

READING 6.11

James, C. & Vince, R. (2001). Developing the leadership capability of headteachers.
Educational Management and Administration, 29(3), 307-317

Major premise of the article

- “ Schools are emotional theatres *par excellence*
- “ Headship is therefore an emotional practice
- “ The role of the headteacher is:
 - . grounded in emotion
 - . shaped by emotion
 - . acted out in an emotional context
- “ Addressing these issues is essential for effective leadership capability development

(p.316)

- “ The principal has to live with considerable disappointments, fears, conflicts and anxieties and often has to cover over such feelings by seeming to be almost continually positive. P311
- “ Headteachers carry invisible rucksacks on their backs into which various people around them deposit rocks represented by others’ emotions, behaviour, demands and expectations (p.312)

“ Senior managers will be recipients of others’ projections: eg –

- . “she knows the answers”
- . “He is to blame for everything”
- . “she is just waiting for me to make a mistake”

“ Not only do headteachers attract expectations onto their role, they invite them (p312)

“ Simultaneously, headteachers were reluctant to take control and to let go of it (p.312)

“ The pressure to be a “perfect” headteacher weighs heavily to the extent that it may stop them taking risks, being inquisitive, acting creatively (p313)

“ As well as passion and commitment, research also found negative emotions associated: eg –

- . Anger caused by carrying the weight of others' emotions, behaviour, demands and expectations
- . Distress created by own and others' expectations plus overdeveloped sense of personal responsibility
- . Anxiety associated with role & consequent tendency to avoid anxiety by accentuating the positive
- . Anger about the isolation they experience and the pressure they feel to be “perfect” managers (p313)

- “ Headteachers are expected to demonstrate a highly developed personal approach to leadership while also maintaining a collective culture of leadership
- “ This expectation creates a constant tension between the need to express their authority and to sustain a wider accountability for the success and development of the school
- “ The authors suggest four specific areas to enhance the emotional understanding of the leadership role of the headteacher (p314)

4 ways to enhance the emotional understanding of the role of principal

1. Learning how to “give back” the projections and expectations that the role attracts – i.e. get rid of the rocks from the rucksack
 - . Learn to distinguish between personal feelings and those generated through others’ projections
 - . Give succinct feedback
 - . Deal directly with situations where they fear disruptive conflicts might emerge (p314)

4 ways to enhance the emotional understanding of the role of principal

2. Learning how to make choices about what their role involves and to establish clear boundaries around what it does not

- . Manage the complexity of the role by creating thought-through and clear boundaries
- . This process involves continuous reflection on the priorities that give shape to the role

4 ways to enhance the emotional understanding of the role of principal

3. Learning about the function of the role of headteacher in “containing” the emotions that are generated as an everyday aspect of organizing
 - . Learn about the ways in which emotion is experienced or avoided, managed or denied, kept in or passed on so that its effects are either mitigated or amplified
 - . This implies an ability to take the risk of “upsetting people”: it involves not backing away from difficult emotions that might emerge from implementing their leadership

(p315)

4 ways to enhance the emotional understanding of the role of principal

4. Learning how to accept being “good enough” rather than trying to be perfect

- . This is VERY difficult for people in role as headteacher to accept
- . Very powerful inhibitions (my word) are at work to prevent comfort with the notion of being seen as “human” even when things are very difficult – it seems that this may be rooted in a desire to keep everything under control so ... come to terms with the fact that anxiety and taking up leadership roles are inextricably linked (p316)