Training school principals, educating school governors

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School leadership in England and Wales is legally shared between the full-time principal and the part-time volunteers, the school governors. Their professional development opportunities during the last ten years have taken opposite directions. Principals’ development has moved to a training focus, with a nationalised, standardised, competency-based qualification for aspirant headteachers. Governors’ education remains a non-standardised, decentralised system but has now become largely school-based and centre on educational issues. In exploring why such differences have occurred, the reasons suggested are differing role expectations, training developments in related occupations, centralisation and decentralisation, uncertainties about the objectives of educational leadership and the costs of professional development.

Introduction

Effective leadership creates effective schools. To be effective, school leaders need professional development to improve their skills. These are the assumptions which underpin all of the research that has been done on effective schooling and on the importance of preparation for, and instruction in, the necessary skills of school leadership (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; Fullan, 1991; National Commission on Education, 1993; DfE, 1996; Earley, 1994; Audit Commission/OFSTED, 1995; Deem et al., 1995; Esp and Saran, 1995). School leadership in an English or Welsh school(1) is shared between the full-time, paid principal and a volunteer, part-time, board of governors, and this article is concerned with both of these. This model of shared leadership is found in many other European and Commonwealth countries although governors in England and Wales hold more powers than their counterparts elsewhere.

This article is concerned with the changes in the professional development of principals and governors during the last ten years. It will be suggested that the courses for principals have moved from education to training while those for governors have moved from training to education. The context in which these developments have taken place will be outlined, together with a description of the developments themselves. Suggestions will be made concerning the reasons for the changes and the article concludes with reflections on the possible future of professional development for these two groups.

In this reflection on professional development for principals and governors, the word “education” is used to mean the transmission and absorption of knowledge usually through a systematic process. “Education” has, however, acquired normative overtones in democratic systems and is often assumed to imply the study of a wide range of topics, the development of the critical faculties and the encouragement of individual creativity (Kelly, 1995). A person who is educated is regarded as one able to make choices from competing ends and who has more learning than that which would be regarded as strictly necessary for the performance of a job. In contrast, a person who has been trained is generally seen as one who has been given guidance on the skills needed for a specific job, requiring a focus and discipline provided by others. A person who is trained is assumed to be able to perform to the standards set for a job.

Research sources

The views expressed in this article arise from research projects which I have completed over the last ten years on governor training, the roles of governing bodies, the roles of governors from business and industry, on the history of community involvement and on international comparisons. These have used a survey of 1,500 governors in a Midlands Local Education Authority (LEA(2)), face-to-face and telephone interviews with governors, governors’ issues, including both academic and instrumental and the roles of governors and their log records (Thody, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1997a, 1998a, 1998b, Industry in Education, 1995; Thody and Nkata, 1996, 1997). Other documentary sources, on both governorship and principals’ issues, including both academic and government publications, are referred to above and in the course of the article. Personal research into school principalship has included studies by observation on the activities of principals and by interviews on mentoring as a training method for principals (Thody, 1991, 1993; Thody and Crystal, 1995) supported by experience in providing degree and diploma courses for principals and in training principals on each of the government’s successive training programmes during the 1990s; mentoring for newly-appointed headteachers, HEADLAMP (short courses for newly-appointed headteachers) and the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH for aspirant school principals) (Cresson and Ellison, 1998).

School leadership: shared responsibilities

The leadership of each of England’s and Wales’ 23,000 schools is legally shared.
between a school principal and a body of external, largely non-educationalist, school governors. The school principal is a full-time, paid employee, who must be a qualified teacher and who usually also has a post-graduate degree in education and considerable experience of school management. The school governors are part-time, unpaid volunteers who give their time to help advise and direct the policies of the school. Each school has between ten and 22 governors, the number increasing as the number of students increases. These governing bodies consist of elected parents, elected teachers and appointed representatives of the local political parties who control local government. These three groups then collectively co-opt representatives of the local community who may include business people, community activists, members of local associations and representatives of religious groups. Thus the expert principal shares school leadership with a non-expert body but one which provides the principal with a means of consulting the views of a school’s external stakeholders.

