

SCEL Fellowship Programme
Area of Enquiry

Reflections on the SCEL Fellowship Programme and Strategic Thoughts on Headship Post- Appointment.

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This report consists of two parts: firstly, selective reflections on the SCEL Fellowship Programme and secondly, some strategic thoughts on extending headship preparation to include the post-appointment phase. The two are connected since the Fellowship provided insights into possible directions for this early phase of headship.

The Fellowship Programme: Some Reflections.

Professional learning has been important to me throughout my career and participation in the SCEL Fellowship has provided an opportunity to extend this. The timing of the Fellowship was apposite as it coincided with the conclusion of my doctoral studies on early experiences of headship, which referenced international problems in recruiting and retaining head teachers (MacBeath et al. 2009: 9; Pont et al. 2008: 30). It also coincided with the launch of SCEL and a review of pathways to headship. Framed in this context, I focused my enquiry on the question, how could headship preparation be extended post appointment? My decision to focus on this area emerged from the conceptual map I had constructed during my doctoral studies (Purdie 2014). It should be noted, however, that recruiting people with the appropriate qualities for teaching and leadership at the earliest stages is critical, not just at headship (Donaldson 2010: 5).

Having ten years' experience as headteacher, enhanced by further study brings a fusion of academic and experiential learning which can contribute to the next phase of leadership development in Scotland. I have been privileged to have had the opportunity to contribute to the SCEL Headship Strategy Group and the Strategy Working Group on headship pathways. I am uncertain if these opportunities would have arisen without my involvement with SCEL.

This has allowed me to operate at systems level by participating in the network taking forward these developments.

The Fellowship Programme: Extending My Learning.

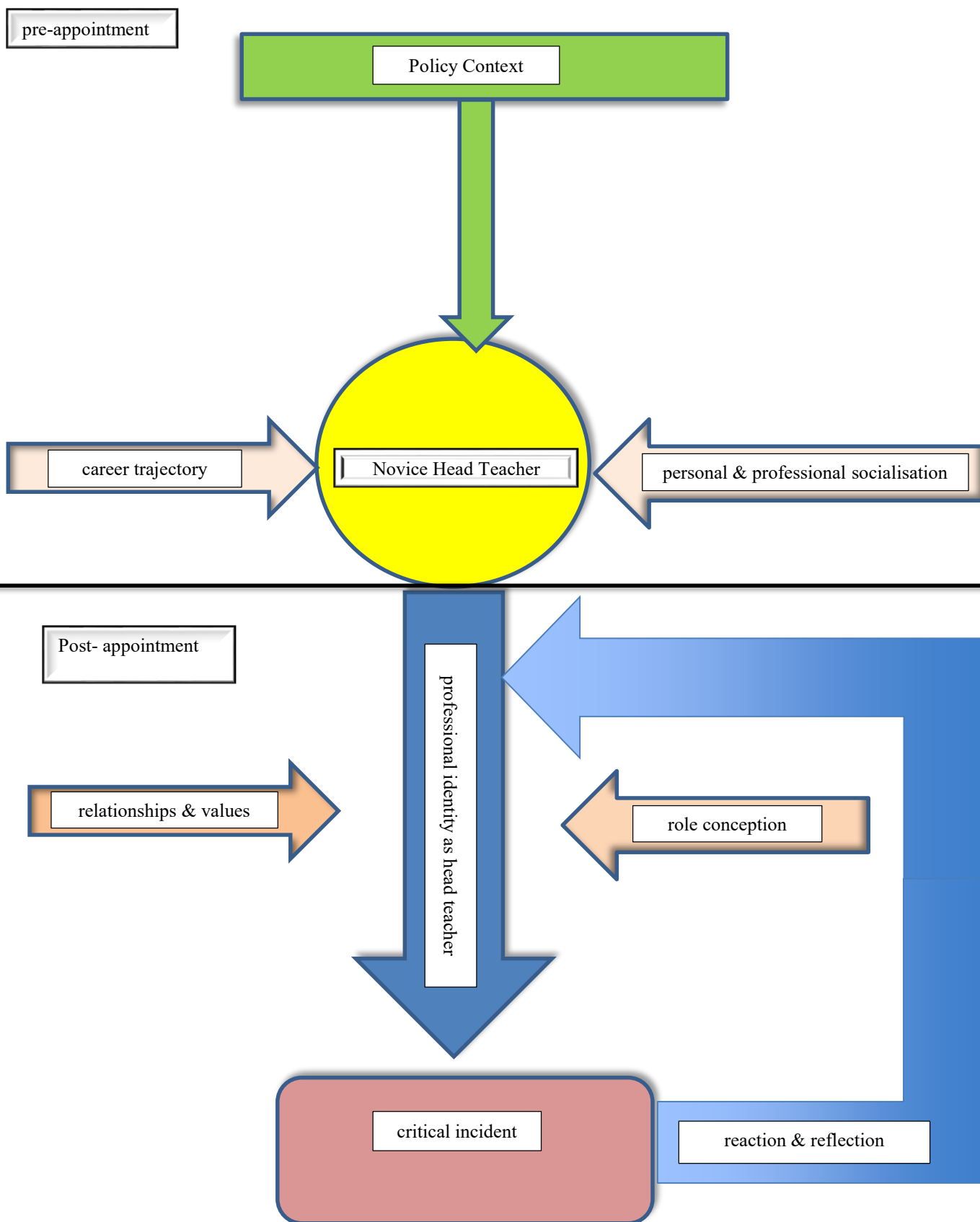
Providing individualised opportunities for professional learning for experienced headteachers is a challenge which SCEL is embracing and from which I am benefiting. The bespoke approach to professional learning offered by the Fellowship has recognised the contribution my background has allowed me to make and has provided a new context in which I can apply it. The presentations during network meetings (whilst not all directly relevant to this enquiry) were thought provoking but some in particular influenced my thinking: Clive Dimmock and Ann Pearson, perhaps because they related to the particular personal aspects of leadership which I was investigating. Uplifting Leadership (Hargreaves et al. 2014) presented models of leadership, which centred on inspiring people towards a common goal, one of the main functions of headteachers today. Although coaching was a key aspect of the Fellowship, it was not something I found particularly useful in that I had no clear purpose for it. This may seem ironic in terms of the recommendations I make but I believe there is a clear difference in a model for coaching for new and aspirant heads and coaching prospective Fellows of SCEL.

