being head of a school was never a job characterized by tranquillity, at least periods of comparative stability tended to alternate with shorter periods of innovation. Now the pace of change has begun to accelerate, sometimes alarmingly. This situation gives rise to what the writer describes as the 'present-future' dilemma which faces many heads today and for which they are, in many instances, unprepared. Somehow they have to cope with a present which is volatile and full of problems and at the same time prepare for a future full of uncertainties which is rushing towards them. For example, it is genuinely difficult to predict how the technological revolution will have transformed schools or homes or factories in ten years' time. It is the management of this dilemma which the writer sees as a major task facing those who are responsible for schools during the next decade. A major need of heads is likely to be support, help and guidance in the resolution of the 'present-future' dilemma as it affects them in their own schools. This is not to imply that we must all become futurologists or indulge in the wilder excesses of science fiction. Speculation about the future is a hazardous operation and prophecy is even more dangerous. Nevertheless, those who are responsible for 'developing children and for developing schools need to devote much more attention to the future than they have done in the past.

An attempt is made to identify some of the training needs of those who have the responsibility of managing schools under these difficult conditions and a number of case studies are offered from different European countries which are attempting to meet these needs. Some consideration is given to the issues of appropriate training methodology and of evaluation. A summary of conclusions is provided.

In the course of this study the writer attended the following events concerned with the training of heads and principals of secondary schools:

The international conference on 'Training for heads (school leaders) in Europe' which took place at Gatwick in the United Kingdom from March 12th to 14th 1982. This conference was arranged by the National Association of

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Head Teachers in collaboration with the Association for Teacher Education in Europe.

The Council of Europe Teachers' Seminar on 'Current trends in school management', which was held in Kristiansand, Norway, from August 9th to 14th 1982.

The Council of Europe Research Workshop on 'Training for management in schools' which was arranged in collaboration with the National Foundation for Educational Research and took place at Windsor in the United Kingdom from September 14th to 17th 1982.

The conference arranged by the French Ministry of Education for the Commission of the European Communities on 'School for the 11-14 age range and its priority tasks' which took place at Pont-à-Mousson in France from November 7th to 13th 1982. One of the four sub-themes of this conference was 'The in-service training of school leaders'.

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CHAPTER 1

The Changing Role of the Secondary School Head

Some views of heads themselves

If one talks to heads from different countries about their jobs, it becomes apparent that they do not have a simple definition of their role. When asked what they do, heads tend to emphasize the fragmented and discontinuous nature of the job. They say that they seldom have time to provide carefully thought-out responses to questions that are put to them or to work out carefully planned solutions to problems that face them. They talk of the lack of time to do the job properly, either because of the amount of administrative paper work in some countries or because of the number of bureaucratic procedures in other countries. Those who follow the routine of compiling a list of outstanding things to be done by the end of the day speak of the common experience of reaching the end of the day with more items on the list than there were at the beginning, and consequently taking some of their work home with them. There seems to be too little time for reflection, thinking and planning. Wherever they come from there is reference to the number of different face-to-face meetings every day, the number of verbal encounters engaged in. These may often be with a wide diversity of people from both inside and outside their schools: professional and non-professional; teachers, students, parents, employers, advisers, inspectors, old, young and middle-aged.

Many heads describe the complexity and the confusion which exists about their role, the changes which that role has undergone in the past decade and indeed which it continues to

undergo in the present, whether brought about by increased decentralization as in Norway, Sweden or in France or by falling rolls as in Great Britain, or by demands for more democracy as in Spain and in Italy. The discussion groups at the Gatwick Conference in 1982 found a remarkable degree of common ground in the complexity of the head's task: 'There are differences in role between the various countries, but in all cases the range of duties is complex and subject to constant changes' (ATEE and NAHT, 1982).

