Chapter 50
Ethical Leadership in an Age of Evaluation: Implications for Whole—School Well-Being

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Abstract The evaluation and inspection of many public services, including education, has become increasingly common in most countries in the developed world (McNamara & O'Hara, 2004; MacBeath & McGlynn, 2002). There are various reasons why this may be the case. It can be argued that it is, on the one hand, part of the movement towards low trust policies derived from the ideology of neo-liberalism which seeks to apply the values of the market to the public sector. On the other hand, it can be argued that increased evaluation is a necessary and defensible component of democratic accountability, responsibility and transparency (O'Neill, 2002). The research reported here sets out to explore the idea of a personal vision or core of ethics as being central to educational leadership, through in-depth interviews with a number of school leaders. The chapter begins by briefly placing educational leadership in the modern context, characterised by the paradox of apparently greater decentralisation of responsibility to schools being in fact coupled with a further centralisation of actual power and greatly increased surveillance of performance (Neave, 1998). Relevant developments internationally, and then specifically in the context of Ireland, are described. It is suggested that in Ireland the modern educational context may indeed be creating difficult ethical and moral dilemmas for leaders to face. To see if this is so in practice, five in-depth interviews with school principals are reported. The evidence arising from these interviews indicates that school leaders do feel guided by a strong moral or ethical compass.

Introduction

The evaluation and inspection of many public services, including education, has become increasingly common in most countries in the developed world (McNamara & O'Hara, 2004; MacBeath & McGlynn, 2002). There are various reasons why this may be the case. It can be argued that it is, on the one hand, a part of the movement towards low-trust policies derived from the ideology of neo-liberalism

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which seeks to apply the values of the market to the public sector. On the other hand, it can be argued that increased evaluation is a necessary and defensible component of democratic accountability, responsibility and transparency (O'Neill, 2002). What cannot be denied is that this process, both at the level of nation states and through the policies of influential organisations such as the OECD, the EU and the World Bank, continues to gather pace. Equally, however, there is also a growing debate regarding the appropriate extent of such evaluation particularly as research increasingly shows that external monitoring of an intrusive kind can seriously damage the autonomy and morale of professionals and organisations (Hansson, 2006).

In consequence, a worldwide debate continues as to the balance to be achieved between accountability and professional autonomy and between professional development and external judgement. Resolving these conflicting demands has become a major burden on school leaders, often caught between requirements for external accountability on the one hand and their roles as staff motivators and developers on the other (Bottery, 2004). Research is increasingly pointing to the importance of an ethical framework which can provide leaders with a secure base from which to defend the educational philosophy and practices which are important to them (Fullan, 2004). In addition, new models of educational decision making which emphasise the centrality of distributed leadership (De Jong & Kerr-Roubicek, 2007) to the creation and maintenance of whole school well-being (Kilpatrick, Falk, & Johns, 2002) clearly identify the importance of the school leaders' ethical framework to the creation of a professionally rewarding and personally enriching school community.

The research reported on here sets out to explore the idea of a personal vision or core of ethics as being central to educational leadership, through in-depth interviews with a number of school leaders. The chapter begins by briefly placing educational leadership in the modern context, characterised by the paradox of apparently greater decentralisation of responsibility to schools being in fact coupled with a further centralisation of actual power and greatly increased surveillance of performance (Neave, 1998). Relevant developments internationally, and then specifically in the context of Ireland, are described. It is suggested that in Ireland the modern educational context may indeed be creating difficult ethical and moral dilemmas for leaders to face. To see if this is so in practice five in-depth interviews with school principals are reported. The evidence arising from these interviews indicates that school leaders do feel guided by a strong moral or ethical compass. There is also evidence, however, of both internal contradictions and feelings of conflict with the essentially pragmatic nature of much of the decision making required by the realities of day-to-day life as a school principal in twenty-first century Ireland.

Leading in the Age of Evaluation

In an article entitled "I audit, therefore I am" in The Times Higher Education Supplement (THES, October 18, 1996, quoted in Simons, 2002, p. 17) Michael Power, Professor of Accounting at the London School of Economics, defined our era as

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"the age of inspection, the evaluative state and the audit society". He went on, "whatever term one prefers, there can be little doubt that something systematic has occurred since 1971. In every area of social and economic life, there is more formalised checking, assessment, scrutiny, verification and evaluation". The intense push to develop systems of accountability and increasing concerns with obtaining value for money that have accompanied this emergence of an "evaluative state" (Neave, 1998, p. 265) have had a significant impact on education. The roots of this movement are varied. On the one hand it is clear that much of this tendency can be closely connected to the dominant political ideologies of recent times, particularly Thatcherism, Reaganomics and Neo-Liberalism (McNamara & O'Hara, 2008). These ideologies tended to distrust the public sector and to progress an agenda of making such services responsive to the realities of the market (Giddins, 2004). Interestingly however, even as the political authors of these policies have faded from the scene and more moderate politicians have come to power much of this self-styled "reform agenda" has been retained and even further developed. This appears to be because it has become widely accepted that public services, including the activities of hitherto relatively autonomous professionals, should be more accountable in a democratic society (O'Neill, 2002).