The task of school leadership is extensive and includes responsibilities for both ensuring that schools are solvent businesses and that they achieve academic successes for their students. A school principal has to be both a competent business executive and instructional leader, while governors have to be aware of the needs of both aspects of schooling in order to give appropriate advice and to monitor whether or not the principal and staff are achieving their targets. All schools are fully self-managing and the principal and governors are jointly responsible for managing human, financial and physical resources. This includes making the school’s strategic plan and monitoring it to see if it is implemented. The school must also decide how to distribute its resources among all of the school’s requirements, including teachers’ salaries. The principal’s salary is determined by the governors and all staff are appointed, and can be promoted or dismissed by the governors. Principal and governors must ensure that the National Curriculum is delivered to acceptable national standards (as tested by national examinations). They must be able to demonstrate to the government’s inspectorate, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) that the leadership of the school is effective and efficient.

The powers outlined, of both school principals and governors, have increased to their present apogee very rapidly over the last ten years and their general direction has remained unchanged despite the 1997 change from a Conservative to a Labour government.

The developments are similar to those in almost all other OECD countries but have been most extensive in England and Wales (Bolam, 1997, p. 267). Reflecting on how principals and governors have been prepared for these developments may, therefore, be useful for other countries considering advancing their own reforms further.

### Professional development for principals and governors: ten years of change

Accompanying the schooling reforms as described were concomitant changes in the professional development opportunities for principals and governors. These are summarised in Table 1.

For principals, the movement has been to a nationalised, compulsory, competency-led training (Creissen and Ellison, 1998). For governors, the movement is to a decentralised, virtually school-based, non-compulsory, wider education for their professional development.

There has been consensus among government, professional associations and to some extent, higher education institutions, that the development of the NPQH is acceptable and much of it has arisen from previous research within higher education about the desirability of a competency approach to training (Heller and Pautler, 1990, p. 142; Earley, 1993; Esp, 1993; Jirasingshe and Lyons, 1996). There are, of course, discussions about the desirability of the precise format adopted and the debate about the prescriptive nature of the training materials, but these are arguments about the niceties of the idea rather than of the idea itself.

For governors, the change has been to supporting governors’ learning rather than to direct their knowledge acquisition. Governors report great gains in confidence from these approaches (Thody, 1997a). The content of courses, whether on or off site, has two principal foci – teaching, learning and assessment methods and micro-political skills of management. Within these two aspects there will be numerous different directions which governors may follow, including, for example, literacy, numeracy, introductions to any of the main curriculum subjects, how to speak confidently at meetings, how to negotiate successfully with teachers or how to plan an agenda. Other topics will range widely from child abuse, or religion in schools, to the legalities of admitting and excluding students from school or appraising staff. Most governors will undertake one or two such courses so that the knowledge of any one
Table I
Professional development for principals and governors