THE Enquiry: How Should Headship Preparation be Extended Post-Appointment?

In analysing the conceptual map from my EdD thesis (Purdie 2014: 148), the post-appointment phase of headship preparation emerged as a significant area in headteacher

development. For ease of reference I have included the conceptual map on the following page.

Conceptual Map of Head Teacher Preparation



The post-appointment phase of organisational socialisation, where the headteacher is adjusting to a new role and the school is adjusting to a new headteacher, is central to a successful and effective headship (Weindling & Dimmock 2006). A major feature of this stage is the fact that the novice headteacher is establishing her credibility. An essential aspect of this is the first meeting with staff and pupils. At this stage, it is also important that the headteacher demonstrates contextual sensitivity, particularly as the senior leadership team realigns under their new leader. Interpersonal skills are paramount throughout headship but particularly so at this time. A key issue is that the individual's personal identity as headteacher is developing during this stage (Benaim and Humphreys 1997; Restine 1997; Fidler and Atton 2004; Rhodes 2012; Thomson 2009). This is shaped by relationships, values and role conception (Brown-Ferrigno 2003; Crow and Glascock 1995; Earley and Weindling 2007; Kelly and Saunders 2010).

What emerged from my doctoral research was the inevitability of a critical incident (or incidents), which I have subsequently renamed defining moment(s), during the early phase of headship (Briggs et al. 2006; Crow 2007; Murphy 2007; Quong 2006; Walker and Qian 2006; Weindling and Dimmock 2006). Fidler & Atton refer to these as 'opinion forming occasions' (2004: 171). This is a significant event (or in reality more than one event), not necessarily of the headteacher's making, but the handling of which influences both how the headteacher views herself as headteacher and how others view her. What I discovered was that these situations often related to legacy issues inherited from the new head's predecessor and usually concerned personnel issues (Purdie 2014: 146). A key factor here is the head's reaction and reflection on how she handled the situation(s). If this is framed positively, it has a positive impact on the headteacher's emerging identity, and subsequent belief in her ability to handle future critical situations (which expectedly occur). The emotional intensity in

dealing with unpredictable situations should not be underestimated. In my original thesis I argued that scaffolding should be provided for novice headteachers in these challenging times, when they are operating in ‘indeterminate zones of practice’ (Schön 1987: 6).

Opening up discussion and signaling that such events are an inevitable part of headship would assist in normalising such situations, as would the allocation of a coach/mentor to facilitate discussion.

Given the challenge of the early days in post, the question I therefore wanted to pursue in my enquiry was: How should headship preparation be extended post-appointment? Weindling (2000) reviews earlier work on the stages of headship and for the purposes of this enquiry ‘Entry and Encounter’ and ‘Taking Hold’ (Weindling 2000: 12) cover the first year in post and the onslaught of the first critical incident. Together with my own work, this suggested a fruitful area of enquiry. Two main sources informed my thinking in addressing this question. Cheyney et. al’s (2010) report on new and innovative approaches to principal preparation (Rainwater Leadership Alliance Programmes, hereafter RLA) indicated that high performing programmes offered direct support to new principals during (and sometimes beyond) their first year in post. This support included individual coaching, peer coaching, ongoing workshops and access to experts. Some coaching is extended to the entire SLT. This was similar to the findings of Barber et al. (2010: 10) who indicate that in York Region, Ontario, new principals are mentored by existing principals for two years. Additionally, in marked contrast to what happens in Scotland at present, all RLA programmes in the USA offer direct support to their novice principals (Cheney et al. 2010: 103). For example, coaches help new headteachers write action plans before they take up post and focus in particular on 30, 60 and 90 day actions. These plans focus on school improvement, which often includes school visits, where the coach works with the novice head teacher in situ. Thus there is a clear focus

for supported and purposeful coaching/mentoring, which contrasts with the current model in Scotland. Given that some of the issues for new headteachers include dealing with the legacy of their predecessor (Weindling & Dimmock 2006; Purdie 2014), this approach could usefully support that early transition to headship. One of the recommendations from my earlier study was that exiting head teachers should leave an exit plan for the school (moderated by the local authority) and such a plan could be the focus for coaching conversations. My conceptual map highlighted the importance of reflection on the defining moment and coaching would provide a means of supporting this. In the NYC Leadership Academy, the job of the coach 'is to ask the right questions to help the principal be reflective' (Cheney et al. 2010: 106).

Expanding My Thinking: Extending The Conceptual Framework.

What I had termed individual differences as a significant factor in shaping headteachers' responses to situations (Purdie 2014: 31) could be more specifically defined as traits, dispositions and attributes (Dimmock 2014: SCEL Network Meeting). The question therefore arose as to where I positioned these personal aspects of development in my conceptual map. Clearly they influence individual behaviour at all levels, not just as headteacher. Therefore, they possibly encircle the entire conceptual map because they impact on all stages of headship preparation. Indeed those programmes described by Cheney et al. (2010) had a clear focus on personal qualities before a potential candidate was included on a principal preparation programme (Cheney et al. 2010: 53). However, given the importance of the post-appointment development and the headteacher's response to their defining moment, traits, dispositions and attributes could usefully be situated in the post-appointment phase of headship development, as they play a key role in reaction and reflection.

As my thinking in this area has developed, I considered further the claim by Leithwood et al. (2008: 28) that: ‘A small handful of personal traits explains a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness’. I therefore began to consider if these traits could be delineated. My findings on this, are summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Summary of Significant Leadership Traits

Cheney et al. 2010	Barber et al. 2010	Leithwood et al. 2008	Zaccaro et al. 2004
Belief Urgency Results Orientation Resiliency	Resilient and persistent in goals, but adaptable to context and people Self-aware and able to learn Optimistic and enthusiastic	Open minded an ready to learn from others Flexible Persistent (in pursuit of high expectations Resilient Optimistic	Emotional Stability Extroversion Openness to experiences Agreeableness Conscientiousness

Although there is a range of common attributes relating to positive outlook and agreeableness across the literature, given the likelihood of a critical incident, the common theme of resilience was of particular interest to me, and the question I therefore posed was how opportunities could be provided for aspiring and novice head teachers to consider and strengthen resilience. In the context of this enquiry, I wanted to consider how this could be incorporated within the post-appointment phase and make recommendations as to how it could be more widely developed.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Although this enquiry focused on post-appointment support for new headteachers, there are also important pre-appointment messages emerging from literature reviewed, but especially from the report by Cheyney et.al (2010). From their work, the following characteristics marked the successful programmes (Cheney et al. 2010: 100):

1. Aggressive recruitment
2. Highly selective
3. Experiential
4. Accountability
5. *Emphasis on personal qualities*
6. Adult leadership

This contrasts somewhat with the current situation in Scotland, where there is as yet no agreement on whether or not a qualification for headship should be compulsory. If Scotland is to move forward in the recruitment and retention of effective school leaders, any future qualification for headship must be seen as highly desirable by aspiring heads and local authorities. It seems somewhat ironic that possible fears of difficulties with recruitment, should the qualification become compulsory, could influence decisions on this important matter.

Recommendation 2

In answer to the question how headship preparation should be extended post-appointment, I would suggest that a comprehensive coaching/mentoring structure in early headship should support reflection on early defining moments and should assist the novice headteacher at this

stage, especially in regard to personal qualities and particularly resilience. The NYC Leadership Academy outlines a detailed standards matrix, which delineates expected behaviour in challenging circumstances. This includes the following descriptors for *resilience*, which could usefully support discussion and reflection with a coach:

Reacts constructively to disappointment, admits error, and learns from mistakes and setbacks
 Maintains mental focus and energy in the face of difficult situations
 Handles disagreement and dissent constructively
 Uses formal and informal feedback to improve performance
 Is able to deal with ambiguities
 (Cheney et al. 2010: 150)

In the NYC matrix these are further illustrated in three ways:

- Meeting the Standard;
- Progressing Towards the Standard;
- Not Meeting the Standard.

A leader meeting the standard is described as transitioning from emotional to strategic responses whilst one not meeting the standard is described as follows: ‘Leader’s emotional responses to disappointment and setbacks inhibit transition to strategic responses’ (Cheney et al. 2010: 150). Each of the behaviours is illustrated in this way and thus illustrates specific responses giving scope for discussion and development. It should be noted that coaches/mentors in the high performing systems were existing principals.

A further challenge emerges, however, in considering the extent to which the descriptors of resilience are traits, dispositions or attributes. Following Dimmock (2012) if resilience is defined as a disposition or an attribute, then there is more likelihood that it can be developed. I would argue that having a vocabulary to discuss resilience, as detailed in the NYC matrix,

could aid its development and assist novice headteachers in reframing setbacks (Seligman 2002)

Recommendation 3

A post-appointment programme could usefully address the areas in the post-appointment section of the conceptual map: role conception, relationships and values and responses to the defining moment(s). An opportunity to reflect on these areas with a coach/mentor is crucial particularly the reflection and reaction around the defining moment as this is the area which has most impact on the novice headteacher's self-belief and self-efficacy and consequently their emerging professional identity as Headteacher (Benaim and Humphreys 1997; Restine 1997; Fidler and Atton 2004; Rhodes 2012; Thomson 2009).

Recommendation 4

A further notable feature of the RLA programmes was the fact that the providers held themselves accountable for the principal's subsequent success in raising attainment and they tracked their graduates' performance as school leaders (Cheney et al. 2010: 9). Data from standardised tests was used in this analysis (Cheney et al. 2010: 124) and whilst not a perfect measure, it at least gives novice headteachers a partner with whom to share the raising attainment agenda. This too is far removed from the Scottish experience and perhaps consideration could be given as to how we take this forward in our new headship qualifications. If mentors for new head teachers were recruited from future SCEL Fellows then a possible model for this shared accountability could emerge, which would also help address professional development for existing, long-serving headteachers.

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