



Minister, Guests, Colleagues... Welcome to Copenhagen!

The value for all of us coming together, here, in Copenhagen has already been clearly outlined by Jorgen Christiansen and Jens Nielsen in the programme details for this, the ESHA Conference 2008 and the theme 'Conditions of School Leadership in Europe.'

So, remember, the aim of our Biennial Conference is:

- to give inspiration to you in your daily work
- to give you a possibility to share visions and ideas with colleagues from all over Europe

and, overall

- to give you an excellent experience.

Already, I can assure you all that the planning, the preparation and the thoughtful attention to detail made by the organisers means that the last aim will be confidently met in the coming days – indeed, we saw at the City Hall reception that the excellent experience has already begun! Jorgen... Jens... on behalf of the ESHA General and Executive Boards, I thank both of you, and the teams you lead, for all the hard work you have undertaken to make this event a success for us all.



'Talk together, plan together, work together...'

Colleagues,

I don't need to remind you that, in recent years, the national and international focus has spotlighted on the world of education, and on schools particularly, because there is recognition of how it is education which makes a real difference to individuals, to families, to communities and to wider society at a time of fast-moving changes in our world. In the past decade we have experienced the impact of such focus on schools and educational systems with 'top-down' models of accountability, inspection, monitoring and reporting, curriculum design, assessment and most recently even the inspection of the quality of how a school provides balanced and healthy meals at key points in a child's day – breakfast, lunch and for afternoon tea. At times I do wonder, is this education or simply child care?

If we want our schools to be places of inspiration, innovation and high-class achievement for all in the community served by a school we are now at a point in time when leadership is increasingly recognised as the key to making such ideals become reality. The theme for the 2008

Conference is well timed. In this past year three key international reports have not only emphasised the role and importance of school leadership but have also outlined the shape of what successful leadership will look like in our schools of the future... I refer to:

- McKinsey's 'Best Performing Schools...'
- OECD's 'Improving School Leadership'
- EC's 'Modernising Schools'

ESHA have been active in engaging with promoting the agenda for the future working conditions of school leadership across Europe and have been fully committed to providing input to the debate and through formal consultation at all levels at the pan-European level.

Let us look at these reports and unpick their key messages.

Common to all three is the message that leadership skills in high achieving and successful schools are aimed at building teams, developing distributive teamwork models where people work together to set and meet high standards and where leadership nurtures and values personal relationships. Such a 'can do' culture and school environment makes a difference where it really matters – in the classroom and staffroom where creating a learning environment is focussed on excellence and where responsibility is distributed boldly across the whole school team with a clarity of purpose which is understood and shared by all.

However, the challenge for leaders of schools in the future will be to provide - with professional confidence - a school experience where the skills, knowledge and attitudes of our young can be articulated and delivered within a framework which will serve them well in a fast-changing world - a world where these competencies and attributes can be less confidently predicted... try putting 'Shifthappens' into Google if you would like to see what the future world of education looks like!

What we do know is that schools for the future will need to be unorthodox places of/for learning and where there needs to be an enlightened approach towards learning. Certainly, at the minimum level, schools need to be set within attractive architecture and equipped with a battery of technology if they are to become the 'outlets for creative ability' and where what is the 'exceptional' today will become commonplace tomorrow - and it is a future where a school will not be a place where any young person would not want to go to each day, nor will it be a place to leave as soon as possible at 16. In short, it is essential that settings will need to become the school of tomorrow for the children of today if we want to ensure wider success and confidence for *all* in future societies across Europe.

Equally essential becomes the vision for learning in the future which needs to include:

- success for all children at all stages – with support for those who are likely to underachieve and where there is increased participation for post-16 pupils to take part in lifelong learning
- enjoyment in the overall learning experience with more emphasis on personalised needs being met in work programmes
- inclusive, supportive, school environment where the opportunity for children and parents to contribute to the decision-making process is promoted and encouraged
- accessible with information, guidance and advice to all in the school community
- the ethical dimension where empathetic and sensitive learners are globally more sensitive and responsive to the needs of others

But, what does this mean for schools and for school leadership?

Just as much as there has never been a single model for all schools to aspire towards if they want to achieve high standards, there can be no single, prescriptive, model for what school leadership looks like. What I do consider to be a 'non-negotiable' is that whenever and wherever learning takes place it needs to be led because, as dynamic activity, learning requires effective leadership to determine and ensure that the relevant content, experience and learning pathways are provided for children in any educational setting. Of course, effective management skills are needed to ensure the operational smooth running of any setting, but, it is the direction, focus and identification of key priorities – the lead – which distinguishes leadership from management.

Individualised, inspirational and intelligent leadership needs to be identified, nurtured and promoted within the profession at all levels.