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principals, pre-1997</th>
<th>Governors, pre-1990</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Optional</td>
<td>• Optional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mainly part-time higher degrees over several years</td>
<td>• Short courses - 1 day to 8 weeks part time, non-accredited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• University or LEA provided</td>
<td>• LEA provided, most LEAs have governor training co-ordinators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wide education, theory and practice</td>
<td>• Aimed to offer the legal information about governorship</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Aimed to produce reflective principals (Schon, 1987) through action learning and a research orientation</td>
<td>• Focus was to produce competent governors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not standardised across the country</td>
<td>• Not standardised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Targeted government funding to ensure spending on principals’ training</td>
<td>• Small amount of targeted government funding, reserved for governor training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Central guidance and pressure through the encouragement of schemes for mentoring and HEADLAMP short courses for newly-appointed principals and through advisory and dissemination bodies, the School Management Task Forces and the National Development Centre</td>
<td>• No central guidance, e.g. each LEA devised own courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Temed, “professional development”</td>
<td>• Temed, “training”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Principals, post-1997</th>
<th>Governors, post-1990</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH), introduced in 1997, becoming compulsory by 2002 for all aspirant principals</td>
<td>• Optional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assessment required for entry to NPQH and to be awarded the NPQH</td>
<td>• No entry, nor concluding, assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Higher degrees still available through universities</td>
<td>• Both off-site and in-school courses are offered but the latter are most popular; short, non-accredited courses of 1/2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• NPQH organised by regional specialist consortia awarded central government contracts</td>
<td>• LEA organised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emphasis on the acquisition of management competences and skills</td>
<td>• Discusses teaching and learning, wide ranging skills and knowledge of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Aims to create effective principals raising standards, being accountable</td>
<td>• Aims to create effective governors raising standards, being accountable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Standardised core modules on strategic direction and accountability; modules on learning and teaching, people and relationships, effective management of financial and physical resources</td>
<td>• Not standardised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Targeted funding must be spent on NPQH</td>
<td>• Small amounts of funding are made available but it is subsumed into school budgets and schools can choose whether or not to spend it on governor education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Central direction and control through a pre-set curriculum, centrally produced training materials, standardised assessment criteria for entrants, standardised training materials and common training for trainers</td>
<td>• Not centrally directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Temed, “training”</td>
<td>• Temed, “development”</td>
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group of people who form a governing body is likely to be diverse and may not collectively cover all the responsibilities of governors. In a 1997 survey of 50 primary and 13 secondary schools in one LEA (Thody, 1997a) only one was found which had organised their professional development so that each governor had attended some courses to ensure that every duty of the governing body had been studied by at least one of their members.

Changes in education and training for principals and governors: a projected rationale

Role expectations

The opposite directions followed by professional development for principals and governors could be related to the greater role certainty for principals who are expected to embody three major traditions. First, there is the nineteenth-century moral leader, highly educated, with strong social control objectives; second, the mid-twentieth century professional expert leading curriculum innovation and social engineering for equity with a strong emphasis on participatory decision making and, third, from the late 1980s onwards, the chief executive of a business. While the other traditions remain, the most recent is accepted, and promulgated by the government as the dominant one in response to meeting the needs of the self-managing school. For this role, the competency-based training of the NPQH can be seen as most suitable.

The importance of retaining the earlier traditions of principalship is, however, recognised in the NPQH training. While the training materials are very prescriptive, there is stress throughout on listening to the views of staff, parents, governors and students, in the traditions of the mid-twentieth century school principal and on developing values and visions, in the traditions of the nineteenth-century school principal. Many of those who must pass their NPQH will also choose to add a postgraduate degree to their qualifications as well and universities are rewriting their Masters' degree courses to permit accreditation to part of their degrees to those who hold the NPQH.

For governors, there is no clear definition of their primary role which could lead to the production of a single training model. Are governors advisers to principals or a conduit for the views of external stakeholders? Are they joint managers with the principal or monitors of the work of the principal and staff? Are they part of a school's management team or representatives of government to whom the school is accountable? Do governors and their associations have a part to play in national policy making? The outcome of this uncertainty is unresolved debates about what governor professional development is for and what, therefore, might be a desirable format for it. Current governor professional development does produce its expected outputs of more governors who are better informed about education (DES, 1989; Pounce, 1993; Schlechte, 1995; Northants, 1994-1995, 1995-1996) but there are debates over whether or not it should increase its emphasis on educational development (Browning, 1997) and over whether or not scarce resources should be focused almost entirely on induction or spread more thinly to meet some of the needs of more experienced governors (Jones, 1997). Some governors are dissatisfied with existing training courses and these are being cancelled for lack of enrolments (Northants, 1994-1995, 1995-1996; Thody, 1997a) but there is acceptance of the value of school-based governor education. There is some evidence that the training encourages governors to feel inadequate when dealing with professional educational matters (Bacon, 1978; Turner et al., 1991; Waring, 1992; Thody, 1994b) but the professional development opportunities for governors have given them a new-found political confidence (Deem et al., 1995; Thody, 1995, 1997).

Training developments in related occupations

School principals are increasingly regarded as the equivalents of senior managers in medium-sized business enterprises, managing annual budgets of between half and four million pounds. For similar posts in private sector businesses, managers are now trained following the competency frameworks developed by the Management Charter Initiative launched in the mid-1980s. Every management post is graded at Levels 1-5 and for each of these there are related competences to be acquired. The competency lists for school principals are not exact replicas of these, but they do embody the same approaches. The message which the government wishes to emphasise is that of schools as businesses in a market-led economy for education.

Governors' professional development has not followed the competency route, possibly because other voluntary jobs are not included in the National Vocational Qualifications structure. It may also be because a rigorous competency route and a requirement that governors cannot serve without having a qualification would deter many from becoming governors. It may be because the time is not yet come for establishing competences for
governors; those for school principals needed more urgent settlement and were more amenable to rapid central action than governors’ professional development, which is still firmly within the purview of the LEAs.

School principal development began leaving the control of the LEAs from the early 1980s but it is not until the late 1990s that it has moved almost completely to central control. Perhaps governor training will follow in due course.

Centralisation and decentralisation

These two are the apparently competing trends in education introduced from the late 1980s onwards. To centralise the system, there is now a National Curriculum for all state schools, national standards to be attained are set by the central government and all schools are subject to frequent inspections which operate according to nationally-set requirements. To decentralise, schools have become individually self-managing. Professional development for principals and governors can be seen to embody the same, contradictory trends. School principalship training follows the centralisation model and school governor training follows the decentralised model.

In centralisation, one could detect the government’s intention to control the teaching profession more strongly and ensure that public education is responsive to government and public demands. Neither principals nor governors take decisions on what is taught nor on how it is taught (surely the most important aspects of education) but only on the administration of the school. If centralised control is the intention of the government, as it appears to be, then the nationalisation of the training of school principals is yet another part of the control mechanism.

Governments’ decision to diminish the previous lead role of the universities as the main providers of courses in educational leadership may also be indicative of this desire to control what is taught to principals. This is despite the lack of user criticisms of university courses. British critics are very mild compared with those which face, for example, US university educational administrator preparation programmes (Jacobson, 1990); British university courses for school principals are recognised for their adaptation to the real world needs of practitioners and for the partnerships engendered between universities and schools.

The centralisation agenda has not been applied to governors’ professional development. As yet, government has not been decisive on governors’ roles nor their training and the debates on these remain unresolved. Perhaps government considers governors to be less important to school outcomes than principals. This conclusion is supported by the 1998 legislation which will permit governors’ powers to be decreased, altered or suspended in the new Educational Action Areas for the improvement of failing schools. Without central intervention, there is unlikely to be a nationally agreed professional development programme for governors. The Governor Training Co-ordinators for each LEA do meet and discuss issues of common concern but the determined individualism of their employers, the LEAs, prevents their deciding on common programmes.

Uncertainty about the objectives of educational leadership

The government’s desire to centralise in order, apparently, to control may have a less sinister interpretation. Successive governments may well have felt that the theoretical arguments among academics about what constitutes effective principalship for effective schools were obstructing the necessary direction to the education of principals. The arguments have been prevalent since the discipline of educational administration became accepted around 25 years ago and, as yet, there is no resolution of them here or in other countries (Bolam, 1997, pp. 275-6). There is agreement that training needs improvement, here and in other countries (Jacobson, 1990, p. 33) but not how it should be improved nor to what ends. With the current needs for schools to raise standards in England and Wales, according to government, then someone must obviously take action to decide how to train appropriately those who must raise standards. Academics debate, governments decide.

Nonetheless, governments have not yet decided about governor training any more than have academics. The academic debate about the roles and training of governors has been referred to above. The governmental debate is illustrated in publications such as the DfE (1996) Guide to Good Governance. The political debate was evidenced in the rapid changes in legislation concerning governors between 1986 and 1988. In the 1986 Education Act, governors were given the power to decide a school’s curriculum. By 1988, this power was withdrawn and replaced with government direction of the curriculum. The lack of decision on governors may be because they have been subject to much less study than have school principals; even by the late 1990s, research is not extensive compared with that devoted to school principals over a much longer period.
Costs of professional development
The political and financial costs of direct intervention in professional development for principals may have prevented earlier moves to a qualification such as the NPQH. Politically, the principals' professional associations are strong and are themselves extensively involved in training provision. They have assessment centres for serving and aspiring principals and run short courses. The universities have, for many years, dominated the provision of accredited courses for principals.