In the more centralized systems such as France, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece, Germany and Denmark, ministry directives affect such matters as curriculum and organization. Pautler, in her paper to the EEC seminar (1982) reported a common emphasis on the weight of bureaucracy and the amount of paper work. There are many circulars to be read, understood and interpreted at the local level. An increased knowledge of the law is now required in Denmark and in the Federal Republic of Germany. She also stresses the increased influence of parents who sit on school committees in France, Sweden and Denmark, on what are known as governing bodies in England and Wales, and who have recourse to tribunals in the case of grievances in Germany.

A head (Skoglund, 1982) reporting on the effects of decentralization in Sweden to the Teachers' Seminar at Kristiansand emphasized how the trade unions have increased their pressures on heads:

Trade unions have assumed a stronger position which means that the employer is bound to inform employees of all questions and negotiate about certain questions. These circumstances have strikingly increased the amount of work to be done by the head. In cases which I have formerly settled in my solitude and by virtue of my wisdom, I have now to call a meeting. Sometimes, I have to call several meetings. (Council of Europe, 1982).

A number of heads have been seconded from their jobs in England to study the role of the head. Jackson (1976) identified among the salient features 'the unrelenting call for adaptation to constant change, excessive paperwork and above all the

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high personal stress of the head's job'. Schofield (1980) when seconded to the institution where the writer worked, to study the factors contributing to the creation of a successful comprehensive school, found that heads had to deal with a wide variety of unplanned tasks, cope with many interruptions and external pressures and face crisis problems requiring an immediate response (p.48). Nockels was seconded to examine the problems of the first year of secondary headship. A new head taking up an appointment nowadays is particularly vulnerable to those pressures coming from outside the school for which an academic training has not provided any appropriate preparation:

Whether teachers in general and heads in particular like it or not, more people are going to take an informed interest in what is going on in schools and more will be prepared to express an opinion whenever and wherever they think fit than has ever been the case before. Upon occasions, too, this opinion will be forced upon the schools and sometimes upon the whole educational structure of an area in opposition to the view held by the head and his staff . . . This readiness to express an opinion which can be given wide publicity by press and television is something new to our age (Nockels, 1981).

These last three examples are from studies carried out by practising heads in England where the tradition has been for heads to enjoy considerable autonomy and independence compared with many of their colleagues in other European countries, whose education systems are more centralized. The writer's own encounters with heads in a variety of European countries reinforce these conclusions that the role of the head is becoming more complex and difficult to define and that this increase in complexity may often be attributed to diverse outside influences which are affecting schools. Some heads express their need to acquire skills in public relations, others refer to the need for what Glatter has described as 'marketing skills'. Others again are more conscious of the political pressures and the need to develop an appropriate stance and an appropriate vocabulary to understand and deal with such

outside influences. Furthermore, they claim that these outside influences make increased demands on their time, creating pressures and increasing personal stress. One consequence of this trend is that some heads are unable to devote the time they would wish to what they refer to as the 'educational aspects' of their job or to the pedagogical leadership of their schools. Such a trend is particularly significant at a time when a number of countries visited by the writer such as Denmark, France and Sweden are carrying out or planning to carry out changes in their curriculum which will be far-reaching and long-term in their effects. Indeed, the need for heads to be concerned and involved in educational innovation and yet having to give more attention to 'management' is given by some as a factor which renders the job more difficult. A head from the Netherlands reported,

It may be safely said that the job has become increasingly more difficult. Among possible causes are:

- educational innovations
- a shift of emphasis from pedagogical—didactic matters to problems concerning management.

These views of heads suggest a diversifying of the heads' concerns, an increased work-load and consequently less time to devote to what may be described as 'educational matters'. Some psychological effects of these developments in the heads' role are to increase pressure, create a sense of insecurity and induce loneliness. Pautler (1982) describes the situation of the recently-appointed heads in those countries where their responsibilities are not shared with a team of deputy heads and senior teachers thus:

The solitude and inexperience of new heads who are former teachers, who for the most part have no special aptitudes for the tasks of headship and who are frequently unaware of the multiple roles implied by their new job, often give rise to anxiety.

Schofield (1980) finds clear evidence that these changes have influenced heads' leadership styles and the managerial structures of schools: