

Taking it personally: examining patterns of emotional practice in leading primary schools in the Republic of Ireland

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The exploration of the emotional practice of school leadership is a recent focus of enquiry with respect to scholarship on school leadership and management. This development provides a much needed addition to the recent proliferation of technical-rational, managerial discourses on leadership. Three dimensions of this complex field of enquiry are examined in the literature presented in this paper: (a) the role that emotions play in the lives of individuals, (b) the emotional context of the task of school leadership and (c) the management of the emotional dimension of leadership and the impact of particular patterns of practice on the culture and fabric of school life. This provides a framework for the analysis of this in-depth qualitative enquiry into the emotional fabric of school leadership in a sample of primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. The findings of the research identify a number of aspects of the complexity of the emotional landscape of leadership and provide an in-depth insight into the patterns of practice that prevail in the sample with respect to the management of leaders' own emotions and the management of the emotional landscape of staff relations and school activity. The paper calls on school leadership development programmes to facilitate school leaders (principals) to reflect on the emotions of self and others, to engage in emotional learning and to understand the strengths and limitations of the emotional climate within their schools while cultivating a professional and supportive ethos committed to authentic relationships.

Introduction

The exploration of the emotional practice of school leadership is a recent focus of enquiry with respect to scholarship on school leadership and management. This research trajectory provides an additional much needed challenge to the recent proliferation of a technical-rational, managerial discourse on leadership. Although this neoliberal dominance of literature on leadership is the subject of considerable critique (Gleeson and Husbands

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2003, Hopkins and Jackson 2003, Thrupp and Wilmot 2003, Shields 2004, Lynch 2005, Bates 2006, Gunter 2006, Fitzgerald 2008, Wrigley 2008), the ideological impact of this perspective continues to exert a significant, formative influence on national and international policy developments with respect to school leadership (Leadership Development for Schools 2007, Pont *et al.* 2008, Mac Ruairc 2010). Indeed, the potential for the field of the emotions itself to be appropriated by the prevailing and powerful neoliberal new managerial approach to school leadership has been identified as a concern (McWilliam and Hatcher 2007, Milley 2008). The impact of such a development would serve to provide improvised scholarship in the area by confining enquiry to a narrow interpretation of the organizational, cultural and social utility of emotions (Beatty 2000b, Hartley 2004).

In contrast, the broader focus has produced literature analysing a range of different perspectives including the emotional labour of school leaders and the emotional dimension that constitutes the process and practices of schooling (Hargreaves 1998, 2004, Beatty 2000a, 2000b, Beatty and Brew 2004, Blackmore 2004, Harris 2004, Slater 2005, Crawford 2007a, 2007b, Zorn and Boler 2007). As scholarship in the area continues to develop, there is an increasing sense of how this research enriches the current understanding of school leadership by contributing to the framing of a specialized theoretical field that will constitute a distinctive space for school leadership within the broader field of leadership enquiry. In the past, school leadership has overly relied on borrowed discourses from business and organizational theory, many of which may have contributed to the current marginalization of core issues, including the concern with the emotional, that arise in the context of leading schools. We are now at a point where the rationale identified in the literature creates the imperative for a consideration of the emotional realm in school leadership enquiry in order to produce empirical research into school leadership praxis that points very solidly to the central role played by emotions in the doing of school leadership. Key contributing discourses to this development include the person-centred nature of the work of school leaders (Fielding 2001, 2007), the unique context and specific challenges that distinguish school leadership from other domains of leadership practice in the post-millennium era (Goldring and Greenfield 2002) and the need for leaders to actively and reflectively negotiate a balance between the professional and the personal in doing their job. This latter factor requires particular elaboration. 'For many ... headteachers, the line between the professional and the personal is increasingly blurred due to the emotional demands of the job and the invasion of personal time and space' (Blackmore 1995: 51). The personal and the professional are difficult to separate out when the task of leadership is fundamentally person centred. The stakes are high for the school leader who is 'grappling with the intrusive experiences of personal feelings, which are having the effect of metamorphosing his otherwise discrete conglomerate life and work understandings' (Loader 1997: 20). What is required of scholarship is to draw on this diversity of perspective within this dimension of leadership in an effort to explain how we can enrich the quality of our education systems so that many of the shortcomings in terms of overall student engagement and attainment that have emerged from many recent sociologically naive reforms can be

ameliorated by the more holistic emancipatory potential of this focus of enquiry (Milley 2008). This paper explores three themes in the literature: (a) the role that emotions play in the lives of individuals, (b) the emotional context of the task of school leadership and, finally, (c) the management of the emotional dimension of leadership and the impact of particular patterns of practice on the culture and fabric of school life. This provides a framework for the analysis of this in-depth, qualitative enquiry into the emotional fabric of school leadership in a sample of primary schools in the Republic of Ireland.

Schooling in Ireland

There are two key features of the Irish education system that impact on the need to consider the functioning of emotions in the practice of school leadership. The first relates to the issue of school size and the second to the increasing evidence of the impact of neoliberal models of accountability in the Irish education system. The issue of school size is significant because of the high number of small rural schools, particularly at primary level. Over 60% of principals at primary level have full-time teaching duties and lead a team of less than eight teachers. In the case of all of these schools, a small number of management posts are allocated; however, the reality on the ground often means that these schools rely on the goodwill of the full team to ensure that the school runs smoothly. In many ways these schools are based on a community of practice model relying heavily on the quality of interpersonal relationship to sustain and develop the individual themselves and the school organization. In the past, these schools operated as highly autonomous units within a locally based, informal accountability framework. The value base of the community type, the person-centred model of primary schooling that has been embedded in local communities since the 1840s (Coolahan 1981, Walsh 2009), has been challenged in the past 10–15 years by an ever-increasing buy-in by the Department of Education and Science (DES), the Irish Education Ministry, into new managerial models of performativity (McNamara and O'Hara 2008). This change is evidenced by the language of the market place that delimits discussions and documentation emanating from the DES (<http://www.education.ie>); the significant increase in forms and frequency of inspections and school/programme evaluations;¹ the publication of evaluation reports on the department website; the recent practice of the Inspectorate of rating school on a scale of 1 to 4, thereby identifying underperforming schools (Mac Ruairc 2010); the setting up of a school improvement group to deal with schools identified as underperforming; the introduction of unannounced inspection visits and the collation of reports from these visits; and the introduction of mandatory standardized testing in primary schools (Mac Ruairc 2009a, 2009b). These developments have changed the context within which schools operate. While the current Irish system does not create the same audit-focused, high-stake evaluation, blame-and-shame culture that characterizes the system in the UK, many of the trends create additional pressures on smaller school units, with implications for staff relations arising from the expectation to comply with these

imposed forms of accountability. In addition to this, leaders might burn out from trying to cope with emotional dissonance stemming from the emotional demands created by these changed circumstances. Leaders may have problems in being authentic and genuine and in upholding personal integrity, thus undermining expectations people have of them and eroding their legitimacy. Or, in a strategic effort to produce a particular culture within the school in response to changed system demands through emotional management technologies, leaders may actually generate emotional resistance, disillusionment and distrust (Milley 2009). At broader, systemic level, developments in the understanding of the functioning of the emotional realm of the more person-orientated dimensions of schooling may also be needed in order to ensure that the rich contribution that this dimension of schooling makes to the quality of school life prevail and survive the current preoccupation with outputs and deliverables.

Exploring emotions

Put concisely, in terms of a working definition, an emotion is:

Usually caused by a person consciously or unconsciously evaluating an event as relevant to a concern (a goal) that is important; the emotion is felt as positive when a concern is advanced and negative when a concern is impeded. The core of emotion is readiness to act and the prompting of plans ... Different types of readiness create different outline relationships with others. An emotion is usually experienced as a distinctive type of mental state, sometimes accompanied or followed by bodily changes, expressions, actions. (Oatley and Jenkins 1996: 96)

Self-reported emotions refer to an emotional state that lasts between a few minutes and a few hours. They are the guiding structures of our lives, marking the junctures in our actions and linking what is important for us to the world of people, things and happenings (Oatley and Jenkins 1996). Emotions are inseparable from their moral purposes, and their ability to achieve those purposes are rooted in and affect people's selves, identities and relationships; are shaped by experiences of power and powerlessness and vary with culture and context (Hargreaves 1998). 'Cognitions and emotions intertwine; ideas are laden with feelings, feelings contain ideas' (Fineman 1993: 16). Cognitions are not completely comprehensible without recognition of the feelings that drive and shape them (Fineman 1993). 'In the dance of feeling and thought the emotional faculty guides our moment-to-moment decisions, working hand-in-hand with the rational mind, enabling—or disabling—thought itself' (Goleman 1995: 28). Emotions and moods affect perception, attention, memory and judgement (Oatley and Jenkins 1996). They influence creativity, attributions for success and failure, decision-making and deductive and inductive reasoning (George 2000). Furthermore, cognition or feeling cannot be separated from the social and cultural contexts which influence and shape them (Møller 2005); they need to be 'understood as publicly and collaboratively formed' (Zorn and Bolter 2007: 137). 'If we get in touch with our personal emotions, then collectively we may be able to get in touch with the "mysterious" energy that binds us together in an organic work setting' (Loader 1997: 21). There is a social

awareness about what feelings to show in what circumstances (Fineman 1993). Emotions can be viewed as the dialect of relationships (Crawford 2007a). 'Emotions are part of the social glue that hold organizations together as they tap into why individuals make particular choices, how they work with others and relate to the organization and how they evaluate their situation' (Blackmore 2004: 444).

In research generally and within school leadership specifically, a focus on the emotions can be a tricky business because of their lack of objectively assessable phenomena (Milley 2008). Often categorized as subjective and chaotic forces, they are/have been regularly devalued and are often viewed as being less appropriate to discuss in relation to the field of leadership practice (Harris 2004, Møller 2005). In addition, the research into emotions presents a difficulty arising from a reluctance to talk about negative emotions and vulnerabilities. People create cover stories to present experiences of leading in a rational way (Møller 2005). James (2004 cited in Crawford 2007a: 89) warns that people may not have the vocabulary to express what they feel and people 'often split of their difficult feelings and project them elsewhere as a social defence'. However, this should not mean that we avoid trying to pin down this ineffable domain and engage in a robust interrogation of its underlying constructs. School leadership and the broader field of educational leadership need to function as a foil to the technical rationalists who attempt to delimit the work of school leaders. Emotions, like much of the real meaningful work of schools, are about hearts and minds, and it is vital that we develop the theoretical language to articulate this core and authentic part of schooling. If we cannot articulate it within our own research community, it is difficult to expect those who exist outside the actual praxis of schooling, many of whom wield considerable power with respect to policy funding etc., to recognize the efficacy of this formative dimension in the work of school leaders.

Emotions and power

'Emotion is ... a constant companion of power ... The idea that power and emotion are everywhere found together gets to the heart of the issue' (Layder 2004: 17). The links between power and emotion are not simple, contingent, uniform, haphazard or necessarily negative. Power is ever present and ubiquitous because it is a variegated phenomenon, multi-faceted in character and capable of transmutation (Layder 1997). Power must be construed as an amalgam of influences—individual, interpersonal, positional, discursive-practical, social-structural and symbolic—that varies in terms of the different social domains in which it is implicated. Power threading everywhere in society is a key element in the interweaving of social activity (Foucault 1972). Similarly, being its constant companion, emotion is likewise everywhere, although often operating less visibly underground, as a 'behind-the-scenes co-ordinator' (Layder 1997: 16). From a leadership perspective, when individuals have prestige and power, they are in a position to control the rhythmic flow of interaction. 'When they talk, others listen and give off positive emotional signals, thus enhancing the powerful or prestigious person's

cultural capital and emotional energy' (Turner and Stets 2005: 83). Individuals are strategists, motivated to augment their positive emotional energy within the constraints of the social setting (Stets and Turner 2008). Once emotions are aroused in exchange relationships, the emotions themselves become highly valued resources. One factor impacting on the intensity of emotional arousal is the relative power and dependence of individuals on each other. A person with power can direct the behaviour of others; to over-use one's power will violate norms of reciprocity, thus escalating the negative emotions aroused and increasing the possibilities for conflict (Turner and Stets 2005). Changes in the relative power and status of individuals have large effects on the arousal of negative and positive emotions. When individuals have power or gain power, they experience positive emotions such as satisfaction, confidence and security. Conversely, when individuals lose power, they experience fear, anxiety and loss of confidence. Gain in status arouses satisfaction and well-being, loss of status, depending on the attributions, triggers shame, embarrassment, depression and anger (Stets and Turner 2008). How power and emotions filter through the ebb and flow of the practice of school leadership becomes a vital component in understanding the dynamics of leadership practice and the impact different forms of practice have on the type of organization that emanates from constellations of practice.

Emotional intelligence

The work of Dan Goleman (1995) on the importance of emotional intelligence has been instrumental in shaping the growing awareness that exists with respect to the need to consider this aspect of communicative action and organizational activity. Emotional intelligence is a diverse concept and many definitions and concepts of it exist. A mixed-ability model of emotional intelligence combines an ability conception with various personality dispositions and traits (Mayer *et al.* 2000). Goleman's definition of emotional intelligence applies to this mixed model as it relates to knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in other people and handling relationships (Goleman 1995). It is a very broad approach: 'Emotional intelligence is a master aptitude, a capacity that profoundly affects all other abilities, either facilitating or interfering with them' (Goleman 1995: 80).

Emotional intelligence conceived as an ability model refers to the ability to process emotion-laden knowledge competently and to use it to guide cognitive activities. It focuses on the interplay of emotion and thought (Mayer *et al.* 2000) and involves:

the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions in oneself and others. (Mayer and Salovey 1997: 35)

While many endorse empirical evidences of emotional intelligence as a legitimate part of effective leadership, concern has been raised about its manipulative use (Day *et al.* 2000). These perspectives identify the develop-

ment and use of an arsenal of emotional management tools often based on emotional intelligence scholarship. Many view this as a manipulative measure introduced to an educational context in order to ‘revitalize and to re-motivate those whose characters and work-commitment have been “corroded” by the flexibilities of corporate capitalism and the “new” public management’ (Hartley 2004: 591), while simultaneously facilitating the translation of policy into practice and maximizing productivity. ‘Emotional management seems to be a technical endeavour, born of modernity, set for standardization, to be rendered as objective and measurable, and made ready for audit’ (Hartley 2004: 592). Emotional intelligence, under the label ‘management of emotions’, ‘exposes the instrumental, manipulative intentions behind an apparently personal approach’ (Fielding 2006b: 358).

Leadership: the context for emotional practice

Leadership involves intensive personal interactions that are publicly displayed and therefore includes an emotional dimension. All organizational actions are inseparable from and influenced by emotion (Crawford 2007b). Organizations are ‘emotional arenas’ (Fineman 1993: 31) and leading these is a profoundly emotional form of work (Hargreaves 1998): an ‘emotion-laden process’ (George 2000: 1046). ‘Emotion is an indispensable source of human energy. Positive emotion creates energy; negative emotion saps it’ (Hargreaves and Fink 2006: 218). Feelings of vulnerability, stress, sadness, regret, powerlessness, paranoia, isolation and anxiety are negative emotions experienced in the ‘inner principal’ (Loader 1997). Several of the recommended leadership behaviours mentioned in the literature, such as caring, building trust and collaboration (Slater 2005), and the development of community, commitment and collective morality (Møller 2005) have emotional foundations.

Emotions impact on leaders’ roles and experiences. Letting go of control can cause fear and vulnerability. Working beyond the comfort zone and reconciling conflicting personal and organizational values places heavy emotional demands on the leader (Beatty 2000b). Values concerning respect, fairness, equality, caring for the well-being of students and staff, integrity and honesty were specified by leaders in research conducted by Day *et al.* (2000). Gold *et al.* (2003) found that leaders’ values related to issues of inclusivity, equal opportunities, equity, high expectations, engagement with stakeholders, cooperation, teamwork, commitment and understanding. Commitment to a particular set of ‘values, beliefs and “world view” that propel individuals to act in particular ways’ (Sugrue 2005: 17) are connected with positive and negative emotions. People acquire emotional knowledge and skills (Caruso *et al.* 2003), and principals learn by experience that which is more likely to give the best result (Crawford 2007b).

According to Beatty and Brew (2004), four perspectives on emotional meaning making can be observed in organizations. First, ‘emotional silence’ attempts to suppress, deny and ignore interactions among emotions as they are regarded as meaningless. Second, ‘emotional absolutism’ is where certain emotions are identified as appropriate and are rewarded or punished

accordingly. Third, 'transitional emotional relativism' recognizes the experience of inner emotional realities as important. Finally, 'resilient emotional relativism' engages in deeper layers of emotion where one is aware of them as they are occurring and later reflects on them alone or with others. The leader's perspective and behaviour influence the organization's treatment of and engagement with emotional meaning making through the shaping of the school culture. Traditional school organizations are largely characterized by emotional silence and emotional absolutism, where the wearing of the prescribed mask and the fabrication of self is the norm. Beatty (2000a) found that teachers reported that they wanted leaders to be more caring, connected and supportive and committed to relationship; they need to break the emotional silence. 'Emotion matters in school leadership because leaders, teachers and learners understand and enact their roles of subordination and domination significantly through learned emotional expressions and silences' (Zorn and Boler 2007: 148).

Emotional labour and the management of the emotions

'Leaders' work seems well described as emotional management of self and others ... [it involves] significant amounts of emotional labour' (Beatty 2000b: 340). 'Emotional labour ... requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (Hochschild 2003: 7); to always be in role as principal, wearing the prescribed 'mask' and 'showing the right face' (Ginsberg and Davies 2003). Emotional labour is experienced most strongly when individuals express emotions that clash with their inner feelings, when personal and professional worlds collide. To manage emotions internally and in display, to detach oneself emotionally from a situation on demand and to depersonalize is perceived as an essential part of leadership for maintaining control and power by principals and to protect oneself from emotional hurt (Beatty 2000b, Ginsberg and Davies 2003). Emotions can help in the smooth running of the school but can also hinder it; one's role as leader is to manage and regulate these emotions. The management of emotions particularly in relation to public perception is of central concern (Crawford 2007b): 'Many staff regard my emotional outburst as one of my big mistakes. Staff felt ... that I had always to be in my role as principal' (Loader 1997: 132). This account underlies the expectation for one to manage and regulate his/her emotions as leader.

'Leadership is about managing one's own and others' emotions' (Blackmore 2004: 445). 'There is a synergy between views of leadership as a process, distributed throughout the school, and the emotions of the headteacher, and how he or she manages those emotions as a leader' (Crawford 2007b: 524). School leaders need to be emotionally competent as they engage with others in the process of collaboration by recognizing, understanding and managing the emotional aspects intrinsic to the collaborative process, thus reducing conflict and promoting positive relationships (Slater 2005). Emotional conditions of 'fitness', 'literacy and depth' and 'alchemy' are required for school improvement and need to be fostered by the leader

so as to create trust, positive feelings of involvement and ownership, positive relationships, communication, self-reflection, improved practice and the engagement of teachers in leadership roles. Approaches to leadership that factor out these emotional conditions are limited (Harris 2004: 402).

Research by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004: 325) indicates that a fundamental job requirement for the twenty-first-century school leader is to be 'a whole person in his or her leadership, aware of attitudes that he/she holds, accepting of his/her feelings, and real in his/her relationships with others'. When a leader is propelled into a state of emotional dissonance, the emotional 'wound' causes one to adapt and learn. Leadership selves are 'unmade and remade' (p. 325) as emotional learning takes place. This new emotional understanding and awareness, particularly for those with a sharp emotional intelligence, enables a school leader to be 'more responsive in practice to the culture of the school' (p. 325), thus providing change. Emotions matter in times of crisis and not all leaders learn from their 'wounding' experience; emotional supports need to be provided to preserve emotional health (Hargreaves 1998).

Concluding remarks

Scholarship in the area has produced some very clear patterns with respect to the role emotions play in the work of school leaders. The examination of emotions itself is very complex and requires an in-depth interdisciplinary examination in order to fully appreciate the layered nature of the functioning of emotions in everyday personal and social interaction. In order to situate this research broadly within the domain of emotions, this paper confines itself to providing a general discussion of the construct, with specific reference to work by Mayer *et al.* (Mayer and Salovey 1997, Mayer *et al.* 2000) in relation to emotional intelligence. Emotions clearly provide all interactions, both personal and professional, with a range of options for different forms of situated activity (Layder 1997). The higher stakes created for emotional work at leadership level and the manner in which the intertwined constructs of emotion and power permeate and delimit the complexity of practice provides a strong imperative for empirical examination. Context is central to the creation of emotional spaces and is identified in scholarship as a key area for investigation. These imperatives combine in very specific, arguably unique ways in the work of school leadership. Many empirical studies attest to the prevalence of emotions at many levels in the work of schools and school leaders. It could be argued that a focus on emotions and emotional labour of school leadership will provide a deeper insight than heretofore into the distinctiveness of school as a social space and the practice of school leadership that shapes and is shaped by the synergy of factors that constitute schools as organizations and teachers as agents of learning. This study seeks, firstly, to provide additional insights into the complexity of the emotional landscape of school leadership, and secondly, the research provides an in-depth insight into the patterns of practice that prevail with respect to the management of leaders' own emotions and the management of the emotional landscape of staff relations.

Methodology

This research used a mixed-method approach conducted in two linked phases. Phase 1 comprised the use of a questionnaire distributed to 97 primary school principals. The purpose of this was to obtain an overview of leaders' perceptions in relation to the emotional dimension to their work as school leaders. The sample was initially one of convenience; however, interest in the topic resulted in a number of respondents seeking to participate in the study. The final number was capped at 97 in order to ensure that the researcher complied with the overall time frame agreed for the research activity. A larger follow-up study is currently being designed in order to develop this work. Phase 2 was based on in-depth qualitative, semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of eight principals selected on the basis of length of stewardship and gender from the larger sample of 97. This paper primarily draws on the qualitative phase of the study, using data from the broader sample as a general indicator of notable trends in the patterns of responses. A brief profile of the interview sample, which consists of six primary school principals, is provided in Table 1.

Due to the small-scale nature of the research, it is important to be cautious in drawing conclusions about generalizability of the findings. There is no way of knowing if the sample for both the survey and the interviews are typical, representative of the whole and therefore generalizable. One-off interviews have a number of well-documented limitations (Seal *et al.* 2004). In the case of this study, a key limitation specifically related to requiring others to access and disclose their own emotional experiences in an interview context. Emotions present as a difficult topic to research as people may not reveal their true feelings, may not have the vocabulary to express how they feel or may project difficult feelings elsewhere as a social defence (James 2004, cited in Crawford 2007a). The creation of a 'cover story' by principals in presenting themselves as socially acceptable in terms of norms is a potential limitation with interviewees speaking not as individuals but as representatives of a profession or organization (Møller 2005). Information provided is filtered through the views of interviewees and the researcher's presence may bias responses (Creswell 2003). Despite these limitations, this study provides a rich insight into the emotional aspects of

Table 1. Profiles of principals interviewed

Pseudonym	Length of stewardship (years)	Gender	Age (years)	Geographic location	Socio-economic designation	Number of students
Caitriona	<4	Female	31–35	Suburban	Disadvantaged ^a	219
Helen	5–14	Female	46–50	Suburban	Middle class	300
Sharon	>15	Female	56–60	Small town	Disadvantaged	145
Brian	<4	Male	46–50	Suburban	Middle class	417
Aidan	5–14	Male	51–55	Urban	Disadvantaged	215
Michael	>15	Male	56–60	Suburban	Middle class	452

^aThe category 'Disadvantaged' is used to classify schools in the Republic of Ireland with high numbers of at-risk students from low-income families and communities.

leadership practice in Irish primary schools as revealed by the sample in this study.

Findings

The findings of this study are reported under two thematic headings. The first section provides insight into different dimensions of leadership practices and the manner in which emotions delimit this work. The second sections focuses on the management of this emotional landscape: it provides insights into how school leaders strive to manage their own emotions in the context of their professional roles, and how they manage the emotional dimension to practice in schools.

The emotional landscape of leadership

The extent to which emotions and emotion-laden contexts function to impact the work of school leaders is clearly identifiable from the findings of this study. A number of different vignettes arising from emotionally driven school activity are reported in this section. Collectively, they serve to contribute to the overall climate of the school. Almost all principals (97.9%) were in agreement that being a principal was an emotionally demanding job, with over two-thirds of principals (67%) in agreement that leadership was immersed in emotions. When this was explored further, the most frequently cited sources of emotional triggers were: (a) emotional issues arising from values and value-based conflict, (b) the extent of patterns of emotional dissonance in schools and (c) the emotional context and consequences of decision-making.

Values and value-based conflict. There is strong evidence in this study that points to the central role played by value-based issues in delimiting the emotional activity of school leadership. The data points clearly to the idea that much of the positive and negative dimensions of the emotional fabric of leadership practice are attributable to the manner in which the value base of school leaders themselves is challenged or confirmed by an incident or encounter. This is at the core of the personal/professional dualism:

The morals that you have inherited through your upbringing or through your education system, they will impact on the value system that you bring to play in relation to your working life. (Aidan)

This study indicates that there were a number of common and strongly held personal values which emerged as guiding principles in the work of the leaders in the sample. Typically, these related to concern for respect, fairness, equality, honesty, justice and caring for the whole development of students and staff. These core values emanated from strong Christian ethics, which were identified as a deep-seated underlying ‘baseline’:

Respect for others overall ... but obviously the Christian traditions and really that every human is special ... I would see myself as the first among equals. (Helen)

Being honest and being fair, treat people as fairly as possible. (Brian) There is a sense of moral purpose ... the will to make a difference if you like and the sense that we can do something ... to bring out the good in the world if you like and in ourselves. (Michael)

The whole area of caring for the staff, for the children ... right from the youngest junior infant to the oldest girl in sixth class ... your staff need to know you care about them. (Caitriona)

The whole concept of having to do justice ... the basic commandment that God said love one another as I have loved you. (Aidan)

These values of 'what I think is right' (Michael) when challenged by others elicit a variety of responses from principals. Principals' speak of engaging in a robust defence of their values: 'I have no problem defending them' (Aidan). They refer to the centrality of dialogue in dealing with conflict arising from differences in values: 'I'd talk about them ... I think we have to cope with a changing world ... and question our values from time to time and see does the blueprint we have hold up to the world we are preparing our children for' (Helen). Conflict of this nature can directly cause emotional distress:

It can be upsetting; it is difficult when I don't agree with it myself, so it is a difficult position. (Caitriona)

I would be upset and I would find myself in a situation where I would want to do something to try and rectify the situation. (Sharon)

The importance of staff sharing the principals' values was fundamental to avoiding emotional conflict. Exploring how this sharing of values is established at school revealed that the predominant solution to this type of conflict was 'if they [the staff] are unhappy, they'd have the good sense to move off (...) unless you are going to be part of the crew' (Aidan). There was general agreement among the participants in the study that cohesion between leaders and staff around values was a necessary prerequisite for positive professional relations. In the event of disagreement at this fundamental level, the data suggests a preference for action on the part of the staff member who disagrees, i.e., have the good sense to move off. This data suggests that in-depth discussions around values, which can be professionally and personally enriching (Bloom *et al.* 1991, Shields 2006), are sometimes sidelined in dialogue and discussion in schools. The power that such practice would have, if managed well, in the context of building positive staff relations and creating a firm emotional baseline for school development and reflective practice provides the imperative for leaders and staff not to ignore this fundamental aspect of schooling.

Staff relations: maintaining the emotional equilibrium. Quality relationships with staff were viewed by principals as the most important aspect of their leadership, with the potential to result in both positive and negative emotional responses. Staff relationships were described using a range of descriptors, including 'paramount', 'critical', 'vital', 'crucially important', 'the whole key to the job' and 'the key to getting on in a school': 'I would see it as the central most important thing in any organization (...) the quality of

internal relationships. It's actually, very often it's the success or failure of an organization' (Michael). Positive staff relationships created energy and positive emotions for the principals: 'I feed off good staff relationships (...) I love to see people who are happy in their workplace ... I think this is what keeps me going' (Aidan). Positive staff relationships creates a 'group synergy', a 'vibrant organization' and 'personal enrichment' (Aidan): 'When you have good relationships within a school, you know the sky is the limit, you have that terrific contribution of energy and talents all around' (Sharon).

There was a recognition that staff relationships if not managed could have a negative emotional impact on both the principal and the staff:

The principal has a crucial dimension in managing if you like the relationships within the school and the emotional climate to ensure that those are right. (Michael)

You need people who can be able to relate to you yourself and other staff members ... if you don't have good relationships among staff, it can be a very difficult job for everybody. (Brian)

The gender of staff for one principal was an issue to be aware of in terms of staff relationships and maintaining a positive emotional atmosphere: 'The female thing can be a small problem at times ... it is easier to deal with the male side of things, they don't take it as personally ... they [female staff] can be a little more temperamental at times' (Brian). Another principal referred to being hypersensitive to the emotional atmosphere among her staff: 'I'm hypersensitive to emotional atmosphere. It could be a good thing. It could be a bad thing. It could cloud you as well as directing people' (Sharon).

One principal had a particularly negative emotional experience in terms of staff relationships when she was appointed as principal from outside the school: 'I came into a bit of an antagonistic situation (...) there was a barrage of resentment waiting to greet me (...) I've had to peel back relationships and to try and develop them' (Helen). Feelings of isolation, vulnerability, powerlessness, anxiety, being bullied and misery were experienced, and patience, time and a sense of forgiveness were required by the principal in order for staff relationships to be improved upon: 'My attitude to things was, well nothing lasts forever, not even misery ... It was difficult and there were times that when you did feel that you were an outsider ... and that took some time to peel back' (Helen). For this principal, 'emotional management and emotional intelligence' were extremely important in 'weeding my way in' and creating a positive relationship with staff:

I can see how somebody who is properly emotionally developed and who tries to take charge of their emotions and who tries to assess their emotions as well because it is very important to assess your emotions (...) You have to judge it within the culture, the ethos of your school, within what is achievable and within the bounds of fairness. (Helen)

Many positive emotional experiences were described by the principals interviewed. It is clear from these that they can be a source of personal and professional sustenance and a considerable motivational force. The data indicates that in many cases, these are attributable to positive experiences relating to the creation of group synergy and teamwork, with staff working

as a cohesive unit. A second key source of positive emotional responses relates to incidents of personal affirmation or recognition:

The best complement I think that can be paid to any principal is when the school becomes known as Aidan Duffy's school, when the leader becomes identified with the building or the institution. (Aidan)

The most emotionally positive experience I've had with staff was last night where they had a surprise birthday party for me. I was very moved and I'm still very moved and grateful (...) I'm still absolutely elated (...) it was very life giving. (Sharon)

Other emotionally positive episodes encountered and described by principals related to issues such as supporting staff through difficult experiences, seeing young teachers develop, being thanked and congratulated for doing a good job by teachers and:

in your own handling of stuff ... when you've seen something resolved ... and when you've invested time in it, it's a very rewarding experience and I'd say those kind of experiences (...) those emotional rewards if you like (...) make it worthwhile. (Michael)

What this data above suggests is the omnipresence of the emotional in the day-to-day practice of school leadership. What is also suggested is that contrasting levels of strain and relief sometimes result from the improvisational, random nature of some aspects of school life where certain aspects of the context and process of schooling hold the potential for a range of emotional responses.

Decision-making: an emotional tightrope. In the questionnaire responses, over half of the principals (57.7%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'taking difficult decisions creates negative emotions for me as principal'. The emotions and emotional intensity experienced and articulated by principals when making difficult decisions was quite varied. Gender was a key variable here in terms of the difference noted in the responses. The importance of planning, reflecting, consulting others where possible and weighing up the situation with the common good and the betterment of the school at the centre of one's decisions was extremely important in making decisions easier and reducing the emotional involvement for all the male principals interviewed:

If I've to make a difficult decision ... I would reflect on it and I would consult ... It is in the planning that a good leader comes about, otherwise you're kind of chasing your tail and reacting to different things (...) if you keep the common good at the centre of your planning, then it makes it an awful lot easier. (Aidan)

One male principal, while acknowledging the legitimacy of having emotions and experiencing conflicting emotions in relation to the impact his decisions might have on others, expressed the need for one to be able to manage emotions as principal:

There would be conflicting emotions (...) you want to make a decision for the good of the school and sometimes you would be aware of other people's emotions and how the decision might impact on them (...) we all have to manage our emotions. (Michael)

The emotional depth and intensity expressed by the female principals when making difficult decisions contrasted dramatically with their male counterparts. Considerable anxiety was evoked in making difficult decisions:

I was in that tangle and I found it very draining, emotionally very draining. The emotions around it would have been upset, anxiety, consciousness, kind of a distraction in my work. (Sharon)

I would certainly feel a bit nervous or a bit jittery about it and umm ... initially I suppose you want to run away, you want it to sort itself out but it doesn't sort itself out. (Helen)

I've had times when the colour would just drain out of your face and you'd be going 'Oh God! what am I going to do?' like this is just a mine field; how am I going to deal with it and I mean the initial reaction is to cry. (Caitriona)

Notwithstanding the differences, the importance of feeling justified in taking a particular course of action on behalf of the school that is fair and for the common good was shared as fundamental by all principals: 'I think you have to feel justified in a decision (...) the best you can hope for is that they are correct decisions and that they are fair decisions because you can't please everybody all of the time' (Helen).

The management of emotions

Management of self. Most principals (91.7%) were in agreement with the high level of emotional management that was part of their practice. The findings of this study suggest that strategies used by principals in managing their own emotions can be broadly categorized into four subsets of practice:

- Be genuine and open.
- Bury emotions and put on a brave face.
- Detach from emotions.
- Unwind and recharge the emotional batteries.

The importance of being genuine and honest in dialogue and discussions with staff was viewed as a key component in the management of emotions while articulating one's professional concerns about a particular issue or situation. For those who draw on this strategy, it was felt that it was key to the maintenance of an emotional equilibrium:

You have to be genuine, you have to be yourself and true to yourself and I couldn't put on an act, that's the sort of person I am ... I wouldn't dare try to put on a false face. I don't like that (...) That's where a lot of principals get bogged down emotionally (...) I think maybe people put themselves on a pedestal a bit when they get the job and if you've that pretence, if you have that kind of false image and you're trying to ... project this image of yourself as a guru that's not you like ... I'd say you'd crack up. (Brian)

A second response was characterized by a tendency to regulate and bury emotions by putting on a brave face arduously in the workplace setting. As a result, the emotional experience had a more negative and damaging potential as a result of the inauthentic nature of the leadership practice:

You bury your personal emotions and you kind of respond on a different level to what's going on around you. I'd say that is possibly very draining in its own way. (Sharon)

I think there is a certain amount at times in the job when you are kind of acting and you are pretending that everything is okay when really you are completely at sea (...) there is a certain amount of times you will be able to put on a brave face (...) and you are kind of going, 'Oh God! No, I can't'. There is nobody around to support you then and it's quite an alienating job. (Caitríona)

There was shared agreement by all principals in both components of the study about the need and, to varying degrees, the ability to utilize the third strategy, i.e., to detach from work and an emotional situation:

I go in and I work, I work a hard day's work and I come home and I forget about it. I have to say I do detach myself from it yeah (...) I wouldn't get too emotionally involved. (Brian)

That's where the big thing with the emotional and not getting sucked into somebody's emotions ... you do have to detach. (Helen)

I've a capacity to some degree to not let them [work related emotions] influence my home life too much ... you actually have to step back to ensure the borders are there. (Michael)

However, in some cases, this strategy was identified as a difficult thing to do, particularly in the early stages of tenureship. One principal described how in her first year she:

... took everything personally, every comment made by every one or person and even now I never feel kind of free of it ... personally for myself I'd have to watch that so I don't end up getting sick or you know end up burning myself out or something like that. I try to remove myself a little from it and not try and get emotionally involved in situations (...) but I mean it's hard to do that. (Caitríona)

Management of others. The questionnaire data revealed that there was a high level of awareness among principals of the need to manage staff emotional responses, particularly during times of change. Almost all principals (94.9%) were in agreement that 'managing emotions in other staff members is important when introducing change'. The strength of this agreement is notable as almost half of those surveyed (49.5%) strongly agreed, while only 2.1% disagreed. Strategies identified in the interview data to achieve this outcome were mainly based on the quality of the staff relations developed over time. While all principals interviewed acknowledged that 'it's very hard to manage the emotions of others' (Caitríona), they equally acknowledged that that nurturing quality relationships with staff and the creation of a positive emotional climate within the school circuitously affects the emotions of others. For one principal, the 'dynamism of the leader, the relationships not just with the teachers ... but the parent body and the whole community' creates confidence, admiration and trust as 'people will respect you and will work with you as opposed to against you ... I try as far as possible to see that I make people happy' (Aidan).

Consciously preserving good relations with colleagues was identified as an important strategy for principals in influencing staff and safeguarding a positive emotional climate. This required principals to regulate their emotions in interaction with others and to be aware of their interactions:

You have to be very careful. I would find myself I try to get into classrooms ... I would be in every-day. I might be in to say hello ... You deal with them all differently you know what I mean ... you can have a joke with one maybe that you wouldn't have with another. (Brian)

This conscious and reflective aspect of leadership practice emerges in a number of different ways. Sometimes, it is based on a 'desire not to hurt anybody or not to undermine their confidence in any way' (Michael); on other occasions, 'when teachers have gone through different emotional problems and joys', there is a need to be seen as 'very much in there, supportive and responding' (Sharon). The management of staff through affective relationships 'plays a pivotal role within the organization (...) by building on the personal relationships that you have with people, by making them more happy in their job ... they will embrace change' (Aidan); 'they are going to give you a lot back' (Caitriona), with the ultimate result that 'it is quite probable that the pupils' learning will benefit' (Michael).

It could be argued that this deliberative dimension to the emotional management of self and others is manipulative, with the potential to have a negative impact on staff relations if the strategy was 'found out'. The degree of divergence of opinion about this in the research suggests that the full nature of this aspect of practice is far from resolved. The analysis of the questionnaire data revealed that there was considerable divergence of opinion in relation to the statement 'emotional management of others is manipulative', with 37.1% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, 34% uncertain and 28.9% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. This difference of opinion provoked the largest number of unsolicited written comments by respondents, including: 'if you're good at it' (female, recent principal), 'very dependent on scenario' (female, experienced principal) and 'depends on how you look at it. It could be described as motivational!!' (male, recent principal).

Discussion

The emotional landscape of leadership

The findings of this study indicate that the quality of staff relationships and the emotional climate of schools influences and shapes the emotional experience of principals, impacting on their actions and decisions, which in turn affect the quality of staff relationships, the emotional climate of schools and the emotional experience of principals. Other research in the area has shown that schools are 'emotional arenas' (Fineman 1993), emotions are the idiom of relationships (Crawford 2007a) and relationships are the foundation of the educative endeavour (Shields 2006). Quality relationships with staff were viewed by principals as the most important aspect of their leadership (Day *et al.* 2000) and an emotionally positive experience as principal. It was clear from this study that all actions are inseparable from and influenced by emotions (Crawford 2007b), and that emotions influence and affect decision-making (George 2000), the quality of staff relationships, the emotional climate of the school and ultimately the educative endeavour.

The emotions of leadership are ubiquitous, taking positive and negative form as a result of a myriad of triggers (Beatty 2000b). Positive emotions

generates energy; negative emotion drains it (Hargreaves and Fink 2006). The emotional 'wound' (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski 2004) experienced by one principal in this study through antagonistic staff relationships and a negative emotional climate when appointed as principal from outside the school created feelings of misery, vulnerability, powerlessness, isolation and anxiety in the 'inner principal' (Loader 1997). The emotional intelligence and emotional awareness of this principal impacted on her leadership practice and led her to be responsive to the culture of the school in order to bring about change in staff relationships (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski 2004). As staff relationships improved, the principal's emotional experience as leader improved. Staff relationships are central to a positive emotional experience as principal.

According to Beatty and Brew (2004), traditional school organizations are largely characterized by 'emotional silence' and 'emotional absolutism'. This research indicates that principals do not characterize their emotional climate as one of 'emotional silence', but rather 'emotional absolutism' and 'transitional emotional relativism' are the typical descriptions of the emotional climate by principals in the context of this sample of Irish schools. This data suggests that discussions around values, which can be professionally and personally enriching (Bloom *et al.* 1991, Shields 2006), are avoided in schools. The power that such practice would have, if managed well, in the context of building positive staff relations and creating a firm emotional baseline for school development and reflective practice provides the imperative for leaders and staff not to ignore this fundamental aspect of schooling.

In terms of gender differences, more males agree that emotions impact on their actions and they are stronger in their agreement that relationships are the key to being an effective principal. Similar to research by Beatty (1999, 2000b), it was found in this study that the males in talking about emotional experiences exposed them in a rational way, whereas the females interviewed identified specific emotions and tended to relive the emotional intensity of experiences through their narration. As regards decision-making, all principals regulated interfering emotions, expended energy, considered their impact on the organization and 'followed their heart' (Ginsberg and Davies 2003). The emotional depth and intensity expressed by the female principals when making difficult decisions contrasted dramatically with their male counterparts. Ginsberg and Davies (2003) found that emotional pain and anxiety were endured by all principals in 'the agony of decision-making'; however, in this research, only females recounted such experiences. Male principals portrayed decision-making as rational in retrospect (Fineman 2003). Gender differences did impact on leaders' emotional realities. This is a very complex domain and the patterns in this study indicate inconsistencies with respect to the emotional realm of decision-making.

The management of emotions

The centrality of emotions in principals' lives requires the management of emotions in oneself and in others (Beatty 2000b, Blackmore 2004, Crawford 2007a, 2007b). To manage emotions internally and in display and to detach

oneself emotionally from a situation were perceived as an essential part of leadership (Beatty 2000b, Ginsberg and Davies 2003). The social awareness about what feelings to show in what circumstances was evident (Fineman 1993), and interviewees were conscious that their behaviour had the potential to contribute to or diminish the atmosphere within the school (Slater 2005). In seeking to control and manage staff through relationships (Fielding 2006a), principals used tools of emotional astuteness (Fielding 2007) by fostering the emotional conditions of 'fitness', 'literacy and depth' and 'alchemy' (Harris 2004) in order to generate enthusiasm, motivate, overcome resistance to change (George 2000) and facilitate collaboration (Slater 2005). The management of emotions in this way implies that the type of school organizations which emerge are those labelled by Fielding (2000, 2006a, 2006b, 2007) as 'high-performance learning organizations'—the personal is used for the sake of the functional. Fielding (2007) described this form of leadership as manipulative; in this study, divergent views were held by principals in describing emotional management of others as manipulative. Nonetheless, preserving good relations with colleagues internally is an important strategy for principals (Møller 2005) in influencing staff and safeguarding positive emotions, requiring principals to regulate their emotions in interaction with others and to be aware of their interactions.

Blackmore (1995) points out that the line between the professional and the personal was blurred by principals to varying degrees due to the emotional demands of the job. The findings of this study indicate that the extent to which this boundary was clouded depended on the principals' ability to detach from work-related emotions. The male principals in this study found it easier to detach from emotional situations at work and, resultantly, the line between their professional and personal lives was more distinct and clear; emotional equilibrium was easier to maintain. It appeared that the strategies of emotional management utilized by the principals interviewed impacted on their ability to detach. The males interviewed felt it was imperative to be genuine with staff and to inform staff how they felt about professional concerns. The females reported a more taxing emotional experience as they buried their own emotions and put on a brave face in their workplace setting. By controlling negative emotions through suppression, 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 2003) becomes too intense and the ability to maintain emotional equilibrium and separate the professional and the personal is affected. An essential requirement of principals working in today's challenging people-intensive educational context (Goldring and Greenfield 2002) where emotional demands are high is to be a whole person, accepting of internal emotions and real in relationship with others (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski 2004).

Conclusion

It is clear from the principals in this study that they are operating quite different forms of leadership to the rational rhetoric espoused by many mainstream writers. These principals are, above all, people centred. Emotional intelligence, emotional skills and emotional knowledge are central unspoken

realms of principals' daily work as they work in relationship with others and create consciously or unconsciously a particular emotional climate within their schools. It is within this context that leadership courses, supports and training need to be examined as such key leadership qualities cannot be left to chance. Leadership development needs to combine emotions and reason, facilitating principals to reflect on the emotions of self and others, engage in emotional learning and understand the strengths and limitations of the emotional climate within their schools while cultivating an open, caring, connected and supportive climate that is committed to authentic relationships. The development of emotional skills and competencies in union with reason to enable principals to select and use appropriate strategies that enable principals to maintain emotional equilibrium and keep intact, clear, distinct boundaries between their professional and personal lives should be a central focus of professional learning provided for principals.

Note

1. See <http://www.education.ie> for an overview of the evaluation of schools carried out by the Irish Inspectorate.

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