The best of school leaders do not happen overnight, they need to be grown and developed within settings and within a professional environment which is not afraid, nor defensive, but is confident:

- to recognise and reward talent
- to share and promote effective practice
- to encourage risk-taking and boldness in setting goals
- to ignite enthusiasm in both children and colleagues
- to reflect and evaluate as part of continuing professional development

Encouraging critical thinking and reflection at all levels in a school enables the school leaders of tomorrow to take risks, to be bold and to think for themselves within a school culture of always wanting the best conditions for children's learning to thrive.

This conference brings together school leadership from across Europe.

We are here to explore together, to talk together to find the common links between us all and the work we do in schools. ESHA Conferences are our opportunity to talk together, to plan together, to work together...' and, finding those common links in such a wonderful forum presents us with the opportunity

to work towards and to meet the ideals of ESHA.

After 30 years involvement with school leadership I am confident that whenever staff have visited other schools they return with ideas to trial, to practise, to improve their day to day work in school. This reinforces the educational 'prize' that,

'in all schools there is always something to value, something positive for others to learn from... something to share, something to learn, something to give for the wider benefit of others... that's professionalism.'

(Sir John Jones)

Perhaps, this conference will help you to discover your gift, your contribution, towards making your own school community all the better for having you there – as a teacher, as a parent or as a school leader.

However, an increasingly common issue across all ESHA member nations is the question 'So, Why would you want to be a school leader?'

We know that the age profile of school leadership suggests that many schools will lack leadership applicants in depth over the coming few years. Even more concerning in my own country, is the statistic that the age profile of Deputy Heads is very similar to that for their head teacher colleagues – with many making quality of life decisions and not opting to make the traditional next step in their career.

To me, it is clear that if we are to 'grow' leadership from within school teams then there must be understanding of the skills and competencies required for the post alongside having had the opportunity to regularly practise and develop such leadership characteristics for themselves. If you want to lead a school, or if you want greater involvement with leading education, then the following represent some of the characteristics – the opportunities – you will need... characteristics and opportunities I've seen across my experience of 30 years of school leadership and the very core skills which the 3 reports identify are at the heart of the repertoire of school leadership...

- Belief that all children are entitled to, and will meet, success in your school irrespective of both their own and the school's contextual background
- Clarity in understanding of the school's contextual position
- An ability to develop, enthuse and share vision and belief with all stakeholders
- Opportunity to select staff
- Effectiveness in raising the performance of teachers
- High Expectations for all stakeholders
- Willingness to consult with and build teams of people – thereby, promoting a culture of commitment to the school and where an 'empowering culture' encourages confidence and grows expertise in others
- Willingness to work within partnerships with others to bring about change in the community
- Leaders need to have empathy with all the range of staff problems... personal or professional... and, to balance that empathy with challenge
- Champion and exemplify high standards – not afraid to identify, promote and build excellence as part of continuous drive for seeking the best for and from all

- Utilise the expertise of others – including those with financial acumen who can source external funding!
- Keep any agenda manageable – 3-4 items each year which make maximum impact on learning!
- Mix humour with stamina with enthusiasm through a time where our jobs have evolved to become more strategic and non-teaching. In English football Alex Ferguson and Arsene Wenger lead two of the most successful teams in Europe (Arsenal and Manchester United) – they don't stare at the balance sheet, but constantly focus on making their teams more effective. They don't expect their physiotherapists to mow the pitch – they do surround themselves with highly skilled people and let them get on with doing what they are good at. This is what we should do – build up our teams and keep on winning!

So, there is no mystery in why we were all appointed to our present posts!

Because, colleagues...this, is what we do... and, these characteristics differ very significantly with leadership models from only a decade ago where the assumptions for effective leadership were altogether more centered on a single individual as the school leader. If any of you grew up in the 50s/60s watching cowboy films... the message for leadership today is that:

'The Lone Ranger is dead!'

We all know that we can strive to get better at the job we undertake ; no-one would expect all leaders to be demonstrating these characteristics all of the time. However, it is the effective school leader for the future who will, over time, build corporate strength throughout their team by providing the opportunities for others to exercise their leadership.

Additionally, it is the wise school leader who both recognises and welcomes the opportunity to appoint staff to compliment his/her own skills

and weaknesses.

So, the imperative for the coming decade will be for our current leaders to be active in continuously seeking out the potential leaders for the future from within our own staffrooms.

For me, it remains the best job in the world – it is why I have remained a school leader for almost 30 years. What I believe is the real challenge for our profession is to start to champion the positive aspects of being a school leader – to talk up school leadership from within the context that guiding others and their learning environments as being the greatest game in life and the most rewarding of all work that there is in the field of education.

To achieve this

requires future leaders in our schools to understand that their role is knowing that they have to become the multipliers of the effectiveness of all who are working in a school. And, I am still trying to do that.... And, I know that this conference will inspire you all to do the same.

Thank you

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Harrison', written in a cursive style.

Chris Harrison
September 2008

Copenhagen