Governments have now decided that they can risk entering the territory of these established stakeholders, perhaps because the public's estimate of the status of the teaching profession has declined since the mid-1980s and because of the universities' dependence on government funding and the introduction of government controls on universities through assessments of their teaching and research. In such a climate, the addition of control over principals' qualifications is not unexpected and opposition to it from within the education professions is unlikely to be well received publicly.

Financially, governments have tried cheaper options for principals' professional development but have abandoned these (e.g. mentoring). Governments have rejected expensive, elitist ideas such as a staff college, and now appear to have concluded that whatever is done will be expensive. If it is to be expensive, then it will be controlled to ensure that investment produces the outcomes desired.

The investment in each aspirant principal's training will be in the region of £2,000-£3,000 but the numbers to be trained are small compared with the numbers of governors needing professional development. There are approximately 350,000 governors, the majority of whom will serve for four years. Every four years, therefore, there will be new governors to train; since the first governing bodies were appointed under the current legislation in 1988, it is possible to estimate that around one million people have served as governors.

Even a short induction course for this number would prove very expensive. Politically, the governors' national associations are not strong and are only just beginning to learn how to pressurise governments. Possibly they have not yet been able to exert enough pressure to persuade governments to dedicate more resources to governors' professional development or governors' local professional associations prefer to encourage local training provision in order to avoid losing their own status with local governors.

Reflections on the future
Principals' professional development has moved to a training model while governors have moved to an education model. The possible rationale for these changes appears to rely on contradictions to support each development. It may be possible to explain the contradictions simply because the roles of principals and governors are different yet they both share the same responsibilities and both are legally liable for achieving school effectiveness.

In my opinion, the changes are more a function of time than of normative principles driving each distinct evolution. It seems to me likely that governor professional development will move to a competency listing of skills and perhaps a national curriculum promulgated through such means as a multimedia CD as agreement grows over what governorship entails, as experience of their training grows, as their knowledge of education increases, as governments decide on the political importance of governors and as research reports indicate the directions to take. Such an approach would be additional to existing provision, in the same way as is now mandatory for aspiring principals. Principals can continue with post-graduate education while also acquiring their NPQH.

Indeed, they will need to; once every aspirant principal has reached the basic standard demanded by the government, selection boards will need to use other criteria to distinguish applicants for posts and one of these could be the possession of a post-graduate qualification. In this way, both the education and training models will co-exist.

This co-existence should enable the roles of principals as instructional leaders and as business executives to operate concurrently rather than being seen as mutually exclusive or in a hierarchy in which the principal as educational leader has paramountcy. Governors also need the knowledge that will enable them to monitor both the roles operated by principals.

Whatever happens, these changes in professional development opportunities for principals and governors are important; there are shortages of people willing to serve in either capacity. Vacancies for principals' posts no longer attract the large numbers who used to apply in the 1980s and many principals have taken early retirement, leaving schools unable to fill their places. At the first governor elections in 1988, there were more than enough volunteers to necessitate contested elections for most places. By the 1996 governor elections, there were rarely contested
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elections and inner city schools have difficulty persuading anyone to stand as governor.
If either of these shortages can be related to lack of suitable training, then it is to be hoped that the changes will ameliorate the situation. Principals have reportedly taken early retirement because they feel incapable of coping with the stresses of the current business executive model of principalship. The NPQH training is designed to provide the skills to enable principals to operate this entrepreneurial model. The similarity between the NPQH and other managerial qualifications is also designed to raise the status of principalship and the government hopes, thereby, to attract those from outside education to the job. There is yet little evidence that this is happening but the NPQH may make it more of a possibility.

Notes
1 Scotland and Northern Ireland, the other two constituent nations of the United Kingdom, are not included in this paper as they have a different system to that of England and Wales.
2 There are 114 LEAs each responsible for most of the state provision in their areas.

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Further reading