In the case of education these policy directions have been compounded by the immense importance which governments worldwide attribute to student achievement and school effectiveness. A vibrant education system is now widely seen as an essential component of economic success without which countries cannot hope to compete for the mobile capital which characterises the modern economy. In consequence in virtually every country in the developed world, and increasingly in the developing world, the State has systematically sought to improve the quality of education and training, not only as in the past by increased expenditure, but also by attempting to increase "output" through systems of evaluation and surveillance (Bottery, 2004). However, it is important to note that these same developments are being increasingly challenged in society in general and particularly in education as the serious consequences of such policies gradually become apparent (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001; Moos, 2003).

The complex arguments, both philosophical and practical, in relation to the evaluation of schools and teachers which have exercised researchers both within education and beyond in recent years (McNamara & O'Hara, 2005) are largely outside the scope of this study. However, a brief contextual summary of the main points of the discussion is necessary for an understanding of the rest of the chapter. It can be argued that much of the policy direction described above is founded on two fundamental flaws. The first of these is that evaluation systems, which by their nature must be founded on data and information acquired through social science research methodologies, can ever in fact produce clear, unambiguous and implementable results, policies or plans. This is simply because, as a great deal of work in the social sciences in the past 30 years has shown clearly, complex systems with wide and various goals such as education are hugely resistant to quantifiable measurement (Elliott, 2004; Pring, 2004; Peters, 1973). The second fundamental flaw alleged against the neo-liberalist approaches to evaluation and appraisal is

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that these policies downplay or totally ignore the serious side effects inherent in unduly interfering in the reasonable exercise of professional autonomy by groups such as teachers (Slattery, 2003). It has become increasingly apparent that, in a nutshell, such policies when implemented in certain forms do more harm than any demonstrable benefits that may arise (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005).

This latter point is important and has resulted in what can be accurately described as a reconsideration of evaluative policies. One of the reasons for this is that in most of the developed world, outside of the English-speaking countries, there remains a strong antipathy towards undue or overweening interference in professional autonomy. This is also true of some countries which might be regarded as belonging to the Anglophone world such as Ireland and Scotland (McNamara & O'Hara, 2006). In most of these countries there has been, admittedly, a significant move towards greater processes of school and teacher evaluation. Arguably, this has a great deal to do with the fact that such policies have been adopted and strongly supported by influential international agencies particularly the OECD and to a lesser extent the EU. However, as developed in each individual country the emerging evaluation systems are in fact a compromise between imported ideologies and strong local traditions of school and teacher autonomy and independence. Therefore, what has emerged in most countries is a series of compromises which involve significant increases in the evaluation of schools and teachers but which are based fundamentally on the premise that these groupings should primarily evaluate themselves with a degree of external oversight (McNamara & O'Hara, 2004). This concept, usually referred to as self-evaluation, was virtually unknown 10 or 15 years ago but has now become the dominant force in the discourse on school and teacher evaluation (Nevo, 2002). In consequence most evaluation systems have now become a hybrid involving internal or self-evaluation by individual teachers or entire schools with a greater or lesser degree of external moderation (Simons, 2002; MacBeath, 2006).

In essence what we are seeing is an attempt to produce a series of compromises which will somehow allow for schools and teachers to evaluate their own performance and improve their work while at the same time providing a basis on which judgements regarding efficiency and effectiveness can be made and political and public demands for accountability be met. Of course reconciling these different purposes is extremely difficult since, naturally, professionals respond differently to a system that is primarily developmental than they do to a system that is primarily judgemental. Increasingly, the responsibility for reconciling these at times contradictory systemic impulses is falling on the principal working within a school community.

The challenge being faced by principals in this area is a daunting one and makes many demands, both personally and professionally. Arguably the neo-liberal reform agenda discussed earlier has reduced and narrowed both the aims and practice of schooling and consequently the scope for vision, innovation and leadership among educational professionals (MacBeath, 1999; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). As the definition of achievement and success within education narrows

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it follows logically that the understanding of what defines a healthy educational environment becomes redefined. The notion of well-being in the school context is often inextricably linked to the easily measurable, and at times quite limited, academic attainments of the students. It is therefore unsurprising that the challenges of leadership in this hostile context have become the focus of considerable attention in the educational literature (Bottery, 2007; Woods, 2007; Dunphy, 2007).

A good deal of recent research in the area of school management has come to focus on "the moral imperatives of school leadership" (Fullan, 2004). That is to say, it is now increasingly understood that school leaders require inner resources, a kind of guide or compass, in the form of a set of values, morals or ideals, which inform their leadership and decision making. Many researchers have tried to tease out further how such a moral compass might be defined. Day, Harris, Hayfield, Tolley, and Beresford (2000, p. 27) speak of "a personal vision. . . and a core of personal ethics" as central to educational leadership. Briggs (2007) identifies personal values as being a key component of professional relationships, while Ball (2003, p. 215) speaks of "the soul of the teacher". Woods (2007, p. 136) describes this guiding framework as "the bigger feeling" or "spirituality", which she defines as "an area of the human experience which involves heightened awareness of something of profound significance beyond what is normally taken as everyday experience". Woods' research suggests that the wellspring of this feeling or awareness may be religious, but need not necessarily be so. Interestingly, in her research sample the majority of those of her respondents who defined themselves as atheist, agnostic or humanist also reported having a spiritual (as defined above by Woods) element to their resources for leadership (2007, p. 146). Quite a number of other descriptions of this "bigger feeling" are to be found in the recent literature. However, for the purposes of this research, it was decided to conceptualise "spirituality" in terms of Day et al.'s (2000) notion of a personal vision and core of ethics rather than in a more overtly religious way such as that put forward by Woods. This is because it was felt that the latter might tend to lead the respondents to interpret the research in largely religious terms.

In summary it can be argued that the research reported above suggests that the ethical framework adopted by the school leader is of central importance when the school community as a whole tries to define for itself the core elements of the concept of well-being. While the emergence of an educationally narrow and at times destructive definition of accountability has obviously had an impact on how leaders act out their values in schools, the parallel emergence of a collegially focused, empowered and distributed leadership model has gone some way towards ameliorating the impact of this on the quality of the school community. In the next section we will examine the emergence of an Irish system of school evaluation with a view to examining how the lived experience of Irish school leaders was actually effected by the introduction of an accountability framework and perhaps more importantly, how they felt this influenced their own and their colleagues core values.

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School and Teacher Evaluation: An Example from Ireland

Schools and teachers in Ireland have a long history of being evaluated by a centralised inspectorate, a division of the Department of Education and Science (DES). However, by the early 1990s this system had broken down to a significant degree. The inspection of primary schools had become sporadic and rather idiosyncratic but still existed. In secondary schools inspection had nearly ceased entirely and in fact the largest teacher union supported its members in refusing to teach in front of an inspector.

The reasons for this decline in inspection are varied and need not detain us here. What is interesting is that the impetus for a new approach to inspection and school evaluation in the mid-1990s came from external sources rather than from any pressing domestic demand. This is made clear in the evaluation report prepared by the Department of Education and Science after the first Whole School Evaluation (WSE) pilot project from 1996 to 1999 (DES, 1999). For example, the introduction justifies the development of the WSE pilot scheme by noting that "across the European Union a wide range of approaches is evident to the assessment and evaluation of schools" (DES, 1999, p. 8). On page 9 we read that "there is now a growing tendency across Europe to see external and internal school evaluation processes as being inextricably linked". Later on the same page it is suggested that "there is an increasing effort to encourage schools to review their own progress in a formal way . . . to engage in their own development planning".

The external influences made explicit in the above quotes show clearly that, as Boyle (1997) argues, EU policy in the direction of new public management systems such as strategic planning and systematic evaluation has been a key driver of change in the Irish context. As Boyle (1997, 2002) suggests, it was not so much any domestic policy or ideology that drove this process, but rather a migration of EU evaluation policy, together with a strong sense that, as these developments appeared to be happening everywhere else, it was potentially dangerous to lag behind. It is no coincidence that in other areas of education, and indeed across the public sector as a whole, the last decade has witnessed similar developments. Rapid change in the Irish education system, and influential research, has moved school development planning and school and teacher evaluation from the periphery to the centre of education policy.

In May 2003, the DES in Ireland published twin documents entitled Looking At Our School, an aid to self-evaluation in primary schools and Looking At Our School, an aid to self-evaluation in post-primary schools (DES, 2003a, 2003b) (these documents, although designed for different levels of the education system, are so similar in content that they can be treated as one and are referred to hereafter as LAOS and referenced hereafter as DES (2003). The publications contain a very detailed framework for the inspection and evaluation of schools and teachers, including 143 "themes for self-evaluation" which schools and teachers are invited to consider in preparation for an external evaluation by the inspectorate. The methodology suggested for using these themes "while engaging in a self-evaluation exercise" is described as follows:

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> A school may decide to focus on an area, an aspect or a component. The school will gather information in relation to the theme or themes under evaluation. Having engaged in a process of collecting and analysing this information and evidence, the school will be in a position to make a statement or statements indicating its own performance in the relevant component, aspect or area (DES, 2003, p. x).

The type of statement regarding each area, aspect or component evaluated which schools are invited to make is described as "a continuum consisting of a number of reference points representing stages of development in the improvement process" (DES, 2003, p. x). This continuum is to be represented for each item by describing the situation discovered by the self-evaluation as one of the following:

- Significant strengths (uniformly strong)
- Strengths outweigh weaknesses (more strengths than weaknesses)
- Weaknesses outweigh strengths (more weaknesses than strengths)
- Significant major weaknesses (uniformly weak)

Here then is a system of evaluation that at its heart seeks to create a framework of quality assurance that relies on internal processes but is ultimately validated externally. Whatever about the practical operation of the system, the introduction of these structures marked a profound change in Irish education, change that needed and indeed needs to be managed. Not surprisingly the onus for ensuring the successful transition to a new context fell and continues to fall, for the most part, on the school principal. As these approaches to change management, namely external inspection and school planning, have become more dominant, certain tensions have emerged. For example, there are obvious contradictory pressures for centralised government control through inspection and evaluation on the one hand and decentralised responsibility for implementation, resource management and self-evaluation at local level on the other. According to Hopkins, Ainscow, and West (1994) the key challenge is "to find a balance between the increasing demands for centrally determined policy initiatives and quality control and the encouragement of locally developed school improvement efforts" (p. 68). From the perspective of the school leader, balancing these contradictory impulses while at the same time enhancing the sense of well-being in the school community as a whole creates what are at times considered to be ethically challenging situations.

Squaring the Circle: Leading the Staff and Delivering Accountability

In describing the impact of the rise of new public management on school leaders, Bottery (2007) identifies what he calls "many commonalities perceptible in most of the western world". These, he suggests, include

> economic rationale for educational change, increased criticism of educational institutions, decentralization of responsibility but not power, pressure to increase achievement through greater testing and the publication of results, oversight systems to measure compliance and

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> managerialist methods for driving change, such as performance management, performance related pay, inspection and evaluation, strategic planning and target setting (p. 89).

Not surprisingly, these developments have substantially changed the nature of teaching and teacher perceptions about their profession. The work of Andy Hargreaves demonstrates increasingly negative attitudes to the reform agenda among teachers in North America (Wolf & Craig, 2004). Hoyle and Wallace (2007, p. 15) summarise research in the UK on the impact of recent developments there on the teaching profession.

1. Teachers feel directed away from the core task of teaching.
2. Teachers feel vastly increased pressures, resulting in stress, less job satisfaction and greater workload.
3. Teachers feel a high degree of dissatisfaction with the bureaucratic and managerial aspects of the reforms.
4. There are increasing problems with recruitment and retention.

Research in Ireland by Sugrue (1999) also indicates negative responses among teachers to what they perceive as external interference and enforced collegiality.

In this context, the staff leadership challenges facing school principals are daunting. Gibton (2004, p. 90) describes school leaders as being caught between the rhetoric and reality of the reform agenda. The rhetoric emphasises "the reprofessionalising of the teaching profession, including raised standards and democratic accountability", while the reality involves "deprofessionalised teachers, reductionist and utilitarian education and centralising cumbersome bureaucratic modes of surveillance". It has been suggested by McNamara and Kenny (2006) that as a result of the corporatist nature of politics and the power of the teacher unions, the reform agenda has impacted less on Ireland than on other Anglophone countries. Nonetheless, as we have seen, the outward and visible signs of the new public management are gradually emerging in the Irish education system in the form of collaborative planning, inspection, evaluation and standardised testing.

Interestingly, in the week in which this chapter was written, two newspaper reports illustrated the direction of public policy in education. In the *Irish Times* of October 5th, it was suggested that school inspection reports published online by the DES and which up to now have been regarded as extremely bland and cautious are now becoming "more robust, noticeably more critical of schools and school departments" (p. 11).

A few days earlier, in the *Irish Times* of October 1st, it was reported that the DES was about to propose that school principals would be required to deal with underperforming teachers by reporting on their work to the school board of management and recommend sanctions up to and including dismissal. In theory the quality of teaching and the supervision of teachers have always been a matter for school principals, but in practice poor performance is rarely confronted and when it is, it is largely left up to the inspectorate. The vehement negative response of the principals' associations and the teacher unions is instructive in respect to the theme of this chapter. Both groups were in agreement that actually operationalising the

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supervisory role of principals over teachers would severely damage the collegial relationship between the two groups. The post-primary teacher unions added that only peers with a specialist knowledge of the particular subject area could exercise such a role, if it were necessary at all, and principals do not have the necessary expertise. Finally, the unions also suggested that difficult personal relationships could influence principals' decisions regarding underperforming teachers and that impartiality would prove impossible.

How, then, do school leaders conceptualise and respond to these challenges? Fullan (1982) suggested that turning policy into good practice stems largely from the ability of those implementing policy being able to translate it into a particular context and thereby provides new meanings to it. Bottery (2007, p. 190) proposes that this means practitioners being able to "critique, mediate and if necessary actively resist some policy developments". Work by Day et al. (2000) and Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin, and Collarbone (2003) suggests that most school leaders hold a personal vision of education and a set of core personal ethics which guide how they react to external policies and initiatives. Wright (2003) is not so sure, arguing that school leaders are so constrained by external regulations and pressures that the best they can do is uncritically implement policies. Roche (1999), cited in Begley, identifies four strategies used by school principals in coping with ethical dilemmas, namely avoidance, suspended morality, creative insubordination and, rarely, taking a moral stance. In contrast, Woods (2007) suggests that school leaders respond through "transformational and democratic leadership", which she defines as "getting people working together to raise one another's awareness towards higher ethical purposes and to the importance of working for the achievement of these in the life of the organisation" (p. 152). Clearly, therefore, different researchers have come to varying conclusions regarding the ethical framework and constraints within which educational leadership is exercised. To explore these ideas further, it was decided to seek the views of a number of principals of Irish schools around the ethical challenges of leading in the current age of evaluation.

Leading Through an Ethical Framework? School Principals Respond

The research that is reported here was conducted with the principals of four post-primary schools and one primary school, all situated in the greater Dublin area. They were chosen only because each had recently undertaken a course of postgraduate study at Dublin City University. Three of the four post-primary principals were men, one was a woman and the primary principal was male. Each was relatively new to the job, all falling within a range of 2–6 years as principal. A semi-structured interview approach was used, involving a schedule of four questions, but allowing for replies to be clarified and a range of follow-up questions to be asked as appropriate. Each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes.

The purpose was to explore the perceptions of these school leaders and the personal concepts and frameworks which guide their approach to leadership. It should

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be noted that in advance of each interview the respondent was told that the research was primarily concerned with the new policy environment as outlined earlier in this chapter, including issues such as inspection, evaluation, testing and accountability. It was made clear that the research was intended to focus specifically on staff relations and organisational development. The interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.

The data is reported by response to each of four questions and the respondents are referred to as A, B, C, D and E. The basic questions asked were:

1. In the context of this research as outlined to you, do you feel that the new policies on school planning, evaluation and inspection involve you in difficult ethical or moral dilemmas?
2. Do you feel a personal vision or core of ethics is important to your work?
3. Do you feel that external pressures are influencing your decision making more or less than in the past?
4. Do you feel that the environment for school leadership is improving or disimproving?

Ethical and Moral Dilemmas

In general there was a noticeable tendency at first for the respondents to downplay what they saw as the rather dramatic terminology in which the question was framed. A spoke of what he called "the cult of the lone leader" and said that "the ethos of the school and the various processes for making decisions—for deciding on admissions and suspensions, for example—tended to clarify most decisions". C said that certainly there were hard decisions with moral and ethical implications, but he doubted if these had changed very much over time—"principals make much the same kind of decision as they have always done, the difference is that it is within a very complex legal and bureaucratic framework which makes you cautious—if you make a mistake or do not follow due process nowadays you are on your own". This emphasis on making decisions through established processes and procedures, the importance of the traditions and policies of the schools, and the idea of not acting without taking advice, was common across the responses.

On reflection, however, the respondents began to come up with examples of ethical questions and dilemmas which they were facing. A common theme here was the perceived pressure for short-term goals, particularly academic achievement, to dominate school life. This manifested itself in increased criticism of particular teachers and demands for pupils to be placed in certain classes or moved to another class because of alleged teacher failings. B said: "this is becoming increasing tough, and despite all the rhetoric about the wider goals of education, results are everything". E, principal of a primary school, agreed, saying that, "with standardised testing all this results pressure will get worse, yet the DES wants everything from road safety to global warming covered in an already crowded curriculum and more children

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with special needs. I have had to take some tough decisions refusing special needs children when I think a class could not take another one, even with an SNA [Special Needs Assistant]. Teachers and the parents are very reluctant to have more than one or two in a class".

A second ethical concern mentioned was the conflict between maintaining collegial solidarity with teaching staff and while at the same time seeking to confront unacceptable practices and poor teaching. Respondents saw this as becoming more pressing, not only with the rise of school and teacher evaluation but also as parents became ever more critical of poor standards. The respondents displayed an interesting degree of pragmatism. B said that "we don't take criticism well, so it is well that the Inspectorate is not going down that route. It is clear that principals and schools are going to be left to deal with weak teachers as always, but you have no power, and you can cause trouble for no gain. You just follow the old approach, giving certain teachers certain classes and so on". Similarly, D suggested that there were contradictions in emerging official policy on schools—"there is a huge emphasis on collegial and collaborative effort, meetings, planning etc., this is good, gets people working together, but you are also supposed to tackle poor performance, where you can easily turn people against you. It is not easy". Finally, on this theme A said: "there are poor teachers in every school, and kids get short changed, which I hate to see, and parents complain year in, year out, but you can only really intervene in really bad cases, and even then you are in a weak position and may do more harm than good—our system has neither carrot nor stick, you need to remember that before you do something irrevocable".

It became clear in the responses to Question 1 that the ethos (a word that came up often), policies and mission statements of the school were deemed a kind of protection for decision makers, and principals are careful not to stray outside these boundaries. For example, C said: "the school policy emphasizes the whole person and a broad curriculum, and so I am able to hold the line and insist that all students, even in exam years, take religious education, social and personal education, PE and so on. Often teachers and parents want to use this time for the main subjects, but we would be just a grind school then".

Personal Vision and Core of Ethics

Given the somewhat pragmatic and cautious tone to Question 1 above, it was interesting that the five respondents all claimed to be guided by a personal vision and core ethical principles. It will be remembered that this form of words was chosen as opposed to any reference to spirituality in order to avoid the question being interpreted in a purely religious sense. Four of the five principals are leaders of Catholic schools, and the fifth of a Community (State) school, of which a Catholic religious order is a Trustee.

In defining the vision which informs their practice, all five respondents spoke of two related themes: care and commitment to the pupils in their charge, and passion

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for education and its benefits. A said: "it is a difficult job, and getting harder. You would only do it for the kids. You feel a commitment to each one". C said: "every decision is for the boys, you want to see each reach his potential, you go the extra mile". E said that "treating the children with respect, listening to them, valuing them, is a bottom line for me. I have had to compromise on other things, but not that".

Although all five principals stress that this commitment to the pupils was about more than academic achievement, there was, nonetheless, a notable difference of emphasis between school types. Principals A, C and E stressed all round achievement, and said that their goal was each single pupil succeeding to the best of their ability, whatever that may be. C specifically said that his vision was "one of all round development for each student, but most of all to be good citizens and indeed people". B and D are the principals of two academically strong post-primary schools, and while their replies also stressed wider goals than the merely academic, there was a noticeable concern with what B described as "excellence, high standards, high academic and sporting achievement". B remarked: "we have a very long tradition of excellence here, as a result we get a certain intake, parents and students expect high standards". D said: "we put a lot of effort into high academic and sporting standards, I think that pursuit of excellence is a good thing. We need not to lose sight of it, not only as a school but as a society".

Although spirituality or religion was not specifically raised, it nonetheless became clear that some of the respondents felt that the foundation of their commitment came from a spiritual source. B said: "well this is a Catholic school, and it stands for something, a Catholic ethos, something I believe in and want for the children". D, in a similar vein, commented: "it sounds old-fashioned, but for me more important than anything else in the school, is passing on the faith, that is why we are here really". Interestingly, in the current climate of mass immigration, E, principal of a primary school, said: "this is a Catholic school, and that is important to me, staff and most parents—we will continue to take newcomers, but we will not become non-denominational, or multi-denominational, or anything like that. We will remain a Catholic school".

In terms of their vision of education, the principals interviewed were strongly resistant to any agenda which might reduce education to a pragmatic or instrumentalist level. A danger, they perceived, in the current reform agenda. A said: "there is a danger in all this talk of competencies, testing, etc. that we'll end up with a list of boxes to tick, and that is not what I mean by education. It hasn't happened yet, but there are straws in the wind, and we must resist it if we can". C said: "we need to maintain the best elements of the system as it is. It provides a good general education, which has served us well. I think this is understood, and I do not think we will end up with lists of competencies and targets, like elsewhere, but it is a danger". Along similar lines, E said: "a lot of the new agenda—inspection, planning, evaluation, testing etc.—can be very positive and useful, but it could also be very misused, for example, testing could bring in competition between primary schools, which is not there now, something I would strongly resist".

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External Pressures

All five respondents indicated, in one way or another, that external agencies exerted significant pressure which was increasing. It was noted normal parental pressure had now been augmented by pressure from other sources. These included the media, with regard to numbers of students going on to achieve college entry and from the state, through inspection, evaluation and mandated strategic planning.

The principals interviewed were uniformly hostile to parental and media pressure, for better and better academic achievement. A said that "we must not lose sight of the mission of education, it is spelt out in the White Paper on Education, a philosophy that includes moral, spiritual, social, personal and physical education, not just academic—I do not know if whoever wrote this believes it, but I do".

Interestingly, however, and in contrast to the reported feelings of head teachers in England (Bottery, 2007), the principals interviewed were largely positive about the manifestations of the reform agenda in Ireland, including school planning, inspection and evaluation. Principal B mirrored the response of the others when saying "as a result of these initiatives teachers, subject departments and so on are meeting far more regularly and planning together—very much a new development". Principal D concurred—"it is remarkable how these requirements have gotten the staff working together, I am amazed at the support I have received, even if it comes from a kind of 'closing of the ranks against outsiders' mentality". A final positive point in this regard was made by several of the respondents, to the effect that the new modes of school evaluation presented opportunities for greater teacher involvement in decision making and created opportunities for distributed and democratic management. Principal B said "working on the school plan and preparing for inspection gives a role to everyone, and, just as importantly, gives me a mechanism to consult and share power and responsibility for plans and decisions".

Once again, principals showed a pragmatic streak in their ability to use external pressures and processes such as inspection to provide, as it were, cover for difficult decisions. Principal D remarked, "the re-emergence of external inspection has had a major effect—it is possible to get a lot done on the grounds that the inspectors will demand it. Surprisingly, teachers are very concerned and influenced by inspection, they treat it like the Parousia (the second coming of Christ)". In similar vein, Principal C used the inspection process to lead in a direction which her ethical principles suggested but which she perceived as almost impossible otherwise: "the inspection report queried our strict streaming policy. I was delighted, I was long against it, but with this behind me I can say 'we have to tackle this' and parents, teachers and the board will at least have to consider it". This last point confirms a feeling which arose from the interviews in general, which is that, regardless of their own values, no matter how firmly held, principals in the Irish context are very constrained by the power of other stakeholders such as religious Trustees, the DES, teachers and, to a lesser extent, parents.

In terms of ethical concerns and difficult decisions arising from the application of new public management methods to Irish education, the principals interviewed

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were more concerned with possible future problems than with current realities. Principal B remarked "this is not Britain, but we have a tradition of following them and making the same mistakes a decade later, but I do not think you could end up with an OFSTED (the inspection body in England) system here—everyone knows it is a disaster". Nonetheless principals feared being forced by future developments into serious ethical dilemmas. Principal A said of school inspection and evaluation: "you get the feeling the DES are moving with caution, and principals will be caught in the middle. At the moment they are really only evaluating us, the managers, but when they start identifying teachers the fur will fly". Principal E, leader of a primary school, was concerned about the trend towards national standardised testing—"I am totally against judging children so young, we do testing now for our own purposes, but any competitive or divisive use of testing would be a serious ethical thing for me".

The Environment for Leadership

In answer to this question, the replies of the five principals were largely similar and to the effect that the pressure to make decisions that did not conform to their values and ethics arose more from resourcing issues than from the new models of planning and accountability. Principal A said: "we have more responsibility, more work, but very little power. I have no control over fixed costs, pay and so on, and a very limited budget outside of this, so I have to prioritise spending, and this is often very difficult".

The principals perceived that it was unstated but unmistakable DES policy to decentralise more roles and responsibilities to schools. This created a dilemma for while we have seen, principals are largely supportive of the new architecture of school governance and are willing to work with it; they equally feel ill-used by the steady increase in workload without any increase in administrative help. Principal B spelt this out: "I think that all the new initiatives are good things in themselves, but in the end it all comes back to my door, and there is a limit". Principal E agrees: "most primary schools are finding it hard to get people to go forward for principal—it is not surprising. I probably would not do it again if I could roll back the clock".

As already indicated, and at odds with research elsewhere, these five principals were more concerned that the moral climate for decision making might decline in the future, as opposed to feeling that they currently face serious ethical dilemmas. Principal B stated: "I think that developments such as increased emphasis on accountability and teacher and school performance will eventually lead to clashes between different values and ethics. At present, the atmosphere is largely collegial, but that may change". Principal D said much the same. "If we go down the route of greater accountability, tensions will arise between desirable but conflicting requirements, such as working as a staff team, as against imposing higher teaching standards or similarly between defending teachers and alienating increasingly critical parents". Principal E concluded with two interesting remarks which summarise much of what the other principals implied—"in our system, the principal does not

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have all that much power. He or she is still *primus inter pares*, not CEO", and "a lot of decisions are made for you by very limited resources. If you had more money, you might have more ethical dilemmas about spending it".

Conclusion

The data emerging from these five interviews suggest a number of inter-related findings. First, it is clear that these particular principals perceive themselves to be guided and supported by a framework of ethics—spirituality, if you will. In three of the five cases, the respondents clearly indicated a religious dimension to this ethical framework. Analysing these ethics or values, a number of things become clear. In the first instance, in defining their educational ethics, the remarks of these principals were very similar to the research reported in other countries. They were concerned primarily with doing the best possible for each child, respecting the individual pupil, seeing education as a broad developmental process, which should not be reduced to purely academic achievement, and more specific to the Irish context, perhaps, seeing faith and faith formation as a key goal of schooling. Also deemed important were ethical concerns in favour of collegial and collaborative practices, allowing the sharing of responsibility with the school staff. Also significant was concern with other stakeholders, particularly the Church, religious orders, parents and the State.

The religious dimension identifiable in these ethical frameworks concerned the importance of faith and its transmission to the next generation and the pursuit of excellence perceived by some of the principals as a keystone of Catholic education. It was clear that these principals saw values-driven leadership as a sine qua non, suggesting that anyone lacking this attribute or quality could not or should not be doing this work. Finally, in contrast to research in England, it was notable that external pressures such as school inspections were not yet seen as the key influence on their decision making.

Secondly, and somewhat paradoxically, alongside there concerns with ethics, the principals interviewed displayed a strong element of pragmatism in their decision making. They perceived that external pressures and expectations were stronger than they had been in the past, and that these had to be managed and accommodated rather than resisted or subverted. The principals saw the advantages of using policies in the making of key decisions and were acutely aware of the danger of being exposed by moving outside protective structures and frameworks. In this, as well as pragmatism, they also displayed considerable realism in being aware that in the Irish system the power of leadership is limited by the strength of the other stakeholders. They understood that support from the religious orders, school patrons, boards of management and teaching staff is required if any initiative is to be implemented successfully, or indeed if even the day-to-day activity of the school is to run smoothly. Very astutely, the principals also showed an awareness of how to use external pressures, particularly those arising from inspection and evaluation as a lever to engineer change in their schools.

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In relation to questions of ethical pressures on decision making, one might summarise the views of the five principals as follows. Most cases where they encounter such dilemmas at present arise largely from the lack of resources in schools, resulting in difficult choices having to be made. These dilemmas are therefore more resource and structure based rather than arising from interpersonal management and organisational concerns. However, it was largely agreed by all five respondents that the policy trend towards greater accountability and increased external monitoring and surveillance will generate future ethical dilemmas and conflicts.

Finally, and rather interestingly, although these principals were drawn from different sectors of the education system, and each professed a clear education vision and ethical framework, yet the pragmatic nature of most of what they said gave the impression that deliberation and caution would be key watchwords in their practice. The limitations of leadership in terms of power and the danger of getting too far ahead of other stakeholders were very clear to these principals. In short, they perceived their roles—to paraphrase the well-known categorisation applied to Irish prime ministers—more as chairmen than chiefs.

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AQ1	948	40	Please clarify whether it is “DES, 2003a or 2003b” in the following occurrences.
AQ2	959	4	Reference Government of Ireland. (1998) is not cited in the text part. Please provide.
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